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AF Hartford Academy

Board of Directors

Monday, September 14, 2020, 5:30 pm

Zoom Video Conference

I. Call to Order and Attendance

The meeting was called to order at 5:32 pm by Endia DeCordova. The following board members, constituting a quorum, and Achievement First staff were in attendance:

Patsy Mundy - Yes	Raven Obas, AFBA School Leadership
Endia DeCordova - Yes	Emily Wojtusik, AFHA School Leadership
Bildade Augustin - Yes	Laneka Thomas, AFHA School Leadership
Ja Hannah - No	Christina Ellington, AF Network Support
Alice Turner - Yes	Shannon Garfield, AF Network Support
David Dee - Yes	Victor De La Paz, AF Network Support
Lisa Tanen-LaFontaine - No	Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support
Celina Whitmore - Yes	Ken Paul, AF Network Support

Public: n/a

II. Open Session for Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Approve Minutes

RESOLVED, the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from August 3 and August 6, 2020.

Motion by David Dee

Seconded by Lisa Tanen-LaFontaine

All in favor

IV. Reports and Discussions

A. Principal Reports

Ms. Raven Obas shared that student engagement, teacher creativity and building connection over Zoom are going well. Attendance and enrollment are not where the school wants. Kindergarten enrollment is low because many families are opting into daycare for an additional year due to COVID.

Ms. Obas discussed how resilient and thoughtful the scholars have been. They are using a new platform to connect with families called Class Dojo and it has been successful. Ms. Obas praised the leadership team and their work and support.

63% families indicated they want to stay remote following October 5th which is the official day or re-opening. 20% want in-person for four-days, 8% are flexible between in-person and remote and the school is recommending remote for those who are flexible. Staff were also given a survey about whether they want to teach in-person or remote. 42% indicated they prefer to teach remotely, 13% indicated they prefer to work in the building and 45% indicated they are flexible and can work either remotely or in the building. Ms. Obas said that they will need two staff in each grade to teach in-person sections and they will need additional support staff for arrival and dismissal procedures.

In person instruction will have a maximum of 13 scholars per classroom. Each scholar will have their own set of materials/school supplies. They will wear masks and maintain six feet of social distance. Lunch will be in classrooms. For those families who are in dire need of in-person instruction (~20 families), AF Hartford Elementary will open for those families on September 21st.

There have been no midyear departures and five staff members did not return after the end of the last school year. Two of those were non-renewals due to positions that were eliminated, one staff member was terminated and two staff members resigned. Both of the positions held by the teachers who resigned have been filled. Teacher certification is currently at 89%. Of the four teachers who are not certified, three are awaiting a response from the State and one must pass one exam.

Enrollment in kindergarten is low. The total enrollment for the school meets the goal because of over enrollment in other grades. Ms. Obas reviewed student attendance and attrition by grade.

The board inquired about the kindergarten enrollment challenges and discussed the methods used to connect with disengaged families.

Ms. Emily Wojtusik, AF Hartford Summit Middle School principal, shared that scholars are getting the basics down with tech challenges and are all really getting into their work. Teachers have done a great job getting to know the scholars and having the scholars get to know them. They've done units on cyber bullying and social justice.

The leadership team is slightly smaller than last year. They decided not to replace Laneka Thomas who is currently the interim principal at AF Hartford High. There is a new DSO. All of the new teachers, with the exception of one, have prior teaching experience. There is a teacher in residence (TIR) in each grade level who will co-teach this year with the hope that they will be full teachers next year.

19% of families have opted for in-person instruction once school re-opens while 81% will continue to be remote. All students who will come in person will get four school days. There will be 9-14 students per advisory in each grade level and 1-3 advisories per grade level depending on size.

There will be new entrances for the middle school, keeping them separate from the elementary and high school entrances. Breakfast and Lunch will be served in classrooms with lunch carts. Offices are limited to one adult and extra classrooms will be used as teacher workspaces. Teachers and staff will not cross grade levels.

Ms. Wojtusik is still working out class coverage and will try to minimize the number of teachers in the building to prioritize safety. Schedules are likely to rotate. Staff retention is 82% with one departure thus far this year and there is someone already filling that position. Teacher certification is at 78% with 75% of the uncertified teachers (six of eight) awaiting response from the State around submitted paperwork. Attendance is 93% and is taken every class period and teachers are following up with families midday. Enrollment is strong - 15 students above the goal.

Ms. Laneka Thomas, AF Hartford High School Interim Principal, gave an overview of the summer training and start to the school year. Staff gave 98% approval (2% were neutral) on the efficacy of summer training. She shared quotes from staff about optimism and hope for the school year, as well as specific lesson feedback and the opportunity to practice using technology. The growth areas that were named from last year are being addressed deliberately by the team to better serve scholars.

The top priorities for the school year are (1) student and staff safety, (2) student experience – classroom environment and (3) adult culture.

Attendance has been above 90% since the first day (when it was 89%). The attendance team has been working hard to get kids into their remote classes and today attendance was 96%. Core classes in the morning and early afternoon are mandatory. There is also live advisory twice per week. The other three days per week there are one on one check ins. Scholars are taking

live electives – theater, dance. They are not recorded videos. Late afternoon there is independent work time, with an adult on Zoom available for extra help (office hours/study hall). Ms. Thomas has already hosted two town halls to hear from students. The seniors have been struggling with their senior year being this way so the school is responding and the energy is turning around. They are demonstrating tremendous fortitude, in Ms. Thomas' opinion.

97% of scholars are using school-issued Chromebooks. The rest are using their own technology and there are two scholars who are still engaging with the school around technology.

The current reopening plan is to reopen on 10/5. 22% of families have communicated that they need in-person instruction. The plan is to have as few staff as needed in the building.

Regarding the safety plan, there will be temperature checks daily, scholars will remain in the same classroom with teachers rotating. Masks, frequent handwashing, and six feet social distancing will be required.

Staff retention has been good. Ms. Thomas noted two departures and the specific new hires the school has made including a new DSO. Once paperwork is confirmed, 90% of staff will be certified which leaves two teachers who still need to be certified. 44% of staff identify as people of color.

Ms. Thomas shared the AP courses that are offered and noted that the school is offering one additional AP course this year (AP Computer Science). AP performance from last year has improved in terms of the number of exams passed per student.

The college office is working hard to connect with every senior and family to talk about their post high school plans. 85% of those meetings have taken place already. The first draft of their college essays are due at the end of this week.

For any scholar who presents symptoms of COVID, there is a designated isolation room where they would go to have their temperature taken and the nurse has a system of retrieving scholars from that room. Ms. Thomas shared that special education continues to be offered and services are being maintained remotely or in person, socially distanced.

The board discussed adult culture –how it is addressed, how it is measured, what are norms (going to the source, students first, honoring different people's truths, among others) and how is the leadership team guiding those conversations and practices.

Shannon Garfield, Regional Superintendent, shared the survey results from staff noting that 100% of staff feel Ms. Thomas is effective in her job. The differences in the school are inspiring under her leadership and Ms. Thomas has been working extremely hard.

Ms. Thomas spoke about the principal transition. The ninth and tenth graders and families know her from here time at the middle school. The eleventh and twelfth graders and families know her from when she was at the high school. She feels her welcome has been warm and strong.

Ms. Garfield shared that reception from the announcement after Ms. Thomas' appointment has been extremely positive.

B. Finance Committee Report

Victor De La Paz joined the meeting to preview the budget amendment that board is asked to approve. There are several categories that, because of COVID and remote learning, have been cut from the budget. There are many other categories that may get cut or reduced but have not yet. The balance sheet is strong. Mr. De La Paz reviewed changes to the PPP loan.

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

Motion by Bildade Augustin
Seconded by Endia DeCordova
All in favor

C. Board Chair Report

Patsy Mundy shared that discussions of a board pipeline, board engagement and development can be covered in a board retreat which may be held in October before the November meeting.

RESOLVED, the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby elects the following leadership slate for the 2020-21 fiscal year:

Patsy Mundy, Chair
Endia DeCordova, Vice Chair
Bildade Augustin, Treasurer
Ja Hannah, Secretary

Motion by David Dee
Seconded by Alice Turner
All in favor

Ms. Mundy gave an overview of the CMO evaluation that is done annually. She asked board members to complete it and send to her if they wish to give input. Similarly, the conflict of interest disclosure statement must be completed and sent to Sarah Blanton.

RESOLVED, the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the facial covering (mask) policy as presented by Achievement First.

Motion by David Dee

Seconded by Bildade Augustin

All in favor

WHEREAS, AF Hartford Academy was founded to address the legacy of racism in public education and to support the young people in New Haven to realize their full power and potential;

WHEREAS, AF Hartford Academy has entered into an Academic and Business Services Agreement with Achievement First, Inc (“AF”), dated as of July 1, 2020;

WHEREAS, Lead for Racial Equity was defined as the lead core value for AF, but AF has acknowledged that it has not -- and does not currently -- consistently live that value in its schools. While AF has made meaningful progress in some areas, AF has not acted urgently or boldly enough to be consistently anti-racist in its instruction and curriculum, school discipline and student experience, talent practices and policies, family engagement, and decision-making; and

WHEREAS, AF Hartford Academy, in alignment with AF, aspires to lead the education sector not just in what our scholars achieve but also in the values-based way we operate. We believe that when we know better, we must do better. We are committed to becoming the anti-racist school system and community that our scholars, families, and staff deserve. We believe that we must interrogate our current practices, accelerate change, and institutionalize the equity-based mindsets, policies, and practices that are needed to move us collectively toward that vision.

BE IT RESOLVED, the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby affirms that AF Hartford Academy will uphold the values of Lead for Racial Equity and:

1. Vehemently denounce racism and actively work to dismantle it within and outside AF Hartford Academy;

2. Build structures and accountability to ensure all students, families, and staff are treated equitably and feel heard and valued; specifically, work to amplify Black and Latinx voices and perspectives both internally and externally;
3. Implement an anti-racist approach to the its beliefs, mindsets, policies, and practices with goals and actions in each of the following areas:
 - Adult culture and inclusive decision-making
 - Student Experience/School Culture (including student discipline policies and practices)
 - Talent (including equitable development, promotion, and compensation)
 - Instructional practices and curriculum
4. Instruct the principals of AF Hartford Academy to report at board meetings on the progress against these commitments, what has been accomplished, how different parts of the AF Hartford community have been engaged, and what the next phase of the work will be; and
5. Ensure all new AF Hartford Academy priorities and initiatives are developed, launched, and executed with an intentional and embedded focus on Leading for Racial Equity; take any additional steps necessary to ensure AF Hartford Academy becomes the powerful, anti-racist engine for equity that we were founded to be - and that our scholars, families and staff deserve.

Motion by Bildade Augustin

Seconded by David Dee

All in favor

Ms. Mundy indicated that she may be reaching out to individual directors to discuss committee appointments.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 pm by Patsy Mundy.

Motion by David Dee

Seconded by Alice Turner

All in favor