Stephanie called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

Stephanie opened the meeting with a reminder 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—and three new members have been appointed to the Board. Stephanie welcomed Janai Jeter, Jackie Wilson, and Gamal Walker to the Board, pending their SUNY approval.

I. Public comment

No public comment was offered.

II. Public comment update

At December’s meeting, Karen Philbert, a parent from Canarsie Ascend Middle School, shared with the Board her concerns about the benchmark exam schedule and requests for tutoring. Danique shared that we are ensuring exam schedules are communicated proactively and that we are looking to bring in external tutoring resources to supplement staff capacity.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the December 8, 2021 meeting and executive session. Nadine moved to approve the meeting minutes and executive session minutes, Shelly seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. School and network updates

Shelly summarized the financial highlights from November 2021, 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. Shelly also shared an update on the status of COVID stimulus fund approvals and expenditures.
Recy discussed the rationale behind Ascend’s decision to shift to remote learning from January 10 through January 21. This decision was made out of an abundance of caution and based on city wide COVID transmission rates that impacted student and adult attendance. Recy shared steps we are taking to minimize the impact on families, such as sharing grab-and-go meal resources with families and ensuring all students have access to portable devices and hotspots as needed. The Board asked questions about authorizer compliance and decision-making criteria for the return to in-person schooling.

Anjya provided a summary of Benchmark II Exam results. Benchmark II results reflected historical patterns, including growth in mastery from the first benchmark exam and higher levels of mastery in middle school science and social studies than in ELA and math.

Maryann updated the Board on SY21-22 enrollment and SY22-23 student applications. Enrollment continues to trend above goal. Applications for SY22-23 continue to outpace previous years and we have received over 25% of our target for total applications.

Aaron shared an update on hiring trends from the SY21-22 recruitment season. Despite a challenging recruitment year, we continue to hire at a record pace. We expect a shift in the candidate pool soon, with prospective staff looking ahead to SY22-23, and we are now hiring for SY22-23 in addition to our immediate needs. The Board asked questions about school-specific staffing challenges and Ascend’s mitigation strategy.

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 embed DEIA principles and practices into all we do. Our Equity Advisory Committee (EAC) provided feedback and input on the implementation of a DEIA curriculum evaluation tool that they recommended. We continue to hold monthly DEIA workshops and are developing additional workshops and readings that will integrate more DEIA learning opportunities for students and staff alike.

V. Adjournment

At 6:33 pm, Kwaku moved to adjourn the meeting, which Nadine seconded and was unanimously approved.