

Board Members Attending: Cynthia Shelmerdine, David Jean, Sally Mackenzie, Peggy Muir, Ed Harris, Barbara Merson, and Kathy Wilson.

Also in attendance: Scott Barksdale, HOS; Amy Bundt, Director of Finance and Operations; Fern Desjardins, Maine Charter School Commission; Carrie McColgan, former Head of School.

HCA Parents: Lori Ballard, Alexis Brown, Natalie Summers Capano, Bob Chappelow, Trista Conners, Janet Fusaro, Jaye Kalil, Kata Ritenburg, Will Rowan, Erik and Heather Sandelin, Margaret Savignano, Leslie Watts, Katie Williams, Kate Wing, Carina Wishman, Jenn Turgeon, Judy Martin, Lisa Truden, Janelle Richard, Jamie Giles, Alessandra Dalton.

HCA Students: Ainslee Albert, Zerrick Roy, Paul Catalano, Marcy Walton, Hayden McAllian, Bella Bolack, Elijah D'Alessio, Trinity Brown, Casper McAllian, Eamon Watts, Jamie Saft, Sam Mathis, Leslie Labonte, Lilliana King, Lyndsey Davis, Haley Nowak, Sam Kemos, Junie Fusaro, Ash Chappelow, Isaac Becker, Nolan Kalil, Laurel Wishman, Avery Giles, Maja Johansen, Haley Lord, Melissa Dalton, Connor Richard, Cambria Smith.

HCA staff present for the public comment: Angie Arndt, Mel Christensen-Fletcher, Emily Gadd, Hollie Paul, Kaitlyn Pulju, Caleb Fletcher, Todd French, Mae Applegate, Amy Gertner, Lee Rose, Mindy Turner, Karli Jo Clark.

Cynthia called the meeting to order at 4:35 pm.

The consent agenda (Minutes of the February 16, 2022 Board Meeting) was adopted.

Scott welcomed attendees. He noted the school is committed to the students and staff. The school is mission driven; the school's purpose is to enact the mission and vision as it has over the years. He also said that all communications of the past week have been shared with the Board.

Cynthia likewise welcomed attendees. She said she wanted to forefront the truth: No one wants to close the school, but it needs to be viable. The official enrollment count on October 1, 2021 on which next year's budget (SY 22-23) is based, provided the amount of money that the state allots the school. We learned that amount in February 2022. At that point, school administrators realized how far from an operating budget they would be for next year. That started the conversations, research, and surveying regarding possible steps. It was a whirlwind process with many moving pieces. She said she understood the anger and confusion that resulted. She apologized for the tight timeline.

She commented on the number of letters she received and wanted to ensure that anyone who wanted to speak tonight on consolidation would have the opportunity to do so. For ground rules: She asked that people mute themselves, raise their hands to speak, and enter ditto or another

symbol to agree. Speakers should limit themselves to three minutes; Amy Bundt is the timekeeper. The board, after hearing from individuals, needs time to discuss before voting.

Public Comment

Will Rowan: has a fifth grader and an eighth grader at the school. He appreciates the support they received. He also understands, though, the difficult spot that we're in. He is eager to do anything to help the situation.

Janet Fusaro has a 10th grader named Junie. Junie had brain cancer last year. The school has been a huge part of her life. She is willing to sit at a farm stand.

Junie Fusaro is in their second year here. They say it's such a big part of their life. The classes have done so much for them. "I identify as non-binary, and I feel so lucky to be at the school where people care. It is so important to me."

Trinity Brown is an 11th grader. This school was her last resort. She knows it's the last resort for many students. She had difficulties previously with regard to sexuality, anxiety, depression. The school is a second home to her. She came out of her social bubble and flourished at the school because of the amazing teachers.

Alessandra is a student. She was present with her guardian, Michelle Brown. She has written an article for the Cryer. "I thrive here," she said. "I lost both my parents. The school helped me."

Ash Chappelow and father, *Bob Chappelow*. Ash is in 11th grader and says that the school is better than any other school for them. People here don't slip up on preferred pronouns. The father said that he wanted to find a school for his child. And now the child is thriving. He is volunteering to distribute flyers and will be willing to help in other ways, too.

Casper McAllian is a 10th grader and is trans. He says that acceptance is predominant here. Other schools don't accommodate. They say, "If I have to go back to my old school, I will not be treated the same way I am here." He has brothers in fifth and eighth grades. All will help if they can.

Sam Kemos says that music is a big part of his life. When he came, he was a quiet, anxious kid. "Now I love everyone. The teachers care so much. I am willing to talk to other people in the community about the school."

Isaac Becker is a senior. He came here in sixth grade. He says that he learned so much more here than he would at his original school. He comments that there are others who have failed out of their schools, and, therefore, this school would be a good fit for them.

Janelle Richard is the mother of Connor. He came in fifth grade and is now in ninth. When he first came, he hardly spoke. He did speak a lot at home about the school. Here he realized he wants to be a writer. He's grown so much. We live in New Gloucester. We will pick up anyone who is on our way here. I will go to feeder schools like Fiddlehead and the charter school in Lewiston and talk up HCA.

Judy Martin has a daughter here since six grade who is now a ninth grader. Previously she had gone to an expeditionary learning school. But here found student-lead learning and meaningful learning. It promotes breadth and depth of learning. It's nontraditional. Here kids find their missing pieces. They're welcomed here. She understands the enrollment issue, but there are costs if the school closes. Many students have experienced trauma. But they will have even greater trauma if the school doesn't exist anymore. So, at the very least the school needs a gentler exit plan if the school has to close. Schools like this are gems. I regret that at the parent partnership I didn't ask more about enrollment etc. Her daughter, she says, felt isolated in elementary school. In the middle school here, she became more social, more open. She got to go outside I want to help as much as I can to keep the school open. Closing it would be awful.

Nolan Kalil and Jaye Kalil (mother) The mother told about moving here from New Hampshire from a regional school that was pretty large. The choices here were Mt Ararat and HCA, so the family made a conscious decision. Nolan was a mess when he came. And now he is an ambassador for the school; he's excited to come to school; he can't miss school.

(Cynthia mentioned that Jenn Turgeon wrote in the chat that her boys love the school and how they are treated.)

Erik Sandelin said that he and his wife and son would do whatever the school needed them to do.

Todd French teaches social studies in division 2/3. He said hearing everyone here makes him know why he travels one hour each way just to get to school. He suggested a frame for thinking about long-term viability. "We experienced a pandemic, and many students dropped out of school completely. Those students need a school like this." We have good test scores, and we can show that we will help those students.

Caleb Fetcher said he has been teaching here for six years. He reminded people that as a school HCA rises to challenges. "As a community, we will step up because we've had a lot of experience doing so."

Carina and Laurel Wishman Laurel Wishman is a senior who came in sixth grade. She had gone to a Waldorf school before this and didn't know what to expect. She was a child of divorce and didn't know what she wanted. Amanda Wogaman inspired her to get into civil rights. Mr. Gallagher inspired her to write poetry. Coming out of her senior year she knows what she wants to do and what she wants to be. "The school means so much to me. Everyone deserves this chance."

Mae Applegate she said she loves the voices. She joined the faculty and is also a mother she has a fifth grade son and an eighth grade daughter. At their previous school they were discriminated against. Her daughter had to deal not only with racial discrimination but sexism. We wanted to be ourselves, and we are at HCA. A lot of parents don't get to see their children.

The alternative for my children is not very good. Even being able to have one more year here is huge. It is more humane to be able to have one more year. We are humans and want to be seen that way.

Alexis Brown, Trinity's mother, said, "My daughter was at rock-bottom when she found HCA. She thrives. She feels accepted." Even as she leaves, I am concerned about staff and all the other students. We are a powerful community. Social media can be helpful because everyone is on it. Mental health is a concern for kids we know that. "My daughter did a 180 from where she was in eighth grade."

Lilliana King said that she had gone to five different schools. But that she is so much happier at HCA. At other schools she felt people did not like her.

Carina Wishman has a son who is graduating this year. Her other child who went to HCA is now at College of the Atlantic. She said her personal interest ends this year but not her commitment to the school. She understands that consolidation is a challenge, but that closing would be really bad. She said she will be here to help. "Please call me."

Karli Jo Clark attended HCA and she's now a teacher. She said the adults here made her. She commented that it's hard to find a place where you fit in. She was here when, in high school, we didn't have a building. Starting without a building is OK. It's not OK to have no school.

Lori Ballard said that she has a sixth grade son who has several spectrum disorders. He was difficult as a young child and he didn't have a real voice before. Now he has started to love school, and he's learned to advocate for himself. Since he's been here, he's off all of his meds except melatonin.

Ainslee Albert is a senior and started here at in sixth grade. She says she's grown a lot, and HCA has grown a lot also. She feels as if this is her safe space and that other students feel that too. She remembered making her own clothing for a project in middle school and feels that that would not happen in a regular public school. Another student who had already spoken chimed in that hands-on learning is important; she still thinks about walking on mudflats...All of it made her a better person ?? is this the correct pronoun for this person?

Mel Christensen-Fletcher has been teaching here for seven years. She says that she is moved by all the students. She wants people to know that the staff has a list of strategies of how to get where we need to get or where the school needs to get. She says, "give us a chance to get to work."

End of Public Comment

Scott described the combined work of the Leadership and Administrative Teams. The group addressed the question, how big do we need to be. We need have 190 students to carry on the vision and to sustain the program. That means that we could take anywhere from 180 to 200 students.

How do you fit that number in a school which has a limit of about 100 students? We decided to start and give preference to the youngest students, that is grades five and six, and then after that, the students in grades 5 to 8 that doesn't mean that others are superfluous. But the younger kids need more in terms of understanding what the school is about and what the norms are.

To answer the question of older kids and younger kids together especially on the buses, he said every other year except last year both middle and high school kids were on the bus. One parent commented that she is hopeful that behavior will be better when the kids are together because high school students have a calming effect.

Scott ended by giving the current count which is 124 students who are re-enrolling and 18 new students. That means we need between 66 and 88 students for next year. We usually get about 50 more students from this point in the year. We need the higher numbers because by October 1, 2022, we must have that number in order to have enough money to be sustainable into school year 2023-24.

David Jean described his son who spent four years at HCA. He started as a very introverted kid, and, like Sam Kemos, he got into music here. He played the drums and still does because he found that he loved it. He was in the band with a bunch of teachers and other kids and then he felt confident and comfortable to also played basketball with them. "He just blossomed here.

Then he continued: What we have here is a simple, old-fashioned math problem. We got some subsidies because of Covid. But we don't have them anymore. Next year, our expenses are going to be more than the revenue. It's going to take

1. community support, volunteering fundraising. Everybody has to do his or her part.
2. an investment in infrastructure --facilities and systems --to make sure that the school will actually be able to run. We have a supportive bank, and its people will need to understand that we need a significant investment in order to start next September. Everyone has to be involved. I feel people are committed, but it's going to take a lot to get where we need to be.

Scott said, if we get the enrollment up, as he indicated, we can make it in 2023-2024. We need 175K to keep going this coming year.

Ed mentioned the other task of this spring and summer, the charter renewal application. *Cynthia* said we first have to get commission approval for consolidation for next year. She plans to be on the April agenda of the charter commission 's monthly meeting.

Barbara made the motion to consolidate the school at the Harpswell location. Kathy seconded it.

Discussion followed: *Dave:* We need charter commission acceptance and bank financing in order to make this work. Not in our control right now. *Peggy* said here is a perfect example of entrepreneurship, which is what the school promotes. The process and plans prove how effectively that is woven into the thinking here. She also said, "let's not aim for just the minimum, dream bigger. "

On a roll call vote the decision was unanimous to keep the school open and to move to Harpswell.

After the vote, *Peggy* said to consider calling HCA "An option that works." Keep the message positive.

Kathy asked, " is it insulting to talk about the students here as misfits?" We can think of them as happy misfits, but *Kathy* said she is happy to be a misfit.

Students had various reactions—generally, positive. *Dave* said he thought of the school more as a collection of individuals who are seen as individuals. So ultimately, the term seemed to be something that the school might not want to use in its advertising.

On a motion by Sally, seconded by Cynthia, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 pm.