APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday April 16, 2024 at 7:00 PM

Location
Bridge Preparatory Charter School
715 Ocean Terrace
Building A - Atrium (Main Floor)
Staten Island, NY 10301

600 Commodore Court
Philadelphia, PA 19146

557 5th st #3
Brooklyn, NY 11215

1960 Broadway
Lake Buena Vista, FL 32830

142 Joralemon Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

201 Pondfield Rd
Bronxville NY 10708

Trustees Present
Amanda Wolkowitz, Geena Kuriakose (remote), George Winn (remote), Laurel Gyimesi, Mark Harmon-Vaught (remote), Rebecca Peters (remote), Rose Kerr, Traci Frey (remote)

Trustees Absent

Maria Casale

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza

Guests Present
Christine Volpe (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote), Nicole DeStefano, Rose Marie Illuzzi, Tara Gore (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

As per Public Officers Law, Article 7, § 103-a *(Videoconferencing by public bodies)* although board members Geena Kuriakose, George Winn, Mark Harmon-Vaught, Traci Frey and Becky Peters are not present in-person for this meeting, they are attending via videoconference from locations posted on the public meeting notice/agenda and open to the public; they are therefore considered to be in attendance for purposes of quorum and are permitted to vote.
QUORUM IS MET FOR THIS MEETING.

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Geena Kuriakose called a meeting of the board of trustees of Bridge Preparatory Charter School to order on Tuesday Apr 16, 2024 at 7:02 PM.

C. Welcome from Chair

L. Gyimesi introduced Nicole De Stefano, a new proposed trustee who has agreed to join the board and is here as our guest tonight; in addition, we have Dr. Tara Gore who is also interested in joining our board. Dr. Gore is a neuropsychologist and an adjunct professor at Fordham University. We've been providing her some information and Dr. Gore is interested in participating in our *Academic Committee.* She's attending the meeting tonight via Zoom. L. Gyimesi thanked everyone for all the hard work that they do. It's a beautiful evening and there are many things going on in the school tonight, so let's just start the meeting.

D. Approve Minutes of March Board Meeting

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the minutes from Board Meeting on 03-19-24.
G. Kuriakose stated if there is no objection, the motion to approve the minutes of the 03-19-24 board meeting will be adopted. As there was no objection, the motion is adopted and the minutes are approved by unanimous consent.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Committee Updates

A. Finance Committee

G. Winn gave the following report of the topics covered at the *Finance Committee* meeting of April 15th:

- The school's annual **FEDERAL TAX RETURN** was filed within a week of our last meeting, when the board reviewed and approved a draft of the tax documents; the tax return was submitted well ahead of the May 15th deadline, so thank you for that.
- We discussed implementation of our **CASH MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**, looking at where the cash is arrayed and where we still have the opportunity to consciously think about balances that are still high, particularly those that exceed the $250,000 FDIC insured limit. Some of the higher balances associated with those accounts might be better placed in higher-yielding vehicles; we're moving forward with that. We're also working on tightening up the accounts receiving monies from the state. That is still a work in progress.
- We looked at the **SCHOOL BUDGET** for next year and different sections being proposed/contemplated by the *Academic Committee* regarding hiring needs, class size and programs. The staffing side is becoming clearer for the board to consider; there is a component of the staff compensation structure that we should look at and pick up the conversation the board had last July. We're looking at strategy with the Executive Director and as ideas become more solidified from the administrative team, the board will be able to consider the proposals.

B. Academic Committee

T. Frey gave the following summary of the topics covered at the Academic Committee meeting on April 9th, *(C. Volpe and T. Castanza will give further details):*

- **STANDARDIZED TESTING** and the process for the ELA exam just ended, although there may be some makeups pending. The Science exam is after return from Spring Recess and the Math exam is in May.
- T. Castanza will share an update on the **NYSED CHARTER RENEWAL PROCESS** and any response to the letter that we sent pointing out 28 instances of factual errors in the NYSED report.
- The **SUNY MIDDLE SCHOOL CHARTER APPLICATION** public hearing was April 2nd; thank you to those who were there and testified at that hearing.
- We discussed an update on **ENROLLMENT AND ADMISSIONS LOTTERY;** T. Castanza will go into more details on the number of students.
- Budgeted **STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS** were discussed and T. Castanza will share the specifics on those positions. If anyone has questions about the rationale as to why we think these positions are needed or not needed, we welcome that conversation.

- We talked about the results of the **IXL DIAGNOSTIC** to get a snapshot of Math data for last minute needs before May's Math exam; overall we saw growth since the December snapshot; 1st grade is doing phenomenally; 4th grade is the weakest with the fewest students on or above grade level.
- Next year's **SCHOOL CALENDAR** was reviewed and we may have more flexibility in scheduling next year's state assessments.
- **STAFF RETENTION** and where we are with **TEACHER OBSERVATIONS;** we are sending out an intent-to-return letter to all staff in early May. We talked about which staff members are up for non-renewal. One is on a PIP and making good progress. The other one, not so much, so we will schedule a 2nd formal observation for her in May to see if she has made any progress.

C. Volpe offered the following further details:

- **STATE ASSESSMENTS**: As it stands, we did not complete ELA testing for all students yet; we did finish the 3rd and 4th grade ELA testing, which went well. We are starting the 5th grade ELA in two sessions tomorrow and Thursday with a computer-based test. Logistically we have many students with many different accommodations and we're trying to be thorough about making sure that each student is in the right group. It's been challenging, but we're doing well. We still have some makeups to do. We have a break over Spring Recess and will give the 5th grade Science exam when school resumes on May 3rd; the Math exams will be given May 7th - May 10th for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders. Hopefully all our make up tests will be completed by the end of that week and then everything can get sent where it needs to go.
- **IXL DIAGNOSTIC** is a platform that we use for student individualized progress and achievement; it is personalized learning which is tailored to each student's needs which generates different kinds of questions based on where students are at. It's used as a tool for instruction, but it's also used as a tool for assessment. We did an IXL diagnostic snapshot in December and then again just before testing in April and the trends we are seeing in our MAP data and Acadience data are across all areas. Our 1st grade is showing phenomenal growth, and the proficiency rate of our 1st grade has really jumped. We identified 4th grade as a grade that's has needs and we are addressing them in different ways with support. IXL is really useful for teachers pushing our Math exams to get a good look at what students know and what they still need to learn prior to the test. We are doing this IXL assessment now so that teachers have a few more weeks to assign things to get students really prepared for the Math test. G. Winn commented that IXL is a wonderful product in terms of how it really drills down to the individual student for the data-driven instruction that NYSED is looking for and it also aligns with the textbook. C. Volpe added that it aligns with the MAP scores too so we can connect the Map scores with the IXL and students can get individualized assignments based on their specific needs. It's a huge resource for us.

C. Board Development & Governance Committee

L. Gyimesi gave the following update on the *Board Development & Governance Committee*:

- **PROPOSED BYLAWS AMENDMENTS**: At the last Governance meeting we discussed possible amendments to our bylaws based on a discussion we'd been having about whether or not we can create a co-chair model. The amendments would include that model but not eliminate any positions. All it does is allow for that circumstance. The amended section is about 2 pages long but are not going to be voted on tonight. We just want to add them to the agenda so everyone can review them and we can vote at our next board meeting. The bylaws sections are just the sections to amend with that co-chair model. We want the ability to have a co-chair position in the future if that is the way the board chooses to divide up the trustees' responsibilities and methodologies; each co-chair could be in charge of certain committees; also how to deal with any future co-chair disagreements. If anyone has any comments or ideas, call me or email me any time.
- **TRUSTEE RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN**; After talking with the Executive Director, we are planning on launching a board member recruitment campaign this week through the Advance's Staten Island Live website; we're looking for more trustees to help fill out the board a little, and provide more help. Even if we don't decide we need more trustees, we can fill in some additional committee members with people that have certain abilities and talents. We're going to put that out online this week and will post an email address for responses from people who are interested. Hopefully we'll have a good response, and if not, we can try something else. Three board members will be leaving at the end of June due to term limits, leaving us with only 6 remaining trustees. We have 2 new potential board members: Nicole DeStefano and Dr. Tara Gore, and they will give us 8 board members beginning July.
- **CHARTER RENEWAL**: As board members are aware, we shared the NYSED draft report and assessment and we are not happy with it at all. We went through the report and had a very limited time period to respond - only 4 days. We worked hard with our consultants, board members and the Executive Director because we wanted to respond in a very guided way regarding factual problems with NYSED's draft report. We reviewed the report and found errors and factual inconsistencies that we felt were important to dispute. We drafted a letter that went to Dr. Long at NYSED pointing out that we are unhappy with the inaccuracies and problems in the NYSED report. She responded that they take this seriously too. We have not heard further and NYSED's final report is not public yet. We are not on the Board of Regents' April agenda for a vote on our charter renewal. We expect to be on their May agenda, which is probably the first week in May. The timing is tight on all of this and if we get a NYSED response, we will let everyone know. If we receive NYSED's final report without any changes or corrections, it becomes a public document and we can thereafter also post our corrective response which also becomes public. But let's see what the final NYSED report says.
- **SUNY MIDDLE SCHOOL CHARTER APPLICATION**: We have not heard anything further from SUNY since the public hearing. We did have good attendance at the hearing with many parents of graduating students voicing their their support for us, which was nice.

- **INCREASING ENROLLMENT**: We received a letter from NYSED that deals with admissions. NYSED has not yet approved increased enrollment for schools that asked for increased enrollment, but everyone knew the admission lotteries were coming up. NYCED says we can recruit students for any requested additional seats but they won't guarantee that the seats will be made available. So we decided before the lottery not to recruit for Kindergarten, which is the class that we asked to open up in the Fall. We're not going to recruit for 30 Kindergarten students only to later tell the parents of those children that we don't actually have a seat for their child. We also asked for expansion of other grades and that's something that E.D. is thinking about. But T. Castanza can speak about this in more detail in his Executive Director report.

A question and answer session followed.

III. Report of Executive Director

A. Executive Director Update

T. Castanza gave the following update:

- **ENROLLMENT EXPANSION**: We are one of many schools that submitted a request for expansion as part of our renewal application, whether that's individual grade expansion or enrollment expansion. NYSED knew that admission lotteries would be happening soon, and said they didn't want to delay that process, so schools can feel free to offer the expanded seats, but those seats are dependent on the Board of Regents' approval, which might not be until their May 6th or May 7th meeting. Which means that families offered those seats in our April lottery might have to be told later that the seats are not actually available and they are going back on the "wait list". We are not comfortable doing this, so we decided not to open up Kindergarten level classes for the Fall because that itself would be a whole other recruitment process. After discussion with the board's Finance Committee and Academic Committee, when we make decisions around class size and sections, we do it very deliberately and thoughtfully, acknowledging that the admissions recruitment process and acceptance and the lottery are very fluid processes that update by the minute; we have a school enrollment team in the building that gives enrollment updates 3 times a day while we're trying to make decisions on budgeting, staffing and space.
- **CHARTER RENEWAL**: There is really not much to say about that while we wait for NYSED to respond. We are currently in an in-between phase.
- **SUNY MIDDLE SCHOOL APPLICATION**: Today we hosted a visitor, Natasha Cherry-Perez *(Director of Special Projects)* of the state-wide NY Charter School Center, who was at our SUNY charter hearing and who is very supportive of our school; she can't understand why there is any question about the good work we do here and she asked what she could do to help. We talked about the SUNY and NYSED charter processes and she requested on behalf of the NY Charter School Center that Bridge Prep consider expansion outside of NYC where there is no charter cap. This is not something that we could do right now, but it's good to know that there

are always pathways forward for us. If we continue to be really thoughtful and mindful and not rush into things, we'll be able to support students wherever we are.

- **ADMISSIONS**: We had a successful in-person randomized admission lottery; about 165 applications for grades 1-5; our new digital student recruitment has been very successful and we will get a briefing from Staten Island Digital Media to see how many applications were due to the digital ads. Our total school enrollment is 240 and we expect to receive more applications through the summer months. We have approximately 60 available seats in all grades 1-5 and over 70 children on our "wait list" for admission. The wait list is kept open through February, so any registered student who leaves prior to February their vacant seat can be filled by a child from the wait list. There are less available seats offered in the upper grades: 15 first grade acceptances; 15 second grade acceptances; 14 third grade acceptances; 8 fourth grade acceptances; 4 fifth grade acceptances= 56 total acceptances so far. We are monitoring those numbers closely. We also have a significant increase in the number of English Language Learners that have applied, 8 ELL applicants so the our budget now has a specific budget line for an ENL teacher. Usually we go from two sections of 2nd grade to a programmed three sections of 3rd grade to accommodate the additional number of 3rd grade students. We discussed an increase in class section count (specifically for 4th grade) in the *Finance Committee* meeting because an increase in section count can result from an increased head count. We're going to budget for an additional section for 4th grade but will open only one section of 1st grade with 18 first grade students enrolled. We are aiming towards having between 17-19 students and 2 teachers per classroom across all grades. Our wait list is predominantly 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students with 4th grade particularly high. That is because dyslexia and other learning differences become apparent by the second grade, and many parents realize that their child has a learning problem by the end of the 2nd grade, going into 3rd grade. In 1st grade there is still a big question as to whether their child has learning differences or whether they're educationally slower than others due to maturation. The final class section count will be determined over the summer. Our registration process will be during the second week in May; after registration, we can do rostering, programming, teacher assignments, and look at classroom space.
  A question and answer session followed regarding ELL students mandated services, IEPs for ELLs, staffing requirements for ELLs, how to increase 1st grade enrollment, possible Kindergarten classes, possible middle school classes, how the wait list process works and other admission/registration/enrollment topics.
- **STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS**: A one-page listing of the staffing recommendations for next year will be shared with the board members to review prior to the May board meeting; the listing will show the staff positions going in, how it's funded and the rationale, so that the board can review it at their leisure and bring any questions to the May board meeting.
- **NEXT YEAR'S SCHOOL CALENDAR**: Needs board approval and he would like to present it at the May board meeting instead of June meeting; we finalized it last week after the *Academic Committee* gave their feedback on the testing window for NYS

assessments; now that it is complete, we want to give it to families before they leave school in June for summer vacation; DoE already posted their calendar for 2024-2025.

- **IMMERSION PROGRAMS**: Spring Recess starts next week and our immersion programs begin when we get back the first week of May; this is the first time we're doing those and we're very much looking forward to them; many will be held outdoors; we'll be taking pictures, good videos and detailed notes to see if this is something that we can onboard and do ourselves as opposed to contracting out in the future.

IV. Family Association

A. Family Association Update

A. Wolkowitz gave the following *Family Association* update:

- Crazy **BAKE SALE** today to support the school's annual event - this year's event will be a Cornhole competition. The Bake Sale proceeds went to buy items for basket auctions and more. This was probably the craziest bake sale we've ever had at Bridge Prep. We had cupcakes and frosting. It was just so much fun and everyone had a good time.
- As soon as we get back from Spring break we have our **PLANT SALE** scheduled for May 1st and May 2nd, both after lunch into dismissal so that parents that pick up their children could also shop our Plant Sale. We didn't have it last year because the weather was just awful and the plant selection was no good. I'm was excited to see a lot of kids who asked for it last year. So we're bringing it back this year.
- Also at the end of May we have our sliming of the Executive Director as a **READ-A-THON Prize**. He doesn't look excited, but I promise you he's so excited.
- We always do something fun for our kids and a little bit of fun for our staff so we're doing a **ROCK/PAPER/SCISSORS TOURNAMENT**. We have 36 spots, first-come, first-served to participate. Players are paired up in teams like basketball brackets as players move along and the ultimate winner gets to pick something from our Wikipedia store, which is school apparel as a grand prize. The kids are excited about it. The kids are taking the state tests and you know they are anxious. We're just trying to keep it fun and keep it light for the kids.
- We're also working on the **5TH GRADE YEARBOOK**. We offer walkthrough tutorials at our Family Association meetings to help parents design a yearbook ad or to personalize a yearbook.
- **FAMILY ASSOCIATION OFFICERS ELECTIONS** are on May 1st when we get back from Spring break and I will keep you all posted. Enjoy the beautiful weather.

V. Other Business

A. New Business

R. Kerr wants to remind everyone that we still have 2 full months of school left in this school year, and it's very crucial that everyone does not go into summer mode now, no matter how easy that could be. That means students as well as teachers; this is a crucial time post-test for staff to start looking at our student's articulation needs for their next grade. So she'll just leave it at that because at the end of March it begins and it goes through April. We have to keep our finger on the pulse of things because 2 1/2 full months is a lot of school time.

R. Kerr had the task of sending a gift on behalf of Bridge Prep to Mary Petrone's family for the loss of her daughter, Diana. Mary Petrone helped us with her educational experience as a member of our staff in our founding years; she tragically lost her daughter Diana and took on responsibility for her grandchild Sophia, and we sent her a $100 gift certificate for her grandchild. Here is Mary Petrone's response to our gift:

Dear Bridge Prep School Community,
Thank you all for your kindness and thoughtful gift. I'll be sure to let Sophia know of your concern for her and for us. Grateful to have you think of us,.
Regards,
Mary Patron

R. Kerr wanted to read that into the record to let everyone know. We wish Mary Petrone all the best.

T. Castanza reminds the board members that they will be getting a formal invitation to the 5th Grade Graduation Ceremony scheduled for June 13th at 4:00 PM at the St. George Theatre; they will also get an invitation to our fundraising event this year, a Cornhole Tournament on June 1st from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM at Nansen's Lodge. Board members are also invited to our end of year awards for staff that are usually given out at our Red & Blue Dinner, however this year the Red & Blue Dinner is merging with the post graduation celebration so rather than having 2 very similar events we're going to have 1 event immediately after graduation at Beso restaurant, which is located near the St. George Theatre. The honorees will be given their awards at the graduation ceremony this year and then we'll celebrate them along with the staff after graduation at Beso. We'll email you the names of the honorees so you know who they are. This year we anticipate the Shield of Bridge Prep award, which is our highest award, will be given to a non-staff member for the first time.

C. Volpe added that we received another Summer Boost award, so we are able to increase the number of seats being offered to students; we received a really nice response from parents, and we may even offer seats to our incoming students. The program has expanded from past years, and we have 55 seats open. Depending on whether we fill them all, it would be about $100,000 grant from the Bloomberg Foundation.

VI. 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 7:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano