

Amistad Academy
Board of Directors Meeting
November 18, 2015
403 James Street, New Haven

I. Call to Order & Attendance

The meeting was called to order by Carolyn Greenspan at 5:42.

The following directors and staff were in attendance:

Carolyn Greenspan, AA Board - Yes	Pat Sweet, AA Board - Yes
Caroline Williams, AA Board - Yes (phone)	Reginald Simmons, AA Board - No
Mike Griffin, AA Board - Yes	Jennifer Connell, AA Board - Yes
Lorraine Gibbons, AA Board - Yes (phone)	Katrin Czinger, AA Board - Yes
Andrew Lachman, AA Board - Yes	
Cassie Crockett, AA Board - Yes	Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes
Daisy Gonzales, AA Board - No	Laurie Bussmann, AF Network Support - Yes
David Katzman, AA Board - No	John Furniss, AF Network Support - Yes
Dorsey Kendrick, AA Board -No	Amanda Alonzy, School Leadership - Yes
Jane Levin, AA Board - Yes (phone)	Katie Poynter, School Leadership - Yes

II. Open Session For Public Comment

No public comment.

III. Reports and Discussion

A. Principal Reports

Amistad Academy ES (Amanda Alonzy)

Ms. Alonzy detailed that there has been significant year over year growth based on this Interim Assessment (IA) cycle in math and English. She is excited that they have been able to build on the previous year's work in a meaningful way.

Two major challenges exist and the first is teacher turnover and burnout. Ms. Alonzy explained that the talent pool has shifted in recent years and they are having a more difficult time identifying top talent. Ms. Alonzy explained that some teachers took their signing check and then never actually came to work. The Board talked about various strategies on how to stop this sort of flight, including signed loan agreements.

The second challenge area is around identifying creative responses to disruptive behavior in grades K-2.

Previous to this year, suspensions were always an option for all children and it was possible to use that tool to increase compliance. There have been behaviors at the school for which they need to find more creative solutions rather than suspending the child.

Amistad Academy MS (Katie Poynter)

Ms Poynter led a discussion on the state of Amistad MS, highlighting how positive the culture has become. Suspensions are down and major disciplinary events are down. School feels much warmer, calmer, and more in control than last year. They have made a conscious decision to put culture first, and have really embraced the idea that kid culture mimics staff culture. Have had only two teacher resignations this year (compared to five by Christmas last year). One was in first week of school and one was in past month.

Kid Culture is still a large challenge. There is a sizeable group of kids that are still struggling requiring a tremendous amount of energy and attention for teachers, interventionists, etc.

Ms Sweet inquired as to the major reasons for teachers leaving. Ms. Poynter explained that her feeling is that the discrepancy between what was expected versus reality is major driving factor for resignations rather than reality itself. In addition, creating additional staff bonds, such as helping them realize how negatively their leaving would affect their peers and on kids. Building accountability amongst teacher peers is a major tactic used by Ms. Poynter to help.

Mr Griffin asked about teacher salaries and how they compare to public schools. Mr. Paul explained that our teachers make more, but when you account for additional work, etc. it doesn't mean as much. In addition, Ms. Alonzy explained that there are several perks of being an AF teacher that are slowly dwindling away, such as Attendance Bonuses, Report Card bonuses and TCP bonuses.

Joint High School Committee Report (Caroline Williams)

Ms. Williams gave a report from the Joint High School Committee. The High school is doing very well, and among the tops in IA's across the network. That said, the pass rates of the courses themselves are currently low. There is an all school celebration of IA results this Friday and the Board is welcome to attend. Family and Staff survey results have been generally positive and Ms. Polcrack was able to adequately explain areas where there is room for improvement.

B. Governance Committee (Pat Sweet)

Ms. Sweet explained that we had a positive Governance meeting, and hope to present and pass bylaws in January.

C. Background Checks (Sarah Blanton)

All board members need to complete the DCF release form and get fingerprinted in order to be compliant. Several board members have already completed both and Sarah Blanton will follow up with everyone who has not done so.

D. Board Giving (Ken Paul)

Mr. Paul gave an update on fundraising, and an appeal for end of calendar year gift. Overall fundraising need for Achievement First went up 25% to a total of \$25.2 million. 70-80% of additional cost is associated with flat funding from state of CT. Additionally, Greenfield model is a major factor in additional funding. \$10 million of funding is to support Amistad, Elm City and Bridgeport (don't get local or facilities support in New Haven and Bridgeport). Mr. Paul explained that we have a good path forward and have been getting additional, important gifts. Ms. Sweet further explained that each Board member should try to get at least one additional person into a school at some point this year.

E. Finance Committee Report (Mike Griffin)

Mr. Griffin reviewed Amistad's financial results as of September 30, 2015. Management is currently projecting a deficit for the current fiscal year of \$84,000 for Amistad High School. The projected deficit is the result of an expected reduction in the Philanthropy allocation from Achievement First because of higher revenues from the State, plus higher salaries and benefits than originally budgeted. The projected High School deficit, however, will be offset by projections of higher surpluses at the Amistad Elementary and Middle schools.

The Finance Committee received the draft audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015 from CohnReznick. After study, the Committee discussed the audit with Kim Nardone, the CohnReznick, partner in charge of the Amistad audit, in two meetings, one separate from management and representatives of Achievement First. During the audit CohnReznick identified a "significant deficiency" relating to teacher certification. A number of Amistad staff were not properly certified during the fiscal year, as required by the State of Connecticut.

Mr Griffin explained that a "significant deficiency" means that the deficiency merits attention from those responsible for oversight. The Finance Committee noted that the Amistad Board had received updates on the teacher certification issue during the 2015 fiscal year and had expressed its concerns to Achievement First about not being in compliance. The Finance Committee discussed the continuing problem at length. After deliberation, the Finance Committee recommended that the following steps be taken:

- The Board should reiterate to Achievement First its concern about the need for Amistad to achieve compliance with the State of Connecticut requirements for staff compliance. The Board should set a target to achieve compliance by June 30, 2016, the end of the current fiscal year. Ken Paul, vice president Achievement First, reported at the Board meeting that Dacia Toll, co-CEO of Achievement First has compliance with the State's certification standards as one of her top priorities.

- The Finance Committee should review the so-called "Teacher Tracking System" to ensure that Achievement First has in place a process to monitor continuously where each staff member is in the complex certification process.

- The Board should receive monthly reports from Achievement First showing the certification status of each staff member broken down into the following categories: New Hires, Employed 1 to 3 Years. and

Employed over 3 Years.

- The Board should receive from Achievement First by April 1, 2016 a written policy indicating how Achievement First will renew contracts for the current staff and hire new staff for the school year 2016-17 so as to achieve compliance.
- Certification compliance should be an agenda item for each Board meeting during the current fiscal year to ensure that the Board continues to monitor this important issue.

After discussion the Board passed the following resolution:

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby accepts the recommendations of the Finance Committee about certification compliance and to approve the Financial Report as presented.

Moved by Katrin Czinger

Seconded by Andrew Lachman

All in favor

Motion to enter into Executive Session at 6:30pm by Carolyn Greenspan to discuss personnel.

Seconded by Cassie Crockett

All in favor

Motion to exit Executive Executive Session by Cassie Crockett

Seconded by Jennifer Connell

All in favor

The board chair has accepted the resignation of Mr. Howard Hill from the Amistad Academy Board.

IV. Board Business

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from September 16, 2015.

Tabled until next meeting

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the financial report as presented.

Motion by Andrew Lachman

Seconded by Cassie Crockett

All in favor

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby accepts the report of the independent auditors CohnReznik prepared in relation to the fiscal year ended 6/30/2015.

Motion by Andrew Lachman

Seconded by Jennifer Connell
All in favor

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby accepts the Roles and Responsibilities document as presented.

Motion by Cassie Crockett
Seconded by Michael Griffin
All in favor

RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby accepts the Conflict of Interest Policy as presented.

Tabled until next meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:28 by Ms. Carolyn Greenspan.