



Executive Board Meeting | Wednesday, March 1, 2023  
4:30pm – 5:53pm | **MINUTES**

**Members Present:** Naiema Frieson, Chair. Members, Janet Taylor, Jeff Meyer, Earnest Wilks, Melissa Dunlap, Tara Sall, Greg Vogel, Faculty Representative. A quorum is established.

**Members Absent:** Betsy Friedman

Chair Frieson called the meeting to order at 4:30 PM

**Guests Attending:**

Dr. Janjay Gehndyu, Principal.  
Laura Randall, VMA Development.

**Mission Moment:**

Principal Gehndyu spoke briefly about a student who has some emotional and behavioral challenges who is on a positive continuum toward growth and change. He stressed that each child continually has to manage their own personal challenges. By speaking with them at their level and trying to understand their motivation for acting out is the best way each of us can help a student overcome the day-to-day difficulties and stresses each one brings to school. A simple conversation with this boy about his expectations and helping him realize them in a constructive way was all he needed to improve his day and his outlook.

**Chair Report:**

Chair Frieson asked for a motion to approve the minutes as distributed to the members prior to the meeting. A motion was made (name?) and seconded (name?), and a vote was taken. It appears that the motion carried with no objections.

Ms. Frieson reported that the School District of Manatee County approved the recent Charter Renewal application and renewed the VMA Charter for a period of one year. This is less than the customary 5-year renewal term and it is believed that the limited renewal was likely due to the most recent school grade of "F" that VMA received in 2022.. Ms. Frieson remarked that because VMA is on a positive upward track regarding academic performance, she is confident that our academic standing will be significantly improved enough to warrant the full 5-year renewal of our charter after this one-year probationary period ends.

She referenced a recent school board meeting that was well-attended by VMA leadership where several questions were raised, and some misconceptions were resolved regarding our current curriculum and if it is in line with the current & changing guidance from the Florida Department of Education. The conversation resulted in an invitation to each of the school board members to visit VMA and see the operation of the school, in person. That gathering will occur toward the end of March.

Frieson spoke about the funding received from the Gardener Foundation who gave us a significant amount of money to support the capital project to build a school on the lot adjoining our current location. She reports that she was part of a meeting with the Knapps (principals of the Gardener Foundation), Laura Randall and Louis Parker to inform them of our suspension of the current plans to build a new school. We explained our position and our need to be in a new location, but the construction project was going to take far too long and cost far too much for us to be able to manage effectively at this time. They support our intention to relocate to a less expensive, perhaps an already existing location that can be retro-fit to meet our needs. The Foundation is slated to make the 4<sup>th</sup> and final payment of the \$1M grant, but the Knapps have decided to defer the final payment until a point when we have a solid plan in place to make the relocation a reality.

Cash flow continues to be problematic due to both low enrollment producing less revenue from the district and flattened philanthropy attributed, seemingly, to a wait-and-see attitude surrounding our school grade.

Laura, attorney Mark Barnabey and Naiema met with Commissioner Ballard and alternately Laura and attorney Mark Barnabey met with the school superintendent, Cynthia Saunders to discuss the relinquishment of the 'Field of Dreams' property and options for relocation, the availability of unused portable classrooms, and the possibility of reinvigorating the Pre-K program at VMA to provide a pipeline to enrollment.

Other things happening:

Communication committee made suggestions for reaching out to our constituents on a regular basis with newsletters & reports to bring them current with VMA progress.

Volunteer orientations are happening. Also, the enrollment committee is working on recruitment strategies to increase interest in VMA.

Judy Laurent is serving as professional mentor to Dr. Gehndyu and will report on their efforts later in March.

#### Principal's Report:

Dr. Gehndyu discussed the testing structure of VMA with regards to the lack of a specific current Science Curriculum and reviving past models, updating them and making them available to the faculty online.

There is local testing (in-house) scheduled that will benchmark our Suns and be able to assess their current position against where we want them to be. We will then create pathways for them to get on grade level in Science.

We are also looking at a new mathematics program that has the ability to elevate our students in math also. It is a "local" program meaning it is not a state program but may greatly benefit our students in ways they haven't been exposed to so far.

Dr. G raised an interesting point about the 1-year charter renewal that was awarded by the School District. He suggested that the state statute is written such that a charter renewal can be renewed for a period of not less than five years. There is specific language in the state statute that supports this. What isn't known is the District's specific rationale for awarding a 1-year renewal when it seems impossible, based on the language in the statute. To give us clarity, he suggests we pursue the reasoning for the exception to the statute.

Dr. G thanked Marilyn Kline for her support in advancing our volunteer efforts, especially in reading & Tara Sall for joining in meetings with the district. It is always beneficial to have a parent who is willing to step up and support VMA in the face of district resistance.

He mentioned that the attendance rate for February is at 95% which is exceptional. Also remarked that 1/3 of the boys attended the Mother/Sun Dance event which was a great turnout. Family Literacy Night on February 28 had meager attendance and we are looking at ways to expand and enhance the offerings at these types of engagement events. He discussed several events upcoming during March that will stress enrollment, literacy & student achievement.

He mentioned the Summer Shine Academy, an enrichment program that serves as not only a program for current students, but a recruitment and engagement tool. It also serves as an orientation period for students who will be newly enrolled in August.

He mentioned the upcoming Book Fair offered by Scholastic. The book fair provides students with opportunities to buy books that meet their interests and needs. Funding is an important part of the program. The school needs to fund the books through an online portal and the student makes the purchase using the available funds.

Marilyn suggested the Executive Board step up and make donations directly to the e-wallet on behalf of the Suns. Naiema asked Marilyn to take the lead on the project and report back.

#### Development Report: Laura Randall

- Brief rundown of current activities in development & fundraising:
- Dream Lunch grossed about \$104,000
- SHINE ON! 2023 invitations are in the final stage of review and should be in the mail very soon after this meeting.
- Corporate sponsors are needed, and the board is asked to provide options for sponsorships from their friends and business contacts.
- A parent is slated to be a featured speaker
- Volunteers: We have had moderate success with our ad on Volunteer Match. We have a commitment from LECOM to have their senior students support VMA. Strong volunteer support for Shine On!
- We are making a concerted effort to capture volunteer hours which will support the 'give or get' guidelines for board members.

Laura spoke of the finalization of the Bishop Parker grant and the addition of a dedicated program to support students with special needs. Naiema suggests we develop a strategy to create awareness about the ESE program so we have possible students to enroll when the program comes online.

#### Finance Report:

Earnest Wilks reports on the financial status of VMA. Liquidity (cash on hand) seems to be an ongoing challenge. We expect an influx of disposable cash as a result of the Shine On! Event which will help our cash flow. He stressed that given the amount of cash we have that it be moved to an interest-bearing account. A motion was offered to allow the board to change the existing banking structure to one where the funds on hand are moved to an interest-bearing account. The motion was seconded and carried by a majority affirmative vote with no abstentions or objections.

Earnest asked that the other committees occasionally invite the Finance Committee to present at their meetings. He believes that the committees will be better informed about how cashflow impacts nearly every aspect of VMA.

Naiema asked the feasibility of creating a corporate sponsorship program. Laura supports the notion and defers the initial program development to Michael who has much expertise in corporate development due to his experience as Corporate Development Director at Sarasota Opera and USF.

Earnest summed up with a mention of the possibility of converting the existing capital funds to discretionary funds. Further discussion is necessary with the Knapps since this is donor designated funds for a very specific purpose.

Laura mentioned the possibility of getting reimbursed from the district (county) for some of the capital outlay funding we expended in doing site prep and research for the Field of Dreams project. We will assemble any expenses we have made and put them together in a package and submit to our contact to see if there is any opportunity for reimbursement.

There being no further business, it was moved, seconded and unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 5:53 PM.

### Earnest Wilks (Treasurer) Report

As the new treasure Wilks has been reviewing documents and will work with finance people to discover the forms, methods and outcomes that are most informative and suitable to present to the board for review.

Wilks cited a revenue shortfall (report dated 1.3.2023) against budget of about \$120K but feels that the two fundraising events will help close the funding gap. He encouraged other members to reach out to professionals and friends to support VMA in whatever ways they can.

### Closing Remarks & Adjournment

There being no additional business, a motion was made (Frieson) & seconded (Kline) to adjourn the meeting. The vote carried. The meeting was adjourned at 6:03 PM