

- Draft Minutes -

**Achievement First Rhode Island  
Board of Directors Retreat**

May 19, 2020, 5:30 pm

Zoom Video Conference

**I. Call to Order & Attendance**

The meeting was unofficially to order at 5:36 pm by Mayor Jorge Elorza to begin discussions despite not initially having quorum. The following attendance of board members and Achievement First Staff represents all who were in attendance for at least some part of the meeting:

Jorge Elorza, AFRI Board - Yes

Macky McCleary, AFRI Board - Yes

Reshma Singh, AFRI Board - Yes

John Iglizzi, AFRI Board - No

Soraida Morales, AFRI Board - No

Ben Smith, AFRI Board - Yes

Maryellen Butke, AFRI Board - Yes

James Wiley, AFRI Board - Yes

Percy Ballah, AFRI Board - Yes

Jorge Cardenas, AFRI Board - No

Jesse Balis Harris, AF Network Support

Aja Davis, AFRI School Leadership

Andrew Walker, AFRI School Leadership

Kevin Lohela, AFRI School Leadership

Mindy Rice, AFRI School Leadership

Salvador Pellerano, AFRI School Leadership

Christien Laible, AFRI School Leadership

Cassidy McKee, AF Network Support

Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support

Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes

Public: Jillian Fain

Mr. Kevin Lohela spoke about how AF Illuminar Elementary School is taking an individualized approach to working with families. They are creating multiple opportunities and formats for families to give feedback. 97% of families shared that they feel positive about the distance learning program. And, while much of the feedback showed appreciation for the consistency of math and ELA, parents also expressed the desire for it to not to feel stale. Mr. Lohela shared that teachers responded to that feedback by making lessons more creative including virtual field trips and science weather reports, for example.

Mr. Lohela said they are providing individualized support for scholars with paraprofessionals. They've worked to be creative about leveraging the knowledge, talents and creativity of staff, while being flexible about scheduling to ensure scholars continue to receive the services they need. Ms. Aja Davis, principal of AF Providence Elementary, added that some students are getting additional supports, with multiple personalized touch points per day, scaffolding, pulling back or adjusting assignments in any ways that the IEP specifies. She thanked AF's Team Special Services and how they have provided related services like speech or occupational therapy.

To address concerns among the students, Ms. Davis said they are using resources from Yale's RULER program and taking time on conferences to check in on how students are doing and feeling.

Mr. Lohela spoke about how they are taking care of the stresses and challenges that the adult team is experiencing.

Ms. Davis applauded the operations team in how they got Chromebooks and mifis to scholars. In a recent staff survey, 100% of the staff at AF Providence Elementary responded positively that their principal, coach or someone at the school cares for them. One of AF's values is Care for the Whole Person and she is proud that her staff feel that way. Teacher retention is strong (85%) and she is fully hired for next year. She noted that AF has been phenomenal in supporting the schools. They are in the middle of a family survey and are working hard to get responses.

Sal Pellerano, Director of School Operations, spoke about the impact that the AF Team and Family Fund which is being raised by AF and disbursed directly to families who need urgent financial assistance. Approximately \$160K has been raised to date, and \$90K has been given out across the network. Some gifts have been one-off and others are recurring donations. Each gift is currently capped at \$500.

At this point in the meeting, Macky McCleary joined the Zoom Room and Mayor Elorza called the meeting officially to order (6:02 pm) with a quorum.

## **II. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

## **III. Approve Minutes**

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from March 6 and April 28, 2020.

Motion by Macky McCleary

Second by Maryellen Butke

All in favor

## **IV. Reports and Business**

Mindy Rice, who will be principal of AF Promesa Elementary School, thanked the board and expressed her gratitude for approving her. She has hired her leadership and 26 of 28 staff members for next year some of whom are coming from AF Illuminar and AF Providence Elementary Schools. She's excited about the diversity of her staff – 40% identify as Black, Latino, multiracial, six are AF parents and there are several men on the team which is not typical for an elementary school.

### **A. Facilities Discussion and Possible Action related to the due diligence for the future AF Rhode Island HS**

Cassidy McKee introduced David Sweeny, AF's new VP of Facilities. AF Rhode Island will have high school students in 2021 and will need a building to house the high school starting in 2022. There are currently two building opportunities that AF is exploring – one is in Providence and the other would be to expand the site at Garfield Ave. The AF Facilities team wishes to begin due diligence with test kits, site planning, and initial environmental work.

WHEREAS, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors (the “Board”) approved expansion of the AF Rhode Island charter by opening a high school in the fall of 2022, pending approval by RIDE, at its meeting on September 29, 2016;

WHEREAS, the Rhode Island Department of Education approved the expansion at its meeting on December 20, 2016;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board approves the due diligence portion of the AF Rhode Island High School expansion project, as presented, for a cost not to exceed \$130,000.

BE IT RESOLVED FURTHER, Achievement First and its designees are, jointly and severally, authorized and directed, in the name of the Board, to submit and execute such documents needed in order to effectuate the foregoing resolution.

Motion by Macky McCLeary  
Seconded by Percy Ballah  
All in favor

#### **B. Board Chair Report**

Mayor Elorza shared summer learning opportunities for Providence students. Without knowing the eventual financial impact of this pandemic, the Mayor is holding to his commitment to investments in youth, such as high quality summer camp, enrichment programs, summer jobs programs (serving 1500-1600 kids), and summer learning programs.

They have asked all service providers to come up with two plans: in-person and virtual. Summer camps can open in June but that is subject to change. The commitment to youth and education, however, remains and they will fight to preserve dollars in the next year’s budget.

The board discussed the principal candidate, Mr. Donovan Tracey, for AF Providence Middle School. They felt he was a strong candidate for a variety of reasons, especially his commitment to building strong relationships and his community engagement within and beyond AF. They noted the high leadership turnover at AF Providence Middle School, the challenges a new principal will face, and the way the board can support his success.

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby accepts Achievement First’s nomination of Mr. Donovan Tracey as principal of Achievement First Providence Middle School effective July 1, 2020.

Motion by Maryellen Butke  
Seconded by Ben Smith  
All in favor

Mr. Donovan Tracey joined the Zoom Room following the approval and was congratulated by the board.

Sarah Blanton noted the resignation of Robert Luciano who expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity to serve on the board.

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby ratifies the re-election of the following directors with a one year term ending June 30, 2021 and does, set the number of directors at eleven (11).

- Mayor Jorge Elorza
- Ben Smith
- Reshma Singh
- Maryellen Butke
- James Wiley
- Macky McCleary
- Percy Ballah
- Mayor Charles Lombardi
- Jorge Cardenas
- Soraida Morales
- John Iglizzi

Motion by Macky McCleary

Second by Percy Ballah

All in favor

Following the voting, Mayor Elorza noted Andrew Walker had joined the meeting and could give his principal report. Mayor Elorza had to leave the meeting and passed to Ben Smith to continue to lead the meeting.

Andrew Walker reflected, with gratitude, on his first year as principal of AF Illuminar Middle School. They've been working to provide the same high level of rigor and fun, despite not being in school. Family survey results have been very strong. They're doing regular town hall meetings ("Pastries with the Principal" continues), consistent check points with families, and strong interventions for scholars. They're working on virtual community events including an end of year expedition. They are almost fully hired for next year. He noted two mid-year departures and 100 percent retention of the teaching staff and leadership team.

Mr. Walker said that the Greenfield model helped support strong mindsets around valuing independence. They had operational systems already in place that supported remote learning, self-directed learning. Students already had Chromebooks. Thus, they were able to quickly pivot but despite being relatively well set up, remote learning is challenging so they sought to simplify the program for kids.

### **C. Treasurer Report**

Victor De La Paz, AF CFO, joined the meeting and gave an overview of the budget process and considerations including an expectation for flat or decreased funding, philanthropy, and many unknowns (costs, transportation, cleaning, and equipment). AF is planning for different scenarios.

Mr. De La Paz spoke about the basis for which the PPP loan was applied for and approved.

The budget assumes flat funding but if revenues decline there are four levers to lean on:

- (1) a cushion from this year based on moderate savings (utilities, transportation, maintenance) despite the spending on technology,
- (2) stimulus funds: Title I and PPP, which is currently a loan,
- (3) balance sheet, which amounts to just under two months of operating expenses,
- (4) mid-year budget cuts.

While on May 19<sup>th</sup>, financials are stable, information is going to change and AF anticipates returning to the board with revisions to the budget at a later date.

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby approves the financial report as presented.

Motion by Maryellen Butke  
Seconded by Macky McCleary  
All in favor

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby approves the financial budget as recommended by the Finance Committee and prepared by Achievement First for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Motion by Percy Ballah  
Seconded by Reshma Singh  
All in favor

RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby ratifies the re-appointment of CohnReznick to perform the financial audit of the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Motion by Macky McCleary  
Seconded by Reshma Singh  
All in favor

## **V. Adjourn**

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 7:04 pm

Motion by Maryellen Butke  
Seconded by Percy Ballah  
All in favor