

CHESTER CHARTER SCHOLARS ACADEMY

BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

6:30 p.m., March 18, 2025

Date of Approval: Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Call to Order: The Board of Trustees for the Chester Charter Scholars Academy held a public Board Meeting in Chester, PA on March 18, 2025. The meeting convened at 6:55 pm. Members of the Board in attendance (at the time of the call to order): President, Frances Hoover, Ben Berger, Bill Cumby, Don Delson, Chris Klock, Zach Oberfield, Judy Owen, Alice Turbiville, Judy Wertheimer, Chanel Young and Head of School/CEO Akosua Watts. Absent: Grant Gegwich, Pam Greenblatt, Marilyn Henkelman.

Public Comments: Members of public present: Nicole DeRitis, Director K-4; Scott Carroll, Co-President, CCSA Foundation Board

Approval of Minutes

- The Board reviewed and adopted the minutes of the February 18, 2025, meeting of the Chester Charter Scholars Academy Board of Trustees
  - Motion – Don Delson
  - Second – Judy Wertheimer
    - Ayes: 10    Nays: 0    Absent: 3

CCSA Mission Moment – Nicole DeRitis, *Director of Elementary*

- Highlighted key aspects of CCSA’s approach:
  - Focus on whole child development (academic, social, emotional)
  - Relationships as the foundation of teaching
  - Arts integration throughout curriculum
  - Student accountability and partnership
  - Letting every student have a voice
  - Community-centered approach with strong family relationships
  - Grateful to be part of the CCSA community

Discussion/Questions:

- Shared success story of COVID recovery:
  - Current 5th grade cohort struggled significantly during remote learning

- Implemented comprehensive support including family work, counseling, academic interventions
- Students now showing marked improvement in behavior and academic performance
- Shared Standardized Testing Approach
  - Veteran 3rd grade teacher leads test preparation efforts
  - Historical context: Initial implementation was challenging with students experiencing stress
  - Current approach focuses on gradual preparation and confidence building
- Pre-K Preparation
  - Desire to get students younger through a pre-K program
  - Charter schools are currently excluded from pre-K funding
  - CCSA currently invites incoming K students to a five-week summer program, which is run through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program
- Succession Planning
  - If an unexpected vacancy were to occur in the position of CEO & Head of School, Ms. DeRitis has been tapped to fill the role on an interim basis

President's Report, Frances Hoover, *President*

- Chichester Payment Release (VOTE)

This vote is to dismiss the legal suit; payment from the Chichester District has been received.

- Motion – Don Delson
- Second – Chris Klock
  - Ayes: 10    Nays: 0    Absent: 3

- Prioritization Protocol
  - Priorities and issues should be reviewed as they relate to the impact of our mission
  - Prioritization Protocol folder will live in the shared board drive

School Report, Akosua Watts, *Head of School & CEO*

- Enrollment
  - Numbers remain strong but it is likely enrollment may diminish slightly between now and June, which typically happens.
- Current School Highlights
  - Outstanding Performances & Black History Authors
    - During Black History Month the school celebrated and highlighted important contributions in the community and beyond.
  - Honor Roll & Distinguished HR; 39% of student body

- This is an encouraging number for the second trimester; it indicates progress, good habits, and scholarship.
- Athletics
  - Boys' Basketball – the team made it to PIAA District 1A Quarterfinals
  - Angel White/Track – Finished top 20 in PA; Competed at New Balance Natl. Meet
  - Track program growing despite facility limitations - 40 middle school students at recent tryouts
- Strategic Initiatives
  - Student-Led Conferences [VIDEO](#) (reflective practice)
    - Ms. Young shared her experience as a parent of being part of the student-led conference
  - Penn State STEAM Day – select students visited the Brandywine campus and learned about steam fields and career
  - Lead-Free Chester Project continues, and plans are underway for an onsite education opportunity
- Upcoming Events
  - Thurs., Apr. 3 at 8:30am / Student of the Month (March)
  - Fri., Apr. 4 / iAM Trip to Vincera Institute
  - Tues., Apr. 8 / Award Surprise
  - Thurs., Apr. 10 / CCSA Blood Drive, hosted by Student Council and National Honors Society

## Committee Reports

Nominating/Governance – Judy Owen, *Chair Nominating & Governance Committee*

- Governance Workshop Reflections
  - A list of action items is in the board shared drive
  - Ms. Hoover thanked Ms. Owen for her work on the retreat

There was a discussion that covered the following topics:

- Potential Board Re-Structure
- Mr. Delson provided background regarding the need and purpose for two boards – one for the school and one for the foundation
- With the settlement agreement scheduled to conclude next year, and the school in a strong financial position, there is an opportunity to potentially restructure the foundation board with respect to the school board
- It was agreed that the school board needs to grow and increase its diversity of membership, including members of the Chester community, alumni and more parents
- There is a lot of expertise on the foundation board, which might be better utilized on the school board

- The school's strong financial position will require the foundation to examine a new model of fundraising
- The foundation and school boards must remain separate entities; the foundation needs to hold the lease, the bonds, and the endowment funds
- The foundation board would like to feel more integrated with the school and the school board
- There is a potential for Charter Choices to expand its role in the school with respect to long-term financial/budgetary oversight
- It was agreed that Align and Bob Clothier will be helpful in determining what any board restructuring will look like

#### Strategic Planning – Judy Wertheimer, *Committee Chair*

- The work plan and contract from Align Partners are in the shared drive for review
- Align will be scheduling interviews and distributing surveys, and it was requested that all members respond in a timely fashion
- May 8 is a proposed date for a strategic planning retreat for both boards
- Clarification was provided regarding final presentation of the new strategic plan: Align will present a draft plan on May 19, with a finalized plan to be present on June 9
- Members were asked to contribute names to the "community and others" stakeholder list that Align put together

#### Education – Zach Oberfield, *Member Education Committee*

- Compensation committee recommendations:
  - Increase teacher starting salary to \$61k (benchmarked to Swarthmore)
  - \$10k across-the-board increase for current teachers
  - \$5k increase for Teaching Assistants
  - Percentage increase for administrative staff

There was a brief discussion, which covered the following points:

- All members are in favor of investing in the staff
- The Finance Committee will review this recommendation with respect to long-term sustainability

#### Finance - Alice Turbiville, *Chair Finance Committee*

- Current strong financial position:
  - \$1.5M unbudgeted surplus this year
  - \$11M cash on hand
  - Expected \$3.3M additional funding next year under statutory rates

- Strategic Planning
  - Major initiatives can be plugged into the budget to assess feasibility/sustainability
  - Is there a wish list of one-time expenditures?
  - Paying down debt is an option for surplus funds

Adjournment: The public meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Date of Next Scheduled Public Board Meeting: May 20, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.