

Yellowstone College Prep Board Meeting

November 22, 2019

Meeting Minutes

Agenda:

A. Roll Call

Board Members in Attendance	Staff in Attendance
Lionel Jellins	Ryan Dolibois
Janice Character	Maria Anderson
Valerie Williams	Melanie Brooks
David Lumpkins	Tommy Parker
Arthur Bryan II (by phone)	Meghan Guion
John Peavy	Deidra Lawson
	Damon Gunn
	Various other YCP staff attended during the public comment portion of the meeting

Call to Order:

A. Call to Order_ Lionel Jellins call to order at 10:36 am

Quorum Declared

B. Public Comments –

Several teachers and staff offered comments regarding the resignation of Deidra Lawson. Deidra Lawson, Principal and Tommy Parker, Director of Grants and Communication and Meghan Guion, Special Education Facilitator, offered remarks for the record.

Deidra Lawson-Principal

I have submitted my resignation as Head of Schools of Yellowstone Academy and Yellowstone College Prep.

After the last YCP board meeting, I was presented with the directive of going on special assignment as the YCP principal for the remainder of the school year. After thoughtful consideration and much discussion, I didn't feel this move was best for me.

There were things I requested be put in place to ensure the directed transition was done well and would effectively meet the expectations the Board was seeking. With little discussion on the how, I was told these requests could not be met. It is unfortunate that the growth that I have

brought to this organization over the last 3.5 years did not warrant a reasonable consideration of those proposed conditions.

It is important that a school organization has a clear vision and direction-not just for fundraising on a new building, but for staff recruitment, teacher development, student recruitment and most importantly, student achievement. It is imperative that a school leader with the background, knowledge and expertise in successfully leading schools, be at the helm of the most important decisions.

I urge the Board to reflect on the current organizational structure around final decision making-from staffing to budget to all things between. The principal must have the autonomy to lead their campus. The principal must be allowed the resources to implement a plan successfully. The school leader must have the ability to make decisions around the things that effect the day to day success of the organization.

I have put forth my best effort to ensure the ethical and equitable operations of YA and YCP. Daily, I advocated for decisions that were in the best interests of the students and families we serve.

I am walking away from the organization with my integrity intact. I have made sound decisions for this organization in accordance with its mission and vision and in compliance with state law. During my tenure, there has never been a time where that has been brought into question. As things became challenging and questions were asked, I urge you to remember that.

I am available to respond to any concerns or questions that may come up in the future-especially those where MY reputation or work ethic may be called into question. I am confident that my record and records speak for themselves.

I have left Yellowstone a better place and I've provided a blueprint and many recommendations for future growth and success. I know Yellowstone will be fine. I pray the leadership of Yellowstone will continue to make decisions that are in the best interest of our children. I pray for the success of each student, family and staff member: past, present and future.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the families of this community.

It is my request that this document be submitted into the minutes for public record.

Yours in Teaching and Learning,

Deidra Lawson.

Tommy Parker:

Good Morning,

My name is Thomas Parker and I have the pleasure of serving as the Director of Grants and Communications at Yellowstone Academy. My comments will be brief.

I love working at Yellowstone-I admire so many of my fellow employees for their commitment to education and especially to the health and well being of the children trusted to our care. Ms. Lawson in particular has been a consistent advocate for our students. Her dedication and loyalty to our mission is unquestionable.

I am also an Eagle Scout. I have pledged, on my honor, to do my best to do my duty to God, and my country, to obey Scout Law, and to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight. I strive to embody the ideals of the Scout Law which says a Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.

My colleagues, friends and those who know me will attest to my character.

I do not wish to point fingers or make accusations today, but I have reason to believe that there are, among my colleagues, persons who have acted without good faith. I have seen a lack of integrity first-hand, and I have heard troubling murmurs from my fellow employees that ring of malfeasance.

Rather than rely on my word alone, I humbly request that the board initiate an independent, external audit of our entire organization, including confidential interviews with every member of the staff. I believe this kind of intervention is necessary to find out whether these rumors are true, and more importantly, to rebuild trust among the staff.

I would be happy to speak with any member of the board individually to expand on these concerns.

Thank you for your time,

Thomas Parker

Meghan Guion:

I was going to speak today even prior to the announcement of Ms. Lawson's exit from YCP. Her future absence makes my presence here even more essential. I can speak to many concerns I have with this departure, but I will stay focused on my department: Special Populations.

First and foremost- Ms. Lawson has always been a true advocate for our students with disabilities and the process in which we identify students. She has lead (sic) and continued my development as an educational leader. Her integrity and professionalism have been unwavering.

As we all know-there has been significant media coverage about YCP and Special Education. The information that has been shared with the public is:

1. Untrue
2. Effects (sic) my professional integrity
3. puts YCP under a microscope with TEA

Any future correspondence with the media concerning special education should be vetted by a Special Education profession (sic) or attorney prior as to not be “misrepresented” or giving false information.

Additionally, I have created and developed a program that has met all state/federal guidelines. I have been able to do so do (sic) to my own expertise and with the support of Ms. Lawson, Deans and our general education teachers and paraprofessions (sic). The search committee should ensure that the next candidate for Head of School possesses a working knowledge of Special Education and a history of ethical practices in their previous employment.

In preparation for the year(s) to come-

The Board, Super and campus leadership must be constantly evaluating the Special Populations Department.

There needs to be a staffing plan in effect to reflect the increase (sic) numbers of students being identified and the variety of instructional settings we are MANDATED to provide and the proper confidential space to provide the services. This is not for the “new building” this is for now and prior to our expansion.

Egos and historical decision-making (sic) processes have to be put aside for the health of the organization and the integrity of the staff.

Meghan Guion.

After Meghan, Deidra, and Tommy spoke, the period for open comments was extended over two hours to allow members of the staff to share their thoughts, concerns, and frustrations regarding the general state of Yellowstone College Prep’s working environment and Ms. Lawson’s departure. The board allowed this time to continue until all concerned parties had spoken and then the remaining board business continued.

C. **Approval of Minutes from the October 31 board meeting**

a. **Board Action:**

Motion to approve: - David Lumpkins

Second: -Janice Character

Motion Carried.

D. **Finance Committee Report-**

CSS Month End report was distributed to board members and there was a general discussion of the current budget and the reports. The auditor was then invited to present to the board upon the successful completion of the YCP audit.

There was discussion of financial statement findings and answers to questions about new standards and rules and clarification of the new auditing procedures.

The auditor reported that there were no serious auditing issues or fraudulent findings. The only finding was that several members of the board had not completed their initial hours of training, due to confusion around the understanding of timing/requirements for the founding year of service. YCP presented its plan to the auditors to ensure all board members were back in compliance as quickly as possible.

Move to accept the YCP Audi for FY19: **Valerie Williams**

Second: **Janice Character**

By vote, it was unanimously approved.

- E. **Fundraising:** It was reported that a total of \$1,644,630 million had been raised to date by Yellowstone Academy, which is 43% of the annual goal. It was noted that we are on track for fundraising goals deadline that is set for December 31, 2019.

F. **Review and Discuss Chairman's Report-**

Discussion of the NPR report/Houston Chronicle stories regarding special education resources towards a former YCP student. No backlash from parents thus far. Megan Guion discussed and clarified the finer points of state requirements and the YCP response to the student's needs and how the parent represented those responses to the media.

G. **Review and Discuss Superintendent's Report**

The superintendent then discussed the Targeted Improvement Plan and shared that it was in place and moving forward as originally presented. Ryan then explained that the directives from the October meeting were being acted upon as directed by the board.

Adjourn to Executive Session 1:24 pm.

Minutes prepared and respectfully submitted by
Elizabeth Daugherty, November 22, 2019