Trustees in attendance
Shelly Cleary (Co-treasurer), Amanda Craft (Trustee), Glenn Hopps (Co-treasurer), Stephanie Mauterstock (Chair), Nadine Sylvester (Trustee), Oral Walcott (Trustee) (all via videoconference)

Ascend staff in attendance
Sulafa Bashir, Jordan Bean, Dellianna Burrows, Tracy DeOliveira-Lewis, Shani Foster, Ms. Francis, Janna Genzlinger, Angelica Harper, Raji Kalra, Lauren Kinrich, Sophie Kramer, Crystal Lane, Lisa Margosian, Anastasia Michals, Aaron Obrochta, Elizabeth Sawicki, Brandon Sorlie, Leyde St. Leger, Anjya Thomas, Zelda Washington, Carl Watson, Billie Quigley (all via video or teleconference)

Stephanie called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm.

I. Public comment

There was no public comment.

II. Public comment update

No public comments were offered at the prior meeting.

III. Consent agenda

Stephanie presented to the Board the minutes of the August 19 meeting. Glenn moved to approve the minutes. Amanda seconded and the motion was carried unanimously.

IV. Finance report

Shelly reviewed key elements of the income statement and balance sheet with the Trustees. She also noted that Ascend received CARES Act Funding and was allocated $370,000 more than was budgeted. Part of Ascend’s student laptop purchases have been applied to this funding. Shelly and Raji discussed these laptop expenses, which were a significant investment by Ascend to ensure that each student has a laptop during remote learning—a critical dependency for synchronous learning—and Raji explained to the Board the decision to capitalize this expense. Raji also spoke to the Board about her drafting an investment policy, which she will bring to the Board for its review.

V. School and network updates

Dellianna shared an update on remote, synchronous learning, which is in its second week after a September 8th launch. Attendance is 92%, an accomplishment which is due in part to the significant staff effort to provide each student with a laptop. Our youngest scholars are learning to use online classrooms, and while this remains a challenge, teachers have observed considerable growth in the short time school has been in session.
Dellianna reminded the board of Ascend’s phased reopening approach. We are operating all-remote in phase 1, and phase 2 will begin October 19th. Conversations are in progress about what form that will take, and Brandon shared some of the major considerations for this decision, such as the state of public health and family and staff perspective. Ascend is on track to communicate a phase 2 decision to families by October 2.

Carl updated the Trustees on current student enrollment data and the recruitment strategies used this summer. Aaron shared with the board that almost all Ascend schools are fully staffed and discussed the talent team’s strategies to fill remaining vacancies. Aaron reviewed projected staff retention numbers, noting that retention is higher this year than last school year.

Lisa shared with the Board an update on Ascend’s DEIA work. The Equity Steering Committee is reconstituting itself as an Advisory Committee and looking for new community members to participate. Brandon provided an update on the competency model project and staff DEIA trainings. The director of strategic initiatives, DEIA has been hired and will begin next week.

VI. SY20-21 strategic imperatives

The executive team shared with the Trustees the organizational strategic imperatives for the year, as well as the supporting goals. Lisa noted that student learning and remote support of scholars and teachers, as well as the DEIA work, remain Ascend’s key focus this year. Anjya highlighted that Ascend will build a school health dashboard, and Brandon spoke to the ways in which Ascend will actualize its commitment to DEIA, including identifying metrics to inform our DEIA progress and revamping the social studies curriculum through the lens of equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. Raji spoke to the goals of building a financially sustainable model, and Carl shared the ways in which Ascend will continue to strengthen the network office systems and structures that support the functioning of the schools.

VII. Nominating committee

Stephanie reminded the Board that the nominating committee has been focusing on identifying Trustees with experience in DEIA, as well as college access and persistence. The committee is advancing a slate of candidates, with the goal of presenting candidates for the Board’s consideration in October.

The nominating committee recommended increasing the size of the Ascend Charter Schools Board of Trustees from nine to eleven, given the growth of Ascend in recent years and the interest in adding new perspectives and skillsets to the Board. The Board discussed this proposal and Oral motioned for a vote to increase the fixed number of Trustees to eleven, as written in the resolution presented to the Board in the board package. Nadine seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

VIII. Adjournment

At 7:22 pm, Oral moved to adjourn the meeting; Glenn seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by: