

**Linn Christian Education Association  
Isaac Newton Christian Academy  
Board Meeting Minutes  
2023-11-28 6:00-9:00pm**

**Attendance**

- staff: Dr. Dean Ridder, Tracy King
- board members: Amy McDonald, Bob Mosey, Stephanie Prochaska, John Garbes, Harris Holsapple, Jonathan Newberry (until 8:50), Neil Gutschmidt, Steve Howard, Katie Warner (remote via video call)
- guests: Ryan & Valerie Sampica (for Newton's Pies, until 6:35pm)

**Opening**

Amy opened the meeting in prayer. Jonathan shared a devotional about Jesus demonstrating thanks to God the Father, even in the face of what He knew was to come, with an encouragement to practice thanksgiving like Jesus did.

John volunteered to prepare a devotion for the January meeting; Stephanie will prepare one for the February meeting.

**Secretary's Report**

The minutes from the October board meeting were reviewed by the board and approved electronically shortly after the October meeting, and published via the usual channels.

**Newton's Pies**

Ryan Sampica provided an review of the pie fundraiser this year:

- Overall profit of \$48k
- Process improvements including using Patriot Center for production and storing apples outside increased overall quality of pies
- Increase in size and investment by Pie committee, specifically noting one member's significant investment in time and skills to build a storage bin system that will be beneficial in years to come
- Ingredient acquisition was difficult and alternative sources will be explored going forward
- Conducted survey and feedback was overwhelmingly positive with some "opportunities for improvements" suggested that will be evaluated and considered

**Head Of School's Report**

Dean presented four policies for review:

- 7.03, Discipline
- 8.08.03, Student Conduct During Transportation
- 8.08.04, Motor Vehicle Accidents
- 8.09, School Lunch Program

Amy asked if the Discipline policy needs updates in the area of suspension and expulsion, the two bullets under *Methods of Discipline That Can Be Used*, to align our policy and practice. After some discussion about the roles of the Head of School and the Board of Directors, Stephanie made a motion to remove the *Suspension* sentence about notice of suspension being given to a member of the Board of Directors, and the two *Expulsion* sentences about the Board of Directors making the determination to expel a student and the decision to readmit the student in a subsequent semester. John seconded the motion, and it passed via verbal vote.

In the context of the School Lunch Program policy, Amy asked about the statement that net proceeds accrue to the benefit of the school's operating fund. Dean explained that the kitchen endeavors to run a self-sustaining, net-zero operation, including planning ahead for equipment maintenance and replacement, and that the proceeds from school lunch is available for kitchen-related needs. Bob noted that there's no separate "Kitchen Fund" and all money that flows through the kitchen is managed in the school's general operating fund, so the statement in the policy is correct as-written, even if the "net proceeds" are separately tracked and earmarked for replacement of kitchen equipment as necessary. The conclusion was to retain the existing language in the policy.

Dean shared a board professional development article by Paul Neal, from *The Center for the Advancement of Christian Education*, about effective board policy and its necessity for good governance.

#### **Director Of Development & Enrollment Report**

Tracy shared an update on gifts year-to-date, with over \$114k received with about \$20k of that related to the annual banquet. She reported that donors are excited about facility growth, and that she is working to develop a year-end giving push to "Pave The Way" as we look ahead to a more formal capital campaign for the facility to meet the needs of our growing student body.

STO donations of \$56k, with an additional \$148k available to raise. Tracy would like to get to the \$100k mark so that STO-eligible families not yet ESA-eligible can be assisted further with the cost of tuition. Neil asked if Tracy, as a member of the Heart of Iowa STO board, knew anything specific about the future of STO as more families become ESA-eligible in the near future. She said no changes or discontinuation have been communicated, but the future of it is still uncertain as the needs of school families change and the focus of donors aligns to other needs.

Tracy reported that enrollment for the current 23/24 school year is down by one student from last month. She also noted that 26 new student applications have been received for the 24/25 school year. For students currently enrolled, under the new continuous enrollment model, there is no action necessary to remain enrolled for the next school year, and families that wish to unenroll will need to do so prior to the withdrawal deadline to avoid the non-refundable annual registration fee, which is primarily used to cover the cost of materials for each student.

Tracy reminded the board of the date for the Annual Banquet, April 19th, 2024, and noted that planning for it is ongoing.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Neil presented an updated financial summary:

- Year-to-date revenue is up 3% compared to last year primarily due to increases in enrollment
- Year-to-date expenses are up 1% compared to last year
- The school is on-track for the expected outcome at this point in the school year
- The balance sheet reflects the current zero-debt situation for the school

Neil initiated the discussion about setting 23/24 tuition with some context:

- The intent is to have tuition (hard income) cover expenses
- Fundraising would be for expansion/upgrades, not normal operating expenses
- There should ideally be some buffer in the bottom line for unexpected expenses
- It is a goal of the board to shrink the gap in staff salaries between Isaac Newton and a similar position within the public school system
- The current gap is around 25%, based on recent research
- It is also a goal of the board to continue offering high-quality, affordable/accessible education
- Universal eligibility for the Education Savings Accounts through the State of Iowa is coming in the 25/26 school year
- Of the usual financial levers (tuition, wages, and enrollment), only two are available (tuition and wages) due to the physical constraints of our facility being at capacity

Neil detailed multiple possibilities for combinations of tuition, labor expenses, and overall economic inflation. Tuition increases of 5%, 7%, and 9% were discussed. The board discussion focused on increasing tuition to keep pace with inflation as well as work toward the board's strategic objective of closing the gap in teacher / staff salary. There was extensive discussion on where to land with 24/25 tuition, with much consideration being given to the interplay between tuition and staff salaries, and the impact to families of enrolled students. Steve shared some research he had performed around inflation, specifically CPI from the U.S. Department of Labor, along with a math-based concept for how to derive a fair conclusion. At the conclusion of the discussion, Jonathan made a motion to enact a 6% tuition increase for the 24/25 school year. John seconded the motion; a verbal vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Communication Committee**

Amy presented a recommendation from the committee for the school to hire a Communications Coordinator. The new position would report to the Head of School, as a full time role. Bob commented that as the school grows, effective communication will require more intentionality and having a dedicated staff resource would be very valuable. Neil made a motion to approve posting the open position for Dean to hire. Katie seconded the motion, and it passed on a verbal vote.

### **Facilities Committee**

The Facilities committee presented one potential contractor's design with estimated costs bids and is awaiting the second. The facilities committee has also asked each potential contractor for recommendations around parking and driveway enhancements and potential pricing.

The Facilities committee continues to work on resolving the Patriot Center side-court basketball hoops but no solution has yet to be identified.

### **Enrollment/Admissions Criteria**

With enrollment increases, Amy initiated a discussion around how to protect the mission and culture within Isaac Newton Christian Academy. Specifically, should being active regular attenders at a local church be a requirement for enrollment.. It was understood that mandating regular church attendance on an ongoing basis is impractical, but there was also clear agreement that the Christian School model of school-home-church is less effective at producing Christlike Character without regular participation in a local church. With that in mind, John made a motion to require that a written pastoral reference be submitted with the student enrollment application, to be included in the consideration process prior to extending an offer to enroll. Harris seconded the motion, and the motion passed with a unanimous verbal vote.

### **Closing**

Harris closed the meeting in prayer.

### **Future Board Meetings**

- January 23rd, 6-8pm
- February 27th, 6-8pm
- March 26th, 6-8pm