

THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNOR'S SCHOOL

12301 Spotswood Furnace Road

Fredericksburg, VA 22407

Governing Board Meeting

May 21, 2015

MINUTES

Members Present: Mr. Dewayne McOsker (Stafford); Dr. Mary Anderson, Vice Chair (Caroline); Mr. Ray Loray (Spotsylvania); Mr. Ken Novell, Chair (King George)

Also attending: Mrs. Merri Kae VanderPloeg (The Commonwealth Governor's School Director); Dr. Scott Baker (Superintendent of Spotsylvania Public Schools); Dr. Bruce Benson (Superintendent of Stafford County Schools); Dr. Robert Benson (Superintendent of King George County Schools).

Mr. Keith Wolfe (Executive Director of Secondary Education in Spotsylvania County) was absent. Mr. McOsker was present after the meeting commenced.

Mr. Lora determined that a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF MAY 21, 2015 AGENDA

Mr. Lora made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Novell seconded the motion. The motion passed 3-0.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

No comments at this time.

BOARD MEMBERS COMMENTS

Mr. Novell shared an email from King George Gifted Coordinator, Amanda Higgins. Mrs. Higgins was happy to report that the King George site graduated its first class of seniors. In addition to receiving the CGS seal and high school diploma, three of the graduates earned their associates degree from Rappahannock Community College while attending King George High

School and The Commonwealth Governor's School. Mrs. Higgins thanked Mrs. VanderPloeg for facilitating the state evaluation visit and keeping all stakeholders involved in the evaluation process. Mr. Novell concurred with Mrs. Higgins remarks.

SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

Dr. Robert Benson echoed Mrs. Higgins comments.

DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Mrs. VanderPloeg presented photographs of the CGS graduates from King George and Caroline to the two representing board members. The pictures were provided by the CGS PTO board. Each senior in the CGS Program received a picture of their CGS cohort. One hundred and twenty graduates were recognized at a senior ceremony at the University of Mary Washington. Mrs. VanderPloeg provided each board member a list of college acceptances of the graduates and a collective list of all of the universities and colleges CGS graduates have attended since 1998. There is one graduate who is traveling to Uganda to be a missionary for a year. The other graduates will be pursuing college or going into the military. Mr. Novell asked if other students from CGS sites were eligible to receive associates degrees. Mrs. VanderPloeg explained that Rappahannock Community College has a partnership with Caroline and King George which offers an associate's degree to high school students. Germanna Community College does not offer a similar arrangement to students in Stafford and Spotsylvania. They have a policy which stipulates that high school students need to take some of their courses on campus. This policy makes it cost prohibitive for the divisions to provide transportation and it is difficult for students to arrange their high school schedules in order to take courses at Germanna unless they are enrolled in night courses or weekend courses.

The annual 'Cookies with Commonwealth' event for new students commenced at all of the CGS sites. Parents and new students met some of the teachers and learned about their summer assignments, as well as had an opportunity to ask questions about the program. CGS will host two Advanced Placement boot camps in August. The boot camps are optional to students who are enrolled in AP Environmental Science and AP Biology. On August 19 and 20, new students will participate in the 'New Student Orientation'.

Mrs. VanderPloeg happily announced that Spotsylvania County Public Schools will give one, graded course credit to students for the Culminating project. The first group of students who will be eligible for the credit will begin as 9th and new 10th grader during the 2015-16 school year. Mrs. VanderPloeg is in correspondence with the other counties to determine if they will compensate their students at their representative sites in the near future. Mr. Lora was pleased to hear that the Spotsylvania County Public School system approved the credit.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES & FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Novell made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Mr. Lora seconded the motion to approve the financial report and consent agenda passed 4-0.

INFORMATION ITEMS

The Virginia Department of Education Governor's School Evaluation Committee gave accreditation to The Commonwealth Governor's School for another five years. Mr. Novell asked about areas the committee evaluated as 'meets standards'. Mr. Lora stated the areas were on pages 16-17. One of the recommendations was a student/teacher ratio of 15:1. Mr. Novell asked if all of the sites met that recommendation. Mrs. VanderPloeg explained the 15:1 ratio was a recommendation from the National Association of Gifted Children. This recommendation was based on best practices by the organization. She emphasized the reality of class sizes and said due to budget constraints it was unrealistic. She thought it was more reasonable to have lower class sizes at the primary level. Mrs. VanderPloeg has toured several programs across the state and the class sizes ranged from 15 students to 30 students. Locally, the sites have low class sizes in the math sections because they are leveled.

Mr. Novell inquired about the evaluation area pertaining to equipment on page 17 of the document. One of the areas of concern was the location and accessibility of science labs in CGS. North Stafford and Stafford High do not have designated science labs; however, the new SHS building will have a designated a lab for CGS in September. Since the last evaluation, CGS was able to receive lab space at Colonial Forge. North continues to use a lab far away from the CGS classrooms. Mrs. VanderPloeg emphasized that the recommendations and the feedback from the team depended on the perspective of each evaluator. For example, the technology person on the team was very impressed with the CGS technology but offered constructive feedback on instructional technology strategies because that is her expertise. The science teacher on the team found a few areas of concern. In the report, it noted that the King George site did not have a safety shower or proper science hood installed in the science lab. Mrs. VanderPloeg will be working with principal on this issue.

Dr. Baker expressed there was some subjectivity of the report and asked if there was dialogue between the Director and the committee about dedicating staff to CGS. He was surprised by the ratio recommendation considering the model of the program was different from other programs across the state. He wondered if 15:1 was a directive the committee received. Mrs. VanderPloeg explained the recommendation comes from the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) and many of the executive board members of the organization come from higher education. They do not work in a K-12 setting and are not experiencing the budgetary challenges K-12 education experiences on a yearly basis. Mrs. VanderPloeg said it was not her recommendation but a recommendation by the committee. Dr. Baker also mentioned the committee was

concerned by the number of class preps CGS teachers had each year. Mrs. VanderPloeg explained that several teachers working in the program have four or more preps which are multiple topics within a subject. Several of the AP classes have changed course objectives in the last few years so it causes more of a work load for teachers to prepare. Additionally, teachers who have SOL classes have extra responsibilities. She gave several examples of multiple course loads of teachers found in all of the school divisions. She said it is difficult to retain teachers when they have multiple preps particularly in the sciences. Mr. Novell inquired about Dr. Baker's concern and he replied that his concern was from a fiscal standpoint and questioned the committee's rationale for their feedback.

Dr. Baker suggested the high school principals from the region get together at some point to discuss the direction of the program and the challenges they face meeting the expectations of the program and their school. Mrs. VanderPloeg said all the site principals were invited during the site visits to speak to the committee as well as attend the evening program. Dr. Baker thought it would make sense to have all of the principals get together to discuss common concerns and share procedures. Mr. McOsker asked if the Director was invited to division meetings. Mr. McOsker thought before Mrs. VanderPloeg met with regional principals she should possibly be part of the division meetings so she was informed of operations or procedures in the divisions. Dr. Robert Benson said that when problems or initiatives arise in the King George division, the Director comes to him or other members of his faculty. Dr. Baker said that Mrs. VanderPloeg was part of the Spotsylvania County school division meetings.

Dr. Baker thought some of the recommendations were regional in nature but CGS has sites within high schools so he wonders what the program's reaction is to recommendations that are regional versus site/division based. Mr. McOsker concurred that CGS is not like Thomas Jefferson which is one facility funded by multiple divisions. He thought the committee should have articulated more what they were looking at from a base-line standpoint. Dr. B. Benson said that he has visited with several CGS teachers who have multiple preps and he agrees that it is a challenge to be responsible for multiple preps specifically in science. Dr. Baker said it is a sensitive subject (especially in recent economic times) to discern what is an adequate workload between general education, special education, and gifted education.

Mrs. VanderPloeg emphasized again that she is not worried about the student/teacher ratio but more concerned about the retention of staff in the program. Mr. Lora wanted to touch on Mrs. VanderPloeg's comment. He said there was a time when CGS students were the trailblazers but now that is not happening as much. Perhaps some individuals in classrooms need to move on because they no longer have a "fire in the belly". He firmly believes that at least in Spotsylvania County, nobody working in the schools has it easy. He praises those who are working in the schools but there is always another side to the story. Mr. Lora theorizes that some of the recommendations were generated by conversations between the committee and CGS teachers. CGS teachers are not the only ones working hard. He believes that if people are unhappy and want to leave, they are welcome to leave because maybe there is another person who would want

the job. Mrs. VanderPloeg's final comment is finding people who want to teach in CGS and to retain the teachers in CGS. She hoped individuals who are selected to teach in CGS wanted to be there and were not told to be there.

Mrs. VanderPloeg said that many stakeholders who were interviewed by the committee voiced the need for CGS to have a designated guidance counselor. The guidance counselors designated at the high schools are responsible for many state mandates with high case loads. A designated counselor in CGS could assist with areas specific to gifted children. Before the issue of counselor was raised, Mr. Novell wanted to note in the minutes that the evaluation was outstanding. Only two areas out of sixty-two were in need of work. One of the areas is fixable and the other area specifically addresses a recommendation that is not as realistic. Mr. Novell agrees teachers need "fire in the belly" but if teachers are overburdened they won't have the energy to be trailblazers. Mr. Lora commented that principals are the most overwhelmed of any other group of professionals. They are overburdened and overworked. The problem with education is doing with less and working more. It is not isolated to The Commonwealth Governor's School. Mr. Lora said, "These are the easiest kids to teach". He believes it is not hard to find teachers to teach in CGS because the students.

Dr. Baker clarified that the evaluation was a success. He questioned the suggestion of having a full-time counselor devoted to CGS because the suggestion may take the program's concept into a different direction. Each school has counselors who work with their students for various reasons including assistance in social/emotional areas. Dr. Robert Benson believed that committee members he met with are passionate about gifted education so there was not a doubt in his mind that they were going to advocate for gifted education.

Mrs. VanderPloeg made a recommendation to the board to approve a contracted service for a counselor for the 2015-16 school year. Like other contractors, the counselor, would not be a permanent position. Rather, the person would be paid to work for twelve days during the school year. He or she would facilitate workshops relating to gifted education and social/emotional learning, meet individually with students about college planning, academic problems, and social/emotional concerns. In addition to counseling responsibilities, the individual would collaborate with teachers on a variety of projects. Dr. Baker suggested this recommendation be a pilot program (a counseling study) for one year with the caveat that Mrs. VanderPloeg reports to the board at the end of the year. The board could determine if the study was effective and should be continued.

Mr. McOsker made a motion to approve a contracted service with a guidance counselor and to call it a Pilot Counselor Study. Mrs. VanderPloeg would provide a report of the study's effectiveness at the end of the 2015-16 school year to the board. Mr. Novell seconded the motion and it was approved 4-0.

FY 2016 Budget

Mr. Lora made a motion to approve the FY 2016 budget. Dr. Anderson seconded the motion. During the discussion, Mrs. VanderPloeg explained different line items of the budget and future expenditures pertaining to upgrading the Tanberg broadcasting system at each site as well as purchasing new equipment for North Stafford and Stafford High School. The motion passed 4-0 to approve the FY 2016 budget.

Mr. Lora made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. McOsker seconded the motion. Motion passed 4-0. The Governing Board adjourned at 5:23 p.m.