APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Strategy Session

Date and Time
Saturday March 4, 2023 at 10:00 AM

Location
Bridge Preparatory Charter School
715 Ocean Terrace
Building A - Atrium (Main Floor)
Staten Island, NY

Trustees Present
Amanda Wolkowitz, Geena Kuriakose, George Winn, Heba Nassef-Gore, Laurel Gyimesi, Maria Casale, Mark Harmon-Vaught

Trustees Absent
None

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza

Guests Present
Kathy Baldassano (remote), Rebecca Peters, Rose Kerr (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Geena Kuriakose called a meeting to order on Saturday Mar 4, 2023 at 10:15 AM.

II. Board Strategy Session

A. Renewal Application

L. Gyimesi gave an overview of the purpose for today's Strategy Session, which is about forward progress towards the renewal of our school's charter and what needs to be included in the renewal application. Everything needs to be voted on by our May meeting and there is only so much we can accomplish in the next 60 days. The red-lined version of our charter was shared with the board recently, but as we discussed at our last meeting, NYSED does not require us to re-write our charter and only needs us to submit any "material changes" when we submit our renewal application. Things like grade expansion or adding kindergarten-level classes are the type of material changes we need to discuss. R. Kerr added that the proposed teacher institute plans are important to focus on in our charter renewal application.

The topics to be covered today:

Expand by opening a Kindergarten program? - NYSED seems to be very favorable to this idea and expected us to open this grade level much sooner; we founded Bridge Prep without a kindergarten grade because of our concern that we could not focus on our target population (dyslexic students) at such a young age since it is difficult to discern reading difficulties in such young students. But things have changed and evolved since then and it is possible to detect if a young student has potential learning issues related to reading. Do we want to do it? Can we do it? How many kindergarten classes would we establish? Can we afford to do it?

Discussion followed on the PROS and CONS of opening a kindergarten program:
PROS:

- Opening kindergarten classes would help us to enroll more English Language Learner (ELL) students; Orton-Gillingham is a very valid teaching method for ELL students;
- It has always been a challenge to fill our 1st grade seats and if we establish kindergarten classes, then those students will have a natural articulation into 1st grade the following year;
- The earlier the intervention of our students, the more likely they will succeed, and by the time they enter 3rd, 4th and 5th grades, they will be doing very well;
- It will increase our performance and proficiency as a school;
- Out test scores will go up;
- Our school's reputation will be stronger;
- We can advertise our kindergarten curricula as early reading skills development and research-based practices - with spelling, phonics and grammar lessons that are not offered by other schools;

- A student who enters our kindergarten program who is not dyslexic can still learn very well in our program; our teachers partner stronger learners with students who need a little more help;
- Our teachers recognize and target which students need extra support and which students need to be pushed a little more.
- If a non-dyslexic student excels and doesn't need our program supports, perhaps we can transition them out to other schools where they can also be successful; if we do have a plan that a student is outgrowing, we can obtain some good will in the community by referring them to other schools; then other schools who have struggling students can refer them to us.

CONS:

- It might be a problem if we don't recognize the need for acceleration for a student who is not dyslexic; teachers would need to understand that even though they've been trained to do intervention, some teachers will be asked to do enrichment;
- It's good that we differentiate skill level, ability and proficiency, and to group different proficiencies together, but there are specific activities that need to be added to a kindergarten program for accelerated students; our charter states that we offer "rigorous" programs and we must do so for all student skill levels;
- We need to be careful which materials we order to make sure each student has his/her needs met whether advanced or remedial; once the students move out of "controlled texts" and move onto "embedded texts" with literature, and chapter books, we need to make sure students have the opportunity to develop those skills. Teachers should tell us what resources they need to meet this challenge.

The consensus of board members is that adding a kindergarten program is a good idea.

L. Gyimesi then asked Executive Director T. Castanza if the kindergarten plan could be created in time to be submitted with our charter renewal application, how many students would that add, how many kindergarten classes would we need and can this plan be fit into the Bridge Prep site plan for expansion at the Petrides Campus location.

- T. Castanza replied that he also thinks adding a kindergarten program is a good idea;
- When Bridge Prep teachers were asked in a survey if they thought having kindergarten would serve the school well, 95% answered yes; the sooner we enroll students, the less behavior problems we will encounter later and the fewer issues we will have going forward. Also we have a better chance of having students on the higher end of the academic continuum if they are with us early on; right now the students who come to us later are already multiple levels behind. We will enroll a lot of general education students in kindergarten, and some may need an IEP later, but we will still get our target dyslexic population in kindergarten. The

diversity of general ed and special ed students we have in the building is already good and it will be even better to build that academic diversity foundation from kindergarten up.

- As far as the actual NYSED documentation, Pasek Consulting will formulate our plan to add the kindergarten program; we just need to tell them how many students and they will write up the plan as a material revision request for NYSED and the Regents Board to approve. We would be looking at 2 classes for kindergarten with 12-15 students in each class, and we should request 30 kindergarten students to be added to our school enrollment, which could be established as 2 classes of 15 students or 3 classes of 10 students.
- Regarding space for a kindergarten program, we have ample space on-site to add 2 kindergarten classes. DoE documents for our permanent site at Petrides *(Educational Impact Statement and Building Utilization Plan)* show our school population to be estimated at 265 students with allocations for 19 full-size rooms, but we only require 15 full-size classrooms for student learning (including 2 for kindergarten); we also plan to have 1 art room, 1 adaptive phys ed room, 1 extra room to be used for grade expansion and 1 extra room for administrative purposes = 19 full rooms. In addition, our site plan includes 10 half-rooms.
- There would be 2 teachers in each kindergarten classroom, 1 general ed teacher and 1 special ed teacher, as there is in all of our grades. A discussion followed regarding which type of license a teacher would be required to have for kindergarten and whether a Teaching Assistant (TA) could replace a fully licensed teacher for kindergarten; based on what type of IEP a kindergarten student might have, a fully licensed special ed teacher would be required, but a TA might replace a general ed teacher. It was agreed that those type of details could be worked out later, after we obtain NYSED approval.
- The Kindergarten Program might begin in September 2024 if we receive charter renewal approval in time to launch the student recruitment process; the NYSED approval would have to be made by December 2023 in order to recruit in Spring 2024 and open kindergarten classes in September 2024. If that timetable is delayed by NYSED's approval arriving AFTER December 2024, perhaps recruitment would need to start in Fall 2024 and kindergarten classes would open in September 2025. However, we hope for a September 2024 opening.

L. Gyimesi requested a vote by board members to indicate their interest in the following idea:

Making a material revision to the Bridge Prep Charter to include a Kindergarten Program of up to 30 children.

Roll Call Vote:

H. Nassef-Gore	Aye
L. Gyimesi	Aye
A. Wolkowitz	Aye
G. Kuriakose	Aye
M. Harmon-Vaught	Aye

M. Casale	Aye
G. Winn B.	Aye
R. Kerr	Aye

8 AYE, 0 NO, 0 ABSTENTIONS

After further development, a formal proposal of this plan will be brought to the full Board of Trustees at a monthly public board meeting for official approval.

A discussion followed about a full review of our charter to consider changing or adjusting sections that are not material changes; board members agreed to hold off on that review until a later time. For now, only material changes will be considered since that is what is required for charter renewal.
Pasek Consulting has finished about 2/3 of our renewal narrative at this point in time; the Pasek plan was to share our renewal package with the school team in June and with the Board of Trustees in July for a formal vote in August; however, that seems a little tight and the alternate timeline is to share the renewal package with us in early May, which would allow for the board to vote in June or July.

NYSED MID-TERM REPORT UPDATE:
The NYSED mid-term report has arrived and T. Castanza shared copies of the report with the board at this meeting; he said that it is a good report for our school, but he was disappointed in how it was put together; he reviewed some of the benchmark scoring in the report and spoke to NYSED about the rating given to our performance benchmark 8 *(Mission and Key Design Elements)*, which he believes is inaccurate since we had submitted our key design elements documentation but that was left out of the report; we can appeal for factual corrections or request a formative appeal; NYSED legal suggested we request both types of appeals with the attached documentation that we had previously submitted to NYSED that was not included in the report on benchmark 8; NYSED may or may not change our score for benchmark 8 due to our appeals. Legal counsel said that the mid-term report is a very small metric in the renewal process and it should not really affect our renewal chances. NYSED's goal is long-term renewal for our charter because it is less work for them and they are understaffed. The parent and staff surveys are also included in NYSED's report and they are very good for our school.

B. OG Teacher Certification Plan

T. Castanza gave the following presentation:

- **Orton-Gillingham Academy Accreditation** - An idea to meet a key charter metric, a unique form of professional development for teachers, called "Center for Teacher Training Development" in our charter; he spoke about teacher retention and the investment we make in our teachers in Orton-Gillingham training; teachers are looking for different ways to develop skills and our teachers enjoy OG; we are creating a new program to give teacher certification in OG and also obtain a full

accreditation by the *Orton-Gillingham Academy* for our OG program. There are 19 other schools in the U.S. that have OG accredited programs; none of those schools are public schools; he spoke about the 5-step process to obtain OGA accreditation; at this point our school meets Steps 1 & 2, but we do not meet Step 3 yet and cannot move onto Step 4 and Step 5 until we meet Step 3. This is a minimum 5-year process, but by doing the steps for the OGA accreditation process we can achieve our charter-specific goals of teacher training and development, and continuing professional learning for teachers.

- **Structured Literacy Practicum Center** - Starting Fall 2023, Bridge Prep could open a Structured Literacy Practicum Center, the first of its kind in a public school in New York; this center will help us toward OGA accreditation and also help us meet our charter goal to develop a center for teacher training; the Practicum Center would be located in space in our school building; there would be 3 practicums offered between 2023-2028 at our school: the *Structured Literacy Practicum*, the *Dyslexia Interventionist Practicum* and the *Support Specialist Practicum.* All practicum have a minimum duration of 1 school year. When a teacher commits to participate in practicum they must sign a binding retention agreement, consisting of information regarding the practicum, as well as a 2-year service requirement at Bridge Prep upon completion of the program. The cost will be determined by the number of teachers in the program *(never more than 6 teachers per year)* and the cost per teacher is expected to be $2,500 for each *Structured Literacy* teacher and $10,300 for each *Dyslexia Interventionist* teacher; in addition, the accreditation consulting fee will be $15,000 per year for 5 years; and books for the *Literacy Resource Library* will cost approximately $65,000. Bridge Prep staff must meet certain eligibility criteria to apply for the program; the program will be led by an on-site Practicum Committee composed of Executive Director Tim Castanza, and Ann Edwards/Jill Edwards from EOG. Each teacher in the program must sign a retention agreement consisting of the practicum commitment, as well as a 2-year service requirement at Bridge Prep upon completion of the practicum. Bridge Prep will partner with Wagner College Education Department for the Practicum Center. The tentative timeline for staff roll-out: March 21, 2023 - Information Session with Q&A; April 3, 2023 - Interview Invitations; April 24-28, 2023 - Interview Sessions; May 1, 2023 - Decision Letters.

Discussion followed regarding teacher salaries during accreditation; is this is a material change to our charter; should we offer the program at Wagner College instead of at our school *(Bridge Prep wants to hold the Practicum Center here so that we can be the hub for this type of dyslexic accreditation)*; do we have flexibility to structure our partnership with Wagner College; what are the penalties If a teacher breaks their retention agreement *(they would be required to pay back the total funds expended on their training and practicum, as well as funds from any related salary increase)*; what do other schools do when it comes to teacher academies.

The board agreed that more discussion is needed on the Practicum Center plans, and they reached consensus to further explore the process to establish a Teacher Academy/Practicum Center based at Bridge Prep, along with a partnership with Wagner College; however the implementation of building out this teacher training center can wait until after the charter renewal process is complete and be discussed further post-renewal. We will let Pasek Consulting know that we are making strides on establishing a Teacher Academy/Practicum Center and teacher certification because we are not ignoring this essential element of our charter.

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 12:53 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano