**Ascend Charter Schools**

**Meeting of the Board of Trustees**

**June 23, 2021**

**6:00 pm**

**Location:**

**Dial-in**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Trustees in attendance**

Shelly Cleary (Co-treasurer), Emmanuel Fordjour (Trustee), Glenn Hopps (Co-treasurer), Stephanie Mauterstock (Chair), Nadine Sylvester (Trustee), Stanley Taylor (Trustee), Oral Walcott (Trustee) (all via videoconference)

**Ascend staff in attendance**

Jordan Akhurst, Tari Ankh, Katie Capella, Recy Dunn, Shani Foster, Catherine Jessup, Raymond Johnson, Sophie Kramer, Leyde St. Leger, Tracy Lewis, Aaron Obrochta, Christina Peña, SueAnn De Los Santos, Brandon Sorlie (all via videoconference or telephone)

**Public in attendance**

Andrea McLean

Stephanie called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.

1. **Public comment**

There was no public comment.

1. **Public comment update**

No public comment was offered at the prior Board meeting.

1. **Consent agenda**

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the May 19, 2021 meeting and executive session. Oral moved to approve the minutes, Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

1. **Financial report**

Shelly reviewed with the Board the content of the most recent finance committee meeting. Ascend’s financial performance this year has been strong with revenue and expenses favorable to budget due to the higher PPA, stronger enrollment, unspent contingencies in the budget, remote operations, and capitalization of tech costs. Ascend’s cash on hand is strong, as are sustainability indicators, covenants, and SUNY metrics.

1. **Schools and network updates**

Brandon provided an update to the Board on Ascend’s plans to reopen our schools in August. We will bring back as many students as possible in person five days a week with no rotation and offer a small non-permanent remote option for students with medical need. Staff will return in person and are encouraged to become vaccinated.

Brandon updated the Board on the administration of the state test this past spring. New York’s request for a waiver from state testing was not granted by the USDOE and New York directed schools to administer state exams to all in-person students. We therefore administered the Spring 2021 ELA and math tests to our in-person students, and subsequently administered an electronic version to our remote students. This enables us to have one consistent set of data for all students to support a strong launch to school next year. While we don’t usually have state test scores until August, we are able to estimate our ELA state test scores because the test included items that were recycled from a previous state test. Brandon explained the drop in ELA proficiency from our prior projections to our state test estimate can be attributed to our instructional approach to testing strategy this year. The state decided to administer solely the multiple-choice section of the state test, yet we did not provide instruction this year on how to attack multiple choice questions, focusing on other skills in the remote environment. In our middle schools, the estimated ELA state test scores were fairly close to the most recent projections, and on average, estimated proficiency in middle school is up slightly compared to the second benchmark projection.

Aaron shared current student recruitment and enrollment data with the Board. While still short of SY21 and SY22 budgeted enrollment, projected enrollment is increasing every day. Increased application yield and registration yield are driving the higher student enrollment projections. The greater yield is due the network and schools helping families through the registration process and our communications and advertisements that we will be open for in-person school. We continue to engage in recruitment efforts and will have better data on student retention as the summer continues.

Aaron also updated the Board on Ascend’s talent hiring goals for SY21-22. While we have high teacher offer rates, we are experiencing a historically low number of teacher applications. We are continuing to make progress in teacher hiring by leveraging five primary strategies to drive applications: referrals, internal hiring, partnerships, content, and digital marketing.

Jordan provided an update to the Board on our work to be more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist. She shared our DEIA learning framework, which includes staff participating in foundational learning opportunities, existing PD structures in which DEIA is embedded, and specialized workshops. This year, we are partnering with Race Forward to provide anti-racism training to all-staff during the summer. Our expanded calendar has been updated to include days and months of significance from the DEIA calendar, and pride clubs have launched in our schools.

1. **Ascend Charter Schools FY22 budget**

Cathy presented the FY22 Ascend Charter Schools budget to the Board. She shared the budget development process, during which department heads and school leaders were actively involved. Ascend’s FY22 ACS budget principles focus on supporting school staffing and academic requirements; investing in DEIA, school growth, staffing for students with special needs, and our staff through compensation increases; continuing to build our cost management muscle through accountability and ownership; and further increasing cash reserves.

Ascend’s budget drivers are enrollment, compensation, and staffing. Our budgeted enrollment is lower than in FY21 given decreased applications across the sector; we provided staff a significant compensation increases this year; and we added many positions across the network. Cathy discussed key budget assumptions and reviewed the budget summary.

On behalf of the finance committee, Shelly recommended the budget to the Board. Stanley moved to approve the FY22 Ascend Charter Schools budget, Glenn seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

1. **Annual meeting**

On the topic of reelecting Trustees to the Board for the 2021-22 school year, Stephanie and Sophie confirmed that all but one Trustee, Christine Schlendorf, confirmed their interest in being reelected to the Board. Stanley moved to reelect the Trustees who expressed their desire to return to service on the board, specifically Stephanie Mauterstock, Shelly Cleary, Glenn Hopps, Nadine Sylvester, Oral Walcott, Amanda Craft, Kwaku Andoh, Tracy Dunbar, Emmanuel Fordjour, and Stanley Taylor. Oral seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Shelly and Glenn offered to continue serving as co-treasurer, and Nadine offered to serve as secretary. Stephanie indicated her willingness to continue serving as board chair and stated she will continue to cultivate a vice chair or co-chair as part of her succession planning.

Oral moved to appoint Stephanie as chair, Shelly and Glenn as co-treasurers, and Nadine as secretary of the board. Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Given the recent onboarding of three new trustees and review of committee compositions, the Board agreed to maintain current committee compositions.

Nadine requested future discussion on her role as liaison between the AL and ACS boards to drive clarity on the responsibilities of the liaison.

Stanley moved to reappoint all Trustees to their current committees, Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

The board then thanked Brandon Sorlie, whose last day is July 7, for his 13 years of service to the Ascend community.

1. **Executive session (minutes recorded separately)**

At 7:25 pm Nadine moved to enter executive session to discuss personnel matters, namely principal appointments. Oral seconded the motion, and all Trustees voted in favor and entered executive session.

1. **Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting**

At 7:35 pm Stephanie moved to exit exec session, Glenn seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Stanley moved to approve the appointment of Sophie Balis-Harris as principal of Cypress Hills Ascend Lower School. Oral seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously. Emmanuel moved to approve the appointment of Katherine Capella as principal of Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower School, Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

1. **Adjournment**

At 7:39 pm Glenn moved to adjourn the meeting. Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

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