

**Ascend Public Charter Schools
Meeting of the School Board of Trustees
December 18, 2019
6:30 pm**

Location:
Canarsie Ascend Lower School
9719 Flatlands Avenue
Brooklyn, NY

Meeting minutes

Trustees in attendance

Kwaku Andoh (trustee), Shelly Cleary (treasurer, via videoconference), Amanda Craft (trustee, via videoconference), Glenn Hopps (trustee, via videoconference), Stephanie Mauterstock (chair, via videoconference), Nadine Sylvester (trustee, via videoconference), Oral Walcott (trustee, via videoconference)

Ascend staff in attendance

Andy Epstein, Brandon Sorlie, Carl-Anthony Watson, Shani Foster (via teleconference), Sophie Kramer, Susan Pollock

Kwaku called the meeting to order at 6:38 pm.

I. Public comment

No members of the public offered comment.

II. Public comment update

At November's meeting, Tanasia Lewis, a teacher at Bushwick Ascend Middle School, expressed concern that her school needs additional teachers, particularly substitute teachers and those who can support students with IEPs. Andy responded that four additional positions have been greenlighted at the school, which will meet the needs of students with IEPs.

Tanasia also requested Ascend Charter Schools board meetings be scheduled earlier in the evening to better accommodate teachers' schedules, and that town halls allow staff to express their opinions more broadly. Amanda suggested that three board meetings a year be scheduled for 4:30 pm, and all board members agreed. Brandon shared that the officers will consider open-ended town halls in planning for next year's sessions.

III. Approval of board meeting minutes

Kwaku presented to the board the minutes of the November 12 meeting. Stephanie moved to approve the November 12 board meeting minutes. Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. Financial report

Shelly presented the October 31 financial reports and noted they are identifying which expenses are driving the negative variance compared to budget. Andy is also in conversation with SUNY regarding the lease coverage ratio, which is falling slightly below loan covenant requirements. Efforts are underway to bring the ratio into compliance. Shelly and Andy also discussed construction and enrollment at Lefferts Garden Ascend Lower School.

V. School and network updates

a. Schools

Brandon shared strategic changes in second grade ELA test preparation and its connection to observed and anticipated third grade ELA benchmark performance. Brandon also presented on math benchmark exams, for which there were three standout schools: Brooklyn Ascend Middle, Bushwick Ascend Middle, and Central Brooklyn Ascend Lower. Algebra I was rolled out to all of eighth grade this year, and projected performance across the network is strong. Brandon also shared key takeaways from the school leader survey, which include interest in technology for adults and students, and continuing to improve network supports for the schools.

b. Student enrollment

Carl reported that the network is currently overenrolled, though five schools remain underenrolled. Carl also shared there has been a significant increase in the number of applications received compared to the same time last year, with the new lower schools in particular receiving significantly more applications. An array of recruitment initiatives is underway to support these applications.

c. Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Susan presented on the equity steering committee's progress in refining Ascend's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism and the intention to share this language with the board in the new year. Susan reported on the current plan for short- and long-term organizational priorities and structures to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism at Ascend.

d. CEO search

Nadine, who also serves on the AL board, provided an update on the permanent CEO search, which is in its discovery phase led by DRG. The AL Board has met with several candidates for the interim CEO position, which will be filled in the new year. The AL Board is also diversifying and growing its capacity.

VI. BACS 6: greenlighting discussion

Susan and Stephanie reviewed Ascend's greenlighting rubric as part of an analysis of whether Ascend is prepared to open the BACS 6 charter school in fall 2020. Following a robust discussion, the trustees decided to request a planning year from SUNY CSI in the interest of the organization as a whole and of the new school.

Amanda moved to vote in favor of requesting a planning year for BACS 6. Kwaku seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

VII. Board matters

a. SD-Trustee buddy initiative

Sophie reviewed the expectations for the school director and trustee buddy initiative, and the trustees expressed enthusiasm for carrying forward this important initiative.

b. Nominating committee

Sophie provided updates on the two recent nominating committee meetings, during which committee members identified targeted skills for new board members and began to build a pipeline of candidates.

c. Media requests

Kwaku reminded trustees that they are not obligated to respond to media requests regarding Ascend Learning, which is governed by the Ascend Learning Board.

VIII. Executive session (minutes recorded separately)

At 8:26 pm Kwaku moved to enter executive session to discuss litigation matters. Nadine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

IX. Exit executive session; resumption of open meeting

At 9:12 pm Nadine moved to exit executive session and to resume the open meeting. Amanda seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

The school director of Brooklyn Ascend Middle School is seeking an expulsion hearing, and Stephanie designated Brandon the hearing officer for the proceeding.

X. Adjournment

At 9:15 pm Kwaku moved to adjourn the meeting; Oral seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

Name:

Date