Ascend Public Charter Schools  
Meeting of the School Board of Trustees  
July 8, 2022  
6:00 pm  

Location: Dial-in  

Meeting Minutes  

Trustees in attendance  
Janai Jeter, Jackie Wilson, Nadine Sylvester, Shelly Cleary, Stanley Taylor (all via videoconference)  

Ascend staff in attendance  
Aaron Obrochta, Anastasia Michals, Carlos Zayas, Danique Day, Emily Acuna, Guy Johnson, Holly Curtis, Jonny Masci, Jennifer Bauer, Kate McGrath, Maryann Li, Nichole Benjamin, Nina Blalock, Raul Echeverz, Recy Dunn, Tanneka McIntosh, Vanessa Aird (all via tele- or videoconference)  

Public in attendance  
Aaron Eastman, Akeshia Craven-Howell, Evan Coughenour, Rochelle Dalton (all via videoconference)  

Nadine called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.  

I. Public comment  

No public comment was offered.  

II. Public comment update  

At June’s meeting, Rashida Gillus-Favard, a parent at Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower School, shared her concern with the Board about homework assigned in her son’s classroom, as well as her desire for Ascend to offer afterschool and summer programming. Anastasia shared that the school’s leadership has connected with Ms. Gillus-Favard and is investigating afterschool and summer programming options for future school years with the support of its’ Parent Leadership Council, which they have also invited Ms. Gillus-Favard to join.  

III. Consent agenda  

Recy took a moment to announce that Holly Curtis, current Director of Student Recruitment and Enrollment, will take on the role of Chief of Staff this summer. Recy also introduced the Board to new members of the Ascend Learning team, including:  

- Carlos Zayas, Interim CFO  
- Guy Johnson, Interim Controller  
- Nichole Benjamin, Director of Development  

Nadine presented to the Board the minutes of the June 8, 2022 meeting and executive sessions. Pending minor corrections to the language, Stanley moved to approve the meeting minutes and executive session minutes, Janai seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.
Nadine presented to the Board the SY22-23 Staff Handbook. Shelly moved to approve the SY22-23 Staff Handbook as written in the pre-read package, Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Nadine presented to the Board the SY22-23 Family Handbook. Shelly moved to approve the SY22-23 Family Handbook as written in the pre-read package, Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. School and network updates

Shelly summarized the financial highlights from May 2022, which continue to show strong financial performance. Net income is favorable to the budget and we are tracking favorably against all covenants, SUNY and financial stability metrics.

Danique spoke on behalf of the Academic Committee and Danique shared how we are teaching and encouraging leaders to make data-driven decisions, such as through the School Health Dashboard that was developed this year. It includes data collected daily and throughout the year under four domains: Academics, Student Culture, Staff Culture, and DEIA. Danique also shared an update on the expansion of the Schools team to include additional data- and student-support focused roles. The Board asked about academic target setting, and Danique and Recy offered to provide a future workshop on academic target setting and

Holly updated the Board SY22-23 registrations, which are on-track to meet their goals. Holly informed the Trustees about the Recruitment and Enrollment Team’s focus on community-building this summer, including attending several community events in neighborhoods of opportunity.

Aaron spoke to the Board about the SY22-23 recruitment season, sharing a summary of all hires thus far and current vacancies by school and role. Aaron also shared an update with the Board on centralized teacher hiring, which has shifted to being held remotely for the summer. The Board asked questions about SPED vacancies and hiring potential, and requested an update of staffing contingency plans in August’s meeting.

V. Summer Institute

Maryann and Danique provided an overview of Summer Institute, which will provide Operations staff, School Leaders, and Teachers each two weeks of training and team building with a focus on problem-solving, leadership, and community. Summer institute will ensure that all staff understand our purpose, mission, values, and are aligned on how to drive student outcomes for SY22-23.

They also shared staff reflections from the first session of Summer Institute, which are largely positive and show excitement about Ascend’s community, commitment to DEIA, and the opportunity to partner collaboratively.

VI. Committee Appointments

Prior to the meeting, the Trustees indicated which committees they would like to join for SY22-23. Nadine presented these selections to the Board. Jackie moved to approve SY22-23 committee appointments as listed below, Shelly seconded, and the vote was carried unanimously.

Committee Appointments:

- Emmanuel Fordjour – Academic Committee
- Gamal Walker – Academic Committee; Finance Committee
VII. Executive session: principal hiring

At 7:01 pm, Stanley moved to enter executive session to discuss principal hiring for the 2022-23 school year. Janai seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

At 7:09 pm, Stanley moved to exit executive session, which Shelly seconded and was unanimously approved.

Jackie moved to approve Katherine Stearns as Principal of East Brooklyn Ascend Charter School. Shelly seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Shelly moved to approve Latasha Williams as Co-Principal of Brooklyn Ascend Charter School. Jackie seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

VIII. Strategic Planning overview

Akeshia Craven-Howell, Evan Coughenour, and Rochelle Dalton, of Bellwether, introduced themselves to the Board and shared an overview of the process to create our five-year Strategic Plan, including the project timeline and key deliverables.

IX. Adjournment

At 7:40 pm, Jackie moved to adjourn the meeting, which Janai seconded and was unanimously approved.