



HCCS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Regular Meeting – Wednesday, February 21, 2024 – 5:30 PM – Room #144

Public Zoom Link: <https://zoom.us/j/96422657430>

- I. **Call to Order & Roll Call 5:31PM** - Sherry, Laura, Dillon, Vincent, Daniel (6PM arrival), Jordan. Absent: Mouna
- II. **Changes or Additions to the Agenda - None**
- III. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes - Approved by all present (Not Mouna or Daniel)**
- IV. **Public Comment -**
 - a. **Abby Adams:** Express disappointment that there hasn't been a curriculum celebration for the first semester. Hoping it's in the works but hasn't seen any communication. It's a really special and important part of our community. The kids work very hard on their project based curriculum and they deserve to be celebrated. We aren't a traditional school where we have a lot of homework going home and this gives us an opportunity to celebrate.
 - b. **Matt Melear:** Speak to the board about the toxic culture that is spreading in the leadership. Last year the SEAB proposed a change to the ...see statement. Text messages and talk behind his back, rumors. One person reached out to - directly opposed to the... - voted unanimously that he was not allowed to express his concerns. [The Board reached out to Matt for a copy of his written statement for clarity and accuracy and he provided his written statement attached to the end of the minutes.]
 - c. **Grace Helms-Kotre:** - read letter to the school board regarding SEAB. [Statement is included at the end of minutes.]
 - d. **Deb Rhizal:** SEAB board member and present in the classroom 8th grade curriculum. Expressed it as a great experience and conveyed the appreciation of the students. Public shout-out to Thaddeus who did a wonderful job teaching.
 - e. **Aaron Towne** - speaking again to reiterate the problematic content. Reviewed his previous experience on the SEAB. How can it be that you as leaders of the school don't feel that these accusations are worth investigating. Please don't be fooled by the equity community. It is not inclusive or equitable. I implore the board to send the SEAB to be reworked to represent his preferred experiences. [The Board reached out to Aaron for a copy of his written statement for clarity and accuracy; there has been no response.]
- V. **Board Correspondence - None**
- VI. **Presentations:** Honey Creek Charter Authorizer Presentation
Naomi Norman, WISD Superintendent & Cherie Vannatter, WISD Deputy Superintendent
 1. Authorization process
 - a. Evaluate - including an anonymous culture & climate survey opening to the community tomorrow and closing 3/7.
 - b. Review charter contract
 - c. Double check bylaws and ensure they're included with the reauthorization
 - d. Our Board and WISD Board review and approve the contract
 2. **Vincent:** Inquired about the historical data from previous evaluation surveys. Sherry says it is available publicly and can be shared with the board. Will comparisons be done with other schools? (Cherie: Unknown - hasn't been discussed).
 3. **Jordan:** What drives the decision making for the focus on the survey. Naomi: We haven't done one. We have this new building and a change over in leadership and it seems like its time. It's on her mind for her own staff especially since the pandemics. Not out of perception that there isn't a good climate. Hanover has been doing these culture and climate surveys over the last few years with many districts.
 4. **Laura:** Are there trends we should be aware of - or trends that exist in the authorization in other charters? (Naomi: There are 71 elements that need to be assured in the reauthorization process. Standardization is sweeping through schools broadly. There isn't an emphasis on a plan to make a program that isn't rooted in standardization but focused on what the children need in their real time

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development. Thinks there is a negative trend and encourages HC to lean into their mission of what practices are best for kids. 'Try not to be complicit in the oppression of children' is a motivational quote that Naomi keeps in her office. There's great intention and we have almost 30 years here with Honey Creek.

5. **Sherry:**

VII. Reports

- a. **President's Report - Sherry**
 - i. Emphasis on the core values of HC and how they flow into all aspects of the school - board, admin, classroom and so on. A lot of information is shared at board meetings and our strategic plan is being developed - input is and should always be a core part of our value set - our job on the board is to consolidate that into formal policy decisions.
- b. **Director's Report - Kevin**
 - i. Jo Brown, social worker, will be leaving the school for employment closer to home.
 - ii. Thank you to Jaelyn Thomas for earning his life guard certification so we can get swim back up and running by the end of the month.
- c. **Parent-Teacher Organization Report - None**
- d. **Committee Reports as Applicable**
 - i. **Finance - Laura**
 1. Reviewing budget amendment and continuing to consolidate and review compensation policy.
 - ii. **Governance - Sherry**
 1. Packed agenda for our next meeting - a number of policy updates including finance policy.
 - iii. **Strategic Planning - Sherry**
 1. Survey going out - not just the ISD but a board survey - there are two separate purposes but with a common theme. We hope the community shows up to complete both.

VIII. Discussion Items

- a. **Charter Renewal Amendments - Edits have been taken to the ISD and they support the recommended changes. At the March meeting we'll have a final draft for action by the board.**
 - i. Extending the term length of trustees to 4 or 6 years (a standard throughout the state of michigan) compared to our current 3 years (or remaining term by appointment). The number of terms don't currently have a limit. Clarification on disqualifications.
 - ii. Possibility to reduce the trustees total to 5 - it is currently minimum at 7 (max 13). This allows for flexibility as a smaller school.
 - iii. **Laura** - need to clarify the definition of membership so that we can establish clear rules on who can vote in the election. (Sherry: One vote per household is the current guideline but with an equity lens - what defines a household? This needs to be defined as well).
 - iv. **Vincent:** The Pre-K question in the document - has this been discussed? Wants to make sure there are no unilateral changes made without input. (Sherry: We have the flexibility to change the programing but this isn't a change we've discussed specifically).
- b. **2023-24 Budget Amendment (pending committee review)**
 - i. **Kevin:** Budget came in where we expected it to come in. We did spend down from a 22% fund balance with staff pay to encourage retention. Finance committee is looking very closely at these numbers as we're looking at the upcoming compensation conversation.
 - ii. **Laura:** Have we done work on clarifying categories? (Kevin: These categories are locked into the system we use. We can look at the specifics in the next committee meeting.)
 - iii. **Vincent:** Emphasized commitment to the people in the classroom.
 - iv. **Mouna** (via zoom): Asks Kevin about the increase in budget for total support services - do you feel it's sufficient for support services? (Kevin: Difficult to answer because it's breadth - concerned that we spend more money than we take in each year. We need to protect frontline education in the classroom).
 - v. March will have the second read and approval for the current budget and the proposed 24/25 budget.

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- c. Pandemic Response Update - No recommended changes.

IX. Action Items

- a. 6th, 7th & 8th Grade Sex Education Curricula
 - i. **Laura** - Moved, Dillon - Second - open for discussion.
 - ii. **Sherry**: First reading at our January 27th meeting. Developed by the SEAB and reviewed by the governance committee.
 - iii. **Laura** - Really appreciate the healthy debate that we did have - and long conversations on the governance committee. Saw some unhealth discourse on social media. As a board member evaluating she looks at does it follow school code, law, our own bylaws, etc. Does the curriculum follow these guidelines, is the education accurate and does it fall within our mission? Looked at it at length. The SEAB is made up of very knowledgeable individuals with a lot of expertise. Saw nothing inaccurate. The sticking points that are playing out throughout the country - it falls within our mission. When it came time for the vote last year we had already had that discussion and the board meeting was spinning around the same issues that had been discussed. The Opt out isn't an exclusion - it's a best practice. Encourage anyone to reach out.
 - iv. **Dillon** - SEAB liaison experience and board communication emails.
 - v. **Sherry** - multiple tiers of the approval process - yes the SEAB but then also to the governance committee. The governance committee was reviewed and it was not a unanimous vote but the dissents were noted at a high level. We take a vote and move on with the majority.
 - vi. **Vincent** - went through the curriculum with a magnifying glass - it's just a breadth of topics and has no real problems with it. One question was brought to the SEAB chairs - asking about the layers of language surrounding sex and gender - an incredibly complex topic - and they strike a balance acknowledging a binary on two ends and discuss that there is a continuum between. Refers to his experience teaching biology at a college level and how his knowledge plays into his understanding of sex and gender and the curriculum. It would be beautiful if the curriculum could go into a deeper level but understands that there are limits to a middle school curriculum - room for improvement but nothing inaccurate - welcomes a more upfront introduction to biological continuums (citing race as an example of biological continuum vs social construct). We encouraged folks who disagree or have concerns to reach out. I don't want to delay the vote because it will keep the middle schoolers from receiving the education that they need - there is so much invaluable information and these kids will lose out if we send it back to the SEAB and delay approval.
 - vii. Sherry - When making important decisions likes to look back on our mission statement and core values. Every individual and not just students are entitled to a respectful environment - no vote stops the conversation - it means we move forward with an action and we hope to continue these conversations. It's so important that we have specific feedback - whether edits to a document or a process.
 - viii. Laura: First year doing SEAB - this is ongoing - it isn't sealed to never be opened again - a lot of work has gone into this. I reject the notion that if a family disagrees with this then they don't belong in the school. Of course they're welcome here.
 - ix. Daniel: Made suggestions to the SEAB in January - regarding timing and want to commend the SEAB on what they've done. I'm glad my child will benefit from this information and look forward to seeing how it will grow in the future.
 - x. Jordan: Not present for the initial process - deep dive in the curriculum - including meeting minutes - stood out the number of students who reported to the meeting that they wanted a curriculum like this that reflects them.
 - xi. Mouna: Remind us all that prior to this curriculum we hadn't had any sex education at the school for a while - this is a huge gap - the fact that the SEAB was able to process this huge amount of information into a concise curriculum is wonderful and took a lot of hard work.
 - xii. All present in favor (Mouna absent). No dissent noted.

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X. Acknowledgements & Thank You's

- a. Sherry: I want to thank families for their participation. To the SEAB, Equity committee, families of all students who take an active role in their children's education. Volunteers are led by our administration and staff. Thank you to all families who are helping their students with their talent show submissions. Still time for still-exhibits! Families supporting students support Honey Creek.
- b. Vincent: Thank you to people with different opinions for coming here and voicing their thoughts. It can be hard. I want to reflect what the community wants. I want to thank Sherry because I've started to realize that this is like a second job that you don't get paid for. People can look at the board and get impatient because they don't see all the behind the scenes things that don't get air time.
- c. Daniel: Acknowledge Chris Culbertson - he's helping to coach middle school soccer games. And for the middle school teachers for organizing an amazing outing for the middle school students. They continue to shine with their commitment and curriculum.

XI. Public Comment

- a. **Taryn Gal:** She/Her - Thank you for all that you do and for the vote on the sex ed curriculum. Filling in as cochair for the remainder of the year and on the equity team. Wouldn't let the meeting end without addressing some of the things that were said this year. The definition of equity...centering the voices that are so often marginalized. I get the sense that those who are pushing against this curriculum don't understand what equity means. While they are a minority in Honey Creek they are members of majority identifies outside of this specific community.
- b. **Kim Phillips-Knope:** She/Her - Came in at the tail end of Naomi's presentation - moved by the quote to not be compliant in the oppression of students - there's so much power in that as a guiding principle. Express my gratitude to the board for their ongoing and unwavering support for our students. We're unique and what we do is special. Thank you for continuing to grow our school as a place where our most marginalized students can show up as their authentic selves where they will be seen and loved and welcomed.
- c. **Sue Hoffbauer:** As a parent, looking at an email from 2007 regarding HC maturation curriculum - the SEAB has done a detailed and the truest curriculum to what our students need at this time. I have a 4th grader - and you can't move onto the % curriculum soon enough. Thank you.
- d. Deb Rhizal: Thinking of the past and future - it's a new state requirement that you have to be certified - it used to be our base class teacher - we have one and only one certified teacher for sex ed. Would encourage us to have another instructor certified.
- e. Abby Adams: Reiterate what Mouna has said - that we have no had sex ed at the school for some time. So grateful that it's back and so grateful that it's cultivated by people who work in this space - that it follows science and statutory guidelines. This curriculum really follows best practices. Daughter is the student rep on the committee - gives her loose review on how things have processed and has been really impressed and proud to have her child learn the material. Really grateful for the parents who express their opinions that may not be in step with others - these are parents who show up to volunteer in the community. Thank you board and thank you SEAB.

XII. Adjournment - 7:29PM

Statement read by Matthew Melear:

Good evening,

I come to speak to the board and broader school community about a deep concern about the growing toxicity that is being allowed to lead our school culture and decision making.

I want to first mention how sex-ed conversations proceeded last year. I want to review this for a couple of reasons: One, it will show that the SEAB and School Board acted in ways that are directly opposite to the School's value statement regarding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Second, the exact same actions are happening today.

Last year the SEAB proposed a change to the sex-ed curriculum. This was brought to the Governance Committee and eventually the Board. The curriculum was supposed to be subject for discussion and eventually subject for a vote to include in the curriculum or not. I happened to be a Governance Committee member and a Board member during this time, and during the discussions voiced concern over a couple of specific points.

After the Board met on the curriculum, rumors started to swirl and text message threads were fired off. SEAB members and other community members started slamming me as a 'homophobe', 'transphobe', 'bigot', and who knows what else? I was publicly (on the school's unofficial facebook page) labelled as a "threat to the culture of the school" and derided again as a transphobe and a bigot. Not one of the parents saying these things ever spoke to me on the issue, but took the simple fact that I had questions and concerns about the curriculum as enough evidence that I was motivated by hate, fear and bigotry. These parents then started a rumor mill in an attempt to exclude me socially and damage my reputation.

One person, in total, reached out to have a conversation with me about my concerns. She was a fellow board member and sits on the board still. While the conversation was cordial, it was highlighted by a question posed: "Why do you even go to this school? Why don't you send your kids to a different school?" Even under the most generous interpretation of that question, there is a clear undertone of "If you don't think the way I do, you shouldn't be here."

There is no doubt that this is directly opposed to the spirit of Inclusion, and is certainly not indicative of welcoming Diversity.

To cap off the review of last year, I want to remind the board of the vote on whether or not to ratify the proposed curriculum. Before the vote, discussion was opened. As a Board member with concerns, I began to state my concerns before being shouted over and quickly voted to not be allowed to speak. I'll repeat that: It was voted unanimously that I was not allowed to discuss my concerns. Every single board member who attended that meeting voted to not let a fellow board member speak. Ironically, they did this under the guise of inclusion and diversity.

...

Bringing our attention to this year, I noticed that some similar trends are happening. Aaron Towne has mentioned that he was silenced during SEAB committee meetings. He mentioned that he had done "100s of hours of research" on the subject and had concerns about the accuracy and appropriateness of the curriculum. Instead of having his concerns addressed, he was told that he couldn't ask those questions and had his concerns dismissed and trampled over.

His next course of action was to bring this up to the board, which he did last month.

With a show of hands, I would ask the board members here: After hearing that Aaron Towne, a respected school-parent who volunteers actively for the community in many capacities, had questions and concerns about the curriculum -- how many of you reached out to hear his concerns? I'll note that one board member raised her hand. I'll ask the rest of you who did not: Why not?

Is it, again, in the spirit of inclusion that you decided that his voice shouldn't be heard? Or are you worried that if you engage in dialogue with him, that you too will be subject to innuendo and gossip from the toxically aggressive culture-setters? Keep in mind that you're not alone in this fear: Aaron mentioned that he has friends at this school -- and I will add I do too -- who have voiced concern about this curriculum in private but are unwilling to publicly state those concerns. The primary reason they are unwilling to do so is the toxic culture around the conversation. It is up to the board to recognize and address this growing cultural problem.

I urge the Board to do the right thing. Don't cower to the bullies; delay the vote until a real conversation can be had. If the SEAB is not emotionally equipped to have a real conversation, then change their leadership. Stand up for the social justice statement that YOU YOURSELVES voted for this school year. Stand up for inclusion, even if that means that you have to "include" people you disagree with.

Letter from the Equity Committee:

To Honey Creek Community School Board members,

On behalf of the School's Equity Committee, we are writing to express our strong endorsement and support for the middle school sexual education curriculum developed by the Sex Education Advisory Board (SEAB) presented to the HCCS Board of Education for its first hearing on January 25, 2024. As members dedicated to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment, we believe that comprehensive sexual education is vital for the well-being and development of our students.

This sexual education curriculum not only provides essential information about reproductive health and safety but also fosters a culture of respect, understanding, and inclusivity. In the context of sexual education, equity and inclusivity mean ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, gender identity, sexual orientation, or abilities, have access to accurate and comprehensive information about their bodies, relationships, as well as reproductive and sexual health. It means creating a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel empowered to ask questions, express themselves, and make informed choices.

We commend the efforts of the SEAB in creating a curriculum that is inclusive, informative, and sensitive to the diverse needs of our student body. Equity in sexual education also requires addressing disparities in access to information and resources, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, and actively working to dismantle systemic barriers that inhibit students from fully participating in their own sexual health education. Inclusivity, on the other hand, involves creating a safe and supportive learning environment where all students feel valued, respected, and represented. The sexual education curriculum developed by SEAB reflects these principles. It is designed to provide students with comprehensive and age-appropriate information that is sensitive to their diverse needs and experiences. It incorporates topics such as consent, healthy relationships, gender identity, sexual orientation, and cultural differences in a respectful and non-judgmental manner. By incorporating these elements into the curriculum, we can help reduce stigma, promote acceptance, and create a more inclusive and empowered school community.

By endorsing and implementing this curriculum we will not only be fulfilling our responsibility to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy choices but also promoting values of empathy, respect, and equality. The Honey Creek Community School Board has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to promoting the well-being and success of all students. We urge the board to fully endorse and support the implementation of this curriculum once and for all and to ensure that it is integrated into our school's broader efforts to create an inclusive and equitable learning environment. It is time to stop entertaining the pushback on this curriculum that is rooted in homophobia and transphobia. To further include these viewpoints in discussion is not inclusion, it is the opposite of inclusion. We will not stand for the centering of voices that uphold values and actions that directly go against what HCCS stands for. Anyone who does not support this curriculum is fully entitled to opt out from participating without penalty. Blocking progress on this effort is keeping children from getting information they need.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to seeing the positive impact of this curriculum on our school community.

Equity Committee Co-Chairs:

Fernanda Cross, Taryn Gal, and Grace Helms-Kotre