

Trillium Charter School
Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes
02/11/2013

Note: Board meeting minutes are approved at the following month's meeting. Posting of minutes is done prior to the approval of the meeting minutes and is considered in DRAFT form until after the next month's meeting.

Board Members: Jennifer Jardee-Borquist, Jeff Cavener, Christian Nielsen

Staff: Cami Touloukian, Jenny Petersen, Emily Saxton, Kieran Connolly, Lauren Kristensen, Sara Tretter, Aron Steinke,

Guests: Johanna Norton, Tara Bockman

Introductions:

Jennifer moves and Jeff seconds that we approve January's minutes. Passed unanimously.

K-5 Advisors presented a proposal to restructure the lower school to have 2-year grade levels: Two K-1st Classes, three 1st & 2nd grade classes, and three 4th-5th classes. See Proposal

Questions: What is the floater for? It is there in case we need it, if there aren't enough 4th graders.

This is an administrative decision, but the Board would like to support the teachers, therefore:

Board Proposal: Jennifer moves, Jeff seconds that Kieran consider the proposal of the Lower School restructuring for the school year of 2013-2014. Passed unanimously.

Director's Report: See attached

Kieron would like to form a Board Advisory Committee, around 6-7 and assess the needs

and the roles of the Board, have a critical analysis. April-October

Finance Report: See attached

Fundraising: Juan Young Charitable Trust for Literacy Assessment and Intervention Project.

Christian would like to market ourselves and get more members on the board. The Board needs to say hello to the community now and again. What Christian got from FLOTT was that we are the school with heart, and we have compassionate, engaged citizens. It's incumbent on us to find ways to communicate what we do well and not make it so abstract. Trying to have a cohesive message about school. We need to work on an elevator pitch for all of us.

Board Proposal: Jennifer moves that the Board adopts The Whistleblower Protection Policy Record Retention and Document Destruction Policy, Jeff seconds and amends motion that the document to be installed in the appropriate manual when it's created. Passed unanimously.

Action Item: Kieran needs his six month review. Kieran would like to propose doing a comprehensive yearly review that uses all stakeholder surveys. 360° review. Debra has the review form. Go for a wider swath (Kristen Miles, parents, teachers, admin staff, Board, Cynthia from Patton Park).

FLOTT: The turnout was good, it made about \$125, and the event felt really smooth. Nikos was the MC, and did an amazing job. A lot of good energy and it was a well organized, well put together. It celebrated what we do well. The positive thing divergent voices there's little things that we can tweak, it's nice to celebrate. The event was a real win.

Trillium needs to advocate to get the funding that other public schools receive, it would be helpful if the Board writes a letter. It's valuable for the kids to protest in Salem.

Christian move adjourn, Jeff seconds. Passed Unanimously.

**Report to the Board of Directors of Trillium Charter School
Executive Director Kieran Connolly
2.11.13**

Financial Report

- **Budget:** Dave Coffman and I met with the PPS budget representatives last month and received a strong vote of confidence from them. While we continue to have our financial difficulties, they acknowledged our drastically improved transparency and our strong planning around our current and potential future (i.e. increased PERS obligations) financial challenges.
- We continue to project as slightly below budget, our quarterly report outlines this in far more detail, but our current projection is for approximately \$70,000 under budget.
- Having completed six months at the helm of the school I have developed (though I am continuing to develop) a grasp on the biggest challenges that school faces and how we might prioritize potential end of the year surplus to address those challenges. The list primarily is broken down between staffing, building improvements and maintenance and debt, largely in that order. I feel confident with our current plan to repay our debt; we continue to make progress on PERS and are scheduled to be debt free in just over 3 years (excluding our bond). I will address how I anticipate allocating additional income below under Staffing Operations and Building Maintenance.

Staffing Operations update

Lower School Blend Reorganization

- Proposal: The lower school teachers have collectively advocated for a restructuring of the lower school blends. Their proposal is to move from the current structure: 1 Kindergarten, 3 Primary (1-2), 4 Intermediate (3-4-5), to 2 K-1 Classrooms, 2 2-3 Classrooms, 3 4-5 Classrooms and one roaming teacher to meet the population demands (i.e. increased numbers at a specific level).
- **Argument in favor** – The lower school teachers are in complete unison about this switch for a number of different reasons including:
 - Complaints from the middle school that incoming 6th graders are consistently not academically prepared for school. The current intermediate teachers feel this is too difficult to do with such a wide range of grade levels together at once.
 - The Kindergarten program, now that it has gone to full time, does not need to be

isolated. It creates a teacher without a team, and a class that does not get to have access to older students to see as role models

- The teachers argue that 3rd grade is a natural leadership age and that students are denied this opportunity by starting over again at that age.
- Intermediate teachers feel that it is too difficult to address the myriad academic and social needs of students of both 3rd and 5th graders which leads to the aforementioned unprepared 5th graders and to numerous complaints of bullying.
- Second graders benefit from seeing 3rd graders go through the OAKS testing process prior to having to do it themselves, so that when they first have to go through it it's not as scary and they are able to take it seriously.
 - **Argument in opposition:** The primary arguments in opposition include:
- Having students for three years in the intermediate program allows teachers a greater opportunity to build relationships with students that have the potential to last throughout their schooling experiences
- The three-year multi-age classroom forces teachers to teach more to the individual student in an emergent and constructivist manner rather than devising a curriculum for a larger group of students. You are forced to differentiate more for each student, but the three-year process allows you to know a student well enough to be able to do that well.
- The three-year classroom gives incoming 3rd graders an opportunity to learn both socially and academically from older students.
- Similarly, it gives 5th graders an opportunity to demonstrate leadership to third graders, while also having the ability to have access to more remedial curriculum without feeling stigmatized.
- Multi-age provides more continuity from year to year, with older students rejoining the classroom to teach younger students the routines and structures of the class.
- More of an opportunity for kids to learn from where they are, rather than have to meet their age group peers to move forward with wider curriculum.
- Everyone who has advocated for keeping the structure the way that it is recognizes that it is very difficult to teach this way and that it takes several years to be able to do it well. Particularly, it is challenging to teach math well in the structure that we have.
 - **Summary** - Again, everyone who advocates for keeping it the way it has been does so while recognizing that it is a very difficult way to teach and that it takes several years to be able to do it well. Most of our lower school teachers now are in their first or second year and have not yet had an opportunity to see a class all the way through. However, if it continues to be this difficult on first and second year teachers, we may not have an opportunity to see teachers get that far. Additionally, it feels like an old vs. new argument in that old Trillium was founded on the idea that all students

should learn together at their own pace. This thought process is well-represented in this model and is a fundamental part of how the school was founded, however, the concerns about being able to properly prepare kids academically as well as deal with a wide range of socially challenging issues remain. It is a front in our fundamental discussion about moving the school forward, i.e. How can we honor our mission of constructivism and social acceptance while preparing students academically and socially for their next steps in life? In light of the information that I have gathered from both sides and a conversation that I had with the lower school teachers this past Thursday my recommendation is to move forward with the switch. Regardless of what ultimately may be the best fit, the reality is that our current teachers feel exhausted by our current structure and unable to serve our kids well as a result of it. However, I have learned from this process that we collectively need to focus on training and assessment of how we are incorporating constructivism, class meetings and other democratic structures, intentional relationship building, improved K-12 view of the school by the teachers and incorporation of mediation and other historically successful problem solving strategies. Therefore, along with moving structures, I think we also need to commit to a stronger program in all of the above areas. We need to find a way to better train our teachers in general and a better way to consistently ensure we are following our mission as a school.

- **Budget Priorities**
- ***Development Director (\$15K)***– We currently have just over \$10k allocated for Emily Saxton to complete the fiscal year as our Development Director; the \$10k came from redistributing the Education Director’s position to partially fund this position. We should have that \$10k budgeted again next year, but in order to have Emily for the full year we will need to budget at least another \$10k for salary as well as likely an additional \$5k for benefits. Considering the work we have begun to move towards a more sustainable fundraising plan I would like to prioritize this. Emily has proven tremendous dedication this year and I believe an investment in this position will more than pay for itself with improved and increased fundraising.
- ***Counselor (\$50K)*** – The need for a counselor continues to be demonstrative. The responsibilities a counselor would typically hold, helping students that are struggling emotionally, connecting students and families with resources, helping to provide process groups for concerns around bullying, self-harm, drug use etc. currently fall to a combination of teachers and administrative staff. I am concerned that the current

process will ultimately lead to high burnout rates and exhaustion of our staff. I anticipate approximately \$50k will be needed to fund this position (which allows for \$35k in salary and \$15k in benefits). If our surplus rates continue as they have been up to this point, I anticipate (after subtracting for additional PERS obligations) we might be able to afford the extra \$65k for Development and a Counselor. A concern of mine, however, is the continued financial stability of this position. It would quickly become a top fundraising priority with the hope that it can become a permanent position at the school

- **Service Learning Coordinator/ Learning Through Internship Coordinator (\$20k/\$20k)** – I think this could either be two part time positions or, ideally, one full time position. The responsibility of the Coordinator would be to provide service-learning opportunities for the K-8 program as well as building community relationships with other service-oriented agencies throughout the community. The goal would be to build meaningful service learning as well as incorporating a curriculum to support the learning opportunities, rather than just organizing community service events. The job of the Learning Through Internship position would be focused on the high school program. That job would be to grow the high school internship program and to incorporate mentor training and support.
- **Cost of Living Adjustments (\$70k)**– Staff members have not received a cost of living adjustment in several years, in fact most of them saw a reduction in pay over the past several years. Were we to prioritize this a conversation should ensue about whether we consider across the board cost of living adjustments or whether we work to bring our staff salaries more in line with the salary schedule we've discussed, my preference would be for the latter. An across the board 5% adjustment would cost the organization \$70k.
- **Expanded Arts and Music Program** – Further down the line our students would benefit from increased availability of Art at all levels, as well as music at the upper school levels and a drama program.
- **Garden Program** – Emily Saxton and I have spoken extensively about getting our garden program up and running again. From an operating budget standpoint this is a lower priority, this position might be better revitalized through pursuing grant funding.

Portland Public Schools reporting update

- We are up to date on all reporting
- **Professional Development**
 - **Middle School strategic plan** – The middle school strategic planning process went well, it did not yield the significant changes that the high school process yielded, but it was not expected to. As much as anything we established some clarity around the vision of the program and established a

set of core values to move forward with. Some specific changes implemented, however, include:

- Establishment of culminating capstone project for 8th grade year. This project will in some ways look similar to our current senior projects and will be designed to help a student explore with more depth a passion that they have, while preparing them for a more rigorous project-oriented learning in high school.
- Creation of cohorts for 6th, 7th and 8th grades. The cohorts will be designed to create some time for sixth graders to get comfortable with the unique experience of middle school, for 7th graders to explore concerns unique to their age and for 8th graders to be able to discuss and prepare for high school. The cohorts will meet every other week and will do community building as well as focus on social skills and health curriculum. The advisory will remain in place as a mixed age setting to explore, culture, community building and other things that it currently incorporates.
- The core values of the program will be more deeply infused into both the curriculum as well as the assessment of middle schoolers. A second page will be added to the report cards to more deeply explore a student's citizenship and social/ emotional growth.
- The school will move more towards proficiency-oriented grading systems
- The school will move more towards stronger student-led parent teacher conferences.
- **Lower school strategic planning** – This process will be on hold until we decide on the alignment issue.
- **Enrollment** – Enrollment at this point is 344. Break down is 171 elementary, 91 Middle School and 82 High School. We are 21 short of capacity, the primary holes continue to be in our high school program.
- **Parent Communication** Our coffee klatches continue to go well, the next one is not yet scheduled, though I would like to do it fairly soon, perhaps at the beginning of March. Issues to discuss are the Middle School Strategic Plan, Lower School Blend Alignment, Funding priorities/ Budget/ Fundraising goals.

Physical Plant/ Facility Needs

- **Safety Measures** – Our safety measures are nearly complete in order to ready us for our first lock in/ lock out drill. We have installed locks on the inside of doors of all classrooms, Debra has purchased/ manufactured curtains for all classrooms, our alarm system is up and running. We will have our first drill next week. Our plan to have all visitors sign in and use visitors passes as well as to only exit through the back door during pick up (no entry at all), have worked well with limited complaints

and concerns. We are still working on consistently keeping the front gate closed and locked.

- **Funding Priorities/ Maintenance Plans**

- Replace HVAC system over MPR \$10k
- Sheetrock second floor ceiling
- Replace sliding classroom walls with sheetrock
- Install door stops on classroom commercial walls \$1.7k
- Install diffusers on heat vents 2k
- Fence roof garden to code
- Repair roof/ HVAC leak 8k
- Reactivate outdoor pole light 1.3k
- Replace second floor restroom floors 1.5k
- Replace 3 restroom toilets with commercial grade 1.7k
- Replace water fountains
- Waterproof exterior walls on E & SE side
- Repaint south and east walls
- Replace 2 broken seal windows in MPR
- Restore lighting on playground from side wall
- Install dusk to dawn lighting on Maryland
- Trillium Charter School sign on Interstate 1.5k
- Playground \$150k

Fundraising projects, partnership development

- **Sustainable Fundraising Model** – We had the first meeting of the sustainable fundraising group two weeks ago to work on moving towards our new model. Our second meeting should be in the next week. The FTLOT event is part of this process as a community building event, the group has begun to discuss what the tours could look like and what the May event could look like
- **Run For The Arts** – We have collectively decided to move away from Run for the Arts to our own in-house arts-oriented fundraiser. This will allow us to use the money raised through the event in a less restricted manner.

Volunteer engagement

- **Recess/ Lunch** – We have made progress on staffing our lunch and recess duties. Lower school teachers are no longer involved, it has been staffed by a combination of parent volunteers and Sarah Cramer, Emily Saxton and myself. For the time being, I think that administrative staff will need to continue to be involved as I am not comfortable putting parent volunteers alone into such a challenging supervision

situation. Ultimately my hope is that a more structured and rigorous training program can be established in order to enable parent volunteers to fulfill a larger role.

- **FTLOTT** – We are set up for the event this weekend. It seems to have come together very well.

Lunch Program

- There is nothing new to report at this time

Information Technology .

- **Information Storage** This is a process that I hope to be able to make some movement towards over the next few months. Over the summer I hope to begin a more large scale effort to convert all files to an electronically housed database on a shared drive.
- **Telephones** Still working out a lot of kinks in our phone system, but we are making improvements

Other

- **Board Transition Advisory Group** – In response to numerous discussions about how to strengthen and more clearly define the positions and responsibilities of our board, I would like to recommend exploring a board transition advisory group. My vision for this group would be to seek out current or former Executive Directors, Board Members and other knowledgeable people to work for approximately six months on assessing how the board might meet the organization's needs, how best to design the board, how to create job descriptions and roles and how best to recruit board members from the community. My thoughts are to have this group functioning independently while our current board continues their governance process. At the conclusion of their work they would present their findings to our board for approval. A current board member serving as a liaison may help keep this process more fluid. The idea is new for me and I have not worked it through fully, I would love some input on how this might work well and help us move forward.
- **Behavior (including Suspension/Expulsion) policy** – Sarah Cramer and I have been working on rewriting and formalizing our behavior policy including when suspensions and expulsions take place. Historically there has been a dearth of consistent policy in this regard, which has resulted in inconsistent responses, communication and follow up. We are going to rely heavily on PPS' policy with a few exceptions. PPS' policy consistently favors strategic problem solving interventions before going to suspensions and expulsions with a handful of exceptions, which is where I would like us to be as well. We intend to codify a

process that incorporates specific problem solving processes before and after a potential suspension. Additionally, “send homes” will no longer exist, if students are asked to leave the school for any reason other than sickness that will formally be logged as a suspension. A second significant change is that the power to suspend or expel students will be limited to Sarah Cramer and I alone.

- **Restructuring Proposal**

**Trillium Charter School
January 2013 Financial Report**

TO: Trillium Charter School
FROM: Dave Coffman
DATE: February 11, 2013
RE: January 2013 Financial Reports

Attached are the following reports:

Financial Statements January 2013

Balance Sheet as of the end of January, 2013

P & L YTD Summary Actual vs Budget July 2012 – January 2013

P & L YTD July 2012 – January 2013 Detail Actuals vs. Budget

Current Cash Position

Cash Flow Projection

Notes to the January Income Statement

Revenue Summary

January Revenue of \$126,996 is \$5,697 under budget for the month. Year-To-Date (YTD) Revenue of \$811,946 is \$14,531 over budget at this point in the year. These amounts contain about \$6,300 of Restricted Playground Contributions and if we exclude those, it doesn't change January but brings the YTD variance to about \$8,000 over budget.

The current month variance results from Contributions, Preschool Tuition and State Funding coming in under budget.

The Preschool variance is due to the fact that we had fewer students attending the longer, full-day schedules than we had anticipated. I anticipate that if the schedule mix of enrollment doesn't change, we will be under budget in Preschool tuition throughout the year. Over the course of the year, this shortfall will likely amount to \$15,000-\$20,000.

We were under in State Funding by \$500 in January. This is the result of budgeting State Revenue flat over the prior year and we're actually receiving a 2% increase, but is offset by a decrease in enrollment compared to last year at this point (9 students). The State Per Pupil Funding rate fluctuates throughout the year so it is possible the per pupil rate will be decreased later in the year. Our enrollment is coming in slightly under what we had budgeted, but year-to-date this negative variance is more than offset by the increase in the State Funding rate.

We were under by about \$2,800 in Contributions. This is not the result of anything specific, but is likely more of a reflection of the fact we built the budget without much in the way of historical data.

Our year-to-date variance results from the items noted above combined with the additional \$17,000 of one-time State funding received in August.

One interesting thing to watch will be the Contributions line item. We are about \$6,000 short

year-to-date, not counting the Restricted Playground Contributions. If this trend were to continue through the remainder of the year, the shortfall could amount to between \$5,000-\$10,000.

Expense Summary

Total expenses for January of \$135,876 is \$7,812 under budget for the month. Total YTD expenses of \$852,853 is \$67,530 under budget at this point in the year. The YTD amount contains expenditures from the Restricted Playground fund for exterior awnings. If we exclude those we ended about \$71,700 under year-to-date.

The current month and year-to-date variances result from the following:

Instructional Expenses in January \$8,257 under budget, YTD \$39,947 under budget

Trillium Charter School January 2013 Financial Report

- The monthly and YTD variances result primarily from savings in Wages & Benefits. We are over in Instructional Wages YTD due to a timing issue that will even out at the end of the year. Additionally we are under budget in both Medical Insurance and Retirement Contributions. We budgeted medical insurance for all new employees for the entire year, but enrollment in the insurance plan isn't as high as we'd anticipated. Retirement is under budget because it was also budgeted for the entire year for new employees. Many new employees do not begin contributions until 2013, so we should see this positive variance continue until March 2013.
- Purchased Services is under budget YTD because we budgeted to pay for an Americorps position for 2012-13 but were not awarded a position.
- Supplies and Materials Expense is over for the month and YTD, which is the result of a timing issue. I anticipate we will end the year within our total budget for this area.

Support Services Expenses in January \$876 over budget, YTD \$31,941 under budget

- January variance is due primarily to Employee Taxes & Benefits coming in under budget, while Security Systems is over budget.
- The variance in the PERS line, both for January and YTD, results from budgeting PERS contributions for the entire year for a couple of newer employees who have yet to start making contributions.
- The variance in the Medical Insurance line is due to a lower number of employees enrolling for insurance than planned in the budget.
- Purchased Services is over budget due to a timing issue with the billing for our annual tax returns. We continue to be under budget year-to-date in this category.
- Food Service expenses are over budget in January due to timing issues, but we're on track YTD.
- Occupancy is considerably over budget due to unanticipated spending in the area of security. A lot of work has been done in the past month in this area in an effort to make the school a safer place.

Other Activities in January \$431 under budget, YTD \$816 over budget

Capital Outlay in January \$0 over budget, YTD \$3,544 over budget

- The YTD variance is due to spending related to the Playground. We have received donations to be used for the Playground project, but neither the revenue nor the expense has been budgeted. Therefore, it makes it appear we are over budget in this category, but the expenditures are fully funded by Restricted Playground donations.

Debt Service in January \$0 over budget, YTD \$0 over budget

Net Income / (Loss) Summary Notes:

January Net Loss of \$8,880 is \$2,115 better than our budget for the month. YTD Net Loss of \$40,907 is \$82,061 better than our budget at this point in the year. Of this YTD variance, about \$2,000 is reserved for the Playground Project, so our true positive variance at this point in the year is about \$80,000. I anticipate we will have variances to our budget throughout the year since a lot of our budget for the year was created without much in the way of accurate historical data. The experience and familiarity we gain this year with our budget will allow us to be more accurate in creating budgets in future years.

Summary of Current Cash Position:

At the end of January, we had approximately \$243,000 in our checking account. This is down about \$50,000 from the previous month, which results from typical State Funding fluctuations.

As of this date, we are in a good position to make it through the school year without experiencing a significant cash crunch. Our State funding payments are coming in consistently and will allow us to maintain a steady cash balance through the remainder of the fiscal year.

As we look to the next fiscal year and the planned increases in PERS contributions, it appears that if we continue spending at our current level, we should be able to maintain a steady cash balance. This is something we'll need to keep an eye on and give consideration to when we begin work on the budget for next fiscal year.

Trillium Elementary School

The Lower School team would like to restructure our grade blends in the following way:

Replace the single Kindergarten class with two K-1 classes

Replace the three 1-2 classes with three 2-3 classes

Replace the four 3-4-5 classes with three 4-5 classes

This type of restructuring is something that has come up for discussion many years running now, especially in the Intermediate Grades. Having a three grade blend is something that has been a heavy burden for the 345 teachers and has kept us from fully meeting the needs of all students.

Although this represents a significant programmatic shift, Lower School teachers are prepared to take on all of the planning required to implement it. *We all* feel that this would better serve our elementary students, and we are all agreed that putting it off yet another year would mean another year of less than optimal service to our kids.

There is a significant body of research indicating that blended-grade classrooms benefit all learners. However, many of us have searched for studies that have looked at optimal blends, and have found very little information that argues for any particular ages or grades. This lack of empirical data raises the question of why we currently have a 3-grade blend and how we justify that structure as being the best for our students. Further, because of this lack of empirical data, we are relying on our own experiences as educators to inform our restructuring plan. These experiences tell us that both academically and emotionally, a three grade blend is not optimal.

Academics

It is the experience of the 345 teachers that attempting to meet the needs of all our students across the broad spectrum of ability present in a 3-grade blend is a nearly impossible task. Far too often we end up teaching to the middle, or focusing on our most struggling students at the expense of challenging our most successful, or putting our energy into challenging our most capable students while our struggling kids get no support. Creating an academic environment that truly supports all students across 3 grade levels has simply not been attainable for our team, or for 345 teachers in the past, no matter how skilled or experienced.

Social/Emotional

Any parent or teacher knows how different an 8 year old is from an 11 year old. As 345 teachers we are constantly struggling to create a social environment that supports the social and emotional needs of kids at 8, 9, 10, and 11 years old, and mostly feeling that we are not reaching this goal. Our younger kids struggle mightily in the third grade, as many Trillium parents will tell you. They feel intense pressure to keep up with their 5th grade peers, no matter how often we teachers reassure them that this is not the expectation. There is constant friction in our classrooms because the behaviors of our oldest and youngest students are so different, and so discordant.

Potential teacher placement

K-1 Teachers: Jenny and Brandi

2-3 Teachers: Ryan, Lyndsey, and Aron

4-5 Teachers: Lauren, Cami, and Sara

Each of us is ready and excited to plan for this new arrangement. We are also happy to be the parent and community ambassadors for this change. We will gladly explain to any concerned parent why we are so confident that this is the right way forward for Trillium.

As we've started to share this idea, we've gotten (via Kieran) some feedback and concerns. We'd like to address each of the concerns we've heard so far:

Stronger opportunity to build relationships that last throughout experience at school

While it's true that you can build more in-depth relationships in three years than two, we do not think that this necessarily means students will receive a better education. Knowing a child well can only help you serve him better if you have the time and resources to do so.

Further, we do not necessarily think that the relationship-building aspect outweighs the benefits of this shift. For example, getting to know more teachers and getting used to adapting to new classes and new teachers will both support kids more (because they will have more teachers they know better) and better prepare them for middle school (because they will be more accustomed to adapting to new teachers and new classes).

Opportunity for 3rd graders to have access to more advanced curriculum

Opportunity for 5th graders to have access to more remedial curriculum without feeling stigmatized

This question of differentiation is one that weighs heavily on our minds, and is an area in which we feel that we are not doing as well as we can, because the spectrum of ability is so broad in a 3-grade blend.

Our hope is that by shifting to a 2-grade blend we will be more able to support our high needs learners by truly meeting them at their level, not just giving them work at a different grade level. Further, just because children are academic peers does not mean they will be good work partners, due to significant differences in social skills and expectations.

Change represents serious programmatic shift while teachers are still new and adapting.

Takes time to develop unique style, but is more beneficial to kids and teachers eventually

No teacher this year is "brand-new." All teachers have some classroom experience. Several teachers are new to Trillium and it is true that a 3 grade blend represents a new challenge even for experienced teachers. However, we don't feel that a several year learning curve is an acceptable situation for any teacher, no matter how experienced. Saying that "it just takes a few years to adapt and learn" means that every time a new teacher is hired, their students will receive a sub-optimal education while they adapts. Further, setting teachers up in a situation that is designed to be more difficult will make it more likely for teachers to burn out and need to be replaced, causing a cycle of teachers who lack the experience and skill to teach a 3-grade blend.

Provides for more continuity from year to year with kids moving up to help new kids become acclimated and help with routine

We don't see any reason why this would not be just as true in a 2-grade blend. Also, shifting to three 2-grade blends provides three unique opportunities for students to take on a leadership role.

Promotes constructivist and emergent learning more strongly, meeting each kid where they are rather than providing curriculum that is where all students are supposed to be

"Meeting each kid where they are" is differentiation, not constructivism. Any teacher in any classroom needs to differentiate, and we are all deeply committed to doing so. We are

also deeply committed to becoming experts at teaching in a constructivist way. To really master this skill, we training and support. Having three grades in our classes makes our jobs much more difficult, making it harder for us to create constructivist environments.

Takes several years for a group to become really cohesive

Building classroom community is a priority that we take seriously and begin on the first day of school. Having a blended class makes this much easier, as the returning kids come back to class familiar with routines, expectations, and culture, and can be mentors to the younger kids.

While it's possible that a class may become more cohesive over three years than 2, we also feel that a class runs the risk of growing stale for some kids who would benefit from a change every couple of years. We also feel that groups can become strongly bonded over 2 years or even just one, and that any potential benefits of a third year are outweighed by the disadvantages of 3-grade blends.

Less importance placed on identification and isolation of struggling kids, more emphasis on belonging and community building.

We believe that teaching for equity means being open and authentic with the kids about their abilities. Letting our students know that some students have different abilities and may need more support is an important tool in teaching justice and equity over the long term. "Identifying" struggling kids is not a bad thing - it's important to us as teachers, and important that kids practice acceptance and support of their peers who may be different.

In terms of belonging and community, we refer to the above concern. All of us consider community building to be of very high importance and work to create loving, supportive groups in our classrooms. We will do this regardless of which grades and ages we teach, and we feel we will be able to better create and maintain a strong sense of community with 2-grade blends rather than 3.