APPROVED

Bridge Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board Meeting

Date and Time
Thursday May 8, 2025 at 7:00 PM

Location
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86306448947?pwd=Da05DbHULgWJRawVu0U32rIte1PWSR.1

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

557 5th St,
Brooklyn, NY 11215

328 Oakland Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10310

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

Trustees Absent
None

Ex Officio Members Present
Tim Castanza

Guests Present
Cheryl Otterbeck (remote), Fahron Ebanks (remote), Kathy Baldassano (remote), Rose Marie Illuzzi (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 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.

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 May 8, 2025 at 7:01 PM.

C. Approve Minutes

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the minutes from Board Meeting on 04-10-25.
G. Kuriakose stated if there is no objection, the motion to approve the minutes of the 04-10-25 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. Edwards Orton-Gillingham Contract

Geena Kuriakose made a motion to approve the contract for Edwards Orton-Gillingham Inc. for comprehensive training, coaching, curriculum and practicum services for the staff at Bridge Prep Charter School for the 2025-2026 school year.
Mark Harmon-Vaught seconded the motion.
T. Castanza said the contract for Edwards Orton-Gillingham was discussed at the prior *Academic Committee* meeting, along with the new ELA curriculum, which is standards-based with a new reading portion. We had to choose the phonics-based component of our ELA curriculum. There were a couple of options as well as the option to continue working with Edwards Orton-Gillingham, who's our current phonics-based provider and a coach from the Orton-Gillingham Academy. We've been with them for 6 years now. Jill Edwards came to the *Academic Committee* meeting and gave a presentation on their new innovative curriculum that will be really helpful for our teachers. After much thought and discussion, the

Academic Committee recommends staying with Edwards Orton-Gillingham and ask that the Board approves the new contract.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. Super Power Mentors

Mark Harmon-Vaught made a motion to approve the Superpower Mentors Fall 2025 contract as presented to the Board.
Nicole DeStefano seconded the motion.
T. Castanza explained the contract for Superpower Mentors, which is a very popular program for students who participate. Last year there were 18 fifth graders in the program. This year the program will start in May with mentor-matching. This new contract will cover 43 participating students.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

C. FY26 Budget

Mark Harmon-Vaught made a motion to approve the Bridge Preparatory Charter School budget for Fiscal Year 2026 as presented to the Board.
Traci Frey seconded the motion.
T. Castanza and R. Peters reviewed the proposed budget, section by section; the NYS pupil finance rate is currently $19,905 per student and our estimated enrollment is 235 students. They discussed various individual budget lines and a question and answer session followed each section of the budget.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

III. Committee Updates & Reports

A. Academic Committee Report

T. Frey gave the following update on the *Academic Committee* meeting held on May 5, 2025;

- **NYS EXAMS:** The state Math tests were given yesterday and today; there haven't been many absent students for the ELA and Science and Math exams. The computerized testing didn't have many problems, except for a PIN issue with the ELA exam which was resolved quickly. The Science exam students took more time then they expected; we aren't sure how prepared students were for the constructed response questions on the Science exam. Since the Science exam no longer has a hands-on component, students must read and write more. The goal is to incorporate more constructed response writing in next year's curriculum as well as professional development for teachers on getting students to write constructed responses. That will be a change for teachers as well as students. As of Monday, 56 students in grades, 3 to 5 opted out of testing which is higher than last year; some opted out of only one of the exams as opposed to 2 or all 3 exams. That means between 25% and 30% opted out this year; last year was probably somewhere between 18%

and 22% opting out. Also our school was selected for field testing for the 3rd grade computer-based exam of ELA Part I.

- **CLASS SECTION COUNT & ENROLLMENT** was discussed in the *Academic Committee* meeting.
- **DOE SPACE PLANNING MEETING:** T. Castanza and T. Frey are meeting tomorrow with the DoE Space Planning staff for a building walk-through since we're going to be tight on space and we're also looking for additional instructional indoor related-services space. We have a sense of where we'd like to ask for space, but we'll see how open they are.
- **EDWARDS ORTON-GILLINGHAM:** New contract was already discussed tonight.
- **NEW PRINCIPAL & ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS:** T. Castanza briefed the *Academic Committee* on the new hires; 2 of the 3 Assistant Principal positions have been filled. Ms. C. Otterbeck is our new A/P of Students and Mrs. Ramirez, who is currently a coach, will be our new A/P of Specialized Instruction. The only A/P that has not yet been hired is the A/P of Operations. They've completed a few rounds of interviews and are down to 2 final candidates; we're hoping to have a decision by tomorrow. An offer has been made and accepted for a new Principal which will be publicly announced tomorrow.
- **NYSED MID-YEAR SCHOOL VISIT** is scheduled for next Friday May 16th; NYSED will meet with the Board of Trustees between 11:00 AM-12:00 PM that day; we have a Zoom option for those who want to attend but can't come in-person. Just let us know who will attend either in-person or remotely. NYSED will spend a whole day in the school, visiting many classrooms and groups, including the Board of Trustees; we've historically done well in these conversations since we're a knowledgeable and engaged Board.

B. Finance Committee Report

R. Peters stated that there aren't any further updates from the May 6, 2025 *Finance Committee* meeting other than the FY 2026 budget which was already covered at tonight's meeting.

T. Castanza added that we worked with the audit firm to file the IRS Form 990 and we've begun engaging them about the annual fiscal audit. We have some dates in August when the auditors will be requesting materials from us. Josh Moreau does most of that for us. It's good to get that booked since we usually don't plan for that so early; we're a little bit ahead of the game with our auditing partners at MMB.

C. Board Governance Committee Update

N. DeStefano gave the following Board Governance Committee update:

- **NEW BOARD MEMBER**: Our new Board member, Jennifer Sammartino-Mallen **i**s unavailable to attend today's meeting, but she's planning to attend our Board meeting in June.

- **BOARD OF TRUSTEE SURVEY**: Still awaiting completed surveys from some Board members. Please submit surveys ASAP because you're going to get another one soon at the end of the school year regarding the Executive Director Evaluation. If there are any outstanding surveys next week she'll send a 3rd reminder.

D. Executive Director Update

T. Castanza gave the following update:

- **STAFF HIRING:** Our administrative portion of hiring is done. That's the easy part. Now we are entering the teacher retention/recruitment phase where we talk about the NYC Department of Education's hiring blitzkrieg, an all-out hiring full-court press on any available or currently working teacher. In this district alone, they're hiring 700 teachers in all certification areas. It's the first time there's been this large of a hiring push for so many teachers; we are fully anticipating a major hit on our teaching staff as are all of our colleagues in the charter sector. We are doing everything that we possibly can to mitigate this. That means having open and honest conversations with teachers to let them know they're valued here. We're going to lose teachers that we really value, that we've invested money in, and that we've invested time in. We believe that the salaries that we will present to staff in their new offer letters are competitive with the NYC Department of Education's salaries, and if salary is the determining factor, then we stand a good chance. Ms. Otterbeck and Mrs. Ramirez, have already begun thinking about how they can work as leaders in this process. We do have teacher-applicants and we will engage those candidates. But we are competing against the large city Department of Education. DoE is hosting a hiring fair on this campus at the end of the month. We have a staff meeting scheduled for next week to prepare for NYSED's midterm visit, but we'll also share with staff their offer letters. And we've begun having strategic conversations with some of those teachers that we think might be potentially leaving. Our class section count is higher, and our teacher count is higher than some other places because we aim to keep our class sizes small. That is the exact reason that DoE is hiring so many teachers right now. Our goal is to put the highest quality teacher in front of students. We've begun to resume share with other charter schools in the community. At some point we may have to have a conversation around what is more important, quality of teacher or size of class? We may have to combine class sections and increase the number of students per class. This is something the *Academic Committee* may have to discuss this summer. We plan to engage our new Principal to understand what role they'd like to play in our teacher recruitment process. We anticipate a large hiring and retention challenge. We're doing our best.

E. Family Association Update

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

- **PLANT SALE**: We have a lot of exciting events happening. We're having a a Plant Sale tomorrow in the rain, and we have which is very exciting. I'm very thrilled about that.
- **FIFTH GRADE DANCE & EVENTS:** We have the 5th grade dance coming up in 2 weeks and a lot of end-of-year activities.
- **APPRECIATION BREAKFAST** for teachers and school staff this week.

A lot of fun, very hectic, but very positive events in the next couple of weeks.

IV. Other Business

A. JUNE SCHOOL EVENTS

T. Castanza reminds the Board about the following upcoming JUNE events:

- **STUDENT AWARD CEREMONY** will be June 17th AT 6:00 PM in the evening in the quad here at Petrides.
- **KINDERGARTEN STEPPING-UP CEREMONY** for our first Kindergarten class will be at 9:30 AM on June 17th.
- **FIFTH GRADE KICKBALL GAME** will be on June 17th in the middle of the day, followed by the Awards Ceremony that night. It's actually a very fun week.
- **FIFTH GRADE GRADUATION CEREMONY** will be the next day, June 18th at 4 PM. Board members will receive formal invitations to the event.

V. Closing Items

A. Closed Executive Session

Mark Harmon-Vaught made a motion to enter into CLOSED EXECUTIVE SESSION for the purpose of discussing the employment history of a particular person.
Amanda Wolkowitz seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

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

The Board of Trustees then entered into **CLOSED EXECUTIVE SESSION** at 8:05 PM. *Recordings were paused.*

The Board of Trustees returned to **OPEN PUBLIC SESSION** at 8:14 PM.

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:14 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Baldassano