

Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, September 22, 2015
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
Middle School
31-20 37th Street, Astoria, NY 11106
7:00 pm

The Trustees present were:

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

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
Lisa Edmiston, Principal
LaToiya Revell, Vice Principal
Jamey Greco, Special Education Director
Anna Evenhouse, PTO Co-Chair
Manu Bhagavan, Parent; Prospective Board Member

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

Board Business

Jeanette Betancourt

Ms. Betancourt reviewed plans for our next Strategic Planning meeting on Saturday, October 3. She also reminded all Board members to sign updated Conflict of Interest forms circulated by Executive Director, Brian Ferguson. She informed the Board that the forms for our newest board member, Olubunmi Emigli had been submitted to SUNY CSI for approval. Ms. Betancourt also introduced a potential new board member, Mr. Manu Bhagavan who attended the meeting to learn more about the work of the board.

Director's Report

Brian Ferguson

Staffing

Mr. Ferguson reported on progress made towards filling vacancies. In particular, he noted that the administration had conducted promising phone screens of candidates to teach Spanish, but that they were not satisfied with the quality of the candidates for our open ESL positions. He explained that this is traditionally a difficult position to fill,

especially because we would prefer to find a teacher with dual certifications in SPED and ESL which is a less common combination.

Enrollment & Admissions

Mr. Ferguson stated that enrollment efforts are moving along. The school currently has 720 students enrolled and is aiming for 750. As is often the case, efforts are hampered by a lack of information. For instance, some families moved out of state, but did not inform the school so we could not plan for their absence by inviting a new student to take their seat. Instead, we are only finding out now, via a request for student records from the new school. Though we cannot formally remove students who do not show up for school from our lists until September 29, the school is sending out invitation letters in anticipation of openings.

Audits

Fiscal year 2015 audits are wrapping up, and the school lunch audit report is due to be completed by September 30. The audit of the 21st Century Learning Center grant will be sent to the Department of Education for review, who will in turn send it to NYSED before it comes officially to OWN. However, a draft has been shared that includes a request that we issue a separate Handbook and Employee Manual to the after school program instead of relying on the ones from our regular school day program.

Mr. Ferguson also reported that implementing partner SAYA will appoint a different site director, and that NYJTL is struggling to hire enough staff so we had to decrease enrollment. He noted that we still don't know for sure whether the program will be extended for another year, and no time line has been announced for the decision. In the meantime, a lot of families want to join the program, and we are taking care to prioritize services for ESL families and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch per the requirements of the grant.

Assessments and Testing

The Board entered into a spirited discussion regarding the opt-out movement, its relationship to the abrupt roll-out of the Common Core curriculum, and how OWN can communicate with its community to explain that we need 95% participation in state testing in order to meet our accountability goals as a charter school. All present concurred that we need to openly share all the positive ways in which we use assessment data to meet the needs of each one of our students, and to develop and constantly improve our curriculum.

Finance & Administration Committee

Charles Guadagnolo

Mr. Guadagnolo reported on the Finance Committee meeting held on September 16, 2015 (see attached minutes). In addition to the audits which were already discussed, the agenda focused first on a review of benefits including compliance requirements and finding the best ways to control costs while offering a solid competitive package to our staff.

The Committee also conducted an annual review of policies. These are in good shape, though the Business Office expressed a desire to update their handbook to reflect new donor requirements. The need for an Open Meeting protocol was also noted, and Brian Ferguson volunteered to draft one for the Board to review.

Mr. Guadagnolo also noted that our Business Manager is hard at work updating financial models that incorporate various simulations to inform decision making at our Strategic Plan meeting.

The Committee asked for the Board's input on whether or not to make a discretionary distribution to eligible 401(k) plan participants. Ms. Fitzgerald explained that if we did not make the distribution, we would still be fulfilling our promises to staff because all eligible employees (anyone with 3 months of service at the school) would continue to receive a 3% employer contribution regardless of whether they are saving funds themselves. And they would all continue to be eligible for a 3% match designed to encourage them to save. However, the unclaimed match funds would revert to the school instead of to the employees and could help balance the budget. However, it was also pointed out that an accrual had already been made for this expense for FY15 and the books have already been closed. Therefore, the Board agreed to make the distribution tied to FY15 but to reconsider it going forward.

Education Committee

Sarah Espanol

Ms. Espanol reported that the Committee is reviewing the school Wellness Policy and the Student Handbook, and that they are reviewing and updating their annual calendar.

Ms. Espanol and other attendees went on to share the thinking of the Committee and the administration in regards to the possibility of introducing Integrated Collaborative Co-Teaching (ICT) to our SPED program next year. They plan to examine the question from all sides including the fiscal and programmatic implications, what grades to start at, and most of all, how can we best support our students. The Committee expects to make a recommendation by January or February with plenty of time to incorporate any plans into future budgets.

Development Committee

Jeanette Betancourt

Ms. Betancourt reminded the attendees that we will dedicate significant time to development at our upcoming Strategic Planning meeting which will lead to a calendar and action steps for this committee.

Facilities Committee

Rich Bogle

Mr. Bogle also noted that Facilities will be a key agenda item at our upcoming Strategic Planning meeting and requested a committee call before the meeting to develop a framework for a useful discussion and to ensure we will have all the information required to make decisions at the meeting.

PTO

Anna Evenhouse

Ms. Evenhouse reported that the PTO is off to a great start. She was pleased to see how many Kindergarten families have contributed the \$50 pledge request and described a full schedule of pending events including a community building picnic on September 26, a presentation by the Education Committee at the regularly scheduled PTO meeting on October 2, and a Read-a-thon on November 2. A fundraising auction is also in the works and Ms. Evenhouse requested items for the auction.

Resolutions

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

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the August 25 Board of Trustees meeting as presented.

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

RESOLVED to approve a discretionary distribution to eligible 401(k) plan participants tied to the fiscal year 2015 budget, per the calculation of the Business Office.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees