



Veritas Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting Annual Retreat

Zoom Meeting

Date and Time

Thursday June 27, 2024 at 1:00 PM

Location

Location:

Twin Hills Country Club

1700 Wolf Swamp Rd Longmeadow, MA 01106

Trustees Present

A. Errichetti, A. Hickson-Martin, A. Mendelson, D. Ford, D. Fuller, L. Doherty, M. Freeman, M. Landon, R. Martin, R. Sela, X. Delobato

Trustees Absent

A. Martínez, T. Maxey

Guests Present

N. Gauthier, R. Romano

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

A. Errichetti called a meeting of the board of trustees of Veritas Preparatory Charter School to order on Thursday Jun 27, 2024 at 1:06 PM.

B. Approve minutes

X. Delobato made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 05-23-24.

L. Doherty seconded the motion.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Welcome

A. Welcome and Review the Agenda

Board discusses a wage complaint from an employee. We will close the complaint out next month.

Lisa asks if the EPLI carrier has been notified? Rachel says no, they will talk about this outside of this meeting.

Ann asks Robbie for an update on Rachel's evaluation? Ann asks that we aim to complete it by the end of July.

Rachel presents an overview of the day.

III. Annual Meeting Governance

A. Trustee Terms, Officer Roles, and Committee Assignments for SY2024-2025

D. Fuller made a motion to to approve the Trustee Terms, Officer Roles, and Committee Assignments for SY2024-2025 as is.

R. Sela seconded the motion.

The Board discusses the annual governance items.

David reviews trustee terms, officer roles, and committee assignments.

The Officers paragraph has one edit: Only Ann is starting her third term as Chair. The other three officer roles will each be starting their first terms.

Lisa asks if we are thinking about officer terms to make sure there is continuity and experienced trustees in these roles? Rachel says yes, which is why there was some role shuffling this year.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. CEO Succession Plan

Ann asks if we can remove draft from the succession plan? Nikki will do so.

IV. Activity Vans for SY24-25

A. Activity Van Purchase

L. Doherty made a motion to authorize Rachel to present a draft lease agreement between Friends of VPCS and the school, in which the school will guarantee the financing with PeoplesBank.

D. Ford seconded the motion.

Rachel discussed the need to revise and write new policies for insurance coverage and driver policies, emphasizing that these changes would not go into effect until approved by the board. She highlighted upcoming discussions in the July meeting regarding activity vans, school policies related to vans, driving activity vans, and insurance for activity vans. Rachel explained that they had found 14 passenger vans which were in high demand but secured them with a small deposit. She also mentioned exploring insurance policy quotes with Lynne's assistance.

Rachel detailed previous conversations about acquiring vans through Friends of VPCS and their research on whether the school should purchase them due to concerns about immunity issues. After confirming that the school's immunity would apply if Friends owned the vans under a lease agreement articulated in a draft lease between Friends of VPCS and the school, she explained potential coverage amounts for directors/trustees as well as drivers under their insurance policy.

The discussion revolved around deciding whether Friends of VPCS or the school should own or finance the vans. It was noted that regardless of ownership, department approval was required due to financing from People's Bank potentially extending beyond charter terms.

A draft lease agreement between Friends of VPCS and the school was mentioned as forthcoming; it required language ensuring no obligations beyond charter term from DESE while outlining minimal cash outlay for van purchase financed over seven years within their operating budget.

Rachel outlined two scenarios in a draft letter, seeking approval for the school to guarantee financing for the purchase of vans by Friends of VPCS. The recommendation is that the activity vans will be owned by Friends of VPCS, with VPCS leasing vehicles from them and guaranteeing the loan made to Friends. Approval was sought from the board to send in this letter.

Rachel described the primary need for transportation is anticipated to be shuttling kids for athletic sports and extracurricular activities. It is expected that this initiative will allow more students to take college courses on STCC's campus but initially primarily serving athletics and extracurriculars. Additionally, it will enable more efficient small group trips and potentially reduce costs compared to contracting transportation services.

Denise asks what the safety history of these vans is - has this been researched? Rachel says extensive research was conducted on safety records before deciding on 14 or 15 passenger vans as part of their growing fleet. Policies around driving records are being considered along with potential additional training requirements before operationalizing these new arrangements.

Xiomara asks if DESE has a preference for who owns the vans?

DESE does not have any preference regarding ownership but requires evidence through meeting minutes that decisions were made without obligations extending beyond return timeframes or financial liabilities beyond certain limits.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. Activity Van Letter to DESE

R. Sela made a motion to authorize Rachel to submit a letter to DESE requesting permission for the school to become a guarantor for a loan agreement between the Friends of VPCS and PeoplesBank.

R. Martin seconded the motion.

See discussion notes above.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

V. State of the School Presentations

A. Middle School & High School: State of the School Presentations

Presenters:

Amy Clark - Chief Academic Officer

Kori Alston - High School Principal

TJ Hebert - Middle School Principal

Academic Achievement and Progress

Amy outlined the purpose of the presentation, which was to reflect on the progress made in the past year and discuss areas for improvement for the upcoming year. The presentation included separate reports from each school principal, focusing on academic achievement, closing learning gaps, and improving attendance. The mission and values of the schools were also emphasized as integral components of their work.

TJ detailed three main goals for academic achievement: increasing academic achievement, closing learning gaps between student populations post-pandemic, and improving attendance based on shared values across all classrooms. Metrics such as data-driven intervention blocks and strong data use by teachers were discussed to measure progress towards these goals.

Specific metrics related to academic achievement were presented including a 60% target for students scoring at higher levels in standard math assessments. It was noted that there had been growth in average scores among eighth-grade math students over time.

TJ discussed the academic progress of students, emphasizing the importance of growth over raw scores. He highlighted specific achievements in math and science classes, noting percentile growth and successful implementation of new curricula. TJ also mentioned data-driven interventions to address learning gaps and shared individual student success stories to illustrate the impact of these efforts.

Successes, Challenges, and Areas for Improvement

Middle school teachers highlighted successes such as fully implementing new curriculum recommendations in science classes and introducing seminars for fifth-grade students focused on college success. However, challenges related to student performance below proficiency levels were also acknowledged with specific percentages provided regarding student performance against set benchmarks.

The challenges related to student proficiency were acknowledged by TJ, who emphasized that there is still work needed to improve proficiency levels based on MCAS performance by subgroup data. Specific attention was drawn towards English Language Learners (ELL) whose performance had declined below target levels according to access scores.

The meeting covered successes in high school related to increasing academic achievement through improved pass rates in math and English classes while highlighting areas needing improvement such as history and science courses where students struggled more significantly throughout the year.

Challenges related to math education were addressed concerning struggles faced by middle school and high school students in mathematics. There was an emphasis on addressing these challenges through curriculum adjustments aimed at improving performance across grade levels.

Long-Term Planning and Goal Setting

Discussion revolved around setting long-term goals spanning three to five years while emphasizing short-term targets aligned with these broader objectives. This approach aimed at ensuring staff could witness incremental changes rather than feeling overwhelmed by lofty long-term targets without visible progress over shorter periods.

There was a focus on institutionalizing practices like conducting annual state-of-the-school presentations following input from an external coach who suggested this practice after working with other schools. Additionally, it was mentioned that while some metrics are driven by state systems or external sources; drivers are unique internal constructs developed within their educational framework.

Student Engagement and Support

The discussion revolved around homework completion goals for students, with a focus on achieving a 75% or higher homework percentage. TJ detailed efforts towards aligning classroom procedures with mission objectives, highlighting successes in mastering homework procedures across all sixth and seventh-grade classes. He provided an example of a student's improved writing skills as evidence of progress aligned with school mission goals.

Chronic absenteeism was addressed as a significant challenge, with TJ discussing strategies implemented to reduce absences such as Saturday school sessions and personalized intervention solutions at different levels based on attendance patterns.

The discussion shifted towards strategies to engage parents more effectively. Rachel mentioned sharing detailed information with parents during recorded meetings as an effort to improve engagement levels. The conversation also touched on changes in communication methods such as sending text messages at the start of meetings to increase attendance.

The high school elopement discussion revolved around analyzing data related to extended bathroom breaks, identifying which demographics spent more time out of class, particularly black male students or those with individualized education programs (IEPs). The team acknowledged the need for further investment in providing support within classroom time.

College and Career Readiness

The discussion delved into college and career readiness, noting that while many of the students achieved high scores, there was a focus on supporting the remaining who were struggling with high school classes. The conversation also touched upon strategies to engage students in work-based learning opportunities.

Kori highlighted individual student progress as exemplified by a high school student's transformation from uncertainty about college to excelling academically with a significant GPA increase. This demonstrated how early exposure to college programs positively impacted his academic trajectory.

An analysis of enrollment data revealed that both ninth and tenth graders exceeded goals in accessing early college classes. It was noted that this achievement surpassed expectations, indicating positive progress towards educational objectives.

The meeting discussed support provided for transitioning students onto the college campus full-time next semester. It outlined plans such as designated office spaces at the campus along with continued support from high school teachers during this transition period.

The team expressed excitement about investing in a college and career readiness curriculum to support teachers in implementing this course. They aimed to increase pass rates in ninth and tenth-grade seminars while focusing on student engagement with early college education.

There was an inquiry into how many eighth graders would transition into high school at Veritas. The percentage is about an 80/20 split. Additionally, there was mention of other college preparatory programs available but not at Veritas' scale or effectiveness.

Academic Policies and Grading

Kori emphasized the importance of high school students not failing college courses, stating that they prefer students to withdraw rather than fail. He discussed the concept of final exams/projects and their significance, highlighting the need for learning from failure and additional support measures. Rachel also mentioned potential changes to the grading system to better prepare students for college classes.

Early College Initiatives and Programs

Rachel discussed the potential benefits of a 13th year program for students who could benefit from it, such as completing an associate degree or partnering with other institutions to save on tuition. She also mentioned the impact of removing a graduation requirement (MCAS) and its potential effects on the curriculum.

Kori mentioned that 36 students will be living on a college campus next year, which represents one-third of the class. He projected that this percentage could increase to around 50% for rising 10th graders and highlighted increasing success rates among students in college classes over time.

The discussion touched upon providing access to extracurricular activities and sports at STCC's campus for full-time college students. It was noted that colleges generally aim to integrate these students into their activities as quickly as possible.

There was mention of high interest among seventh graders in early college programs, leading to concerns about meeting demand. Additionally, efforts were made towards ensuring equal access to support services and facilities at partner colleges for participating high school students.

School Culture and Values

Kori presented findings from a survey assessing community sentiment regarding demonstrating values within the school community. The results indicated that only 37-38% of staff and students strongly agreed that these values were consistently demonstrated as a community.

Financial Planning and Budgeting

A surplus financial goal was discussed with an emphasis on living within means due to past budget changes and enrollment fluctuations. The conversation highlighted previous financial challenges faced by the district but expressed optimism about managing current staffing needs without major cuts.

Teacher Support and Development

Kori highlighted that 100% of teachers agreed they received supportive feedback, underscoring the significance of investing in teacher growth for student success.

VI. FY2025 CEO Goals

A. Draft CEO Goals FY2025

Strategic Planning & Organizational Development

Rachel outlined her strategic priorities for fiscal year 2025, focusing on workplace learning, career exploration in middle school, alumni engagement support after graduation, communications materials revision including website updates and annual report creation. She also emphasized stakeholder engagement events to increase demand for the school.

Rachel discussed the need to expand early college partnerships and increase capacity for college and career readiness. She emphasized the importance of both aspects and highlighted the need to develop capacity in this area. The discussion revolved around broadening stakeholder engagement, raising funds, increasing enrollment, recruitment strategies, and succession planning for existing team members. Rachel mentioned applying for a three-year grant from American Student Assistance Fund aimed at increasing capacity in short term but emphasized long-term sustainability of initiatives such as workforce learning programs due to their potential expense.

Rachel expressed the necessity of institutionalizing organizational practices to ensure continuity in case of her absence. She emphasized systematizing processes such as goal setting and presentation by school leaders to maintain consistency even if she is not present. The conversation also touched on succession planning across the organization, making processes transparent, codifying Veritas' approach, improving enrollment management practices, budgeting shifts from a school-centric mindset to an organizational perspective.

Reflecting on challenges post-pandemic, Rachel highlighted how their mission became less ingrained within staff due to operational shifts during COVID-19. This led them to reevaluate their approach towards institutionalization efforts while maintaining passion for their mission without compromising flexibility or entrepreneurial spirit.

Succession Planning & Leadership Development

The discussion delved into long-term succession planning efforts across various roles within Veritas organizationally rather than just focusing on individuals' positions. It

included plans for hiring a consultant for this purpose as well as grooming internal talent over several years with a focus on building organizational capacity through systematic approaches.

Consideration was given to succession planning for key roles within the organization, including discussions around identifying critical managers and developing talent pipelines. It was noted that this is a long-term goal requiring careful consideration.

A proposal was made regarding implementing an ongoing training model for principals as part of succession planning efforts. This would involve providing support and development opportunities tailored specifically to assistant principals' needs based on their individual skill sets.

The Board discussed staff culture at the high school.

VII. Trustee Strategic Priorities

A. Trustee Strategic Priorities

Organizational Structure and Leadership

Rachel discussed the importance of revising job descriptions to keep them current, especially for key leadership positions. She emphasized the need to codify and institutionalize tasks for smooth transitions in case of personnel changes. Rachel also highlighted the significance of creating a three-year deliverable document that outlines organizational structure and succession plans.

Rachel discussed institutionalizing practices to ensure long-term commitment regardless of who holds leadership positions. She underscored that this strategic priority would provide stability amid potential future challenges, referencing how vulnerabilities during the pandemic made her realize the necessity for such measures.

Rachel mentioned ongoing work on Veritas' identity guide but expressed uncertainty about what exactly needs to be created within three years regarding organizational culture. She suggested exploring samples of strong organizational cultures and their guiding documents as a reference point while being cautious not to rush into defining specific actions due to various ongoing initiatives related to job functions.

Academic Oversight and Student Support

The discussion revolved around the unique issues related to early college course failures in high school. There was an emphasis on learning from these failures, ensuring proper student support, and aligning students with appropriate courses at the start of their college journey.

The conversation delved into challenges related to college persistence, particularly focusing on first-year retention rates and sophomore year dropout rates among low-

income students and students of color. It was noted that there is a need for better handoff processes between freshman and sophomore years in colleges to support underrepresented student groups effectively.

The importance of career readiness support for high school students entering college was discussed. Emphasis was placed on providing guidance regarding suitable courses, leveraging resources available through career offices at colleges or universities, as well as establishing partnerships with community organizations such as Upward Bound/TRIO programs.

Rachel stressed unwavering oversight of academic programs by both herself and her team, highlighting specific targets set by DESE that required diligent monitoring from all staff members.

Rachel emphasized the need for the board to prioritize providing academic oversight without dictating operational decisions. She stressed the importance of sustaining Veritas' culture and mission, suggesting a more specific description of trustees' responsibilities at Veritas. Rachel expressed concern about succession planning and her ability to eventually move on from her role as founder, highlighting the fragility of the organization in her absence.

Partnerships and Community Engagement

There were discussions about forming partnerships with TRIO/Upward Bound programs aimed at supporting low-income first-generation students' transition from high school to higher education institutions. This included insights into how these programs provide essential skills such as time management, study habits, basic skills orientation while emphasizing their effectiveness in supporting historically marginalized populations.

The meeting participants shared positive experiences from engaging with students during community events such as conversations around gun reform led by Representative Carlos Gonzalez. They also discussed potential strategies for enhancing stakeholder involvement through science fairs or marquee events showcasing student achievements.

The discussion revolved around engaging alumni in community events and leveraging their support as champions. There was a focus on creating opportunities for alumni to contribute to the community without solely relying on financial donations.

Matt stressed engaging students by emphasizing their role as potential future employees in Western Mass. This approach aimed at fostering community buy-in for events while highlighting the long-term impact on local employers' access to skilled individuals.

Curriculum and School Culture

Rachel stressed the importance of integrating culture and mission alignment into strategic board goals, emphasizing that these elements are critical even if not explicitly stated as

goals. She underscored the need to develop metrics that reflect a mission-driven team's impact on student outcomes over three years.

Reflecting on past practices, there was an exploration of how structured discipline within schools positively impacts academic performance. While acknowledging changes over time, there were considerations about revisiting certain aspects like uniforms or reevaluating disciplinary measures to enhance academic prowess through respect for structure within schools.

Metrics and Strategic Priorities

The discussion delved into developing complementary sets of metrics to gauge organizational success, including input data related to teacher performance observations, staff surveys on lived experiences, student outcomes data, engagement levels among educators aligned with school values.

The following list of strategic priorities emerged from discussions:

- 1.) Growth and learning outcomes - academic performance.
- 2.) Board engagement and participation in sustainability.
- 3.) Succession planning for key leadership positions.
- 4.) Clarifying the role of the Board in development and philanthropy.

Financial Considerations

There was deliberation about balancing financial strength with culture sustainability as part of board responsibilities. The conversation highlighted efforts towards stakeholder engagement through community events involving students' civic participation as well as initiatives aimed at broadening stakeholder engagement.

The conversation delved into clarifying the board's role in fundraising efforts, including setting annual expectations for board members' contributions. It was emphasized that defining clear policies would help align fundraising goals with board responsibilities.

There were deliberations about a new hire responsible for communications and development work within the organization. The focus was on coaching this individual towards assuming a more prominent role in development activities over time.

Teacher Support and Compensation

The conversation delved into the significance of teacher compensation in retaining high-quality educators. There was a consensus on providing competitive compensation to attract and retain top talent, ultimately contributing to a positive school culture. It was suggested that prioritizing teacher compensation could position their institution as a model for educational communities.

Event Planning

Xiomara discussed the potential timing and alignment of an event with the organization's mission. She suggested an entrepreneurial pitch contest for students, emphasizing the need for inclusivity and broad participation. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of connecting events to early college and career aspirations.

VIII. 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 5:27 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
A. Errichetti

Documents used during the meeting

- 2022 Accountability Plan VPCS.docx
- Charter School Performance Criteria.docx
- Veritas_Preparatory_Charter_School_Trustee_Job_Description.docx
- Trustee Terms, Officer Roles & Committee Assignments 2024-25 - March Meeting.docx
- VPCS_Succession_Plan_DRAFT_v3_.pdf
- Procurement of Activity Vans June 2024.docx
- Activity Van Purchase.docx
- VPCS Request to DESE for approval of financing vans.docx
- Veritas State of the School Presentations for Board Retreat 2024.pptx
- FY25 CEO Goals.docx
- Board of Trustees 5 Year Strategic Priorities Plan 2021.docx