APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Strategy Session

Date and Time
Friday November 11, 2022 at 2:00 PM

Location
Wagner College
Student Union Building
4th Fl Conference Room
631 Campus Road

The best GPS address for the college is 631 Howard Avenue. There, you'll enter the main Wagner College campus entrance. Please let Public Safety know your name and that you're attending this meeting and they will direct you to park within the Tiers Parking Lot.

Zoom:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85726236693?pwd=SmVOZ0xlajVIZjdSZnlGOVd4MDQxdz09
Meeting ID: 857 2623 6693
Passcode: nvgu2S
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BOARD OF TRUSTEE
REAUTHORIZATION STRATEGY SESSION
with Pasek Consulting, LLC

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

Trustees Absent

None

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza (remote)

Guests Present
Amanda Wolkowitz (remote), Dan Pasek (remote), Heba Nassef-Gore (remote), Jen Pasek (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote), Nora Clancy (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Geena Kuriakose called a meeting to order on Friday Nov 11, 2022 at 2:05 PM.

II. Strategy Session: Charter Renewal & Long-Term Planning

A. Discussion: Long-Term Vision for Bridge Prep Charter School

L. Gyimesi welcomed the attendees and began the session with a brief overview of the reasons for this strategy session for the upcoming reauthorization of the school's charter. The board needs to consider whether to make material changes to our charter, and the timing of the submission of changes; we can submit material changes by December 1st or we can wait and include material changes in our charter renewal application in 2023. She then gave the floor to T. Castanza, Executive Director of Bridge Prep to update the board on what he learned when attending a recent Charter Center conference.

The following points were discussed:

- T. Castanza said the essential questions on which we need to reach agreement are what are we going to do and when will we do it? This is important in working with Pasek Consulting to write our charter renewal application.
- In the past, we discussed grade expansion, either an upward grade expansion (6th grade) or a downward grade expansion (Kindergarten); either one would be a material change to our charter, and would require a vote by the Board of Regents in the spring of 2023.
- What would be the benefit to the school to submit a material revision *before* we submit our charter renewal application? Since the Regents won't vote on material revisions until spring of 2023, we would not have enough time to recruit the necessary staff and students for the 2023-2024 school year. It doesn't make sense to rush through material revisions this December; we couldn't open the expanded

grades for another year anyway; so it makes more sense to include any material changes within our charter renewal application.

- T. Castanza attended a Charter Center conference in Buffalo NY recently and spoke to Dr. Lisa Long, the new Director of the NYSED Charter School Office along with Coronne Jackson, their legal counsel; most of the leadership at NYSED's Charter School Office is new and Dr. Long said they are reviewing how their office oversees charter schools; they have too many schools to oversee and not enough staff; we need NYSED to understand who we are and what we do so they can recommend to the Board of Regents that our charter be renewed long-term; NYSED doesn't really know us right now; we still have no NYSED liaison to work with. We need to build a relationship with NYSED so they will support us in the charter renewal process. We need to get to know them and let them get to know us. NYSED will be more likely to support our grades expansion if bundled within our renewal application. They are not opposed to us expanding downward to add a K level; they think that idea makes a lot of sense.
- T. Castanza recommends that we shift our thinking away from a material revision submission and concentrate on including everything in our renewal application. L. Gyimesi responded that makes sense to her as well, especially if we don't have a strong chance of getting material revision approval in advance of submitting our renewal application.
- M. Harmon-Vaught asked about timing; T. Castanza responded that the first school year under our charter renewal would be 2025-2026.
- R. Kerr asked if Pre-K was being considered along with K; T. Castanza said that only Kindergarten would be involved. L. Gyimesi added that Pre-K classes are run by NYC DoE and NYSED has nothing to do with administrating Pre-K grades. R. Kerr asked if we could somehow find room to house a Pre-K grade (knowing that we can't teach using OG methods at the Pre-K level) but could that Pre-K work as a bridge or feeder-grade for K students, would that be an advantage for us? M. Casale responded that our Kindergarteners would be starting as 3 or 4 years old cognitively due to the type of population that we serve; to go to a Pre-K grade would put a level of stress on us academically; it could go either way; R. Kerr said that this discussion can be had at a later time, when we can debate the pros and cons academically, instructurally, etc. M. Casale added that Pre-K students might eventually fill K seats, shutting out other students who are identified as needing our K program who would benefit from our program but might not be able to get in because there are not enough empty K seats.

L. Gyimesi said she wants to sum up what was discussed:

- Submit a material revision by December 1st to add a Kindergarten grade level or do we want to wait and submit the addition of K in our renewal application or do we not want to add K at all?

- Do we want to offer more seats in existing grades, such as adding seats in additional classes for 1st grade or 2nd grade? And to help to make that decision, what grades are encompassed on our current student admission wait-list?
- T. Castanza said that there are still some unanswered questions, such as if we admit Pre-K students do they count towards our total student enrollment if they are not NYSED administered? We need to know. We need to have a conversation on what is the total recommended enrollment for our school in its new 5-year term? Right now we have 242 students in grades 1-5. If we want to add K classes, how many seats do we want to add? If we open up 2 K classes with 14 seats each, that increases our enrollment to 270 students; do we stop there and add no additional seats in grades 1-5? Or do we want to be able to open up an additional 30 seats in grades 1-5? We currently have 98 students on our admissions wait-list, so the demand is there. We could fill additional seats in all grades, if we had them. We need to continue to offer space to the community for children who don't come in at the Kindergarten or 1st grade level.
- T. Castanza recommends that the board, in addition to the K seats, add more seats for all grades 1-5. He modeled a total school population of 300 students, which would be an additional 58 seats above our current enrollment. If we open up 28 seats for K, that leaves 30 additional seats for grades 1-5; programmatically we would add no additional seats for grade 5, and open more seats in grades 1, 2 and 3. We also have to consider how many more teachers would we need to hire and what happens to our class size and how many classrooms or additional space would we need? We have the room to add 2 K classes and maybe 1-2 flex extra sections for other grades - but we cannot add a new section for every grade. T. Castanza said that adding 58 students across 5 grades is feasible and could be done right now.
- L. Gyimesi said that financially, the 5-Year Budget was worked out based on keeping a static amount of students over a 5 year period and the budget is sustainable by the model that we have in existence now; there a many factors that come into play, teacher salary increases, inflation, etc. but we are currently left with a surplus of over $700,000.
- G. Winn added that the facilities component of the budget needs to be discussed as a group to figure out what we can plan on/plan for once we have a better sense of things. T. Castanza agreed and said that the budget itself is sustainable exactly where we are, but it is very critical that we stay in the public space at Petrides for as long as we can, since it saves us a significant amount of money. It was good to find out from the discussions with Josh and the *Finance Committee* that we can build out more; what is possible if we want to leave?; those types of decisions on whether to leave and go to private space, to take on a larger new initiative, to be able to rely on per-pupil funding with no fund raising? The additional 58 students will affect those decisions significantly. R. Kerr asked when the *Panel on Educational Policy* will vote to allow us to remain at the Petrides location indefinitely? T. Castanza responded that the DoE is putting forward a proposal that Bridge Prep be allowed to remain on the Petrides Campus in perpetuity, which will

be voted on by the PEP at the May meeting. His concern is whether the space will meet our needs for the next 5 years.

- L. Gyimesi asked the board members if anyone wishes to push for submitting material revisions by December 1st? No one indicated that they wanted to pursue that. Board members agreed to wait to include any material revisions bundled into the renewal application submission in August 2023. Additional discussion will be had regarding the actual revisions before that deadline. Pasek Consulting will need to know what grade span and enrollment will be included in the renewal application to drive the narrative.

- T. Castanza said that he also learned at the conference about a charter school that went through the renewal process but did not meet their academic goals in Benchmark #1, they were questioned about how they planned to bridge the gap from COVID in the next 5 years; the conversation about academic data did take COVID into account. Since NYSED will only have 2 years of standardized tests to review for our school, we are putting together documentation and talking points about what we are doing from an intervention prospect, in the classroom and from a staffing perspective to be responsive to learning loss from COVID. R. Kerr added that in the Academic Committee C. Volpe is already focusing and compiling data from MAP and standardized tests to show how we can improve performance of students who are on the cusp of moving to a higher testing level and Core Collaborative is working with C. Volpe to see how this can be accomplished. L. Gyimesi added that it's important to repeat not only that we were impacted by COVID, but because we are a new school, it was our 1st year of standardized testing and our targeted population of students came to us 2 years behind in our 1st operational year.
- T. Castanza added that it is very important that the Board of Regents has a clear understanding that our students may not show the score levels of the district because of who our students are. That is why we need to offer a clear narrative and show different levels of growth data. Our data is also low because our sample size is small. Only 45 students took the 3rd grade state test.
- A description that captures us very well: "We serve 100% of tier 3 students." Every student who comes to us is a tier 3 student whether they have an IEP or not. L. Gyimesi responded that our charter states that under our program and with our interventions we will take our students to the district level, which is a legal requirement for a charter school. So we need to be careful if we are going to try to carve out an exception under the charter law.
- T. Castanza said that Pasek Consulting's thoughts and expertise are needed but we know our students better than anyone else and we need to have a strong narrative that we let Pasek drive forward. We need to feel comfortable on where our renewal process is heading. This December Pasek wants to talk to us about what needs to be removed from our current charter and what needs to be added. G. Winn responded that this is helpful because the board needs to plan on that and be engaged, like thinking about capacity; as per the *Academic Committee*, the

focus is on where we are performing well, and where we want to perform better, in training staff or individualized remediation of students; if we can demonstrate a focus over the coming months, across the board, committee by committee, we will be walking the narrative that will support the conversation we have with Pasek.

- L. Gyimesi encouraged each board member to share ideas and conversations, which will guide us to where we want to be and where we want to go; can we grow, can we afford it, etc? Every committee should email her one or two thoughts so she can keep a master list of important points.
- R. Kerr added that our charter promises were not only about standardized scores but about many other points such as percentage of students with us for 3 years, etc. We need to focus on that since that is what NYSED approved in our charter and that is what they are supposed to hold us to; whether we have done what we said we would do. T. Castanza added that you also need to serve the student population you promised to serve, which we are clearly doing.
- Our narrative's opening line: "We have served our population as we promised in our charter." Then we can add how we served them and what we think we can do over the next 5 years to do it better. G. Winn added that what we are doing is understanding what is needed at the individual level of each child and we have the capability because of our small scale; it's clear that the *Academic Committee* is digging in to discover what is needed to take us forward.
- T. Castanza said that one area where we are not strong is English Language Learners and part of the reason is because we don't get ELL students because they are already enrolled in ELL programs in K in other schools, so adding K level grades to our school will help us to enroll more ELL students. In that way, adding K is also an intervention. M. Harmon-Vaught said he believes adding K level is the right way to go but he wonders what is the youngest age that a student can be tested for dyslexia? L. Gyimesi said that she has been convinced that very young children can be successfully tested for dyslexia.
- M. Casale said that adding K classes will probably change our mission and philosophy a little because right now we are discussing mitigation (for younger students entering in K) and intervention (for older students entering later). Is our core purpose to mitigate/prevent failure or intervene when they are in failure? The more students we take into K, the more seats we lock-in, and the less likely we can admit students in later grades for intervention and what will that mean for the local community? We will need to discuss this further later. She would like to see a real potential for school growth in a monetary realm, operating in a very large facility. G. Winn said he understands about the earlier students from Pre-K and K that might prevent later-grade students from having available seats for admission, but he wonders if there is any way to preserve seats/space for new students in 2nd grade upward; he also wonders if Pre-K comes in under a different financing system, do they even get breakfast? L. Gyimesi said she likes the idea of having the ability to intervene for children who need the help, so she would like to see some available

seats for older students too. T. Castanza said we could call this "K+" (adding Kindergarten + seats for later grades).

B. Presentation & Discussion: Charter Renewal Plan

Nora Clancy, a consultant at Pasek Consulting, offered a presentation, **"Bridge Preparatory Charter School Renewal 2023"** a copy of which is available for download.

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 4:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano