

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy

Board of Directors Meeting

September 28, 2017, 6:00 pm

AFBA Middle School

529 Noble Ave, Bridgeport CT

I. Call to Order & Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm by Chris Kunhardt. The following board members, constituting a quorum, and Achievement First Staff were in attendance:

Chris Kunhardt, AFBA Board - Yes

Dick Kalt, AFBA Board - No

Marlene Macaуда, AFBA Board - Yes (phone)

Debra Hertz, AFBA Board - Yes

James Bennett, AFBA Board - Yes

Kimberly Bruce, AFBA Board - Yes

Ruben Felipe, AFBA Board - Yes

Ebrima Jobe, AFBA Board - No

Michael Strambler, AFBA Board - Yes

Heather Watcher, AFBA Board - Yes

Simon Obas, AFBA MS School Leadership - Yes

Christina Pares, AFBA ES School Leadership - Yes

Natasha Noel, AFBA MS School Leadership - Yes

Florisca Carter, AFBA ES School Leadership - Yes

Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support - Yes

Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes

II. Open Session For Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Approve Minutes

RESOLVED, the AF Bridgeport Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from August 1, 2017.

Motion by Jim Bennett

Seconded by Heather Wachter

All in favor

IV. Reports and Discussion

Principal Reports

Christina Pares, Principal, AF Bridgeport Elementary School. Christina reported that she feels very good about the start of the year. Staff retention went up this year (83%). Everyone she wanted to stay, stayed. They did lose some particularly strong teachers and a dean. Their reasons had to do with opportunities for advancement. One former teacher is now a dean at Amistad Elementary. A couple teachers went to law school. Others were starting families or dealing with medical issues.

They had one teacher on maternity leave, one on medical leave, so they have had to do some hiring. They also had four new hires leave very early one. Over-hiring is not an option due to budget constraints. The primary stressors are work-life balance and certification. They are working to strike the balance between pushing hard while also caring about how they are doing as people.

Christina's own leadership team "is awesome." They meet daily for half an hour, weekly for an hour and generally aim to spend lots of time together, challenging one another, and having fun.

In grade 3 and 4 ELA, the data is pretty low. This is a common trend and was what last year's classes experienced. They have a lot of work to do with the kindergarten (more 4 year olds than they've ever had). They are dealing with a lot of behavior issues with the four year olds.

On Friday, October 6th at 11am, there will be a celebration of the academic results of the current 4th graders (last year's 3rd graders). Board members are encouraged to attend.

Teacher certification is a priority and daily practice. They are making a huge push to ensure teachers get their certification and feel confident that they will hit the goal. They review the list weekly and identify action steps for each individual teacher. They have regular calls with Dacia and Laurie. The network has offered resources like tutoring.

The board discussed the exceptional results from the 2017 SBAC where the 3rd and 4th grades outperformed nearly every town in Connecticut, including Darien, Greenwich, Westport and New Canaan. Florisca Carter expressed her frustration that despite the incredible results, Bridgeport continues to be unsupportive of our schools especially around areas like having to fight for transportation each year. Chris raised the question of whether Dick Kalt could leverage resources he has through his work in radio to help get the word out.

Simon Obas, Principal, AF BRidgeport Middle School. Simon shared the mini-organizational health data with the board which was lauded by Christina Ellington for it's strong improvement over last year. They are in turnaround mode and there is a sense of urgency in the building and he feels that it could even increase.

Weekly quiz data has had a solid start. 5th grade had results the were at the top of the network in CT. 8th grade is showing strong improvement. The cohort of math teachers is relatively new (to AF and to teaching). They are getting support from the network to identify action steps to ensure that the scholars get the best math education possible. They are pushing for more rigor, increased focus on looking at student work, and shifting mindsets around what students can

actually accomplish. There has been too much handholding and they are shifting towards more critical thinking and ensuring the students are doing the heavy lifting in the classroom.

Students are invested, and while they will say “Mr. Obas is strict” they also know that they are at a school that is actively preparing scholars to be ready to excel in college. Simon shared that there is pushback from some parents around rules and compliance. He noted that one scholar who he’d heard had significant behavioral challenges is, this year, focused and working. His mother visited the school, sat in class, and then thanked Mr. Obas for changing the school. She noted that last year her son did not work while in school and this year, he does.

Skating trip tomorrow for students who got “scholar-dollar money on their paychecks”, they have several other events to keep school fun.

They have had some suspensions. Simon shared his philosophy on suspensions. In turnaround mode, suspensions are often high. While it is common, they are working hard to bring them down. He noted they are lower than they were at this point last year. In the event of suspensions, it is critically important to focus on coming back to school - the process and procedures. Returning to AF Bridgeport Middle School after a suspension includes reflection, action steps, follow up which allows a scholar to process what happened. By doing a lot of this work now, it will hopefully prevent more problems down the road. Most of the suspensions were for kids who were at the school last year. There are higher levels of accountability and consistency this year and students are adjusting to that.

Simon said there is a strong feeling on the staff of team and family. When they come together at the end of the week, staff are generally happy to be there. Simon wants to be sure the staff feel valued. Simon makes sure that whether they need a hug or a coffee, Simon will be sure to provide. He wants this to be a school where people feel empowered, families are excited to send their children.

Chris Kunhardt asked about what changes were made to the 8th grade team. Simon shared that the strongest teachers at the school are now on the 8th grade team. Last year, the seventh grade that Simon saw was the toughest grade, but this year the 8th grade is leading the school. Simon said that the restructuring has resulted in his “A-Team” at the 8th grade.

Chris also asked about the current 5th grade, who were 4th graders at AFBA Elementary School. Shannon Garfield reported on 5th grade academic results. Being in the 5th grade classrooms this year is different than the 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The 5th graders have so much knowledge. Skill levels are high. The level is discourse in the classrooms and the work they are

producing is better than it's ever been before. The goal is to continue the upward trajectory for those scholars as they continue through middle school and high school.

Natasha Noel discussed teacher certification and the major push from the network. All staff are scheduled to take tests in the next month.

V. Executive Session

The board entered executive session at 7:42pm. Motion by Debra Hertz. Seconded by Jim Bennett. The board exited executive session at 8:10pm.

VI. Reports and Discussion (con't)

A. Joint High School Committee Report

Chris Kunhardt gave a brief update about Amistad HS including a conversation about AP test taking within the culture of AP for All.

B. Board Chair Report

RESOLVED, the AF Bridgeport Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the Corrective Action Plan in response to Finding 2016-001 which has been approved by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

Motion by Debra Hertz

Seconded by Jim Bennett

All in favor

C. Treasurer Report

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

Motion by Debra Hertz

Seconded by Heather Wachter

All in favor

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22pm by Chris Kunhardt.

Motion by Debra Hertz

Seconded by Jim Bennett