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

Location: Dial-in

Meeting Minutes

Trustees in attendance
Emmanuel Fordjour, Gamal Walker, Janai Jeter, Kwaku Andoh, Nadine Sylvester, Shelly Cleary, Stanley Taylor (all via videoconference)

Ascend staff in attendance
Alim Uddin, Anjya Thomas, Carmen Maldonado, Danique Day, Emily Acuna, Kate McGrath, Kelly Baick, Korena Johnson, Marcy Gentle, Maryann Li, Recy Dunn, Sophie Kramer, (all via tele- or videoconference)

Public in attendance
Jordan Dunn, Rashida Gillus-Favard, S’Ken Evans

Stanley called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

I. Public comment

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.

II. Public comment update

No public comment was offered at May’s meeting.

III. Consent agenda

Stanley presented to the Board the minutes of the May 11, 2022 meeting and executive sessions. Shelly motioned to approve the meeting minutes and executive session minutes, Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Recy shared that a plaque in honor of Christine Schlendorf, a former Trustee who passed last Spring, has been placed outside the college suite at Brooklyn Ascend High School.

IV. Refinancing

Carmen Maldonado, head of real estate special projects, shared an overview with the Board of Ascend’s plan to apply to refinance leasehold debt through the Equitable Facilities Fund. The Board asked about barriers to application.

Shelly motioned to approve the resolution to apply to refinance through EFF as written. Kwaku seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

V. School and network updates
Shelly summarized the financial highlights from April 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. Shelly also shared a summary of the May finance committee meeting with the Trustees.

Danique spoke on behalf of the Academic Committee, who met on June 7. She shared a summary of matriculating seniors’ post-graduation plans, with 72% attending a four-year college, 11% awaiting college responses or considering their college options, and 17% pursuing a trade, the military, other employment, or gap years. The Board commended the class of 2022’s accomplishments and post-graduation plans. Danique then previewed for the Board the schedule and focus for summer institute.

Maryann updated the Board on SY21-22 enrollment and SY22-23 student applications. Enrollment continues to track above goal and will exceed end-of-year targets. Registrations for next year are on track to meet July targets. The team has put a focus on supporting Kindergarten acceptance and registration, particularly for Cypress Hills Ascend Charter School and East Brooklyn Ascend Charter School. The Student Recruitment and Enrollment and Schools teams are also partnering to conduct focus groups on our families’ experiences at Ascend to drive key areas of focus for customer service in SY22-23.

Danique shared outcomes from the first four weeks of centralized teacher hiring days with the Board. Hiring days have had a meaningful impact on talent collaboration between schools and network teams, and have received positive feedback from candidates. The Board asked about steps we are taking to address historically difficult roles to fill. Kelly Baick, interim director of talent, shared that we have doubled internal referral bonuses, which are also scaled higher for those challenging roles.

VI. FY23 ACS budget approval

Recy introduced Andrea Pineda Madrigal, associate director of financial planning and analysis, who summarized ACS’ FY22 financial performance for the Board before sharing an overview of the FY23 budget and its key drivers. The Board asked about facility expenditures and additional opportunities for rent assistance.

Stanley presented to the Board the FY23 ACS budget. Shelly moved to approve the budget as written, Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

VII. Changes to open meeting law

Kate shared an update on the status of the Open Meeting Law, which dictates meeting practices for public bodies, including that members must attend meetings in-person except under extraordinary circumstances, to be defined by the Board. Kate presented a resolution to create written procedures further governing the Board’s use of videoconferencing by its members.

Shelly motioned to pass the resolution as written, which Nadine seconded and was carried unanimously.

VIII. Annual meeting

Stanley presented the names of the Board members for reelection to the Board for the 2022-23 school year: Stanley Taylor, Nadine Sylvester, Shelly Cleary, Emmanuel Fordjour, Gamal Walker, Jackie Wilson, and Janai Jeter. Kwaku motioned to reelect this slate of officers to the board for the 2022-23 school year, Shelly seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Kwaku, Oral, and Stephanie will all be stepping down from the Ascend Charter Schools Board after many years of service, and Recy extended his gratitude to them.
Kwaku motioned to fix the number of Board seats at seven, which Nadine seconded and was carried unanimously.

Stanley motioned to approve officer appointments, which Nadine seconded and was carried unanimously. Nadine will serve as chairperson, Emmanuel as secretary, and Shelly as treasurer.

Nadine motioned to appoint Stanley Taylor as Vice Chair, which was carried unanimously.

The Board will share committee appointments when they reconvene in July.

IX. Executive session: principal hiring

At 7:28 pm, Nadine moved to enter executive session to discuss principal hiring for the 2022-23 school year. Kwaku seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

At 7:40 pm, Kwaku moved to exit executive session, which Nadine seconded and was unanimously approved.

Nadine motioned to approve Axel Nda as founding Principal of Cypress Hills Ascend Middle School, and Inan Barrett as Principal of Bushwick Ascend Middle School. Emmanuel seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

X. Adjournment

At 7:43 pm, Kwaku moved to adjourn the meeting, which Shelly seconded and was unanimously approved.

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Name       Date