



The Children's Guild DC Charter School Board

Date: Monday, November 25, 2019

Time: 6 p.m.

Place: Phone Conference

Minutes

Attendees

Dana Baughns
John Ferguson
Melody Giles
Cleopatra Green- Clarke
Imani Samuels
Chris Zimmerman

The Children's Guild

Nakia Nicholson
Bryan Daniels
Kathy Lane
Josh Sutherland
Andy Ross
Amanda Henck

Call to Order

Mr. Zimmerman called the meeting to order on behalf of the Board Chair at 6:08 p.m.

Budget Approval Review (see attached documentation)

Ms. Lane stated the reason for this meeting is to get an approval for the budget which will be explained in further detail by Mr. Sutherland. The school staff presented a new proposed budget for the upcoming school year with the least impact on the children and existing staff members. Ms. Lane stated that there was only one staff member who was recently terminated due to internal issues.

Mr. Sutherland spoke on the summary description of the original budget versus where we currently are for the Board to approve. The file, TCGDC Budget Updated for the Board of Directors 11/8/2019, starting on the summary tab, which reflects in column D, the original anticipated budget based on the enrollment target of 380, the estimate of the percentage in the various categories of funding and below the anticipated expenses at the time and then the net result. The new budget column percentages on the new revenues based upon the data available to us as of November 8, 2019, which were the current enrollment numbers and current special education levels and breakouts. The approximate loss of fifty students from the original target has created a \$933,000 loss in revenue. The loss in revenue would have caused our deficit to go to approximately \$1.5 million dollars had no adjustment on the expenses been made.

There are two significant ways the expenses were reduced: the first is the salaries and benefits line items and the second is the management fee reduced as a result of the revised budget. The focus here was to not directly impact the employees and or the students and the services they receive. The positions listed in the budget reductions were presented on November 8th and a team from The Children's Guild (Kathy Lane, Josh Sutherland, Amanda Henck, Duane Arbogast and Jenny Livelli), a team from the school (Nakia Nicholson, Bryan Daniels, Tanna Jackson and Brett Stidham) and those who are on the call reviewed and discussed a staff analysis and effectively accepted the proposal related to how to balance the budget from a staffing perspective. The benefits line item decreased as a result of the staffing positions being removed from the budget as they are fixed percentages of salary cost and the management fee was reduced, which is a percentage of revenue. The decrease in the management fee

is based on the change in the enrollment. The Board of Directors requested The Children's Guild consider lowering the management fee, however, it was considered but will not be reduced based on the fact that the 12% fee is considerably low compared to other charter management companies and this percentage doesn't truly cover our cost of the services we provide. The previous budget was \$13.8 million and is now \$12.8 million. The amount of FTE's has been reduced by twelve and a half positions that had not been filled to date but were originally in the budget.

Mr. Ferguson asked "Is staffing at a level of sufficiency to support the student needs with this current budget and does the staffing model meet the needs of the school?"

- Mrs. Nicholson stated we are currently transitioning students off some of the support services and once completed the students' IEPs will reflect the current staffing model that we have in place.
- Mr. Daniels stated that some positions, such as an additional SPED Coordinator and others, had to be cut to balance the budget which has an impact on the current SPED Director.

Dr. Payne asked "Have we reviewed all of the students current IEPs to see how many visits they are to have as we think about reduction in staff?"

- Mrs. Nicholson stated that we are having a difficult time in acquiring permanent staff as well as from the temp agency which is why we are very calculated to have sufficient documentation to support the decision surrounding the student supports.

Ms. Samuels joined and Mr. Sutherland provided a summary of tonight's discussion so far. Mr. Sutherland stated that we were working off only the summary page sent out by Ms. McFaul to make it clear. In the yellow highlights, you see the figures originally presented and approved by the board as the budget versus the updated percentage of the budget. The net impact, especially in staffing, was a net change of 12.5 FTE's from the beginning of the year to what this budget final shows. Again those FTE's are primarily vacant positions and student service positions that are anticipated to not be required under the new enrollment, new levels and services required and the change of the IEPs.

Ms. Samuels asked "So if the biggest impact is per pupil SPED and can you remind me of what at risk meant?"

- Mr. Sutherland stated that the biggest impact on the revenue is per pupil general education and per pupil SPED. This is formulaic based upon whether it is general education, which is by grade or the per pupil for Special Education, which is by level. The original budget was projected for 380 students with a certain number of those identified as SPED, whereas, the actual budget we are using is true data of 331 students. The at risk is also formulaic funding that we receive based on the students defined criteria of meeting an at risk assessment such as homeless, foster care, qualifying for free and reduced lunch or another designation in this category. The enrollment decrease would cause that funding to decrease.

Ms. Giles questioned why are the SPED numbers low since we had students transition over to different levels? Why is there such a significant difference in the numbers?

- Mr. Sutherland stated that based on real numbers, we are currently receiving revenue for 127 students in level 4 and there are an additional seven or eight students who are transitioning

which will give us a budget of \$5.5 million in revenue. In the original budget, the number of students projected was 147.

Ms. Samuels asked “Do we know the data as of today?” “Will we not revise it since we have the time?”

- Mr. Sutherland and Ms. Henck stated that we made an estimate for the future based on historical data. We know the figures through November 7th and estimated for what will happen for the rest of the year. If we exceed our estimate we will absolutely adjust the budget.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that what the board is asking is if we come in better on our weekly check-ins is there a list of things that we would add back to the budget?

- Mr. Sutherland stated “I think that the organization ensuring the school has the staff to meet all requirements of the services to be given to the students and to maintain the staffing at a reasonable level as it relates to the other positions which exist in a school which aren’t mandated by an IEPs, teachers.... those sorts of things. We have not as a result of this budget cycle reduced the amount of administrative staffing, instructional coaches, and other key positions added this year in order to help the school move toward its goals. At our enrollment level we have reasonable staffing, certainly as new information comes to light we can manage against that new information. In the past the school and The Guild have been flexible as it relates to changes midstream”.

Dr. Payne asked “What is the legal obligation to the SPED students?” She has seen charter schools closed if their obligations for the children are not met and we must remember our legal responsibility to provide the children with the best possible services for their needs.

-Ms. Lane stated that legal requirements are met and we will be monitoring those IEPs on a weekly basis.

Ms. Samuels stated that she wants to make sure that we have the same expectations for the population that we are serving. The quality of education that we commit to these students is beyond adequate, and should be above and beyond, giving the right support and care needed and not projecting baseline support and services based on outdated data. Ms. Samuels would like to hear from all those who assisted with composing this budget to enforce they feel confident that this budget reflects the commitment we have made to the students and their families.

- Ms. Lane stated that this was her expectation and asked Mrs. Nicholson to take the lead on this to determine where the least impact is in student programming. This proposed budget was reached by the school staff knowing what they can and cannot live without. The Board told us to go back to the drawing board and this recommended proposed budget is from the school staff. In terms of meeting student needs, they know the students best along with the culture and climate of the school.
- Mrs. Nicholson stated in confidence that we have made the best effort to provide adequate services for our students in terms of the budget challenge. While she did not feel it is the best because certain positions had to be cut, the team did a tremendous job identifying the least level of impact on programming.

Ms. Samuels asked Mrs. Nicholson if she could speak to what was cut that does not give you the greatest confidence?

- Mrs. Nicholson stated that Mr. Daniels talked about the IEP Coordinator. Although Dr. Jackson does a great job with managing the caseloads, she could be more efficient on certain challenges. She has many obligations where it pertains to support in meetings, teachers, and overseeing resource staff with caseloads, especially with the high population of students that are identified as Special needs. There are some hard to fill positions that we currently use temporary services for which is the second area for us to benefit from. We would like to split our self-contained classrooms because they are getting larger and the general education classes are getting smaller.
- Mr. Daniels agreed with what Mrs. Nicholson has stated and finding additional TBA staff that can handle the population of students that we serve. The IEP Coordinator position would have been a direct link for all of the students having annual evaluations, meetings, and reevaluations. This would have allowed Dr. Jackson to handle the high profile cases, IEP situations that needed a more prolific special education mind i.e. when parents bring attorneys to manage the related service providers, making sure that all of the caseloads are covered and people are turning in their paperwork on time. Without the IEP Coordinator, it does not free her up to go into the classroom to support staff.
- Mrs. Nicholson stated that there was never a candidate that was a good fit for the organization as they were not willing to take on the large caseload that would have been shared with Dr. Jackson.

Ms. Samuels asked could the Special Education Coordinator position be reconsidered before we finalize and solidify the budget?

Ms. Giles asked what were the next steps because we cannot vote on the budget tonight so when can we reconvene to have a conversation about this separately. Mr. Ferguson also asked for a separate call for a board discussion.

Ms. Giles made a motion to reconvene as a board to have executive session, Dr. Payne seconded. The motion was approved. Ms. Samuels will schedule a discussion for Monday, December 2, 2019.

Adjourn at 7:20pm

Submitted by:
Melody D Giles