APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday April 10, 2025 at 7:00 PM

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

1 Great Wolf Drive
Scotrun PA

557 5th St. #3
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Agenda Google Doc:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ejBJbqYfZ11jyF83GAEndFQ2lgHwGPqitHvrp5pjLew/edit?tab=t.0

Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4116293460?pwd=TexfxTCRQf2wdnqWQkUFcG148XidDJ.1&omn=88457695597

Meeting ID: 411 629 3460
Passcode: 717305

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Trustees Present
Amanda Wolkowitz (remote), Deidre Medina (remote), Geena Kuriakose, Mark Harmon-Vaught, Nicole DeStefano, Rebecca Peters (remote), Traci Frey

Trustees Absent
Tara Gore

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza

Guests Present
Cheryl Otterbeck (remote), Fahron Ebanks (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

As per Public Officers Law, Article 7, § 103-a *(Videoconferencing by public bodies)* although board members Deirdre Medina, Amanda Wolkowitz and Rebecca 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.

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 Apr 10, 2025 at 7:03 PM.

C. Approve Minutes

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the minutes from Board Meeting on 03-13-25.
G. Kuriakose stated if there is no objection, the motion to approve the minutes of the 03-13-25 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. Votes

A. BoostEd Contract Extension

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve an extension of the contract with BoostEd for the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 as indicated in the agreement presented tonight.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
The Term of the Agreement originally dated June 28, 2019 is to be extended for one (1) year from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 under the same conditions at an annual fee of $88,000.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. Tax Return

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the Bridge Prep 2023 Exempt Organization Tax Return for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 as presented to the Board at tonight's meeting.
Traci Frey seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

C. Investment Policy

Mark Harmon-Vaught made a motion to approve the Bridge Prep Investment Policy as presented to the Board at tonight's meeting.
Geena Kuriakose seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

III. Committee Updates

A. Academic Committee

T. Frey gave the following report on the *Academic Committee* meeting of April 7, 2025; after her report, T. Castanza will elaborate on the new curriculum for the new school year:

- **STAFF CHANGES:** A 3rd grade teacher is relocating and her last day is tomorrow; an internal associate teacher will be shifting her role to support the co-teacher and families have already been notified. Both 1st grade teachers are leaving and are being replaced. One new teacher started this week and T. Castanza interviewed someone today who looks very promising. They are trying to work out some of the specifics and then hopefully, the 1st grade will have 2 new teachers. NYC DoE must abide by the state mandate to reduce class size, and as such DoE is hiring a large number of additional teachers (3,700 city-wide and the Staten Island target is approximately 500 new hires). So we will be competing with DoE schools for teachers hires, which will be challenging for us as we look at the voluntary and involuntary turnover happening at the end of the school year. We suspect we will lose

teachers to the DoE because of this push to hire. We may have a problem finding teachers to staff classrooms. Also we might be expanding our kindergarten-level section. We need to figure out if we will stay in the 2-teacher model for K or should we move to a teacher and an associate teacher for K classes. School leadership is looking at what will work best for K students and will structure accordingly. Assistant principals' hiring should be completed by the end of April for Operations A/P and Specialized Instruction A/P.

- **NEW PRINCIPAL UPDATE:** The search has narrowed down to 2 final candidates for the Principal position. Both will be virtually interviewed on April 29th at 3:30 pm via Zoom; we'd like all Board members to participate. An official invitation will be sent to the Board to sign into Zoom on the 29th from 3pm-6pm. The 1st half-hour before the interviews we will cover the process, the rubric and Board members will need to agree to a confidentiality waiver. We'll decide what questions to ask the candidates and who will be asking those questions. Then we will virtually meet individually with each candidate. After speaking to the first candidate, there will be a 5-minute break before we start the next interview. There will be a quick debrief afterwards, and Board members will complete a feedback form to be submitted to the recruitment agency assisting in the search. Final deliberations will happen during the 1st week of May so that we can officially hire the new principal before May 31st.
- **FACILITY SPACE PLANNING:** We're still trying to get a walkthrough date with DoE space planning so we can see where there's potential for us to grow in this building. Hopefully, by the end of April we'll have a sense of how many sections of each grade we need to plan for and how many additional classrooms will be required.
- **STUDENT MAP DATA:** Regarding the midterm data which we discussed at our last meeting, T. Castanza already met with the 2nd grade and 4th grade teams and coaches to talk about how to move students toward higher proficiency. They've identified students who are high level-2 with the potential to score level-3 and be considered proficient. What do teachers need to do to work with those students? C. Otterbeck and consultant Kara are looking at MAP data to identify which students could be moved to the next level and sharing that with the teachers. We're also pushing student MAP assessments forward so that they happen after the state tests are finished.
- **NEW ELA & PHONICS CURRICULUM:** Will be covered tonight by T. Castanza, along with the latest enrollment figures and the admission lottery.

B. Executive Director Update of Student Enrollment & New ELA Curriculum

T. Castanza gave the following update:

- **ADMISSION LOTTERY:** The lottery was held on April 2nd. We received a late surge in applications, causing us to hold the lottery for every grade. We're experiencing real competition among our partners in the charter school sector for the 1st time. The charter sector on Staten Island is experiencing saturation in the market due to more school choices and a private school renaissance emerging here causing all Staten Island charter schools to compete in a smaller pond for the same number of fish.

So far we have 41 students who've accepted admission offers, and 34 outstanding offers across grades with the most applicants for kindergarten. This year we have 64 students in 5th grade and next yea we'll have 70 students in 5th grade. That's134 students that will articulate out within 2 years so we have to do our best to replicate those numbers at the early childhood level. It's going to be hard in the beginning while we start the new focus on kindergarten through grade 2. Realistically how many can we can fit here in the building and what's sustainable from a budgetary standpoint?

- **STUDENT ENROLLMENT:** NYSED approved our enrollment increase to 270 students last year. So we're allowed to add about 30 more students. We're really trying to find our optimal enrollment school size and to get enrollment consistency. It would be good to have the same number of students year after year to help us with budgetary planning. There will be some impact in the short term, but in the long term we can likely stabilize it. This will also be part of the conversation at the next charter renewal time. From a recruitment standpoint, it might be advantageous for us to begin that conversation next year as a team so we can plan staffing., plan facility space effectively, and plan budgeting. A big concern is the amount of students that are leaving the NYC every day, and are not coming back. We are anticipating that 10 to 20 of our students will be moving out of New York State next year, which is a significant number when you have a small school. For every 10 students, the school loses $200,000 in the budget. A drop in enrollment is something that both charter schools and NYC public schools are experiencing. We have to be able to adapt to decreases in enrollment. In the event we get an enrollment crunch how are we adapting from our strategy standpoint and from a fundraising standpoint, to offset the cost of lost students in the budget. We have some strategies that we're implementing; our enrollment team has been doing drop-offs of welcome packages/acceptance packages to families We've had many requests for school tours this year. Some families are talking about comparisons of different schools. Parents want to choose a school for their children based on different factors, like student test scores, or building/facilities upgrades. It's something that we're very attuned to and aware of. We'll have to be a little bit more strategic and realistic with our plans - maybe another recruitment push in late spring if student seats are still available. We have more students applicants from Brooklyn this year than from multiple zip codes on Staten Island. We looked into what it would cost to secure school busing for students from Brooklyn as an option. There may be an opportunity to tap discretionary funding from Brooklyn Council members for busing of Brooklyn students to be appropriately placed at our school. We have good relationships with Brooklyn elected officials that we haven't tapped yet, but now maybe we will start to engage. Student recruitment is becoming a year-long process that looks different at different times. Some of the larger charter school networks that are really successful have a perpetual recruitment cycle. Their application launches at a certain time, but they consistently recruit students all year. He will be meeting tomorrow with the other CEOs of charter schools on Staten Island and one of the topics will be student enrollment decline. He will continue to keep the Board updated.

- **NEW ELA CURRICULUM - WIT & WISDOM:** T. Castanza shared a print-out of a proposed new ELA curriculum *WIT & WISDOM by Great Minds*. *The Board reviewed an overview which indicated that Wit & Wisdom by Great Minds is a K–8 ELA curriculum where students dive deep into topics and authentic core texts to build knowledge of the world around them and focus on building skills in reading, writing, and communication The curriculum is designed to help students by exploring literature, history, art, and science. Each grade level is divided into 4 modules, each focusing on a specific topic. Modules consist of 30-38 lessons, spanning 6-8 weeks of study. Each module features several core texts that delve into the module's topic. The curriculum utilizes a framework of recurring content stages (Wonder, Organize, Reveal, Distill, Know) to guide students through the learning process. Craft stages support students' writing process. Following core lessons, 15-minute Deep Dives focus on vocabulary and grammar in the context of the module's texts.*
- **WIT & WISDOM RECOMMENDED**: This new ELA curriculum is being recommended by a committee comprised of T. Castanza, C. Otterbeck, 2 instructional coaches, and Mrs. Meglio, our literacy interventionist. The committee likes the Wit & Wisdom curriculum because it aligns very well to NYS next generation learning standards, and is able to articulate by grade standard how they align, which is very clear and something we don't currently have. Also it's one of the top *Science of Reading*-based curricula on the market right now. We knew that when we began researching ELA curricula. We met with them at the *Reading League*, where we were introduced to the Wit & Wisdom program. It's a research-based curriculum, with proven results for increasing proficiency across school districts; it's content heavy and it's a different type of ELA curriculum than we have now. It would be replacing *HMH Into Reading* which we've had since we began. We've made modifications to every subject's curricula except ELA, until now. One of the issues that we struggled with was how do we align our phonics-based program, Edwards Orton-Gillingham with our standards-based curriculum. Our structured reading period has seen multiple adaptations, and it's taken a lot of work for us to get to the right place. Our ELA proficiency data shows growth, but not enough growth. And we agree that if something's not working, we're going to look at something different. We've just been a little bit more hesitant to do that with ELA given the investment we had previously made. So to change our ELA curriculum is not a decision that we take lightly, or that has come just out-of-the-blue. We've been doing some real research on this. Some of the structures that we already have will lend to a more seamless implementation of Wit & Wisdom because we already have a strong foundational skills program to go with it. We have Edwards Orton-Gillingham, which is very structured and our staff are comfortable with OG's structure. This new structure will further push our teachers and provide our teachers with resources. This also has a really good family resource component - one that we've been missing. With every module we can send home a *Family Tip Sheet* which shows the content of the module, the text their children are reading, and why we picked these texts. It gives parents sample questions to ask of their children at home. Parents can know what their child is learning. There is a vocabulary resource

glossary in 13 languages for families that shows them every vocabulary word that a student is learning for a whole year. *A brief question and answer session followed.*

- **NYSED MIDTERM SCHOOL VISIT**: We are still awaiting a response from NYSED to the dates that we provided for the midterm visit. T. Castanza will reach out again to NYSED via email tomorrow morning with a reminder of the 2 dates on the table, May 1st or May 5th. Their last response to us in late March is that they're waiting to hear from SEQA *(Special Ed Quality Assurance)* who will be joining the visit here. Our school team is ready and has been doing a lot of work to prepare. There are some documents that NYSED asks for as part of the midterm visit, but they haven't told us what those are yet. We hope that we have an answer from them by the end of the day tomorrow, because when we return from Spring Recess, we jump right into state testing.

C. Finance Committee

R. Peters gave the following report on the *Finance Committee* meeting of April 8, 2025:

- **BUDGET**: Next month the school budget approval is coming up; we are working on budget version 2 and it's looking really good. And of course it's an ever-changing document, especially with student enrollment. We always budget conservatively, but obviously want to keep an eye on those enrollment numbers as well.
- **SUPERPOWER MENTORS:** T. Castanza stated that we are trying to find creative ways to continue our partnership with the *Superpower Mentors* program, which continues to get really good reviews. Many 5th grader's families are asking us about it. We asked Superpower Mentors about a partnership, and what that would cost, and they gave us 2 different prices: a 50 student program or a 30 student program. 30 students would be roughly half of our 5th graders participating. This year we have 18 students participating. We only had 6 participants the first year. So we are continuing to increase our participating students. We would love to be able to to offer the program to all of our 5th grade students, but the cost is too high at $100,000. This is something for a grant to fund. But the grants that we're applying for now are for next year. We have already engaged one foundation that we think might be a good partner for this. We're going to continue to look for others. If we can find some funding in the budget to offer the program again, we'll try to do so. We have a meeting for 5th grade families coming up in May and this is usually where we share this program as an opportunity to find out how many families are interested. We are meeting with Laura Jean Waters of *Staten Island Foundation* after Spring Recess; they already give us a grant that covers our Practicum. But we may try to shift some funding because Superpower Mentors supports 5th grade students that eventually go onto Staten Island middle schools. N. DeStefano added that if you have support in the pipeline already, there are grants that support our student population and if you already have money committed by the school and another foundation, you can just continue to grow the funding because it's matched by others. T. Frey commented that it may be worthwhile getting testimonials from parents and students about the impact of Superpower Mentors, so when you go to meet with funders, that's part of your

evidence package. T. Castanza added that Jake Sussman of Superpower Mentors has offered to come to any funding meeting. R. Peters wanted to highlight that these are funds we would be spending for graduating students. She said that she loves the mentor idea but obviously we have to make sure we spend the school's funds in line with our mission. Keep in mind that Superpower Mentors are serving students that are leaving our school to move onto middle schools. It's a great cause for other people within the community to participate in this type of mentorship, but just highlight that these students are leaving. T. Frey said perhaps if we build some kind of a component that Superpower Mentors starts while they're in 5th grade and is used to help the transition from elementary school into middle school, the funding could work. T. Castanza said that they actually recommend starting the mentor program here in 5th grade, so by the time the 1st semester of 6th grade is complete, the students have had over a year in the program. But that's part of a longer term funding strategy, because it comes with a cost of $1,500 per student regardless of when it begins.

D. Governance Committee Report & Board Recruitment

N. DeStefano stated that we have a new Board member application from Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen who is the Executive Director of Community Media of Staten Island. In addition she has a long history working at the Borough President's Office, and at Richmond University Medical Center; she is really grounded in community engagement and can help from a fundraising and community building lens - we are really excited about that. Her paperwork has been given to M. Harmon-Vaught, so we can vote to select her as a Board member right away. Her materials are attached to the agenda, as is the draft resolution for a vote. If there's any comment, question or concern, we can discuss that. If not, I would recommend that we move to a vote tonight.

E. Approval of Resolution #35 Selecting Jennifer Sammartino as Member of Board of Trustees

Mark Harmon-Vaught made a motion to approve Resolution #35 selecting Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen as a member of Board of Trustees.
Geena Kuriakose seconded the motion.

RESOLUTION #35 – Selecting Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen as Member of Board of Trustees

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees of Bridge Preparatory Charter School (“Bridge Prep”) deems it to be in the best interests of Bridge Prep that the following action be taken by the Board of Trustees of Bridge Prep pursuant to this Resolution:

WHEREAS, The Bridge Preparatory Charter School Board of Trustees, having conducted a thorough criminal history record check via fingerprinting which is deemed acceptable by NYSED, and having discovered no State or Federal criminal history, or having provided information regarding such history to NYSED, if found, and having verified that any academic and/or professional credential or qualification presented by the proposed member is genuine, and having reviewed the application in its entirety, has voted to select **Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen** as a member to its Board of Trustees, with a term expiring on **June**

30, 2028 pending approval by NYSED. The resolution approving **Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen** is adopted upon NYSED's approval.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

Roll Call	
Geena Kuriakose	Aye
Tara Gore	Absent
Traci Frey	Aye
Amanda Wolkowitz	Aye
Deidre Medina	Aye
Rebecca Peters	Aye
Nicole DeStefano	Aye
Mark Harmon-Vaught	Aye

IV. Closing Items

A. Family Association Update

D. Medina gave the following update on the *Family Association*:

- **5th GRADE EVENTS:** We're focusing now on 5th grade; getting ready for the 5th Grade Dance and 5th Grade Trip. All of the 5th grade Graduation activities.
- **MOTHER'S DAY**: We're going to have a Plant Sale for Mother's Day and a (Moretti Bakery) Dream Cake Sale
- **FUNDRAISING**: We're hoping to get some more fundraising events planned. We're holding an Ice Skating fundraiser event on April 26th from 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM at the Staten Island Skating Pavilion, 3080 Arthur Kill Road. We have discounted skating tickets.
- **FAMILY ASSOCIATION OFFICERS' ELECTIONS:** We're working on our upcoming election, to be held in May, which is very big thing. We are forming our nominating committee and several people have expressed interest in all the officers' positions. Hopefully, we'll get some former members back and we'll be back to having a full Board.

B. New Business

T. Frey stated that if there are no objections, she would like to propose that the **June Board Meeting be moved from Thursday June 12th to Tuesday June 10th** at the usual time of 7 PM.
There was no objection to the change of meeting date. **All attendees were in agreement that the meeting date will now be June 10th at 7 PM.**

M. Harmon-Vaught announced that 2 of our colleagues are receiving prestigious awards this month:

- Board Co-Chair **Traci Frey** will receive the **FIRST GENERATION AWARD** from the Staten Island JCC, at the *16th Annual Nancy Avis L'Dor V'Dor Awards Ceremony* on April 27th.
- Executive Director **Tim Castanza** has been named a recipient of the **"20 UNDER 40" LEADERSHIP AWARD** from the SIEDC and will be honored at the SIEDC Business Conference on April 30th.

Congratulations to you both.

C. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:04 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano

Documents used during the meeting

- FY26 BPCS Extension of Service Agreement (3.27.25) (1).pdf
- 2023 Bridge Preparatory Charter School 990 Draft (1).pdf
- Investment Policy_Board Share (1).pdf
- Resolution_35_Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen.pdf
- Resolution_35_Jennifer Sammartino.pdf