STAR School Board Meeting Minutes
April 15, 2025
4:00 PM

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Mark Sorensen at 4:00 PM.

Present: Mark Sorensen, Elaine McCabe, Rick St. Germaine, and Thomas Walker (4:06 PM.)

Others Present: Director Jeannie Gross, Forrest Vallora, Elaine Jim, McKenzie Wilkins.

Opening words of encouragement were made by Evelyn McCabe.

Board Chair Mark Sorensen discussed the agenda, which had been posted.

Motion was made by Evelyn McCabe and seconded by Rick St. Germaine to approve the posted agenda. The motion carried 3-0-0. Voting in favor were Evelyn McCabe, Rick St. Germaine, and Mark Sorensen.

Board Chair, Mark Sorensen briefly discussed the Board meeting minutes of January 14, 2025. Thomas Walker entered the meeting at 4:06 PM.

Motion was made by Evelyn McCabe and seconded by Rick St. Germaine to approve the minutes from the School Board meeting of January 14, 2025. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, Mark Sorensen, and Rick St. Germaine.

Reports

Academic and Testing.

Director Jeannie Gross reported that as of this week 102 students were enrolled. Including the pre-K students, there were 110 students enrolled. The state testing was completed today. There may be some make up testing done next week. The percentage of students tested, including make up testing, will be 100%. The school has not completed the third testing of Dibels as yet. There are 16 students at risk. And the benchmark is 20.

Rick St. Germaine reported that he made observations and visits of five classes in the lower elementary. He indicated that the upper grades were in testing this week. He reported that he does these infrequent observations on behalf of the School Board. He noted that there were low numbers of students in each of the classes he observed. The teachers in pre-K, kindergarten, first, second, and lower Dine were providing quality instruction, administering their lessons very well, with most students engaged and on task. Teachers were enthusiastic, positive, supportive, and gave students individualized attention and reinforcement. The teachers appeared to instruct with veteran expertise.

Some teachers intersperse DINE language throughout their instruction. Grandma Sarah was covering for the DINE instructor and she taught students with confidence and effectiveness. Rick met with the first grade teacher and had a great visit with her regarding her work with students, their progress, test results, work with the Leadership Team, great experience with her parents, and how things are done on the STAR School campus. Rick St. Germaine reported to the board that he was very impressed with the quality of instruction rendered by our teachers in the lower elementary grades.

Director Jeannie Gross discussed testing results, comparatively speaking from last year. Eureka curriculum. We are hoping for improvements in math and science. Benchmark Galileo. Our teachers are looking at what our results tell us, analyzing the data, weighted standards. She described the teachers working on standards from the assessment. Navi as a benchmark is better than Galileo. With feedback from Mary Lou, Becca, and Elaine (Leadership Team members), they suggest that testing is more positive with Navi. Will Navi replace Galileo next year? It seems that more schools are going in this direction, with Pearson. Our test results will come in May, 2025. Evelyn asked, are our students getting used to state testing? The answer was: Our students still get nervous at testing time so we need to keep giving them opportunities to experiencing on line testing.

Financial Report

Forrest provided a positive report. Near the end of the school year, we have a surplus of about $450,000. We are cash healthy with $200,000 on hand. This is a healthy cash position. We are trending ahead of budget, and will exceed net income. We should meet all of the financial requirements this year.

Grants Update

Forest and Jeannie provided a report on the status of School grants.
NAM - We are in year four of five. This program covers DINE language, three employees; personnel.
NAAF - This program ends this year. We will reapply for new funding.
Newman's Own - This grant provides $50,000 per year and we must reapply annually. This covers part of our agriculture program and personnel.
Native FEWS - We will be in our final year of this five year program, which supports our gardener.
RISE - We will be in our third year of the three year program. We received this grant from the Arizona Office of Education.
School Safety - We will be in our third year of the three year program. This supports an employee personnel salary.
NAL - We are in the first year of a three year grant for $1 million for Native American language.

Pending Grants

NAAF - We are applying for a new grant for $150,000.

USDA Farm to School - We applied for this program to support our Farm to School project that covers our livestock and 4H projects.
Native American Language Preservation - We applied for this DINE language education program. We requested $718,000 for three years with a 20% match. It is pending.

Action

A. Financial audit and legal. Forrest reported that our audit went well, with a smoother process. On legal questionnaire, there were two no answers. It involved attendance and financials. It is not on our dashboard. We do not expect any consequence about that. The financial statement audit went well. It was clean. We have $500,000 cash. It was approved by the state board. This is healthy. The audit has been successful for two years now.

Motion was made by Evelyn McCabe in seconded by Thomas Walker to accept the financial and legal audit compliance questionnaire. The motion carried 4-0-0. Folding for the motion were Mark Sorensen, Thomas Walker, Evelyn McCabe, and Rick St. Germaine.

B. Financial forecast for paying off the loan.

Forrest led the discussion on this matter. He suggested that as we are in a very positive cash position we should consider paying off the loan to provide our school security from this major debt. We also have the matter of paying March interest amounts. He posted the question Considering that school begins for the new year in July, 2025. Should we pay off the loan now? Rick St. Germaine suggested that we wait until after school begins in mid July, considering that there are unknowns about a presidential administration that is threatening federal resources to rural schools. Even though there are great benefits to paying off the loan early and saving large amounts of dollars, we may be wise to wait until we know more about the availability of federal funds, including Impact Aid and Title I funds, and the need to ensure that we have funds to begin our school year in July. Our Board has a priority to retire the burden of loan debt. Board members generally agreed with this suggestion.

C. Back-up Plan Regarding Department of Education Grants
The STAR School has two grants, NAM and NAL, that are in an unknown status from the US department of education, that can have a severe detrimental impact on resources to support our DINE language program. These grants have been approved, but the president has suddenly cut personnel from DOE to authorize funding for the successful grants. If these grants are canceled because of presidential orders, we will lose the support of our native language and culture projects.

D. Preschool program.

Board members discussed the prospects of continued non-funding for our pre-K program and the low numbers of students enrolled, plus the unreimbursed cost of spending K-8 core school funding to support this non-funded program.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and second end by Evelyn McCabe that STAR School close and discontinue our pre-K program at the end of SY 24-25 and not operate it next SY 25-26. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.

E. Contract Renewals

Director Jeannie Gross provided a list of employee contract renewals and discuss this with the board members. She made a recommendation for renewals.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and seconded by Evelyn McCabe that the following employees be offered contract renewals for SY 25-26 (see attached list). The motion carried for-0-0. Those voting for the motion included Rick St. Germaine, Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.

Director Jeannie Gross presented to the board new positions that she was recommending for SY 25–26. She discussed these positions with the board members.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and seconded by Evelyn McCabe to approve Director Gross's recommendation to offer a contract for a SPED teacher position for SY 25-26 to Zoe Gale. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.

F. School Calendar SY 25-26
Director Jeannie Gross discussed the proposed School Calendar for SY 25-26. She indicated that it was reviewed and generally favorable to the School Leadership team and others. Director Gross shared a chart of how the calendar was in compliance with the required hours per School year per grade.

Motion was made by Thomas Walker and seconded by Evelyn McCabe to approve the proposed SY 25-26 STAR School calendar (see attached Calendar SY 25-26). The motion was carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Thomas Walker, Evelyn McCabe, Rick St. Germaine, and Mark Sorensen.

G. COLA

H. 401K Match

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and seconded by Thomas Walker to enter executive session at 5:53 PM for the purposes of addressing agenda items COLA and 401K Match that involved personnel and financial matters. The motion was carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Thomas Walker, Evelyn McCabe, and Mark Sorensen.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and second end by Evelyn McCabe that the school board exit executive session at 6:09 PM. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in

favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and seconded by Thomas Walker that the STAR School offer school employees a 3% COLA rate increase for SY 25-26. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Thomas Walker, Evelyn McCabe, and Mark Sorensen.

Motion was made by Rick St. Germaine and seconded by Evelyn McCabe that the STAR School offer school employees a 401K continuing match for the SY 25-26. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Rick St. Germaine, Evelyn McCabe, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.

I. Public Comments

There were no public members or school employees present either in person or on Zoom.

J. Next Meeting

School Board members discussed and agreed by consensus that, in conformity to previous designation of school board meetings already agreed upon, the next two school board meetings would be held on June 24, 2025 and July 8, 2025.

Motion was made by Evelyn McCabe and seconded by Rick St. Germaine that the meeting be adjourned at 6:14 PM. The motion carried 4-0-0. Voting in favor of the motion were Evelyn McCabe, Rick St. Germaine, Thomas Walker, and Mark Sorensen.