



DRAFT Minutes
Achievement First Joint Connecticut
Board of Directors Meeting

Venue: AF Amistad High School
580 Dixwell Avenue, New Haven, CT 06511
Thursday, December 14, 2024, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

I. Call to Order

Dick Ferguson called the meeting to order at 5:41.

| Name | Present | Name | Present |
|---------------|---------|-----------------|---------|
| Dick Ferguson | Y | LaVonta Bryant | N |
| Laura Saverin | Y | Patric Gregory | Y |
| Stephanie Ma | Y | Shashank Ghiria | Y |
| Prish Pierce | N | | |

AF Staff in attendance: Lisa Margosian, Blakely Simoneau, Shannon Miller, Angela Ackerman, John Sharkey, Karolyn Belcher, Charmayne Joseph, Dumar Paden, Tiffany Bostic, LaNelle Alexander, Ru Sharma, Neil Shah, and Aaron Obrachta

II. Discussion with Achievement First

A. CEO Welcome (5 min)

Lisa Margosian, CEO, welcomed the boards to the meeting and extended gratitude for the board members and school staff.

B. Academic Deep Dive (50 min)

John Sharkey, CAO, welcomed the board. He noted that connecticut is different as a state compared to the other states with AF schools. It was hit harder by the pandemic and has been slower to rebound from the pandemic. Mr. Sharkey

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noted that ES and MS math were hit the hardest. Mr. Lakra asked if the comparison is the same across the state, and Mr. Sharkey noted that while AF CT is still outperforming its local district that is not enough.

Mr. Sharkey noted that CT MS students also declined significantly and are now backsliding instead of rebounding.

Mr. Sharkey stated that the “big bet” of Achievement First is the new external curriculum. The theory of change rests on three pillars - strong foundational tools, implementation strategy, and assessment strategy. If these three things work together, we believe we will see academic results.

Mr. Sharkey walked through the new curriculum. Board members asked questions about how AF will differentiate for CT, and Mr. Sharkey explained that differentiation will depend on academy level and need. Mr. Sharkey and Ms. Belcher provided details.

Ms. Joseph noted that there are regional differences that existed before the pandemic. She spoke about turnaround schools, including allocating resources. She noted that children of color were disproportionately affected by COVID, which is a large percentage of AF’s population. She provided details about how AF is differentiating in other areas as well.

Mr. Sharkey walked through the elementary school data and noted that AF is seeing growth in some areas. He noted that many goals are below the waterline, but also noted that there is positive growth. Ms. Belcher noted that financial investment, per pupil funding, and certification requirements make Connecticut different from AF’s other regions. Ms. Belcher walked through some of the things being done in the Connecticut schools to improve academic performance, including changing school culture and altering the approach to academics.

Ms. Belcher noted that in ES, AF is focused on Kindergarten through second grade and that AF is concentrating on supporting teachers in learning how to teach the curriculum through coaching. Ms. Belcher spoke about the desire to learn from other schools within AF who are doing well.

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Mr. Sharkey provided details about what the measures show. Several board members asked for more details about what each measure means, and Mr. Sharkey committed to following up.

Board members expressed frustration about Connecticut schools being the last to adopt the curriculum. Ms. Belcher explained that there was an issue with school culture that had to be addressed first.

Mr. Sharkey presented on middle school results. He noted that reading results are better when compared to a national average. Ms. Joseph noted that there was progress being made. The goal last year was stabilization, there were issues with school culture and staffing. She discussed Tiering the schools, which includes additional funds. That funding has been used for tutors, additional staffing, and other supports. This year, the concentration is on continuous improvement cycles. She noted that the school culture is much better this year. The goal is for a school to come out of turnaround in three years. Ms. Joseph also spoke about leadership retention and staffing challenges, including finding and keeping teachers which will help with academic improvement. She stated that this time next year the numbers will be different.

Ms. Joseph noted that change of curriculum was difficult for teachers initially but they now appear to love it. Mr. Sharkey spoke about the things the new curriculum offers, including fully translated lessons and videos and specific supports for students with disabilities.

Mr. Paden spoke about graduate aims, and how academic results cannot be read in a vacuum. AF wants to be the best in class in the country. AF is trying to demonstrate what makes our high schools strong, and what makes our design strong. Mr. Paden spoke about the work that needs to be done on literacy and math, but acknowledged that AF is still finding its “north star.” Mr. Paden spoke about college acceptances. Mr. Paden spoke about the need to handle teacher certification and how AF is offering alternatives when a certified teacher isn’t available, and Ms. Belcher asked the board to consider what they might be able to do to help with getting the state to reconsider how they approach certification. Mr. Boas acknowledged that AF did not always comply with certification requirements, and AF now needs to get back into the good graces of the state.

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C. AF Philanthropy (10 min)

Mr. Obrochta spoke about philanthropy needs at Achievement First. He noted that in Connecticut, charter schools get about 75 cents to the dollar compared to public schools. AF is tasked with doing better and more with less. He asked the board to attempt to get to 100% giving, and noted that PCLB is matching any donations made with a two year commitment. Board members discussed the need for a cohesive and compelling story for AF - including student testimonials, school tours, family testimonials, and alumni stories.

III. Board Business

Mr. Ferguson asked for the board to pass the consent agenda.

Motion by Laura Saverin.

Second by Patric Gregory.

All in favor.

BE IT RESOLVED, the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from October 19, 2023.

BE IT RESOLVED, the Elm City College Prep Board of Directors hereby approves Ms. Alejandra Lopez Valdes to serve as a Yale SOM Board Fellow for an 18-month term, ending June 30, 2025.

IV. Adjourn

Mr. Ferguson moved for the meeting to be adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Motion by Laura Saverin.

Second by Prish Pierce.

All in favor.