

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
April 9, 2014 6p.m.**

Board Members Present: George Awad, Mike Barsanti, Rebecca Clothey, Richardson Dilworth, Barbara Dundon, John Eagen, Susanna Greenberg, Tre Johnson, Nirva LaFortune (via phone), Krista Pfeiffer, Gloria Shabazz, Sheila Simmons, Elsie Stern, Dana Twyman

Board Member(s) Absent: Brigitte Daniel, Claiborne Taylor

Others Present: Thomas Scheid, CEO; Ramzy Andrawos, Director of Operations; Kareem Thomas, Lower School Principal; Kristen Long, Middle School Principal; Amy Leigh, Staff Rep to the Board; Odamis Fernandez-Sheinbaum, Student Achievement & Assessment Coordinator; David Peterson, IT Coordinator; Jerry Santilli, Business Manager; Mike Danyo, Santilli & Thomson associate; Megan Steelman, Compliance Manager; Rashidah Miller-Andrews, Ebru Erkut, parents; Reinaldo Alfonso, Community Member

Call to Order

Elsie called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. and noted that the two main items on tonight's agenda are the 2014-2015 budget discussion and the student achievement update. She stated that as indicated on the agenda, the board will now go into an executive session for about 20-30 minutes to discuss a confidential matter.

The board returned at 6:33p.m.

Approval of Minutes

John moved to accept the minutes; Dana seconded. The February meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment

An e-mail for public comment was received from ICS parent Laura Weinbaum; Elsie read it:

We can't be at the board meeting tomorrow, so I was hoping there is some way we can register our serious concern (and unhappiness) about the idea of ICS starting August 30. There are so many ICS families who have kids in both charter and district schools (which don't open until after Labor Day), and this really wreaks havoc on our ability to plan. Spring break being out of sync is bad enough! Can you please let the Board know we would definitely vote no on this start date or let us know how to communicate this? In addition to my original note, I really think changing the schedule in this way puts a huge burden on working parents who already struggle to make the calendars work.

While summer camp is usually an option, there is often little (affordable) coverage during winter break and other holidays/days off. Most ICS parents who have children in two schools have one (or more) in district schools, and if ICS's calendar further deviates from the district calendar, there will be an undue and unnecessary burden for these parents, including us. It is really hard.

Many thanks!

Elsie explained that we are attempting the use of a consent agenda, where we will consider several resolutions at one time. She asked whether the board was comfortable with keeping the 2015-2016 calendar resolution on the consent agenda. Amy asked if she

should wait to give staff feedback. Elsie said we'll move that calendar resolution to the regular agenda for discussion.

CEO Report

Tom gave an update on recent events:

- Special Saturday event for ICS families who primarily speak Spanish; about 25 families attended
- National History Day
- State Department visitors from 17 countries, who came via the International Visitors Council
- Take Flight bonding event occurred last Friday; those 7th grade students left on their trips today.

Tom gave a brief update on fundraising, noting that he expects we will make or likely exceed our goal of \$169,000. He announced that the annual donor event that has been in the past been held in the spring will be held in the fall of 2014.

Tom reported that two representatives from the Philadelphia charter school office visited ICS recently. They met with Tom and toured the school.

Tom also reported that we need to amend the 2013-2014 school calendar again since due to additional snow days we now also need to hold school April 15th and 16th which were originally two days of Spring Break. And he would like to propose starting the 2015-2016 school year on Monday, August 31, 2015.

Elsie added that last year the board launched the Jurate Krokys Travel Fund, which is going to be re-named the Jurate Krokys Student Travel Fund. There will be a small celebration in June, which will be a fundraiser and will also celebrate Jurate. She stated this will be a targeted, niche-fundraising event.

Elsie thanked Tom for keeping the board informed regarding relationship-building with staff at the school district. Barbara added that she feels this year's fundraising efforts have been working really well.

Tom reported that because the school district is enforcing the enrollment cap, he would like to request additional seats which will help with budgeting and would ensure we get paid for all the students in the school. Additional seats would be spread over grade levels. He noted that we might consider increasing kindergarten classrooms to 24 students per class, instead of 23. The idea would be to keep the enrollment at about 90 students per grade through all grades. Gloria moved the enrollment resolution; Rebecca seconded. Krista asked why we are asking for these now instead of after an expansion decision. Tom said that the SRC is most likely not going to agree to large increases this year. John asked if we are increasing too much. Gloria noted that if all the lower school students would move up, we'd naturally have this many students. The motion passed unanimously.

Tom gave an update on the charter school coalition's work on opposing the mid-year change in the student subsidy. Tom explained that the School District of Philadelphia recently cut this year's per-pupil payment allotment to charter schools, retroactive to the beginning of the school year. A discussion followed concerning potential legal actions and a resolution was considered pertaining to those activities. Susanna moved the motion; Rebecca seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Elsie reviewed the items on the consent agenda:

- Calendar change for 2013-2014 Make-Up Days
- 2014-2015 Calendar
- Employee release
- Principal contracts
- January & February disbursements
- Alternative pension

Barbara moved the consent agenda; John seconded. John asked why we chose this particular pension company; Jerry said there are only two and this one seemed the better option for ICS. The consent agenda passed unanimously.

Elise asked Amy what staff feedback staff gave about the calendar. Amy said that she's received several comments since the last meeting; all were stating that they did not feel students should start before Labor Day. Tom stated that his thought was that giving more than a year's leeway with the 2015-2016 calendar would give families plenty of time to plan. Barbara asked whether the Philadelphia School District would be starting before Labor Day; Tom said they probably will not, but that many charters do start in August. Tom stated that this front-loads instructional days, rather than going later in June. It also allows ICS to have summer school programming in June and close the building and save energy costs, etc during the month of July. Tom noted that if we do start before Labor Day, students would still have off on Friday and Monday of Labor Day weekend. He added that this year's winter weather made us lose a lot of instructional time. Elsie said that her understanding of why the Philadelphia School District doesn't start before Labor Day has to do with their contracted teacher start date. Elsie said ICS starting in August would be a pilot for one year before deciding on it for long-term. Amy said she feels the staff should have received the updated draft 2014-2015 calendar before tonight's meeting. Elsie said if folks are more comfortable circulating a draft 2015-2016 calendar and passing it at the May meeting, we can do that. Krista asked if Tom has received support for the August plan. Tom asked Kristen to address that; Kristen stated that starting in August allows for better instructional time because teaching days in the fall are much more productive than in June. She added that our calendar never follows the school district. Amy added that some staff did give favorable comments about an earlier start date. Elsie said the Executive Committee will make sure the draft, along with the context, will be circulated and parents will be directed to give responses to the parent board reps. She clarified that parents and teachers can give input, but do not get to make the decision. Elsie said this is a small scale change, and that the responses are more often in response to how the decision impacts particular families.

Finance Report

Gloria reported there are a lot of things up-in-the-air at this point in the budget process. There are two significant things we don't yet know 1) the amount of the school district cut and 2) whether there will be a PSERS subsidy reduction. She circulated two handouts of draft assumptions and the draft budget. Jerry reviewed the budget assumption sheet. He said there is an anticipated 8% subsidy decrease for non-special education students and the subsidy for students with special education services is expected to remain the same as this year. He noted that this is clearly not an easy situation. Jerry explained that if the School District was better funded, charters would be better funded and that we're using the best data we have at this point to develop the budget. He stated it is not a doomsday budget. Elsie stated she wants to underscore that if we lose the PSERS subsidy, that is a permanent hole in the budget, not just a one-year cut. Elsie stated that at this point, a salary freeze is only projected for next year, but that the board anticipates

increases in future years. She noted that the request for additional seats would obviously assist with the budget.

Gloria reviewed some potential additional funding for next year and subsequent years by adding students and increasing fundraising. She added that if we need to add additional middle school students, we might need more support and would need to look at the cost effectiveness. John noted at some point we need to address the budget gap because adding students will not be able to fill in the gap. Gloria stated that we have some extra funds to cover for rainy days and that we need to decide over how many years we want to spread those funds, so we might need to review our priorities for the use of the fund balance. Elsie asked members to give feedback now. Mike noted that we have several years where we can run a deficit, but we need to have a sustainable business model. Gloria stated that even if we expand (i.e., replicate, etc), there could also be some initial costs for that. Gloria said that there has been objection from some fronts to charters having fund balances. Elsie said we need to decide if we want Tom to present a more draconian budget for next year or if we want to use more of our fund balance to have more time to make more structural changes. Tom stated he feels staff need an increase in compensation. Gloria said the salary task force put out a survey to teachers to get feedback about items most important to teachers. Gloria reminded everyone that once the budget is passed in May, we are not allowed to make any changes for 90 days. Elsie reminded the board that the special May 7th meeting will be include more items than just the budget. Elsie asked the External Communications Committee to send out information about how people can get involved in activist efforts regarding charter school funding. Gloria said we will put out a letter about that. Gloria will send out a reminder about the next Finance Committee meeting; Elsie encouraged people to attend.

Student Achievement Presentation (copy of presentation attached)

Odamis, Kareem and Kristen presented. They noted that the Curriculum Committee has changed the Middle States achievement gap goal to closing it for *all* students. Odamis explained the new PA School Performance Profile (SPP); he added that the new Educator Effectiveness System (paschoolperformance.org) will help us track individual teachers. Kristen pointed out the PSSA slide (same as October) which shows that we did better than the state in all areas. This year two more Saturdays were added to the Saturday Academy PSSA prep. As part of our Middle States goals, we instituted an incentive program for students in 6th, 7th and 8th grades to encourage students to get to school on time every day. No major change has been seen so far in 6th grade, but some of those students still ride the yellow school bus. The most significant difference has been in the reduction in students who are tardy.

Nirva, Rebecca and Dana were thanked for their work with these efforts. Odamis reported that we have see results from our students' use of Achieve3000, but that it's hard to tell how much Achieve3000 is doing, how much our teachers are doing, etc. Kristen pointed out that we don't know whether this will connect with results on PSSAs, clarified that one thing the term "college-readiness" means is reading on grade-level. Odamis said that the current PSSAs are very fiction-heavy; that will be changing with the new common core and PSSAs changes. Students' use of Achieve3000 has been varying; the average has been 1.4 times per week; the goal is to have them use it at least two times per week for maximum academic impact. Kristen said that this year's middle school tutoring on Early Dismissal Wednesdays has been going well and appears to be helping a lot; many students go every week. Kareem stated he and Odamis are brainstorming to see if we can start a similar tutoring initiative for lower school students next year; one challenge is that so many of the lower school students ride the yellow school buses. Kristen said that parents of 5th and 6th grade students have been very supportive in getting their students home another way (other than the school bus) in order to get tutoring. The

principals reported a lot of good collaboration by teachers regarding teaching specific reading and math skills. They reported that the review of middle school project-based assignments showed mixed results. Some projects like for the science fair that are mostly completed outside of school show differences among whether students from certain economic groups move on to the next level of competition. However, assignments like Young Playwrights, which is mostly done in school and in traditional voice, show a variety of students achieving.

Barbara said this is such motivation for the job the staff is doing! Kristen noted that the collaboration is amazing.

Governance

Rebecca reported that the committee recommends increasing the size of the board, because we anticipate several people rotating off the board over the next several years. She stated it seems to make sense to start some additional new members now to get them oriented before five member leave at once. Elsie said this increase would probably be temporary until we make sure all our committees are robust and working hard. Krista asked if that affects quorum; the response was that it does not. Elsie read the resolution. John moved the motion; Barbara seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24p.m.

Handouts circulated prior to this meeting:

Agenda

January & February disbursements

February 2014 Minutes

Draft budget assumptions & draft budget

**Independence Charter School
April 9, 2014
Resolutions**

ADOPTED

Enrollment Increase Request

-Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees grant authority to the CEO to petition the School District of Philadelphia and the School Reform Commission through the SDP Charter School Office to add up to 35 more seats for the 2014-15 school year.

Opposition to Subsidy Change:

- ***WHEREAS***, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has reduced school subsidies to reflect actual as opposed to budgeted expenses retroactive to July 1, 2013, resulting in a loss of revenue for the school in this fiscal year even though the law specifically mandates budgeted numbers be used.
- ***RESOLVED***, that the Board of Trustees hereby authorizes Independence Charter School, in collaboration with other charter schools and Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools, to file an injunction to restore budgeted numbers for subsidy funding. The amount for this action is not to exceed \$5,000.

Calendar Change for 2013-14 Make-Up Days

-Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees open school during on April 15 and 16 to make up days missed to inclement weather.

Calendar 2014-15

- Be it resolved that that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees adopts the 2014-2015 academic calendar as presented.

Employee Release

-BE IT RESOLVED that the Independence Charter Board of Trustees release employee Marjorie Plenty as a school nurse for the 2013-14 school year.

Principal Contracts

-BE IT RESOLVED that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees approves the Principal contracts for the 2014-15 school year.

January & February Disbursements:

- ***BE IT RESOLVED*** that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approves disbursements from the month of January 2014 in the amount of \$331,546.75 and February 2014 in the amount of \$262,605.46.

Alternative Pension:

- ***RESOLVED***, the CEO and business controller are authorized and directed to negotiate the terms of participation in a 403 (b) alternative pension plan to be managed by PenServ Plan Services, Inc. (“Alternative Pension Plan”);
- ***FURTHER RESOLVED***, the Alternative Pension Plan shall be made available to all employees hired after July 1, 2014; and
- ***FURTHER RESOLVED***, the Board of Trustees is authorized and directed to execute any document or delegate any task necessary to effect this resolution.

Bylaws Change

-Whereas the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees seeks to expand the capacity of the Board of Trustees and maintain stability and continuity of the Board over time, be it hereby resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees amend section 4.1 of its bylaws to state:

4.1. General Powers. The business and affairs of ICS shall be managed by a Board of Trustees (the “Board”) comprising no fewer than nine and **no more than nineteen voting members** (each, a “Member” or “Trustee”) selected in accordance with Section 4.5 below, except as otherwise provided by applicable law or these bylaws. The Board will govern all operations of ICS, but may delegate day-to-day management to a Chief Executive Officer (“CEO”). The Board, in consultation with the CEO, shall establish a reporting relationship between the Board and ICS's staff. The Board shall establish policies and procedures for operating ICS in accordance with its approved public school charter and shall monitor ICS compliance with such policies and procedures, and shall establish budgets and operating procedures aimed at preserving the continued financial viability of ICS.

Resolutions DEFEATED: None

Resolutions TABLED:

Calendar 2015-2016

-Be it resolved that that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees adopts the opening day for the 2015-16 school year as August 30, 2015.