

**FOLK ARTS-CULTURAL TREASURES CHARTER SCHOOL
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

1023 Callowhill Street, Philadelphia, PA 19123
Wednesday, January 20, 2021, 6:30 p.m.
Via Zoom Meeting (Zoom Invitation posted on website)

MINUTES

Present: Pooja Agarwal, Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Tim Matheney, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth
Staff Present: David Brown, Pheng Lim, Ellen Somekawa
Public Present: Heather Green, Edwin Mayorga, Lucinda Megill

- I. **Call to Order** Selina Morales
- II. **Executive Director's Report** Ellen Somekawa

Principal's Report Pheng Lim

- Sharing a video excerpt from the Celebration of Peace
- Training for Principals: Pheng shared that FACTS strengthens and maintains community through music. For example the FACTS play list of songs that inspire our staff and sharing that music at staff meetings. FACTS is attempting to find connections to students and between staff members
- DRAs, our reading diagnostic: We are in the second round of testing and will be finished with testing all of the students next week. We are seeing that students are learning, but we are trying to understand the pace of learning and don't have a comparison to past years.
- We are analyzing report cards and looking at who is meeting grade level standards.
- Deadline for applying to FACTS is February 5: Our Intent to Enroll numbers are lower than usual. We now have 207 applications.
- Lunar New Year Celebration is February 11
- High School Admissions: 51 of 57 8th graders were admitted to one of their choice schools. 20 were accepted to Carver, which is high for us. We are now working to find placements for the remaining students. Charter School applications are happening now. It is a stressful situation for 8th graders.
- WIDA ACCESS Testing: a mandatory standardized test for English Learners. This year families are allowed to opt out. FACTS sent letters to families explaining what the test is, what other methods of assessment we use, and asking if parents want their students to participate.

Discussion:

- Is attendance holding steady?
 - Yes, attendance is still holding steady at around 96% or 97%. We are looking for ways to support students and families struggling with attendance. We still have a small number of students who are chronically absent and are trying to work with their families.

- III. **Stars Program**

Discussion:

- Does our charter require that we maintain the program or maintain a certain size of enrollment? [no]
- The process of intake and screening English Learners at the School District changed right as we started our program, so this source of referrals did not come through for us.
- Social workers could be a source of recruitment and referrals
- Are there any current lottery applications that would qualify for the program? [no]
- If we need to put the program on pause, we want to make it clear how much we value the program
- We want to express appreciation to Teacher Lucinda for the incredible work in setting up the program and to say that you have the support of the Board; it is important to our mission
- Emphasize that this is a temporary pause.

Proposal: Establish a board and staff committee to steward the Stars Program. The committee will explore: What we learned from the Stars program, how we use that knowledge as a jumping off point for when we are able to restart the program, how we can create conditions for re-starting the program and recognize when conditions are ripe. The committee will plan to meet once before the end of the school year, and do some evaluation while the program is still operating so we can gather data and information.

- Volunteering for this committee: Lucinda, Thierry, Heather, Neeta, Pheng, Kenzo, Xu, Ellen
- It can be possible for Swarthmore to offer research support (Edwin Mayorga)

IV. Approval of the Minutes

1. BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School approves the Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes of December 16, 2020.

Moved: Heather Davis-Jones

Seconded: Xu Lin

Voted Yes: Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth

Abstained: Pooja Agarwal, Tim Matheney

V. Finance Report

Finance Committee Report

Neeta Patel

FACTS is in good shape. Flagging some issues: Our income projections are down due to a reduction in enrollment (partly due to lower Stars enrollment and also due to some vacancies not filled in the upper grades). We will be slightly under enrolled in future years. We are expected to receive additional funding from federal COVID Relief that can help see us through potential budget shortfalls. We know that lean times are coming, but have good sized reserves. Admin is working on the budget for next year. The financials for November are

included in the December Financial Statements so we did not present them separately. We will need to approve our Form 990 in the next two months.

Discussion:

- Why did the number of Special Education students go up?
 - We tested the kindergarten students. Our goal is to get the testing done by December, but because of remote learning, we couldn't get the evaluations done in time. Every year, our SPED numbers change as our eighth graders exit and we get a new group of kindergartners. Evaluations were delayed this year due to the pandemic.

Report on the Financial Statements

David Brown

2. BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School approves the Financial Statements for the period ending December 31, 2020.

Moved: Allaire Wohlgemuth

Seconded: Alan Phan

Voted Yes: Pooja Agarwal, Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Tim Matheney, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth

VI. **Emergency Paid Sick Leave Policy**

Presentation

Ellen Somekawa

Discussion

- Should the policy be extended past March 31, given that we might reopen to in person learning and teachers might need leave more. We would want staff to know that the Board would consider extending the policy.
 - We need to plan to revisit this again prior to March 31 so we do not need to amend the policy at this point. Federal policy and conditions are continually changing.

3. BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School approves the revised Emergency Paid Sick Leave Policy.

Moved: Pooja Agarwal

Seconded: Xu Lin

Voted Yes: Pooja Agarwal, Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Tim Matheney, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth

VII. **School Reopening Discussion**

Presentation:

Ellen Somekawa

- Report on School Preparedness
- New Guidance from the PA Department of Education
- COVID-19 Conditions and Vaccine Timeline

Policy Committee Report

Pooja Agarwal

Proposal from Admin is to set a date of April 14 for reopening in our hybrid model which is far enough into the future that Admin can begin making concrete plans for the reopening starting now and the pandemic conditions may have shifted by then.

Discussion

Responses to the Proposed Opening Date of April 14:

- Don't object to the date. It seems a little soon given that we don't know what will happen with the vaccine.
- Is the building ready? Want to know more about air circulation and ventilation. This is an important factor in spread.
- Nervous about the thought of reopening. If given the option of returning to my own work in a school, I would choose not to. It makes me anxious.
- Thinking about coming back right after spring break. Might people travel and might we see a spike? We could inform parents that if they travel, they should quarantine for ten days.
 - April 14 is ten days after Spring Break
- We need to take the time to create a concrete plan that is predictable. It's hard when you're in a stressful situation to ask people to change. Don't want people to feel that they are being bounced around. Going back into the building and resetting will be a huge change and challenge for students, staff, families. We're asking people to learn how to do something in a new way. There is a lot of conflicting information about learning loss and about what is safe. We won't know the lasting effects of this for decades.
- Every time we talk about this, we talk about the same things. We are not in better shape in terms of what is known. We aren't going to have the answers to these questions maybe for years. We are going to have to take some risks. We have this date in mind; I suggest that if all the adults in the building have had the opportunity to have the vaccine by this date, then we will open. The vaccine is more of the game changer in terms of having teachers back in the building. The vaccine's timing is an uncertainty. If that is not the case, we may delay. And also a change in community spread would be expected. If that is not the case, then we are in another set of problems.

Clarifications About the Hybrid Model

- Our plan is for K-8 to return to the building?
 - Yes.
- Clarification on our hybrid model. Our model is for the in person days on Weds and Thursday being focused on Social and Emotional Learning and well being, community building, exploration; MTF focus on academic content taught remotely. Want to talk about what learning means. Invite us to discuss if there are things being gained that we do not measure.
- Teachers and I believe that there can't be different teachers teaching in person and remote at the same time. That would sacrifice the quality of instruction. Principal does not want to move to that model.
 - Agreed
 - Agreed

- Checking to make sure that if and when we return in a hybrid, families have the option to continue 100% remote.
 - Yes
- If half of students do not want to return, do we have the ability to keep teachers fully remote or do we have all teachers come back? Is it all hands on deck?
 - We will need responses from parents in order to plan.

School and Building Preparedness

- I'm looking at new guidance on the new strains of COVID-19 going around and now the guidance is to wear two masks. Given that families and children will lose masks or not come with masks'
 - We have 500 children's masks and will buy more if we run out or are close to running out.
- Have we thought through what do we do if we get a positive case? Do we inform parents of any positive cases?
 - This information is contained in the Return to School Guide for Parents. The link to the guide is being sent to the Board.

Urgency of Return to the Building: Learning Loss

- I would approach this with a lot of gravity. We would be looking at students learning virtually for another 30% of the year. Extending virtual learning for that much more of the year is sobering.
- Shared a link to a McKinsey report that shows COVID learning loss. Even if students are learning, but they are not learning at the same rate as usual, we need to get students back in person. We know that poverty-impacted students lose many months of learning in virtual settings, so that weighs heavily on me. We should get back to in-person learning as soon as conditions permit. We are not there yet. But when the level of community spread reaches a particular level, schools should consider opening. I am fearful that we will experience more learning loss if we continue fully remote for 30% more of the year. April 14 seems pretty far off. We have many examples of schools being open with minimal cases. The timeline of ten days after spring break seems too long. If we postpone until mid-April, we should consider more than one day per week, especially for younger students. I am uncomfortable with the proposal.
- From TIm: I wanted to share this report on COVID learning loss, which is the best report I've seen on the topic:
<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-learning-loss-disparities-grow-and-students-need-help>

There is More Than One Way to Think About Learning Loss:

- We need a discussion of what counts as learning when we talk about learning loss. Want to think more broadly about what students are learning or losing.
- Don't know that it's helpful to weigh learning loss versus health risks. Not as useful to compare what is happening now to what was in the past. Can't define learning or attendance as in the past. Whatever amount of learning we choose to measure this year is not a forecast to what happens to students in the future.

- How do we think about learning loss? How do we engage in this conversation within the ethic of care prioritizing certain definitions of learning, maybe deemphasize standardization in learning loss.
- From Kenzo:
https://truthout.org/articles/fixating-on-pandemic-learning-loss-undermines-the-need-to-transform-education/?utm_campaign=Truthout+Share+Buttons

Changes in COVID Conditions and Knowledge:

- The science is still evolving with the new variant and transmissibility. What would the decision rules be for when we would open and when we would close again. What information we are able to provide to parents.
- In the US it is taken as an accepted fact that schools aren't the cause of community spread whereas in other countries this is not taken as a proven fact and that perhaps schools are a cause of community spread. From Kenzo: Evidence from Canada that schools contribute to the spread:
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/emsb-unveils-air-purifiers-maintaining-they-will-slow-spread-of-covid-19>
- Also vaccines also do not necessarily protect against getting the disease, but reduce the severity of the disease. People still may get the disease and being able to pass on
- Agree that we have to make decisions about both health concerns and learning concerns. My concern is about making decisions about 30% of the school year. There are many variables involving the vaccine schedule and the rate of covid spread. Uncomfortable making the decision now about a long period of time before a return to school. Think we would have more information in a couple of weeks.
- The information we have will be changing, whether we make a decision now or in a few weeks. It is a certainty that the information will be changing. We can't wait for certainty in order to make a decision. Want us to decide and not remain without making a decision until June.
- From Tim: Another interesting article:
<https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2020-12-23/new-study-cautiously-suggests-schools-dont-increase-spread-of-coronavirus>
(The proviso is that Philly, despite signs of good trends, still has high community spread.)

Desire for More Input

- If at all possible, have a meeting to figure out what teachers and parents want to do. Share the proposal and have a vote to reopen rather than us deciding for them. Teachers should have a voice.
- Important points but feel pressed to figure out what decisions to make tonight. We told parents that the earliest we would plan to open is February 16. Whatever we decide, we need to be clear with them. Can we decide what our communication is to parents?
- When was the last time staff were asked of their comfort level? Parents have the option to choose. It is the staff who don't have the option.
- Part of my job is to send plants to families who have members who have died, and I'm sending so many plants. We do need to say something to families and staff.
- Originally I said I wouldn't send my kids back. I know I'm able more than most to support my kids with learning loss. My kids are begging to go

back. I know the decision is so hard. Thank you for listening so hard to each other. I don't know if my answer would be the same the next time.

- Could we survey staff?
 - What would a survey say? Almost anyone would want to stay home if given a chance.
 - One of the conversations would be about the vaccine. Once you are vaccinated, would you be willing to come back? There will be a range of responses.
 - If teachers aren't willing to come back after being vaccinated at what point will they be willing to come back?
 - I don't want to do a survey if it isn't going to be real. We need to know what we will do with the information if we ask a question.
 - Some teachers are willing to work extra days in person.
 - Surveys are empowering

Setting Contingencies along with Date to Return

- In terms of timeline, there are contingencies with setting a set date, there still must be some contingencies. Part of the decision could be based on staff having the opportunity to be vaccinated, but this is a moving target and the roll out is going badly so far.
- We should establish a date for reopening along with criteria for reopening, and make a final determination if this criteria has been met by the March 17 board meeting. Between now and then we come up with criteria of what would need to be true if we are to reopen.
- The Ad Hoc Committee on School Reopening to discuss next steps.

VIII. **MOU Pennrose**

Ellen Somekawa

4. BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Trustees of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School authorizes the Executive Director to include FACTS as a signatory to a Memorandum of Understanding and/or Community Benefits Agreement with Pennrose Properties, LLC in order to gain assurances of benefits to the Chinatown community of a planned affordable senior housing project on the parcel at 800 Vine Street.

Moved: Allaire Wohlgemuth

Seconded: Kenzo Sung

Voted Yes: Pooja Agarwal, Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Tim Matheney, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth

IX. **Website Bios**

Selina Morales

We are working on a website update. We want to include bios of school leadership and would like board members to contribute a short bio to better communicate with the public about our school.

Staff will set up board.factschool.org email addresses

X. **Committee Reports**

- Development Committee

Alan/Allaire

The Committee is working on expanding the development committee to include more people including parents. Updating roles and responsibilities as well as developing outreach materials for it. The committee is working on changing the webpage for donations. Do a program like Friends of FACTS fundraiser in May by working through our networks. Considering doing the 5K as a virtual event.

XI. Adjournment

Moved to Adjourn: Pooja Agarwal

Seconded: Alan Phan

Voted Yes: Pooja Agarwal, Heather Davis-Jones, Xu Lin, Tim Matheney, Selina Morales, Neeta Patel, Alan Phan, Thierry Saintine, Kenzo Sung, Allaire Wohlgemuth