

Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, December 15, 2015
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
Elementary School
36-12 35th Avenue, Astoria, NY 11106
7:00 pm

The Trustees present were:

Jeanette Betancourt, President
Melissa Chin, Vice President
Charles Gaudagnolo, Treasurer
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary
Rich Bogle
Olubunmi Emigli
Sarah Espanol

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
LaToiya Revell, Vice Principal
Jamey Greco, Special Education Director
Mark Crusante, Director of Development
Lucille Ranchor, Admissions Coordinator
Yvette Strachan, Executive Assistant
Anna Evenhouse, PTO Co-Chair

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

Board Business

Jeanette Betancourt

Ms. Betancourt asked for an update on the revised timing of our replication application so the Board can plan its next Strategic Planning Meeting to support the process. This led to a discussion of whether we might also want to apply for a grant from the Charter Growth Fund which supports CMOs created by people of color. The Board and Administration are leaning towards creating an Education Corporation, so we would need to carefully consider whether the grant would add value to our endeavor or not. The Board agreed to create a working group to review the parameters of the grant, and conduct a final analysis of the pros and cons of a CMO vs. an Education Corporation with support from the Lawyers Alliance. The working group would then make a recommendation to the full Board by early January to allow time to submit an application by the February 10 deadline should we choose to apply. Ms. Betancourt and Mr. Bogle from the Board and Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Crusante from the administration volunteered to participate in the working group. In light of these conversations, it was agreed to postpone the Strategic Planning Meeting until the Spring.

Finance & Administration Committee

Charles Guadagnolo

Mr. Guadagnolo reviewed the lost revenue resulting from attrition and the steps taken to improve enrollment. He also noted that a preliminary analysis of enrollment numbers indicates that even if we were to aggressively over-enroll in future years, we would still remain under the charter cap.

In addition, Mr. Ferguson reported that the new health insurance plan had been rolled out, and that while any big change like this is bound to cause some anxiety, the new electronic enrollment process was very clear, succinct and more efficient than in the past.

Facilities Committee

Rich Bogle

Mr. Bogle reported that the consultant the school has retained to make faster progress on creating and analyzing financial models for the Lifetime Building project will be officially on board tomorrow. In the meantime, the committee has worked with Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Montaque to clearly outline the questions that we would like to see addressed in time to set forth a plan to a potential funder, RVB Capital, in February.

Education Committee

Melissa Chin

Ms. Chin reported that the committee's agenda this month focused on the Guidance and social/emotional programming at OWN. They reviewed staffing, the children's needs, and how roles and responsibilities have evolved to adapt to those needs. They noted that the staff had an unusually high load of ACS cases this year which reduced their ability to run special programs such as peer mediation. As a result, they are wondering whether they have enough staff. However, in light of the fact that our Dean of Students is new to the school and needs time to review the lay of the land, the committee and staff agreed that they should wait until the end of the year to decide on future plans.

The Committee encouraged the administration to clearly articulate and document the very good work the school is doing in this area. They feel that OWN is known for being academically strong and we've documented where our students are going to high school, for instance, but that we could also benefit from highlighting the strong social/emotional support we offer, even as we continue to solidify and further embed the programs in our curriculum and other offerings.

A Board member asked how recent political issues, terrorism and hate speech in the world at large are affecting our Muslim students and what we can do to address these issues in our community. The attendees reflected on the fact that while this may be the pressing issue of the day, we need to focus on broader messages of diversity and inclusion, and to always take care to embed the school name – Our World Neighborhood – into our culture. Mr. Ferguson commented that the timing of our review of the STEM and Social Studies curricula is ideal since we can take the opportunity to ensure the

Pillars, and the pillar of Respect, in particular, are aligned to and built-in to our curricula. We can use this moment in time to reevaluate, define what it means to teach these values, and commit to doing an even better job going forward.

When asked what our curriculum change will look like, Mr. Ferguson responded that in addition to aligning to the Common Core with its focus on inquiry and critical thinking, they are seeking to make the curriculum more relevant globally via intentional project-based work that can be responsive to emerging topics. For instance, when studying the water cycle, students can do a project tied to a global issue such as the recent drought in Ethiopia.

Development Committee

Jeanette Betancourt and Mark Crusante

Ms. Betancourt and Mr. Crusante reported that they were initially excited to review a new grant from NYSED for an extended school day, but they learned that it is not open to charter schools. There may be legal issues involved so Mr. Crusante has brought it to the attention of SUNY CSI. There is still no word as to whether the 21st Century Learning Center grant will be renewed.

The Committee reviewed the rough cut of the new marketing video created with OWN alumni attending the High School for Careers in Film and Television and recommended using the footage somewhat differently by creating smaller units for specific audiences.

Mr. Crusante reviewed the shift in timeframe for the replication application and the revised deadlines. Ms. Betancourt noted that he had drafted a strong piece that can form the basis for consistent messaging about the replication that will be circulated to the Board. The next step will be to develop a plan for circulating the message to our broader community.

PTO

Anna Evenhouse

Ms. Evenhouse announced that the PTO has given \$200 to each teacher, or a total of \$10K, for their classroom wish lists. She noted that this is their biggest annual expense. She reported that the Read-a-thon is in progress, and that the final tally for the annual auction was almost \$14K. Future plans include pushing to re-start the free Saturday arts program.

Respectfully submitted by:
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees