



Board Meeting (in person)
DRAFT Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
October 4, 2024
10:00AM - 5:10PM

Members Present:

Hector Torres, Chair
Robbie Dean, Vice-Chair & Treasurer
Allison R. Kokkoros, Member
Yeshimebeth Belay, Member (left at 1:00pm)
Giovanni Delfino, Member
Vilma Rosario, Member
Johan Uvin, Member
Larry Villegas-Pérez, Member

Members Absent:

John Goodman, Member
Ana Mejia, Secretary

Staff:

Chelsea Bradford, HSC Principal and Interim Co-Chief Academic Officer
Elani Lawrence, SGC Principal and Interim Co-Chief Academic Officer
Chrissey Klockner, Chief of Staff
Angela Medina, Chief Operations Officer
Robert M. Skelton, General Counsel
Karla Vasconez, Manager, Executive Administration

Other:

Mike Mesterharm, EdOps

Quorum: Yes

Welcome & Pre-Meeting Announcements

Board Chair Hector Torres provided opening comments and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00am.

Review of Agenda

Mr. Torres asked if there were any proposed changes to the agenda previously sent to the Board. Board members did not propose any changes to the agenda.

Public Comment Period by members of school community

Mr. Torres confirmed that no members of the public had signed up to give comments during the Public Comment Period.

Consent Agenda Approval

The following items were brought forward for approval as part of the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes of the Board's regular meeting held on June 12, 2024.

Ms. Rosario moved to approve the Consent Agenda, and Mr. Delfino seconded the motion. Following the invitation for discussion on the motion, a roll call vote was conducted, and the Consent Agenda item was approved unanimously.

Mission Moment

Alessandra Vasconcellos in the HR Department started off the meeting by recounting her journey as an immigrant from Brazil and as a student at Carlos Rosario. She was told that in order to get a job she needed to improve her English. She fondly remembers her first teacher who she originally thought was mean, but who pushed their students to be successful, and because of her teachers she was able to graduate from college with a 4.0 GPA. She is now working for Carlos Rosario and is starting on her master's degree. Ms. Kokkoros noted the new staff appreciation program for years of service that Ms. Vasconcellos and the HR team developed and implemented. The board members greatly appreciated her inspiring story.

Financial Report

Mr. Dean, accompanied by Mr. Mesterharm of EdOps, presented the financial report.

- For fiscal year 2023-24, the audited enrollment of 2109 students was greater than the budgeted enrollment of 1950. Revenue exceeded budget due to several factors:
 - The increased enrollment;
 - Fundraising exceeded its budgeted goal, including with the success of the 50th Anniversary Gala;
 - Unrealized investment gains were greater than normal; and
 - The School's interest earnings were stronger due to higher interest rates.
- In addition, expenses were less than budgeted because:
 - Student computer and data expenses were carefully managed and resulted in significant savings;
 - Salary expenses were under budget due to vacancies. These savings are somewhat offset by additional contractor expenses; and
 - Managers carefully managed their department budgets.
- Overall, the unaudited net income is \$4.7 million. Mr. Mesterharm noted that the audit is going well, and that the Finance department is performing the monthly close process on time, and that the appropriate internal controls have been put in place. In response to a question from Mr. Villegas-Pérez, Mr. Mesterharm also stated that the Finance Department has fixed the journal entry process, has sent monthly reports to the budget managers, and has not experienced any delays in the monthly closes. Mr. Mesterharm also noted that the School will be hiring a Vice President of Finance soon.

- For fiscal year 24-25, enrollment is projected to exceed the budget, though not as much as last year. Unrealized investment gains of \$400k continue to be strong. Investment gains are budgeted at zero to account for market volatility. There will be more investment earnings due to the recommended lower risk investments in the reserves. The finance team will be bringing reserve recommendations to the Board at the December meeting. Those reserves will include the reserve of at least 4 months of expenses required for the School to be in compliance with DCPCSB minimum expectations (which includes 60 days of cash on hand), the board reserve and the special project reserve. The special project reserve is intended to finance necessary facilities improvements and other projects, such as the Student Information System, needed to serve the students. The amount of money available for those projects is less than the amount needed to fulfill all of the requests. The finance team is soliciting proposals for the management of the reserves. Mr. Mesterharm noted that the team recognizes that the School must provide for the needs of the students, and that the student needs continue to grow.

Strategic Planning and Oversight Committee

Mr. Uvin noted the following:

- The Committee set its meeting schedule for the school year.
- The Committee proposed its academic reporting structure for each board meeting. For this meeting, the Committee will review the data dashboard for school year 23-24, in December it would focus on learner needs as reported by the Student Services Department, in February it would look at mid-year performance data, and in May it would review the student satisfaction data from the student survey conducted this fall.
- The Committee also reviewed the AIR research and that we expect to get some preliminary data this fall, with final reporting completed by April. The Board will be consulted before the report is finalized.
- The Committee is aware of the issues with the School Information System and will provide monitoring and support for the system and needed improvements.

The Board then took a short break.

Board Engagement

Ms. Vasconez then spoke to the Board about the committee schedules and goals for the school year. She displayed the spreadsheet which will be available to all board members and which has the Board and committee schedules and the goals for each committee. The spreadsheet also includes a calendar which lists the dates of board engagement opportunities and includes a column for board members to sign up for the opportunities in which they can participate. Additional opportunities will be added to the calendar as they become available. Mr. Villegas-Pérez asked whether the opportunities could be sent out as calendar invitations to help board members remember when events are scheduled. Ms. Vasconez mentioned that it may be possible to do that for some events.

DEIB Task Force

Mr. Villegas-Pérez noted the following:

- He thanked the staff for their efforts and appreciated the trust that has evolved within the Committee.
- The Committee will have more engagement with students to enhance the DEIB work and environment, and to uncover ideas for improvement.
- The Committee talked about the effects of trauma, especially for people of color.
- The Committee is also working with IDEAS Generation for a board training in January.

Mr. Torres noted that the request for additional board engagement in the community came from the Board/Staff Relations Task Force, and that participating in the community is critical for the board members. Mr. Villegas-Pérez also mentioned feedback he received from some younger former students who felt that the School was more for older adults, and asked for data on the age of the student body. Mr. Uvin noted that his organization has five generations of employees, and that it is important to determine the support that each generation needs, and whether the School can provide those supports. There was consensus that the School exists to serve all generations, not one group more than another. Ms. Klockner shared the current work around developing the School alumni network. Mr. Dean mentioned that it takes an intentional commitment of resources to engage alumni effectively.

The Board then thanked Ms. Klockner for her service and wished her well in her next endeavors.

The Board then took a break for lunch.

CEO Report

CEO Allison Kokkoros referred to materials shared in advance and noted the following highlights in her report:

- Projected annual enrollment is 2140, but it may be adjusted after the audit process. The audit results should be available by December. The School has now exceeded our pre-pandemic enrollment. In response to Mr. Uvin, Ms. Kokkoros noted that the enrollment ceiling of 2200 is set forth in the Charter Agreement. The School can request an increase if needed.
- Following a deep dive into student persistence data, the team developed a playbook to address the issues with the assistance of staff, and the School increased the budget for direct student support by 15%. This year's theme is ASPIRE for Higher, to tie into the new DC Charter School Board ASPIRE performance framework. The staff will be negotiating the School's individual performance goals under ASPIRE during this year.
- Thanks to Mr. Goodman, Accenture provided pro bono consulting services to help develop recommendations to improve the registration process for potential students.
- The School has a three star compliance rating, which is the highest rating.
- The School has an unaudited positive net income for fiscal year 23-24, as noted earlier in the meeting.
- The next climate survey will be conducted in November, and we are implementing actions suggested by the previous climate survey. The School is also in the process of implementing the second year of the DEIB plan.
- Voluntary turnover was only 1.6%, which is reflective of the School's efforts around climate and culture. Voluntary turnover does not include involuntary turnover, deaths or

seasonal employees. Mr. Villegas-Pérez noted that low turnover is positive for stability for the students and for other staff members.

- Ms. Klockner shared the following progress under the strategic plan:
 - Under the first pillar (Center Our Mission), the AIR report will be released soon, we are addressing the issues with the student information system, and we are implementing the new ASPIRE performance management framework. In addition, the School has developed and is implementing the academic action plan.
 - Under the second pillar (Empower Our People and Culture), the DEIB Advocacy Committee is recruiting new members and implementing the DEIB plan, which includes student engagement. The School achieved its climate survey participation and satisfaction goals for 2025. The School is also focused on improving processes and procedures and the School has increased the budget for professional development for staff and for direct student support.
 - Under our third pillar (Build Our Future), fundraising was very successful, with over \$1.1 million to support our students.
 - In response to Mr. Uvin, Ms. Klockner noted the various ways in which the school has solicited feedback from the staff and the community on the strategic plan, and how the School has implemented changes to achieve its strategic goals. Ms. Rosario noted that there has been a positive change in the attitude among the staff and board members that has helped the School with its growth and achievements. Mr. Torres noted that staff seems to have accepted and embraced innovation and change to do better for the students. Ms. Kokkoros noted that the School has intentionally distributed leadership and responsibility, improved collaboration, and increased visibility and clarity around the School's operations and goals. Mr. Uvin stated that the next frontier is a strong data environment and a solid student information system. Mr. Villegas-Pérez suggested that the School incorporate student feedback on attendance and persistence in its efforts. Mr. Uvin also commends Ms. Kokkoros for her leadership through these changes.
- Ms. Medina noted the following:
 - The School is focusing on the issues with the student information system (SIS). Only 28% of users are satisfied with the SIS, and the team has been engaging with users and the vendor to gather feedback and identify improvements. The immediate focus was on ensuring that registration was well supported, and the team is now working on the next steps with the SIS and will be reviewing the market to determine the best solution for the School. Reliability, functionality and the user experience were issues that need to be addressed. Mr. Torres asked whether the IT Department is gathering all of the data points needed to be clear on the needs that a new system will have to meet. Ms. Medina noted that the team is in the process of determining the requirements for the SIS going forward, and that the SIS will need to be flexible in dealing with future changes. In response to comments from Mr. Uvin, Ms. Medina noted that the team has begun considering whether there might be an enterprise-wide solution that could meet the needs of all departments.
- Ms. Lawrence then provided the following academic performance updates:
 - The DC Charter School board has also adopted the new charter goals policy. Charter goals for school year 23-24 could have been attained in three ways:
 - Meeting the charter goals as written;

- Demonstrating growth in goal attainment over the prior year; or
 - Meeting a transitional set of goals that are not the same as the charter goals. This pathway is not available for this school year.
- For school year 23-24, the School had 10 goals which focused on student achievement, and college and career readiness. Ms. Lawrence spoke about the areas needing improvement:
 - GED English – The target was not met by the GED English Program even though the GED English Program celebrated their highest number of GED graduates in SY23-24 with 12. There was a challenge with students attending classes regularly, and there was confusion amongst the faculty regarding which assessments count for the charter goal. There was an assumption that students making achievements on their GED assessments were meeting the growth criteria, but this is measured by the TABE assessment, not the GED.
 - CASAS assessments – in December during the testing window the CASAS system crashed several times and many of our student scores were not included, which likely contributed to the low scores. The Board requested additional data to understand the impact on our students.
 - Average daily attendance – the School achieved 65% versus a goal of 69%. The new ASPIRE framework does not include attendance as a performance measure. Even though daily attendance will not be a performance measure, the School intends to continue to use attendance as a valuable data point toward student persistence and achievement.
- Ms. Lawrence introduced the new academic performance dashboard that is being used this year to manage the School’s performance. The dashboard will be updated with the mid-year performance data for the February board meeting.
- Ms. Bradford addressed the strategies for this academic year.
 - The School is focused on providing timely, actionable data to equip faculty with the data needed to drive instructional practices. It includes attendance data for last year and ongoing for this year.
 - The School has developed a student attendance and persistence action plan which includes an external resource to reach out to students whose attendance is below 75%. The plan also calls for helping students understand their role in improving attendance. For September, attendance was at 73%
 - The action plans dashboards are shared weekly with the academic staff, and there are several working groups to work through plans to increase performance. The working groups consist of faculty, leadership and other staff in order to collaborate throughout the organization.
 - The School is also enhancing faculty professional development and using data to enhance instructional design and practices.
 - Faculty reaction has been very positive and the strategies appear to be producing results. Faculty are also helping students build relationships with their peers.

The board then took a short break.

Ms. Kokkoros then discussed the proposed amendment to the School's charter agreement. Since attendance is not included in ASPIRE for adult education schools, the School has the opportunity to remove the attendance element from the School's charter agreement goals so that the charter agreement aligns with ASPIRE. The School will still use attendance data to assist students in reaching their goals and for other School needs. Mr. Uvin made a motion to approve pursuing the removal of the attendance goal from the charter agreement and Mr. Villegas-Pérez seconded the motion. Mr. Dean then conducted the roll call vote, and all board members present approved the motion.

Ms. Kokkoros then noted that each charter school is going through a process to determine their mission-specific goals under ASPIRE. This will evolve over the course of the school year and be finalized in the spring 2025.

Ms. Kokkoros then shared her priority goals for the school year, which include:

- Investing in leadership development.
- Strong organizational oversight and measurement.
- Development of a new strategic plan.
- Investing in the School's culture and climate.
- Dialing up the school's advocacy plan.
- Meeting the fundraising target and increasing community involvement.
- Meeting the student enrollment target.

Ms. Kokkoros then updated the Board on the changes in the leadership structure with the composition of the Senior Leadership Team. She also requested that each board member share the contact information for three potential sponsors and for three external individuals to receive our external newsletter which will be launched soon. Ms. Kokkoros also asked that the board members invite friends to visit the School and that each board member fulfill their commitment to make a financial contribution to the School.

Governance and Nominating Committee

Ms. Rosario noted the following:

- **Board self-assessment:** Each year, the Governance and Nominating Committee asks the board members to complete the self-assessment so that the Board can continue to improve its work. The assessment will be open until Wednesday October 9 so that the last 2 members can complete the assessment. The Committee intends to analyze the results and report back to the Board at the December meeting.
- **Potential new board members:** Using the results of the board competency assessment from the spring, the Committee is actively recruiting and interviewing board member candidates to help fill the gaps in financial acumen and advocacy that the assessment identified. The Board also needs a student/alumni board member to replace Teresita Retana Piedra.

According to the School's bylaws, three of our board members' terms will expire on December 31, 2024. Those board members are Ms. Belay, Mr. Dean and Mr. Villegas-Pérez. Mr. Dean and Mr. Villegas-Pérez are both willing to continue their board service

and will be re-nominated at the December board meeting. Ms. Belay has decided to roll off the board.

The Committee recommends Alejandra Barrera be elected as the second student/alumni member of the Board. Ms. Barrera was a student from August 2017 through June 2018 studying ESL Level 8 and Vocabulary. The Committee recently interviewed Ms. Barrera and was very impressed with her enthusiasm and qualifications, and with her desire to give back to the School.

The Committee is also very aware of its duty to recommend board members who reflect the richness and diversity of our community, and it will continue its efforts to recruit those candidates.

Closed Session

Mr. Torres noted the next item on the agenda is slated for closed session, citing the DC Code provision for doing so:

- Discussion in closed session pursuant to DC Code § 2-575(b)(10) – personnel matters.

Mr. Goodman made a motion to approve entering the closed session for the stated purposes. Mr. Dean seconded the motion. A roll call vote was conducted to approve entering the closed session as proposed. The Board voted unanimously to enter closed session. Following the vote, the Board entered closed session.

Following the closed session, the Board returned to the open meeting at about 4:58pm.

Open Session

Mr. Torres thanked everyone for a robust discussion during the closed session. The Board discussed the proposed board member, the performance review for the CEO Ms. Kokkoros, and the continued employment of Jay Haddock. Ms. Kokkoros recused herself from the portion of the closed session in which her performance review was discussed, and Mr. Torres recused himself from the portion of the closed session in which the continued employment of Jay Haddock was discussed.

Mr. Torres then requested a motion to approve the employment of Jay Haddock as Senior Advisor to the CEO upon the terms and conditions discussed with the board during the closed session. Ms. Kokkoros made the motion, and Mr. Villegas-Pérez seconded the motion. All board members present voted in favor of the motion, except Mr. Torres who abstained from voting.

Mr. Torres then requested a motion to approve Alejandra Barrera as the new student/alumni member of the Board through December 31, 2024 (the remainder of Teresita Retana Piedra's term), and for a three-year term thereafter. Ms. Rosario made the motion, and Mr. Torres seconded the motion. All board members present voted in favor of the motion.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjourn

Mr. Torres adjourned the meeting at 5:10pm.

Respectfully submitted by Ana Mejia, Board Secretary

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