



**Da Vinci Schools Board of Trustees
Meeting Minutes
September 19, 2013**

Board Members Present:	Staff Present:
Chet Pipkin, President	Matthew Wunder, Executive Director, Da Vinci Schools
Don Brann, Vice President	Chris Jones, Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Technology, WSD
Cheryl Cook, Secretary	Tom Cox, Chief Financial Officer, Da Vinci Schools
Israel Mora, Trustee	Tom Johnstone, Superintendent, Wiseburn School District
Jennifer Morgan, Trustee	David Wilson, Director of Budget & Accounting, Wiseburn School District
Art Lofton, Trustee	Yolanda Saldana-Bautista, Business Manager, Da Vinci Schools
	Nathan Barrymore, Principal, Da Vinci Communication
	Kate Parson, Principal, Da Vinci Design
	Megan Anderson, Asst. Principal, Da Vinci Design
	Michelle Rainey, Principal, Da Vinci Innovation Academy
	Steve Wallis, Principal, Da Vinci Science
	Erin D'Souza, Asst. Principal, Da Vinci Science
	Carla Levenson, Enrollment, Da Vinci Schools
	Jhezrel Valentine, Executive Assistant, Da Vinci Schools

Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 5:47 P.M. by Chet Pipkin.

Approval of Minutes

August 19, 2013 Minutes approved.

First: Don Brann; Second: Cheryl Cook; Motion carries 6 – 0

Board Approvals

August 19, 2013

First: Israel Mora; Second: Brian Meath; Motion carries 6 – 0

From the Board

Mr. Pipkin called the meeting to order and thanks all his colleagues and room for being there and taking time away from their critical schedules to be there and take part in the great work that is being done at Da Vinci Schools.



The Pledge of Allegiance was performed by Dr. Wunder.

Mr. Pipkin informs the audience that this meeting will require as a result, more time in Closed Session and more time will be given to the public forum than usual. He motions to have a few of the scheduled agenda items pulled and postponed. Agenda items 4b, 4c, 4d and 4e.

Agenda items 4b, 4c, 4d and 4e pulled and postponed
First: Israel Mora; Second: Don Brann; Motion carries 6 – 0.

Mr. Pipkin asked if there were any comments or corrections regarding the Minutes. Cheryl Cook noted that she, in fact, remembers that she had a lot more to share than what was represented by the Minutes. It was determined that the Minutes would then be revised to reflect that Ms. Cook did emphatically and energetically state how proud she was to be a part of the board, and as a parent, how enthused she was that her son graduated and is now in college.

Dr. Brann stated the Minutes were well done and he motioned for approval of the Minutes.

Mr. Pipkin moves to the next agenda item, Public Comments. He thanks everyone for being there and wanting to share. Mr. Pipkin collects requests from the public, stating there are 7 requests from the public to speak. He states that 20 minutes has been allocated for this agenda item and that each speaker would be allowed 3 minutes to speak, totaling 21 minutes from the public.

Mr. Pipkin reads the following statement for Public Comments:

“Individual speakers shall be allowed three minutes to address the Board. The Board shall limit the total time for public input to 20 minutes. Members of the community who wish to provide Public Comment should complete an orange “Request to Speak at a Meeting of Da Vinci Schools Board of Trustees” form. The chair will then recognize such individuals who wish to speak at the appropriate time. Dr. Wunder will collect these forms if they haven’t already been turned in.

On behalf of the Da Vinci schools Board of Trustees and all of our students and staff, we understand that the test prompt situation is an emotional issue. We kindly ask that you not publicly disparage our staff members. While this is a request, you are not bound by law to do what we are asking. We hope that you will remain respectful.



Public Comments

Speaker 1: Dr. Mark Newell states he representative of the Centinela Valley Union High School District representing the students, teachers, employees and parents of Hawthorne High School, where he has served as the principal for the past 6 years. He reads: “Approximately one week ago today there was a picture taken of a narrative written on a U.S. History test at Da Vinci School, which linked Hawthorne High School to Jamestown, which was the first permanent English settlement the Americas established by the Jamestown Company of London. This narrative portrayed early Jamestown as violent, possessing a lack of knowledge, having the presence of women with questionable moral character, and the narrative ended with a tagline that compared Jamestown, a little like the modern day Hawthorne High School. Now just to be clear which Hawthorne High School we’re talking about, a picture was posted above the narrative of our school just to clarify any misinterpretations as to what other Hawthorne High School this narrative might have been referring to. Sometimes in history we will learn just a little bit more about than we want to. Jamestown may not have actually been the Pilgrim fairytale set forth throughout generations depicting a hardworking people in search of a new life. They may have had cases of strife, slavery, terrorism, capitalistic profiteering, immoral use of women and maybe even capitalism. Jamestown may have very well have been comprised of what some people who made questionable decisions in their lives 400 years ago. And at this time, now, it’s hard to comment on their character, but can comment on their decisions, and that’s why I’m here tonight. I’m here to comment on a decision made by an individual, not on the character of the individual. To print this statement was wrong. No way to change that or make it right. And it did have an effect on the students at Hawthorne High School. Just as wrong, I believe, it must have had an effect on the students at Da Vinci High School because they were exposed to a bias. Bias should never come up when we’re teaching children. Through them, for in someone they trusted, there was a foolishly documented innuendo. If it was meant as a joke, it wasn’t a joke. As educators as all of us are, we take on a responsibility to teach our children to the very best of our ability within our content area by providing them with information, thought provoking questions and supporting them as they grow and try things out, so that their generations can grow and become academically prepared and responsible. This printed question seems to negate any of that responsibility or intent. The narrative had a different effect over different human beings we’ve all seen over the past week, but it did have an effect on everyone. It was rage to some it was not much thought to others but to the students from institutions, mothers, fathers and colleagues, the remark itself that may have been interpreted by the educator as a joke somehow became public. When it turned out this educator was caught making such a negative comparison, I’m confident that the students of Hawthorn High will never allow the remark to have an everlasting impact upon our lives because we know it is not true. My main concern is with the children here at Da Vinci. Was this the first time a comparison like this had been made? But my concern is in this age of social media, once it was publicized a name was placed to this statement very quickly. As we move forward here at Da Vinci and



at Hawthorne we will continue to work together, support one another in our equal vision providing children with a relevant knowledge and challenges. The response of this publication that came out a week ago is now in the hands of the board and I have confidence that the response to address this error in judgment properly and effectively so that all of us can move on with our lives. Thank you.”

Speaker 2: Liz Ramirez states she is a parent at Da Vinci Science going on her fifth year as a parent at Da Vinci. She states that she is on the Leadership in the Family Association. Ms. Ramirez further states that she is here to primarily talk about the signature practices at Da Vinci and how proud she is to be part of this organization as a parent and community member. She states that one of the signature practices is about relationships and that over the past four years she has seen, in practice, the beauty that comes to children learning with adults together. She goes on to describe a situation when her son first started attending Da Vinci and how project based learning and group work was very new to him and how he preferred to finish his homework then go to video games than having to depend on the skills of the group rather than his own to complete a task. His teachers guided him and helped him learn how to work with others and really encouraged and coached him along the way – that is a signature practice and that is what we are about here at Da Vinci Schools. Liz further stated that she’s always worked in school environments and that school pride does not equal elitism. Finally, stating that she had a problem and loved how the teachers at Da Vinci came together to help her work out the problem with the attitude to try and figure out what could be learned from the situation rather than placing fault and blame. Stating that’s why her child is entrusted to Da Vinci Science and she appreciates the board listening.

Speaker 3: Eli Akiba states he’s a parent at Da Vinci Science and Dana Middle School. He wanted to speak about the prompt question, stating he was both angry and sad and that he wanted to put it all together to determine why he was having this range of emotions. Mr. Akiba specifically wanted to speak about the teacher in question, without mentioning the name. He stated his daughter was not a lover of history and that now, because of this teacher, she’s excited about history and attributes it all to this teacher. He goes on to say that although the prompt question was in bad taste, when placed in comparison to the teacher’s ability to inspire and motivate, the prompt question pales in comparison. He asked his daughter what is it about this teacher that makes you like him so much, to which his daughter said the teacher is like an artist. He teaches the lessons like an artist. Further stating that he doesn’t feel a slight misstep should damage someone’s career, although some level of disciplinary action might be warranted. Saying it would be an injustice to his daughter’s education if this teacher was not allowed to continue teaching at Da Vinci.

Speaker 4: An 11th grade Da Vinci Science student named Michael, started by commenting on the teachers at Da Vinci. Coming from a small middle school he was used to a small atmosphere, but states he was always an introvert never feeling apart of anything or special until he came to Da Vinci. Being at Da Vinci, he states he feels more a part of a family or community. Michael further stated that



teachers at Da Vinci are very special. He never thought he'd get that type of community or connection in a school and that he is very appreciative of it and being a graduating member of the class of 2014. Michael states that the teacher in question is the teacher who is responsible for helping him to get out of his shell and meet new people. That the teacher helped give him the ability to stand in front of an audience and speak confidently. Stating the teacher built an excellent bond between him as well as other students. Michael states that he has not been able to find a single student to say anything bad about this teacher because they all know this teacher is someone they can go to and trust, someone who makes them laugh and cry and experience so many emotions. Saying this teacher inspires us all to do better. Stating most of all he's helped him to become a much better person. Michael stated that the teacher really taught him analysis – and to not just think about dates or objects, but to also think about the meaning behind the dates or objects and know exactly why those events happened. Finally stating that keeping this teacher at Da Vinci will be the correct decision that he's sure his fellow students will agree on because this teacher really pushes them all forward and moves them in the right direction.

Speaker 5: Chris Call states that she is a parent at Da Vinci Science and just wanted to support the teacher in question. Stating he was a wonderful teacher who always had his door open. If your child was not doing well, he'd definitely tell you and find ways to help the student. Stating what has happened is horrible and not fair to the students, parents or teacher in question. Ms. Call further stated that it was unfortunate but that sometimes the truth does hurt. She states she wishes this had never happened and hopes it will never happen again and is asking if we can all just move forward from here and allow the teacher to continue to teach our students.

Speaker 6: Carmen Bird states that she is a member of this community who went through Hawthorne High School and the Wiseburn School District. Stating she is highly invested in every child in this community and very proud of all of them. Ms. Bird states that although her daughter has not had the teacher in question, she see's in reaching out to students, greeting them in the parking lot knowing their names. Saying, the students see him and they smile – he's invested. Ms. Bird states that when her daughter arrived at Da Vinci, academically, she was on a rough road, that academics never came easy to her. Ms. Bird states that in her home when someone missteps they try and guide them back. Saying that even though everyone has their feelings about what has happened, we still work to pull them back in. Ms. Bird states that we do things differently here (at Da Vinci). Stating that we do not ostracize anyone here at Da Vinci, we bring them closer – asking the board members to remember that.

Speaker 7: Crystel Coleman states she is a parent with two students matriculating through Dana and Da Vinci. Stating how grateful she is to Wiseburn-Da Vinci Schools for what they've done for her children and family. Ms. Coleman says that Da Vinci has a saying, "kids first." Stating she thinks that's the mantra in which Da Vinci Schools dives into every situation. Ms. Coleman states that she asked her daughter what is it that she liked most about Da Vinci, to which her daughter responded, "it doesn't have



any drama.” Which Ms. Coleman interpreted to mean there’s a respect and a love that goes on between administration, teachers and students. Stating she was even hugged by the custodian. Further, that the fruit of this district is found in her children. Ms. Coleman stating she is grateful to Dr. Brann for bringing the Ladera Heights community into the Wiseburn District.

Statements from Trustees

Mrs. Cook states she’s been on the board since Da Vinci opened and is fortunate to have a son who attended Da Vinci Schools for 4 years and is now moving on to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, so she is sad but excited for his departure. Cheryl stated that her son did have the particular teacher in question and he is a phenomenal teacher. Further stating that her son was getting a little behind in a college history class and the teacher emailed Cheryl to let her know what was going on. In turn, Cheryl was able to get right involved and her son was able to pass with a high grade in the class due, in part, to this teacher’s involvement. Cheryl states that she will be forever grateful to the teacher, noting that we all make mistakes and that everyone is sorry that this has happened, but she thinks it’s time to move forward. Mrs. Cook is sure that everybody has learned something and in the future we will work to be more careful that things like this just won’t happen again.

Mr. Mora states, thank you to everyone for being here tonight, we really appreciate you being here and verbalizing your thoughts. Stating that to the Hawthorne community, he extends his humblest apology and is grateful to everyone for giving us in your thoughts.

Mr. Meath states it is really disappointing to see what has happened.

Dr. Don Brann states that he’s been here (at Da Vinci) since before the beginning, so five years later he can put this into perspective and know that this transaction is an aberration, stating this is a low point since opening and operating the school since August 18, 2009. Further, this matter will be discussed further in Closed Session as it is a personnel matter. Dr. Brann states he really appreciates all being there sharing their perspective and showing how much they care for the school community at Da Vinci and at large.

Mrs. Morgan states she grew up in the area having gone to Wiseburn and Hawthorne schools. Further stating that in the community in the area everyone wants what’s good for their kids. She did not think there was any intention to hurt anyone’s feelings. Stating we all want to see all students in all districts do well. Jennifer wants to see that the relationship (between Da Vinci and Hawthorne Schools) continue and heal and that they work together for the greater good of our students.



Dr. Brann adds that next month is the 50th Reunion for the Class of '63 – his class at Hawthorne High, so this particular incident hits home with him as well as Dr. Brann, too, is a Cougar.

Mr. Pipkin states that he grew up in the city of Hawthorne in the same house just a few blocks away from Da Vinci the first 22 years of his life. He's a really proud graduate of Dana. A very proud graduate of Lawndale High School and he likes to say that in his immediate family he went to the best high school. His siblings tell him that he's wrong. His youngest brother, oldest and younger sister all graduated from Hawthorne High School and all concur that Cougars are better than the Cardinals. Mr. Pipkin points out that anything having to do with public education, especially for him in the city of Hawthorne, is very personal and one that is wrapped with a lot of challenging memories when he did not do his homework adequately and cramming for that test, as well as a lot of fond memories. Mr. Pipkin goes on to say that when the concept for Da Vinci Schools first started to come to fruition out of the wise counsel from the members from the Wiseburn School Board, Mr. Pipkin was honored and delighted to be considered to be part of the team to help input some thought into what they had hoped to be a great organization. He further states that he has been so proud to be associated with the very fine folks at Wiseburn who gave such a great education to him and to others, and put them in a spot where they were able to bring the vision for Da Vinci Schools to fruition and has stayed very proud of his association with Da Vinci Schools from the time he started all the way through last week. He states he was disappointed to receive a letter from legal counsel from Centinela Valley Union High School informing him of the incident that has been the cause for some discussion tonight. What Mr. Pipkin is proud of tonight is that some of the speakers so eloquently addressed is that they are all about providing a safe environment for their children, empowering the students that are there, and hope to bring them a great education with a very solid vision and a lot of focus on the values for the school, inclusiveness and really doing the right thing for the students that are there. Mr. Pipkin states that they firmly believe the best way to do that is with great vision, great values, and empowered teachers. He's further states that they are very proud of the great work that the teachers do day-in-and-day-out. Mr. Pipkin states that this incident was a big mistake. He is, however, very proud of the way the administration from Da Vinci handled the matter with being proactive in acknowledging the error and making their apology to Centinela Valley and the students of Hawthorne High school. Mr. Pipkin states that he apologized to the principal of Hawthorne High School this night. Mr. Pipkin further stating this action was not a reflection of the vision or the values for Da Vinci Schools and is an outlier. He remains very proud of Da Vinci Schools. He was proud to see everyone there, noting that great schools are comprised of engaged students, parents, teachers and administrators. He asserts that he is convinced that this incident, like so many incidences before, will be seized upon by the board and staff to make the environment for our students even more healthy, positive and with an even better outcomes. He is hoping that they will seize upon the opportunity that has been presented to them to keep doing what is right for the students at Da Vinci Schools and for all the students at Centinela Valley Schools and Hawthorne High School. Stating our vision is to raise the boat for every student, for every public education everywhere. Mr.



Pipkin states that we may have some work to do in communicating our values throughout the organization and providing the right kinds of tools for ourselves to make sure we're living and embracing. Mr. Pipkin closes by saying that he as well as the rest of the administration are very committed to making sure that they put children first from all schools in all districts.

Discussion Items

- ✚ Regarding Board Approval #8 – Dr. Brann would like to have a study conducted this year regarding teacher turnover. Dr. Brann, specifically with regards to Teach for America, wants to find out what level the turnover rate is and why. Dr. Brann further stated that it's typical that teachers have historically performed their two years of service to then go on and do different kinds of work.

Financial Update

Dave Wilson presented the highlights of 2012-13 school year and how Da Vinci ended the year for Da Vinci as a whole:

Total revenues: \$10.8 Million

Expenditures: \$10 Million

Net Changes: \$805,000 to the good

Mr. Wilson stated that for the most part Da Vinci had a breakeven school year

Started school year with a fund balance of \$2,053,000

Ended school year with a fund balance of \$2,858,000

Mr. Wilson concluded that the auditors will come out the first and second weeks of October and will have a finalized audit report in early December that will be presented to the board at that time.

Mr. Meath commented that it's great to have a healthy reserve and wants to make sure that there is a plan in place to use those funds in a healthy manner.

- ✚ Dr. Wunder thanked everyone for their insights, further stating that they are excited to bring back a proposal to the board showing how they can bring more money to the school sites and classrooms, specifically.



Mr. Pipkin thanked Mr. Wilson and entire back office staff for their time, service, great work and leadership.

Presentations

Michelle Rainey, Principal of Da Vinci Innovation Academy presented highlights from 2013-14 thus far, categorized by DVIA's goals:

Teachers design rigorous and engaging projects that reflect the PBL model

- All teachers are mid-project
- Teachers have distributed "Project at a Glance" documents to all families so that home-to-school connections can be made
- All teachers have updated and frequently utilized digital portfolios
- Students are making homeschool connections through project
- New Professional Development structure provides focused time on Project-Based Learning and is facilitated by different staff members each week
- DVIA's API score, when disaggregated from Design and Science data, increased from 805-833 in 2012.
- The Girard Foundation sponsored DVIA's staff to pilot the new Activate Instruction platform and is offering a renewal of that pilot this fall.

Students are able to problem-solve and express their needs effectively and compassionately

- Students are using their problem-solving tools during play and classtime
- Parents trained in compassionate communication are offering workshops to support our vision
- ECHO Parenting & Education (Center for Non-Violent Communication) is designing a second part to their Classroom Management series based on feedback and guidance from DVIA

A Parent Educator Resource Center (PERC) is developed and utilized by parents; additionally, at least 75% of families are represented at a minimum of 4 workshops per year

- A designated space has been created for families to gather and collaborate
- A parent has designed the preliminary draft of a logo for PERC



- DVIA's Jumpstart Parent Educator Conference has been a tremendous success thus far with three full days of over 46 workshops. Participation rate is ~75% (180 parents)
- An additional 15 workshops have already taken place or are coming up in the next 2 weeks

DVIA's Enrichment Program unfolds as a sustainable, well-executed and successful program

- Donation of 10-15 new laptops from Southern California Edison
- Increase in participation from last year
- Parents happy with selection of classes
- Decrease in facilities cost from \$44,000 last year to ~\$18,000 this year

On the horizon...

- Developing a mentor system for new families
- Expanding the full-time Independent Study program to 25 students (currently 5)
- Activate Instruction parent pilot
- Exploring innovative and more effective communication systems for newsletter content
- Re-implementing the Mindfulness program being provided to us for free and making connections to home
- Expanding DVIA's Parent Educator Conference to 3-4 day/year (previously 2 day/year)

Closed Session

Entered into Closed Session at 7:23 P.M.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned from Closed Session at 12 Midnight

 Indicates action items