

BOT Meeting Thursday October 24, 2024 Minutes

Board Members in Attendance: Jim Sander, Robert Ansbro, Sean Blackwell, Lucas Doe, Ted Francavilla, Thomas Gorrell

Administrators in attendance: Norma Hurwitz, Leena Thomas, Eddie Kubina

Not in attendance: Christopher Brignola

Meeting Called to Order by Jim Sander 6:54pm

I. Approval of Minutes

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

II. High School Extension

We got approval for our high school. We are now looking to fill the positions for the high school. We have put out ads and are currently looking through the applicants who are applying. The most difficult position to fill is the assistant principal. We are looking for a seasoned teacher in literature or math and they will be able to give assistance with running the high school. In the coming weeks we will have conversations with some of the lead teachers at the middle school in order to best prepare our current 8th graders for the regents exams. We have to make sure we perform well. A lot of effort has to be put into the new staff members that will be joining us. We would like to have about seven people and the three of us have our work cut out for us. We also have to look to see how we will improve our recruitment efforts. We will not be able to send out the mailing until March. It used to be earlier. Since the DOE is competing with us for students, it will be more difficult for us to reach families before they make decisions to potentially go with a public school. We need to come up with other strategies in order to see how we can get to more families and attract students. We have our families that have been with us and we can depend on keeping them. We would like to get 65 students. We will be able to pull students from other districts with the high school. We need to work on recruitment efforts. Norma would like for the board to add their input on what they would do in order to attract parents to send their children to our school. Since we are starting with 9th grade, other schools have a lead on us and we need to publicize our school. Maybe with the ideas from the board, we can come up with a better strategy for recruitment. Norma adds that just yesterday she was looking at the budget, Sonia put together all the documents that were done by Paul. We have a nice chunk of change coming in, even though some of the money has been spent already. It will put the school in a positive note and we should be good for the remainder of the year. If we then get more students for the high school, we would be in an even better position. We still have enough money, but it is good to try to stay ahead.

Sean adds that with the St. Paul school in Maryland they do a lot of career opportunity fairs. They are doing a stem fair, they are giving a presentation about the new building they are getting. If we can spread the word about the building they will have and the tools that would be available to them to help them take the next steps in their educational path.

Norma says a career fair sounds like a great idea. We have to figure out how that would look for us and what we can get the people to present. It is a good idea to have for our 9th graders and even start now with our current 8th graders.

Looking for 7 teachers would be for the high school. We could survive with 4, but 7 is ideal. They would be full time and for the first year they could help with the 7th and 8th grade as well. We are right now looking for literature and math. We have someone for science on staff, so if we do not find someone, we can rely on him.

One way to draw in high school students is to reach out to k-8 schools that do not have a high school and look to attract those students. We can also reach out to our students and parents that have friends and family that might be going into 9th grade as well and we can encourage them to come to our school. If we use parents of our current students, we will be able to have them convince other parents to send their children to us.

We could have a celebration, a get together where parents and children can come and celebrate our high school. We can have an 8th grade parents and students meeting about graduation. We can have a meeting around Thanksgiving.

We could give information during parent teacher conferences and then we can have a get together before Thanksgiving where they can see the building and potentially invite other friends of the students to make them interested in our school as well.

The eighth grade in classical charter school is high performing, they have earned a blue ribbon about 4 times. They do not have a high school so we will reach out to the director and see if we can get him to promote our school. If not, we can go to those schools and hand out materials to convince those students to attend our school.

If any board members have any other ideas, they can be emailed in order to expand on how we will recruit students. We need to see where else we can advertise. We have to do a lot of canvassing, especially since

Ted adds the existing students and parents are the best marketing we have. We need to convince parents to refer others to our school. They will get a better education, a better quality school, safety, a staff that cares, it has to be made clear why our school is better. It needs to be clearly outlined.

We have a lot of this already written out. The mailing in the past, all addresses are given to us and we can send out a mailing to all potential kindergarten parents. We are in the process of doing the common application.

We should do multiple open houses. There will be nothing like seeing it first hand. We need to try to do a really special event, trying to get a celebrity that can really attract people. We will have a full extra curricular program. We have lots of things that can be assets. We will offer a lot of sports. Our school has a good sports program.

We can put out literature during sports events. We need a brochure just focused on the high school.

III. Educational Program

Leena states that we have been looking to make sure students have a balance of traditional educational experiences along with projects. Teachers are able to expand on lessons and have more time to fully engage students. Most teachers are moving in the right direction. There are also projects that go along with fiction stories allowing students to better understand the text.

In our middle school the teachers have been creating more engaging experiences for the students. Some teachers still need to improve and are lecturing too much. In most rooms though, the students are leading the conversation and it is an improvement over the past.

Norma added that our children have become good at expressing themselves. We don't want it to be a rote process. Several years ago, the state wanted evidence and asked to see the children's actual work and it was sent back without a comment. They were no doubt impressed that it was our student's authentic work.

Jim adds that when projects combine all the fields together it has positive outcomes. They can see it in a practical way and not just an abstract way.

It will be a multi year effort, but we have seasoned teachers that are willing to take risks and get away from their comfort zone.

Projects can also cause collaboration between classes and they can feed off each other and it can enhance the work. Teachers have time to plan together in order to feed off each other and pick up things from each other. The more students and staff can work together on things, the better. If done right, it has a lot of rewards to it.

We do that during PD where teachers are able to share experiences and others are able to build on it for their own grade levels.

We do have classes at times that join each other and students are able to teach each other.

We can have time outside and make students more aware of the school's presence in the neighborhood. It would be good for them to see the environment around them.

Our testing has just started. The students are seemingly doing well. It is hard for some of them, but they are putting in a good effort. Mrs. Parker, who was moved to 8th grade, is working out well. She had 77% passing the first ELA test, which is the best she has had since she began with us. Adam Berg introduced a friend of his to us and he accepted a position today. He seems like a good person who interacts well with the students.

We have a good kitchen staff, and the lunch is very good. The students in the cafeteria are happy.

We can bring over our 8th graders in order to have lunch at the new building in order to give them a feel for it.

Jim was impressed with the kitchen staff when he was there for breakfast.

We will have some cost overrun for the building. It is not that bad. With all the overruns, it seems as if David has had success with keeping Signature under control. Signature is still in the building to complete their punch list. We are grinding down the punch list. The ops staff has done a great job and the custodian in identifying areas that need Signatures attention. The specificity they have been given is good. It will probably be another 3-4 months minimum. The work does not interfere with the students, the work is done on weekends, after school hours, or on floors that are not in use. The internet has been working well in the building. There have not been other issues with it.

They are still working on taking care of the issue with rats entering the building. We are trying to resolve the issue, but it still remains.

Jim inquired about the security of the building. It is going well. Given the size of the building. We have requested that the bell rings directly into the office. They are working on a panic button that would shut down the building and lock all doors.

We don't have a security officer, but we do have an employee who handles security. He helps in the office, but does the security as well. We also have the precinct around the corner and park across the street from our building.

Sean added that we should have David Haller submit to the board a current punch list of what the contractors are still working on.

How many students do we need to cover our costs if we hire all of our new staff members? We will be fine with the current numbers.

The building expenses are already accounted for.

The numbers that have been put together by Paul are very conservative. We are due to get money that is owed to the school, that will give us more than we need. So if we do bring in extra high school students, that should cover the staff that is coming in and if it does not, we are still sitting on a nice nest egg. We have to be generous in setting up a robust high school.

It is proposed that the 6-8 grade moves to our new location and we phase out the current middle school building. The building has gotten more dangerous, the leadership of the high school has deteriorated, the safety agents have been injured multiple times. Several are looking to leave the building. Having UP in the space with us is also problematic as they look to poach students and teachers from us. We have also lost students because the parents have not been able to travel between the various buildings and they have chosen schools where there is one location.

We can put it on the agenda for the next session so we can all think about it. The PS 65 space is still good, so we want to make sure that we do not lose that space or risk having another charter school enter the space.

Meeting Adjourned 7:53 pm