

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2013 6p.m.**

Board Members Present: George Awad, Lauren Ayala, Mike Barsanti, Rebecca Clothey (via phone), John Eagen, Susanna Greenberg, Nirva LaFortune, Gloria Shabazz, Sheila Simmons (via phone), Elsie Stern, Dana Twyman

Board Member(s) Absent: Brigitte Daniel, Tre Johnson, Naomi Wyatt

Others Present: Richard Trzaska, Interim CEO; Ramzy Andrawos, Director of Operations; Kareem Thomas, Lower School Principal; Lynn Eckerman, Teacher Leader; Amy Leigh, Staff Rep to the Board; Jerry Santilli, Business Manager; Mike Danyo, Santilli & Thomson associate; Megan Steelman, Compliance Manager; Yong Ji, Parent; Krista Pfeiffer, Parent; Temple University Research Team: Maia Cucchiara, Erin Horvat & Erin Rooney

Call to Order

Elsie called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm. and noted that the focus of tonight's meeting will be a presentation from the Temple University researchers and an update on the CEO search.

Approval of Minutes

Susanna moved the minutes; Nirva seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Presentation by Temple University Researchers

Elsie introduced Temple University researchers: Maia Cucchiara, Erin Horvat and Erin Rooney. The researchers explained that they have a keen interest in charter schools and were pleased when former ICS CEO Jurate Krokys asked if they would look at ICS. They presented a draft report and will be forwarding the final report to the board soon. They noted that ICS is unique in many ways, including having students come from so many different parts of the city and offering the Spanish Immersion program. The researchers spent over 50 hours observing at ICS and meeting with various stakeholders. They found that ICS is deeply reflective about what it does and how it does it, and has internal and external accountability. They found that teachers hold one another accountable. The researchers were struck by what a charter can decide to do, as opposed to a regular public school -- charters can actually take action and be innovative without a lot of delays.

They found opportunities for growth in the areas of Immersion/Enhanced programming, including dealing with issues of race, classroom management, and expectations. In the area of family engagement they found that ICS seems to keep parent volunteers at a distance and found that parents want more meaningful engagement. They suggest giving a clearer message to parents as to what types of involvement are and are not available. They noted that meaningful parent involvement may be a challenge for teachers from other cultures, who may not be used to parents being in the classroom on a regular basis. They suggested giving time in the schedule for the Family and Community Liaison to work with staff.

The research team also felt that the ICS mission and vision need to be clearer as to the actual mission. They also noted that there seem to be some cultural differences among staff and students and feel that the school needs to specifically look at the experience of African American boys. They encourage ICS to continue having courageous conversations and perhaps bring in outside help for staff training. The first workshop will be happening in the early spring.

As to “where does ICS go from here,” the researchers recommended that ICS concentrate on going from good to great. And that rather than expand to a high school or replicate, they recommend that ICS offer support to others. They also recommended that ICS start a pre-school in order to address the achievement gap, which they think would also be a draw for potential staff members. They noted that they were impressed with the commitment and caring they saw at ICS.

Elsie asked for questions:

Lauren: How can we work on changing perceptions in regard to the perceptions about African American boys, differences between the Immersion and Enhanced programs, etc? And could there be a benefit from eliminating one of the tracks?

Response from researchers: The situation with African American boys is pretty common. Have community conversations about it and look at the available books on the topic.

Nirva: We have had that conversation, but it doesn't seem that anything has been done about it. How can we take action? How can we start to change the culture?

Response from the researchers: You need to look at policies and practices and decide on things like how much noise is acceptable and how much physical activity the kids are getting.

Amy: The ICS Global Education Leadership team has found a resource to come in and have a series of guided conversations with staff about this topic.

Nirva: We also have to educate parents to make sure they know the expectations and work with the teachers to support the students.

Susanna: What's the most important quality to look for in a new CEO?

Response from researchers: The mission and vision would be the area to look at. Ask the candidates “what systems have you put in place?” Likewise, when you check references, be sure to ask that question.

Is starting an off-site pre-school program a good idea?

Response from researchers: We actually didn't give it much thought, but it would probably be fine as long as it was somewhat accessible to ICS.

Elsie: The board recently decided that we want to reach more kids, so we do want to consider expansion. What would this look like as part of a board strategy?

Response from researchers: Frustration helped build *this* school, but we worry that you could dilute what's here by expanding. Instead, maybe you can help a group that wants to start a charter modeled on ICS. We were so struck by the quality of the staff.

Sheila: I was interested in the part about offering technical assistance to other schools. Is there possible funding for doing that? I am also interested in the “tipping point” for white parents, since they usually leave after the school becomes less than 20% white.

Response from researchers: We do feel there is possible funding for efforts like this and would love to work with ICS on something like that.

Gloria: Have you worked with other charters on expansion issues?

Response from researchers: Our recommendation is on instinct, not on specific experience. ICS is very bottom up. Erin Horvat worked with Youth Build Charter’s board; they opened a second site and that didn’t work for a variety of reasons. Instead of expanding, you can concentrate even more on the success of your students.

Elsie clarified that we will have a final document that we will share with parents.

CEO Report

Rich reported that our Saturday Academy has started; this is part of our plan to help close the achievement gap and offer support for PSSA (grades 3-8) for students who do not receive special education services. Students in 3rd-5th grades who do receive special education services will work with special ed teachers for some extra time from 8:30a.m.-9a.m. For 6th-8th graders who receive special education services, the extra time will be from 3:30p.m.-4p.m. For the Saturday Academy, we invited 60 students and 59 are participating. He thanked Pr. Kareem and Tr. Lynn for their hard work in following up with parents and students about this opportunity. In addition, we have started after school tutoring (Achieve 3000, Reading Olympics, iexcel, etc).

Rich also noted that he feels we need to research, discuss and decide (before the end of the school year) about whether we should sign our charter. He reported that he will continue discussing this with ICS legal counsel and once he receives more information, he will share his recommendation with the board.

Rich announced that Read Across America will be held in the beginning of March and ICS is making that a “grandfriends” day from 8:45a.m.-9:45a.m. on March 1st. Rich asked Pr. Kareem to talk about the Lower School’s May 10th Career Day; he invited board members to participate. Kareem noted that Counselor Gabe is organizing the Career Day and welcomes adult participants to share their occupation with our students. To volunteer, contact Counselor Gabe or Kareem.

Rich noted that this year’s play will be performed at the Prince Music Theater; the show will be presented on Thursday, June 13th at 1p.m. for the younger students, on 14th at 9a.m. for older students and on the 14th in the evening for parents. Tr. Adrienne L, M. Ronith and Tr. LaVeta are the co-directors. The school van has arrived and is already being used for basketball games. It holds 9 passengers, plus the driver. The basketball team has won 2 and lost 7; there are 2 games remaining. The team has had a good time and teachers have noted that a lot of the players have reacted very well to the experience; it’s been character building. Pr. Kareem said the team members have been happy, even when losing. Gloria asked if there have been a lot of spectators. Rich and Amy said there have been some spectators, including ICS alumni. The girls intermural team will start in April; Kate B will also be the coach for that team. Rich reported that some kids have come and asked about soccer and flag football. John said Palumbo has a flag football team.

Rich reported that Pr. Kareem and Tr. Keia will be representing ICS at the nemnet career fair this Saturday; part of that registration includes 45 days of job posting. He noted that we have posted our CEO position there. Rich said that the HR Committee has been reviewing the recommended changes to language in the teacher contract.

Rich asked Tr. Lynn to explain the school wide “Survivor” competition, which is a fun way to survive the reality of PSSA testing. Lynn explained that a few years ago, some ICS teachers went to a conference where they learned about this idea. The competition includes PSSA-type questions (outwit). Names are drawn to go to the “Outplay” (i.e., put a cookie on your face and try to get it into your mouth with no hands). Points are compiled along the way. At the end (after PSSAs), the final “outplay” is a big event between two classes.

Rich noted that ICS is celebrating Black History Month with trivia during morning announcements. Also, each Monday first grade Tr. Erika is dressing up as a famous persona (Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, etc). He reported that Monika is working on the Philadelphia Schools Partnership Grant and it will be completed soon. He also noted that Pennsylvania is now offering an alternative track to principal certification. Rich urged board members to spend time at ICS to see it on a day-to-day basis. Amy circulated a sign up sheet for visits.

John asked about our engagement of legal counsel and Rich explained recent developments. Dana asked about whether we make any special exceptions for accepting students. Rich said ICS does not do that, but we do have Keystone staff status. In addition, the board no longer assigns “Founder’s Status,” but those previously designated as Founders still can get their children into the school.

Elsie clarified that we have changed course and are trying to resolve the issues with our charter so we can have it resolved before the new CEO starts. Dana asked about the issues that prevented ICS from signing; Rich stated that the issues have been identified by one of our attorneys and he would be discussing them with the School District.

Finance

Gloria reintroduced Mike Danyo from Santilli & Thomson. Mike reported that we have spent down the remaining FLAP grant funds and submitted the federal paperwork. He noted that there are some timing issues on the financials, such as funding from out-of-county revenue and that we will soon start receiving federal Title funds. He explained that once we do budget adjustments (staff raises at the end of December, etc.) for the April meeting, the variances will disappear. He stated that we are about \$17,000 ahead of budget. Dana moved the November disbursements resolution; John seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Dana moved the December disbursements resolution; John seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Gloria reported that the next committee meeting is at 8a.m. on Tuesday in Rich’s office; we will start getting very involved with the budget process. Elsie reminded all board members that the second Wednesday in March at 6p.m. is a phone conference for board members to talk about the budget process.

Check-in re: Board Process

Elsie reported that there are committee goal progress notes in the Dropbox and asked everyone to review the information. She asked for feedback regarding the changes that have been made in board process this year -- more governance and cutting down on time commitment. She asked Mike to lead the discussion. He asked for the perspectives of those who have been on the board for a while. Do the changes feel like they’re doing what they’re supposed to do? John said it does feel better and that we’re not wasting

time. However, he said he also feels a little less engaged, but that's probably maturing as a board -- although it's hard to get a feel for what's happening in other committees. Lauren voiced a similar sentiment and that it's more reading and less talking. Dana said she enjoys the board meetings more because of the focus, but that she misses having committee reports e-mailed. It was noted that committee chairs should be more diligent at keeping reports in Dropbox, which might be helped by having a review about using Dropbox. Mike said the word engagement has been coming up -- regarding how much we know, how do we prepare, etc. and that it may just be that we have a larger board and more separation of responsibilities. Lauren said that as a parent and a board member in a parent seat, the every month meeting felt right; however, she understands the every-other month being more efficient. Nirva said she likes that we're meeting every-other month because the meetings are productive and that if you read before you get to the meeting, you're prepared. Mike said we need to separate the engagement as a board member from the engagement if you're a parent at ICS. Several board members noted that coming in to observe in classrooms is a really great and important experience for board members. Amy will send a list of events to board members.

Update on Benefit Event

Elsie asked Nirva to give an update on the March 7th benefit. Nirva asked members to address envelopes tonight so the invitations can be sent next week. Tomorrow is the deadline to send names to Monika. An e-mail version of the invitation will also be sent out next week. The price is \$100; \$50 for staff. If someone wants to buy a ticket for a teacher, the cost will be \$100. Elsie said this event is a great way to meet your board financial obligation. Gloria noted that we don't just want to sell tickets, but want to have a lot of people there. Elsie thanked everyone for their hard work.

Executive Session

At 7:55p.m., Elsie announced the board members will be going into an executive session to discuss a confidential matter related to the CEO search.

Adjournment

The board reconvened after the executive session and were reminded that their Financial Interest forms are due by the end of April. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20p.m.

Handouts circulated prior to this meeting:

Agenda

December 2012 Financial Report

November & December 2012 Disbursements

**Independence Charter School
February 6, 2013
Resolutions**

ADOPTED

1. November Disbursements:

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approves disbursements from the month of November 2012 in the amount of \$317,290.85

2. December Disbursements:

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approves disbursements from the month of December 2012 in the amount of \$407,091.66

Resolutions DEFEATED: None

Resolutions TABLED: None