



The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School
Board of Trustees meeting
October 16, 2021. 10:00 a.m. By video conference.

Board members on call:

Wendy Pugh
Kiva Zytnick
Richard Pohlman
John Kenchelian (joined at 10:26)
Jonathan O'Connell (joined at 10:37)
Atalie Jacobs
Laura Masimini
Caroline Hill (joined at 10:42)
Donice Leak

Board members absent:

Marlena McWilliams

Staff on call:

Justin Lessek

The meeting started at 10:12 a.m. with an icebreaker.

Orders of Business

1. Approval of minutes from August 28 meeting

Wendy made a motion to approve minutes. Kiva seconded the motion. No discussion and the motion was approved unanimously via roll call.

2. General updates

Justin provided an update from the first six weeks of school. Justin began by extending an invitation for board members to set a time or consider coming to the school for a visit- had one this week and it was great to show off all that is happening in the building and how our model is working in real life. Justin also provided an update regarding daily schedule and after school activities.

- a. Enrollment- total 157 students (7 over ceiling so we are paid only for 150). We started school with 157 and left about 6-7 students on the waitlist. Demonstrative of solid demand for the program- lost no students from the first day of school through the enrollment audit.
 - i. Race demographic breakdown in presentation.

1. SPED= 22.5%
2. ELL up slightly = 8%
3. 504= 5%
4. At-Risk= 40%

b. BOY Data Review

Justin presented an update on test scores. One issue is that 39 percent of Truth students are in the first quartile in math. There remain gaps between White students and Black students, as well as between White students and Hispanic students. There are also gaps showing students with IEP or who are at-risk are not scoring as highly as other students. John asked if all students with lower math scores are receiving intervention; Justin said not everyone is getting one-on-one tutoring but that they do get extra attention in small groups.

Caroline asked about Black students in lower quartile; Justin said they are overrepresented. Caroline asked about school culture, identity and development and whether all students are being seen and heard. Justin said Truth is using the Kelvin survey, which started this year and goes through next year.

Donice asked about a grade level breakdown in particular to ensure that 8th graders are ready to advance. Justin said 8th graders are slightly below 6th and 7th graders but that the gap is shrinking. Donice asked how students were chosen for Algebra this year. Justin said they were chosen based on their scores and readiness.

c. Family Survey Data

Justin presented family survey data. A total of 104 families, or just under 70 percent of families responded, and 59 percent strongly agree and 36 percent agree that their students have had a positive overall experience at Truth. Similar numbers to last year.

d. COVID Safety

Staff vaccine mandate went into effect Sept. 15, ahead of the city mandate. Students 12+ playing sports must be vaccinated. There is biweekly testing for all staff and students using Curative. There have been six total positive cases over the first seven weeks, and no spread within Truth.

Rich asked parent board members whether they feel they are receiving info. Donice said the school has been transparent. Laura said her student has been quarantined twice but the school mostly communicated well. Kiva asked if more overall Covid info could be shared with parents; Justin said there is some concern that there is too much messaging coming from Truth but that Truth could offer an optional update. Atalie suggested some more messaging in advance of the holidays. Justin said Truth would like to do a vaccination drive and is waiting for approval.

OSSE is now offering grants to schools that would allow nurses to help provide Covid support, rather than leaving it to the rest of the staff. This has been a topic at State Board of Ed and in the media. Truth is interviewing nurse candidates.

e. On the Horizon

Opening the high school and enrollment remain top priorities, as well as addressing instruction, achievement gaps, facilities, budget and Covid response.

Truth is recruiting new board members. Rich introduced Christa Kovacs, a Ward 5 resident and director of development for the Brady Campaign and Center to Prevent Gun Violence. She toured the school with Justin and Rich and is interested in joining the board. Kiva said the development committee could use Christa's expertise and guidance.

Caroline asked whether students could be considered for board positions. Atalie said such a proposal is not currently in the bylaws. Justin said he liked that idea. Atalie asked what the state of board recruitment is. Wendy suggested that we discuss as part of governance update.

3. School-related politics discussion

Tabled out of time concerns

4. Calls for Support

Opening our high school

Justin said Truth needs assistance from the board for:

- a. Vetting the high school plan
- b. Providing accountability for following the plan
- c. Reviewing the school's lease
- d. Providing facility support
- e. Connecting to business and professional partners for internships.

Board members volunteered to help with each of the areas. Donice said high school students will also need community service hours.

Recruitment for 2022-2023

Justin said Truth needs assistance from the board for:

- a. Reviewing staff recruitment material
- b. Reviewing promotional materials
- c. Hands on support at EdFest Dec. 11
- d. Posting signage
- e. Advocacy in favor of a public montessori preference for the 2023-2024 school year

Board members volunteered to help with each of these areas.

5. Committee updates

- a. Governance

Atalie provided an update. Four trustees have terms ending in July of 2022. All are eligible for second terms. Committee is looking to support the chair in evaluating the Executive Director and is refining board recruitment process. She asked board members to update their skills on the matrix of board skills. Board still lacks expertise on Montessori practices, fundraising, Latinx issues, accounting and other areas. Atalie explained the board recruitment process.

John asked how many members are needed. Atalie said the total cap is 15. Diversity remains a focus as well as candidates' capacity to contribute. Atalie said the goal is to vote on the two new recruits in December.

b. Finance and Audit

John provided an update. Audit field work took place last week and went well. Truth's FAR score is at 100. Audit needs to be submitted to PCSB in December. Finance committee will receive results and present them to the full board for approval. Auditor will then attend a Truth board meeting.

There has been a decrease in gross margin due to decrease in expected CARES Act funds. Just said the decrease equated to a roughly 5 percent drop in the operating budget and that Truth is raising concerns about the process. Rich said the change will affect Truth's ability to save for future facilities and suggested elevating the voices of families in the process. Laura agreed that parents need to advocate.

c. Facilities

Justin provided an update. Truth is still working on dual tracks of short-term and long-term needs. Truth signed a letter of intent to lease space at 1825 Michigan Ave NE. Discussing with the church how to update the space. Truth has toured the Armed Forces Retirement Home and the former BET campus as candidates for a long-term home. Will be meeting with AFRH developers to discuss costs of rehabbing an existing building.

One question is how much Truth should be spending on consultants and the like to plan for a long-term facility. How big of a priority should a permanent solution be given the state of our current facilities? John said it might depend on what the value-add is but it's never too soon to consider the long-term.

d. Development

Laura provided an update. \$15,750 has been written into the budget, which is a fundraising goal. Sports and clubs fundraiser raised \$4,735. Committee is setting fundraising goals for the board and parent groups. Kiva said there will be an end-of-year fundraising effort.

e. Academic Achievement

Justin provided an update. Goals include closing gaps and for all students to show expected annual growth on MAP.

7. Next steps

- a. Governance committee will meet to discuss board recruitment
- b. December meeting will include discussion on D.C. politics and education
- c. Board members will update their skill sets on tracker
- d. Justin will follow up with board members on calls to action

Materials:

Justin's slides:

Committee slides

Closing

Wendy motioned to adjourn at 12:42. Rich seconded. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned.