

Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday, February 24, 2015
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
Middle School
31-20 37th Street, Astoria, NY 11106
7:00 – 9:00

The Trustees present were:

Jeanette Betancourt, President
Melissa Chin, Vice President
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary
Richard Bogle

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
Lisa Edmiston, Principal

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

Director's Report
Brian Ferguson

Staffing

Mr. Ferguson informed the Board that the 8th grade math teacher who was on maternity leave this winter resigned from her position and did not return to work in early February as expected. Before she informed us, a temp who was working in the department made arrangements to accept another position. Therefore, Mr. Ferguson, who is an experienced math teacher, has stepped in to co-teach with the current staff. There is also a teacher who has worked steadily at the school as a substitute over the last year and a half who will be providing support. The parents of the affected students are understandably anxious, especially the parents of the children in the Regents program who are preparing for their exam, so Mr. Ferguson held a parent meeting to answer questions. He reported that there was a good dialogue at the meeting.

Mr. Ferguson went on to explain that the administration and faculty are reviewing the entry criteria for the Regents program again to determine success factors. Each year some kids have dropped out of the two-year program after the first grade and the school has noticed that it can be hard for the students who drop the program after 7th grade. They also recognize that 7th grade grades and test scores are important to high school admissions. Therefore, the school may decide to be more selective when inviting students into the program. That said, this year's group is doing well and at this stage, no one is expected to drop. Even so, it can be hard to predict how they will ultimately do on the Regents exam, especially since the test format changed last year. The math department has made efforts to adapt the curriculum but there are fewer sample tests and less curriculum guidance to draw on than in the past. In fact, we are still waiting on an

analysis of last year's results from the state. He forecasts that, like last year, the test results may not be as high as they were before the 2014 test change. This is an experimental stage of Regents math testing and we need to be open and honest about all these factors with families as they make their decisions about whether their child should enroll in the program.

Mr. Ferguson also reminded the Board that the Regents students no longer need to take the NY state math exam because the Regents exam will be accepted in lieu. While we are pleased that the 8th graders will not need to prepare and sit for two very different exams, we need to be aware that the school's overall results on the state 8th grade math test will be lower now that the top math students will no longer be taking the test.

Policy Review

Mr. Ferguson reported that he is seeking input from the staff to aid his review of the *Parent and Student Handbook*. The attendees discussed whether we could move to an e-version of the Handbook, with print versions available at the office, however, agreed that there is still a value to proactively circulating a print version. An updated version will be reviewed by the Education Committee first, and will then be circulated to the full board.

Prior to the meeting, Mr. Ferguson circulated information about a confidential student discipline matter. It was an unusual matter that led to a suspension. The attendees confirmed that they had read the information provided. Ms. Betancourt added that the parents of the student had asked the Board to review the administration's actions in the matter. She requested all files, notes and any other relevant information from Mr. Ferguson and Ms. Edmiston, and stated that she would respond to the parents and provide them with a timeline for our review.

This led to a thoughtful discussion on matters of student discipline in general and the way these matters are addressed in the *Parent and Student Handbook*. The attendees acknowledged that each situation is different, and we need to do our best in each situation to balance the needs of the child, the family and the school community. Furthermore, there are a range of consequences that may be applied. If a child is suspended, the school needs to aid the child with re-entry. One parent Board member shared that his/her child had been suspended so s/he had direct experience of the additional assistance offered, with the objective of re-integrating the child, getting back to normal, acknowledging what happened, but putting it in the past and moving head with a clean slate. It was agreed that when we update the handbook it may be better to shift to and/or add a statement of intent and philosophy that is descriptive of this nuanced approach. Mr. Ferguson said that the school is also working on developing a restorative justice model of discipline.

Mid-Term Exam Schedule

Two Board members asked about some confusion that arose in January around the scheduling of mid-term exams. Mr. Ferguson explained that the school sent home written notices about the schedule. Later, in attempt to provide additional support to students who receive special accommodations for testing ("504's"), they made some last minute changes to the schedule for those students and made individual phone calls to the affected families. However, the changes which conflicted with the written notice, led to some confusion. In addition, there was a snow day that week and some exams needed to be re-scheduled. The Board understood that the administration made the last minute changes in a good faith effort to be supportive, but asked

that in future there be no changes once the schedule is complete, and that the schedule be posted on the school website. They thanked the administration for making the individualized phone calls to the 504 families and encouraged them to continue this practice.

Facilities Committee

Rich Bogle and Brian Ferguson

Mr. Ferguson reported that the Roman Catholic parochial school, Most Precious Blood, which is located on 37th Street right between our two buildings, will be closing at the end of this school year. The building is appealing because of its location and because it would be large enough to house a K-8 school -- though he cautioned it is also in need of substantial repairs that would cost around \$2 million. Numerous calls have been made to the diocese and to the school to enquire about a possible lease, but they have gone unanswered. The attendees brainstormed a list of contacts who might have information about the status of the property and agreed on who would contact whom.

In the meantime, Mr. Ferguson continues to follow the news on lawsuits regarding facilities funding for charter schools.

Development Committee

Jeanette Betancourt

Ms. Betancourt reported that the Development Committee is re-establishing its schedule of monthly calls. She informed the attendees that the federal 21st Century Learning grant is not currently in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. She said that Early Childhood, College Readiness, Special Needs programs and two-year colleges are taking priority over after-school programs. Mr. Ferguson added that there is also funding available for replicating schools. She noted that Development is on our agenda for the Strategic Planning meeting and said we will need to refocus our strategy, and assess different types of grants for their fit. In the meantime, she asked the administration to provide a synopsis of options complete with pros and cons to the Committee for review.

Upon motion duly made, seconded and carried, the Trustees:

RESOLVED to approve the Board minutes for November, 2014 with minor edits as discussed.

Respectfully submitted by:

Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees