

DRAFT MINUTES
Achievement First Rhode Island
Board Meeting

Monday, August 29, 2022, 4:00-6:00 pm
Venue: Sprout Coworking Space (Annex Training Room)
Zoom: <https://achievementfirst.zoom.us/j/8959180848>

Board Members in Attendance: Maryellen Butke, James Wiley, Macky Mcclarey, Mayor Elorza

Staff in Attendance: Lisa Margosian, Beth Cocuzza, Isabel Tañedo, Neil Shah, Xanthe Jory, Christina Braganza, John Sharkey, Rod Bowen, Jesse Balis-Haris, Charmayne Joseph, Christi George, Ken Paul, Jillian Fein, Ketki Harale, Cassidy McKee, Patricia Granda-Malaver, Sultana Salma

Guests in Attendance: Sulafa Bashir

Patricia Granda-Malaver recorded the minutes.

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:11 PM by Mayor Jorge Elorza, Chair of Rhode Island Board.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Board Business

Mayor Elorza moved the board to a vote on the following resolutions.

A. Approval of June Board Meeting Minutes

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Achievement First Rhode Island Board hereby approves the minutes of its June 1, 2022 meeting as presented.

Motion by Macky Mcclarey

Seconded by James Wiley

All in favor.

B. Approval of SY 2022-2023 Leadership slate

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Achievement First Rhode Island Board hereby elects the following leadership slate:

Mayor Jorge Elorza, Chair
Maryellen Butke, Vice Chair
James Wiley, Treasurer

Motion by Macky Mcclarey
Seconded by Maryellen Butke
All in favor.

C. Approval of SY 2022-2023 Personnel Committee

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Achievement First Rhode Island Board hereby appoints the following board members to the Personnel Committee:

Mayor Jorge Elorza, Chair
Maryellen Butke, Vice Chair
James Wiley, Treasurer

Motion by Macky Mcclarey
Seconded by Maryellen Butke
All in favor.

D. Proposed Executive Session: State of Rhode Island Facilities

The board entered executive session at 4:19 PM to hold discussions on the state of Rhode Island facilities. Mayor Elorza invited AF staff present physically and digitally.

Motion by Macky Mcclarey
Seconded by Maryellen Butke
All in favor.

The board exited out of executive session at 4:48 PM.

Motion by Maryellen Butke
Seconded by Macky Mcclarey
All in favor.

IV. Presentation by Achievement First

A. AF Strategic Initiatives

Ms. Lisa Margosian, Interim Chief Executive Officer, kicked off the meeting presenting 4 strategic imperatives - multi-year initiatives that will direct Achievement First's focus and efforts in service of scholars and teachers.

Ms. Margosian then provided a brief overview of each strategic imperative for this coming school year:

1. Ensure that our schools deliver on their promise to our scholars, including summer readiness and a strong start to the school year.
2. Focus on our culture, ensuring a clear sense of direction, transparency in decision making, predictable communication, and a willingness to engage with all stakeholders.
3. Improve our systems and structures that support the quality performance and scaling of the network.
4. Attract and retain quality talent to deliver on our commitment to support the excellence of our schools.

Following this, AF leadership talked through each imperative in more detail.

Mr. John Sharkey, Interim Chief Academic Officer, explained that the first strategic imperative prioritizes the critical work of delivering on our promise to scholars, through our academic and instructional offerings, our social-emotional supports, and ensuring that students feel safe and welcome at school. He reminded the board that this school year AF is focused on reading in particular, as well as on student investment and continued reduction of exclusionary discipline practices. Mr. Sharkey also highlighted the fundamental summer professional development teachers recently completed which provides teachers the preparation to start off the year in a great spot.

Ms. Beth Cocuzza, Chief of Staff, explained the second strategic imperative which focuses on workplace culture. She noted that this year AF plans to focus on bringing back a strong performance culture for both Network Support employees and principals while leadership strategizes a long-term plan for teachers and other school based staff.

Mr. Neil Shah, Chief Financial Officer, then transitioned to the third strategic imperative and explained that it seeks to improve AF's systems and structures. He listed out some ways that we are already working on this goal such as investing in finance and human resources improvements. For instance, centralizing employee relations by automating systems like payroll will ultimately lessen the load on school-based DSOs in the long run.

Lastly, Ms. Cocuzza presented the final strategic imperative that focuses on retaining and hiring school-based and Network Support staff members to deliver on our mission.

She noted the nationwide teacher shortage crisis that has impacted the teaching profession nationwide which is why talent is a primary focus this coming school year.

Ms. Margosian then opened the floor to questions. Mayor Elorza asked how strategic imperatives filter down to teams and schools. Mr. Rod Bowen, Chief of High School, answered that there is collaboration with schools, but for the most part, strategic imperatives live on the Network Support side. Nonetheless, schools know how these achievements will help them. Ms. Cocuzza also pointed out that the goals and subgoals are accessible to all the network via a spreadsheet that outlines the owner of the goal, progress, etc. This allows the imperatives to be easily embedded into team and individual goals as well.

B. SY 2021-2022 report and reflections

1. Scholars

The next meeting topic focused on AF scholar data across academies this past school year. Mr. Sharkey expressed the tremendous progress in school academics and cultures that have brought us closer to pre-pandemic standards while also acknowledging that there is still work to be done to close pre-pandemic gaps, particularly in math. He noted that the results shared exhibit an incomplete picture of our scholars' experiences due to lack of state assessment data.

Mr. Jesse Balis-Harris, Chief of Elementary Schools, continued the conversation with data on Rhode Island elementary schools, reporting that the school year ended with strong adult and scholar culture that has created an imperative foundation for continual academic achievement. He shared academic data that expressed that students were not where they needed to be on reading and math proficiency. In order to increase levels to our goals, Mr. Balis-Harris explained that we will be implementing curriculum changes, intentional professional development in the science of reading, and upgraded coaching/training. Mr. Balis-Harris then entertained questions from the Board on topics like Rhode Island academic results in comparison to our NY and CT schools, class cohorts rebounding differently depending on age, and academic intervention efforts.

Ms. Charmayne Joseph, Interim Chief of Middle Schools, began by reporting on student experience at Rhode Island middle schools which had mixed results for this year. For instance, academies met student experience survey goals yet there are needed improvements in attendance and suspension rates which are largely due to the ramification of the pandemic. As for academics, Ms. Joseph focused on reading, science, and math results, and ultimately confirmed that middle school scholars have improved from 2020-2021 but are generally performing below pre-pandemic levels. Ms.

Joseph answered questions regarding the expansion of Algebra 1 teachings and the academic equity gap on multilingual students.

Mr. Rod Bowen, Chief of High Schools, presented the academic state of Rhode Island high schools. He overviewed internal assessment results to explain that overall there needs to be work done to bring scholars to the appropriate academic levels. Mr. Bowen then turned to school culture for high schools which had experienced improvements by exceeding attendance targets and suspension rates that fell within an acceptable range yet exceeded our expectations. Board members asked about the number of high school students that attended our middle schools.

Mr. John Sharkey wrapped up this discussion topic by noting that for this school year we will improve academics by prioritizing reading growth and strengthen culture by prioritizing student investment goals and discipline targets.

Ms. Xanthe Jory, Chief Operating Officer, presented updates on scholar enrollment and recruitment efforts in Rhode Island. She reported that there is full enrollment across all schools, and there is strong demand across all grades as there are waitlists. She explained the effective recruitment methods we are using such as in-person outreach strategies, phone banking, digital marketing, and building data capacity. Ms. Jory then entertained questions from board members about reasons for the current trends in kindergarten enrollment and the specifics of improvements to our digital advertisements.

2. Staff

Ms. Cristi George, Vice President of Talent Operations, transitioned the conversation to staff updates. She explained the bi-annual organizational health survey AF releases and the metrics used to predict retention, and presented results from staff at each academy level. For elementary and high schools, there was strong satisfaction whereas middle schools showed variance. Where there was low employee satisfaction, Ms. George noted that the root causes were tied to teacher shortage and staffing challenges. These survey conclusions also helped instructional leadership to build more intentional alignment and more effective principal development with regional superintendents.

Mr. Michael Rabin, Deputy Chief of Staff, continued with the current state of recruitment and retention. He highlighted our talent efforts like salary and retention bonuses, prioritization of schools with most openings, increased marketing efforts, and streamlining application process. He concluded with brief updates on hiring goals versus progress made to date.

Ms. Christina Braganza, Chief Program Officer, reported on the investment of staff summer training series for AF's school-based teams. Ms. Braganza highlighted New Team member taxonomy training which gives new teachers the opportunity to practice building a strong classroom environment by rehearsing lessons and roleplaying. She shared the excitement of summer training being back in-person, with over 95% of participants agreeing/strongly agreeing that summer training is of high quality and high impact. Mr. Sharkey added that the goal of summer professional development is to present a series of connected training and experiences that support our visions across academies. He explained that we employed a logic model to identify specific inputs, activities and outputs needed for each session to lead us to the intended mission. In other words, we no longer look at summer training as individual sessions but rather as a collective story that will accelerate the recovery of students. Board members inquired on how summer training effectiveness is being tracked and whether individual boards can thank teachers and staff through appreciation events or additional support.

3. Operations

Ms. Jory said that with the lessons we learned last year, we have implemented COVID safety guidelines in schools which include:

- Aligning guidelines with district policies and CDC guidance to simplify the decision-making process
- Evolving approaches as policies change and pandemic progresses
- Continuing asymptomatic testing this fall
- Requiring staff to receive booster shots

She continued with insight on school response to both imminent and non-imminent threats to the school community. Ms. Jory explained that we have revised and clarified protocols covering a range of threat responses that align with state guidance as well as adjusted preparedness and prevention protocols. Board members asked questions about potential simulations that can help improve our response.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:04 PM by Mayor Elorza

Motion by Maryellen Butke

Seconded by Macky McCleary

All in favor