

BOT Meeting Thursday August 29, 2024 Minutes

Board Members in Attendance: Jim Sander, Robert Ansbro, Sean Blackwell, Lucas Doe, Ted Hurwitz (Ex-Officio)

Administrators in attendance: Norma Hurwitz, Eddie Kubina

Not in attendance: Christopher Brignola

Guests in Attendance: Ted Francavilla, Thomas Gorrell, David Haller

Meeting Called to Order by Jim Sander 6:38pm

I. Approval of Minutes

Robert motioned to approve the minutes, Sean seconds, all in favor

II. Election of Ted Francavilla

- Ted was invited to address the board.
- He has known Bob for a few years. He likes to spend his time working for good causes, this fits the bill. School finances look in good shape. He would like to join if the board sees it fit.
- Right now we have a five member board, we are looking to move toward a seven member board. The board voted in favor of accepting Ted.
- James welcomes Ted Francavilla to the board. States that the board is very happy with the school and its executive director and co-founder. The school provides a wonderful opportunity for students to learn.
- Lucas asked what Ted would bring to the table as a board member. Ted states he has a strong skill set in finance and will assist in any way he can.

III. Building Project

- David Haller joined the meeting. James states how David has done a wonderful job helping with the building of the new school.
- David states we have the TCO. The punch list is an item of annoyance. It will get worked out. The second part is the bond money. He is projecting a \$300,000 overrun. Some money left for contingency and \$175,000 left for change orders.
- Norma states in general that there are a few items that have been spoken about. Shades are not in all rooms and that will be added to the cost. There are a few items that are essential. David states that the \$300,000 then may increase a bit.
- The last thing is the maintenance contracts that are required to conduct inspections, such as the elevators, fire pumps, boilers, and backflow preventer. These are normal yearly costs that will have to be done. There are some other things that would need to be done to maintain the well being of the building. David is working on that budget and will set it for Norma soon.

- Norma feels it is a lovely building and it seems sound. Looking at the punch list next week with the contractors, architect, and school leadership, we should have a smooth transition. Parents came in yesterday and were very impressed. Some parents were disappointed it was only grades 3-5. A lot has been accomplished. The work has been arduous with getting the building done effectively.
- David states there are a lot of minor issues that need to be adjusted like chips in the wall, ceiling tiles, internet access, and other small annoyances.
- James wants to know if Signature will have to stay on the job until all aspects of the project are completed. David states that is the purpose of the retention funds. They will slowly get the remainder of the money owed until it is complete. It will however take 2 to 3 more months.
- Lucas got to see the building, he really liked the building. He saw the gym, classrooms, library, rooftop, the layout is very nice. He enjoyed his visit.
- Everything was squared away with the architect.
- Ted has a question on the cost of the building. He wants to know if it was about \$40 million. The school took \$20 million in bonds and then contributed the rest of the money. The repayment interest on the bond is about 2.5%. We are earning about 5% on the treasuries. They will be repaid in 15 years. Ted Francavilla states it is a very good deal.
- Lucas adds as long as we have enough students we can pay off the loan fine. We should not have an issue with attracting students to the new building. We will then go back to building a surplus.

IV. Education

- The transition into the new building has been going well. The staff is very happy with the building. All teachers have been working for the fall PD in the same location and it has been going well. There is more of a sense of comradery. There are a few inconveniences, the internet still is not working correctly. Some finishing touches need to be made as well. Overall everyone is very happy with the new building. We had an open house and families were very happy with the building and the children were excited about being here for the school year. The classrooms are nice, the teachers have set them up. We are mostly ready for the school year to begin.
- State exam results were good, but could be better. Overall we were at 88% in math and 77% in ELA. The seventh and eighth grade had above 90% passing in both subject areas. 96% of seventh graders scored a 4 on the math exam. Fifth and sixth grade were the weakest grade levels. We often get an influx of new students in 5th and 6th grade. With students moving up in the new building we should be able to retain more students. We will work on improving the performance of those grades. Third and fourth grade also had above 90% passing in math.
- The cook was beaming to be in a kitchen that is so nice. She seems like a very motivated individual, she has been in DOE for 3 years and is very eager to provide a menu that students will eat and enjoy. Norma is hoping that we can get the children high quality food that the children will enjoy. It seems as if they are trying to add some authentic cooking to a set menu. We will find out soon how the food is prepared. We have a diverse group of students so it will be interesting to see if there are one or two

dishes that we can create to meet the needs of these students. Having a good diet that is enjoyable is an important element.

- It seems that the food is cooked and not premade, so there can be some input in how it is prepared. It is uncertain how much we can factor in. We looked into having a private company, but the issue of getting money from the state is complex and there is a lot of paperwork in order to get some of the cost back. It does look like there are some variances.
- James asks how much having the DOE provide food costs, it is without any cost to the school. It is provided for free.
- Leena Thomas will be returning on October 1st.
- James would like to have Paola Coste to join a board meeting briefly so the board can recognize her.
- The new building has a parking garage and an automatic door. There is room for about 15 cars to park.
- We should be printing Academic Leadership on advertising instead of ALCS, to make it clearer who we are.
- The staff is trained to say Academic Leadership when they answer the phone.
- All school logos have Academic Leadership written out.
- We have had stabilization in our enrollment. It has been an ongoing issue. The new building will likely attract more students. We have better numbers in our middle school and 3-5 classes. We need to add on more K and 1 students.
- James points out that enrollment is a city wide issue due to people moving out of the city. There is also an increase of schools in the neighborhood. We get our money from our enrollment. We therefore need to keep working on attracting new students.
- There are close to 9300 students in the district and there are 40 charter schools and around 27 public schools. There is a lot of competition for students. We are an independent school. Other schools are network schools, run by large organizations which makes it more difficult because they have more money. One board member of Success Academy funded principals to start a leadership program. Each year they take 15-20 principals to give them a scholarship to Columbia. A lot of these network schools are more like regular districts. We have done well, but we have to do better.
- Lucas adds we have about 385 students. Our coverages are still good, we are always working to get more students. Our finances are still good with our current number of students.
- Our goal is to increase our numbers
- We also are looking to add a high school.
- So many schools have opened in the same location where we are. There is gentrification taking place in district 7. This had an impact on us. There are a lot of new buildings, but right now they do not have a lot of families. It is realistic that we can get back to 400 and then eventually 500. We will spend a lot of time developing a relationship with the community in order to show them the value of attending our school. We have to let our parents know that our school is like a second home.
- Ted Francavilla states that less students and more schools is a bad combination. He understands that students are not leaving because they are unhappy with our school.

- Norma states that now there is more opportunity for us to attract students.
- Lucas adds that we have a blue ribbon for our school performance.
- James adds that we have not had a growth in attrition.
- We do not have a pre-k program and that makes it difficult to attract kindergarten students.

V. Finance

- We talked about having less students and what we need to do to get more students. Our finances are good. There is not much to add that has not been discussed. Once we are in the new building we will see how the costs play out and how it impacts our finances.
- We get a financial report every month from Paul, our accountant. He creates the budget for the school.

VI. Real Estate

- There is nothing to add, nothing else is occurring at the moment.

VII. New Board Member

- Thomas states that he has known Bob for several years. He spent a career in research of public and private schools. He currently is with a private for profit art school. He has a background in microbiology. He has a background in education and the higher education level. He has helped teachers learn programs. He is involved with the American Museum of Natural History. He has an affiliation with the harbors school, it is a maritime school. It gives college credits.
- He is also involved in dentistry. Teaches microbiology for dental hygienists. Has an interest in how germs can inform us.
- James asks why Thomas would be interested in becoming a board member and what he can offer.
- Science is an issue in the school system. Especially with advances that occur. It is always changing. It is important for teachers to keep up with the changes. He can be a resource in that regard.
- James wants to know if Thomas had been part of any other boards. Mentions that he himself had not been a board member elsewhere before his current position.
- It is optional for students to take science and he thinks it is great that students still choose science.
- In response to a question, the new building will expand into sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. We have sufficient space to house high school students. It will be challenging to get the approval, but we will keep working at it. The area is oversaturated with schools. The middle school location is not ideal with the metal detector. It causes people to feel uncomfortable at first. However, once students are there, it is a welcoming environment and their perspective changes. It is just sometimes difficult to convince new families that it is a good space. The new building will not have that issue, parents see the building and love it and want their children to be here.
- Another challenge we have is the area is oversaturated with schools.

- Bob formally nominates Tom. He feels he would make a wonderful addition to our board. He feels his educational background would be an asset. The board will take that into consideration. Next month we will come to a vote on adding Tom. The meeting will take place on September 26th.
- Norma discusses the mission for the new school year. Bottom line, she wants us to move our instructional program in such a way that it allows more hands-on learning. Especially in science. Tom could perhaps lend a hand. Norma wants more observation and more doing, so it is both language based and hands-on. This will help students understand the content area more tangibly. Eddie has put a lot of effort into the math program to make teachers solve the problems themselves. They have not experienced it in a tangible way, but in a more formulaic way. They do not have the ability to really understand what is taking place. Students will have a variety of materials available to them. We have the funds. Norma wants to see instruction become more enjoyable. Especially in science. The results in science were not as good as they had been in the past. We need to do a better job. In the past we had a broader range of topics. We need to get back to teaching the students more topics and giving them experiences. We need to get better at what we are doing.
- Tom adds he can help find resources that can be useful. We need materials that go into the subject area more deeply. There is a shift to the stem education system.

Meeting adjourned 8:34pm