

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Our World Neighborhood Charter School
January 22, 2013
7:00pm-9:00pm

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Our World Neighborhood Charter School was held on Tuesday, January 22, 2013 at 7:00 pm at the Middle School of Our World Neighborhood Charter School (31-20 37th Street, Astoria, NY 11103).

The Trustees Present were:

Jeanette Betancourt, President
Steven Solinsky, Vice President and Treasurer
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary
Melissa Chin
Sara Geelan
Jeff Maclin

Also present were:

Brian Ferguson, Executive Director
Lisa Edmiston, Principal
Karinne Montaque, Business Manager
Mark Crusante, Development Director
Jamey Greco, Special Education Director
Lucille Ranchor, Admissions Coordinator
Jayme Pabon, Teacher Representative
Sarah Espanol, PTO Co-Chair

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

Board Business - Jeanette Betancourt

Executive Director Review – Mid-Year Check-in

The Executive Committee of the board conducted a routine mid-year check-in with the Executive Director to review progress on objectives identified for the year, and begin to articulate ideas for the future. It was a very positive conversation and resulted in no need to modify criteria or correct course.

Board Recruitment

Maura and Steve will be attending a Board Fair with an Education theme hosted by the United Way in effort to recruit new board members. Candidates attending the fair receive leadership and development training from United Way.

Strategic Plan

In May 2012 the Board met with members of the school administration for a Strategic Planning retreat. It produced a document identifying key goals and desired outcomes for the next five years. It's time now to consider how to better disseminate the plan within the school community and to discuss how to link the Strategic Plan to our annual plan for fiscal year 2014. We expect a NY State budget in April and should consider blocking out time at about that time to focus on planning. The Board President will circulate dates to see when we can expect the best attendance.

Director's Report - Brian Ferguson

Admissions

The school has launched its annual advertising and outreach campaigns intended to reach a wide spectrum of our local community, and is hosting Open Houses. The school is also hosting events for Directors of pre-schools and cultural organizations and reaching out to community service groups and groups that provide special education services to make sure they all know about OWNCS. In addition, the school is canvassing in search of community-based organizations that offer Universal Pre-K programs. The school has produced a brochure that emphasizes that we offer support to English Language Learners, and has made minor updates to our application to ensure it complies with the latest guidance provided by the Charter School Institute. We have already received about 250 applications, mostly for Kindergarten slots.

Common Core

With the introduction of the Common Core this year, the school is focusing its efforts on translating the new standards into classroom work, linking it to the curriculum and supporting teachers to make the transition. The school has also introduced parent workshops (1 during the day; 1 in the evening) to share the history and intent of the Common Core as well as tools and resources that parents can use to support their children. The families who have attended were very appreciative.

Special Education

The Special Ed team, including occupational therapists, reading specialists, ESL teachers, and counselors, hosted an evening workshop which was attended by about 40 parents. They used the workshop to let the parents experience what their kids are doing and to build a shared vocabulary. By taking an interactive approach it gave the parents an idea of what they could do at home to support and reinforce their children's learning. Again, the parents who attended were very grateful. The team plans to host another workshop targeting Middle School parents.

Facilities Committee Report - Brian Ferguson

The school has been invited to present its response to the EDC's RFP to the EDC at a meeting to be held on February 12. The Facilities Committee will meet to fine tune our speaking points. Jeanette Betancourt will represent the Board.

Education Committee Report - Sara Geelan

The Committee discussed the new recommendations produced by Governor Cuomo's Education Reform Commission. It found that OWNCS is very much in alignment with the recommendations and that we are on the right track with our long-term planning as well. For instance, we already have strong community links, as recommended. The Board and Administration noted that we could do a better job articulating the existing links, and explicitly documenting what it is we do in this and other areas covered in the recommendations.

Another theme of the recommendations is college readiness, encouraging a connection with college even at the Pre-K level. As a result, we need to be prepared to be more overt and more proactive in our efforts in this track as well. We already invite alumni back to speak to the students, and will need to find ways to start talking about college even at the elementary school level.

Education Reform also emphasizes a commitment to Open Meetings, which OWN is also committed to. Again, we could document our commitment more thoroughly, writing up our procedures on where, when and how we will structure our open meetings, including transparency on what is and is not open (e.g. Executive Sessions; protecting student privacy). We confirmed that posting our agendas for public meetings ahead of time is an important element both for keeping our meetings structured and focused, and allowing the members of our community to attend when there is a topic of interest.

Development Committee Report - Jeff Maclin

The Committee is engaged in a review of the schools accomplishments and expectations, plus what we can do to expand our development efforts. Their goal is to create a realistic plan with clear priorities. The Board agreed that it would tie a review of this plan into the Strategic Plan meeting scheduled for April.

It's important that the plan identify needs outside the basic needs that are being met by per-pupil funding. A program-specific approach was suggested. It was noted that this approach would require input from the school community and its leadership, and that those needs would need to be mapped to available funding sources. If there is donor interest in things that are already planned (e.g. technology), donations for that program could free up dollars for another program where there is less donor interest.

The Board encouraged the Committee to be both realistic and strategic in its approach. They noted how important branding and marketing the school is, and asked the Committee and the Administration to consider whether we need to separate out our marketing and fundraising efforts, and to identify what staff and/or consultants might be needed to achieve our goals.

Joint Finance & Audit Committee Report - Steven Solinsky

It's too early in the month to have closed the second quarter books. Our consultants have produced a draft of a new Procedural Manual for the Business Unit. It's very concise, and our Business Manager wants to ensure that all internal controls are adequately covered. She will make sure to review it carefully with the consultants after the December closing.

As previously reported, the Board requested a special audit of our MetroCard disbursement process to be conducted by our external auditors. The auditors have received all the documents required and expect to meet with the Business Manager later this week. Once they produce a report, the Audit Committee will meet with them as well to review the outcome.

Faculty Report – Jayme Pabon

- Math & Reading Academies have been launched in both buildings.
- After-school homework help, and study hall recess are being offered at the Middle School
- The Middle School has collected a large amount of books to donate to the Dupree reservation school in South Dakota
- Staff volunteered their time over the Martin Luther King Day weekend to paint the Middle School gym, which turned out beautifully
- The school continues its efforts to support victims of Hurricane Sandy, with a Blood Drive (truck to be posted by Elementary School), and a Basketball fundraising event. Students are also collecting change in a “Rocking Change for Rockaways” drive which they plan to present to our local legislator on Advocacy Day.
- Students have also sponsored an initiative to create snow flakes to welcome children to the new Sandy Hook elementary school facility.

PTO Report – Sarah Espanol

- The PTO is planning a Carnival combined with Multicultural day as a big fundraiser this Spring to be held on the street in front of the Elementary School.
- We are hosting a workshop with other schools to prepare parents for Advocacy Day, and are hoping for strong attendance.
- The PTO has arranged for a new Legos Robotics after-school program at the Elementary School. Three groups of 12 kids have signed up.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:
Maura Fitzgerald, Secretary, OWNCS Board of Trustees