

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
October 23, 2012
7:00pm-9:00pm

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Our World Neighborhood Charter School was held on Tuesday, October 23, 2012 at 7:00 pm at the Elementary School of Our World Neighborhood Charter School (36-12 35th Avenue, Astoria, NY 11103).

The Trustees Present were:

Jeanette Betancourt, President
Steve Solinsky, Vice President and Treasurer
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary
Sara Geelan
Jeff Maclin

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
Abimbola Disu Olaya, Vice Principal
Karinne Montaque, Business Manager
Mark Crustante, Development Director
Jamey Greco, Special Education Director
Jayme Pabon, Teacher
Leslie Rossello, Teacher
Lucille Ranchor, Admissions Coordinator
Sarah Espanol, PTO Co-Chair
Florence Adu, Consultant

Jeanette Betancourt, President of OWNCS Board of Trustees, chaired the meeting.

Director's Report - Brian Ferguson

Month 1 – How are we Doing

Free and Reduced Lunch application forms. Data from these forms affects the schools income and its eligibility for funding. Therefore, the administration is making a concerted effort to collect applications from OWNCS families. We are still missing forms from about 50-70 families, and the school is reaching out to them.

Parent Workshops. The school will be hosting workshops beginning mid-November to introduce parents to the state mandated shift to the Common Core curriculum. The goal is to familiarize parents with the curriculum, so they know what skills their children are expected to master in each grade and what they can do to support their learning.

The Board asked whether the Administration thinks parents have a sense of what Common Core is and Mr. Ferguson answered “not yet.” We need to keep building their knowledge. He went on to explain that the content is mostly the same but the line of questioning about the content is different. The school will re-align its quarterly assessments to adapt to the new standards, and is using new math text books.

Online Learning. The school has sent out a mailing about the various online learning options that children can use at home. It will also set up computers at the school in order to be able to do demos for parent. A workshop will be set up where 25 laptops can be used by the attendees, and demos will also be available when parent/teacher conferences are held. The PTO parent liaison, Patricia McSharry has been extremely helpful with these efforts, and has even gone to students’ homes to help.

Teacher Evaluations. The requirement to translate Danielson observations into numbers is a big shift and is anxiety provoking for the staff. The Administration expressed its desire to support the teachers through this transition.

Facilities Committee Report - Brian Ferguson

Our landlord, the EDC, has issued a Request for Proposal for expanding the Elementary School building. It hosted a walk-thru and one other organization showed up briefly. Our response is due before the next full Board meeting, therefore, the Board decided to hold a joint Facilities/Finance meeting in the interim. The proposal team has mobilized and has already submitted most required items, and is busy securing others such as letters of support from the community, and from a bank that has vetted the deal, and has committed to provide a loan to OWNCS for the project. We are also having an appraisal done to determine market rates to help us better determine and substantiate the lease terms that we will request in the proposal, as well as Real Estate attorney to help us shape the lease terms.

Board of Trustees Business - Jeanette Betancourt

The draft Strategic Plan has been circulated to the full board and feedback is requested.

Per our By-Laws, we will have our Annual meeting at our next regularly scheduled Board meeting in November. We will start one hour before the Public Meeting to hold an Executive Session to review Board membership, vote in Officers, and review Committee membership.

The OWN Foundation has informed us that they have officially changed their name to the “Open School Project.” The Board agreed that we should review the final version of the agreement between OWNCS and the Foundation to see if any language needs to be amended pursuant to the name change.

Education Committee Report - Sara Geelan

The Committee discussed the school's progress report grade. This year OWN earned a C. The details of the report show the school earned an A for student performance but a C for student progress between 2011 and 2012. In doing their calculations for the overall progress report grade, student progress accounts for 60% of the score compared to 25% for actual student performance. Mr. Ferguson reminded us that the state has been moving towards the concept of growth and this plays a huge factor in how OWN gets graded.

The reports show that we made some improvements in the area of ELA, but our drop in Math was damaging to the overall score. We also made some progress with ELL, SPED and got some extra points from our Regents scores. Mr. Ferguson wrote and distributed a message to parents explaining the significance of the grade.

Mr. Ferguson noted that this year we are faced with a huge challenge, since the state tests will be focused more on Common Core standards. The math and ELA coaching team will be working hard to help us prepare our students, but we will look to members of the science, social studies, and arts team to support their efforts in improving student achievement and progress. We should expect several years of adjustments and re-alignment of curricula.

The Committee also reviewed the data analysis that the school is doing. The data is being provided to teachers to see how their kids did and to help them identify needs for the group..

Development Committee Report - Mark Crusante

The Committee is reviewing and editing an Annual Report that should be ready for the full Board by the December meeting. The Board asked about the distribution plan. The school will print 250 hard copies to go to elected officials, community partners and as follow-up to prospective foundations, with a e-version on our website

Mr. Crusante has approached several potential partners for an application for the federal Race to the Top grant, but no one has expressed any interest as yet. He's conducting research to identify other prospective partners.

About 45 alumni attended Alumni Day at the school, and spoke to current middle schoolers about the high school application process.

Mr. Crusante is also supporting the EDC proposal process by seeking letters of support from school partners such as YAI and NYJTL, plus Community Board 1.

Joint Audit & Finance Committee Report - Steven Solinsky

Annual Audit

The audit of the 2011-2012 fiscal year has been completed and a draft audit report has been submitted to the Board for review. As required, the Audit Committee met with Joseph Blatt of

Loeb and Troeper to review the report. We are happy to say that OWN has received a clean report with no qualifications. The auditors have included a management letter with minor recommendations regarding best practices. The Committee had some questions about the information in the letter which the auditors are reviewing. They will issue a final version shortly.

The Balance Sheet contained in the report is a snapshot of the school's finances on the last day of the fiscal year. It is very similar financially to the prior year report. Our cash position is slightly higher, and we have the accustomed balances due on school lunches reflected in our accounts receivable balances.

The Statement of Activities reflects that per pupil funding was frozen, and that since our student body was somewhat smaller (due to the graduation of a "bubble year" with additional students), our overall income was lower. This drop in income was anticipated and well managed by the school.

Expenses by type show that compensation a significant portion of our overall expenses. Salaries were up somewhat over the prior year, and benefits costs were down reflecting savings realized by switching vendors, without reducing benefit levels.

In sum, there was nothing in the report that was different from the unaudited year-end financials that we previously reported on.

The Audit Committee has asked Loeb & Troeper to review the way the school is distributing MetroCards to staff to see if there are ways to simplify the process.

Faculty Report – Jayme Pabon

- Ms. Pabon recently explained her role as teacher representative to the faculty and solicited questions. One teacher asked if there was any way to alter the charter to prioritize the attendance of faculty children. Unfortunately this is not possible. The state has mandated specific preferences that we cannot override. Nevertheless, the Board asked this Ms. Pabon let the faculty know that we welcome their questions.
- The Middle School after school program with the YMCA is up and running, providing a combination of homework, study hall and fun.
- The school's first volleyball team had its first game of the year.
- Spirit Week and picture day are planned.
- The school is sponsoring a new Circus Day activity with the help of many parent volunteers, thanks to the PTO.

PTO Report – Sarah Espanol

- The PTO is hosting a Talent Show on December 8.
- The PTO sponsored a clean-up day on a recent weekend at "Bear Park" a few blocks from the school, to help make it a more pleasant place for the school to bring students to at recess. They had a very good turn out; pictures have been posted to the school website.

- The PTO is looking into sponsoring, and possibly fundraising for an after school robotics program.
- They have sought feedback from parents and kids on the new lunch vendor. The kids are happy with the change and are taking and eating salad and not skipping meals.
- A nutrition consultant was the invited speaker at the last PTO meeting.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and carried, the Trustees:

RESOLVED to approve the results of the Audit Report subject to a pending correction to footnote 4 regarding rent commitments.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and carried, the Trustees:

RESOLVED to approve the August Board meeting minutes.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees