

Meeting Minutes

Kids Unlimited Academy a public charter school Board meeting

Date: May 28, 2024

Time: 7:30 a.m.

1. Preliminary

Call to Order: 7:38 by Chair Jani Hale

Present: Jani Hale, Martha Ibarra, Ignacio Sanchez, Lisa Hutchins, Ryan Bernard

Determination of quorum: yes

Absent: Pat Barry

Guests: Larissa Medina, Gonzalo Duran, Rocio Mendoza, student council members Jimena Velez, Iris Gomez and Natalie Moreno-Deras

Staff: Tom Cole, Cass Weiland, Lindsay Ochs, Emmanuel Balan, Cheryl Graham, Sarah Lemon, Tyrone McDonald, Andrea Gee

Approval of agenda (additions/corrections): approved as read unanimously

2. Review and approval of minutes: approved as read unanimously

3. Public comment: None

4. Student representative report: (3-5 minutes): Student council presented a survey they conducted about students' likes and dislikes about the school. They highlighted the most common answers. Ryan Bernard said the information was valuable and helped people feel heard. What are the students' plans for utilizing the information? Iris said they hoped it would be incorporated into school operations. Lisa Hutchins asked if the kids knew the background for some of the rules they don't like, for example wearing uniforms and not having cellphones at school. Martha Ibarra asked the council to describe more of their concerns over campus security. They replied that students felt unsafe on the sidewalks on streets adjacent to campus. Larissa Medina commented that some of the things about the food program she'd already heard from her daughter. She could see how a few items in the survey could be implemented.

Jani Hale told the student council that the information was valuable to the board ensuring the success of the school. K-8 participated in the survey. The student council made the survey online and sent it out to teachers so it could be shared with students to complete. Jani volunteered to sit down in classes and explain some of the legalities around the school operation while honoring the work the kids did. "I don't recall when we did a schoolwide survey to this effect, and it's really exciting." Jani said it was hard work. The board gave them a round of applause. Tyrone McDonald said he's really proud of the students on the

council. He said there are some promising fifth graders, and the school plans to continue student council next year. The mentoring program helped set the stage for the transition.

5. Teacher/staff report:

3. Business update — Cass Weiland/Pat Barry: Finances are right on track for April. The percentage for April is at 83%. The overall expenses are right at 84%. This month there is the annual true-up from ODE, and it's bad. There will be \$177,000 less next month. It's because of a loss of kids. "You have to have a full school for this to work," said Cass. The equity grant for next year is \$96,000.

Jani said she was totally unprepared when she went from Medford to Phoenix for what can happen with the true-up. The number of students for this year doesn't matter, she said, because the school is going off last year's budget, said Jani. The board has to approve the budget for the next meeting. Cass has been working on the budget, but she and her staff were waiting on the charter renewal from the school district. Tom said with the overall number of students 100 short, that translates to \$1 million. Also grant awards go down when the amount is weighted based on enrollment.

Rocio asked how the school is going to serve the incoming number of students based on the number from last year. Tom said the school was going to have to do some things that need to be discussed in the meeting. Tom said it would probably entail cutting some staff. Rocio mentioned the White City numbers, and Tom said they were being factored into the numbers already. There are 77 students coming from White City. It's one reason for realigning the school day. A full school for next year is 572. Gonzalo asked how many true-ups for the year and pointed out you had to make the decision to operate the school awaiting the money that actually matches the current enrollment.

Ryan asked about the enrollment over the summer. Tom said kindergarten is the largest group. Transfer students from another school have been historically lower. But we are looking at a targeted marketing campaign to attract certain students. Jani said test scores and a culture we can advertise is valuable. She and Cass literally went to White City and knocked on doors for recruitment. Ignacio asked about the role of parent fundraising and asked if there was any chance KUA could keep a small group of middle schoolers. Tom said KUA is now a K-5 school for the next five years.

4. KU Executive Director report — Tom Cole: The Medford School District contract is all but finished. The cap would be a maximum of 600 students. But we're more than 100 students away from that now. The district is saying they would not allow the number to grow over 600 unless KUA engaged in another negotiation. The district wouldn't allow 624 based on their own declining enrollment. They would be open to another discussion, but it's set at 600. KU leadership was worried the ADM would be lowered. But the district kept the original 85%.

After bouncing a lot of things around about SPED, KUA got a list of things it would be required to purchase, and it was so cumbersome that they declined to take SPED money. There are about 70 kids on SPED plans now, and there likely will be 100 next year. The only area KUA students are showing no growth is among SPED students, but the school has no control over it.

"We wanted to do a lift for staff." Now leadership is recalculating positions. Lupita will be coming back full time instead of being spread between Medford and White City. "It's a budget issue." Letters of intent will go out to admin and additional staff. They are behind on this process. There was a board meeting about how to offset things.

"The food program for sure is an issue of concern for us." The food program is hundreds of thousands of dollars in the hole. Nate quit when Tom brought the survey to him. Kids don't like the food. It's wasteful. They have to provide milk, which kids are throwing out. Lisa clarified that because the school accepted

government money, they don't have very much control over certain aspects. Jani and Tom agreed the posole was great, which is the kids' favorite. Nate is considering going back to a senior community. "We have some serious issues with the food program." One of the hopes is to ditch the dependence on federal funds with the support of a donor.

Rocio asked what happened to the food program that kids loved. It was smaller, Tom said. After COVID, Tom said the level of scrutiny became so much higher. And as the school grew, the volume increased. It will cost a million dollars to operate it themselves. Lisa asked if we have to find ways to fund it every year. Tom said yes, and KU needs to find grants and foundations that are in favor of the food program. Jani said getting the community involved would "take the shackles off." Cass said the danger is when the state comes during a week for an audit. If the milk count is off, they take back the money. Martha pointed out that group homes and different facilities have bilingual providers who are able to cook for special populations. Tom pointed out the differences between accounting for a large group and for a small group, and how tracking ingredients becomes exacting.

Tom said every time a kid looks at milk and throws it away, it's a waste of 37 cents that the school paid. "Kids are throwing milk away every day." The school is in the midst of a huge transition from White City to pre-K and a construction project at the Medford pre-K building to accommodate more kindergarten classrooms. Jani asked if pre-K was solvent. Tom said Preschool Promise pays for some of the program, but it opens KUA up to lawsuits for behavior. The KU board is exploring the cost of operating a private preschool. "And it's a million dollars." Jani pointed out the difference between Logos Charter School and what KUA is trying to provide, i.e. educating kids whose parents have no education. Martha asked if KU is continuing with Preschool Promise, and Tom said they're looking at it.

5. KUA Principal report — Lindsay Ochs: She and Emmanuel had some tough conversations with teachers about returning next year. Those are over. She turned the schedule over to Cheryl because of her "puzzle brain." Cheryl said she found it easier than the schedule for field day. Field day is this week, and it didn't cost \$5,000. It was only \$150 to rent a Medford city park.

Cheryl handed out test results, which haven't been shared with the public. The ELPA is one of the most challenging tests for students to pass. The ELA results have to be determined, but the projection is lower pass percentages compared with last year. Last year middle school did really well, but this year there has been teacher turnover in middle school and new curricula. The new ELA curriculum has been really successful in grades K-2. SBAC testing starts in third grade. Middle school last year helped to save last year's pass percentage. Cheryl set a high standard for growth — 10% — this year. The school pass percentage grew by 17% in two years. She'd like to see 15% growth next year.

She shared a list of factors in test preparation. One of the main goals was to bridge the gap in student skills who are in the same classroom. "The teacher buy-in was really good." All teachers contributed to overall success. "Fifth grade is on a mission next year, and they want to take down third grade." Third grade keeps seeing exponential growth. "They are whuppin' it!" It's a super organized cohort. They do whatever Cheryl tells them with fidelity. "We know that third grade comes in hot." There's a drop at fourth grade. And then in fifth grade, they try to make up for that lag. They are looking at how to address that. The middle school pass percentage is kudos to Kody Lindsey. Middle school students will only work for you if they like you. It's because he built a rapport with the kids.

The data shows that the testing approach is working. Tom said Cheryl has made a massive change in math since Jani brought her in two years ago. It's not only lifted the school, but the district is paying attention. Jani likens the effort to coaching the Lady Panthers to a state championship. Jani is looking forward to collective buy-in for the coming year. Three years is the most anyone can expect from a principal these days. This job takes a toll. She thinks recognizing people's efforts helps. The board's identity is going to be

about listening and responding. "We will have a really important meeting on June 18 going forward." It will be "all hands on deck."

6. Other business

Jani pointed out the process for board recruitment and handed out the board recruitment packets. Lisa said she would love to see everyone from the White City board on this board.

Rocio said she appreciated the opportunity to join the meeting. Maybe things didn't work out in that location, but it's an opportunity for growth here. "We're excited to continue to stay involved," said Rocio. She emphasized remembering the mission statement.

Larissa recalled working for KU before there was a "beautiful building," when they were just hosing kids off when they were hot. The impact was building relationships with those kids. She worked for KU for 10 years. She has a third grader at KUA. "I think it's just really important that we continue to hire staff that are interested in building relationships with kids." When she's walking down the hall, she doesn't like to see staff members on their phones having private conversations. She's passionate about making sure KU is sustainable. She's seen the huge difference it's made in kids' and families' lives.

Gonzalo said he's looking forward to creating culture around KUA values, including the food program and pre-K. "I'm willing to make the commitment if it takes some of my time to volunteer." His wife is very passionate, as well. They would even help look for new monetary resources.

Jani said the board would look at the applications at the next meeting. There's a break in July with a meeting in August. "This board is right where it needs to be ... It's an exciting time to become a board member."

Consent agenda

None

7. Adjournment 9:10 a.m.

Next meeting, June 18, 2024, 7:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Lemon
Director of Mission Advocacy
Kids Unlimited of Oregon