

ORACLE CHARTER SCHOOL

888 Delaware Avenue

Buffalo, New York 14209

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Thursday, August 3, 2017

Board Co-Chairs Jacqueline Hollins and Ramone Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM.

The following individuals were present:

Trustees – Jacqueline Hollins, Ramone Alexander, James McLeod, Thomas Bailey, John Whitty, Susan Hakala, Evin Conyer, Vivian Logan, Divitta Alexander.

Administration/Teaching Staff - Janet Barnes, Ellen Connell, Chantele Thompson, Rebecca Moraites, Beth Brown, Nicole Donogher, Shawn Knight.

Labor Relations Specialist, NYSUT-Paul Conklin.

Legal-Steve Polowitz, by phone.

The following *Trustees* were not present –Bryan Donohue, Ron Stewart, Maureen Ludwig.

Guest (prospective new Trustee) – Pastor George Nicholas.

Consultants –Ken Peterson, Melissa Brinson; (via Skype) LaVonne Sheffield, Kevin Quinn.

UNION – STEP III GRIEVANCE HEARING

The Oracle Charter School Instructional Staff Association (OCSISA) initiated a grievance on June 28, 2017 with a Step I informal meeting held on June 27. A Step II formal hearing was held on July 11, 2017 with the Head of School, who denied the grievance. OCSISA demanded a Step III Hearing before the Board of Trustees. Nicole Donogher, Beth Brown, and Paul Conklin were on hand to represent and present OCSISA's position. The nature of the grievance is the following: "Administrator completed Danielson observations without completing training. Administrator did not abide by NYS department of Education guidelines and is violation of 8.30-2.9."

After considerable discussion and clarification about terminology, precedence, types of training, and chronology, as well as review of documentation provided by OCSISA, including a proposed MOA to remedy the situation, it was decided that the Board would share a memo on the subject the Board received from legal counsel with the Association and notify the Association of its decision on the grievance by email within the CBA required 10 day time frame. The hearing concluded at 6:35 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon motion by James McLeod, seconded by Jacqueline Hollins, the Board unanimously voted to approve the July 6, 2017 Regular Board meeting minutes.

CONSULTANT PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION

Ken Peterson and Melissa Brinson were present in person, and LaVonne Sheffield and Kevin Quinn were available via Skype to answer questions and to discuss how to structure efforts moving forward.

- A. They answered questions and commented on the CSI July 7, 2017 school evaluation report based on its May 16-17 site visit to OCS.
- B. They offered suggestions on how the school leadership team and Board should craft the renewal application due August 15, 2017, stressing that ideas and narrative must come from the school, augmented by relevant exhibits, which have mostly been assembled. They noted that the renewal application document must speak to deficiencies, with a specific action plan to both address the deficiencies and to hold the leadership team accountable with a timeline. OCS must become an organization that meets its academic goals.
- C. Ms. Sheffield noted that the school must recruit talent to teach to a higher standard.
- D. Mr. Quinn reported in some detail on the processes that must be in place if OCS is asked to close, noting that the Board must be intact through the process and that it is an onerous process.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATES

Janet Barnes, Head of School Report:

- A. Introduced Shawn Knight, new Human Resources Officer for OCS. Mr. Knight provided the new hire list and provided perspectives on the challenges of hiring qualified staff in the wake of competing attractive offers made by other charter school and the Buffalo Public Schools. He noted that there are still vacancies in science, English, and language. In response to Board interest in ensuring that all teachers close any gaps in certification, Mr. Knight and Ms.

Barnes noted that all teachers are expected to be certified or on a clear path to certification.

- B. Announced that 3Assistant Head of School candidates were interviewed, on July 14, 2017 and met with the Search Committee, the leadership team, and with a group of teachers. The leading candidate was offered the position but subsequently declined the offer.

Ms. Ellen Connell – Director of Student Life Report:

- A. Noted that the school has formulated a plan for homeless/displaced students professional development will be scheduled regarding requirements for and how to report to Child Protective Services. Ms. Connell also wants to institute training for teachers working with students undergoing trauma.
- B. She and Trustee Divitta Alexander commented on the completed Code of Conduct, which was distributed electronically to the Board in preparation for this meeting. Discussion emphasized that the Code of Conduct must be made available to each student and parent at the beginning of each school year, and parent signature should be required to acknowledge receipt and acceptance. The Code of Conduct will be available electronically, and a shorter, annotated version consistent with the full version, will be created and made available. There was also discussion about making the Code of Conduct available in multiple languages, as needed.

Ms. Chantele Thompson – Director of Community Relations and Outreach Report:

- A. Noted that an interview was conducted with an ABLE Ameri-corps member, and OCS is waiting to hear if the candidate is a good match.
- B. In light of Board discussion at the July meeting, Ms. Thompson explored other options for college preparatory training for OCS students beyond the College Simulation Experience, and she found the “Overcoming Obstacles” curriculum. This will be offered to all students as an elective course, which will eventually be a requirement. Ms. Barnes has also proposed hiring a college preparatory teacher who will teach “Overcoming Obstacles” course. This course comes with multiple modules, including a service learning component. Ms. Thompson presented a helpful chart on existing college preparatory learning and future plans, indicating augmented activity at all grade levels.

BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES

- A. Academic Excellence Committee: There was no update. Ms. Hollins asked Ms. Barnes for a new Dashboard template at the next Board meeting.

- B. Audit/Finance Committee - John Whitty noted that the OCS financial statement for the period ending June 30, 2017 was still in process. Mr. Witty noted that the year-end actual as compared to the budget is extremely close. The Finance Committee will meet on Monday, August 7, 2017 to review the Five Year Budget and re-look at financial incentives to recruit and retain high quality teaching/leadership talent at OCS. The issue of teacher recruitment and retention, with transparency in hiring, is a high priority for the Board.
- C. Governance Committee – Tom Bailey, Chair, noted that George Nicholas was interested in becoming a Trustee and was in attendance. His paperwork will be submitted to CSI. Susanna Schenk submitted her resignation from the Board as of August 3, 2017. The Committee has a good lead for a replacement, Dr. Ramelli Coates, who is an Academic Advisor at the University at Buffalo. Mr. Bailey asked for scheduling date preferences for the annual Board Retreat.

BOARD BUSINESS

- A. Mr. Knight presented a request for input on a new provider for health insurance for school personnel. He will circulate the information from the potential providers via email on August 4, 2017.
- B. Ms. Barnes presented a proposal to change allowance for timing of paid leave for fulltime employees. It was decided that the matter would be referred to legal counsel to determine how best to implement the changes.
- C. Upon **Motion** by Jacqueline Hollins, seconded by Vivian Logan, the Board unanimously approved adoption of the Code of Conduct as presented to the Board earlier in the meeting
- D. Upon **Motion** by Tom Bailey, seconded by Vivian Logan, the Board approved the status of Oracle Charter School as the sponsoring organization for the Law and Government Career Explorer Program for the 2017-18 school year. Ms. Divitta Alexander abstained, and the rest of the Trustees voted unanimously in favor of the motion. The Board would like to have the program incorporated into the curriculum if possible.
- E. Upon **Motion** by John Whitty, seconded by Evin Conyer, the Board voted unanimously to accept the organizational chart with changes as proposed by the Head of School.
- F. At 8:40 PM upon motion by Jacqueline Hollins, seconded by Evin Conyer, the Board unanimously agreed to move into Executive Session to discuss personnel issues. At 9:00 PM James McLeod moved to come out of Executive Session. John Whitty seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved.
- G. Upon **Motion** by Jacqueline Hollins and seconded by Judge James McLeod, the Board unanimously voted to deny the OCSISA Step III Grievance presented at the beginning of the meeting.

Upon motion by Evin Conyer, seconded by James McLeod, the Board unanimously agreed to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 PM.

Next Board meeting will be held on Thursday, September 7, 2017 at 6 PM.

Susan R. Hakala

Secretary to the Board of Trustees