

The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School
Board of Trustees meeting
December 4, 2021. 10:00 a.m. By video conference.

Board members on call:

Wendy Pugh
Kiva Zytnick
Richard Pohlman
John Kenchelian
Jonathan O'Connell
Atalie Jacobs
Caroline Hill
Donice Leak
Christa Kovacs

Board members absent:

Laura Masimini

Staff on call:

Justin Lessek

The meeting started at 10 a.m. with a discussion about some of the violence in the neighborhood around Truth recently, including one event that resulted in a lock-down. That was followed by an icebreaker.

Orders of Business

1. Approval of minutes from Oct. 16 meeting

Richard made a motion to approve minutes. John seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously via roll call.

2. General updates

Justin provided an update.

a. Life at Truth.

Truth students are organized into four “ecosystems,” with around 44 students in each. They are in “work cycle” from 8:45 to noon. The units are 1) Identity 2) Diversity 3) Ethics and 4) Justice. Truth has 10 clubs and sports so far. Afternoons have electives and squad time. Kiva asked about homework. Justin said most students do not have homework every night.

b. High School planning.

Truth held a parent focus group Nov. 30. Truth is likely going to lose some rising ninth graders to other high schools, so will probably bring in some new ninth graders, which could affect the number of sixth graders Truth can have. Middle school is expected to remain at 150 students. Truth is planning to have some AP classes and professional internships for 11th and 12th graders.

In focus groups, parents have said they are ok with the possibility of a smaller ninth grade but some expressed concern about how many specials, sports and clubs the school would be able to provide. Wendy asked about early college exposure for students. Justin mentioned Truth's farm partnership with UDC but said he will look at more opportunities.

c. Student and teacher recruitment

Truth has been advertising for staff and begun interviewing candidates. Justin encouraged the board to send candidates. Jonathan asked how many graduating 8th graders might depart. Justin said 55 percent say they're definitely coming back, which is a little more than 20 students. Richard said D.C. middle schools are projecting a decline in enrollment.

Wendy asked about offering a remote learning option. Justin said that would be difficult from a staffing perspective but that Truth will monitor Covid data. Caroline asked whether Truth should consider enrolling students remotely who do not live in D.C. Justin said a family or two from Virginia or Maryland asked about attending remotely. OSSE would receive funding for those families but does not distribute them to the schools.

d. COVID safety

Truth received a grant to hire a nurse, who has been full-time for a few weeks. She is handling covid testing and tracking. So far there have been eight positive cases and no spread within the Truth community. Truth is hosting a vaccine clinic Dec. 16.

e. Priorities and horizon

Preparing high school, recruitment, facilities, achievement gaps and budget remain top of mind.

3. Vote on new members

Christa left the meeting temporarily. Rich introduced her. He met her through a neighbor. Professionally she works at a non-profit to prevent gun violence. She also lives in Ward 5, near Truth. Rich motioned to have Christa join the board as a trustee. Kiva seconded the motion. Board members voted unanimously to add Christa to the board.

4. Committee reports

a. Finance

John provided an update. The committee met Nov. 9 to review audit results. The full board voted over email to approve the audit and it was submitted to PCSB by the deadline of Dec. 1. The next step is submitting IRS form 990, which is due in the spring. The auditors prepared this for Truth simultaneously. Rich said 990 submittal does not require a vote.

There have been no major budget changes since the last board meeting.

b. Facilities

Jonathan and Justin provided an update. Truth is negotiating a lease with Rhema church for about 10,000 square feet. Justin said the lease may be signed by mid-January. Rich asked what PCSB approval items might need approval, or ANC approvals. Justin said PCSB is aware of our discussions and ANC does not need to approve our expansion.

Justin asked if the full board needs to approve signing a lease. Rich said it probably will require a board vote.

c. Development

Kiva provided an update. The committee's large goal is to raise \$15,750. Its smaller goal is to create a more strategic overall approach. Laura is going to be liaison to parent fundraising committee, which will be selling some swag at a possible staff vs student basketball game.

Truth raised \$5,000 for September sports and club launch. Swag-sale netted \$1,260. Truth received \$7,868 on Giving Tuesday. Christa asked how many people gave on Giving Tuesday.

d. Academic Achievement

Truth is focused on closing achievement gaps and making annual expected growth for all students. Report cards have been issued.

Gaps in ELA: Black vs. White (-0.7) IEPs vs. peers (-0.2) at-risk vs. peers (-0.3)
Gaps in Math: (-0.5), (+0.1) (-0.5) for same groups.

Justin said the gaps are disappointing but are reflective of the BOY MAP data. He said he is seeing progress in the classroom that he thinks will be reflected on PARCC.

e. Governance

Atalie provided an update. Committee met with Aryan Bocquet about possibly joining the board. Board members were asked to inform Atalie before the February meeting if they are considering leaving the board. Some terms are expiring. Atalie asked that board members reach out to two possible members in their networks.

The committee has been working on executive director review, and is reaching out to more Truth staff and teachers. The committee is also considering an executive director compensation review.

The committee is also considering board training needs and Rich has offered to provide some training.

Rich said because the board has an even number of people on the board we may have to designate on one of the members as a non-voting member. Rich volunteered to be the non-voting member.

5. Next steps

- a. Wendy asked whether board members would like to meet in person. Some board members said they were interested in that. Atalie suggested a remote option might be nice to provide.
- b. Justin said there will likely be an email about the potential lease signing and that members should expect something in January.

Materials:

Closing

Meeting adjourned at 11:54 a.m. without a vote.

DRAFT