

Achievement First Hartford Academy
Board of Directors Meeting

September 22nd, 2015, 5:00 – 7:00 pm
305 Greenfield Street, Hartford

The following board members and Achievement First Staff were in attendance:

I. Call to Order & Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 5:15 pm by John Motley.

Barry Jacobson, AFHA Board - Yes
Lankford Wade, AFHA Board - Yes
John Motley, AFHA Board - Yes
Nyema Pinkney, AFHA Board - No
Marshall Ruben, AFHA Board - No
Angela Scott, AFHA Board - No
Colleen Palmer, AFHA Board - No

Emily Banks, School Leadership - Yes
Benjamin Cruse, School Leadership - Yes
Ernest Peterson, School Leadership - Yes
Sorby Grant, School Leadership - Yes
Nick Lebron, AF Network Support - Yes
Megan Tokarski, AF Network Support - Yes
Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support - Yes
Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes
Morgan Barth, AF Network Support - Yes

II. Open Session For Public Comment

No Public comment

III. Reports and Discussion

A. Principal Reports

AF Hartford Elementary School

Mr. Ernest Peterson reported that staff retention is high for this year including all of school leadership which has returned for the 2015-16 school year. Thus far, student attendance is strong, averaging 98% and until September 22nd, there had been no suspensions (down from 40 on that same date in 2014). Similarly, removals are down to about one per day compared with 14 per day last year. He believes this is due to more effective planning and training of teachers.

The SBAC results have led to excitement about opportunity for improvement for this year and the school is heavily focused on academics for the 2015-16 school year.

AF Hartford Middle School

Ms. Sorby Grant reported a number of programmatic changes at the school, due to feedback from the

school community. For example, electives have been added to the day such as cheer, community service club, and photography. Regardless of the activity, character and skill development is a focus of the electives. In addition, each day begins with Daily Literacy Seminar and discussion that is focused in groups at their reading level. Similarly, Math Lab has been focused on helping improve scholars' skills at an individual level. Culture issues have been improved and the scholars have had dress up days and scheduled dances.

SBAC results were low and reveal last year's struggles.

AF Hartford Middle School is down a Dean and two other staff, which is creating additional work for the leadership team. Ms. Grant is working with Team Recruit to fill the positions with strong candidates.

In addition to challenges in bandwidth, teacher morale is a little low due to some school culture issues which have carried over from last year. Class size has increased from the 2014-15 school year and average class size is around 25. Ten students have transferred to AF Summit Middle School.

AF Summit Middle School

Mr. Ben Cruse reported that the school is fully enrolled at 95 scholars per grade.

They have 32 students per classroom because school is under-staffed based on two resignations - both are special education teachers. Both teachers resigned and went to traditional public schools.

School culture is a little bit less stable because the school size has doubled since last year from grade growth, the leadership team is very new, and half of the teachers (8 of 16) are completely new to teaching this year. To train them as effectively and efficiently as possible, they and all other teachers are getting real time training with headsets where a school leader is in the back of a classroom talking to teachers through the headset. This has helped to improve some of the culture issues at the school but there is still room to grow.

Mr. Cruse reported that there has been one expulsion this year due extreme behavioral misconduct. It happened very early on in the school year.

Attendance is around 97% and 27 of the 189 scholars have IEPs.

There is going to be a new Parent Leadership Committee this year. They want to be involved in helping in school and with advocacy.

AF Hartford High School

Ms. Emily Banks reported some academic accomplishments to the Joint High School Committee:

Advanced Placement Exams

- 55% of Sophomore class passed the AP World History exam outperforming AF Amistad High

(24%) and AF Brooklyn High (17%) and AF University Prep (50%).

- In the junior class, 33% passed AP US History, also outperforming Amistad and AF Brooklyn.

SBAC

- Scholars did well on the SBAC - 65% were proficient in ELA (compared to State average of 53%) 45% were proficient in math (state average 30%).

SAT

- highest among all AF high schools on all the portions of the test. Beating the national average for students of color and just below national average overall.

Staff retention was very strong year over year with 93% of staff returning for the 2015-16 school year. This means that each classroom either has a returning teacher or, in the event that the teacher did not return, Ms. Banks stated that they were able to hire a stronger replacement for the departed teacher.

During the 2014-15 school year, there was no Dean of Students nor was there a Dean of Special Services, but those positions have been filled for the 2015-16 school year. The special education students are getting much more robust support.

On Friday, NCCJ is coming in to do a full day of workshops and programming on racism, classism, sexism. This was in response to a realization that most behavioral issues are not happening during school hours in the school building. Most suspensions were based on things that happened outside of school. Mr. John Motley shared the history of the NCCJ which was originally called the National Coalition of Christians and Jews. Ms. Banks said that many scholars have participated in AnyTown which is connected with NCCJ and the program has had a significant impact.

On the college front, scholars are getting admitted to diversity overnight programs at colleges and universities which are good early indications of college viability. Two scholars have been accepted to the program at Bates College and one to WPI.

Ms. Banks shared that the summer included a significant increase in summer training and so she needs to be aware of staff fatigue. Training should be robust and strong but staff should also be fresh and energetic for the beginning of the year.

Ms. Banks noted some significant skill deficiencies in the 9th graders in both math and ELA. She feels confident that this can be remedied but will take lots of intervention which they are prepared to put in place. The reading tutorial (a guided reading course) usually has 10 ninth graders who, according to testing, qualify for the program. This year they have 25. These scholars will be working on academic habits. Ms. Banks feels that scholars are invested but there's a lot of ground to cover academically.

Ms. Banks said Barry Jacobson has been very helpful tutoring math.

Finally, Ms. Banks shared some dates for the end of the school year including Senior Signing Day on May 24 (which will hopefully be held at the Bushnell) and Graduation Day on June 16th.

B. Teacher Certification (Laurie Bussmann)

Organizationally, everyone understands that teacher certification is a top priority. As a result the goal is to have 100% teachers certified by 12/1/15. As of 9/22/15 AFHA teachers are 67% certified.

There is a weekly call around certification every Friday. None of the new teachers that were hired for AF Hartford Academy were already certified in Connecticut. That said, we hired teachers that we believed could and would be certified within 45 days.

C. New Legislation (Sarah Blanton)

Fingerprinting and background checks need to be done for Board members under new legislation. AF will be communicating with the Board to provide guidance on what the exact requirements are for getting this done.

D. Community Outreach (Nick Lebron)

Mr. Nick Lebron spoke about student recruitment. The Dream Series: AF and Ice Cream for a Dream* partnered to get out into the community to talk about AF. Mr Lebron keeps a running and active list of students who are interested in filling positions that may become vacant before October.

*Ice Cream for a Dream - in exchange for a child sharing his or her dream, he or she gets an ice cream cone. AF is asking for kids to share their educational dream.

Between 100-110 families expressed interest or are enrolled in the school now. So far, Mr. Lebron has attended 15-16 events.

While the lottery is open, AF is working to get seats filled. Mr. Lebron is creating a map and a plan, earlier by a month, covering October through January. With lessons learned from last year, Mr. Lebron is working hard to have a successful recruitment season during the lottery so that he and his team can focus on other areas of work during the rest of the year.

E. Directors and Officers Coverage (Tom Boobar)

Mr. Tom Boobar, Vice President, Alliant Insurance Services, Inc., joined the meeting by phone and shared that he has covered AF'd insurance needs for over eight years.

According to the policy, everyone on the board is covered and any new members are automatically included in the policy. There is a primary coverage of \$1 million. Then there is an umbrella of \$10 million for school policy. Aggregate is \$3 million. The board inquired if this is standard and Mr. Boobar said that it was standard.

F. Treasurer's Report (Lankford Wade)

Mr. Lankford Wade presented the Treasurer's Report and shared that enrollment is solid. Everything is in line tracking towards the budget.

IV. Executive Session

V. Board Business

The Board did not have quorum and therefore did not vote on any of the following resolutions.

- 1. Resolution 1: Resolution to approve Previous Meeting Minutes (5/18/15, 8/13/15, 9/4/15)**
- 2. Resolution 2: Resolution to approve Financial Report**
- 3. Resolution 4: Resolution to approve 2015-16 School Wellness Policy**

VI. Board Discussion

Mr. Morgan Barth discussed the intensive training teacher over the summer. The belief is that with much more robust teacher training over the summer, teachers will begin the year better prepared, classroom culture will be stronger and scholars will receive ever better instruction.

Mr. Barth reported that both the elementary and high schools are well off, but the middle schools are off to a rocky start as the board heard in the principal reports.

Mr. Lankford Wade requested a future board meeting to discuss succession planning and Morgan will lead that discussion.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 by John Motley.