

APPROVED



Foxborough Regional Charter School

Minutes

Board Meeting

Executive Director Candidate Interviews

Date and Time

Wednesday February 7, 2024 at 5:00 PM

Meeting Format

Whether in person or online, the public is welcome to attend Board/Committee Meetings and have access to meeting minutes. Meetings are held once a month and additionally, as determined by the Board/Committee Chair. All meeting Agendas are posted on the school website at least 48 hours in advance of each public meeting.

During the meeting, the Board and its committees follow the published agenda. Gallery members are not part of the formal discussion or deliberations. Those wishing to speak at a meeting are asked to follow our [Privilege of the Floor Policy](#). To request to speak at a meeting, please complete the following [google form](#) before the start of the meeting.

Trustees Present

Anissia Vixamar, Badawi Dweik (remote), Kathleen Crawford (remote), Matthew Yezukevich (remote), Mia Ortiz (remote), Sergio Martin, Todd Tetreault

Trustees Absent

None

Trustees who arrived after the meeting opened

Mia Ortiz

Trustees who left before the meeting adjourned

Badawi Dweik

Guests Present

Christine Barraford (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

Mia Ortiz arrived at 5:25 PM.

Badawi Dweik left at 5:44 PM.

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Kathleen Crawford called a meeting of the board of trustees of Foxborough Regional Charter School to order on Wednesday Feb 7, 2024 at 5:00 PM.

II. Executive Director Search Committee

A. Interview of Toby Romer

Ms. Crawford welcomed Candidate Toby Romer and asked him to introduce himself to the Board.

Mr. Romer is currently the Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education at Newton Public Schools. Prior to that he worked in Boston for twenty years as a teacher, teacher-leader, assistant principal, principal and director of professional development. He currently lives in Boston with his wife who was a previous school counselor and now a professor in education training counselors. He has two ninth-grade daughters in ninth grade and a senior in high school.

Throughout the course of the day at FRCS he became more excited about the school, its possibilities and opportunities and the role it plays in the education eco-system in the community in which it is situated and serves. Based on meeting staff and connecting with kids and touring classes, he sees a "school in action," and is pleased to have the opportunity to serve.

His overall career in education has been mission-driven by his desire to create opportunities for all students and particularly those less well-served in public schools. He has served in a thoughtful and intentional way to an undeserved diverse community to create equity and expand opportunities for high quality education for all students.

As an undergraduate he taught English to refugees in the evenings and summer. He taught English when he lived in Ecuador and began teaching Spanish and French after graduation. He transitioned to assistant principal and principal at Brighton High School.

When his two younger daughters were born fourteen years ago, he stepped down as principal of Orchard Gardens K-8 and transitioned to leader of professional development, a transformative experience broadening his horizons into public education at the K-8 level.

He took another leave eight years ago when friends from the Boston Public Schools encouraged him to take a look at leadership opportunities at Newton Public Schools. The community is much more diverse both socio-economically, racially and ethnically than a traditional public school. This experience has enabled him to create equity and a high level of expectation for students to reach a high level of achievement.

At one point today he was asked why he wanted to work in a charter school. He answered that it was not necessarily that he wanted to work at a charter school *per se*, but he wanted to work at FRCS as the school is in a unique position between a really diverse school pulling from different communities in the area and a heterogeneous group of students both socio-economically and in more recent years students of color. In either case, the role the school is playing in the community is to create high quality options for families, focused to meet students where they are and pushing them to a high level of achievement. There are challenges and things to work on, but the school is fundamentally strong evidenced by the hard-working staff and commitment to students to be further built upon as the foundation.

Ms. Crawford invited members to ask questions of the candidate.

Mr. Martin: why are you seeking opportunities outside of your current employment?

While he has enjoyed his work at Newton Public Schools and has learned a lot supervising middle and high school principals, having served his ninth year in Newton he has been “craving to go back to his roots in the Boston Public Schools where there were opportunities to take leadership roles. While FRCS is not a traditionally urban area, he sees the difference it is making in the lives of students and families to create and commit to new pathways of excellent education for families, and that is the opportunity to which he is looking to be a part.

When he was a principal of Brighton High School over fifteen years ago, he was quite young and the last time he served in a CEO role as the “front man for the band.” Although not ego-driven, he enjoyed that leadership role and having the “last word” of responsibilities to set the vision and course for the school. He enjoyed going home exhausted every day and knowing that he had accomplished good and important work, and he was told that he made a difference as such a leader.

His children are older now, and at this point in his career he believes he can bring his “CEO experiences” to committing to the role of Executive Director at FRCS.

Mr. Dweik: can you provide an example of when you faced a significant crisis in leadership role and how you handled it?

Referencing the financial collapse of 2008, and before the federal government had issued its rescue package, Boston Public Schools was faced with a huge budget crisis. He was handed a bottom line budget for the school which resulted in double-digit cutting of positions when staff was minimal to begin with. As an aside, he was impressed with the “resource rich” environment at FRCS where there were different tiers of support to which staff has access to address the different learning needs of students.

While advocating for more resources from the city or otherwise, he was able to engage directly with the school council and work transparently with staff about the crisis facing the district and the choices being made. Working with the leadership team and the school council, hard choices were intelligently made to cut positions. He recalled being thanked by faculty members after the fact on how humane and thoughtful the process was and being gratified that something good could come from something bad. The transparency and clarity of process of hard decisions at least provided an understandable rationale for them.

Mr. Dweik: what strategies would you employ to attract and retain top talent within the school?

While Boston and Newton are in the middle of the city with frequent movement into that area, Foxborough is in a unique position. In speaking with Ms. St. Brice on attracting staff and especially men of color, recruitment can draw from Providence and the south of Boston as well as surrounding communities. He noted he heard from staff how they enjoyed working at FRCS and how that commitment continued even after they left “exhausted at the end of the day.” That matters as a network for attracting new employees, where they feel supported by colleagues and a meaningful team and part of the larger community supported by leadership. Work can be done to continue to build the reputation that makes FRCS not only a great place for students but a great place for adults to work.

He expressed surprise that the work of recruitment continued even given the interim leadership position nonetheless to attract high-quality talent. As the next Executive Director he will create a level of stability and clarity going forward and build on existing recruitment strategies.

Mr. Martin: insofar as the rotating leadership damaged the culture and trust around the organization, how will you approach restoring that trust?

What he has observed is that the school is dealing with the after-effect of the pandemic. It had an impact on every profession, and in particular educators who were hit hard throughout the lockdown in hybrid or other mode as well as the employees that were asked to return to the building. The impact on young people at all levels of academic social-emotional distress manifested in behavioral issues in the classroom.

Notwithstanding the leadership instability in the last few years, staff was complimentary on how the issues have been managed. There is a group of teachers, however, who have worked for a long time who grieve what FRCS used to be and what it is now, some of which is just about change being hard and the human nostalgic wish for things that used to be.

Mr. Tetreault: although FRCS has a group of phenomenal people who have been with FRCS from the outset, there has been a significant reduction in the average tenure of the team resulting in less experience and lack of institutional memory, how would you address the challenge of cohesion implicit on building trust?

Having strong and consistent leadership for multiple years will bring nothing but good to the school. There are positive foundational pieces still intact and a really strong culture. Having the right person committed to the school for the long term will “regrow” the culture naturally.

He added that “it is harder than ever to be an educator, and true everywhere they are feeling burnt out and need support and appreciation.” Some educators are working with multiple challenging students in the classroom, causing an exponential change in the complexity of the role. Staff need to be provided support to rely on professional and skill building to organize the universal classroom design for the success of as many students as possible. Regular staff appreciation events recognizes educators’ hard work and ensure they are given the tools they need to be successful.

As many people confirmed, this is the perfect time to have a mission and vision revisiting process to engage stakeholders at all levels including staff and students. Even though the recommitment process to mission and vision *may* be the same as it currently is, the process will have a positive impact on morale. The questions are answered: why FRCS, why are we here, what do we do together to create a positive cohesive set of values and motivations to keep us coming to work every day? This will lead to the positive impact as a recruiting tool as well to say explicitly why we are here and serve the communities we serve to get the story out on why we come to work. Sharing that is motivating to others.

Ms. Crawford noted that during the past year there have been several sessions on value statements that FRCS leans into. Talking about the values could be the foundation to springboard to other things.

Ms. Ortiz: if you are offered this position, on day one what do you see as the priority for FRCS?

It has been helpful to hear of the school's needs and the assessment from Mr. Tarvin. It is important as a new leader to go through the entry process. He will spend a lot of time listening to people from every different role in the organization and going into the fall to access everyone and have their voices heard. Having been in the leadership role and coached other leaders along the way, he would ask the same "naïve" question: what is really good about FRCS and what do we need to work on, what are its strengths and weaknesses? He would take a variety of notes from stakeholders to understand what is going on and share that information back to the community: here is what I heard from you and other folks in the school and wider community. Does this sound right to you? What would you add to or negate? With one group saying one thing and the other the opposite, how do we fit into a strategic plan for next steps to confirm mission and vision and setting opportunities to build on the strengths.

While the temptation is to go as fast as possible after a long interim period, he would instead "go slow to go fast" as a new Executive Director to build relationships and build trust by listening to everyone even if seems obvious and to get to know families. Referencing the question he was asked today on "what is your plan for us," he answered the question with a question: what is it that you are going to ask me to work with you on. Part of the healing process is to know leadership is "here for them." Insofar as there will be "low-hanging fruit" for a new leader to do right away and some things got done before a new leader starts on a "clean slate," he will "hit the ground running" which may not translate to an immediate flurry of action steps.

Mr. Dweik: How do you handle conflict and disagreement among leadership and staff and could you provide an example of a situation you successfully resolved?

Talking about this idea with senior leadership today, he used the analogy to a multi-tiered system of support with the bottom of the pyramid tier 1 being: do whatever you can all the time to ensure success and intervention over a layered arc. Having a facilitation of meetings process in place created through good facilitation strong team bonds. Having all things in place decreases the opportunity to have conflict. Although in a healthy organization conflict takes the process "off the rails, it can be constructive and not destructive. His role is to help everyone understand one another's position. He "rolls up [his] sleeves" to have hard conversations by preparing a strategy ahead of time. In Newton he brought members of the leadership team into a three-way conversation that he was leading, but also facilitating, stating the facts that were non-negotiable going forward in dialogue.

In the case where harm has been done and someone has hurt another person and may not be aware, restorative practices addresses these harms in a healing and not disciplinary or directive way to be effective.

He relayed a situation he encountered at the high school in the middle of an emergency situation of an electrical fire in the building where two administrators got into a shouting match disagreeing on what to do about a certain group of disabled students getting out of

the building. They were safely led out, but one administrator was clearly at fault and the other in the right. He invited each one individually to come to his office to understand what happened because he was not witness to the event. Both administrators were then brought together to express their feelings, and he (Mr. Romer) stated his expectations of both of them going forward. Ultimately he did not renew the person's contract at the end of the year due to his not embracing growth and change as a basic expectation.

While this is not his normal "mode of operation," being transparent and walking toward challenge to address hard decisions to be made is necessary is something he knows how to do when the situation merits.

Mr. Yezukevich: being a school of choice, we have to motivate parents to send their kids to FRCS, and we also motivate families to keep kids at FRCS. What you learned from today's visit, how would you sell FRCS to both new families and existing families as a place to send their child/children and place their trust in us?

Part of the role is to compete and reach out to the community to attract students to create a heterogeneous carefully curated prospect of students to make a rich school experience. As principal at Brighton High School he oversaw open enrollment for eighth graders to apply in a lottery process. Toward that goal, he spent a good deal of time over a cross section of Boston pitching opportunities for a high level of academic rigor and support.

He got to ask students in grades 9-12 in today's visit the specific question of what do your peers from your hometowns think of FRCS. They answered that FRCS was really strict, you had to wear uniforms and it was more like a prep school for K-12 and offered a lot of different events and teams. These are relatively good recruiting tools.

One parent said he may withdraw his son out of high school to go to a Christian day school down the street. This is why the vision and mission process is so important in that you get to provide families what they are looking for and not "tell them what they want to hear." FRCS needs to tighten up the message on what an amazing opportunity it offers with a wealth of resources in a beautiful school at a cross section of communities to create a more diverse student body with an amazing track record for a college education. In addition we have an amazing array of extracurricular activities and sports. This would be put in a package that is consistent of who we are and what families can expect when they get here.

Mr. Martin: we are in the process of negotiating a union contract, new for FRCS. Have you had experience managing union and non-union personnel?

As a leader in the public schools, he has had extensive history in working with union leadership. He recalled an incident where he ran into a former union leader after he left Brighton High School who said "you were tough on us, but we need more leaders like you." He has been through the hard process on the negotiating team through the recent fifteen-day strike and settlement in Newton.

His philosophy is when people operate in good faith and generally think about the basic right of employees as a clear and consistent expectation, it benefits everyone. He recalled hiring former charter school teachers in Newton who complained of lack of boundaries to family life and being overworked. Insofar as nothing can change unless agreed to in the collective bargaining contract, the district has to be agile enough to take the contract and capture creativity of innovation. This can also be a recruitment tool that FRCS sets the tone for hard work well compensated with extra time off when needed.

Mr. Tetreault asked if Mr. Romer had questions of the Board.

What is the Board's expectation in terms of engagement in daily, weekly and monthly meetings with the Executive Director?

Ms. Crawford stated that, as the outgoing Chair and Mr. Martin as the continuing Vice Chair, he will most likely ascend to the position.

Mr. Tetreault stated the volunteer Trustees have a history and interest in the school with kids in the school and have "day jobs." The majority of the Trustees are not expert educators, but have witnessed the impact of the pandemic on operations and in some ways are still struggling with the "lingering story during the pandemic" that resulted in leadership changing its view and strategic thinking to the longer view. In coming back off that story and "re-centering," the Board recently re-established an annual calendar tracking key concepts to be followed-up on and providing the oversight that the Board is obligated to provide. The Board would seek to establish a partnership with the Executive Director to assist in getting the right transparency around education and fine tuning the ultimate strategic view. Also the Board would seek to partner with senior leadership in not only fine tuning practices and rules but also in maintaining and supporting the overall culture of the school.

Mr. Yezukevich stated that the Board's intention is to ensure that whoever is hired in the position of Executive Director has the tools to succeed. In addition to the daily, weekly or monthly "check-ins," the Board would consider investing the dollars to hire an external coach to support his entry plan and be as successful as he can be. Mr. Tetreault added that this is the Board's most important decision that will impact the next fifteen years.

Mr. Romer stated that he was excited about everything he learned about the school and thanked the Board for the opportunity to present his candidacy.

III. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Todd Tetreault made a motion to adjourn.

Mia Ortiz seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call

Matthew Yezukevich Aye
Sergio Martin Aye
Todd Tetreault Aye
Anissia Vixamar Aye
Kathleen Crawford Aye
Mia Ortiz Aye
Badawi Dweik Absent

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Christine Barraford

Documents used during the meeting

None

The listed matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair to be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.