

Ascend Public Charter Schools  
Meeting of the Schools Board of Trustees  
July 24, 2019 6:30 pm

Location  
Brooklyn Ascend Charter School  
205 Rockaway Parkway  
Brooklyn, NY

Meeting minutes

**Trustees in attendance**

Stephanie Mauterstock (chair), Amanda Craft (secretary), Shelly Cleary (treasurer), Kwaku Andoh (trustee), Christine Schlendorf (trustee), Nadine Sylvester (trustee), Oral Walcott (trustee)

**Ascend staff in attendance**

Pascale Artamin, Krystalyn Azikiwe, Inan Barrett, Luisa Batiz, Dellianna Burrows, Miltiade Delille, Marsha Gadsden, Janna Genzlinger, Betsy Goldfarb, Crystal Lane, Erica Murphy, Nancy Olisma, Susan Pollock, Dylan Schaffer, Brandon Sorlie, Naomi Tataille, Zelda Washington, Carl-Anthony Watson

Stephanie called the meeting to order at 6:44 pm.

**I. Public comment**

Zelda Washington, school director of Bushwick Ascend Lower School, urged the board to be proactive in speaking to school directors, and to have diversity, equity, and inclusion be an ongoing conversation.

Luisa Batiz, director of talent outreach at Ascend Learning, raised concerns about officers living by the values of Ascend and requested board action in holding them accountable.

Krystalyn Azikiwe, dean of students at Brownsville Ascend Middle School, expressed that many people in the community feel they are not heard, asked for actions to restore faith within the community, and backed Luisa's call.

Inan Barrett, dean of instruction at Bushwick Ascend Middle School, agreed with the previous speakers' comments.

Crystal Lane, school director at BAMS, noted that school directors asked for diversity, equity, and inclusion work to be made a focus two years ago, and requested that Ascend declare itself an anti-racist organization, and that the ACS board connect with the AL board.

Millie Delille, teacher at Central Brooklyn Ascend Charter School, thanked the board for holding the session, and echoed the calls for accountability.

**II. Public comment update**

Brandon provided a response to Camille Cox-Betancourt, who attended the June meeting and raised concerns about communication between school staff and parents, specifically related to students' academic performance, at Canarsie Ascend Middle School. Brandon reported that he

had relayed these concerns to Tracy DeOliveira, the school's director, and Marsha Gadsden, managing director of middle schools, and discussed with them plans already underway to ensure that parents have direct access to the school's online grading portal, where they can access their child's grades as they are entered.

Stephanie responded to Janna Genzlinger, Ascend's managing director of leadership development, who spoke at the June meeting about the need to focus on inclusion of Ascend staff of color in Ascend's and the board's ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. Stephanie again thanked Janna for raising this point with the board, noting that the board planned to receive an in-depth update on the status of the DEI work, and that the board planned to discuss ways to better facilitate school director's engagement with the trustees, so as to open clearer lines of communication between school staff and the board.

### **III. Approval of board meeting minutes**

Stephanie presented to the board the minutes of the June 18 meeting and the minutes of the June 18 executive session.

Kwaku moved to approve the June 18 board meeting minutes June 18 executive session minutes. Nadine seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

### **IV. Financial report**

#### **a. School financial reports**

Shelly presented the May 30 financial reports and accompanying narrative, highlighting major findings (including year-end expense forecasts, status of loan covenants, and SY 2018-19 end-of-year enrollment) and areas of focus (including SY 2019-20 enrollment challenges).

### **V. School and network updates**

#### **a. Diversity, equity, and inclusion**

Susan provided the trustees with a detailed update on the status of Ascend's ongoing DEI work, including the scope of work for DEI consultant Angela Cobb. Susan presented a timeline of current and planned action items and deadlines for the coming months, noting the status of various items such as listening sessions and the launch of the Equity Steering Committee application for Ascend staff.

Brandon then provided the trustees with an update on the rollout of this work to school staff, which included numerous adjustments to Leader Institute, which began on July 8. He noted in particular the challenge of balancing a need to carry out this work intentionally, thoughtfully, and correctly, with the desire to act with urgency and take decisive action to mitigate and repair existing harm.

There followed an in-depth discussion among trustees and Ascend staff about these dynamics and how best to move forward with the work, with a particular focus on ensuring the stability of the schools and their staff as they prepare to launch school year 2019-20, and how the board can best support and oversee this work as it continues in the schools.

#### **b. SUNY Accountability Plan updates**

Dylan briefed the board on proposed updates to Ascend schools' Accountability Plans, as proposed by the SUNY Charter Schools Institute, which include formally adopting Plans for Ascend's three new schools, and adjusting language in the Plans for Ascend's existing schools to align them with current metrics used by SUNY CSI in their assessment of the schools' performance. He noted that these updates would not materially impact Ascend's Accountability Plan reporting or performance status.

Amanda moved to approve the Accountability Plans for each Ascend school as presented; Christine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

With no objection, Stephanie proposed tabling other school and network updates to the August meeting, to allow the board adequate time for executive session.

## **VI. Board matters**

### **a. SY 2019-20 board meeting design and structure**

Stephanie led a discussion among trustees and Ascend staff about how the board could best engage school directors—both during and outside of regular board meetings—going forward. Ascend officers agreed to work with the trustees to devise a plan of action for trustee engagement with the schools.

## **VII. Executive session (minutes recorded separately)**

At 8:30 pm Amanda moved to enter into executive session to discuss two personnel matters related to school leadership at Bushwick Ascend Middle School. Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

## **VIII. Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting**

At 8:50 pm Amanda moved to exit executive session and to resume the open meeting; Christine seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

Amanda moved to appoint Miatta Massaley as school director of Bushwick Ascend Middle School, effective immediately. Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

## **IX. Board matters (continued)**

### **a. Reelection of trustees, election of officers, committee appointments**

In order to allow trustees to have more time to consider their roles on the board in SY 2019-20, Stephanie proposed tabling the discussion of trustee membership in SY 2019-20, election of officers, and committee appointments until the August meeting of the board, without objection.

Stephanie moved that the trustees vote to extend all trustees' and officers' terms of service until the August board meeting. Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Without objection, Stephanie proposed tabling the remaining board matters until the August meeting.

X. Executive session II (minutes recorded separately)

At 9:05 pm Kwaku moved to enter into executive session again to discuss a personnel matter related to a member of the staff of Ascend Learning. Amanda seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

XI. Adjournment

At 9:47 pm Amanda moved to adjourn the meeting; Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Name:

Date