

APPROVED



City on a Hill Charter Public School

Minutes

May 2020 Academic Excellence Committee Meeting

Date and Time

Monday May 18, 2020 at 2:00 PM

This meeting took place remotely pursuant to the March 12, 2020 Baker-Polito Administration announcement of an emergency order temporarily modifying the state's open meeting law.

Committee Members Present

Andres Tejada Soto (remote), Karin Wall (remote), Sarah Griffin (remote), Sonya Pratt (remote)

Committee Members Absent

None

Guests Present

Cara Stillings-Candal (remote), Jessica Nix, Jordan Lopez, Kevin Taylor (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance and Guests

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Karin Wall called a meeting of the Academic Excellence Committee of City on a Hill Charter Public School to order on Monday May 18, 2020 at 2:08 PM.

C.

Approve June 2019 Committee Meeting Minutes

Karin Wall made a motion to approve the minutes from June 2019 Academic Excellence Committee Meeting. June 2019 Academic Excellence Committee Meeting on 06-13-19.

Andres Tejeda Soto seconded the motion.

The committee **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Sarah Griffin Aye

Andres Tejeda Soto Aye

Karin Wall Aye

D. Approve April 2020 Committee Meeting Minutes

Karin Wall made a motion to approve the minutes from April 2020 Academic Excellence Committee Meeting April 2020 Academic Excellence Committee on 04-01-20.

Andres Tejeda Soto seconded the motion.

The committee **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Karin Wall Aye

Andres Tejeda Soto Aye

Sarah Griffin Aye

II. COVID-19 & Remote Learning Discussion

A. COVID-19 & Remote Learning Discussion

Karin Wall, Committee Chair, directed the attention of the Committee to the City on a Hill's Remote Learning program due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, and asked Sonya Pratt, Chief Schools Officer, to provide an overview of initiatives to date.

Pratt explained that City on a Hill has used a three-phase process as the COVID-19 Pandemic unfolded. Pratt shared that Phase One began with the decision to close all City on a Hill schools for a two week period out of an abundance of caution. During this time, packets were created for students, in addition take home interim for most courses. City on a Hill administrators mailed over 200 packets, which were available for pick up or download from the website.

Next, Pratt shared that Phase Two, which began after Governor Baker announced the closure of all schools in the Commonwealth through May 4, 2020, City on a Hill implemented Google Classroom and a unified configuration for all classes. School Leaders asked teachers to prepare at least 3 lessons and materials, including opening slide with objectives and instructions, and at least one live aspect (recorded video of teacher or other materials).

Board members probed about student engagement throughout online learning. Pratt shared that engagement is very high in the Upper School, with the majority of students participating and submitting work, though the Lower School is having more trouble engaging students. Pratt shared that engagement has trended higher for older students who have been with City on a Hill for a longer period: Seniors and Juniors are participating at 90-95% and 80%, respectively, whereas only 40-50% of 10th graders and 30% of 9th graders are engaged. These engagements rates are in-line with Boston Public Schools (BPS). Pratt also shared that advisors and School Leaders have been reaching out to families we have not heard from to notify them if their student had not logged into any Google Classroom.

Now that CoaH is in Phase Three, Pratt shared that School Leaders have created a summer school proposal, and other typical services are still being given; mental health counselors are still having sessions and Deans are reaching out to families about behavior. Pratt added that Mayor Walsh's announcement that all BPS students would be promoted adversely affected our engagement, as CoaH is not taking the same approach, and many students do not understand that we are not a "Boston Public" school so they thought Walsh's message applied to them.

Additionally, live classes were considered, but School Leaders have received feedback from teachers expressing concern. Currently, 40% of teachers voluntarily doing live classes once a week, though they are not mandatory for students to attend. Student engagement varies from class to class, though Advanced Placement (AP) class engagement has been very high due to the upcoming AP Test.

Committee members asked to hear more about why classes are not mandatory. Pratt explained that if all teachers were doing them, School Leaders would make it mandatory for students, but since not everyone was doing it, it didn't seem fair to make it mandatory for some students and not others. The Committee further probed as to why management wasn't requiring teachers to hold classes. Pratt explained that in a traditional charter, School Leaders could require teachers to do so. As we are in a unionized environment, management must negotiate changes to working conditions with the union. At the time, CoaH still did not know when school would return, which is when we decided on uploading work. Since the side agreement was signed, Governor Baker announced that schools will not re-open for school year 2019-2020, but given other priorities, management decided to focus on finalizing the overall contract with the Union rather than seeking to renegotiate the virtual learning agreement for the last few weeks of this school year.

Next, Pratt returned to the topic of the proposal for virtual Summer School. The proposal is for four (4) weeks, with live classes every day for 55 minutes. These classes will include daily assignments, as well as mid summer and final summer exams. This would also include Extended School Year (ESY) for students with IEPs

Finally, Pratt shared feedback she has heard from families and students about virtual classes. Students' internal clocks are very off and are struggling to keep a schedule without routine of school; some have missed 12:00 pm classes because it's "too early." Parents have shared that they appreciated live instruction and also have asked why this wasn't the expectation for all classes, as it seemed to help the students whose teachers were holding classes. Pratt affirmed that this feedback will be integrated as the new baseline if we are still at home next school year.

III. Additional Updates & Next Steps

A. SY21 Hiring Update

Next, Pratt shared that School Leaders are running as many normal meetings as possible, including Academic Committee meetings, grade-level meetings, and interviews to plan for next year. Currently, City on a Hill is fully hired for History, Science, and Spanish teachers. Remaining teaching positions include two (2) Special Education Teachers, two (2) Math Teachers, one (1) English Teacher, and one (1) Humanities Teacher. There are currently offers out for both Math Teachers, and School Leaders' goal is to be fully hired by June 30th. For non-academic positions, searches for a replacement for the Director of Specialized Services position and a new position of Director of School Culture and Climate, which will oversee the Deans of Citizenship, parent outreach, and school culture.

Committee members asked if School Leaders were surprised by the results of this hiring cycle given recent year's difficulty recruiting. Pratt shared that the COVID-19 Pandemic has made the hiring world different, and made some teachers who were on the fence about returning stay. School Leaders are also working hard to prioritize hiring now, knowing it is very difficult to hire for math and science teachers.

B. End of the Year Events Update

Then, Pratt shared that she met with a group of seniors virtually to talk about graduation, prom, and other end of year events, and that they were averse to having a virtual one. Students wanted something live and in person, and also shared they were sad about their senior year and felt disconnected from school.

School Leaders are currently working on a plan to boost culture and morale, including social media posts, lawn signs, and spirit week digital challenges to celebrate seniors. These initiatives have been well received so far, and School Leaders are looking into doing something similar for teachers.

Finally, Pratt shared that Graduation will be on June 12, 2020 at 6:00pm, and will be a pre-produced video live streamed on the website, including many of our normal graduation traditions such as speeches by advisors, teachers, and honored students.

C.

Next Steps

Next, Pratt shared that some of our teachers have not had any kind of teacher prep program, and professional development must be prioritized to ensure teachers are prepared for the school year. School Leaders are looking at Research for Better Teaching (RBT), an organization CoaH has contracted with previously. RBT is holding a virtual workshop over the summer, for about \$800 per teacher. If we don't develop teachers we will struggle to move academic results. This will also help keep teachers since we do not match BPS salary.

Committee members asked Pratt how School Leaders are thinking about what Professional Development (PD) content performed internally versus external. Pratt shared that School Leaders are struggling to differentiate between skill levels of teachers. Struggling if we need to bring up bottom rung of teachers, more tenured teachers will be bored with PD for teaching 101. Committee members agreed using RBT for PD is a good long term investment, but we have to justify the cost with additional support.

IV. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 3:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Karin Wall