

# DISCOVERY CHARTER SCHOOL

## **Board Meeting Minutes**

**December 19, 2013**

A Board of Trustees Meeting was held on December 19, 2013, at the Bamba Bistro, 282 Alexander Street, Rochester, NY 14607.

**Trustees Present:** Daniel Aureli; Barthelemy Koumassou; Thomas DaRin; Joseph Martino; Delmonize Smith; Sara Varhus; David Vigren

**Trustees Excused:** Scott Adair; Donna Dedee Doyle; Grace Tillinghast

**Also Present:** Joseph Saia, School Director; Steven Polowitz, Attorney; Valerie Nolan, Independent Consultant

### **1. Call to Order**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. at the conclusion of the Annual Staff Holiday Gathering and it was determined that a lawful quorum was present.

### **2. Proof of Public Notice of Meeting**

Public Notice was provided in the Messenger Post. A notice listing the address of the meeting was also posted on the school's front door, reminding people of the location of the meeting.

### **3. New Trustees**

**a. Seating Scott Adair.** A *Resolution (#140)* seating Scott Adair as a voting trustee was moved by Mr. Aureli, seconded by Mr. Martino and unanimously approved.

**b. Seating Thomas DaRin.** A *Resolution (#141)* seating Thomas DaRin as a voting trustee was moved by Mr. Aureli, seconded by Ms. Varhus and unanimously approved.

**c. Election of Treasurer.** Mr. Vigren placed the name of Mr. Adair in nomination for Treasurer and asked for further nominations. There were none. Mr. Vigren called for a vote on the slate and Mr. Adair was unanimously elected Treasurer.

#### **4. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**

A motion to approve the minutes of the November 21, 2013 meeting was made by Mr. Martino, seconded by Mr. Aureli and unanimously approved.

#### **5. Expeditionary Learning**

Ms. Stephanie Burke, School Designer, Expeditionary Learning (“EL”), presented EL’s evaluation of the school’s implementation of EL practices and principles at the close of its second academic year. She noted that the target score of 66 was substantially exceeded with a score of 88. Where scores were low for particular practices, she indicated that those practices are intentionally targeted for years 3 and 4. She highlighted that Discovery remains on a path toward becoming a highly implementing EL school.

In answer to a question asking what EL is doing to help the school achieve higher scores on State tests, Ms. Burke stressed that it takes time for a school to be “highly implementing” and data shows that “highly implementing schools” score very well on state tests across the country. She also noted that the first cohort to enter the school at the Kindergarten level will not take NYS tests until the school’s fourth year of operation. That event should be a truer test of EL’s effectiveness as other cohorts coming to the school during year 1 had part of their instruction elsewhere.

#### **6. Expansion Committee Report**

Mr. Martino indicated that an in-depth discussion had been held with Mr. Munno, Principal at U Prep, a local 7-12 charter school for young men. Mr. Martino also noted that substantial data and information for several charter high schools are now in the hands of the Committee. He indicated that the Committee will be creating a “straw man” model for Discovery based on the information it possesses, with the expectation of presenting the model to the board at its January meeting. The objective is to present something that all can relate to in order to focus attention on issues that need resolution and structural items that may need to be changed to reflect the vision of the board for an expanded school.

#### **7. Board Survey**

The recently completed Board Survey was discussed. The board concluded that there is nothing it should be doing differently. Mr. Smith urged the board to pay particular attention to comparable information a year from now when the survey will be conducted again.

## **8. Director's Report**

Mr. Saia led the board through his report.

**a. Staff Survey.** Results of the recently completed Teacher and Staff Wellness Assessment were discussed. Results compared to last year are similar (and favorable) except that "Job Stress" showed a slight increase. Mr. Saia indicated that this is directly related to low NYS test scores last spring and the clear understanding on everyone's part that scores must be improved. The staff is working extremely hard to do so and the survey reflects the increased stress that has resulted.

## **9. Business Matters**

**a. Enrollment Report.** The December 1 Enrollment Report was examined showing 215 students currently enrolled and a current wait list of 138, heavily weighted to the lower grades.

**b. Lottery and Application.** A *Resolution (#142)* to establish the 2014 lottery date, time, place and process to be followed, as well as the Application for Admission document to be utilized, was moved by Mr. Martino, seconded by Mr. Aureli and unanimously approved. Mr. Saia indicated that it is likely that the school will have approximately 25 seats available in Kindergarten (after sibling preference), with a handful of seats available at each other grade level.

**c. Student Recruiting Plan.** A Student Recruiting Plan to prepare for the 2014 lottery was reviewed by the board.

**d. E2 Services Agreement.** A *Resolution (#143)* to approve a Services Agreement between Education Enterprise of New York ("E2") and the school and to ratify the signing of same by the School Director was moved by Mr. Aureli, seconded by Mr. DaRin and unanimously approved with Mr. Martino recusing himself. During discussion it was noted that the amount the school will be paying for services is below market rate. Mr. Saia indicated that time allocated for IT work in the agreement is already completely

used. Despite “being used up,” time for necessary IT work will continue to be available for the balance of the year. Mr. Smith, who owns a consulting firm, indicated that a similar agreement with his firm would cost the school approximately 2 to 3 times the rate being charged. A schedule of market rates will be in the files of both organizations.

## 10. Finance Committee Report

**a. Key Financial Indicators.** The Key Financial Indicator report was reviewed. It continues to show favorable indicators across all columns.

**b. November Financial Statements.** The board reviewed the November balance sheet, P&L Statement, and a Cash Flow Forecast for the current year. It was noted that the current operating surplus of close to \$100,000 (versus a budgeted deficit of approximately \$85,000 for the year) will be considerably less at the end of the year due to expected personnel expense accruals at year end.

**c. Long Term Financial Plan.** A long term financial plan projecting school operations through Year 8 was reviewed. Key assumptions upon which the projections were made include no expansion of the school, flat per pupil rates, and 2% inflation for key operating expenses (personnel and facility). It was noted that there is a projected deficit in all years with substantial deficits in the later years. A discussion took place on the issues of per pupil rates and expansion of the school. Attention was also drawn to a new forecast of current year financial results (forecasted deficit of approximately \$20,000 versus a budgeted deficit of approximately \$85,000) and a “first cut” budget for next year showing a \$31,000 deficit.

**d. Grant Status.** Ms. Nolan reported that the SUNY Facilities Grant application for \$146,000, that was filed on 9/17, has not been acted upon. It is not known when the evaluating committee will meet.

**e. Check Detail Report.** The Chair called for questions on the November Check Detail Report. There were none.

**g. Checks Over \$5,000.** A *Resolution (#144)* authorizing payments to several organizations was made by Ms. Varhus, seconded by Mr. Aureli and unanimously approved.

## 11. Motion to Move into Executive Session

A motion to move into Executive Session to discuss a confidential legal matter was made by Mr. Martino, seconded by Mr. Smith and unanimously approved.

## **12. Motion to Move out of Executive Session**

A motion to move out of Executive Session was made by Mr. Aureli, seconded by Mr. Koumassou and unanimously approved.

A *Resolution (#145)* ratifying the selection and retainer/engagement of Alexander Geiger, Esq to represent the school as litigation counsel in the Kearney lawsuit and authorizing the board chair to make certain decisions as may be requested by Mr. Geiger was moved by Mr. Aureli, seconded by Ms. Varhus and unanimously approved.

## **13. Old Business**

Mr. Polowitz was asked if he had researched the summer school financing issues discussed at the November board meeting. He indicated that he had done so. His conclusion is that the RCSD, because it pays for busing to sites outside the district for its students to attend summer programs, is acting inconsistently by not paying for busing simply because a student, living in the district, attends a charter school. It was agreed that the Superintendent will be made aware of this inconsistency.

## **14. New Business**

The chair asked for any new business. There was none. (The chair inadvertently neglected to report that Mrs. Tillinghast had asked that it be noted that substantial website and facebook updates are occurring during the year as school “news” is created. Recent examples include posting board meeting dates for 2014, Family Association new officers and meeting schedule, perfect attendance lists, Student of the Week highlights, and many postings on facebook.)

## **15. Motion to Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. DaRin and unanimously approved at 8:15 pm.