

Minutes from September 4, 2019 Meeting

A special meeting of the Board of Trustees ("Board") of Digital Pioneers Academy Public Charter School ("DPA") was held on September 4, 2019 at 7am by conference call.

The following members of the Board were present:

Johnny C. Taylor, Mary Wells, Paul O'Neill, Sara Batterton, and Mashea Ashton. Orlena Blanchard, Henry Hipps, and Stephney Riley were absent. Greg Foster, Managing Director of Finance and Operation was also present.

Board Action:

Mrs. Ashton presented the terms of modified loan agreement between DPA and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education ("OSSE"). DPA is seeking a \$510,163 increase for building renovations at the 709 12th St SE site. The loan increase is to be added to the existing balance of \$306,168 owed on the original loan. The amended loan is \$816,400, payable over 5 years.

After the discussion, the Board voted to unanimously adopt the resolutions to allow DPA to undertake the 2019 OSSE Financing Transaction.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15am.

Board Meeting (via Conference call)

November 8, 2019

3:00 - 4:00pm est

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Board:

Mary Wells, Henry Hipps, Orlena Blanchard, Paul O'Neill, Sara Batterton, Johnny Taylor, Mashea Ashton

Staff:

EdOps: Rhonda Henderson and Shelley Hughes

Discussion Summary

The Board met and discussed a number of key updates in relation to the overall business and health of the organization.

General topics discussed included: CEO update, Audit update and Financial Update. The Board also discussed strategic questions and priorities related to DPA growth and indicators of success.

Discussion

Quick update on Committee calls: in the next two weeks i'd like to connect and go deeper into the work. Want to touch base before the end of the calendar year so we have good next steps moving forward in 2020.

CEO Report:

Tried to highlight some of the major indicators around where we are from a staffing, culture and academic perspective. Overall we are having a very strong start

Academic Perspective: One of the primary indicators is the attached document which has our PMF scores. This is what the authorizer puts out in september which says you are tier 1, 2 or 3. We will get our official tier rating next year, we are currently at 56% strong tier 2 9 points off from being a tier 1. Our goal is to consistently rank tier 1. 4 categories of scoring; proficiency, growth, attendance, retention

- Attendance:

- Easy points are around attendance, if he had had the attendance at the 95% we would have gotten the 3 extra points which would have gotten us to 59 and so this year we have focused on working towards attendance and the clarity around attendance and the importance around it. We want to engage our families and use data systems to be able to track attendance everyday.
- Alexis and the ops team identified a new partner for us in schoolrunner and this is a great program that allows us to target the scholars who are below our attendance % and we can now all target our scholars and support them. We are currently at 92% with a handful of scholars who are chronically absent so there is definitely work to do

- Interim math assessment data:

- Says we have a lot of work to do 6th grade scholars came in lower than our 7th grade scholars but making good progress in Math and ELA. When you see the ANet data we are compared to network schools like KIPP DC Prep who are all tier 1 schools so we know we are on track
- We need to continue monitoring this data and use the data to differentiate and make sure our scholars are getting intervention and needs and we can close the gap. Last year we were unable to look at the data and respond to where our kids are. These are two good actions and initiatives we are taking.

Had conversations with Scott our authorizer and asked for honest feedback and reflection:

- We want every school to be tier 1 however, it is incredibly hard to do that in your first year because you don't get re enrollment credit or data. They want every first year school to at least get 50 points and we got 56 so this is very promising.
- This is a bright spot as a first year school. We serve families in wards 7 and 8 which have low socioeconomic statuses and 100% african american scholars and even still they outperform their peers in proficiency.

This specific feedback from Scott feels good and we are right now on track to being tier 1 school

Staffing Perspective:

- Race and ethnicity: strong staff we need the time training and skills to build them out. We have almost an 80% minority staff which I am proud of. We recruit people who are aligned to the mission and vision and I believe this makes a difference to our culture and community.

Culture Perspective:

- Josh Norman Press: continues to be another bright spot. They already sent the check for 60K. Leveraging communication with this so we can bring in more resources

Pause for Q&A from Board members:

1. 6th grade cohort came in lower than last year. Was your spending school different or the same? Half of our scholars came from 5 partner feeder schools and that's why our data was stronger coming in to this year. This year a third of our scholars came from those feeder schools. Democracy Prep scholars came in this year and their data is lower. Reflection point in our recruiting strategies. Founding year we had more girls than boys and this year we are 60/40 boys to girls and next year we want to focus on recruiting more girls.
2. In the partnership with relay, are you using them for instructional coaching? They do both, they do walkthrough, they do data they observe the implementation of the work and use the appropriate follow up. Their approach is building the capacity. We also just restarted our coaching supervision and observation planning.
3. Follow up question on projected score: looking at where we are mid performing what are the things that you think we need to get us to tier 1 and high performing that the board can focus on;
 - a. Zooming in on the easy points: attendance and reenrollment.

- b. Day to day interaction: students approaching and growth. We did not demonstrate best practice in data driven instruction and we will focus on that this year. Individualize instruction based on individual student data verses teaching to the whole group.
- c. Relay: We worked to get trained on data driven instruction with this organization and this will help us work through the data, action planning and differentiate.
- o Scholars who were proficient and advanced stayed in that area but did not grow. We didn't target their instruction enough so using the data you should be able to see the growth
- o MAP data basically confirmed this: 2 years of growth in one year is a very aggressive goal. A more realistic goal is 1 year and 4months of growth for an elementary tier but for middle school will be harder. 1 year 2 months is what we accomplished last year but not enough to get us to tier 1.
- o I think we need a reading specialist: someone who can guide us in the curriculum and show us how to get scholars moving up and closing the gap for those scholars. If we had some more expertise there we would see greater achievement
- o Coaching is something we have increased in our capacity and have done for the last two weeks and they are focused on the data analysis and focusing on the capacity

Audit:

Headline: We are still finishing up our audit it is in final stages. We transitioned to EdOps in July 1st but the previous company is finishing our audit and EdOps is working closely with us to get a strong audit. We will set up an audit call with the board in the next few weeks.

No significant deficiencies or concerns. Two things that they flagged for us are

1. Debit card that we use extensively for staples and orders and lot for the receipts and tracking in emails and we did not follow strong protocols around the use of the debit card.
2. Not going through the procurement process for contract over 25K. We continued to use the same companies. We did not use the same protocol and did not do the public procurement.

Shoutout to Alexis: the changes that are happening and adjusting the procedures in real time.

Financial Update

Forecasted we would close the year around 20 days of cash but since then we have had some change that has moved us downward to 6 days.

Please refer to the executive summary

- *Expense side:* we say increased staff development spending this is more like investments. We will be making investments into the staff so they have the opportunity to meet all the goals we are trying to accomplish.

- When the team brought this to my attention I was most concerned about the SPED count and final enrollment which totals 126K less than anticipated. Now I understand there were a couple of miss steps we took that we now have adjusted for. We sent projections on SPED numbers that were in our original application. When we submitted the numbers again we stayed with the projection numbers instead of adjusting for the reality of what we had.

Next steps: We cleaned up our numbers to project the reality and moving forward we will have a better sense. We will have a finance meeting where we can dive deep into the report. Where can we reduce spending? Hiring and what that will look like in the future.

- Overall thoughts from EdOps: 6 days is concerning but it is better than negative days. This means that after June 30th we will only be able to run for 6 days before we need actual cash. On July 15th we get our first per pupil payment. We will have to work these 6 days into 15 days. We will have to find 180k this is not impossible.
 - The target for us moving forward is 45 days of cash. We would want DPA to have at least 30 days. It is important to have a gameplan early on so that you can meet your financial goals and also your academic goals so that we can have a high quality experience.

Additional fundraising opportunities that you have in mind that would be helpful that are not included here: STEM corporate donors we need to start to build relationships there and gifts that seem small to them can be really meaningful to us.

- Absolutely there are a number of funders I am in connection with in the past 6 months that are very focused on STEM and computer science.
- When I look at the staff positions that we need to fill, there are really only 2 DFO and electives that are absolutely critical for the long term everything else is on hold.

Strategic Board Question: What are the conditions for quality growth that we should prioritize?

- Johnny: In addition to the traditional 3Rs are we also building in life ready skills. Those skills that say that when they leave they can actually function as productive human beings. We see a lot of people in the workforce now that are brilliant technically but do not have the best life skills.
- Sara: Come up with a sense of what the most important criteria to evaluate when the green light is to grow. What are the top 3 or 5 that help us decide if we are going to grow. Do we have an instructional leader identified?
- Mary: High school is a different animal than middle school and it is a different question. That much more complicated to plan for and grow a high school. I have also come to a view that a network of schools feels more sustainable than a smaller school. That's why I want to get to the small network at the very least rather than multiple middle schools thinking about expansion for DPA its always been the plan to have a high school but how do we think about enrollment.
- Orlina: Partnerships strategic partnerships for the long term are going to be critical. The vision long term and what the students path should look like. How do we identify those partnerships and how do we secure those from a real estate perspective, funding, marketing

perspective. The pipeline to high school we need to consider the academic pipeline to establish.

- Henry: Sharing my excitement on the prospect for the right kind of growth and a thank you for your resilience through this period of time and reflecting on the fire and how that happened at the worst possible time yet things are still moving along.

Minutes from December 19, 2019 Meeting
Board Meeting (via Conference call)
3:00 - 5:00pm est

Attendance

Present: Board - Mary Wells (Chair), Orlena Blanchard (Vice Chair), Sara Batterton (Treasurer), Mashea Ashton (Secretary), Henry Hipps (Board Member), Paul O'Neill (Board Member)

Also present: Alexis (Director of Operations), Shelly Hughes (Ed Ops), Rhonda Henderson (Ed Ops), Steven Sheffield (Ed Ops)

Absent: Johnny Taylor (Board Member)

CEO Update

Ms. Ashton provided the following updates. The current enrollment includes 241 scholars with over fifty students on the waitlist. The DPA goal is 120 per grade level. On Count Day (October 10), we had 243 scholars enrolled: 121 sixth and 122 seventh graders.

We have had about 8 scholars withdraw since then, mostly due to moving to a different state. We have filled most of those seats.

Ms. Ashton also provided a brief staffing update. DPA started the year with 39 team members, approximately 90% fully hired. We had to make some shifts, and currently have about 4 positions vacant (2 teachers, teacher's aide, and a social worker). Most of the shifts allowed for scholars to now enjoy lunch and breakfast in the cafeteria and increased the course offerings for electives. Scholars now have a range of electives including wrestling, step, basketball, art, performing arts, music, and PE. The 7th grade experienced the most changes shifting out of the semi-self contained model. Scholars will still remain in their cohorts, however teachers will shift to teaching one content area compared to teaching three content areas previously.

Audit Committee

The audit committee presented the findings for audit. DPA received a clean opinion for our first Audit. There were several recommended improvements from the auditor which the team has already begun to implement.

Action Items

The board voted unanimously to approve the following items:

Approved to receive the audit management letter as presented.

Approve the policies and procedures manual as revised. The changes include: improved explanation of federal procurement policy and DPA's adherence to it (per audit suggestion) increased Anybill approval threshold to \$25,000. Second signature only required for purchases over \$25K. (per staff suggestion).