

Board of Trustees Meeting  
Tuesday November 18, 2014  
Our World Neighborhood Charter School  
Elementary School  
36-12 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Astoria, NY 11106

**The Trustees present were:**

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

**Also present were:**

Lisa Edmiston, Principal  
Karinne Montaque, Business Manager  
Yvette Strachan, Executive Assistant  
Jamey Greco, Special Education Director

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

---

***Board Business***

***Jeanette Betancourt***

Ms. Betancourt called the Board's attention to the minutes of the October meeting which had been circulated ahead of the meeting. She also informed the attendees that Steven Solinsky had agreed to remain on the Board pending the recruitment of a replacement.

***Director's Report***

***Lisa Edmiston***

***Health & Nutrition***

Ms. Edmiston distributed the School Wellness Policy and reported that the administration is doing a holistic review of its policies and practices in this area. The school is continuing the Fresh Food Friday competition among classrooms started last year, and put the school lunch program out to bid. The selection process focused primarily on quality in addition to cost. She asserted that the school had not been talking about the Wellness Policy enough recently and would like to do more to promote it. Attendees recalled that the policy was created with the involvement of a parent committee, and it

was agreed that it would be a good idea to seek support from the PTO again to place a renewed emphasis on teaching healthy choices.

### *General Business*

The Middle School Science Night was a huge success. Representatives from the Museum of Natural History were in attendance along with the NY Wild who brought a traveling exhibit of animals. Ms. Edmiston reported that the ELA and Math teachers at the Middle School are supporting science across the curriculum, and that former OWN teacher Ms. Rossello is overseeing and developing the science curriculum at the Elementary School. She also noted that the NYC Department of Education has introduced a new Social Studies Scope and Sequence to align with the Common Core.

The school's Support Services Team hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for the students and families it serves, catered by a local restaurant. *(get more info from Jamey)*

### *Report Cards*

Elementary School parents will receive the new Elementary School report card for the first time this week at Parent/Teacher conferences. The report cards have been revamped to align with new state standards and to incorporate OWN's Pillars of a Positive Community in order for the report cards to serve as a comprehensive reflection of the school. Number grades (1-4) have been replaced by descriptive words. Parents received a letter ahead of time to advise them of the change and will also receive email and voicemail messages via School Messenger tonight.

The Trustees asked whether the school was considering changes to the Middle School report card as well. Ms. Edmiston responded that there were no immediate plans since the Middle School students have different needs, particularly in regards to high school applications. The current format includes grades and comments. Upon reflection, however, she said there could be aspects to enhance. The Board agreed that a full change is not required, but that it would be worth exploring how to integrate the Pillars into the Middle School format as well.

### *Professional Development: Instructional Rounds*

As previously reported, OWNCS is participating in a network of schools that has formed groups to make class room visits ("instructional rounds") to help each school analyze and make progress on a particular "problem of practice." The leader in charge of the visits to OWN is Paula Bevin, who has made significant contributions to the Danielson method of teacher evaluations. She is a gifted mentor, and Ms. Edmiston noted that this is an incredible opportunity for professional development for the school.

### *Finance Committee*

#### *Steven Solinsky*

The final version of the audit, incorporating one anticipated change (as previously reported) was circulated to the Board prior to the meeting.

The annual management letter from our auditors was also circulated. There were three topics presented for the Board's consideration.

#### *Corporate Credit Cards*

"As part of our audit, we reviewed the School's process for reviewing and paying corporate credit card invoices. Best practices require an individual in a higher position than the person expending the funds review and approve those expenditures. Therefore, we are recommending that all executive expenditures, including credit card bills, should be reviewed by a member of the Board in order for this process to be meaningful."

Mr. Solinsky pointed out that this is a common issue at non-profit organizations. He reported that an improved process has already put in place. Mr. Ferguson will ensure that a credit card report that itemizes and allocates expenses and is backed up with receipts will be prepared on a monthly basis for review by the Finance Committee on a quarterly basis.

#### *Construction in Progress*

"As of June 30, 2014 the School has approximately \$980,000 in construction in progress related to the feasibility project to renovate the elementary school. During the year the School was notified that the project will likely not occur. We recommend that the School review the probability of the project and possible write-off of this asset."

The Board has discussed this possibility in the past. We will continue to explore options for realizing the construction project. In the meantime, the Board asked the Business Office to see whether there are components of the expenditures to date that could still be capitalized.

#### *Segregation of Responsibilities*

"The current size of the School's accounting staff does not allow for the proper segregation of duties to ensure adequate internal control. This is not unusual, but management should be aware of this condition and realize that the concentration of duties and responsibilities in a limited number of individuals is not desirable from a control point of view. Under these conditions, the most effective controls lie in management's knowledge of matters relating to the operations of the Business Office."

Mr. Solinsky reminded the Board that this issue is raised every year in our management letter, and is common for an organization with our budget size. He noted that some activities are performed by Mr. Ferguson's Executive Assistant and that the Finance Committee is confident that Mr. Ferguson approves invoices so is abreast of Business Office activities. Furthermore, in addition to reviewing quarterly financial statements, the Finance Committee reviews monthly bank account reconciliations and sees a list of every check written against those accounts. Therefore, the Executive Director and the Board are taking appropriate measures to mitigate this risk.

A formal response to the management letter was prepared and submitted by the Business Manager, Karrine Montaque.

### *Grants Compliance*

Mr. Solinsky noted that the Business Office is still working on some reports to comply with the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Community grant. He recommended that the school consider adding a Grants Compliance position depending on the development plan for the school.

### *Education Committee*

#### *Sarah Espanol*

### *Health & Nutrition*

Ms. Espanol also commented on the School Wellness Policy. She recalled how positive the process was. It took a lot of focus and effort to gather parent voices and develop the policy, and there was excitement at rolling it out. At first the school was quite strict about enforcing it, so she's happy to hear that there's a renewed effort to remind the community about it and to honor the work that went into it. In addition to the programs Ms. Edmiston mentioned earlier, Ms. Espanol reported on the Move to Improve program in the Elementary School classrooms. In addition to 3 Physical Education classes per week, the school has introduced the new best practice of holding Recess before lunch each day. She also reported that the school nurse is having conversations with the parents of overweight children to make them aware of the health risks.

### *Technology*

The technology staff presented at the last Committee meeting. An additional laptop cart with 28 laptops was added to the Middle School this year, so there is now one cart per floor, and all students have a regular tech period. All of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms now have Smart Boards, like the Middle School, and there are one or two in the lower grades.

Last year, OWN participated in a pilot for administering state tests on computers and was one of the few schools who had sufficient bandwidth and a stable wi-fi network to administer the tests. We don't yet know how the students performed. Ms. Espanol reported that the school is considering whether or not to continue with the pilot testing. Up until now, OWN has volunteered which has placed us in a good position to learn more about the tests, but there are concerns that the additional tests place a burden on the students and take time away from regular classes. However, in future, the state may force schools to take a turn on pilot tests so we may not have a choice.

Upon discussion the Board reconfirmed the schools commitment to protect children from excess pressure and to always keep the whole child in mind. Concerns were raised that if there are too many tests the students may disengage, and that testing displaces opportunities for learning. The Board agreed that if the school decides (or is forced) to continue with pilot tests we should share information about the purpose and benefits of the pilots to our families. Perhaps if everyone understands that these are practice tests it will take some pressure off. When asked about children who might need extra support, Ms. Greco responded that there are accommodations for children with special needs and

described some of the measures taken. The Board went on to discuss ways to provide support for students who don't need special accommodations but who nonetheless feel anxious about tests by building activities into our Health & Wellness program to help them cope with stress. Ms. Edmiston reminded the Board that the school is already taking measures in this regard. It has introduced exercise at the start of the day, and there is food available in home room on testing days to give students the best chance of succeeding. The Education Committee will continue to follow this discussion.

The schools tech team went on to outline several programs which are highlighted on the school website. They include:

- Links to “super sites”: Educational Games and Resources;
- Reading A to Z (“RAZ”) Kids: includes an e-book library; and
- Resources: such as typing programs to prepare students for keyboard testing.

Over the past few years, students have been using Google Drive to comment on each others' work. Now, some teachers are also experimenting with Google classroom. They send assignments to students, students submit assignments, and teachers comment and grade the assignments all on Google classroom.

### ***PTO***

#### ***Sarah Espanol***

As the Board representative to the PTO, and the organizer of the PTO Auction, Ms. Espanol reported that the auction raised \$11,000 this year. In addition to the fundraising, it served as a wonderful event for building community. There were several spontaneous testimonials from parents who are new to OWN that were quite inspiring. The Board thanked Sarah for all her work organizing this successful event.

Ms. Espanol also reported that the PTO would like to see a laptop cart (valued at approximately \$27,000) and a SmartBoard (\$5,000) in each classroom. They plan to approach our city council representative to discuss funding opportunities.

### ***Resolutions***

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

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes for the October, 2014 Board meeting as presented.

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

**RESOLVED** to accept the Independent Auditor's Report on Financial Statements and Supplementary Information for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014.

### ***Executive Session***

The Trustees met in Executive Session to conduct Board business. A report on their business follows:

### **Annual Review of Board Terms and Election of Trustees**

The Board conducted its annual review of board terms, which are as follows:

Expiring 2014  
Rich Bogle  
Maura Fitzgerald  
Steven Solinsky  
Expiring 2015  
Jeanette Betancourt  
Charles Guadagnolo  
Expiring 2016  
Melissa Chin  
Sarah Espanol

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

**RESOLVED** to re-elect Rich Bogle for a term ending in 2017  
**RESOLVED** to re-elect Maura Fitzgerald for a term ending in 2017  
**RESOLVED** to re-elect Steven Solinsky for a term ending in 2017

### **Annual Election of Officers**

As per OWN by-laws, officer positions are elected each year at the annual meeting.

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

**RESOLVED** to elect Jeanette Betancourt as President;  
**RESOLVED** to elect Melissa Chin as Vice President;  
**RESOLVED** to elect Maura Fitzgerald as Secretary; and  
**RESOLVED** to elect Charles Guadagnolo as Treasurer.

### **Annual Review of Committee Assignments**

The Board discussed the mandate of the Finance Committee and agreed to broaden its mandate to Finance & Administration, including Human Resources. The Committee will develop a charter and annual calendar to share with the full Board. The Trustees proceeded to review the Committee assignments and appointed Committee Chairs as follows:

#### **Education**

Melissa Chin, Chair  
Jeanette Betancourt

Sarah Espanol

**Finance & Administration**

Charles Guadagnolo, Chair

Maura Fitzgerald

Steven Solinsky

**Audit**

Maura Fitzgerald, Chair

Charles Guadagnolo

Steven Solinsky

**Development**

Jeanette Betancourt, Chair

Richard Bogle

Sarah Espanol

**Facilities**

Richard Bogle, Chair

Melissa Chin

Maura Fitzgerald

Charles Guadagnolo

**Executive**

Jeanette Betancourt, Chair

Melissa Chin

Maura Fitzgerald

Charles Guadagnolo

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees