

**DIGITAL PIONEERS**  
ACADEMY

**Minutes from June 24, 2021**  
**Board Meeting (via Conference call)**  
**3:00 pm - 3:20 pm**

**Attendance**

Present: Board - Orlena Nwokah Blanchard (Vice Chair), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Chase Glass (Board Member), Paul O'Neill (Board Member), Henry Hipps (Board Member), Legand Burge (Board Member)

Also present: Ryan Benjamin (Director of Operations), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Carolyn Reynolds (Executive Assistant), Erin Swide (Associate Director of Operations)

Absent: Mary Wells (Board Chair), Henry Hipps (Board Member), Johnny Taylor (Board Member), Sara Batteron (Board Member), Kevjorik Jones (Board Member)

**CEO Update**

Ms. Ashton called the meeting to order. Ms. Ashton asked if the Board could vote on a consent agenda. No objections. She then provided the following updates.

There were no budget changes from the previous meeting. We are on track to 470 for enrollment and are expecting to get to our goal of 480 by October 15, which is count day in DC. We have a contingency for 10 students in case we do not hit 480. We are budgeting for a net income of \$250,000 and 48 days of cash, which is \$1.7 million.

All DC high schools require at least 24 credits to graduate. The 24 include 4 math credits, 4 English credits, 4 science credits, 4 social studies credits, 2 world language credits, music, art, PE/Health, and elective credits. We have surpassed the 24 credits and propose requiring 26.5 credits to graduate. This will include additional computer science credits and internship/leadership credits.

We have a partnership with Cadence for summer school, which is supported by Bellwether. Mary Wells, our board chair, is the President of Bellwether. We are paying Bellwether the same rate as every other school. We need to disclose this to the Board and ask for a vote to follow our financial guidelines and those of PCSB.

Legand Burge moved to approve the consent agenda, which included approving the budget, graduation requirements and the Bellwether contract. Orlena Nwokah Blanchard seconded. There was unanimous approval. Legand Burge moved to adjourn the meeting. Henry Hipps seconded. All approved.

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## Minutes from June 9, 2021

### Board Meeting (via Conference call)

3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

#### Attendance

Present: Board - Mary Wells (Chair), Orlena Nwokah Blanchard (Vice Chair), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Kevjorik Jones (Board Member), Chase Glass (Board Member), Sara Batterton (Board Member), Paul O'Neill (Board Member), Johnny Taylor (Board Member), Legend Burge (Board Member)

Also present: Ryan Benjamin (Director of Operations), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Carolyn Reynolds (Executive Assistant)

Absent: Henry Hipps (Board Member)

#### CEO Update

Ms. Ashton called the meeting to order. She then provided the following updates.

For recruitment, we have 386 fully enrolled. We have 474 students expected to enroll, and we are working hard to get this paperwork. Our sixth grade is lower than our target, but we have taken in some new 7th grade scholars. We have a lot of 8th grade scholars. There are scholars in other schools who are having negative experiences and want to come to DPA. Our budget is built on 480, but we have contingencies for 10 below that number, at 470. We are doing a lot for recruitment: community outreach, marketing, canvassing, etc.

For staff hiring, 10 offers were accepted so far, but we are not at our targets, as there are lots of moving parts with the pandemic ending. We have a leadership fellow and new Associate DOO. We are hired for our computer science and math teachers in high school, and those are difficult areas to staff. We have 17 teaching positions open and 5 non-teaching positions open. 97.5% of teachers who were given offers have returned!

We had great end-of-year events, including the St. James and two field days. We had a wonderful 8th grade promotion video that was broadcast last night. Ms. Glass shared good memories from her time as a parent at DPA. The founders have a special place in our heart.

Johnny Taylor asked about general academic performance during the pandemic. We use two data points: MAP and ANet, and we will have updates at the next board meeting. Our high performers and even some with behavioral challenges did well during the pandemic.

Mashea and Steven Sheffield presented around the budget. We will not take action today. We were meeting three goals: launching a high school, investing in required facilities upgrades, and maintaining financial stability during growth. We are investing in adult/student social/emotional learning, staffing, uniforms, expeditions, and esports/sports programs. Steven broke out some SEL spending to show how we are supporting the team's capacity.

Some additional context: Growing schools spend more, high schools require higher spending, and campus expansion requires additional spending. We have a few risks we considered during the process: enrollment

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revenue, staffing, private revenue, facilities at 9th Street, and our general 1% contingency applied in addition to the other risks.

We expect 48 days of cash at the end of next year. Our FAR metrics are expected to be strong next year. We will have 3 years of financial performance.

Shawn Samuel and Mark Cager from JDC presented about their facilities work. They are a project and construction management firm since 2003. They are leaders of the team. To date, we've conducted site visits at both properties, worked with the architect at 9th St, walked with the contractors at 12th St. We meet three times weekly. The scope of work for both campuses will be wrapped up this week. Then we can work on pricing and scheduling. For the short term, at 9th street we are looking at updating the paint, doors, ceilings, and cleaning up the building space. On the exterior, we are looking at demolishing the playground and add athletic areas. We also will want to add ADA accessibility. We will spend roughly \$500,000 in year 2 for modulars, and then less than that for this summer to make the building comfortable and safe. We believe we can be at this location for two years.

Mary Wells adjourned the meeting. Ms. Glass seconded the motion at 4:40 pm.

## Action items

- Unanimous approval of May 13 minutes (Kevjorik Jones moved, Johnny Taylor seconded).

## Minutes from May 13, 2021

### Board Meeting (via Conference call)

3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

## Attendance

Present: Board - Mary Wells (Chair), Orlena Nwokah Blanchard (Vice Chair), Mashea Ashton (CEO) , Kevjorik Jones (Board Member), Chase Glass (Board Member), Sara Batterton (Board Member), Paul O'Neill (Board Member), Legand Burge (Board Member)

Also present: Ryan Benjamin (Director of Operations), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Carolyn Reynolds (Executive Assistant)

Absent: Johnny Taylor (Board Member), Henry Hipps (Board Member)

## CEO Update

Ms. Ashton called the meeting to order. She then provided the following updates.

DPA is heavily recruiting 6th graders and is 100% fully enrolled for 7-9th and 75% fully enrolled for 6th grade. This includes community outreach, social media, paid ads, referral incentives, special events and elementary school outreach. Most of DPA's new recruits live in Ward 8. About 10 8th graders are going elsewhere for high school. Half were admitted to selective schools, while the other half want to be with other family members.

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For teacher recruitment, DPA had over 800 applications with 160 advancing to DPA 101. This is an opportunity for an applicant to opt into DPA. About 30 people have advanced to sample lessons. DPA has 16 teaching positions and 5 non-teaching positions open. Almost 90% of current teachers were offered a position, and some are moving into leadership positions. DPA relies on direct outreach, social media, paid ads, career fairs, teacher town halls, and referral incentives.

DPA reopened for CARES classrooms on 5/3/21 with 38 scholars and 20 staff. Scholars feel welcome, but 6th graders have never been to middle school before. The KLR team is leading CARES classrooms. DPA is focused on screening, testing, social distancing, masks, and facilities improvements. DPA has a 100% testing program for all staff. Ms. Glass spoke of her daughter's enrollment in CARES classrooms, and she spoke of the high expectations for academic and health standards. Her daughter spoke about how she is enjoying being back.

DPA is in a strong financial position. DPA has 86 days cash on hand. The revenue forecast has increased by \$120,000 due to the reopening grant. Sarah and Kevjorik are working on negotiating with the landlord for a potential release of some rent due to ongoing renovations. The budget will be sent to the finance committee on June 3 and to the full board on June 9. It is due to PCSB on July 28.

Mary Wells adjourned the meeting. Ms. Glass seconded the motion at 4:19 pm.

## Action items

- Unanimous approval of April 8 minutes (Mary Wells moved, Paul O'Neil seconded).

## Minutes from April 8, 2021

### Board Meeting (via Conference call)

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

## Attendance

Present: Board - Mary Wells (Chair), Orlena Nwokah Blanchard (Vice Chair), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Kevjorik Jones (Board Member), Henry Hipps (Board Member), Chase Glass (Board Member), Sara Batterton (Board Member), Paul O'Neill (Board Member), Legend Burge (Board Member)

Also present: Ryan Benjamin (Director of Operations), Mashea Ashton (CEO), Steven Sheffield (Ed-Ops), Carolyn Reynolds (Executive Assistant)

Absent: Johnny Taylor (Board Member)

## CEO Update

Ms. Ashton called the meeting to order. She then provided the following updates. Digital Pioneers has prioritized safety for students, staff and families, and DPA wants to follow city guidelines. DPA is aiming to

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reopen on May 3, 2021. DPA staff shared this with families and will have an additional meeting tonight to discuss more details. DPA is preparing for as many as 120 students but estimates about 50-60. There are some concerns from families about coming back due to high-risk scholars or family members. Over 70% of the staff has been partially or fully vaccinated.

Digital Pioneers has made many improvements to the building, including: touchless sinks, toilets and water bottles; installation of air troffers, costing \$118,000; and portable air purifiers. DPA has notified the property manager of these improvements and has requested some rent credits from the landlord. The board can be helpful in this ask.

Digital Pioneers is also doing some extensive renovations this summer, totaling about \$348,000. DPA is adding bathrooms on the second floor. DPA is also creating clerestories in some of the classrooms that do not have any natural light, costing about \$40,000. DPA can use a variety of funds, including federal and local grants.

The enrollment process has begun, and Digital Pioneers is on track to meet its goals. DPA is sending offer letters in a few days and will hire for about 20 new positions for middle and high school. DPA's attendance was 94% for Quarter 3, and learning loss has not been as much as expected. Over 80% of families believe DPA is moving in the right direction, and 84% have said they wish to return to DPA. Over 96% of staff believe DPA is moving in the right direction. DPA is focused on increasing student engagement in a remote setting. Digital Pioneers is working on programs for high-dosage tutoring during the summer, and thinking about partnerships for athletic programs.

DPA can connect with Ward 6 Mutual Aid to help families get vaccinated.

## **Finance Updates**

Cash on 6/30/21 is forecast to be \$1.71 million, which is 75 days of cash on hand and \$351,000 over budget. Facilities improvements will be higher than expected. Some staff roles will not be filled, resulting in savings.

Digital Pioneers has had strong fundraising this year and will receive a series of federal grants.

## **Action items**

- Unanimous approval of January 14 and February 1 Minutes (Mary Wells moved, Kevjorik Jones seconds)
- Unanimous approval of Air Quality Proposal at \$118,000 and projection of MCN work at \$348,000 (Kevjorik Jones moved, Orlena Nwokah Blanchard seconds)