

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy
Board of Directors Meeting

November 19, 2015, 6:00 – 7:30 pm
529 Noble Avenue, Bridgeport

The following board members, constituting a quorum, and Achievement First Staff were in attendance:

I. Call to Order & Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 pm by Chris Kunhardt.

Chris Kunhardt, AFBA Board - Yes

Ed Raice, AFBA Board - Yes

Max Perez, AFBA Board - No

Cornelius Medas, AFBA Board - No

Debra Hertz, AFBA Board - No

Dick Kalt, AFBA Board - Yes

Harold Kamins, AFBA Board - Yes

James Bennett, AFBA Board - Yes

Lauren Patalano, AFBA Board - No

Marlene Macauda, AFBA Board - Yes

Wiley Mullins, AFBA Board - No

Laurie Bussmann - AF Network Support - Yes (phone)

Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support - Yes

Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes

John Furniss, AF Network Support - Yes

Catherine Dumas, AF Network Support - Yes

Challa Flemming, School Leadership - Yes (phone)

Christina Pares, School Leadership - Yes

Natasha Noel, School Leadership - Yes

Public: Andy Boas

II. Open Session For Public Comment

No public comment.

III. Reports and Discussion

A. Principal Reports

Ms. Christina Pares (AF Bridgeport Academy ES)

Ms. Pares gave a report on how the school year has gone thus far at AFBA Elementary School. They recently had their first data day which provided the first opportunity to look at Interim Assessment (IA) data. They noted major gains in K-2 writing which was the result of a stronger focus in the beginning of the year. 3rd grade math is also a bright spot.

Ms. Pares explained that they are still in a very good place culturally - suspensions down 92% and removals down 84%. Most of removals and suspensions have been in a small cohort of kids. Ms. Pares explained that she and her team are looking for outside resources in an attempt to serve these kids best. Have also focused on supporting teachers in "win teams." Had an interim Org Health Survey, resulted in top three in network in terms of teacher culture and happiness. Results also show that teachers are willing to talk candidly with the leadership team.

There is a much bigger focus on data this year, using both weekly and daily all staff newsletters to update staff.

AFBA Elementary has seen no staff departures up to this point, but there is one upcoming departure. They are already in the process of onboarding a new teacher who is already a member of AF Team & Family. Mr. Kunhardt inquired about the number of new teachers - more than 50% of the teachers are new to Achievement First. Mr. Kunhardt further inquired about how the number of new teachers has impacted the returning staff - Ms. Pares explained that the summer training was a great kick off. Leadership staff was very strategic with teacher pairings and it seems to have had a positive effect on morale.

The fourth grade continues to struggle (as they did last year as third graders). They have improved significantly from last year. Lots of individual success, but as a cohort there is a lot of ground to make up. Mr. Kunhardt inquired about when in the process parents/guardians are involved. Ms. Pares explained that it is policy to let the parent know every time a scholar is removed from class. Teachers are in frequent contact, even letting parents know when things are going well so that the kids can earn something at home as well.

Ms. Challa Flemming (AF Bridgeport Academy MS)

Ms. Flemming shared that loss attrition is down from 2.1% to 1.3%, which is a great improvement (but still not 0). Average daily attendance has gone up from 97.4 - 97.7. For much of first eight weeks of school attendance was above 98%, but sickness has taken it's toll. Suspensions and removals have gone down tremendously compared to last year, as have the average length of removals. They are feeling very good about the culture of the school and proud of the decreases. Mr. Kunhardt asked about the relation between age and suspensions - generally as the students get older there are less, but the two highest suspensions are in 5th and 7th grade (both shaky culture). When scholars are removed from class they typically meet with a behavior interventionist and recognize behavior, but the length out of the classroom varies. They are trying to keep those minutes as low as possible.

Ms. Flemming and her leadership team did a lot in the beginning of school to get teachers to a place where they feel happy about working with the school. Ms. Flemming recently had a chance to talk to teachers candidly about the how they feel about working at the school. She asked teachers to create a list of things they need to address - most teachers highlighted improving student culture and investment, which is a major challenge in 5th and 7th grades and are weighing heavily on the entire school. The second highest factor was reducing teacher workload and/or better prioritizing tasks. Teachers are asked to do a lot, but there is a real challenge to work/life balance and sustainability. School leadership team engaged with grade level chairs, who are engaging with teachers to determine what can be done to make the workload more manageable. The leadership team is looking for ways to remove or shift responsibilities to help reduce workload. Mr. Kunhardt asked about shifting workload - would adding an additional teaching assistant make a difference or are the tasks too detailed? Ms. Flemming explained that it's unfortunately not that simple. The most time consuming responsibilities are things like grading, which a teaching assistant could help with, but then teachers would lose the personal knowledge of how the individual kids are doing and how to better tailor their lessons. In addition, F&P testing is currently taking a lot of time and having an additional person could help, but again now allow teachers the first hand knowledge of the scholars. It is unfortunately not easy to

identify even a small number of things that can be moved from the teacher that won't negatively affect their instruction. Mr. Kunhardt asked about how staffing compares to other AF middle schools. Ms. Flemming explained that the staffing model is consistent with other MS, but entire year has been understaffed.

Ms. Pares additionally explained that there are things in traditional public schools that external people cover - especially lunch and recess, morning arrival and dismissal etc, that AF teachers must cover. Teachers are asking if external folks can look after this time, but after trying at the MS it turns out that it created more problems than it solved. In addition, there are smaller numbers of teacher's assistants, etc. to help in the classroom setting. The board proceeded to have a discussion about the merits and possibilities of exploring the idea of hiring outside staff to cover these responsibilities to alleviate some pressure from the teaching staff.

B. Joint High School Committee Report (Chris Kunhardt)

Ms. Blanton gave a report from the Joint High School Committee highlighting the successes and challenges they are facing. The principal, Claire Polcrack, is focusing on providing more opportunities for feedback from scholars and families. Ms. Polcrack is spending time with groups of scholars (10 at a time) talking about how they feel the school year is going and seeking their input on areas they think are going well and areas where they think improvements can be made. Some of the takeaways include:

- Students appreciate more options for their uniform
- Merit system - appreciate prompts rather than going right to a demerit
- Increase assemblies and more school spirit events. Once per month there is an all school assembly. Additional assemblies occur at the grade level.
- Teacher consistency - scholars encouraged grade level teams to thoughtfully balancing work loads so that scholars don't receive multiple large assignments and assessments on the same night.
- Additional assemblies, some scholar led.

Things that students think the staff should focus on

- Consistency across grade levels
- Consistent grade book updates

Academically, AF Amistad High is leading the network in many subjects based on the results of the first Interim Assessment but the overall pass rate is low (although Ms Polcrack said that is it normal for that time of year).

College trips are starting in fall with scholars grouped by GPA, looking at private colleges. In the spring they are going to be looking at public universities. The Juniors are focused on schools within 60-90 minutes of New Haven, but seniors will be doing overnight trips later in year (usually hosted by colleges).

Teacher Certification (Laurie Bussmann)

Ms. Bussmann gave a report on Teacher Certification. Bridgeport charter is only 50% certified, and not much movement since beginning of year. Progress has been made (tests taken, paperwork filed,

etc), but it is not reflected in the numbers. Goal is still 100% for the end of the year. AF is pushing teacher certification in a very direct and clear way - meeting with Principals, DSO's, etc. DSO's are point people at the school, tracking, filling out paperwork and troubleshooting any barriers.

Mr. Paul asked about how New York relates. NY is in the 80-90% certified, mostly due to increased amount of reciprocity with other states. In CT administrators need to be certified, and you can only be certified in a particular grade/subject. Relay is coming to Connecticut next year, and then next year we will have a pipeline to get teachers certified in CT.

C. AFBA Board Engagement: Committees, Workshops, Communication (Sarah Blanton)

Ms. Blanton explained that there are two standing committees that need to be populated: governance (recruiting new Board members, review of bylaws), principal committee (annual review, meeting with Principals on a regular basis, getting to know the Principals better).

Ms. Blanton explained that we are looking to start a "Workshop" series of 60-90 minute meetings over lunch to deep dive into certain aspects of Achievement First such as Special Ed, Advocacy, Student Recruitment, etc. All CT Boards would be invited with Webex/conference for those who can't attend.

Mr. Kunhardt has met with Shannon Garfield (Regional Superintendent for AFBA MS), who has given walkthroughs of the school. Ms. Garfield is open to having two Board members at a time shadow her for a time, explaining what is seen in classrooms and how she will coach the teachers. Mr. Kunhardt would like to set up time with either the Principals or Regional Superintendents to do walkthroughs. Mr. Kunhardt also encourages the members of the Board to see AF Elm City Greenfield. Mr. Kunhardt and Mr. Paul highlighted that Elm City Greenfield addresses many of the issues that Ms Fleming and Ms. Pares highlighted in their Principal reports.

Ms. Blanton added that the Board would be added to the News Blast unless any opt out.

D. Background Checks (Sarah Blanton)

Ms. Blanton thanked everyone who had submitted their DCF forms. An opportunity to get fingerprinted will occur at Mr. Boas' office at a date and time TBD.

E. Finance Committee Report (Ed Raice)

Mr Ed Raice gave the finance report showing that the Elementary and Middle schools are on budget.

IV. Board Business

The board did not vote on the resolutions because they did not have quorum at this time due to board members who had to leave early.

RESOLVED, the AF Bridgeport Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from 9/17/15.

Motion by:

Seconded:

All in favor

RESOLVED, the AF Bridgeport Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the Financial Report as presented.

Motion by:

Seconded:

All in favor

RESOLVED, the AF Bridgeport Academy Board of Directors hereby accepts the Conflict of Interest Policy as presented

V. Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive session at 7:53 by Dick Kalt

Seconded by Marlene MaCauda

All in favor

Motion to exit Executive session at 8:01 by Harold Kamins

Seconded by Marlene Macauda

All in favor

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 by Mr. Kunhardt.