DRAFT

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Special Board Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday May 11, 2022 at 4:00 PM

Location
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7872944585?pwd=VzF6Y1luK3dwVVV4NG9lbWVzRzI2dz09
Meeting ID: 787 294 4585
Passcode: 965225
Dial by your location- 646 558 8656
Meeting ID: 787 294 4585
Passcode: 965225

Trustees Present
Azalia Volpe (remote), Geena Kuriakose (remote), George Winn (remote), Laura Timoney (remote), Laurel Gyimesi (remote), Mark Harmon-Vaught (remote), Rose Kerr (remote)

Trustees Absent
Maria Casale

Guests Present
Christine Volpe (remote), Fahron Ebanks (remote), Heba Nassef Gore (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote), Tim Castanza (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Mark Harmon-Vaught called a meeting of the board of trustees of Bridge Preparatory Charter School to order on Wednesday May 11, 2022 at 4:02 PM.

He then gave the floor to Executive Director Tim Castanza and his team.

II. Strategic Planning

A. Strategic Planning Updates & Timeline Review

T. Castanza stated that today's conversation is an important one; one that we began having last fall and will continue today. As the school's organization grows, he is looking forward to having more of these strategic sessions in the future with the *Board of Trustees*; he and his team are looking forward to having conversations with the board; collaborating and strategizing as partners for the future. We are at the point now in mid-May when we are getting a lot of questions from external sources, emails from families, feedback, and questions on where the organization is going; we have been focusing on where we've been, but now there are questions about where we are headed. Today he will talk about potential strategic growth opportunities and discuss where we might want to go; he doesn't think that this will be the space to make that decision, but we need to be able to speak with one voice. Today he will be sharing timelines and dates; we need to be on the same page so we can communicate effectively with the public and education officials. If asked about space, partnerships, future growth, plans for the future and the school's vision, he wants to be able to speak on behalf of the school and to speak in a shared voice with the *Board of Trustees*.

A PowerPoint presentation covered the following points:
STRATEGIC GROWTH PATHWAYS - *Middle School expansion and Kindergarten addition* Neither of these 2 options are possible under our current authorized grades; it would cause an increase in the number of enrolled students beyond our charter's authorization; we might consider the option of requesting increased enrollment authorization. These are the areas we get the most questions about; it would require board review, action and recommendations. The decision points to be discussed: Which of these growth opportunities do we want to pursue, if any? When do we want to pursue them (pre-renewal or during renewal)? What factors need consideration, such as needs of current & future students/families, timelines, the impact of space, the current climate of education in NYC, the focus on dyslexia and literacy from the NYC Mayor and DoE Chancellor.

POTENTIAL PATHS FORWARD - *Before renewal or at renewal*; Add grade 6 only; add kindergarten only, add middle school only or add both middle school & kindergarten. Adding both middle school & kindergarten BEFORE RENEWAL would be a massive undertaking and if we are going to do anything before renewal it should be targeted and specific. Any changes made prior to renewal would be considered material changes to our charter. Even though kindergarten is an elementary school grade, it would still be an addition of a grade and therefore a material change to our charter. Any material change to our charter would require a vote and approval by the Board of Regents. Changes made AT RENEWAL would be built into our renewal application.

TIMELINES FOR MATERIAL REVISION *(Changes BEFORE Renewal)*
Field Research/Design/Feedback due June-October 2022
Development of Revision Documents due October-November 2022
Board of Trustees Approval of Revision Documents due November 2022
Revision Documents to NYSED Portal due Mid-December 2022 *(then work with NYSED for recommendation to be made to Regents)*
Regents Vote due Spring 2023

TIMELINES FOR RENEWAL *(Changes AT Renewal)*
Narrative Draft Review with Pasek Consulting due Spring 2023
Board of Trustees Approves Charter Revisions due June 2023
Board of Trustees Approves Renewal Application due August 2023
Renewal Application Submission due September 2023
Post Application Renewal Items (Site visit, public hearing) due October-November 2023
Draft Renewal Recommendation by NYSED due March 2024
Regents Vote due April 2024

B. Strategic Planning Discussion

The PROS & CONS of each expansion option (middle school only/kindergarten only/both middle school & kindergarten) BEFORE RENEWAL & AT RENEWAL were discussed, along with the feasibility of each option.

The following discussion followed the presentation:
*R. Kerr: Isn't there another option, which is to do none of these changes BEFORE RENEWAL and consider them AFTER RENEWAL has been approved.
*T. Castanza: We could also increase elementary school enrollment but there doesn't need to be an option that is chosen at this time.
*L. Timoney: When would requested changes take effect?
*T. Castanza: Any change being proposed is effective for the following school year.
*M. Harmon-Vaught: Being authorized to increase your grade span could not obligate you to do that immediately.
*T. Castanza: Yes, that is correct - it is a nuance of charter revisions/applications, depending on how the application is written with NYSED; being authorized to make a change does not dictate when that change must be made.
*G. Winn: What are the parameters of the role Pasek Consulting would take in this?
*T. Castanza: Pasek Consulting would not assist with any changes requested BEFORE RENEWAL, but they would support us with changes AT RENEWAL included in our renewal application.
*L. Timoney: Could all the necessary steps possibly be completed at the school level in the timeline allotted for changes prior to renewal?
*T. Castanza: Timely preparation of the material in not a concern because we would get it done in time; his concern is how it can be done well; his recommendation would be the

addition of middle school grades which he believes is not a matter of if, but a matter of when.
*R. Kerr: Doesn't believe she has enough information yet to discuss opinions; she would like to hear more about the options and then discuss this.
*T. Castanza: There is an existing need regarding middle school; by adding 6th grade BEFORE RENEWAL, it would address the need of our current 4th grade students, as well as provide the opportunity to show our impact over a longer period of time (grades 1-8) and help recruit new students/retain current students.
*R. Kerr: Do we know which option NYSED would look favorably on?
*T. Castanza: Initially the indication was that NYSED was not supportive on adding a middle school grade BEFORE RENEWAL, however based on information conversations with NYSED he believes that opinion has changed since the chancellor's visit to our school. He added that if we do open up middle school grades with grade 6 only, it will require additional space, either DoE provided or not which must be considered.
*L. Timoney: Have the financial numbers been run for adding a 6th grade, including the cost of additional teachers, additional teacher training, additional space, and the compartmentalization of classes?
*T. Castanza: We would build the cost into our 5-year budget that the *Board of Trustees* will see in June. If we need additional space, we would need to have that conversation with DoE quickly.
*G. Winn: Why would additional space be an issue adding a 6th grade but not if adding a kindergarten grade?
*T. Castanza answered that when submitting this change to NYSED you cannot ask to add only a 6th grade, but you would need to request a middle school expansion encompassing all middle school grades. It is somewhat misleading to identify the option as adding 6th grade only because in reality it would mean an expansion of all 3 middle school grades (6/7/8) to our school.
*L. Gyimesi: The financial cost of adding middle school grades with the increased number of teachers (language teacher, science teacher, etc.) and the space required for the students to move from classroom to classroom is a concern; how many teachers would we need to hire and how many students would be in the seats to provide income? Funding is an issue as well as space.
*T. Castanza: The addition of only kindergarten would be easier for programming and would give us a natural entry point at the elementary school level, helping to recruit our target population as well as ELL students. It would also make finding classroom space easier. Middle school grades require additional space such as science labs, etc. NYSED has been pushing for kindergarten expansion as well. If we are not going to make any other material changes to our charter, we could wait until renewal to pursue the addition of kindergarten - we don't need to do this now. However, this would not solve the concerns of our current 4th grade families; he believes that adding a kindergarten grade now, instead of 6th grade, would send the wrong message to those families and open concerns from parents of other grades regarding our future plans. Not adding 6th grade BEFORE RENEWAL - or at all - will result in the loss of some current students; we will need to come up with an answer for our 4th grade families that we are all comfortable

with; those families have already been told of our partnerships with DoE to ease their children into 6th grade enrollment in a DoE middle school and the response has been lukewarm.
*A. Volpe: Speaking as a parent, on behalf of parents and as President of the Family Association, she has had numerous conversations with parents regarding their desire for a 6th grade and a middle school expansion; at least 10 parents have told her that if there isn't a middle school option, they are pulling their children out of Bridge Prep and placing them in catholic school even if they don't receive their special ed. services; these parents want to assure their children have a seat in 6th, 7th and 8th grade; the board will have to explain to NYSED why 10 families have pulled their children out of school; how will that look in optics for NYSED and how will that look financially for the school? Some 3rd grade parents have also said they will leave Bridge Prep; parents are afraid about what is going to happen when their children reach middle school age. What does it mean for renewal if 10-15 students withdraw from our school? Also, since the board has received letters from parents asking for a middle school, are you going to ignore those parents? How will the board address that? This needs to be dealt with in a realistic manner; that feeling is out there and is very real for parents. Parents are scared and don't know what is going to happen to their children in middle school; parents also feel that the board is not listening to their desire for a middle school.
*M. Harmon-Vaught: Wants to express caution about treating as a question of "preference" what is ultimately a question of what is possible; what can we do based on programming, based on space, based on our pedagogy and approach, based on finances, and all those factors that would go into the research phase, then based on what aligns with our mission and goals as a school; he doesn't understand all of the critical factors that go into making a decision like that, except for the compression of the timeline, especially for middle school expansion; he wants to know what is possible, what makes sense, what meets the needs of our families and our students; he doesn't have enough knowledge about that to have an informed opinion on what and how we should do things.
*L. Gyimesi: As head of the task force that created 2 very long extended strategic sessions *(with the full board and the public/open to anyone to attend)* regarding our path moving forward; decisions were made at those strategic sessions; in a meeting with our consultants, *(who also met with the school staff and leadership team)* we were all agreed on one strategic path; if we could expand to middle school tomorrow, we would all say yes, let's do it; but our point is: what is possible by December? It took years to get our school opened, to develop the programs, offering NYSED our proposal, and failing and going back again; it took a long time and we are now at our first renewal point; we opened during a very difficult time and we have to prove ourselves against the balance of students in District 31. That is why we developed a strategic plan to fight for this renewal because we have to keep our school's doors open - we can't expand if we don't exist. That is our path, and we fully understand the concerns expressed by parents; we are onboard to do everything we can. Board membership is a voluntary position and we are working as hard as we can. Is it possible to open a middle school? What resources can we tap from the school to get a middle school program developed by December? We have to show that the students in our school are successful and growing academically.

We have a strategic plan that we developed over the last 6 months and this middle school request is a curve ball; we are here to listen but there are grave concerns about this getting done by December when it took years to establish the school.
*T. Castanza: He agrees - everyone here concurs that it is not a matter of "want" but of what can be done correctly; he would not feel comfortable submitting something that we don't all feel can be handled the way it should be. He respects everyone at this meeting, every family and student at the school and won't force something that we're not capable of delivering; he trusts his team and the board members and thinks that we could deliver on a middle school expansion. It's not the expansion execution, it's understanding what a good middle school looks like, otherwise we would be no better than the middle schools where parents don't want to send their children.
*R. Kerr: Founded a K-8 grade school and wrote the application; it required her to operate as 2 schools combined into 1; elementary school grades and middle school grades are very different in operation, in structure, and in the way the children develop, you must manage it separately but together, as one unifying school coalesced together - it is possible, as she proved with her staff, but it is so difficult to organize a middle school and elementary school - they are vastly different; everyone should understand that operationally. She thanked E.D. for getting us prepared on the options but asked what is literally possible? What about the site? An important point is that 6th grade is not only 6th grade, it is all of middle school; and for those who think we should just add 6th grade and send our students out to 7th & 8th grade at a district school, that would be an injustice for our students; K-8 is helpful, but 6th grade only is not.
*G. Winn: Programmatically we are preparing our students from 1st-5th grade to articulate into middle school; some may be able to go independently into middle school. If we are doing our job, students should articulate back into a general school district. This is when E.D.'s team can look at whether some 4th graders are ready to move onto middle school. Perhaps we could accommodate students who are struggling at another school and bring them to Bridge Prep for a year; if that need is out there we can be of service to the community. He thinks that the wisdom of adding a kindergarten grade is debatable for all of the reasons expressed when founding the school; in terms of resources it's very difficult to figure out the child's need at that early age; he is torn about what to do regarding 6th grade expansion; his heart is with the parents who are worried and fear for their children entering middle school, As R. Kerr said, adding only a 6th grade and then moving the children out to DoE middle schools is not easy; but do we intend to take on the development of a full middle school expansion? Did we intend to keep these children at Bridge Prep this long? And what are we doing programmatically? That is something we need to think about. This is a strategic process that would require committing resources right now from the school; it involved a facilities cost, which would need to be imbedded in the budget so the board can look at those figures; he doesn't have an answer today, only a perspective. Pasek will certainly charge more money to consult on what we are talking about expanding here.
*T. Castanza: Here are the concerns he's heard from the board today: 1.) What is possible?/What can we actually feasibly do? and 2.) Is this too much to focus on right now?/Should we just be moving directly towards renewal with the current grade span? It

might help for the board to hear from NYSED. In the renewal process, whatever we want Bridge Prep to look like for the next 5 years will go into our renewal application; including instructional approach, a 5-year budget and any change that we make will go in there. There are some charter schools who start middle school in 5th grade; we haven't even discussed the triad method yet. How does what we are planning to do impact our elementary grades and staffing? The triad is supposed to work well with middle schools; Does implementation of the triad look more natural in middle schools? He would want the time to build it out; it is possible to deliver the materials, but that doesn't mean that we have the time to do it well. He agrees that no decision should impact renewal. All material changes to the charter would need to be submitted by December. Our recruitment process opens in the fall, we will recruit for 2023-2024 school year starting this fall and can only recruit for the grades we are already authorized to serve, which are grades 1-5 regardless of any potential expansion. So if we were to expand to 6th grade, those seats could only be filled by articulated 5th graders but no new students as we could not reopen the application period for new students.

*L. Timoney: Are we supposed to come to an conclusion today?

*T. Castanza: He doesn't think there can be a conclusion today, but this is a good conversation and it's good to voice concerns. He gets emails and questions from parents every day about expanding to middle school. He had a conversation with parents about 2 months ago where he told parents that we are not exploring - or able to add - a middle school; that was made very clear to the parents. That does not stop parents from sending emails to the E.D. and the board.

*G. Winn: What do parents think about our plan to partner with DoE middle schools to help ease their children into 6th grade at a general district middle school?

*F. Ebanks: Parents just want Bridge Prep to expand to middle school.

*A. Volpe: Parents are not interested in working with DoE middle schools; the DoE doesn't take care of our kids, that is the reason why our children are at Bridge Prep. The DoE has failed our children; what makes you think that the DoE is going to do justice for our children? Bridge Prep gave our families hope; by delaying a decision on middle school expansion, the board is failing these parents; the board needs to make a decision so that parents can decide what to do; whether to sue the DoE and get money together for an attorney or start exploring other options; it's not can we work with the DoE, the DoE doesn't work with parents of children with dyslexia.

*L. Timoney: We now have a mayor and a chancellor who will be making an announcement tomorrow on what they plan to do for dyslexic students and we have a district that is open to creating a partnership/collaboration at the middle school level to create specialized instruction for dyslexic children; she thinks that parents are dealing with an older paradigm which didn't work in the past, but this is a new world and if there is an opportunity with schools that are training their teachers in specialized instruction, don't shut a door so quickly on a wonderful opportunity.

*T. Castanza: He and L. Timoney have been having these conversations with DoE at the district and their middle schools will need as much time as we would to do this at the middle school level; so we shouldn't put all our hopes into the DoE being able to take care of our students.

*R. Kerr: We have a parallel track of continuing to work directly with the district on collaboration with their 6th grade and at the same time to work here to see what is possible; her point is that we can't magically create a middle school, this is a big process; we need to know what are the possibilities and what do we have to do to get those possibilities, what do we need to do next?
*T. Castanza: Are we looking for NYSED to say if you want a middle school you can have it? or if NYSED says we can have a middle school, can we fit them? He is not comfortable shutting the door on a Bridge Prep middle school expansion and he knows that the board isn't either.
*A. Volpe: In 2019 there were 200,000 teachers in DoE and only 900 of them knew how to teach the science of reading; she doesn't trust the DoE. The only people who haven't failed our special needs children are Bridge Prep and she is one of more than 200 parents who feel the same way; parents are frightened and they just want an answer.
*R. Kerr: What is the next step on our parallel tracks?
*M. Harmon-Vaught: To know what is needed to execute a middle school, field research is needed and that is the job of school staff - not our board. which is happy to support it in any way possible; he would like to see a provisional plan indicating what middle school expansion would require, a plan that takes into account the various components, such as space, instructional model, a hiring plan, etc. in a provisional way - not in a final form to be presented to NYSED, just in a manner that provides a path to show what is possible. We just don't have that information now. We need to know what are the red flags so that we know the various factors to make an informed decision, with debate and discussion. He is supportive of the middle school option; it is pedagogically critical and Bridge Prep is doing it right; that is his view.
*R. Kerr: The K-8 model is extremely emotionally supportive of children and prepares them for high school far better than a K-5 model in an era when emotional support is so important for children and their parents.
*T. Castanza will use M. Harmon-Vaught's suggestion as a starting point and will work on creating a provisional plan for middle school expansion, but it will take some time to research.

III. 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 5:22 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano