Ascend Charter Schools
Meeting of the Board of Trustees
December 8, 2021
6:00 pm

Location: Dial-in

Meeting Minutes

Trustees in attendance
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
Alieghcia Dodd, Alim Uddin, Anastasia Michals, Anjya Thomas, Catherine Jessup, Claudia Aubourg, Emily Acuna, Hannah Martinson, Jordan Akhurst, Jonathan Masci, Lisa DeRoche, Maryann Li, Recy Dunn, Sophie Kramer (all via tele- or videoconference)

Public in attendance
Ana Sanchez, Brielle Grosvenor, Carine Diejuste, Dianne Laurent, Diana Duncan Ramsden, Karen Philbert, Marie Fidelia, Melanie Mendonca, Rovena Brissett, Sandra Williams, Stephanie Sandeus, Sheena James, Taifa Johnson, Tracey Thompson (all via tele- or videoconference)

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

I. Public comment

Karen Philbert, a parent from Canarsie Ascend Middle School, shared with the Board her concerns about the benchmark exam schedule and requests for tutoring.

II. Public comment update

No public comment was offered at the prior meeting.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the November 10, 2021 meeting and executive session. Stanley moved to approve the meeting minutes and executive session minutes, Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. School and network updates

Shelly summarized the financial highlights from October 2021, which continue to show strong financial performance. Net income is favorable to the budget and we are tracking favorably against all covenant, SUNY and financial stability metrics. Shelly also shared an update on the status of COVID stimulus fund approvals and expenditures.

Maryann shared an update with the Board on SY21-22 enrollment and SY22-23 student applications. Enrollment continues to trend above goal and applications for SY22-23 are trending higher than previous years with three times as many applications as there were at this time last year.

Lisa summarized hiring trends from the SY21-22 recruitment season, which saw historically high hires and interview to offer rates, but lower offer acceptance rates than in past years given the competitive hiring market for teachers this year. We continue to review hiring and retention data across Ascend to better
understand school-specific and enterprise needs, and we are amplifying our retention strategy, inclusive of retention bonuses and revamped onboarding and offboarding processes. The Board asked about competitive hiring strategies and the impact of compensation on school and network hiring. Lisa then shared updated staff Covid-19 vaccination data, which reflects that 98% of staff have received at least one dose.

Jordan provided an update on some of the initiatives underway to actualize Ascend’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. Our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-Racism Leaders (IDEALs) at each school continue to work to integrate DEIA into all that we do, including leading DEIA-centered morning meeting and advisory content with students, and holding a session at BAHS to raise awareness about invisible disabilities. We continue to hold monthly DEIA workshops, which are receiving strong positive feedback from participants.

V. Sending AL notice of intent to renew management agreement

Stephanie reminded the Trustees of the renewal process for the management agreement between Ascend Charter Schools and Ascend Learning. Before January 1, 2022, both parties must agree to give written notice of their intent to renew this agreement, which they will then finalize by March 31, 2022. Stephanie invited the Trustees to share any concerns about renewing the management agreement with Ascend Learning prior to her submitting the written notice to renew on behalf of the Board.

VI. Nominating committee: adding new board members

Stephanie shared that Tracy Dunbar and Amanda Craft have both resigned from their seats on the Board—Tracy due to her relocation out of state and Amanda following a decade of service on the Ascend Charter Schools Board. Their departures leave three vacancies on the Board. The nominating committee has cultivated a panel of candidates and shared their bios with the Trustees. Stephanie invited the committee to share reflections on the three candidates.

Stephanie presented to the Board a vote to appoint Janai Jeter, Jackie Wilson, and Gamal Walker to the Ascend Charter Schools Board of Trustees. Nadine moved to appoint Janai, Jackie, and Gamal to the Board, Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

VII. Executive session: BWLS principal transition

At 6:44 pm, Nadine moved to enter executive session to discuss a leadership transition at BWLS. Stanley seconded the motion, and all Trustees voted in favor and entered executive session.

VIII. Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting

At 6:57 pm, Stanley moved to exit executive session, which Kwaku seconded and was unanimously approved.

Stephanie presented to the Board a vote to approve Lisa Roach as acting principal of Bushwick Ascend Lower School. Nadine moved to approve this appointment, Kwaku seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IX. Adjournment

At 6:58 pm, Stanley moved to adjourn the meeting, which Oral seconded and was unanimously approved.

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