

Meeting Minutes 8-11-2025

ATTENDEES:

Walter Martin – Chair
Steve Moody – Treasurer
Marcia Simmons – Board Member
Mark Fleming – Board Member
Kristina Rodrigues – HOS
Scott Sides – K12
John Kramer – K12
Tasha Parnell – HS AA
Marcella Nyte – MS AA
Kelly Shannahan – EL AA
Lea King – AA
Stacey Bryant – EC AA
Sara Struhs – Executive Director

Sara Struhs called a quorum present at 5:00pm. Walter asked Sara to run the meeting since he was overseas. She started the meeting by reading the Mission Statement.

She asked if there was anyone wanting to communicate with the board who was not already on the agenda. There was no one.

She asked Kristina to give the HOS update.

Kristina said the enrollment sits just under 4200 and acknowledged we will have an influx of students leaving since some choose not to return but fail to tell us. She expects we will settle out some place close to 4000 – our target goal. Last year we lost about 5% and this year we did things a little differently, enrolling slightly above the cap so that we will settle somewhere closer to the 4000-student enrollment voted on by the board. There are still some openings in the elementary school, but the MS and the HS are maxed out for capacity.

Currently we have hired 18 elementary teachers, 15 MS teachers, 9 HS teachers, and 9 EC teachers. All of them started on PD last week.

There are 12 open positions, mostly from last-minute terminations that came in last week. We will fill them. There are other positions: 1 in EC; 1 Admin position; 1 MS position. These positions will eventually get filled, but they are not critical for the start of the new school year.

Professional Development: welcoming back to school was a great success this year with 300+ people there. We are growing so much we need to address the volume of people for next year!

There was no speaker this year. The theme set for the coming year is all about changing. With a strong push to achieve the C grade – the letter C was our “leader”. We talked about change – both good and challenging, community, commitment. Each table decided on a “C” word and shared them with the rest of the room. These will be our words for the year and will be posted as the words we will keep in mind as we work through the year. We discussed how change is both good and

challenging: challenging because we are using new systems and making changes to schedules that will be different than last year and good because there is an internet stipend increase for teachers and the new bonus structure that was very well received by the staff. Everyone is all about the letter grade and want to shoot for the A! We would all love that! In the end, despite some internet challenges, PD was a big success and the connections made were an especially good way to start the new year.

Updates have been made to the Student/Parent Handbook including policies on student computers, new attendance procedures, updates to the AI policy and behavior metrics.

This week Kristina said she met with the people from Novo Nordisk who have a robot that was very cool, and they started thinking about ways to connect. These are very early stages, and they are trying to find out how this will work, but it is a very interesting and valuable connection for us.

Kristina said she is working with UNC Pembroke to have a new MOU put into place for student teachers to observe how our teachers work and what it is like to teach in the virtual world. We do not have an MOU with Appalachian State but will also work with them for student teachers. Their program does more like a student teacher and while we have yet to hire any who have been with us in the past, we are hopeful that will change in the future.

Overall, PD was great, and everyone has done an amazing job getting ready for the start of the new school year.

Sara asked Kristina to give an update on the additional space on the 3rd floor that we have been considering for expansion.

Kristina said the space is very nice but does not think we need all that space at the moment. Having two floors between the Administrator and half of the other admin people is beneficial and believes we can renovate the space we already have to accommodate our needs.

She said the space on the first floor can be renovated to provide more storage space and with an A/B rotation for staff, there is no reason they could not share offices. Walter also saw the 3rd floor space and so Kristina asked him for his input.

Walter said the space was larger than he thought it would be. He believed there was a viable space for the storage of files that we need and he like the lighting – very pleasant space. Kristina said we could consider using only the 3rd floor and letting go of the first floor, but it would need some renovations. Marcia asked what the long-term goals are for the school because with large growth ahead, we will need the extra space before too long. Kristina agreed but believes with a storage unit for the annual prom props, etc., it would be more affordable to redesign the first-floor space and if we need more space down the road, we can let the management company for the building know we would be interested in the future.

Sara thanked Kristina and asked Chad to please give his update on the finances

Chad said there was no bill to present tonight because July there is very little that happens and so the payables are included into the August bill.

He did give an update on the finalized end-of-year financials. Our final funding came in at \$37.8m, which was \$2.4m above what we budgeted. There was \$3.8m in surplus and we ended the year with \$15.7 m in the bank.

There were no questions for Chad and so Sara moved on to the Executive Director's report.

Sara then moved on to the Executive Director's report.

Sara said that on authority given by the board, she had approved the new teacher hires and would like the board to vote to approve acknowledging that the teachers have been hired. They asked that the list of teachers be sent to them and Sara agreed to do that following the meeting.

Sara then said that she is asking for a vote on the school lunch pilot recommended by Stride. The board has decided that it is not a good fit at this time, and she wants that in the record. She did speak with Scott after all had agreed that it was not a good fit right now and explained that these kinds of pilots/programs are interesting to the board and they hope they will continue to include our board in those kinds of innovative projects. The Board very much appreciated being included and hope they will continue to include us in future projects.

Lastly, Sara wanted to talk about the bonuses structure. Initially the proposal put forward would have the bonuses paid out within a week of when the school grade was official which would mean that it would be paid out in October and the tenure/administrative part of the bonus would be paid out around June 15th at the end of the school year. Kristina had concerns about the payout in the fall because in this case there would be 50+ teachers who would not be getting the bonuses and would have to wait until the end of the year bonuses which will be significantly less coming in around \$1000.00-1500.00 – in that ballpark.

Chris and Sara had discussed this, and Sara was asked by him to express his strong concerns and asked that the vote on this be tabled until he could discuss this further with the board. Sara made it very clear that he believes it should be paid out in October when the grade comes out and given to the teachers who were there for the previous year. We would need to remove teachers who are new this year since they would have only been on staff for 6-8 weeks and we are able to sort them out.

Steve interjected affirmatively that we can do that.

Sara continued stating this is the call for the board to make. Chris feels concerned that Sara would not be able to make the case strongly enough to represent his concerns. She reiterated that he feels very strongly that this should be done in that manner.

Kristina then said the question came up from some teachers that made sense to get the full bonus (both school grade and the tenure and administrative bonuses) at the end of the year since they can then plan their summer and what to do with the bonus. Either way, it is important that the board articulate clearly when the bonuses will not be paid out this year for the school grade and all will only get the tenure and administrative bonuses at the end of the year. It needs to be clear when they are getting the bonuses.

Steve agreed

Sara said there is one correction here. That Kristina was right about the possibility of no pay out in the fall because that was the initial way Sara had written it, but Sara said they could pay it out in October.... Steve interrupted and asked about what was to be paid out in October.

Sara explained that if we get the C grade for last year. She said we are now finished with the school year 24-25 and are entering the school year 25-26, but the school grade coming out in October will be for the school year 24-25. At that time, if we were to receive a C grade, would you want to give out a \$5k bonus and would it be paid out at that time?

Steve said yes that it makes perfect sense.

Walter agreed

Steve said he doesn't know why we would do otherwise. If you look at the types of things for which teachers are given bonuses – and there are a number of them within the DPI world: AP scores and a number of different things that teachers in certain areas get for different reasons when scores come out, so this is not a new concept for teachers in the school arena. I think it makes perfect sense.

Kristina said this is more a question of since they got the bonus in May, would they be eligible now in October or have to wait until the next October to get it. That was the kind of question.

Sara said it was an error on her part.

Steve said his take on the bonus they just got was as a thank you for staying with us at NCA and going through the whole process with us and that's the way he interpreted it.

Mark agreed with Steve and said he believes the bonus just given and the bonus for achieving the C grade are two separate issues.

Marcia said the only concern she has is – the State of NC gives out bonuses one year to the next year and she knows because she calculates it out in her job. The only caveat she has is that only those who are still teaching with us get the bonus. If a person is working with us and the grade comes out in October. If any teachers leave and are not working with us in June and July, they do not get the bonus – they are pulled out of the system.

Steve agreed

Marcia continued if they get the bonus in October, are they for the teachers there or have to be employed with us in October?

Walter said no - that all teachers need to be employed at the time of the bonus.

Steve said they need to be employed by NCBVA just like AP's and all

Marcia said Chris wanted us to track down employees who were with us during the school year that the bonus was given and give them the bonus too.

Sara said that Chris did want us to track that down if possible. I spoke with 2 attorneys and they both said it does not make sense. It is a nightmare and makes more sense to say this is how the bonus comes and is given to those who stay with us.

Steve agreed

Marcia asked if that is the case, she is totally on board with this bonus. It looks like the school grade will come out at the SBE September meeting and if we get the C, they should get the bonus in October. Not in September because the SBE can adjust and the grades are not official until October. But we should not be hampered down by October – if for some reason it doesn't come out until October, they would be paid in November.

Walter agreed

Sara said we can say it will be paid out....

Steve said when the grades are official.

Sara continued within two weeks of the grades becoming official.

Steve added to the teachers who are still employed by NCVA

Marcia agreed.

Kristina then asked for clarification of if they need to be with us for the year to get that bonus or does everyone employed the previous year get that bonus?

Marcia said only those who are there during the session

Kristina confirmed so everybody starting now would get the bonus in October?

Sara, Steve and Marcia said no

Marcia added they were not there when the testing occurred.

Steve agreed

Kristina said we need that recorded in the policy

Sara added if they were employed with us during the year 24-25 when the school grade comes out October of '25, they will be paid out if they are still with NCVA

Steve and Walter agreed

Sara confirmed the two points: 1) here during the previous school year and 2) still employed with us when the bonus is given out.

Walter added that would be the entire previous school year, so someone coming in late here, say in November, would not qualify.

Steve was not sure about that.

Marcia was also not sure about that

Walter said this is unfortunately the real world. He got nabbed at UNC – the state said he was two weeks short of being vested and he lost a lot of money because of that including bonus money.

Marcia made the case that if she was a teacher hired even in March and was responsible for the test prep and remediation that got those kids to a higher grade, she should get the bonus.....unless you are going to pro rate the bonus because I would have been right there during testing just like everyone else.

Sara commented that the number of teachers coming to us in the middle of March is few. We don't get a lot of teachers that late in the year – am I right Kristina?

Kristina said they get teachers all year long and that three had been hired in January of last year and they would have been there for ½ the year – which would have been critical for working with the students to be successful during the EOG testing. Even for ½ a year, those students in tested areas need a good teacher for the remainder of the year.

Sara agreed ½ year makes a difference.

Steve commented that Walter was saying the cut off would be only 2 months into the school year

Walter suggested we come up with some kind of pro-rating system.

Marcia suggested if you are here from the start of the year on you get the full bonus and if you are here from January on you get ½ the bonus – or whatever other option we could come up with. And then she stressed we need to figure this out.

Steve said he could be ok with pro-rating

Sara said that we are beginning the school year next week but suggested this is something that actually needs to be fully fleshed out and see what the best solution is going to be.

Kristina suggested we have a little bit of time because the AAs are still working on what would be equitable for the other areas as well so we can roll it all out at the same time with all the parameters. She suggested having the right decisions at the right time that everyone is behind, is important. We don't have to have it by next week, but there will be a staff meeting and she will push it back because it is important to have everything worked out and we are already getting questions.

Sara said that would be best also because it will give Chris and Natalie the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Kristina agreed.

Sara confirmed that the next board meeting is September 8th

Kristina confirmed she will hold the whole school meeting after that board meeting.

Sara said she will organize a meeting for all the board members solely to discuss this matter in the coming weeks. She will send out date suggestions for them to respond to and then we will be able to have a policy in place for a vote at the next meeting.

Steve and Walter agreed.

Sara thanked everyone for their input and moved on to the votes. There was no monthly bill so we moved on to the vote to recognize that Sara has approved the teachers hired and the board is aware of them.

Sara asked for a motion. Steve made a motion to approve all the new teachers that Sara has, by our authority, approved. Mark seconded it. Sara called for the vote: it was unanimous.

Sara asked for a motion to approve the Student/Parent Handbook updates. Steve made a motion to approve the Student/Parent Handbook and include the changes to the attendance policy approved at the last board meeting. Walter seconded it. Sara called for the vote: it was unanimous.

Sara noted that the vote for the bonus structure update is tabled until the board has met to further clarify the policy.

Sara asked for a motion regarding the Stride lunch pilot program. Mark asked to make a comment and then the motion: He wanted to thank the Stride team for the work they put into it and thanked Sara as well for her work. He said a lot of time and work was put into it and a lot of discussions happened. It was one of the better discussions we've had in a long time and with that said he made a motion that we do not pursue the school lunch pilot as discussed. Steve seconded it. Sara called for the vote: it was unanimous.

Sara called for a vote to adjourn. Mark made the motion and Walter seconded it. Sara called for the vote: it was unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50pm