

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Brenda Marrero, Esq. Chair  
Nelson Flores, Ph.D., Vice Chair  
Joseph DuCette, Ph.D., Member  
Donna Nuccio, Member  
Sarah Finkelstein, Member  
Caroline Gorman, Esq. Member

## **PARENT REPRESENTATIVES**

Dana B. Espinosa, Secretary  
Jessika Garcia

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES**

**Location:** Zoom.Us – Meeting ID:821 5102 0296

**Monday, November 15, 2021**

**Board Members Present:** Dr. Joseph DuCette, Caroline Gorman, Dr. Nelson Flores, Dana Espinosa, Sarah Finkelstein; Donna Nuccio

**Quorum Established:** Yes

**Others Present:** Dr. Darcy Russotto, CEO; Robin Eglin, Omnivest; Dr. Joshua Fineberg, Director of Student Services; Mercedes Walton-Mason, Assistant Principal; Yolanda Cooper, Principal, David Shemaria Assistant Principal, Steve Glueck BBD CPA, J Margulis BBD CPA

### **Call to Order**

- 4:37PM

### **Public Testimony**

- No Public Testimony

### **Governance**

- Motion to approve the *Meeting Minutes* for 10/18/21 (first Dana and second Donna)
- Motion to approve *Meeting Minutes from 10/18/21 were then voted on without objection*. Sarah asked if it matters that she was not present at the end of the meeting. Dr. Flores confirmed that she could remain.
- Board support for Angeles De Cristal. Dr. Russotto gave a report that we have over 100 students that we support. She will send an email to the board members about ways to participate.
- A board member is still needed. Preferably someone who has knowledge of development and/or a philanthropist. Please send any interest to Dr. Russotto. Sarah asked about materials available to share with prospective members. Dr. Russotto will reach out to Mrs. DeMarco in order to send those materials. Dr. Flores reminded the board of their intention to diversify the group.

### **Audit Report**

- ***Draft Audit Report presented by Steven Glueck***
- Page 1 contains an unmodified opinion of the audit
- Page 40 contains audit results for government programs. There are no findings to be reported to the government. Everything is on schedule and looks good.
- Increase of 1.1. Million dollars for the financials. It includes pension liabilities that are tied in with the state.
- Page 9 is the balance sheet of the government funds.
- \$686,000 surplus this year.
- The footnotes have not changed this year.
- The PP Loan was forgiven this year.
- There are nine pages of pension disclosure.
- Page 28 is the general fund, under budget on revenue and expenses.

- Reviewed many documents (payroll, disbursements, receipts, invoices) and worked onsite at school.
- Thank you to everyone who helped, it was a tedious process and it went according to schedule.
- It must be submitted to the bond trustee by December 27th and uploaded to EpiCenter by December 31st. The final draft will be released before the due dates.
- In the past submission and ratification has been in January. This year's submission will be in December.
- Dr. Flores solicited questions from the board members who have financial expertise.

### **Finance Report**

- ***Robin Eglin shared the financial statements for October***
  - Current Net loss of \$487,589
  - Budget Net loss of \$458,031
  - Budget variance of \$29, 558
  - Revenue is below budget by \$43,000
  - Tuition from the School District of Philadelphia is below budget by \$46,000
  - Student population - 547 Gen Ed 184 SPED, 19 students short of budget (18 from SPED population)
  - Expenses are below budget by \$14,000
  - Utilities above budget by \$21,000 (in general they are running higher than the budget)
  - Repairs/Maintenance above budget by \$17,000
  - Contracted services above budget by \$43,000
  - YTD - 10/31/2021 net loss 619,804
  - YTD -10/31/2021 budget net loss 695,147
  - Budget variance \$75,343
  - YTD revenue is flat to budget
  - Tuition fees from the School District of Philadelphia below budget by \$130, 000, \$111,000 due to decrease in the SPED population.
  - Review of financial metrics .91, slightly below the standard for charter schools which is 1.1. This year's budget for ESSERS 2 is 2.1 million dollars which is being released very slowly. Almost to a point in which it will be submitted to PDE, but now we are utilizing cash on hand which is temporary.
  - Donna asked *When does it need to be submitted?*
  - Dr. Rusotto responded *By 2023.*
  - Robin replied *It may take six months because all school districts are applying for it.*
  - Donna asked *Is there a number that we will stop at to avoid a worst position?*
  - Robin replied *We are monitoring the cash. It's a catch 22. We want to make sure the classrooms get what they need. The next step is getting our application in.*
  - Donna responded *I just want to better understand the process. I don't want to be too conservative that the students don't get what they need.*
  - We have \$737,281 cash on hand, slightly below the metric of 45 days.
  - It's a challenging year. We are slightly below budget on enrollment. The most important thing right now is to submit the ESSER II grant application.
  - Dana asked, *Where are we at in terms of enrollment?*
  - Dr. Rusotto stated *We get a bunch of kids in and others leave. We hit our goal for kindergarten. We are working on first and second grades. We are at 750. We will try to get those in and add a few third graders for extra cushion. We had a set of twins start in kindergarten today . It is our third set of twins. Robin please stick around for the Executive session for the forecast that we discussed.*
  - Dr. Flores summarized the goal to increase enrollment and submit the ESSERS application.

## **School Report**

- Yolanda: We have some data from the PSSAs and the STAR assessments from October. We have some benchmark data as well. They are screenshots and may be blurred, my apologies. The PSSA results are ELA, Math and Science (4/8). 84% of 3rd grade in ELA, the whole class tested in Math 4th -80% Science 5th - 86% ELA, 88% Math 82% 86% 93% ELA/Math and 90% Science, Average 86% overall for the school
- Many students fell in the below basic category for ELA. 3rd grade 53% of BB for ELA. ELA across the board the percentage sits between BB and Basic. The Math scores have a heavier percentage - 90% of 3rd grade at BB 92% of 7th/8th grades in BB. We hired Math teachers for each grade K-5 to help focus on Math like a Specialist teacher.
- Science 46% at Below Basic in 8th grade, we would like to see that decrease in 8th grade, but we would like to change that for next year.
- STAR Report  
Early Literacy Assessment - ELA and SLA -1st and 2nd grades receive a classification. Descriptions for classification are on the right hand side. Once they are proficient they switch to the STAR reading assessment. We gain grade equivalency from the assessment: independent, lexile range and oral fluency. A score of 710-850 is proficiency/advance at a 3rd grade level reading.
  - Lexile range scores are 250-1100.
  - PP is pre primer (kindergarten level -1st through 9th month of the grade level)
  - Many students have lost a lot of ground. We have students who average 2nd-4th grade reading levels.
  - Math is measured by quantile measures (EM). The average goes from 400-1600 (high school). Some students are landing in the emergent category, not surprisingly because of our PSSA scores. We definitely have our work cut out for use. 8th grade should be at 1095, but are in the 400 level.
  - We did not access our kindergarten students, only 1st through 8th grades.
  - It is a computer adaptive assessment, starts at grade level and adjusts questions until it finds the students' levels and continues the assessments.
  - Benchmark Data - Math and ELA - All took Form A. The first scores are usually high and decrease because the cut scores adjust. It is a predictive test. It is scored in quartiles. Any questions?
  - Dana How do you feel about the model of having a Specialist Math teacher?
  - Yolanda - We feel really strongly because they are focusing on student needs. They focus on small group instruction. It has been helpful thus far and hopeful
  - Dana - Project LIT is great after school. Is it possible to do something like that for Math? Possibly have workshops for parents as well.
  - Yolanda - We used to have academic nights for parents to learn strategies that they could practice at home with their children, Certainly something we should consider to bring back as it was successful.
  - Donna - I can hear it in your voice about how concerned you are. Is there something in the data that is making you tweak what you are doing?
  - Yolanda - I took a deeper dive into the portal to see what was happening. I looked at grade levels by class and looked at the amount of time the kids took on the test. They took the tests rapidly despite encouragement from the teachers. I spoke with Kelly and we talked about shifting, not assessing by grade. Perhaps we will test in smaller cohorts because it is getting lost in the whole class atmosphere.
  - Donna - Thanks, that was a great example.
  - David - We have WIN periods daily. We are using the STAR assessment data to group students for intervention needs. Teachers will work on specific skill sets with student groups. They will use Focus Math for lessons to create small group interventions.
  - Dr. Flores - What is the student climate data? Will it be shared? It's the attendance rates.
  - Yolanda - Attendance is impacted by Covid - quarantining students and those affected. Aside from that we still have our attendance issues. Quarantine is a 10 day stretch.
  - Dana - Discipline referrals - 16 per day. How does that compare to previous years?

- Yolanda - It is high. It has been a challenging year. We knew returning would be difficult. It is not all students, we continue to work with and train staff. Behaviors are up quite consistently, we have had a lot of suspensions. We try to avoid suspensions, but vaping, fighting and bullying will not be tolerated. We hope to connect with the SEL program and turn things around.
- Dana - How many were pre Covid?
- Dr. Russotto - About 5
- David - If you give me a few minutes, I can have those numbers for you.
- Dana - Selena has shared with me that there is a difference in the behavior with her class depending on the time of the day.
- Yolanda - We have a dynamic team of coaches, but unfortunately they are being pulled to teach.
- Dana - With the work that you do with Cultured Enuf, do teachers receive training on how to understand students and the neighborhoods they come from.
- Yolanda - Latrese Collins and Miguel Feliciano lead our task force and they present at every PD.
- Dana - Maybe they can focus on how to communicate with the students and understand their culture.
- Yolanda - The focus now is empathy.
- David - I have the data for you. The 2019-2020 school 645 write ups and we have 510 now. I am actually seeing in the upper school 4th-8th grades an escalation in the major behaviors. It is a manifestation of the trauma they experienced during the lockdown. As unfortunate as it is that they are back in the classroom, I am excited that they will work with students in SEL and provide academics as well. For me it was the most difficult part of the job, but the most rewarding.

#### School Challenges

- Dr. Flores - This has always been a hectic time of the year. You are asked to do something unprecedented. You are expected to help others and I hope you have someone to take care of you. I admire the work that you all are doing.
- Dr. Russotto - It has been super challenging. The biggest concern is the resignations. We have three people at this board meeting. The kids coming back was boom - they were back. They needed a runway, but we just put them on the plane. We are discussing big, bold changes.
- Yolanda - I took time to meet with instructional teams to get feedback on what is and is not working. The one thing that continually came up was the long day. They believe that a dismissal at 3:00 would be best. Kids are checked out at 2:30. Teachers are reaching in their bag of tricks to engage them. We changed our schedule due to lack of Specialists and resignations. Shifting to the new schedule has afforded the opportunity to improve transitions for middle school. With the new schedule the  $\frac{5}{8}$  and  $\frac{7}{8}$  transition at different times.
- Yolanda - Staffing, lunch and recess, safety team are also concerns. People in support positions feel that the longer day is too much. I will open up the floor to allow partners in crime to speak.
- Mercedes - Length of day is a concern but with the new schedule things are getting better except for 1st grade everyone does not have math at the end of the day. Instructional teams working better - two teachers in the classroom at all times - this helps with less challenging behavior. There is challenging behavior in the lower school as well but it is different from upper school.
- Dr. Flores - Why was the decision made to extend the school day?
- Yolanda: We originally thought we would be post pandemic and could work with students more closely. We thought WIN would be an opportunity to engage in small groups with teachers. We had to pull SPED/EL staff and they felt that it was a babysitting period. Again we are not recovering, we are still very much in it.
- Dr. Flores - Does the board have a say in changing the day?

- Dr. Russotto - Yes, the board approved the change in the length of the school day and would have to vote to change it back. We did go through a recent schedule change that addressed some staffing needs. In timeliness, if we have to change the time of the school day, we need to get information out there. My fear is that we can be back in this same position. We don't meet in December, this is why we are talking about this now.
- Dr. Fineberg - I think we came into this in June, July, August with the mindset of recovery. We planned for recovery but it was not what was needed. We needed to focus on transitions. Another bold change is Mastery Charter have Wellness Wednesday, students have half days and staff leave as well. There will be multiple things we have to plan for and in stages. We have to get our teachers to think differently. They are using pre pandemic strategies and expecting the same results.
- Dr. Russotto - We did think about that a little. We extended the day to give space in between things. The classes ran back to back and were stressful. I think Josh brings up an interesting alternative. In talking with Nelson late last week, there is an opportunity in changing our calendar. We may give ourselves some time to fix things that are not okay. I just mentioned this to Yolanda during dismissal.
- Dr. Fineberg - I came into this year with big bold plans. I am realizing that there has to be incremental growth. If implemented as we had envisioned it would have been great, but the kids and families bring in other factors.
- Dr. Russotto - I would be remiss if I did not share that we are not in a place where we thought we would be. Other schools are experiencing the same things. The scary thing and the sad thing is that no one outside of our school community realizes this. I was at a renewal workshop and below 75% teacher certification is grounds for non renewal. There is a 1st grader who missed 25 days of school due to Covid exposures and having Covid himself. It is urgent what we do and how it will impact our students.
- Dr. DuCette - It worries me that the board doesn't meet until January. I think the board should give approval to do what needs to be done to keep the school running.
- Dr. Russotto - There are two ways: we meet in December or the board gives preapproval for future decisions.
- Dr. DuCette - Please tell us what works best for you.
- Donna - We will never say no what is best for students and staff. It will be safer to have a board meeting to cover everything.
- Dr. Russotto - It would have to be December 6th-8th because we have to give word out to families. It gives us time to plan what we will present to you.
- Yolanda - I couldn't agree with that more.
- Dr. Flores - Cutting the school day may be drastic, but taking an extra day off may not be as drastic.
- Yolanda - I don't have enough data. There was a parent complaint filed to PDPH about our long school day. I don't know how parents are feeling about that.
- Dana - I think it would be great to have a survey. My biggest concern was homework after a long school day, but she gets a lot of it done during WIN. My preference would be to have different days off. We are used to the schedule now. Is it a benefit for some because they are spending an extra 45 minutes in safety? I agree and I can meet in December.
- Mercedes - Will a calendar change in days off be for students and staff?
- Dr. Russotto - I will send a calendar invite for December 6th.
- Dr. Flores - For the sake of time we need to move on to the Executive Session.

## **Executive Session 6:16PM Ended at 6:20PM**

### **Action Items**

*Motion to approve the new hires* - Dr. DuCette 1st, Dr. Flores 2nd - no objections

*Motion to approve the salaries of the new hires* - Donna 1st, Dr. DuCette 2nd - no objections

*Motion to approve part time salary adjustment to \$15 per hour* - Dana 1st, Sarah 2nd - no objections

*Motion to approve athletic stipends for coaching basketball (Darius Wallace and Brianna Thomas) - Dr. Flores 1st, Dana 2nd - no objections*

*Motion to approve the rental reimbursement - Dr. Ducette 1st, Caroline 2nd - no objections*

*Motion to approve the property management agreement - Dr. Flores 1st, Dana 2nd - no objections*

*Motion to approve the Max Cleaning Company Contract - Dana 1st, Dr. DuCette 2nd - no objections*

**Meeting adjourned at 6:28 PM**

*Minutes recorded by: Mercedes Walton-Mason*