

Yinghua Academy Board Special Meeting

Minutes of February 20, 2007

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Sandy Doubek, Cindy Moeller, Doug Parish, Kristina Schatz, Michael VanKeulen, Larry Yan, Margaret Wong

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE

Betsy Lueth

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

25-30 Yinghua Academy Parents, Future Parents, and Others

Meeting began 6:06 pm

Ms. Moeller welcomed everyone to the special board meeting. Introductions were made by the Yinghua Academy staff and board members. Ms. Moeller gave an overview of the agenda and the background of the situation. The basic purpose of this special board meeting is for the board to make a decision about whether to have a maximum of 20 students or a maximum of 25 students in each kindergarten class during the 2007-2008 school year. Since the school has already received 55 applications for the 2007-2008 kindergarten, many parents of prospective students are interested in this decision.

Director Lueth discussed the kindergarten enrollment proposal for 25 students in each kindergarten classroom with more than one teacher, i.e., with the support of a part-time licensed teacher or educational assistant who has native-quality fluency in Mandarin. The opportunity for more personalized instruction would be greater. Differentiation and small group teaching would happen more readily, and teachers would receive more preparation time, which would allow for multiple levels in a lesson as well as more support in the classroom than they currently have. In addition, this model would allow the school to “grow” teachers for the program long-term by having the new teacher work collaboratively with a master teacher in our program and consequently strengthen the overall quality of our teachers. Also Director Lueth encouraged growth to at least 50 kindergartners to ensure sustainability of classes at higher grade levels in future years and, therefore, the sustainability of the school.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Michele St. Martin urged caution about the appearance of the special board meeting, which might communicate that there is an emergency or might give the appearance of impropriety. She also expressed her concern about class sizes and would like to see class size and number of instructors together in the decision.

Chris Isett supported the school’s need to do what they can to sustain class sizes without jeopardizing other opportunities like art classes for the children.

Muree Larson was thankful to the board. She has a kindergarten student who is accepted for next year and would like to see Yinghua Academy as strong as it possible.

Jamie Meilahn has one child entering kindergarten this fall but is on the waiting list and a 2_ year old future Yinghua Academy student. She feels that this option has been well-thought-out by the Yinghua Academy board. Her husband stressed the importance for our country of building a great relationship with the People's Republic of China and commented that we don't have enough Chinese-speaking people in this country today. He thinks everyone should make a commitment to the future of the school and that, when they enroll for kindergarten classes, they make a commitment to send their children to all grades offered at Yinghua Academy. He also stressed the importance of larger class size next year, because it is more difficult at immersion schools to replace higher-grade students who leave the school. Also he recommended that the board look into portable classrooms as an option to the potential space issue.

Deb Volkert would like the kids' classroom to stay small. She lives in the Rosemount/Apple Valley school district, which is introducing an international curriculum. She encouraged the board to consider creative solutions for admitting as many enrolled students as possible.

Janine Trutna would like the board to brainstorm on other ideas. She is comfortable with increased kindergarten class sizes if the teachers have additional in-class support. She also asked the board if it would be possible to collect statistics about attrition from language immersion programs, before making a decision about adding a third kindergarten classroom.

Toby Schifsky had questions about Yinghua Academy's competition and the strategy for getting and retaining talented teachers. Director Lueth shared some information about Yinghua Academy's interview process for teachers, the professional development Yinghua Academy has provided and will continue to provide, the priority she and the board have given to teacher retention, and the great work environment at Yinghua Academy.

Teacher Keri Norell gave her views on portable classrooms, and she has had experience teaching in them. She supports the board to look into this option for the future. She made a statement to the group that, if your children want to attend Yinghua Academy next year, she wants to be there to teach the children. She said that, based on her experience of teaching a class of 25 students, she would be comfortable with having a kindergarten class of 25 students, especially if she had some additional support. She shared with the group how pleased she is to teach at Yinghua Academy and how pleasant the work environment is in comparison with other schools at which she has taught.

Teacher Ping Peng made a statement to the group that she was okay with teaching as many as 50 students in her class, given the fact that there is more competition with other immersion schools opening up. In China for a year-and-a-half she had 60 students in a classroom. She also noted that the teachers at Yinghua Academy are committed to the school. The teachers know their students and where they are academically at all times.

Teacher Peter Avirom stated to the group that he supports the statements made by Teacher Norell and Teacher Peng. He shared his satisfaction with teaching at Yinghua Academy.

BOARD DISCUSSION

Meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm.

The board discussed the thoughts that had been shared by the public and teachers. A majority of the board expressed their support for having kindergarten classrooms of up to 25 during the 2007-2008 school year. In addition, there was support for looking for alternative solutions for facilities, including the possibility of portable classrooms.

Mr. VanKeulen indicated that he wanted to make sure the board stayed committed to the number of students promised for enrollment in 2007-2008.

Ms. Schatz stressed the importance of communicating to the public how important kindergarten class size is for the growth of the school and for the future of Yinghua Academy. She noted that the Yinghua Academy Board needs to look at growth for the future and consider the possibility of adding a third kindergarten class for the 2007-2008 school year.

Ms. Wong said that she would like more discussion about the teacher-to-student ratio and about looking into adding a third kindergarten classroom for the 2007 – 2008 school year.

Director Lueth said the viability of fifty students for the 2007-2008 school year is more realistic at this time. HanBan is a potential source for visiting teachers from China, though those teachers would be able to stay in the U.S. for only a year or two. This presents a dilemma for Yinghua, since it would be best for the school to “grow its own” teachers who could stay with the school for a number of years.

Mr. VanKeulen asked the board to make a commitment for further research and finding creative solutions; and he expressed his support of making a decision at this meeting about a specific number of kindergarten to be admitted now for next school year.

Ms. Moeller indicated that she is comfortable with making a decision today to admit fifty kindergarten students, with the intention of conducting further research for creative solutions on structure of the kindergarten classes. She also expressed her concern about admitting all 55 students who have applied for kindergarten, since that would potentially put the school in the position of having kindergarten classes that would be larger than 25.

Mr. Yan indicated that he is okay with voting on fifty kindergarten students for the 2007 – 2008 school year and looking for options of growing the school further.

Ms Schatz commented that the board will still have to look at options for the families still on the waiting list for the 2007 – 2008 school year.

Ms. Doubek stated how she was not comfortable voting this evening on admitting more than fifty kindergartners. She also expressed her support of the board doing additional research on the possibility for adding more students.

Mr. Parish made a motion that we admit fifty kindergarten students for the 2007-2008 school year in two classes with added classroom support in a manner to be determined later. This will result in the creation of a waiting list for five students who have applied for kindergarten and for any additional students who apply for kindergarten. The board will continue to evaluate options for adding capacity in a manner that allows us to maintain educational quality and financial stability. Ms. Wong seconded the motion.

All board members voted in favor of the motion, with the exception of Ms. Schatz and Mr. VanKeulen, who abstained since each of them is the parent of a child who had applied for kindergarten for next school year and who might be impacted by the outcome of this vote.

The board then discussed a strategy for communicating this decision. Director Lueth will notify all parents whose children’s applications were drawn in the lottery as #41 through #55. She will inform the families whose children’s applications were #51 through #55 that their children will be on a waiting list and that they will be notified as soon as any openings develop and/or if enough additional kindergarten applications are submitted to justify a third kindergarten.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Parish made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Doubek seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 7:17 pm.