

The Bronx Charter School for Children
Board Meeting Minutes – December 21 2023 4:30pm

A meeting of The Board of Trustees (The Board) of The Bronx Charter School for Children (TBCSC) was held on December 21, 2023 at 4:30pm.

The following members of the Board were present: Denise Alexander (Executive Director), Paul Libretta (President,) Jane Rosen (Vice President), Bruce Greenwald (Treasurer), Ken Blomster (Secretary) Nicole Schmidt, Michele Smith and Maria Aveledo

Absent: Joanne Carris, Mark Samuel

Guests included: Tina Maiuolo (Elementary School Principal), Bonnie Halloran (Middle School Principal), Candace Manzano (Director of Operations), Emily Conrath (Director of Development), Anastasiya Rosebaum (Director of Finance), Tara Cox (Director of Education) Maxine Grant (Assistant to the Board)

The Meeting was called to order at 4:35pm by Paul Libretta, Board President

APPROVED: The minutes from November 16, 2023, were approved without changes.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Paul announced that Joanne Carris will be taking a leave of absence from The Bronx Charter School for Children Board of Trustees. Her absence is expected to last approximately six months and will not count against the quorum. The attorneys for The Board have been notified of Joanne’s leave of absence and approved her request.

Executive Director’s Report

Denise Alexander

Denise introduced placing a timed limit of approximately 10 minutes on presentations so that Board meetings can be more streamlined, more efficient, and adhere more closely to the agenda. This is an approximation, and decisions which require more in-depth discussions will always be given the time they need. Denise reviewed the following 1) Reorganization; 2) Partnerships and 3) Renewal Site Visit.

- 1) The Executive Leadership Team has evaluated what TBCSC looks like in the current environment, and has instituted a freeze on hiring and spending to stem the financial losses due to under-enrollment. The freeze extends to hiring no additional teachers and administrative staff as well as curbing additional expenses.
- 2) The partnership with South Bronx High School (SBHS) is underway, and John Clementi of SBHS and Denise will create joint marketing materials for dissemination in late January. They will increase street canvassing, participate in each others’ open houses, have joint appearances at and cooperate on professional development. Denise reiterated that SBHS does very well, and the students are well taught, well cared for and impressive

in their communication and behavior. Their test scores and job placement statistics are impressive. The School offers stellar college preparedness and mental health support for their students as well. The SBHS also has a robust internship and mentoring program with a variety of institutions across multiple sectors. These internships offer students opportunities for learning during school years and employment following graduation. Companies providing internships include The Bronx Zoo, Magic Johnson Corp., various banks and law firms. And the community partnerships provides students with access to professionals in training who help students with various counseling and advice.

The Board wanted to know how selective the High School was in their admission. The Board of Education may have those numbers, which we can seek out for the next meeting. The High School does have an enviable retention rate of 95% for 9th through 12th grade.

Philosophically, The SBHS is similar to TBCSC. They share similar student-led learning techniques, emphasize small class size and project-centered learning.

- 3) Renewal Site Visit - The only corrective action from the SED was regarding fingerprinting. This appears to be as a corrective action for a lot of schools this year. A change in the guidelines regarding fingerprinting of staff members has triggered notifications in the system regarding fingerprinting. SED's digital log of fingerprinting can now more easily identify those who are not in the system. Moving forward TBCSC will be in compliance with all fingerprinting guidelines.

The pandemic caused a shift in reporting absences. We are awaiting communication from SED regarding changes to how Schools should report absenteeism. PASEK will assist with redrafting the report for the State.

Principal Reports:

Bonnie Halloran

Bonnie identified The Goals of the Middle School to High School application process:

- 1) Assist scholars in understanding the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and the world of work.
- 2) That scholars will participate in an examination of their personal characteristics leading to career evaluation that can guide their future approaches to High School choices.
- 3) That scholars will acquire the skills to investigate High Schools, the world of work in relation to self and make informed decisions.

All Eighth graders have applied to the public High Schools of their choice thus far. 60 percent applied to schools in Manhattan, which is encouraging because we try and get scholars to apply to schools outside the local area. Parents were involved throughout the process with personalized conferences with Mr. Marchan. This year, eight students took the Specialized High School Test, four students took Test for Admission into Catholic High schools (TACHS). Six scholars are doing an introductory Mathematics Algebra 1 Regents course, to determine if they can be made ready for the examination at the end of the year. Even if they are deemed not ready the classes will continue as it will assist them in their preparation for this examination in High School. Applications for Charter Schools begin in January. And several students applied to the Coding High School, which has different application deadline as well. Most students will probably be notified of their admission status in February. Some Charter Schools, which typically notify students in April are beginning to notify students earlier.

Interest surveys to determine the future goals of scholars to begin the High School process begins in January for our Seventh graders. This will be followed by choice of a small sampling of possible High schools. Essays on what scholars will be looking for in High School and what we can do to prepare for them will be coordinated with the Humanities department. The High School process will be discussed in advisories during the last trimester. We are piloting a new mentorship program in the spring with select companies such as Winston and Strawn, LLP.

Tina Maiuolo

Bonnie and I continue to align our strategies to ensure our Elementary School scholars are ready and prepared for our Middle School. In the Elementary School, we are focusing on how to increase retention of our students, so they make it to the Middle School. Our goal is to keep parents and scholars happy and satisfied. We are doing more parent check-ins, because we have found it is a quick and easy way to address issues before they escalate into problems. We are working on helping our teachers develop their communication skills, so they know when and how to communicate with parents and to increase touch points and engagement. When scholars leave, it's most often because parents are unhappy. The more satisfied the parent, the more likely the students are to remain at the school.

Committee Reports:

Academic Report

Maria Aveledo – The primary focus remains the development, monitoring and implementation of The Academic Achievement Plan. Learning Walks have been great for our teachers. We have collapsed the Seventh grade classes from 3 classrooms into 2 classrooms with a co-teaching model. We continue to work with our teachers to help them analyze data so they can do the best for their scholars.

Beginning in January, 60 scholars (already identified by their teachers) will participate in Math Camp. This Before or After School endeavor will help students master the principles of mathematics they need to succeed. We are trying to identify some form of incentive for the teachers or others who will be giving their time to teach students outside of the regular school hours.

Tara Cox

We are in the midst of transitioning to digital reporting of assessments. This will make problem areas quicker and easier to identify, as well as students who are struggling. We are also instituting support for early readers at grade level for students identified by their teachers.

Development Committee

Emily Conrath

We continue to expand our development efforts. We are strategizing on developing political connections to better position ourselves for grants from Congress by increasing our visibility. PASEK is helping us with strategies to increase our political connections.

We are awaiting decision on the NYSED \$941,000 three year grant, and should know in a couple of weeks. They've told us that Grant requests are increasingly required to show evidence based research and the adoption of strategies based upon research and evidence, so Tara has helped to put together some information responsive to that request, and we have provided it.

We are requesting from FEMA in-kind donations such as cameras for the hallways, as there is a higher likelihood of getting donations in this form. We have already raised \$22,000 through our Annual Campaign, with an average donation of \$500, so we are in a good position to meet our target by June.

Finance Committee

Bruce Greenwald

A draft of the financials was just recently circulated to Board members. Please take the time to review it carefully. We expect the budget deficit to narrow and possibly close, due to the spending freeze currently in place. We are running quite lean, but expect the year to proceed without further hiccups, and at no loss in resources to our students.

Governance Committee

We are waiting to hear from **Shiksha Kaushik**. Paul notified her of the Board's acceptance, and we expect to hear from her soon.

The Board Manual has been recently updated. Our attorneys have incorporated Conflict of Interests changes, as mandated by the State. Please take the time to review the manual.

Facilities Committee

Bruce Greenwald

We are continuing to work on 629 Cortlandt, and there will be another site visit within the next four weeks. At that time, we should have a more reasonably confident view of whether or not the facility will be ready in time for the upcoming 2024-2025 school year. The decision will be made around January 31, 2024. We will try to avoid changing locations mid-year to prevent any disruption to our students.

The Board decided to continue conversations regarding converting the lease to a condo lease, which would result in several million dollars in savings over the next 30 years. As real estate prices continue to trend upwards in The South Bronx, this is the most cost effective way to insulate TBCSC from rapidly increased prices. Motion approved to continue looking into conversion of the current lease to a condo lease.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43pm.

The next meeting will be held on January 18, 2024 at 4:30pm.

Happy New Year Everyone!