

**Ascend Public Charter Schools**  
**Meeting of the School Board of Trustees**  
**Aug 19, 2020**  
**6:00 pm**

Location:  
Dial-in

Meeting minutes

**Trustees in attendance**

Amanda Craft, Christine Schlendorf, Glenn Hopps (treasurer), Oral Walcott, Shelly Cleary (treasurer), Stephanie Mauterstock (chair) (all via videoconference)

**Ascend staff in attendance**

Aaron Obrochta, Abigail Brown, Anjya Thomas, Brandon Sorlie, Brenda Smith, Carl-Anthony Watson, Christina Pena, Cora Neville, Crystal Lane, Gabriela Gallegos, Hamna Mela, Lauren Kinrich, Leyde St. Leger, Lisa Margosian, Livia Angiolillo, Michael James, Nancy Alexander, Nicole Duckett, Raji Kalra, Richard Tucker, Sophie Kramer, Sulafa Bashir, Tanneka McIntosh, Thomas Vitola (all via teleconference or videoconference)

Amanda called the meeting to order at 6:07 pm.

**I. Public comment**

There was no public comment.

**II. Public comment update**

Livia Angiolillo, the principal of Brooklyn Ascend High School, responded to Danya Shneyer's comments from the August 19 meeting. She explained how the SY20-21 schedule for the high school was designed to accommodate the new staffing structure and to ensure students with IEPs receive their services. Section size and composition were built to ensure no pod of 15 students has more than five students with mandated IEP services. In addition, all sections across all core content areas have two teachers, one of whom is coached by the Department Chair and one of whom is directly by the Student Services Coordinator to ensure targeted professional development. Students with mandated support classes will receive their services during daily intervention classes. We are also in the process of securing all related services through approved DOE agencies, and counseling will be provided by BAHS clinicians.

Carl Watson responded to Danya's queries around fire drill protocols and air circulation. Per New York State guidelines, all safety drills will happen in a

manner which mitigates for possible COVID-19 exposure. For instance, masks will be worn throughout the drill and staggered evacuation drills will ensure classrooms evacuate separately. We have updated our procedures manuals accordingly and will train staff and students upon our return to our buildings. In addition, heating, cooling, and ventilation systems at all Ascend facilities meet all CDC requirements. Where applicable, bolts have been removed from windows to ensure optimal airflow in classrooms. Our ventilation systems have been upgraded with the highest rated filters that our systems will accommodate. We have also increased filter change frequencies.

Brandon Sorlie responded to Cora Neville's comments from the August 19 meeting. The role and responsibilities of the mentor teacher have not changed from previous years, but we raised the annual stipend for this role. The grade team leader responsibilities are somewhat increased, as such we raised the associated stipend to match the stipend of a mentor teacher. In regards to the Ascend schools board, there are two parent representatives, and an Ascend employee may not sit on the board as this would constitute a conflict of interest because they are paid by Ascend. Brandon shared that we have taken significant steps around DEIA as recommended by the Equity Steering Committee. This year, training for staff will focus on being anti-racist and leaders will focus on how to lead with equity. Beyond training, we have set goals for our DEIA work aligned to the strategic objectives drafted by the Equity Steering Committee that include work related to talent selection processes, family engagement, curriculum and more.

### **III. Consent agenda**

Stephanie presented to the board the minutes of the August 19 meeting. Amanda moved to approve the minutes. Shelly seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Last week the Trustees participated in a session led by the Equity Steering Committee to explore Ascend's DEIA commitment language. Stephanie thanked the Committee for their work and excellent presentation. The Trustees reviewed the commitment language again, and Amanda moved for the ACS Board to adopt Ascend's commitment language to be a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist organization. Christine seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

### **IV. Financial report**

Shelly shared discussion from the finance committee meeting. They reviewed the audit plan and process with the auditor, as well as the June 30, 2020 year-end draft financials. Raji suggested how to refine the financial narrative and board package to focus on a strategic summary. Raji reminded the Trustees that the

State has still not announced what the per pupil revenue will be this year, and so we remain conservative with our spending. In addition, New York State Senate aid has not been granted to Ascend, as they are holding on to the funds until the federal government determines its aid package.

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

Brandon reviewed key elements of Ascend's reopening plan and the decision to begin the year with all grades engaged in remote learning. A working group is exploring how best to support kindergarten students with remote learning, and we will provide grab and go meals to all students learning remotely. Our technology team worked with our vendors to quickly produce and image computers, with an anticipated delivery date for student laptops prior to the first day of school.

Carl reviewed the health and safety protocols that will be in place when we return to in-person learning. He then discussed the inputs that went into the decision-making process. We spoke to families and staff via town halls and surveys; we reviewed city and state guidance; and we adhered to our guiding principles. Families expressed wanting more synchronous learning, and many staff members shared they plan to seek an accommodation due to their own high-risk health status or that of a family member with whom they lived.

Anjya provided several instructional updates. Leader institute was successful, and teacher institute kicked off Monday and was grounded in DEIA. Diagnostic assessments will be administered to all students upon the start of school, as we don't yet know the effects of COVID-19 on learning last year. Assessments will be administered throughout the year, regardless of whether we are in-person or remote.

Carl updated the Trustees on student enrollment, and Aaron shared an update on school staff hiring and retention projections.

## **VI. Strategic imperative imperatives and goals: SY19-20 in review**

The executive team shared how Ascend landed with respect to its SY19-20 goals and the leadership team's reflections. Lisa remarked that the five strategic imperatives were pursued during a year of significant change.

Carl shared that Ascend had many successes this year across six areas: DEIA, systems and structures, people support, accountability, Ascend's pivot to remote learning, and school performance. For example, the network committed to becoming more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist; more inclusive decision-making processes were developed and an extended leadership team was created; organization-wide guiding principles were written; performance

management activities were launched to ensure all employees received supervisor feedback, midyear and end of year evaluations; we successfully and quickly pivoted to all-remote instruction with 92% attendance; and the AP test passing rate at the high school increased by 24 percentage points.

Carl then reflected on areas the leadership team wishes we had done better this year, such as filling key network vacancies in people support and DEIA, continuing to work on accountability and ownership across the organization, and establishing a stronger collaboration between the schools and curriculum teams.

Brandon shared that Ascend met or almost met 73% of its goals, with ¼ of goals directly affected by COVID, resulting in their elimination, modification, or their no longer being measurable.

#### **VII. Approval of Ascend's SY20-21 plan for SUNY**

Sophie presented Ascend Charter School's plan for SY20-21 which was submitted to SUNY and addressed all facets of reopening and operating in the coming school year. Christine moved to pass the Ascend plan as presented in the pre-reads; Amanda seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

#### **VIII. Adjournment**

At 5:14 pm, Stephanie moved to adjourn the meeting; Glenn seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Name:

Date: