



Serendipity Center

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2022, 5:30pm – 7:00pm

Virtual Teams Meeting

Present: Matty Berryessa, Shannon Dale, Paul Fields, Rachel Gardell, Rachel Gitner, Rick Larson, Megan Pine, Wendy Ricketts, Eric Robertson, Lori Silverman, Dan Smith, Mark Takehara

Absent: Michael Hsu, Erika Schwartz, Patrick Wrobel

Meeting Opens: 5:33 PM

Welcome: Paul opened the meeting, welcoming **Megan** and introducing her to the group, also thanking **Shea** for taking minutes.

Approval of January Minutes: Paul asked for comments on minutes. No comments on January minutes. **Rick** motioned to approve the minutes. **Shannon** seconded. Motion carried unanimously. Minutes adopted as submitted.

Program Report: Paul introduced **Megan** and shared his history and partnership with her. **Megan** introduced herself and her position, as Director of Education & Compliance, summarizing her job responsibilities: accreditation, agency-wide equity, student supports, assisting with transition coordinator supervision; compliance with contracts, family investigations, insurance renewals. She transformed this position into a manageable role, taking on roles that make sense both for her and our Principal. She oversees an admin, Tier III Supervisor, SPED Supervisor, and Assessment Coordinator.

Megan discussed her oversight and connections to the Outcomes Project (Synergy), MTSS (multi-tiered student support) behavioral interventions, professional coaching implementation, and student outcomes and goals. She discussed specifics of each of these areas of responsibility, relating them to Board strategic planning and noting difficulties with these responsibilities as they relate to COVID issues and constraints.

Megan then related an “snapshot” email from a longtime staff member, a teacher, to illustrate specifics of the “threadbare” day-to-day staffing issues currently happening at Serendipity, with our severe staffing shortages. She read the text of the message to the Board, editing for clarity. The email narrates these issues from the point of view of constant and ongoing staffing changes, issues, and problems within one classroom. No routine or stability, no chance to complete routine required classroom tasks or responsibilities or focus specifically on student needs. Teacher indecisive about leaving. Not a critique, but rather a documentation, of current goings-on in classrooms.

Megan related the difficulties in addressing her problems, noting there are few or no options. Staff are focused on basics and doing the best they can with what they have.

Questions & Discussion:

Wendy noted how difficult it was to hear this report, noting how dismal the narrative is. She asked if the Board could provide solutions and if staff are coming in. **Megan** replied that staff are trickling in and noted much of what the narrative relates is out of our control. “Chicken and egg” process – difficult to find staff, making it difficult to take in students.

Mark asked **Megan** to relate staff survey results to the Board to further illustrate these difficulties. **Megan** notes that there is improvement around creating and maintaining a safe environment, due to more staff support around students remaining. Intensive student support (MTSS) has also helped to create safety.

Matty notes we have had 6 program interviews in last two months and we have hired two from this process.

Paul commended **Megan** and all the staff for their work with these challenges in the face of difficulties and thanked them for their work.

Rachel noted several success stories despite these dire issues, including returns to home districts, and these successes were directly due to the work program staff are doing. **Megan** concurs with these success stories.

Wendy asked about other results from the staff survey besides the safety issues. **Mark** provided a further overview, noting issues around communication and transparency. Staff want more input on classroom changes, difficult to get buy-in and consensus. Focus is on making sure staff are heard, including regular supervisory sessions. Major focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion – lots of work to do. **Mark** is looking at both inside & outside resources to address DEI. Good news in that salary comments are improved, due to the Board working to increase salaries & compensation. We are still in a difficult environment with lack of staff. Nothing shocking from surveys – lots of work to do.

Finance Report:

- **January Financials:** **Dan** gave an update on January financials, including presentation from 403(b) advisor, Chris Cabbage of Retirement Advocates. Feedback positive. All funds performing well, as good as can be expected. Economic turbulence affecting these funds. Finance Committee & Finance Manager will continue to monitor. Presentations for employees planned around their 403(b) funds.
- **Budget vs. Actuals:** Running a deficit for January – payroll/benefits costs exceeded student revenue. Both staffing & enrollment are down. First time **Dan** has seen this deficit during a regular school year. Cash balance strong – a few million dollars. We can weather these deficit months. No cause for extreme alarm, just caution. Federal aid we accumulated will see us through.
- **Initial 22/23 Budget Assumptions:** **Dan** noted **Mark & Matty** are starting work on budget, nothing to report yet on this planning.

Mark relayed that he and **Matty** were getting an early start on the budget; managers asked to participate early. Teachers asked to get sense of enrollment for next year. Budget assumes 68 students (current level this year) but only 8 classrooms. This will mean staffing cuts. Management talking about

where these cuts will happen. Does give capacity to grow because enrollment will not completely fill out classrooms. Wants to present worst-case scenario to Board. Budget includes 6% tuition hike and 25% increase in development & fundraising revenue. On target to achieve or go over fundraising goals currently. Still looking at \$750K deficit for next year, but we do have capacity to go to 80 students – which would reduce deficit to \$150K. Entire budget has to do with staffing issues – only block right now. Expects possible staffing from PPS layoffs.

Matty notes staffing will not shrink by that much – we are still significantly understaffed (12 instructional assistants, 25-30 needed with this budget).

Mark notes difficulty in cutting any more fixed costs – already cut as much as we can. His goal is to present Board with most realistic budget possible.

Questions & Discussion:

Wendy asked if new salaries were tracking according to plan/budget. Dan noted new budget includes these higher salaries, and that the increases weren't affecting the budget now due to lower staffing.

Paul asked about beefing up recruiting by advertising to academic programs – **Matty** notes this is already being done. We are reaching out to universities and the immigrant community work placement. We participated in virtual job fair yesterday. Challenge is many are wildly not qualified to work in this environment and good candidates are in high demand by competitor employers. Recruiting is trying to be swift and nimble. We are starting early enough so that we will be able to adjust as needed. **Matty** also notes current difficulties in hiring parents with school-age kids (where much of our labor pool formerly came from). Lots of parents staying home to take care of children. Lots of children switching to virtual learning, leading to lower enrollment in regular districts.

Wendy feels 68 is a reasonable number, given circumstances. **Matty** notes referrals are still up, as is our waiting list – we are unable to take these children due to staffing issues. We will grow to and past our break-even point in a couple of years.

Development Report: **Rachel Gitner** mentioned outcomes from the Blazers 50/50 Raffle, thanking everyone on the Board who participated (Shannon, Paul, Rick, Eric, Patrick) and noting how great, and exhausting, the evening was. **Dan** asked about arena attendance (and if a larger crowd would've netted more money). **The Board** discussed the attendance & morale issues around this specific game night and how it affected our take. **Rachel** noted that, despite attendance & morale issues, we did well – taking in \$3K (vs \$1500 for another nonprofit a few evenings before). **Wendy** and **Paul** thanked **Rachel** for her efforts with this event.

- **Speaking opportunities and involving your network (help fundraising efforts):** **Rachel Gitner** relayed brainstorming from last week's Donor Engagement Committee to involve Board members' networks in fundraising efforts. She notes that she and **Mark** very much need to get "in front" of people to relay why Serendipity and our message matters – this is where Board members are instrumental. She asks the Board to consider their networks for a 15-30 minute information session (not a fundraising ask) and who they could connect with **Mark & Rachel** around this session. Idea is to get out in front of the community and share about us. She asks the Board to engage their networks in whatever ways make sense to them.

- **Upcoming Events:** **Rachel Gitner** discussed the upcoming March 8 virtual “brown bag” lunch Q&A with **Mark & Belinda**, challenging Board member to each forward the invite to those in their network they believe would find this event interesting. High-level overview for donors to feel involved and get comfortable with **Mark**. **Rachel Gitner** will re-send the invite to the Board. **Paul** urged her to do so, noting several in his network who are interested.

Committee Reports

- **Capital Committee:** **Rick** related two major topics from CPSC – scheduling and fundraising campaign. Major modifications to schedule happening – a slowdown due to budget. **Mark** to give more information. Meeting schedule changing to bimonthly for time being, will pick up speed later. More members needed (2-4 members, with one or two Board members especially). He asks for referrals to people with construction or engineering backgrounds; detail-oriented people; people connected with Portland giving & society structure. Next meeting in April.
- **Donor Engagement Committee:** **Wendy & Rachel Gardell** note no issues arising from February meeting.
- **Program Advisory Committee:** **Lori** reviewed minutes from last meeting, relaying continued interest in staff & Board relationships and support from Board to staff. **Mark** notes positive of three students transitioning back to their regular district in the last month, a major accomplishment for program team.
- **Nominating Committee:** **Wendy** reviewed outcomes from last meeting; good meeting on brainstorming & recruiting. PriceWaterhouseCoopers & EC Electric major targets for recruiting; also looking to education departments at UO and UP, PSU. **Wendy** reaching out to UO; **Mark** to UP; **Jackie** to PSU. Hoping for Board member from The Standard. **Wendy** chatted with our new Board members and connected with them – will report those conversations back to Nominating Committee this Friday. Hoping for more in-person connections & events as COVID restrictions lift. **Paul** concurs, asking Board members to continue thinking about their networks and who in those networks would be good candidates.
- **Data and Outcomes Committee:** **Paul** notes project manager for Synergy hired – **Barbara Burkart**. Two weeks in. She is shaking things up and jumping in with both feet. Lots to work on, focus is on ways of collaborating effectively across the Synergy team and unwind processes that are less productive than we would like. **Barbara** is experienced and can get to the heart of our organizational and process issues. **Paul** is optimistic these efforts will turn our process around. **Mark** notes **Barbara** is in-person much of her time to work directly with staff. **Paul** notes **Mark** deserves appreciation for focusing his time and energy on this operational tumult.

Executive Director 6-Month Evaluation: **Paul** put together evaluation and circulated it with Board. Executive Committee meeting with **Mark** next Friday to go over results.

Executive Director Report: **Mark** feels things are improving within the agency. We were in “doom and gloom” situation last couple of months (as **Megan’s** message relates). Managers no longer meeting in emergency morning sessions. We have been able to hire some staff. Safety issues abating. Budget process is deeper and lengthier this year to get better collaboration from managers on this process. Survey results generally positive. We are trending positively. End of mask mandate issues are upcoming. State health policies still changing. Students & staff will remain masked after end of mandate – we will follow State policies and take safest

approach. Huge topic of conversation over next couple of weeks – staff are being prepared on how to communicate mask decisions effectively.

Mark gave praise to **Matty** over hiring processes and outcomes; praise to Rachel for meeting & surpassing development goals for this year – he feels confident we can increase fundraising by 25% for next year. He thanked Board members for keeping committee, meeting, and event momentum alive, and for their dedication to Serendipity.

Questions & Discussion:

Rick asked for an update on the capital campaign schedule as it relates to the budget process. **Mark** notes that there are delays to this schedule due to deficit for next year and smaller fundraising base. Not stopping project – just moving groundbreaking back from late spring next year. **Rachel Gitner** will deepen fundraising base. We have 10-year window to spend funds from state. Delay also due to probable challenge in securing SNAP bond from Heritage Bank (due to deficit). Wants to dedicate all our resources next year to sustaining the organization as is. Not interested in killing momentum but rather to build blocks. **Rick** concurs, noting difficulty in getting money to expand facilities when enrollment is declining and that more time to plan helps with construction – by giving us time to think things through.

Wendy asked about our relationship with St Joseph Church and our ability to continue staying there. **Matty** reached out to church, directly to business manager, about losing our space in church classrooms. Business manager wants us to stay, will work in whatever way she can to keep us there, regardless of other input. Will have our back with archdiocese. **Matty** is sustaining our relationship with church going forward.

Action Items:

- **Rachel Gitner** to forward March 8 virtual brown bag lunch invite to Board
- **Board members** to consider persons in their network for 15–30 minute Serendipity info sessions with **Mark & Rachel Gitner** – **Rachel** will reach out to each Board member individually.

Meeting Closes: 6:44 PM

Upcoming Dates of Importance

Upcoming Events:

Meet and Greet Tuesday, 3/8 12-1pm

Upcoming Meetings:

March Board Meeting: Wednesday 3/30 5:30-7pm