

The Sojourner Truth Public Charter School  
Board of Trustees meeting  
February 5, 2022. 10:00 a.m. By video conference.

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Board members on call:

*Wendy Pugh*  
*Kiva Zytnick*  
*Richard Pohlman*  
*John Kenchelian*  
*Jonathan O'Connell (non-voting)*  
*Atalie Jacobs*  
*Laura Masimini*  
*Donice Leak*  
*Christa Kovacs*  
*Caroline Hill*

Board members absent: N/A

Staff on call:  
Justin Lessek

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

### **Orders of Business**

#### **1. Approval of minutes from Dec. 4 meeting**

Wendy moved to approve the minutes from the December meeting, Rich seconded the motion. The board approved the minutes unanimously.

#### **2. General updates**

Justin provided an update.

a. Third academic term

New term is underway with a focus on ethics. Black History month activities are underway, spring sports planning has begun. High school preparations are also underway.

b. Insight data

Survey of staff on instructional culture. Truth's data is compared to other D.C. charter schools. Truth ranks high on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as school operations and workload. Truth has improved on evaluation. Areas being targeted for improvement

are consistent expectations and consequences for student behavior.

c. Family survey data

Responses from Week 20 largely mirror responses from Week 4. There is improvement in the number of students who feel seen, heard, known and loved by their teachers -- 71 percent said they strongly agree. Also improvements on feelings on covid testing and safety protocol. About 89 percent of families agree that communication from the school works for them.

d. NWEA middle of the year MAP data

This is a national reading and math test taken by 4 million students. Truth students have shown improvement from the beginning of the year on reading, which is very encouraging. On reading, 28 percent were in the first quartile at the beginning of the year, down to 19 percent in the middle of the year. There were improvements in all quartiles. Math improvement has not been as strong, and fewer students were in the top quartile at the beginning of the year than there were in the middle.

By subgroup, Black and Latino students showed higher growth than White students on reading. Students with disabilities made more growth on average than those without disabilities. ESL students grew more on reading than non-ESL students. However on math the gap between growth by white students and Black and Latino students has expanded. At-risk and ESL students did not improve as quickly as other students.

Atalie asked what the typical expectations are for MAP. Justin said on some measures Truth students' growth is ahead of even year-end averages. On some measures of math, Truth is probably below average. Richard asked how well the MAP test measures what Truth is trying to achieve. Justin said reading is a big part of students' days and they are starting to do more on-demand writing. Some Truth math lessons have more of a conceptual approach to learning than what MAP scores might register.

Kiva asked what to make of the math scores. Justin said the gaps are important to consider. A tutor already comes to school to help students with math three days a week and we do not have data on the effect of that yet.

e. Student recruitment

Truth is holding regular middle and high school info sessions, providing on-campus tours with covid tests. Some Perry Street Prep 8th graders have applied to Truth for 9th grade. Current enrollment is 156, over our 150 ceiling. Ceiling next year is 210. Expectation is we will lose around 30 students. Goal for new enrollments is 90. Thirty-seven percent of applicants are from Ward 5. Ten percent from Ward 6, more than previous. Number of applications are up in each grade. Twenty 8th graders have applied to other schools.

f. Staff recruitment

Truth has begun asking staff for return-to-school commitments for next year. There are six positions for new roles that need to be filled. Truth has a six-step hiring process beginning with applications through Indeed.com and ending with in-person demo lessons with Truth students.

Rich asked what the top three selling points are for prospective staff. Justin said Truth is doing something unique and different with a Montessori model and mentors. Staff view the place as a joyful place. Montessori at this level is still a rare thing. Caroline asked if

Truth could capitalize on the current political climate to recruit staff from Texas or Virginia. Justin said Truth hasn't considered that but could in the future.

g. High school planning

One of the challenges is that there will be a small high school class, around 50, and Truth doesn't know how many of our current students will go elsewhere. There is a lot of planning yet to do for high school.

h. Covid

There were a significant number of positive cases over holiday break. Truth re-opened Jan. 5 after testing 100 percent of staff and students. Since then, Truth is doing 100 percent testing Sunday nights/Monday mornings. During the past four weeks there were 4, 4, 2 and 1 positive cases identified at the door. Kiva asked if the tests are done outdoors, where temperature could affect the tests. Justin said the tests happen in the multi-purpose room.

i. Priorities going forward

- Preparing high school programming
- Planning for new facility
- Next year's budget
- Keep eyes on instruction and closing gaps

Years 3 and 4 are tough for a lot of schools budget-wise due to easing off start-up grants but not having the size yet to afford robust staffing and funding. Truth needs to tighten belts going forward without damaging the staff or student experience. Currently have \$140,000 deficit in 22-23 budget.

### 3. Committee updates

a. Governance

Atalie provided an update. Board needs to ramp up trustee recruitment efforts as at least two trustees are rolling off in the summer. Committee is developing survey and outreach communications for executive director evaluation.

Aryan Bocquet is being considered as a member of the board. She worked for OSSE and led the District's effort on the D.C. Language Access Act. Jonathan, Justin and Atalie shared their positive experiences in meeting and speaking with her. She toured Truth. Rich said he has known Aryan for 7-8 years and was impressed by her work on behalf of expanding school choice to students throughout the city and her experience with data to focus on equity.

Atalie motioned to approve Aryan's addition to the board. Rich seconded. Board voted unanimously to add Aryan as a trustee. Truth now has 11 trustees.

b. Finance & Audit

John provided an update. December financials remain largely unchanged. Truth has more than 76 days of cash on hand. SPED revenue has been somewhat less than expected. Truth's finalized 990 IRS form was submitted well ahead of the spring deadline. Budget approval is a big topic coming up. Committee will look at budget

through May ahead of June 25 full board meeting.

c. Development

Justin provided an update. Large fundraising goal is \$15,750. So far this year we've raised \$19,636. Since last meeting, the committee made a Giving Tuesday drive and end-of-year giving drive. Omicron forced cancellation of some plans. Committee will need to brainstorm some type of spring fundraiser or event.

Christa said Truth is looking for an affordable database to track outreach. Rich asked if there is any other software that Truth uses.

d. Facilities

Jonathan provided an update. Negotiations are in the final stages for lease at Rhema. Planning is underway for operations at the new location, five blocks away. Truth staff has been in contact with PCSB and the ANC. Truth has also put flyers up in the neighborhood.

Kiva asked how students will be split between the two campuses. Justin said families are aware of this plan but don't know which location their students will be in yet. Once the lease is signed Truth will be able to focus more fully on finding a "permanent" campus in the future and will keep an eye on space availability at 1800 Perry Street.

e. Academic Achievement

Justin provided an update. Truth is still pushing to close achievement gaps by subgroup, particularly in math. Justin will provide an update going forward.

#### **4. Closing and next steps**

a. High school planning

Rich proposed that the board focus more on planning to open the high school. Wendy asked whether the board needed an additional committee. Justin said that if there is a board member interested in taking a planning lead it could be helpful.

b. MAP data

Kiva suggested the board look at additional MAP data and take a more active role in addressing learning gaps. Justin said he would do that with the entire board.

c. Bloomberg grant

Justin raised the possibility of pursuing Bloomberg funding that was recently announced. Rich said he is looking into how much might be available locally.

d. Next meeting

Wendy said she is considering whether there could be a spring meeting in-person, possibly with some students present.

#### **Closing**

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.