

Kirby Hall School Board of Directors
58th Meeting Minutes
Saturday, January 27, 2024

All board members were present. In person at Kirby Hall: Victoria Rase Shinn, Board President; Macdonald Kempf, Amy Clements, Board Secretary; Teri Fickling, Ev Lunning. Via Zoom: Adrian Colesberry, Board Treasurer and VP; Sara Pevaroff Schuh, and Sabina Behague.

Ex Officio members present: Helen Roberts, Claire LaChance.

Staff and faculty members present: Emily Roberts, Alyssa Drury, Paige Arnell, Martha Peters, and Jared Dailey (via Zoom).

Parent representative present: Andy Liddell

I. The meeting began at 9 a.m.

We welcomed new board members Ev Lunning and MacDonald Kempf. We are excited to have 8 board members.

II. Report from Parent Liaison Andy Liddell

Andy spoke of parents meeting for a monthly social hour. People are busy, but those who attend the events seem to be enjoying strengthening bonds with other parents. All appreciate the classroom parents. There has been some discussion of the board's appeal to the parent community for new board member suggestions. The March 8th deadline for submissions is stated in the 2 emails with links provided in each Friday's newsletter. The board was in favor of Andy's suggestion for a breakfast social with parents and board members. It will be scheduled before the board's September meeting. Board members look forward to an informal opportunity to meet with parents.

Andy articulated many of the things he feels should be clearly communicated to the local community about how KHS fills an important niche in Austin's independent school landscape. What differentiates KHS? KHS delivers small, welcoming, in-person classes emphasizing human growth and relationship-building instead of starting with technology and relying on Chromebooks or other technology as the starting point. KHS is not anti-tech, however, and computers are used as a tool for creativity. KHS is where the students' friends are. For example, they have time for free play in aftercare and get to play with children in other grade levels. KHS is not conservative Christian, but values kindness, humility, and respect. KHS is not Montessori. We need to grow what's working. Enrollment Catalyst survey was appreciated by the parents. The board communicated that the school is already making changes based on some of the information and how it will be useful as work on the new strategic plan progresses. Andy encouraged the board to collect and communicate metrics.

When a draft of the strategic plan is ready, the board will put out an invitation for parent involvement with a preference for in person meetings.

Andy excused himself to coach his son's basketball game.

III. Reports from Faculty Representatives Paige Arnell & Martha Peters

Faculty are working on ensuring a smooth transition from pre-K through grade 3 in course structure and learning outcomes.

Paige Arnell, curriculum director, reported on Harvard's Project Zero, creating cultures of thinking in schools. To encourage professional development in KHS faculty, teachers will be empowered to do self-assessment. Summer ELA teacher training for writing workshop is offered along with a per diem so that faculty will be paid for their time. AISD professional development money is also available, but with strict parameters. The administration's goal is to issue teacher contracts in early March. Ms. Arnell is a proponent of offering classes that aren't screen-based and offering free social play among young children. Faculty are striving to help KHS students develop the ability to generate ideas, not spend time on rote learning. Ms. Arnell also presented a new math curriculum that is being considered, Math In Focus. She will next present the curriculum to the faculty and final decisions will be made soon. The board appreciated all the careful research that has gone into the presumptive recommendation and was interested to hear the description and strong points of the Math in Focus curriculum.

Martha Peters who teaches 4th – MS Spanish, is working with the lower school Spanish teacher creating a more logical flow from grade to grade. Sonrisas Spanish curriculum is better for young learners, with circle time etc. to mirror natural language acquisition processes. It is being implemented now. Ms. Peters is developing a K level Spanish program as well.

Consultant Shelly Keller has been hired to work with kindergarten teachers to create a hands-on environment with music, movement, and teacher-guided play. KHS is intentional about how faculty are teaching students to use tech, with Jared Dailey integral to the conversation.

Extending curriculum to the outdoors is possible with use of our adjacent park land. Sara Pevaroff Schuh recommended tapping into the playful learning trends she is seeing in Philadelphia through her landscape architecture practice. Paige was invited to follow up with Sara for further discussion.

IV. Marketing Reports from Alyssa Drury and Admission Reports from Emily Roberts

There were 213 recipients of the inaugural issue of the Friends of Kirby Hall newsletter with no bounce backs. Another newsletter will go out early summer. Class notes could be requested. The goal is 2 issues per year. A mini alumni event will be scheduled for former KHS students who are about to graduate from high schools, both public and private, they attended after KHS. The event will include a walkthrough of the school. 2024 is the year of the 100th birthday of the building and KHS plans to host a birthday party in the fall.

Rick Newberry, educational consultant with Enrollment Catalyst, made marketing and enrollment recommendations last fall and will continue to consult with staff by phone every other week for at least 6 months. His survey indicated that more than 3/4 of the parents are satisfied or very satisfied. He completed focus groups and helped draw out the reasons people come to KHS: tech intentional, excellent academics, amazing faculty, small class size, feels like family, non-religious, affordable compared to others. Additionally Rick recommended that the board be more visible, the mission be marketed, and that there be emphasis on retention and improvement of the facilities. The new strategic plan will address this. He taught Alyssa and Emily how to create a FAN club, Family Ambassador Network. Tools to spread the word include bumper stickers, "tag us on social media", "write online reviews." The school's social messages have become more personal with a Friday Faculty Feature and family stories on the blog.

Marketing is working with Geek Powered to create a lead generator page. Families came to the recent open house. There will be more frequent open houses going forward. Options for a more permanent KHS sign are being considered. It will help communicate that this is a school not just a building named Kirby Hall.

To enhance retention, Rick recommends more meetings with parents and reenrollment reminders, including a mention of what they can look forward to for each grade (sports in third grade, e.g.). KHS is moving toward a continuous enrollment method instead of re-enrollment each year. The entry hall has been reorganized.

We will look forward to Emily's thorough admissions-centered report after the re-enrollment period ends. This year, Emily convened an admissions review team with Dean of Curriculum, Paige Arnell, and administrator, Jared Dailey, to ensure we can provide the support the admitted students need. Sarah Jane, the school counselor, addresses issues with social and emotional learning. One potential parent and owner of a Pre-K school is interested in encouraging her students to attend KHS.

Rick Newberry recommended sending welcome boxes with a letter to help onboard families. Emily likes this idea and will include a spirit shirt, perhaps a tote bag, stuffed penguin, or other swag. Guest parking signs for prospective parents will help us roll out the red carpet. Re-enrollment emails will come from Emily who has been studying best practices of other local schools. By way of the Penguin Pals the student community work on projects together, some just for fun. Community Day will be on March 1st. Emily is trying to build a more intentional offering of service opportunities. Ideas include a trash walk with grabbers to keep hands clean, ATX Free Fridge Project, Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Art House where Mobile Loaves clients can sell their crafts, distributing hygiene kits, ATX Kids Club for museum visits and collecting dog toys and treats, a book drive for Book Spring. She is also looking for ways for KHS students to learn about the city including instruction on how to use public transportation.

The new playground is complete with very popular climbing structures in place.

New admission packets are available, streamlined, and colorful.

V. Executive Director's Report

Ms. Roberts reported that Cognia Accreditation was successful. One action item is more data collection that can then be communicated. Kirby Hall is approved for a six-year accreditation period. In three years, there will be a mid-cycle accreditation review.

Strategic Plan: Ms. Roberts has asked other administrative staff for their input on the strategic plan and the board is looking forward to their thoughts and participation in the strategic planning process. Ms. Roberts describes the faculty as amazing. The board will also welcome faculty input on the strategic plan.

Victoria: Strategic Plan

It's time to draft a new five-year strategic plan. The 6 overall goals of the existing strategic plan were reconfigured into 3 committees and committee assignments were made:

1) Educational Attainment, Facilities, and Learning Environment Committee:
Board members will be Teri, Sara, Amy, and MacDonald. Staff members Paige and Jared will be instrumental.

2) Stakeholder Engagement and Communication: Sabina and Ev

3) Financial Stability, Management, and Governance: Adrian, Tori, and MacDonald, who heroically is willing to serve on two committees

Timeline:

End of April: Ms. Roberts and Emily provide strategic planning input to the 3 committees

May 31: Deadline for each committee's draft of the document

June: Board reviews a draft of the new strategic plan and shares it with parents for their input

Future meetings for 2024

June 22, 2024 at 9:00 AM, 59th Board Meeting ending by 12:00 PM The agenda will include time parameters for each item, and the secretary will be the time keeper.

September 14, 2024 at 9:00 AM, 60th Board Meeting. The parent community will be invited to join the board members for coffee from 9:00-10:00 AM. Official board business will begin at 10:00 AM with a goal to finish by 1:00 PM.

Ideas for future board members

Sara will try to contact alumnus Colin Kendrick, who was recommended by previous board member Jason Wakefield. Sabina will try to contact alumna Ianthe Brock.

We adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Clements, Secretary

Unanimously approved by the Board via electronic vote on February 21, 2024