Meeting Minutes

Trustees in attendance
Amanda Craft, Emmanuel Fordjour, Glenn Hopps (treasurer), Kwaku Andoh, Nadine Sylvester (secretary), Oral Walcott, Shelly Cleary (treasurer), Stanley Taylor, Stephanie Mauterstock (chair) (all via videoconference)

Ascend staff in attendance
Anastasia Michaels, Anjya Thomas, Catherine Jessup, Claudia Aubourg, Danique Day, Emily Acuna, Jonathan Masci, Jordan Akhurst, Leyde St. Leger, Louis Trani, Lisa DeRoche, Maryann Li, Recy Dunn, Sophie Kramer (all via tele- or videoconference)

Public in attendance
Caroline Peters, Crystal Gonsalves, Daina Thomas, Dianne Laurent, Gillian Atkinson, Gus Saliba, Kerline Desir, Monica Edwards, Sandra Williams, Stephanie Sandeus (all via tele- or videoconference)

Stephanie called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.

I. Public comment

No public comment was made.

II. Public comment update

At October’s meeting, Dale Robinson, a parent at Canarsie Ascend Middle School, shared concerns about student behavior in her child’s classroom. Danique shared that we have partnered with Ms. Robinson to understand her concerns and are grateful for her partnership. We have confirmed that the school’s response to student conduct is and has been aligned to our student and family handbook.

At October’s meeting, Susan Best, a parent at Brooklyn Ascend Middle School, requested that the Board consider a hybrid learning plan. Danique expressed that there is not a plan for hybrid learning at this time, but we are bringing in new technology that may allow for increased hybrid classroom flexibility to support scholars quarantining at home.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the October 20, 2021 meeting and executive session. Shelly moved to approve the meeting minutes and executive session minutes, Kwaku seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. BACS 6 and second Ascend high school

Recy reminded the Board of their recent discussion regarding BACS 6 and Ascend’s second high school. Ascend has been exploring a third planning year for its tenth charter, BACS 6, and Bushwick Ascend High School to allow the network to focus this year on supporting our students, families, and staff in recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. Another planning year would also allow us additional time to monitor and understand enrollment trends following the pandemic. The Board reviewed the draft resolution to
request from the SUNY Charter Schools Institute a planning year to delay the opening of Brooklyn Ascend Charter School 6 and Bushwick Ascend Charter School’s high school to September 2023. Shelly moved to approve the resolution, Amanda seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

V. BAMS principal transition

Danique presented to the Board the decision to appoint Brandon Barnett-Smalls as interim principal of Brooklyn Ascend Middle School, following the resignation of Richard Tucker. Nadine moved to approve the appointment, which Shelly seconded and was carried unanimously.

VI. FY21 ACS Financials

Gus Saliba from O’Connor Davies presented the findings of the FY21 ACS Financials audit to the Trustees. Overall, ACS is in a strong financial position. O’Connor Davies recommended increasing Ascend’s grant management capacity based on an influx of grant funding in FY21.

VII. School and network updates

Shelly summarized the financial highlights from September 2021, which show continued strong financial performance in the first three months of the year. Revenue and expenses are favorable due to instructional vacancies and conversion of six schools to the DOE food service program. We are also tracking favorably against all covenant, SUNY and financial stability metrics.

Maryann updated the Board on enrollment data for SY21-22, which continues to exceed in-year enrollment targets.

Lisa presented a summary of hiring trends across the schools, where we are still seeing a record number of fall teacher hires, but vacancies that reflect a nationwide teacher shortage. In an effort to combat vacancies, we have incorporated a number of hiring and retention initiatives, such as increasing the Thanksgiving vacation for all staff, and distributing retention and signing bonuses. Lisa then shared updated staff vaccination data, which reflects that 90% of staff have received at least one dose. We are providing webinars and daily reminders to encourage staff who are not yet vaccinated to receive their first dose. Ascend’s staff Covid-19 vaccination policy requires that all staff be fully vaccinated by December 1st, 2021

Jordan provided an update on some of the initiatives underway to actualize Ascend’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. We have rolled out an internal diversity dashboard to provide a snapshot of academic, disciplinary, attendance and demographic data through a DEIA lens. This dashboard will help identify trends and barriers to DEIA; inform an evidence-based approach to dismantle those barriers; and monitor the impact of our work. Jordan shared some of the demographic data of our staff and students with the Board. We continue to hold monthly DEIA workshops, and our Inclusion, Diversity Equity and Anti-Racism Leaders (IDEALs) are developing a speaker series, monthly book club, and classroom content.

VIII. Quarter 1 progress on org-wide goals

Recy shared an update on our progress towards org-wide goals as of the end of Q1, including that 75% of org-wide goals are on-track to reach their objectives by the end of the year. While our academic goals are not yet meeting their targets, we are deeply focused on improving our instructional management so students are achieving mastery. In addition, four goals have been delayed as we prioritize other initiatives. Recy shared that we will report back to the Board on our progress at the end of the second quarter.

IX. Board’s goals for 2021-22
Stephanie requested that committees convening in advance of December’s meeting review last year’s Board goals and Ascend’s org-wide goals for 2021-22 to prepare a proposed Board goal for 2021-22.

X. Nominating committee update

Stephanie shared an update on candidate recruitment for the Board’s vacant seat and efforts to build a pipeline for future Board vacancies.

XI. Executive session: acquisition of property (minutes recorded separately)

At 6:40 pm, Shelly moved to enter executive session to discuss a potential acquisition of property. Kwaku seconded the motion, and all Trustees voted in favor and entered executive session.

XII. Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting

At 6:48 pm, Shelly moved to exit executive session, which Stanley seconded and was unanimously approved.

XIII. Adjournment

At 6:50 pm, Stanley moved to adjourn the meeting, which Amanda seconded and was unanimously approved.

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Name       Date