



MITCH
Charter School
Board of Directors

Inspiring colorful acts of greatness

School Administration:

Caitlin Blood, Executive Director
Nicole Hans, Vice Principal

Board Members:

Sarah Parker, Chair
Daniela Pratt, Treasurer
Neil Tosuntikool, Secretary

Corey Cabrera

Susan Noack

Krista Brown

Regular Meeting

When: 1/21/25 6:30pm

Where: In Person and Virtually via Zoom

• **Opening Items:**

- Call to order by Sarah at 6:34pm
- Roll Call/Attendance
 - Board/School Administration: Sarah Parker, Krista Brown, Daniela Pratt, Susan Noack, (Corey Cabrera and Neil Tosuntikool via Zoom), Caitlin Blood, Nicole Hans, Leah Smith
 - Attendees: Shannon Fairley, Kristen Hoover, Ashley Beyer, Paula Robertson, Cheryl, Jenny Burnett, Marie Henderson, Carrie, Althea Idomoto, Tracy Borders, Charlene Negus Shemley, Christine Sanchez, Alisah Morton, Cristen Glover, Karissa Brown, Sonia Mann, Marrie Lesage, Cheryl Berg, Rick Proulx, Carrie Novak, Kristen Paul, MaryEllen Rasmussen, Stephanie Irving Lee, Elizabeth Adkins, Michelle Potter, Holly Cuperus, Jamie Fazio, Beth Hudson, Cameron Grile, Nicholas McDonald, Tracy Senft, Heather Hurshman, Jordann Bartlett
- Approve Agenda – Caitlin requests Continual Improvement be moved to the February meeting. (Neil to follow up). Sarah motions to approve. Susan seconds. Board approves.
- Approve Minutes – No Board additions or suggested revisions. Neil motions to approve the minutes from 12-3-24. Susan seconds. Board approves.
- Approve Financials – No Board additions or suggested revisions. Daniela motions to approve November and December 2024 financials. Susan seconds. Board approves.

• **Public Comment:** None

• **Action Items from Previous Meeting**

- Sarah to schedule Board meeting training date with Kristen Miles for Thursday, February 6th (will replace regular meeting on February 4th) - DONE
- Neil to move Collaborative Classrooms to next meeting agenda on January 21st - DONE
- Caitlin to investigate Backpack Buddies responsibilities – DONE
- Corey following up with 2 more contractor estimates for the gym flooring – DONE (Will report on later in meeting)

• **Kern-Thompson Audit Report**

- Rick Proulx and Carrie Novak from Kern-Thompson presented an overview of the MITCH 2024 annual audit
- Overall grade of A+, clean report, no material audit adjustments
- Board to review audit and send any follow up questions to Board Treasurer Daniela, for follow-up with Kern-Thompson

- **Teacher Spotlight - Kinder Team**
 - Ms. Potter (KC) gave an overview of the typical day schedule of a Kinder student at MITCH
 - Shared observations about the fantastic growth and development in the students already this school year
 - Brief Q&A session with the Board members and meeting attendees

- **Collaborative Classroom – Literacy Grant Data**
 - Nicole Hans and Leah Smith gave an update and overview of the literacy grant program (i.e. Collaborative Classroom)
 - Collaborative Classroom is the curriculum used for Kinder-2nd grade
 - Core Knowledge is the curriculum for 3rd-5th grades
 - Brief Q&A session with the Board members and meeting attendees

- **Review Survey Feedback**
 - Survey feedback is completely anonymous
 - Caitlin Blood thanked all families for participating, for their involvement, etc., and gave a detailed overview of the feedback that was shared in the latest MITCH family survey
 - The main themes shared in the survey were:
 - Communication and Transparency
 - Teacher Turnover and Retention
 - Academic Rigor and Curriculum
 - Teacher and Staff Support
 - Caitlin addressed the issues in each theme and outlined what MITCH administration and staff are doing to alleviate/improve/mitigate these challenges (see attached Executive Director Statement: Board Survey Results)
 - Caitlin also answered several questions from the Board and provided additional feedback and clarity

- **Read-A-Thon**
 - Still working on finalizing letter, will submit to Board for review before next meeting

- **Gym Flooring Contractor Update**
 - Corey updated on the grants MITCH has received for a new updated gym floor
 - Sarah proposes that MITCH apply for the Nike grant to help fund the gym floor update. Corey seconds. Board approves.

- **PSO Update – Shannon**
 - Shannon announced the PSO would be purchasing a book for the MITCH library in each of the Board member’s name
 - Upcoming dine-outs: Panda Express 2/7 (nation-wide), McMenamins Sherwood 3/5

- MITCH Merch: re-opening the shop at the end of the week until 2/8, ready for pick-up early to mid-March, new this time around long-sleeve tee-shirts and new black and gray colorways
- STEAM Night updates, request for parent volunteers to please help, double the volunteer hours x2!
- **Closing Items:**
 - **Takeaway Action Items Review**
 1. Neil to move Continual Improvement to February 18th meeting agenda
 2. Caitlin to add an action item to next Board meeting to solidify the backpack buddy role within school responsibilities
 3. When the audit report gets delivered to the Board, members can send questions to Daniela
 4. Neil to add Parent Square question to next family survey 2/18
 5. Neil to add Read-A-Thon to next meeting
 6. Corey to finalize the Readathon letter with the committee
 7. Sarah to email out the finalized Readathon letter once completed
 8. Caitlin to investigate the cost and participation of HSA/FSA programs for staff
 - **Public Comments:**
 - i. What is the hiring process, who does the hiring, what are the qualifications for new hires? Sorry, to add to my previous question, that also includes which substitutes are brought in. (Cristen Glover)
 - ii. Thank you for sharing the survey results. While the responses indicate compliance with requirements, there is still concern about the need for greater stability in both curriculum and staffing. The challenges we currently face showed warning signs over the past two years. I encourage the board to develop and share a concrete action plan for addressing both existing and potential issues. Additionally, a more thorough discussion of the school's current position and the steps being taken to ensure long-term stability. Thank you for your time and consideration. (Anonymous)
 - iii. Thank you for sharing the survey responses and what the school address, please consider all students not just students below standard, but also TAG (Stephanie)
 - iv. Shoutout to T.K. (business manager) for all her work on the audit, the systems that she's put in place, and all of her hard work in general (MaryEllen)
 - v. Does the HSA and FSA cost the school to participate? (Dr. Hudson)
 - **Board Comments:**
 - i. Neil – Thank you to all the attendees tonight for their engagement and involvement in the Board meeting
 - **Adjourn:** Sarah adjourns the meeting at 9:01pm

Executive Director Statement: Board Survey Response

Thank you all for attending tonight and for sharing your thoughts and concerns through the MITCH School Board's survey. We value our community's input—it's clear how deeply our families care about the success of our school and the well-being of our students and staff. I'd like to address the main themes we've heard from folks recently and share how we are working to improve. Many of these measures have been shared over the past three years, and I am happy to review them again in an effort to be more transparent and to keep our community in the loop.

Communication and Transparency

First, we've heard some concerns about communication. I have similar concerns. It's frustrating when you feel left out of the loop or when important issues involving your children aren't communicated promptly. It's one thing when this happens here and there, but I have noticed a pattern that has emerged recently. Some of the miscommunication is due to having multiple substitutes with chronic absenteeism in the building. Some of the last minute changes we have recently experienced in staffing resulted in clunky communication to impacted families. We are happy to say we have moved past those challenges and have permanent teachers in every classroom that are ready to partner closely with parents.

However, I have noticed that communication at MITCH is suffering in large part because teachers are getting left out of the loop. Many families, out of the best intentions of advocating for their child, are going straight to administration or support staff instead of following the policies and processes described in the Family Handbook, which essentially say, "talk to your teacher first." Your teacher is your students' on campus advocate. They will use our intervention and supports processes to involve the appropriate staff so that we can strategize to meet your students' needs. This especially goes for communication with the school counselor. Families in need of social emotional, backpack buddies, or 504 support for their student, reach out to your students' teacher first. They will take your students' needs to the school counselor, who will coordinate with the teacher to make sure they are met. Any plans for student support must be made through the teacher. Your students' teacher is with your student 90% of the day and knows them best. If a family has had multiple conversations with their teacher and do not feel their child's needs are being met or need to escalate their request, that is when they can reach out to the administration. Not the school counselor, but administration. I also believe that administrators and support staff are to blame for this growing issue, and Nicole and I are doing all that we can to restore the proper channels of communication at MITCH.

In regards to our 504 programming, the same standard of communication holds. Start with your teacher. They are your advocate on campus and must know what is going on with their students. The beauty of our small class sizes is that we can get informal accommodation plans in place until a student is evaluated, found eligible, and has a formal 504 plan. This is an area we are actively working to improve. Our goal is to make the process clear, efficient, and supportive for families so all students can thrive here at MITCH.

That said, our implementation of Parent Square this year is in effort to improve communication at every level of the school. Parent Square streamlines our communications, allows us to track and collect data so that we can review and reassess our communication strategies and expectations for staff and families moving forward. We are committed to doing better, implementing clearer communication processes and continuing to provide more detailed updates about school-wide decisions like staffing, curriculum, and our budget in the monthly Executive Director Update, which we will be adding to Fox Tales.

Teacher Turnover and Retention

Despite the high levels of teacher turnover across the country, we know the high rate of teacher turnover at MITCH has been unsettling. Multiple families have shared how this impacts both your children's learning and their sense of stability. We are fully aware, and I want to assure folks this is a top priority for us. We are always working with the board to address teacher compensation, foster a supportive workplace environment, and ensure that teachers feel valued and respected. This includes conducting surveys to hear directly from our staff, working with staff to create protected spaces in which staff can productively discuss their challenges and concerns to bring to admin, offering professional development, partnering with the PSO to support continuing staff education, and conducting exit surveys to learn how we can improve.

While we understand that families want to know more about why individual teachers leave, please know that privacy laws prevent us from sharing details about personnel matters or the reasons behind specific departures. Generally, the biggest reason for staff departures is continuing education or family needs, and the majority of staff that have left MITCH have left full time teaching altogether. Teaching is an incredibly taxing job no matter where you are today. In fact, teacher turnover in the US has risen between 10 and 15% after the pandemic.

Some survey responses asked what more could be done for staff financially. Over the past 3 years, we have listened to staff needs and done our best to meet them within our budgetary capacity. My first year as Executive Director, we implemented a salary schedule at the request of staff. This adjustment has provided salary increases for the majority of staff. Some of our most tenured staff have seen increases as high as 10-20% over the last three years. This salary schedule also provides a clear path for our newest staff to chart out their salary growth moving forward. Our salary schedule model is informed by the same elements as the schedule at TTSD: tenure and education. In addition to salary increases, we were able to offer end of year bonuses to full-time lead teaching staff last year. We hope to do the same this year.

We have also ended the opt-out insurance stipend that was instituted during the pandemic. This has been challenging for many. This stipend was difficult to maintain because it incentivized staff to leave the school's insurance plan, diminishing our pool and driving up rates for members. We are committed to finding a different way to support staff to afford out-of-network insurance, and were able to offer salary increases that made up for the difference for almost all staff. We have invested in FSA and HSA programs, and employee assistance programs through our Paychex, our payroll and HR service provider. Full time classified staff also have access to retirement benefits through PERS, the Public Employee Retirement System.

We are very clear in our hiring process that our school receives 80% of the funding that traditional public schools receive, and that our staff is paid 80% what traditional public school teachers receive. We are also clear about the benefits of teaching at MITCH and being a charter school. At MITCH, our curriculum is unique. Our teachers are encouraged to be creative and build as many dynamic, differentiated, and hands-on experiences within that curriculum. Writing and preparing for unique and creative lessons requires extra time and energy. Please understand, this is why we have more work days and professional development days than TTSD. In fact, this was why MITCH had school only 4 days a week up until about 2015. The education we provide requires more time to prepare. Even with the extra time we have built in, we are still working on more ways to find time for teachers to prep the deep and robust learning experiences that we want MITCH to be known for.

Retaining great educators is essential for our students, and we are committed to making MITCH a place where teachers thrive. We have worked hard over the past three years to increase salaries, benefits, professional development opportunities, and cultivate a supportive and positive school culture and work environment for teachers and staff. We will continue to take the feedback we receive from both staff and families to heart as we work toward meaningful and lasting improvements in our school.

Academic Rigor and Curriculum

We've also heard questions about the curriculum and academic expectations. Some families are wondering why we teach "Common Core". To clarify, the Common Core Standards are a set of shared K-12 learning expectations for students in English-language arts and mathematics, and were adopted by over 45 states in the U.S. Like traditional public schools, MITCH is required to teach to these standards and demonstrate that our students are meeting them through standardized testing. The standards are WHAT we teach. Unlike traditional public schools, whose curricula is chosen by the district, MITCH gets to choose HOW we teach those standards. We choose the curricula and lessons that teach our students to those standards at our school. Some examples of our curricula are our literacy curriculum, Collaborative Classroom, our Math curriculum, Eureka Math, or our history and science curriculum, Core Knowledge.

Some of the standards we are required to teach are embedded in our health curriculum. While we recognize that families have diverse perspectives and values, we are required to teach certain health content, while offering families the ability to opt out of specific lessons deemed sensitive. Our goal is to foster an inclusive environment while respecting your role as parents in guiding conversations at home.

Our team is always reviewing curricular materials and instructional strategies to ensure they meet our high standards and address the needs of all learners. This year, for example, Dr. Hudson is leading the staff in a curriculum crosswalk for Eureka Math. A Curriculum Crosswalk allows for gaps to be found between current coursework and expected learning outcomes. These gaps and deficiencies can then be used to develop new coursework, new lessons, and new opportunities for students to gain the necessary knowledge and skills.

We have also prioritized our Academic Intervention Program this year. Leah Smith has taken the role of Intervention Specialist from part-time to full-time, developing a more robust reading workshop program, the beginnings of math intervention, and a strategic

and impactful Effective Behavior Intervention and Supports or EBIS program. This means that teachers, support staff, and administration are regularly meeting to evaluate student progress, identifying students with behavioral challenges and/or are performing below benchmark, and identifying and revising interventions. We have prioritized the intervention program budgetarily as well, pushing the staff in this program, like Instructional Assistants off of grant funding and into our core budget. There has been a nationwide dip in academic scores and a spike in behavioral needs since the pandemic, and MITCH is not excluded from that. New curricula, new teachers, and new needs from students and families are informing every decision we make to move forward as an educational institution. We'll continue gathering feedback from families and teachers to help guide our adjustments.

Teacher and Staff Support

Many of you have asked how you can support our teachers. Your ideas—like hosting monthly appreciation events or contributing financially to ease classroom burdens—are incredibly thoughtful. Snack Fridays is something that the PSO started three years ago and has kept going. It's a big hit with staff. The PSO pays for it, all you have to do is pick up the groceries and drop them at school. Volunteers are always welcome if you are able. Volunteer to help in your child's classroom or if you can't volunteer in person, offer to take teacher's busy work home. Choose one day a week to volunteer at car line or recess if you can. It's a great way to get to know students and staff!

Ultimately, we can all support one another by giving each other grace. If your student comes home and says so-and-so hit them or said something mean to them at school, and you haven't heard from the teacher or the office yet, pause, take a deep breath, and send your teacher an email to ask them if something happened today. We understand your emotion, and we are so glad that you care. We are here to serve you and your students. We are here because we care about your child and we want to help them grow. Their safety and wellbeing is our priority. Thank you for trusting us with that immense responsibility - we do not take it lightly.

I want to thank the survey respondents, our families, and staff for your dedication to our school. Your feedback is invaluable, and we take it to heart. It is only together that we can make MITCH a stronger community that supports our students and prepares them for the world ahead. I look hopeful to continue this conversation and work collaboratively to address these challenges.



03/05/2025



03/10/2025