



# Beacon Academy

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Dear Parents,

Last night, I spoke with a group of parents regarding the three areas listed below. In particular, I shared with them the main points within each area. In addition, several other questions were asked at the end. Listed below are the three areas, the main points, and the gist of the discussion. I hope this keeps you well-informed of the status of our school both for short and long term direction and financial health.

## 1. Church of the Open Door – Update

- Lease renewal – In December, the Board authorized the Board chair and me to negotiate a lease with Open Door for next year. In January, the Board chair and I approached the church administration about negotiating a 3 year lease with an annual option to terminate the lease. The church leadership whole heartily endorsed the idea and it was also endorsed by our board. The rationale for doing so was for several reasons including:
  - \* Offers stability for current and prospective parents in knowing where we will be for more than one year.
  - \* Avoid costly moving and related building expenses during a period of economic uncertainty at the state level.
- Facility improvements – The church recognizes that we fulfill part of their mission (to utilize the whole facility during the week as well on the weekend). In doing so, they expect that they will want a school to replace us after we leave. This means that they are receptive to adding amenities and make improvements in the building including: middle-school storage, elementary drinking fountains, playground structures, etc.
- Additional space? – The Board is considering offering all-day everyday Kindergarten. This would necessitate an additional classroom for Beacon Academy. In addition, we hope to discuss room switches for next year that benefits both programs.

All in all, this has been a very positive experience for us. The church leaders have been wonderful to work with and they have offered us the opportunity to defer our rent this summer in order to avoid borrowing as well as renegotiate lease rates in the event that our state funding is reduced.

Beacon Academy: A Caring Community with High Expectations for Character and Learning  
CORE KNOWLEDGE • CHARACTER EDUCATION • DAILY SPANISH

Beacon Academy is authorized by Friends of Education, EX0-01-A, 200 East Lake Street, Wayzata, MN 55391

## 2. Long-Range Plans – Update

We have two realtors working for us to explore any and all options for our long-term facility needs. To date, we are focusing on a few parcels of property or 3 existing buildings that could be remodeled for our needs. The challenges continue to involve rezoning, property taxes, and land costs.

- Vacant property searches (5 parcels in Plymouth/Maple Grove)
- Existing facility searches (3 facilities - Maple Grove & BP)
- School building searches – We continue to discuss with Osseo and Robbinsdale School Districts their vacant facilities. I am meeting with the Asst. Supt. of Osseo Schools this week and I have met several times with Robbinsdale officials over the past year. To date, neither district has agreed to any of our proposals.
- Capital financial investors – I have met with several groups of investors. Two are from California and one is a local group. We are pursuing the local investment group and we are hopeful since they would be willing to pay property taxes which would assist us in our discussions with a municipality in getting a property rezoned.
- Senate Sub-Committee on charter school lease aid – There was an inflammatory news article in the StarTribune on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> that prompted a Senate investigation with a series of hearings on lease aid. I was fortunate enough to be asked to testify on behalf of Beacon Academy to discuss our frustration with the current means of securing a quality educational facility. The committee is charged with making recommendations to the larger legislative body and the three reoccurring themes seem to be:
  - \* Eliminate the building companies and allow charter schools the ability to own their own school.
  - \* Create incentives to encourage traditional districts to sell or lease vacant facilities to charter schools.
  - \* Charter schools need similar access to low interest financing.
- Robbinsdale Divestiture Committee status – The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M. in the Plymouth Middle School media center.
- Fundraising/investment – A new group of parents are very interested in conducting a significant fundraiser for potential investment of a new school.

- Letter campaign? – There was discussion regarding two opportunities to mobilize parent groups. One involves Robbinsdale parents whose children are still with the district but are frustrated with the board and administration and want to use our name as part of the solution to the district's unused assets. The other need is to mobilize our parents to make sure that charter school needs are not ignored during the upcoming legislative session.

### **3. Financial status of MN. and its impact on Beacon Academy**

- 17 percent holdback (permanent and/or repeated) – The state is currently withholding 27% of our revenue from us due to charter school law and the Governor's decision to un-allot after the last session. We are able to weather this without having to borrow money for cash-flow purposes, especially in light of the church's generous offer of deferred rent.
- Current legislative situation – The state is anticipating a 1.2 billion dollar shortfall for the remainder of the biennium. We don't know what impact this might have on us but the board has been "thinking out loud" about various options depending on the final outcome of the legislative session. Rest assured that parent feedback regarding financial matters will be a given.
- 2011-2013 Biennium projections – The projected shortfall for the following biennium (2011-2013) is 4-6 billion dollars.
- Impact on all charter schools - It is safe to say that every aspect of state funding will be on the table. That is why charter school leaders feel a sense of urgency to mobilize the parents to prevent charter schools from being a casualty of the state's economic struggles.
- Impact on Beacon Academy – We will be proactive in maintaining a positive financial health without compromising the core values of the school.

- Rumors – Tam Harkin, board chair, wanted the following three statements be recorded in the board minutes to refute any rumors.

- \* **“We are not cutting teachers at this point due to budget concerns”.**

- \* **“We are not borrowing money to pay teacher salaries”.**

- \* **“We are not increasing class size because we are out of money”.** (Some classes were increased by one student to alleviate odd-number sections which teachers find difficult to sub-divide.)

- “Beacon Day” at the Capitol – The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools is organizing a day for charter schools to attend a rally on the steps of the capitol and facilitate meetings with charter schools and their legislators. The day is scheduled for Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. Beacon Academy’s board and administration are discussing the inclusion of our students, staff, and parents in the day’s events.

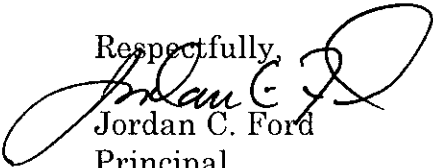
#### 4. Questions and Answers

There were several other questions related to bus transportation, student lockers, and all day Kindergarten. More details will follow in upcoming Thursday envelopes.

Finally, I want to remind parents that board elections are coming up later this spring. The board is always looking for parents who are passionate about the school and interested in serving on the board. Stay tuned for more details.

I apologize for such a lengthy communication, but I felt it was important that you have the most recent information in the proper context. If you have any additional concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Jordan C. Ford  
Principal