Meeting Minutes

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

Ascend staff in attendance
Jordan Akhurst, Nadine Alfred, Jyll Atkinson, Jordan Bean, Dellianna Burrows, Shani Foster, Sheena James, Cathy Jessup, Phanord Johanne, Raymond Johnson, Lauren Kinrich, Sophie Kramer, Crystal Lane, Lisa Margosian, Anastasia Michals, Brandon Sorlie, Leyde St. Leger, Anjya Thomas, Louis Trani, Richard Tucker

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

I. Public comment

Shani Foster, principal at Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower School, asked the network office to add an additional intervention teacher to her school’s budget. Shani noted that staffing has decreased but student need has not, and there are still unknowns with regard to the impact COVID has had on our students.

II. Public comment update

No public comments were offered at the prior meeting.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the board the minutes of the February 17 meeting. Stanley moved to approved the minutes, Oral seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. Financial report

Shelly reviewed with the Board the content of the most recent finance committee meeting. Overall Ascend’s financial performance continues to be strong. Revenue is ahead of budget due to higher enrollment, and expenses are favorable to budget due to the capitalization of laptops, expense management and remote operations. The SY21-22 budget process has begun and is backloaded to allow time for information on enrollment and PPA to further develop. The budget will be presented for approval at the June Board meeting.

V. Schools and network updates

Brandon provided an update to the Board on school reopening plans. It is expected that some amount of hybrid learning will be our reality through fall 2021, so we are gradually reopening schools this spring, increasing the scale and scope of students benefiting from in-person learning while bringing staff back to
buildings. It is essential to do so now to reduce student social isolation, strengthen academic learning and better prepare the network for hybrid learning in the fall. Teachers will return to buildings on March 22 for a week of training, and in person learning will launch across the network on April 6. On April 6, we anticipate 1,150 students will attend class in person and expect to see attendance grow to 1,300 students by April 26. The highest concentration of students will be in kindergarten, fifth and twelfth grades.

The academic committee reviewed ELT and math benchmark projections, which Kwaku shared with the Board. Between this school year and the last, projected proficiency in ELA is down 10.6%, showing clear indications of “Covid slide”. Projected math proficiency is down 8.1%; however, this gap is less than it was following the first benchmark exams, indicating we have likely stopped the Covid slide in math. Kwaku shared with the Board the projected proficiency by grade and by school.

Aaron offered the Board an overview of student recruitment and enrollment data. Ascend has received fewer applications than it has historically, reflecting trends seen across the charter sector. A two-pronged approach is being taken to recruit students, with both school-led and network-led initiatives.

VI. 18 month greenlighting of new schools

Lisa reviewed Ascend’s school greenlighting process, which involves assessing Ascend’s readiness to open a new school at three points in time: 18 months, 12 months and 6 months before the scheduled opening of a new school. BACS6 and the second high school are slated to open in July 2022. Ascend is proceeding with the opening plans and has identified several areas of focus, such as student enrollment and the principal pipeline, which will be reviewed again at the 12 month greenlighting.

VII. AL-ACS management agreement

Stephanie presented to the Board the SY21-22 management agreement between Ascend Learning and Ascend Charter Schools. The Board has previously stated their intent to renew the one-year agreement.

Shelly moved to renew the SY21-22 management agreement, as written in the Board package. Kwaku seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

VIII. Nominating committee update

Nadine updated the Board on the activities of the nominating committee. Trustees will be asked to share their intent to stay on the Board next year, so that the committee can prepare to fill any vacancies that may arise. In anticipation of future vacancies, the committee is beginning to cultivate candidates for future consideration, and the committee is prioritizing recruiting an Ascend parent and someone with academic expertise.

IX. Adjournment

Oral moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:09pm. Stanley seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned and the Trustees participated in board buddies training.