Ascend Charter Schools
Meeting of the Board of Trustees
April 21, 2020
6:00 pm

Location:
Dial-in

Meeting Minutes

Trustees in attendance
Shelly Cleary (Co-treasurer), Tracy Dunbar (Trustee), Emmanuel Fordjour (Trustee), Stephanie Mauterstock (Chair), Nadine Sylvester (Trustee), Stanley Taylor (Trustee), Oral Walcott (Trustee) (all via videoconference)

Ascend staff in attendance
Jordan Akhurst, Nancy Alexander, Dominique Artamin, Inan Barrett, Jordan Bean, Dellianna Burrows, Rhonda Ekwunoh, Janna Genzlinger, Michael James, Cathy Jessup, N’Gadie Kamara, Sophie Kramer, Crystal Lane, Lisa Margosian, Jonathan Masci, Miatta Massaley, Aaron Obrochta, Lana Sabb, Brandon Sorlie, Leyde St. Leger, Richard Tucker, Thomas Vitola

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

I. Public comment

There was no public comment.

II. Public comment update

Dellianna responded to public comment by Shani Foster of Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower School at the March 21 board meeting. Shani requested an additional scholar intervention teacher at her campus in the coming school year. Delli responded that Shani rightly anticipated that academic need will be greater next year across the network and the nation. Draft staffing plans are being created as part of budget season, and we now have more clarity about revenue assumptions for next year and projected enrollment. It remains unlikely we will be able to add intervention teachers across the network. However, mature K-8 schools have at least one flex teacher in their staffing plans, which principals can assign to best meet the needs of their schools as they see fit, including for the purpose of intervention. In the coming weeks each principal will have the opportunity to review their budgets and staffing plans with this flex position in mind.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the March 17 meeting. Oral moved to approved the minutes, Nadine seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. Financial report

Shelly reviewed with the Board the content of the most recent finance committee meeting. Network revenue is favorable to the budget due to stronger enrollment than anticipated, and expenses are favorable to the budget. In the 2021-22 school year, Ascend will receive an increased PPA as well as federal funding to be spent on Covid-related expenses. These numbers and program details are being
finalized. At the recent finance committee meeting, the Trustees agreed on the approach to invest Ascend’s cash on hand.

V.  Schools and network updates

Brandon provided an update to the Board on school reopening. About 28% of students are now participating in in-person learning across the network, and school leaders were given the flexibility to organize their reopening plan based on individual community need. The network has moved one step closer to full in-person learning. Tracy provided an update on the most recent academic committee meeting. She discussed the plan to administer state tests this year to Ascend students in grades 3-8. With regard to remediation, planning is under way for next year with cross functional teams.

Aaron provided an update on student recruitment and enrollment. Prior to the early April lottery, there was a gap in student applications as compared to Ascend’s historical average. This is now manifesting in a seat gap in our lower grades. Tackling the seat gap includes a three-pronged strategy: increasing application yield, driving student recruitment, and improving student retention.

Aaron also updated the Board on Ascend’s talent hiring goals for SY21-22. Right now, the network is on track with hiring.

Jordan provided an update on Ascend’s DEIA initiatives. A DEIA communication plan is in progress and the DEIA resource library is open and regularly visited by staff and families, with over 15 new resources added in the last two months. These resources have been utilized in the building of school clubs and PD sessions. Twenty-two DEIA commitment statement workshops were delivered to each school and AL team between January and April this year. The objective of the workshops was to establish a shared language and understanding of our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism and to identify actions that we can take to actualize our commitment to DEIA. Data was collected pre- and post-workshop, with highlights including 92% of staff reporting a good understanding of the DEIA commitment statement (an increase of 12% points) and 94% of staff reporting the statement being important to them (an increase of 1% point).

VI.  Competency model overview

Janna presented AL’s competency model project to the Board. This initiative is connected to our strategic imperatives to adapt and refine our student learning, culture, and operating systems; actualize Ascend’s commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism; and strengthen the systems and structures that support the efficient, equitable and sustainable functioning of the network office. We will use the competency model in full cycle talent processes in this multi-year initiative with the goal that all staff members at Ascend will begin to experience clarity in all aspects of their career. Every leader who interviewed at Ascend this year engaged in tasks that are aligned to the competency model. Janna walked the Trustees through the components of the competency model and the ways in which our DEIA commitment is actualized throughout.

VII.  Quarter 3 progress to goals

Lisa shared a quarter 3 update with the Board on Ascend’s progress toward organizational goals. We continue to make great progress toward our goals this year, and we are on track to complete 81% of our goals by year-end. However, we set ambitious goals during a time of great ambiguity, and there are three goals that have been deferred to next year.

VIII.  Executive session (minutes recorded separately)
At 7:15pm Shelly moved to enter executive session to discuss personnel matters, namely the appointment of a principal to Brooklyn Ascend Middle School and the onboarding of Ascend’s new CEO. Oral seconded the motion, and all Trustees voted in favor and entered executive session.

IX. Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting

At 7:13pm Tracy moved to exit exec session, Nadine seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

X. Principal hiring

Oral moved to approve Richard Tucker’s hiring as principal of Brooklyn Ascend Middle School, effective SY21-22. Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

XI. Board matters

Sophie offered a reminder to the Board that June is the annual ACS meeting when the current Trustees will be reelected, officers will be elected, and SY21-22 committee appointments will be made.

At 7:38pm Stanley moved to adjourn the meeting. Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

I. Adjournment

Name _______________________________ Date _______________________________