

The Cottonwood School

A Home Study & Montessori-Inspired High School

Special Scheduled Board Meeting

The Cottonwood School

July 30, 2020 – 9:00 am

7006 Rossmore Lane

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

Through Teleconference

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://cccconfer.zoom.us/j/93414649074>

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Or Telephone Dial:

+1 669 900 6833 (US Toll)

Meeting ID: 934 1464 9074

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Public Comments

Public comment rules: Members of the public may address the Board on agenda or non-agenda items through the teleconference platform, zoom. Zoom does not require the members of the public to have an account or login. Please either utilize the chat option to communicate with the administrative team your desire to address the board or simply communicate orally your desire to address the board when the board asks for public comments. Speakers may be called in the order that requests are received. We ask that comments are limited to 2 minutes each, with no more than 15 minutes per single topic so that as many people as possible may be heard. If a member of the public utilizes a translator to address the board, those individuals are allotted 4 minutes each. If the board utilizes simultaneous translation equipment in a manner that allows the board to hear the translated public testimony simultaneously, those individuals are allotted 2 minutes each. By law, the Board is allowed to take action only on items on the agenda. The Board may, at its discretion, refer a matter to school staff or calendar the issue for future discussion.

Note: The Cottonwood School Governing Board encourages those with disabilities to participate fully in the public meeting process. If you need a disability-related modification or accommodation, including auxiliary aids or services, to participate in the public meeting, please contact the Governing Board Office at 951-290-3013 at least 48 hours before the scheduled board meeting so that we may make every reasonable effort to accommodate you. (Government Code § 54954.2; Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, § 202 (42 U.S.C. § 12132)).

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4. Discussion and potential action regarding The Cottonwood School Organizational Strategic Planning/12 Month Cycle Development: Part 1 of a multiple part series through 20-21 school year
5. Closed Session CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL--ANTICIPATED LITIGATION
Significant exposure to litigation pursuant to Paragraph (2) or (3) of subdivision (d) of Section 54956.9: One case
6. Report out of Closed Session
7. Adjournment

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Strategic Planning Session Part I

July 30, 2020

Assumptions

Who are we accountable to?

Our students, parents, employees, the home study program, the Montessori program, Buckeye Union Elementary School District, El Dorado County Office of Education, and the tax-payers, in general.

Why would families choose Cottonwood?

For the homeschool or Montessori option. However, the main reason parents choose Cottonwood is that they love their teachers and the teachers love their students. Some students enrolled generally in ICS schools and did not specifically choose Cottonwood.

What is the role of the Board?

School board members are entrusted with governing the public charter school to ensure students learn while ensuring transparency, public accountability, and fiscal responsibility. Authority is granted to the board as a whole, not each member individually unless authority is designated to an individual by the Board.

How did we get where we are today?

- The Buckeye Union Elementary School District (Buckeye) approved the Clarksville Charter to serve a home study population beginning on July 1, 2017. The Petitioner was Inspire Charter Schools (“ICS”).
- The Cottonwood School was originally approved by Buckeye in 2018 as a site-based Montessori program for approximately 400 students with a small home-schooling component of 125 students. The Petitioner was Inspire Charter Schools.
- In 2019, a material revision to Cottonwood was submitted (and approved) and Inspire Charter Schools shifted many homeschool students from Clarksville, Feather River, Lake View, and Winship-Robbins into Cottonwood. That took effect on July 1, 2019. The material revision increased the nonclassroom based numbers to 1200.

- After July 1, 2019, Inspire Charter Schools (now known as Provenance) discontinued its operation of charter schools and instead transitioned into only a service provider known as Inspire Charter Services (and later into Provenance).
- After July 1, 2019, Inspire charter Schools and the Executive Director of Cottonwood directed the site-based Principal that no more students could be enrolled in the site-based program for the 2019-2020 school year.
- In 2020, a material revision was submitted (and approved) to update the address of the site-based program and also to increase the nonclassroom enrollment to 2650 and decreased the site-based program to 125.
- On October 3, 2019, six County Superintendents submitted a request for an Extraordinary Audit Request to the Fiscal Crisis Management and Assistance Team (“FCMAT”) pertaining to collective concerns regarding the governance, fiscal practices and operations of the charter schools operated by the Inspire charter network. Cottonwood is one of the former Inspire Charter schools included in that audit. The scope of the audit includes attendance practices, enrollment practices, related party transactions, and conflicts of interest.
- Cottonwood currently has approximately 2400 nonclassroom based students and 50 site-based students enrolled for 2020-21.

How did families/employees choose Cottonwood?

Many did not. It is likely that families and employees chose Inspire Charter Schools in general. The parents signed a document agreeing that their students could be shifted between schools with Inspire Charter Schools and many of the current Cottonwood nonclassroom based students were shifted from other ICS schools on or about July 1, 2019. Likewise, many employees likely applied through Inspire Charter Schools and were not specifically choosing one of the schools at which to work. It is not clear how or why students or staff/teachers were assigned to Cottonwood by ICS over another school.

Why start strategic planning?

- 1) Legal Compliance
- 2) Establish goals and a workplan
- 3) Keeping teachers and students together
- 4) Ensuring continued employment for employees

Who else provides similar services to students in the area?

- Former Inspire Charter Schools: Clarksville (1110, El Dorado County), Feather River (1100, Sutter County), Lake View (536, Glenn County), and Winship-Robbins (98, Sutter County)
- Other nonclassroom charters: Visions, CAVA, South Sutter, Horizon
- No other high school Montessori in the area (neither public or private)

What outside challenges exist to the School?

- Pandemic
- Growth Cap
- FCMAT Audit
- Renewal
- Overall Political Threats to Charter Schools and Specifically NCB charters
 - Legislative attempts to halt or slow charter growth
 - Moratorium on new nonclassroom charters
 - Legislative attempts to limit the ability of a charter school to allow parents to use funding for outside vendors

What is the shared MOU?

The shared MOU was approved in 2019-2020 and continues in effect for the 2020-21 school year. The MOU can only be terminated with 60-days notice by any party to the MOU. The shared MOU allows but does not require the sharing of employees between Cottonwood, Clarksville, Feather River, Winship-Robbins, and Lake View. The shared MOU is implemented by Provenance. The shared MOU currently provides teachers and some administrators employed by the other parties to the MOU for many Cottonwood students and provides Cottonwood teachers and administrators to many students of the other parties to the MOU. A revised MOU has been circulating among the parties to the MOU to make revisions for the 2020-21 school year, but does not change the status that the current MOU remains in place unless changed with mutual agreement of the parties. Professional development and teacher training is scheduled to begin on August 3, 2020. Special education staff training has already begun.

The shared MOU covers some administrators, HST, classified employees, and special education staff. By sharing the staff, Cottonwood is able to offer more community-based programs, highly qualified teachers, intervention programs (EL and MTSS), testing sites, community events, shared field trips, and student achievement programs.

Cottonwood has been working with and continues to work with Provenance and Charter Impact to understand how the MOU is being implemented including but not limited to the reconciliation of funds.

What is the planning funding amount?

The current budgeted total fund for TK-6 \$2100. The total fund for 7-12 is \$2500. This amount is reduced from 2019-20 as a result of projected statewide funding reductions. The 2019-20 planning funding amounts were \$2600 for TK-8 and \$2800 for 9-12. The 1st semester pro-rated planning funds will be placed into student accounts on August 3, 2020. The total fund matches

those of the other North ICS schools. The multi-year planning funds (formerly called “rollover”) are pending accountant verification. Cottonwood is working with Charter Impact to determine the amount as soon as possible but is hopeful that the amount will be up to \$1,000 per student if those amounts were leftover from last year. It is possible that state funding will be increased, at which point, the Board can reconsider the planning funding amount.

What services for Cottonwood are currently outsourced?

- Financial Services (Charter Impact)
 - Accounts payable
 - Accounts receivable
 - Budget development/management
 - Payroll
- HR (moving toward a contract)
 - Was formerly done by a Clarksville Employee who was serving 5 schools but she declined to serve Cottonwood moving forward.
- Operational services (Provenance)
 - Curriculum ordering system (COS) and Enrichment Ordering System (EOS)
 - Parent fund account management
 - Student information system
 - Registrar
 - Student record maintenance
 - Health and Safety
- Risk management (CharterSAFE and Provenance)
- Auditor (independent auditor) (Wilkinson Hadley King & Co.)
 - The same as the other North schools
- Vendor contracts (may be direct with Cottonwood; or unclear whether with Provenance)
- Shared MOU

What services are provided through in-house employees of Cottonwood?

- Teachers (in-house and from other North schools)
 - Community connections
 - Mentor teacher program
 - EL Coordinators
- Special education programming (some but not all – some are coming from other north schools)
- MTSS programming (some but not all – some are coming from other north schools)
- Interim Principal (over both the nonclassroom and site-based programs)
- Interim Executive Director
- Student discipline (some but not all – some are coming from other north schools)
- Nutrition (some but not all – some are coming from other north schools)
- Students in Crisis (some but not all – some are coming from other north schools)

Shared Administration

Regional Coordinators

Review of Mission & Vision

Mission: Home Study Pathway

The Cottonwood School provides a flexible personalized learning experience, empowering families to tailor a program designed around the specific needs of each student. In collaboration with highly qualified credentialed teachers, students engage in diverse and dynamic learning pathways and unparalleled enrichment opportunities to achieve personal and academic success.

Vision: Home Study Pathway

The Cottonwood School develops the individual gifts of students to become critical thinkers, responsible citizens, and innovative leaders prepared for academic and real-life success in the 21st century.

Mission: Site-Based Pathway

The Cottonwood School, influenced by Montessori principles, will provide an innovative, rigorous, self-exploring education through experiential learning, design thinking and meaningful interdisciplinary studies cultivating a growth mindset.

Vision: Site-Based Pathway

The Cottonwood School's vision is to guide our community to love learning, to profoundly contribute to our diverse world and to lead lives of achievement.

Establishing a Core-Purpose

The School's fundamental reason for being:

Example:

"Flexible Academic Excellence for All"

Establishing Core Values

The practices we use every day in everything we do.

Establishing a Work Plan

Priority 1:

To keep teachers and families together to the greatest extent possible while ensuring the fiscal, legal, and operational responsibility of the Cottonwood Board specifically to Cottonwood students and Cottonwood employees and ensuring that all legal requirements and best practices are maintained.

Action plan (1): Continuing the MOU for Shared Services to begin the 2020-21 school year.

Action plan (2): offer employment contracts to teachers and instructional support staff serving Cottonwood students for the 2020-21 school year.

Action plan (3): offer enrollment to families currently enrolled in other charter schools who are being served by Cottonwood teachers for the 2020-21 school year.

Action plan (4): ensuring that vendor contracts are continued.

Priority 2:

To ensure all service needs to start the school year are fulfilled.

Action plan (1): to identify which outsourced services Cottonwood continues to require and/or not require.

Action plan (2): As needed, engage in the contracts for the 2020-21 if not completed already.

Action plan (3): As needed and where possible terminate unneeded services.

Priority 3:

Ensure fiscal transparency and public accountability.

Action plan (1): Ensuring that Executive Director has the responsibility and the authority to oversee the implementation of the shared MOU to ensure fiscal accountability to Cottonwood including the hiring of independent fiscal consultants to assist.

Action plan (2): Seek detailed information from Provenance and the other parties to the shared MOU to ensure that Cottonwood's knowledge of its own financial information is complete and accurate.

Action plan (3): Fully cooperate with the FCMAT audit.

Action plan (4): Engage in governance training including best practices in effective and accountable governance, Brown Act, Public Records Act, and conflicts of interest laws.

Priority 4:

Hiring permanent administration – Executive Director and Principal.

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