

Board of Trustees Meeting  
Tuesday, December 16, 2014  
Our World Neighborhood Charter School  
Middle School  
31-20 37th Avenue, Astoria, NY 11106  
7:00 – 9:00

**The Trustees present were:**

Jeanette Betancourt, President  
Melissa Chin, Vice President  
Charles Guadagnolo, Treasurer  
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary  
Richard Bogle  
Sarah Espanol

**Also present were:**

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director  
Lisa Edmiston, Principal  
Karinne Montaque, Business Manager  
Yvette Strachan, Executive Assistant  
Olubunmi Emigli, PTO Co-Chair

Jeanette Betancourt, President of OWNCS Board of Trustees, chaired the meeting.

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***Board Business***

***Jeanette Betancourt***

Ms. Betancourt informed the attendees that Ms. Edmiston would start to join the Development Committee calls. She noted that she has begun work on the annual goals for the Executive Director and that she will circulate them to the full board once they are more developed. She also reminded the Board that there will be a Strategic Planning meeting in February or March.

***Director's Report***

***Brian Ferguson***

***Cost Containment & Contracting***

Mr. Ferguson gave an update on the work being undertaken by the Business Office to review all the major contracts and vendors. He thanked board member, Mr. Bogle, who is an attorney, for his review of the contracts. Mr. Ferguson said that the review is resulting in small to big changes and cost savings. He is keenly aware that the school has budgeted a deficit for the first time in its history and stated that we may be close to erasing the deficit through these changes. The review has also led to some adjustments to the health insurance options to control costs in a way that will not significantly weaken the benefit. For instance, our lower-cost option will now offer

in-network services only, but he noted that no one was using the out-of-network option anyway. Members of the board commented that their organizations had made similar decisions recently. Mr. Ferguson went on to say that in January our new caterer will start its contract. He anticipates some improvements to the menu as well as savings, though the price may go up for the paying families. He hopes this will motivate more families to complete applications for free and reduced lunches, though he expects the school will continue to forgive bills on an as-needed basis. These changes, along with other changes to storage, water supply and cleaning will be reflected on the mid-year budget.

#### *Professional Development & Curriculum Activities*

Mr. Ferguson reported that the administration is continuing to foster robust conversations about the requirements of the Common Core to ensure all staff are aware of what is being asked, such as non-fiction reading skills and science in literacy. In fact, the science curriculum was discussed at the latest staff meeting. He stated that we will be paying for substitute teachers and consultants to allow for the professional development of our teachers, but that he views this as good investment.

Last week the elementary school teachers stayed late to meet with parents to review upcoming testing schedules and preparation, but unfortunately there was a low attendance rate. On the other hand, there was a SPED/ESL meeting that was very well attended. In fact, a third workshop has been proposed for late January to explain the use of post-its and book-logs in the reading program, and 25 people had signed up one day after opening registration. Day care will be provided during the meeting.

#### *Staffing*

Mr. Ferguson informed the Board that a replacement had been found for the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies teacher who did not work out, and that the new teacher would be starting in January after the holiday break. At the elementary school a teacher hired as a maternity leave replacement in the fall will shift to cover another leave replacement. He remarked that this has made for easier transitions and overlap with the incoming/outgoing teachers, and that parents had already been notified at parent/teacher conferences in November. In the meantime, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher who was on leave this fall is expected to return to work on February 9, though the school will retain her substitute for additional support through the end of the school year.

#### *Monthly School Events Review*

This fall both the volleyball and flag football teams earned division championships. The school play *Oh, HORRORS! It's MURDER!* was a great success this past weekend, and the after-school program is going well and is taking advantage of the Physical Education grant we received to offer fun and unusual activities to appeal to the kids such as Capoeira and break dancing. Mr. Ferguson noted that there have been some great opportunities via grants for activities in and out of school. Unfortunately, some offerings have been under-utilized such as discounted Alvin Ailey tickets, though a group of middle-school students will be attending the Broadway show *Pippin*, tomorrow, and the "Cool Culture" museum tickets offered to Kindergarten students to allow free access to museums across the city are getting utilized. Plus the Urban Advantage program continues to provide free field trips for kids and parents. The Board was pleased to hear

this update and urged Mr. Ferguson to keep reviewing how best to communicate to the community about these opportunities.

***Finance & Administration Committee***  
***Charles Guadagnolo***

The first quarter financial report summary was circulated to the board, and the Treasurer noted that there were no significant variances at this time of year. He pointed out that special attention is being paid to the allocation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning grant, and that our Business Manager, Ms. Montaque is on top of the details. Members of the board asked questions about some unfilled administrative positions, and a possible additional specials teacher to be shared with the after-school program(s). Mr. Ferguson responded that he intends to re-launch the search for a data analyst and for an Assistant Principal for the Elementary School in January. He has also engaged his team in discussions about the extra specials teacher. Ideally, they would like to recruit someone for the performing arts, but the school does not have adequate space for it. They are considering a music program, but the plans are on hold for the moment until they figure out how to make best use of the position.

The Committee reminded the Board that it will be addressing a broader range of Finance and Administration topics this year, as discussed at the November meeting, and will develop an annual calendar of topics.

Mr. Guadagnolo went on to report that he would be meeting with Ms. Montaque to do a detailed review of the underlying assumptions in the long-term budget that accompanied our building improvement proposal to the EDC with the goal of determining possible alternatives and variations. Once they complete the review they plan to update the model with fresh data to see what might be possible for funding a future building project.

Mr. Bogle reported that he had spoken with contacts at Academy of the City, a K-5 Charter school that is outgrowing its space in is looking for a new location. They shared information about the buildings they had visited. So far, it seems that the most viable spaces are in Northern Astoria near 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was noted that our current location is much more central, and closer to public transportation, so the school will have to decide whether or not it would be preferable to have a single campus in a more remote location. We will also need to take into account that our current buildings are aging and demand a lot of maintenance in addition to basic upkeep for routine wear and tear. The Board agreed to continue these conversations and make them a focus of the Strategic Planning meeting.

Mr. Ferguson also reported that he is active in a group of charter school representatives who are working to obtain equitable funding for facilities for charter schools. There is currently an active court case on the issue and if it becomes a class action he will likely seek permission from the Board to sign on to the suit.

***PTO***

***Olubunmi Emigli***

- A Coat Drive / Swap was hosted the last two Saturdays at the school, with coat racks lent to the school by a community partner.
- Our librarian Ms. Sharkey and Elementary School reading specialist Ms. Russel conducted a very interactive parent workshop for the PTO that was so well received that they plan to offer a reprise.
- The PTO has distributed \$10,000 -- \$200 each to 50 teachers at the school for out-of-pocket expenses.
- The school will offer a free drop-in Winter Arts program over 8 weekends using donations from Materials for the Arts that will culminate in an exhibition on the final weekend.
- The PTO has organized a special screening of Penguins over the break. It is a paid event but will be just for OWN families.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees