



MERCERSBURG ACADEMY

Board of Regents Update Winter 2021 Board Meeting

April 15, 2021

To the Mercersburg Community,

The Mercersburg Academy Board of Regents meets as a full group three times each year—in May, October, and January—although in this most unusual year the Board has been meeting more regularly as we continue to navigate the many challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the COVID-19 landscape. On January 21-23, 2021, the Board gathered to continue its critical work with school leaders on the strategic design process, to hear reports from individual committees, which meet between meetings, and to vote on a series of important measures ranging from the next year's budget to revisions made to the Board's bylaws. I hope our broad Mercersburg community will take a moment to read through this summary of what was discussed and approved at these meetings.

School Updates

As is typical practice, the January Board Meeting opened with updates from the school's leadership team, led by Head of School Katie Titus P '20, '23. Those updates are summarized below.

- **Mercersburg Intensive** - Given that the Board has been meeting virtually for the last year, the school has taken several opportunities to connect students and teaching faculty with Regents. With that in mind, current students and a faculty member were invited to join the Board (virtually) to share their experiences during the Mercersburg Intensive, sharing impressive reflections on their exploration of topics in three different Intensives—Social Justice, Story Corps, and Stand-Up Comedy.
- **Reopening of School Planning** - The school's new director of health and wellness services, Laura Nickerson P '22, '24, provided Regents with an update on the plans to reopen the school to in-person learning for the last three weeks of the winter term and the remainder of the academic year. Dr. Nickerson shared information on the COVID-19 landscape, including local positivity rates, vaccine rollouts, and testing plans.
- **Hiring Landscape** - Danielle Nordyke P '14, director of human resources, was asked to apprise Regents of the recruitment efforts at the school. Ms. Nordyke outlined the typical process for hiring at the school and how it has been adjusted to meet the needs of a virtual environment.

All hiring is scheduled to be completed by mid-May and open positions range from various teaching positions, a director of diversity, equity, and inclusion (a position that has since been filled), an athletic director, a director of the arts, a director of annual giving, and additional faculty and staff roles.

- Accreditation for Growth/Sustaining Excellence - The school is once again going through the accreditation process with the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA). Given the strength of Mercersburg's programming, the school elected to go through a different accreditation process for high-performing schools, titled Sustaining Excellence. Teaching faculty member Emily Parsons P '21, '22 is leading the accreditation process and presented an update to the Board. She outlined the two-part process underway and reviewed the work that had taken place to date. Each school that chooses to follow the Sustaining Excellence protocol must choose a campus-wide project. The committee at Mercersburg identified diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and levels of anxiety and stress on campus related to inclusion, as its Sustaining Excellence project, seeking to answer the question of "How can we improve the sense of inclusion on campus?" A virtual visit by MSA took place on April 13, 2021.
- College Counseling Interim Update and Admission Trends Overview - Michael Conklin, director of college counseling, gave an update to Regents on the landscape of college counseling, which has been heavily impacted by the global pandemic, as well as on early admission returns to date. The College Counseling Office is anticipating increased selectivity through regular decisions as testing policies, record applicant numbers, and delayed notification timelines all impact the applicant experience this year. The office has been working hard to educate students and families on the realities of this year's college admission process in order to help mitigate increased stress and anxiety. Mr. Conklin also shared that the school will be forming a College Advisory Board (CAB) composed of a small group of experienced college admission and enrollment professionals that will help provide guidance on policy, practices, and programming. At the time of the January meeting, 220 early-round applications by Mercersburg seniors had yet to receive an admission decision, but many seniors had already earned a wide range of acceptances, including to many of their top choices—Brown, Stanford, Notre Dame, and the University of Chicago to name a few.

Committee Report Highlights

- The Reach and Reputation Committee discussions centered on several key initiatives and decisions regarding earned media, Reunion Weekend, and the naming of the school's baseball field. At the time of the committee meeting, the school was seeking an earned media partner and had sent out requests for proposals to several firms (update: a firm from Philadelphia, Grimm & Grove, has been hired to serve as an earned media partner for the school and that work is already underway). Regents were also updated on Reunion Weekend in June, which will once again be virtual for reunion classes due to COVID-19. The Advancement and Alumni Relations Office is also working to organize in-person reunions (at a later date) in the 2021-2022 year. Finally, the gift acceptance committee met in August 2020 to discuss an estate gift from Phil and Dottie Cannon '46, which resulted in a large unrestricted gift to the

Academy (more than \$1 million). Mr. Cannon loved baseball and the estate chose to name the baseball field in his honor. Thereby, the baseball field will now be called Cannon Baseball Field.

- Investment Committee - The Investment Committee reported that portfolio performance for the endowment has been strong and, as of December 31, 2020, the market value crested the \$350 million mark.
- Infrastructure and Technology Committee - Along with discussions about deferred maintenance and the allocation of adequate funding to meet the needs outlined in the facilities conditions assessment, the committee also updated Regents on the Campus Master Plan, which is continuing at the same pace as strategic design work to ensure alignment. The school's Campus Master Planning partner, the Blanchard Group, is also collecting data and working to best understand Mercersburg's needs to ensure school spaces support current and future programming needs.
- Governance Committee - The Governance Committee, which is responsible, among other things, for managing Board membership, has established a membership task force that is charged with creating a playbook for how the Board should approach new member recruitment, onboarding and orientation, Regent evaluations, emeriti status, and board size. This committee is chaired by Chuck Roberts '07.
- Finance Committee - Each winter, the Finance Committee proposes a set of budget variables to the full Board for the following fiscal year budget, which is officially ratified each May. After significant discussion and analysis, the Finance Committee recommended, and received unanimous approval, on the following 2021-2022 budget variables changes to the full Board for approval:
 - Boarding and day tuition increases of 2.9% for each;
 - Endowment draw at 3.85%;
 - Annual Fund increases by 4%;
 - Salary and benefits pool increases by 3.25%;
 - Health insurance budget increases by 2.8%;
 - Other expenses increased by 1.3% to support the food service initiative and inflation in select expenses;
 - Capital budget of \$1 million to support the facilities conditions assessment recommendation.

Strategic Design

- The strategic realignment work with the Board and school leaders continues to unfold. An invitation to other constituents to participate and join the conversations with our strategy partners has been offered and we are looking forward to hearing from other perspectives as this important work continues.

Updated Board of Regents Bylaws

- A Board of Regents task force, known as the Bylaws Task Force, was established in 2019 to review and update the Board's bylaws to reflect recent changes and the evolving nature of

nonprofit boards. Dave Flanagan '81 shared a recap of the bylaws review process. The revised bylaws were then approved by the Board and a copy of the bylaws can be made available upon request.

Investigation into Historical Abuse - Important Update

- In 2019 T&M Protective Services (our partner during the 2017-2019 investigation into historical abuse) reported its findings to the school community. At that time the school made it clear that the investigation would remain open to any future findings. We share today that T&M has received further information involving former faculty member Fred Kuhn (1931-1965) that they have deemed to be credible, thereby reaching the threshold for the school to share his name, and this information, with its constituents.

The Board of Regents voted unanimously to remove Mr. Kuhn's name from the wrestling room and from named endowment funds. At this time, all plaques with his name have been removed from campus. The school has conducted outreach to the alumni and friends who gave in support of these initiatives. All funds will continue to support their intended purposes. We will continue to communicate with you should other findings emerge. If you have any questions about this most recent finding, please email Head of School [Katie Titus](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacie Rice Lissette".

Stacie Rice Lissette '85, P '14, '14, '17, '23
President, Board of Regents