



Amistad Academy Board Meeting Minutes

Achievement First

Tuesday, April 21, 2026 at 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM EDT

Zoom: <https://achievementfirst.zoom.us/j/87291965938>

Attendees:

Board Members: Lorraine Gibbons, Jen Alexander, Jim Baron, Jason Prime

Board Fellows: Henry Melzer, Molly Lynch

AF Staff: Amy D'Angelo, Sam Lucky, Liv Levey, Lauren Raimondi, Qiana Dinkins, Jasmine Watts, Rosie Basille, Ben Schanback, Sulafa Bashir, Ash Rodriguez

Guests: Peter Butler

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Lorraine Gibbons at 5:32 pm.

II. Public Comment

Ms. Gibbons acknowledged previous public comment during the February meeting from Peter Butler regarding teacher retention factors, namely competent school leadership, mission focus, and staff feeling supported. She expressed the board's gratitude for his insights and contributions.

There were no members of the public present who wished to make public comment.

III. Board Resolutions

Ms. Gibbons outlined the consent agenda which the board needed to approve and which included the previous meeting minutes, principal renewals, the new board fellow from the Yale SOM and annual health food certification. Ms. Gibbons asked if there were any questions or comments on the proposed resolutions. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda. Jim Baron so moved, Jen Alexander seconded, all were in favor and the consent agenda passed.

Consent Agenda

1. BE IT RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from February 10, 2026 and March 19, 2026.
2. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the appointment of Qiana Dinkins as interim principal of Amistad Academy Middle School through January 31, 2027 or until such time that a permanent

principal is appointed.

3. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the renewal of the following principals, with a final compensation package to be incorporated in the FY27 Budget to be reviewed and approved in June 2026:
 - a. Lauren Raimondi - Amistad Academy Elementary School
4. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves Ms. Molly Lynch to serve as a Yale SOM Board Fellow for an 18-month term, ending June 30, 2027.
5. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby appoints the following committee member:
 - a. Joint Amistad HS Committee: Molly Lynch

Healthy Food Certification:

6. Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.
7. The Amistad Academy Board of Directors will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales.

IV. Welcome and Agenda Overview

Amy D’Angelo welcomed the board members and staff and gave a quick overview of the agenda.

V. **Mission Moment**

A mission moment was shared by Rosie Basile, highlighting nine Amistad Academy students, who were participating in the national level academic decathlon in California, focusing on extensive knowledge of the 1920s. Acknowledgement was given to Board Chair Lorraine Gibbons who was instrumental in rallying donations to support the team's participation and travel. Fundraising efforts through Achievement First and AF Giving were successful in covering costs and allowing students the opportunity to visit Disneyland.

VI. **Academic Update: Mock Exams**

The meeting then transitioned to principal reports, with Amy D'Angelo providing context on recent state practice exams and the challenges in interpreting proficiency projections due to new assessment tools. She shared a protocol for presentations and Q&A for the principal reports, which would include updates and action plans focused on test results, attendance, and student enrollment.

Elementary School Principal Lauren Raimondi presented academic performance data showing declining ELA proficiency, with inconsistent performance in Grade 3 and strong growth in fourth grade. The school implemented test preparation strategies including focusing on teaching test-taking skills in a superhero-themed environment to reduce anxiety. Attendance improved to 92.9% from last year's 91.8%, with chronic absenteeism decreasing to 25% from 30%, though kindergarten and first grade still face challenges due to illness and weather.

Middle School Interim Principal Qiana Dinkins reported ELA results showing proficiency gains in 6th and 7th grades, and described targeted intervention strategies including small group tutoring and daily student work tracking.

Lauren and Qiana discussed communication strategies with families regarding student academic performance, including benchmark assessments and progress monitoring. The discussion also covered retention policies, noting that post-COVID the organization moved away from retention but is now implementing a new policy that will no longer be based solely on family choice, with plans to roll out network-wide next year.

For the high school, Roseann Basile reported significant academic improvements from the mock AP exams, particularly in AP World History where proficiency increased by 67 percentage points year-over-year, and AP Biology which saw a 10% growth. While the school made gains in culture and safety, Roseann acknowledged that attendance and chronic absenteeism remain areas of concern that require more focused attention. She identified improving attendance as the top priority for next year and mentioned plans to learn from other schools' successful attendance strategies, particularly AF Hartford High School.

There was a discussion on addressing chronic absenteeism, particularly in 9th grade,

with Roseann explaining that initial data misperceptions had suggested it was primarily a 12th grade issue.

Jasmine Watts presented enrollment updates for Amistad High School, reporting a 66% increase in applications year-over-year and a growing waitlist. The school aims to reach 680 students by October 1st, 2026, and has implemented new outreach efforts including direct family engagement and evening meetings at local middle schools to build stronger connections and increase student matriculation from network middle schools.

VII. Finance Committee Report

Ben Schanback, Chief Financial Officer, presented the budget challenges facing the organization, noting flat state funding and rising costs, leading to staffing model adjustments and targeted reductions across schools.

He described strategies for simplification of the budgeting process for schools by issuing a single budget number to work within, moving away from net income accounting between revenue and expenses. He stated that final budgets will be presented for voting at the next meeting in June.

There was also a discussion about philanthropy which was likely to grow next year with the team working on outreach and re-engagement of past donors. Board members were encouraged to share information about foundations or corporations that fund education with Amy D'Angelo for potential funding opportunities.

VIII. Adjourn

Prior to adjournment, Ms. Gibbons acknowledged board member Yashira Zwisler, a graduate of Amistad High School and an attorney, who was stepping away from the board to focus on family, expressing gratitude for her time and commitment. She also thanked Henry Meltzer, a current board fellow from the Yale School of Management, who will be graduating soon, expressing appreciation for his valuable contributions to the board. Molly Lunch, the latest board fellow from the Yale SOM was introduced as taking over through the end of the school year 2027. Molly expressed her enthusiasm and willingness to contribute to the board, highlighting her background as a principal and math teacher.

Ms. Gibbons made an appeal to the board members to nominate and recruit additional board talent who share in the mission of the board, to strengthen the Amistad Board.

There being no other business, Ms. Gibbons requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jen Alexander so moved and was seconded by Jim Baron. All were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 6:41 pm.