APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday August 8, 2024 at 4:30 PM

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

328 Oakland Avenue
SI NY 10310

3700 Walnut Street, Suite 215
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Trustees Present
Geena Kuriakose (remote), Mark Harmon-Vaught (remote), Nicole DeStefano, Traci Frey

Trustees Absent
Rebecca Peters

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza

Guests Present
Amanda Wolkowitz, Cheryl Otterbeck (remote), Deidre Medina, Fahron Ebanks (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote), Rose Marie Illuzzi (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

QUORUM IS MET FOR THIS MEETING.
As per Public Officers Law, Article 7, § 103-a *(Videoconferencing by public bodies)* although board members Geena Kuriakose and Mark Harmon-Vaught 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.
As the total number of the full Board of Trustees is currently 5 members, **QUORUM IS MET** with 4 trustees present either in-person or via videoconference from open public locations.

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Geena Kuriakose called a meeting of the board of trustees of Bridge Preparatory Charter School to order on Thursday Aug 8, 2024 at 4:33 PM.

II. Consent Agenda Items

A. Consent Agenda Description

M. Harmon-Vaught explained that the board discussed at the July strategy session meeting about moving forward with a protocol of having a Consent Agenda section at our monthly meetings. It's a simple set of non-controversial items that are pre-published on the meeting agenda. These items shouldn't require substantial discussion, though if any of them do, they can be pulled off the Consent Agenda. The idea is to take one vote to cover all of these items as opposed to voting on individual items. Again, if there's anything that trustees wanted to pull out and discuss further, we can do that.

B. Approve Minutes from July 19 Special Meeting and Strategy Session

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the minutes from Special Board Meeting & Strategy Session on 07-19-24.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
G. Kuriakose stated if there is no objection, the motion to approve the minutes of the 07-19-24 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.

C.

Adopt Revised Trustee Responsibilities and Commitment Agreement

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to adopt the Revised Trustee Responsibilities and Commitment Agreement as presented to the board.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
The trustee responsibilities and commitment agreement, a document all new trustees are asked to sign, has been updated with revised language and information reflecting board governance best practices and the current norms and expectations of the board.
G. Kuriakose stated if there is no objection, the motion to approve the *Revised Trustee Responsibilities and Commitment Agreement* will be adopted. As there was no objection, the motion is adopted and the motion is approved by unanimous consent.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

III. Reports from Committees

A. Finance Committee Update

G. Kuriakose stated that the May financial report is attached to today's meeting agenda for review by trustees. Since the *Finance Committee* has not yet met this month, and the committee chair is not here today, does anyone have a finance update they want to share?
T. Castanza said that *Finance Committee* Chair, R. Peters asked him to give a report today:

- The attached **monthly financial report** appears to be for May, but that's because we don't create June financial reports; we use July and August to prepare for the annual audit which is starting next week. So there is a preliminary version of the end of year financials in the report. Josh is still adjusting those so that they can be presented to the audit team next week. We're also doing a soft close of our July expenses; we don't have as many expenses in July since it is usually a quiet month, plus we close out June for the audit firm. We have a new audit firm. MMB, that we approved earlier at a board meeting in the spring. They will be starting next week. Josh will be serving as the point person for most of that work; if there are any specific questions that come up, Fahron and the operational team will be on-site and I'll also be available.
- The *Finance Committee* will be meeting next week. When R. Peters returns, we'll be updating the **Financial Policies and Procedures Manual**, which is due for a much needed update - we've begun that work already;
- We're doing a **budget refresh** because there's been some movement in the budget since June, so we'll do a budget review at the board meeting in October.
- There are some **contracts' renewals** that are on the agenda today for approval by the trustees. However, we have delayed renewing the contract for **PowerSchool,** our student information system, because their fee is based on student enrollment and we are still waiting to see where our enrollment numbers land. We've been in communication with PowerSchool, and we'll likely have some confirmed contract information for the September board meeting. We still have access to the PowerSchool service since we are in contact negotiations with them. We are trying to get some support from PowerSchool to provide staff with the tools they need to

effectively use the system correctly; there is also a parent portal for PowerSchool as well.

- There is an item on the agenda for today's meeting regarding board approval for some **building renovations and construction**, however, because the work is considered minor refurbishment it doesn't need approval from the board. The renovations include painting and creating a storage closet. This will be done via a work-order and doesn't need a vote from the trustees.
- G. Kuriakose asked at what **price-point** is the board not required to vote on an expense. T. Castanza replied that the trustees need to vote if an item concerns a continued provision of services, such as for a contract - as opposed to a one-time provision of services, which is covered by a work-order. The price-point is currently $7,500 which is something that we'll probably update in our *Financial Policies and Procedures Manual*, because that price-point oftentimes requires us to come back to the board for approval more frequently than we should need to for some of the minor basic operational expenses. We're on the very low end of a price-point than most schools which have a $25,000 price-point for needed approval. We may not go that high, but will make some modifications so that we need to come for board approval a little bit less.

B. Academic Committee Update

T. Frey gave the following update on topics covered at the Academic Committee Meeting on August 5th:

- We welcomed C. Otterbeck, our new *Interim Acting Director of Teaching & Learning* at the meeting; congratulations Cheryl.
- T. Castanza shared some school start-up dates regarding staff assessments, professional learning, school systems enhancements and the new **Literacy Lab** which is in the process of changing rooms soon.
- **BACK TO SCHOOL**: Teachers are returning sporadically the week of August 19th but everyone is back in the building on August 26th; students return on September 3rd. The school has already set dates for beginning of year assessments, MAP, Acadience, OG, etc.
- **BUILDING UPDATES**: The school building is currently being cleaned; there is some painting going on; they are moving bulletin boards out of the hallways and into classrooms; considering putting student lockers or cubbies in the hallways to reduce the amount of furniture in classrooms and increase the space.
- **ADMISSIONS:** We continue to be fully enrolled. Kindergarten is fully enrolled at 12 students, mostly because of siblings. With the charter renewal we are able to serve up to 270 students; we budgeted for 235 and currently we're enrolled at 261; we still have a little wiggle room if want to add additional students; the school is maintaining a waiting list.
- **STAFFING**: The new kindergarten will have 2 teachers: one teacher was already on staff and had previously taught kindergarten; the other teacher is new to our school from PS 45. There's still some maternity leave coverage that needs to happen. The

school has not lost any teachers and has hired hired some special teachers, replacing STEM with a second PE period teaching mindfulness and wellness; and a music teacher has also been hired. We secured the auditorium for a music period every day and another period in the gym and a period in the dance room; the partnership between our school and Petrides School is really blossoming and allowing us to share more school space. School leadership members T. Castanza, C. Otterbeck and F. Ebanks are meeting together every day and looking what still needs to be decided. It seems like there's a nice cohesive working environment among the administrators in the building. The literacy interventionist that was hired is an on-staff teacher who's taught SESS last year, Mrs. Meglio. Professional development sessions are in the planning stage; teachers will have more ownership of their schedule this year within specific parameters; the school is giving teachers some leeway in when they are teaching subjects and teachers will have some flexibility with the subject schedules.

- **DATA:** C. Otterbeck will be working with the Data Team this year, 2 teachers are leading the team and they are looking at what the data will be used for. One of the things that came out of the focus group with teachers was that they're given data, but they're not sure what they're supposed to do with it, and how they're supposed to use it to improve student instruction. So that's where our data focus will be this year. Regarding the trustees' review of the Data Dashboard, what data does the board want to be looking at on a regular basis and how can we be a partner with the E.D. and his staff to drive some of that work? M. Harmon-Vaught and T. Frey have discussed taking deeper dives into specific topics at future board meetings. And one of them may be data. The trustees need to think about what data they would like to have presented at the board meetings; the board needs to come together and build consensus around the data we really want to see. We want to see more than just grade-level proficiency or grade-level growth; we want to dive deeper. And we also want to hear from the the school about what's working and what's not working; not just the number of students who are proficient, but what is the school doing to try to improve and increase this level? And how can the board members help.
- **FUTURE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE MEETINGS**: Will be held on the 1st Monday of each month at 9:30 AM, except for September, because of Labor Day.
- G. Kuriakose asked T. Castanza if he would share information regarding the **professional development** being offered prior to the first day of school so that trustees can attend. T. Castanza responded that he will know more by next week and will let the board members know because they are welcome to attend.

C. Executive Director Update

T. Castanza gave the following Executive Director update:

- **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**: Some of the work that F. Ebanks, C. Otterbeck and E.D. have doing is about organizational structure; taking feedback from NYSED renewal comments, particularly regarding Benchmark 7, where we felt that we had really clear organizational structures, but NYSED didn't see that. So what do we have

and why was it not seen? And what do we not have? So we've come up with some really clear teams and putting team meetings on the calendar, so when teachers come back it's very clear as to what the expectation is for these teams; we making sure that those who are leading these teams has enough time to prepare and knows who are on their teams. There are new teams that we're putting into place, particularly at the academic level now that we have 2 coaches. We will share more information with the trustees as part of the September board meeting update.

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**: For teachers in professional development sessions, we will be giving them everything they will need to know from an organizational standpoint on day one. Things like the organization of teams and plotting out the calendar for professional development sessions all school year, every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM from September to June, so that everyone is aware and is held accountable. It's extremely ambitious to plot out professional learning that far in advance, but we are setting goals that at this particular time we will have professional learning scheduled in future months. Right now we're planning through October and into November. The instructional schedule template that we're giving to teachers on the week of September 19th is nearly complete.
- **ENROLLMENT**: We are at 262 students enrolled as of today; this is the largest number of students we've ever had; there are 90 new students, which is a lot and there will be an adjustment period when we start classes. We are getting so many new students because of our targeted recruitment, and the way that we're doing registration which is very effective. Registration is almost complete. We just had another offer that went out today.
- **STAFF HIRING**: Hiring is also nearly complete; we only have 1 remaining maternity leave to cover for the classroom; the teacher expects to return in November, so we are hiring someone to fill in temporarily but we want to also keep them on to work for us in REI small group instruction through the rest of the year. So we're hiring for 2 types of role. We have narrowed it down to 2 candidates, both special ed. certified and will be speaking to them early next week and wrap with up. We also have a final interview scheduled with our new Family Coordinator candidate, and internal staff candidate who is far and above the other applicants; she will be seated on the External Affairs Team which will meet with E.D. every 2 weeks.
- **DATES TO SHARE**: The evening of August 27th is our **New Family Orientation** for our 90 new families; invitations are going out. September 3rd is our 1st day of school and it's a half-day. On September 10th we are offering a traditional **Back-to-School/Curriculum Night** inviting parents to come and sit in their child's classroom. On September 16th, T. Castanza will be giving testimony at the **Dyslexia Task Force Hearing** in Albany at the State Education Department. The **NYS Charter Schools Conference** in Manhattan is on October 23rd & October 24th, if board members want to attend, just let T. Castanza know, and he will register you. T. Castanza will be at the **International Dyslexia Association Conference** during that week in October. The **NYS Charter School Association** has invited us to join a cohort of schools that are trying to navigate a shorter renewal window than other schools; they are offering us

free consulting, coaching and support. The goal is to bring together a community of school leaders that are navigating this because it is difficult to navigate, and for us it's new. They will connect us with school leaders at these higher performing schools that also received a short term renewal in the past. They'll give us **free training sessions** around how to interpret the reports that we get from NYSED and how to prioritize what's important; how to work with the board and how to foster and develop positive authorizer relationships. This is where we can lean on the Charter School Association who has had the experience. It's 3 virtual sessions in September, November and January and then 2 in-person sessions in February and April and it's free. We may want to choose to work with Pasek later, but this is a good opportunity for us in year one.

IV. New Business & Special Topics

A. Special Topics for Board Business Calendar, SY 2024-25

T. Frey said that as we discussed at the special session in the July meeting, we are looking at changing the format of the board meetings so that we can spend more time talking about important things in a deep way, as opposed to just having a 5 minute committee report from everyone. We'll still have some committee reports, maybe in the Consent Agenda. We can type up our committee notes and put them in, so everyone can peruse the committee reports as needed and we could really spend our time looking more closely at a topic. So what we want to do is to get some input from the trustees as to what topics you would like us to go further in-depth during the course of the year, and also, if you have a sense of the best timing for each topic. M. Harmon-Vaught has a draft of a topic calendar; I don't know if he wanted to share that with us today.
However, we really want to use this time to pick your brains and think about what topics you all would like brought forward to the board to talk to about in more detail.

- N. DeStefano suggested for board governance, perhaps we can deep dive into digital programming or things that we'd want to champion externally; how we can use that for recruitment, in the same way that the SI Media Group was really fruitful for enrollment; can we look into more of digital grassroots and what that looks like?
- A. Wolkowitz suggested to deep dive into how to get more parents involved, Family updates are usually just about what we're already planning to do, but we need to open it up to other ideas and suggestions; if you have a child in another school or you are involved in another school that is where we can find new ideas. We can talk about how to get more staff participation in events that the school holds on weekends or after school; we always struggle to get teachers at those events, but students and their families love to see teachers there. So how do we incentivize that?
- G. Kuriakose said that she thinks it's as basic and as simple as thinking about the mission of the school, and who we serve. What is dyslexia; what is Orton-Gillingham? Does everybody on the board have a good understanding of all of that? Can we have a common language so that everybody is talking about it in the same way? That

might be really important, particularly because we have a number of new people on the board; she doesn't know that we have ever had a conversation about this topic as a group. She thinks that might be a good for us to do so that we're all using the same language and meaning the same thing when we refer to something. T. Castanza agreed and said that he tries to do the same with staff as well. It's like realignment of the use of the language around the science of reading; how do we talk about it? How can a board member talk about the work that we do with the science of reading in a way that somebody at the supermarket understands? That's what he tells teachers, how would you explain this to a parent? What does that mean? He added that he's putting together a dyslexia/science of reading presentation for staff that he could then share with the board. And the board can use it and manipulate it for trustees as well. It's been created from resources that we've been getting over the course of years.

- T. Castanza continued by saying as a non-board member who works closely together with the trustees, can we talk about advocacy? There's advocacy for the school on behalf of the school, so what does that look like? After going through renewal, the board members played a really heavy role during renewal. But there's a lot of things that happen that lead up to renewal, particularly we need to be thinking about authorizer relations and elected and external advocacy. He does a lot of that work, but how we can work together with that advocacy is really important, because we have a great board with deep roots in the community and a lot of ability to do outreach. He would be interested to see how we can continue to advocate not just for the school as it is right now, but for what we intend it to be; who are the people we need to be talking to? That's really important. It's similar to what we've talked about with Identification of external donors.

T. Frey asked that since there are a lot of new board members, is there's anything about the school that you want more information about that would help you be a better board member and advocate on behalf of the school? Anything that you think we need to spend time digging into?

- N. DeStefano responded that a deep-dive into the mission statement and what it means will help her to open up the granular pieces since she is so new. She feels that once she has clarification she may have follow up questions of what it looks like in the classroom, or historically versus the future,
- T. Frey stated that NYC public schools each have a School Leadership Team which is made up of parents, staff and administrators and at the high school level, students as well. We did Learning Walks together as a team through classrooms with a rubric, looking for specific things, and then we came back and talked about what we saw, and used that as a jumping-off point to make suggestions or comments. She is wondering if board members would be interested in doing a Learning Walk. Then we can talk about it in the *Academic Committee* and maybe make it one of our committee reports at the board meeting. G. Kuriakose said she would love to do that, and several trustees agreed. T. Frey responded that's something that we can set up with dates,

and since many trustees work and it may be hard to take a day off from work, we will try to figure out when the Learning Walk could happen.

- A. Wolkowitz suggested that after seeing the success of the board's focus groups from last year she thinks that if more of trustees could sit in on the focus groups it would be helpful to listen to the various opinions of so many different groups of people, even students who are in school living it every single day, and are the most honest, they will tell you like it is. She thinks the feedback from that was so eye opening and important and gave us so much information.
- G. Kuriakose suggested that we revisit these ideas with the board members who are not here today so that we can make sure that their voices are heard. We'd love to hear their insight as well. And we may have a couple of new candidates coming on board.
- T. Frey added that she is thinking in terms of governance, as she and M. Harmon-Vaught are meeting with a prospective board member. How can we all work more efficiently and effectively to identify prospective new board members; it seems like new trustees just come up by happenstance, when someone knows someone. How can we develop more prospective board members? Maybe we can take some time with that topic too. A discussion followed regarding the maximum number of trustees allowed on the board (15) and how many are currently board members (5). In addition there are 3 trustee applicants awaiting NYSED final approval to become board members, which will give us a total of 8 trustees; we still have plenty of room to grow.
- T. Castanza added what type of person does the board need in new members? That type of needs analysis would help: perhaps a real estate agent or an educator?

B. Approval of BoardOnTrack Annual Renewal Contract

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve renewal of the Board-on-Track membership agreement contract effective 10-15-24 for 2024-2025.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

C. Approval of BPCS District Safety Plan

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the Bridge Preparatory Charter School District Safety Plan for 2024-2025 as presented to the board by Executive Director T. Castanza.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
The District Safety Plan was updated on 07-31-24.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

D. Approval of Staten Island Media Contract

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the Advertising Agreement contract with Staten Island Media Group for the period 09-01-24 to 04-01-25.
Traci Frey seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

V. Other Business

A. Update from the Family Association

D. Medina gave the following *Family Association* update:
Not much has happened yet this year. She will be meeting with T. Castanza and the rest of her team, and probably the Vice-President of the Family Association to discuss their events for the new school year. We last met about a month ago and discussed some ideas, and we will sit down and put some dates together next week.
There's really not much to update on.

B. Public Comment

VI. Closing Items

A. Review of Action Items & Next Steps

M. Harmon-Vaught stated that this section was added this into the agenda as a standing item, so that at the end of meetings, if there are things we've agreed to do, and follow up, we have the opportunity to do that. He didn't report any from this session, but he wasn't present for a portion of the meeting, so. is there anything, Traci, that you recorded that you want us to follow up on?
T. Frey responded that:

- We brainstormed about the topics the board would like to potentially go into a deeper dive on the calendar. *(Details of these topics are documented in Section IV (A) Special Topics for Board Business Calendar, SY 2024-25 of these minutes.)*
- We also talked about holding a Learning Walk with the board to go through classrooms. That's something that we need to follow up with T. Castanza to schedule dates and with the rest of the board to see if they're available.
- Thinking about focus groups and when we want to hold them. We'll include focus groups in for the quality review and then later for the MPPR visit, but maybe we can schedule a 3rd focus group sometime in the middle and include board members who would like to listen in.
- On the To-Do List; T. Castanza or someone on the administrative staff will share dates of upcoming events and happenings with G. Kuriakose and she will incorporate the events into the board agenda each month so that board members can see what opportunities are coming up.

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 5:31 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano