

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
February 25, 2014
7:00pm-9:00pm

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Our World Neighborhood Charter School was held on Tuesday, February 25, 2014 at 7:00 pm at the Middle School of Our World Neighborhood Charter School (31-20 37th Street, Astoria, NY 11103).

The Trustees Present were:

Jeanette Betancourt, President
Steven Solinsky, Vice President and Treasurer
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary
Richard Bogle
Sarah Espanol
Charles Guadagnolo

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
Lisa Edmiston, Principal
Karinne Montaque, Business Manager
Jayme Pabon, Teacher Representative
Olubunmi Emigli, PTO Co-Chair

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

Director's Report - Brian Ferguson

Admissions & Enrollment

- The re-enrollment process is complete. Three children left the school in the last month because their families moved out of state. Mr. Ferguson explained that any move out of district is not counted in the school's attrition numbers.
- The admissions process is proceeding apace, and so far we are on track to reach similar numbers to last year's. The admissions office has been very busy and has remarked on strong interest in the Middle School, especially from families who were initially concerned that the local K-5 charter school Growing Up Green might not be allowed to establish its own middle school.

NY State Testing Preparation and Related Issues

The Executive team has been having conversations regarding the burden of double-testing on 8th grade honors students who have been taking both the 8th grade state exams for Math and Science and the high school Regents Exams. For the first time, SUNY has ruled that students who take the Regents will be exempt from taking the 8th grade state test.

The two exams require the teacher and students to follow two separate curricula in order to prepare for both exams. This has been tough on the students and the teachers who have offered after-school programs. Pedagogically, the administration feels it would be beneficial to prepare for a single test and focus on one curriculum.

It's important to recognize, however, that this choice carries some risk vis a vis the perception of our school's performance. While the state is exempting 8th graders who take the Regents from taking the 8th grade exam, it is not clear whether the city will certify the Regents test as an appropriate substitute and include the results in the data that inform our NYC progress report grade.

SUNY will include the Regents results so we can be confident that we will meet the accountability goals of our charter. However, nearly 30% of our 8th grade students are expected to take the Math Regents exam, and these are typically our strongest performing students. If their scores on the Regents are not included in the city's data, it will give the appearance that our overall math scores have gone down, and our NYC school grade will likely go down, which can have a disproportionate impact on public perception of OWNCS.

If we decide that it is best for the education of our students that they take only one exam, we should be prepared to communicate clearly about the negative impact this might have on our school report card, especially as it pertains to the politically charged atmosphere surrounding the current dialogue about charter schools.

After-School Update

As reported last month our new 21st Century Learning Center funded after-school program has started, and enrollment figures are strong. Due to timing issues surrounding the administration and start-up of the grant, the "mid-year" evaluation is due only 3 weeks into the program. Fortunately, the evaluators have been involved from the earliest stages in the work plan, so all that is required at this point is for them to conduct a site visit.

Staffing

Our 8th grade ELA teacher resigned mid-year to accept an unexpected opening in a school closer to her home. This is a big loss for the school as she was a strong teacher, and the timing is not great as the students are nearing their state ELA exam. She came to OWNCS as a novice and over time became both a Danielson and a Common Core expert. We are currently working with a substitute who is getting lots of support from existing teachers and our reading specialist to ensure a smooth transition.

Education Committee Report - Brian Ferguson

Mr. Ferguson reported on the growth and shifting priorities of the technical department. The school now has more infra-structure in place and is shifting its focus towards integration. As mentioned before our fifth and sixth graders will be field testing the NY state online exams, and we are trying to prepare teachers and students for the shifts in the curriculum. The teachers are very pleased with the support that they are getting from our new hire Joseph Alcruz. He is a former teacher with strong, forward-thinking ideas. At the Middle School, Alcruz is meeting

with groups of teachers to review their tech plans together. Then they test the plans in their classrooms and bring the results back to the group to review and tweak.

The school is continuing in its efforts to assess our student's online readiness and access to technology. We've determined that the percentage of students with computers at home is higher than anticipated, but have learned that we need to ask more nuanced questions to understand how much they use technology, and how they use it. For instance, do they have internet access on a mobile phone or on a computer? Is it a shared computer? Where is it located? Is it in a shared space? When the students say they use social media, what platforms are they referring to?

Development Committee Report - Josh Adland

- As reported last month, we received a signed contract for the 21st Century Learning Center award over the Winter Break, and as we've heard, activities have started. The Business office now has to project how to use the total year's allocation when we were only able to start mid-year. Unlike many federal grants, we do not bill against actual expenses, rather we will receive quarterly funds and must document their dispersal. We also need to come to an agreement with contractors who were lined up from the start, but were not able to provide services until the launch date.
- We will be filing an extension to file our annual 990.

Joint Finance & Audit Committee Report - Steven Solinsky

2nd Quarter Financial Report

The Committee reviewed the unaudited financial statements for the quarter ending December 30, 2013 which were distributed to the full Board, and confirmed that revenues and expenditures are in line with projections, with only minor variations. A review of the balance sheet shows a strong cash position. It was noted that we are holding a large sum in one account that exceeds the FDIC insurance limit, therefore the committee has asked the Business office to look into a service that could buy Certificates of Deposit at different institutions.

401(k) Plan

- Each year, OWN allocates 6% of salaries as a contribution to our employees' retirement savings plans. Employees are eligible to participate after their first three months of employment. Our plan design calls for a 3% employer contribution regardless of employee participation, plus a dollar for dollar match of up to 3% of salary. Since not all employees contribute to the plan there is usually some money left in this line item which is distributed as a discretionary contribution to all eligible employees regardless of participation as a percentage of salary. This year when the Business office prepared the calculation for the annual discretionary contribution, the amount to be disbursed was larger than expected. Upon closer examination, we discovered that a group of staff had not started receiving contributions after their first three months of employment. The business office is in the process of doing a careful review of staff inappropriately categorized as ineligible against their hire dates, to make sure we don't omit eligible staff from receiving the annual distribution. It is likely that additional corrective action will need to be taken.
- When a plan has more than 100 participants, it must conduct an annual audit of the plan. OWNCS has fewer than 100 employees, but former employees who leave money in the plan are

also considered participants. As a result, we have now passed the 100 participant threshold and will need to budget for an annual audit going forward.

Faculty Report – Lisa Edmiston

- The basketball team won its game today.
- The school has just launched the “INOK” or “It’s Not Okay” program designed to encourage students to speak out when they see something that is not okay. The initiative is being led by the Middle School guidance counselor, Kelly Whitney, and each grade will decide on what behaviors are important to them.
- Ms. Edmiston’s mother will be attending the next Middle School assembly in honor of Black History month to speak about her experience as the first black stewardess in the US. She will talk to the students about her persistence in repeatedly taking the airlines to court, and her experiences flying to the Jim Crow south where she went to hotels with her white colleagues, sparking riots.

PTO Report – Olubunmi Emigli

- The PTO donated \$750 to support the Cabaret night.
- The Tech department made it’s presentation at the monthly meeting, and an anti-bullying workshop is being planned for sometime in March. They will work with OLWEUS in order to tie into the work the school is already doing, including the new INOK program.
- A K-2 fundraiser is planned for April – it’s expected to be fun even if it doesn’t raise a lot of money.

Board of Trustees Business - Jeanette Betancourt

- The new date for the Strategic Planning meeting is Saturday, March 1 from 9:30 to 1:00 at the Elementary School. The Board is reminded to re-read the Strategic Plan in preparation for the meeting.
- The review of the Executive Director is in process by the Executive Committee.

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

RESOLVED to approve the 2nd Quarter Financial Report.

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

RESOLVED to approve the bank reconciliations for October, November and December 2013, per the recommendation of the Finance Committee.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees