

Meeting Minutes

Kids Unlimited Academy a public charter school Board meeting

Date: March 19, 2024

Time: 7:30 a.m.

1. Preliminary

Call to Order: 7:41 a.m. by Chair Jani Hale

Determination of quorum: Jani Hale, Pat Barry, Ryan Bernard, Lisa Hutchins, Ignacio Sanchez

Absent: Martha Ibarra, Julia McFadden

Guests:

Staff: Cass Weiland, Lindsay Ochs, Emmanuel Balan, David Thygeson, Elaina Rich, Jacqueline Rangel, Sarah Lemon

Approval of agenda (additions/corrections): corrected title of document to agenda

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

3. Public comment: None

4. Student representative report: (3-5 minutes) None

5. Teacher/staff report: Jani Hale wanted to recognize the efforts of KUA's English language development staff — Elaina Rich, Jacqueline Rangel and Yolanda Ortega. Principal Lindsay Ochs said they were a "breath of fresh air." A high number of KUA students are passing the English Language Proficiency Assessment, which is very difficult. There are very few students statewide who are non-native English speakers who can pass. The ELD team is more willing to help step in and substitute than almost any other teachers, said Lindsay. "It's so nice not to be met with resistance."

The ELD teachers spoke about middle school's recent trip to Southern Oregon University. The students practiced writing essays and filling out applications. It's changed a few kids' demeanors. "We spent a good month on career development," said Elaina. SOU is a vital resource in our backyard. They plan to continue career development for fifth graders next year. They also delved into trades. "There are so many different avenues to success," said Elaina.

Jani said she's amazed at the level of difficulty faced by our ELD students when taking the ELPA test. An ELPA test determines whether a child advances in the ELD program. Pat Barry asked what the ELD team thought about dual-language immersion programs. The ELD teachers said it would be beneficial, not least because parents want their kids to learn Spanish. Emmanuel Balan said Jackson Elementary started one,

and it was very popular. "The interest is certainly there," said Jacqueline. Elaina said it's also a draw for parents who are native English speakers. Pat asked if there was any way to bring middle schoolers "back to home base." Elaina said it would be great to have an IA elective that earns them credit in high school.

3. Business update — Cass Weiland/Pat Barry: Cass is working on a new budget. The school will be in negotiations with Medford School District 549C. Currently KUA receives an 85% pass-through, which is above the minimum that the state requires. KUA will be asking for an additional 5%. KUA has had some ups and downs financially and will be able to weather those, largely because of its relationship with the KU nonprofit.

Pat said he's not worried about the financial picture going back to the K-5 model and he thinks KUA provides a safe environment. Lisa Hutchins said she's hearing that safety is a concern everywhere; she's not sure what's changed. Cass said enrollment is so important, not just for the ADM, but the SIA allocation, equity grant, migrant funding and the food program. Ryan Bernard moved to approve the financials, Lisa seconded and the financial report was approved unanimously.

4. KU Executive Director report: In Tom Cole's absence, Jani presented some items on his behalf. The district is exploring a hybrid special ed program with the school. She reviewed Tom's responses to the Medford School District administrators about the phase-out of middle school. Currently there are only 58 middle school students. After a year of surveys and parent feedback, the majority of families supported the return to a K-5 model.

The Medford Board asked if KUA is concerned about the school's "family atmosphere" if the school grew to 750 students. Tom replied that the school would not grow to that number unless the physical structures were in place, including outdoor play areas. It would be a phased-in process of adding students, if that was appropriate.

One Medford Board member asked how KUA is addressing the increase in behavior issues. Tom said the school would keep managing those in the responsible way that it has for the past 12 years.

Jani shared that Tom said he's working on a date to meet with KUA White City and KU boards to start making inroads into those boards merging. Jani said she wanted it to be a social event, largely to celebrate the White City KUA Board and the work it's done leading up to its dissolution. Ryan said he's done some work to look into the Board structure. It seems like we want to have things lined up going into the new school year, ideally voting new members in at either the May or June meeting.

Jani announced this year's gala will be June 21. Sarah Lemon commented the event will showcase students more than last year's did, including kids serving the tables. Pat said he looks at this coming year as taking some steps back. Jani said she views it differently, that we're streamlining and are setting ourselves up for smooth operations.

5. KUA Principal report — Lindsay Ochs: She wanted to spotlight David Thygeson and the work he's been doing. All the kids are at such a deficit. "And we have these huge holes to fill," she said. Literacy Night had about 70 people, which was calm. More than 250 people came to Pi Night, and pizza ran out. They had to order more on DoorDash.

The school is transitioning away from iReady and going to Dibels, which is owned by Amplify, the current reading curriculum. Most Portland schools use it, said Lindsay. "It's just going to be such a powerful piece of data for us," she said. At this month's Site Council, one of the parents asked about the "hand-off" to middle school. They have the outgoing students sorted by their schools and will have an event for each school. Already, the North and South Medford counselors came to speak with eighth graders. A handful of kids are going to Crater and Eagle Point high schools.

Pat asked if it's open enrollment in other districts. Lisa said there's a lot of pieces to the process that change year to year. Lindsay pointed out the home district has to release a student first to release their funds. Jani said she had a fight to get rid of iReady, but she couldn't because Medford School District had purchased it. Lindsay said she believed KUA was paying for its own diagnostic program. Dibels already is used for multiple kids at KUA.

Emmanuel talked about the positive behavior system and staff excellence awards. There also are posters out in front of classes that introduce staff members. He plans to put together a spring softball league for staff at the school. The West Medford Tigres had a try-out Sunday, and the vast majority were KUA kids who showed up. The school also is celebrating farmworker awareness week.

He and David are putting together a new job description to attract employees who want to be here for the kids, including being "solution focused." There will be a few staff who are not going to have their contracts renewed because they are not team players. They called a server who was interacting positively with administrators at Road House and asked if she would be interested in coming to work at KUA. She's going to volunteer and hopefully will be coming to work as an IA the following year.

David said all the students rated the school very highly on safety. They realized the staff wasn't being celebrated as much as it could be. He explained his job as coordinator for multi-tiered systems of support.

Recent tests showed a lot of kids in second grade do not understand phonics and spelling. There's recently an 80% success rate on tests, and previously this year it was at 20%. Among the 16 lowest-level readers, there's now only one who has not made any progress, which indicates he may need a special ed referral. Before, they referred way too many students. That student, though, now is routinely testing, and he wasn't before. He's received positive behavior checks. David shared the progress of an ELD student who has made unbelievable growth. "Her growth is just one example," he said.

There is an issue with iReady not always being indicative of kids' abilities. Their growth in a month is more than growth in an entire year with this intervention. There is one second grade teacher who hasn't bought into the new intervention, said David, although all the data show it's working. At the same time, behavior referrals are going down since the new intervention. "There's not a single behavior referral ... since students were receiving instruction at their level," said David. When these kids are not overwhelmed by the instruction, they don't misbehave. The students deliver at least five compliments every day. At first they resisted it, and now the kids have totally bought in. It's created more of a connection between the students. "They're not saying 'I can't read' anymore," said David.

MTSS gave the students these tools, and they are doing the work. Now they're going to replicate the program for fourth graders, some of whom are reading at a lower level now than some second graders. Jani said "many hands make light work." And she asked if we're giving parents basic tools — reading aloud and flash cards — to work on skills at home. Lisa said it's so refreshing to see the school getting back to relationships. Lisa said it's awesome to see it happening, and it's been a while since she's heard this type of account from staff.

6. Adjournment 9 a.m.

Next meeting: May 28, 2024, 7:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Lemon
Director of Mission Advocacy
Kids Unlimited of Oregon