

Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School
Board of Trustees “Retreat” Meeting
APPROVED Minutes
Saturday, July 12, 2008 9:00am
Home of John Neas

Attendance: Trustees President John Neas, Vice President Lori Clements, Treasurer Anna dos Santos, Clerk Richard Frongillo, Lisa Buchholz, Nav Chander, Chuck Mayo, Cathy Tomaso, Tim Tracy, Poh-Lin Yeoh; HOS Dr. Kevin O’Malley, Asst. HOS Heather Zolnowski, Acting Asst. HOS Joe Perna

Absent: Faculty Representative Gail Trotin, Cheryl O’Donnell, Thom Viveiros

Welcome (9:06)

John begins the circle of introductions in a “A Little Bit About Yourself” segment. Kevin reveals that he was once the body double for Harry “The Golden Greek” Agganis in the distant past. John notes that his job circumstances have changed which may impact his BFCCPS volunteering.

Comments by the Chair (9:26)

John reads a note from Coach Burke expressing her gratitude to the Board. John addresses some administrative “loose ends” including the Board mailing list, financial disclosure forms, etc. He highlights that our joint meeting with the Franklin School Committee was unusual as he reflected on an article which made mention that there is typically “a wall between traditional public schools and charter schools”. John points to invitations to Charter school focus groups in case a trustee wanted to participate.

The President’s Fund (9:33)

John reviews the tradition that flowers, gifts, etc. have been sent to people in the school community. He had set up a fund and voluntary donations are being accepted this year. Last year, three items were distributed. A check could be sent to John.

List of Meeting Dates between Board Chair and Head of School (9:35)

John distributes a list of meeting dates; generally first Tuesday of the month; generally meet 30-60 minutes, talking about potential agenda items. Meetings are open.

List of Board Meetings for 2008-2009 (9:37)

Generally, Board meetings will be the second Thursday but there are a couple of exceptions (first Thursday in October and second Wednesday in June). A list is distributed. Consideration is being given to moving the Board Retreat to June to make more convenient to more Trustees.

Meeting Refreshments (9:42)

John distributes a proposed list of per-month assignments for bringing refreshments to the Board meeting. Participation is voluntary.

Clerk’s Report (9:44)

The minutes of the June 11 and June 16 meetings are distributed. A vote for acceptance will be taken at the next Board meeting.

Treasurer’s Report (9:46)

The audit is ongoing. Anna distributes June financial report. Cathy questions the appropriateness of a department (e.g. the Band) having its own checking account. Tim and Rich also express concern of oversight of this account. Anna notes that the auditors feel it is okay to have the separate account and Kevin notes that all expenditures are approved by the HOS.

Anna intends for the Finance Committee to meet on Wednesdays at 8am in the HOS office in the week before the monthly Board meeting.

Head of School Report (9:58)

Kevin begins his comments with a “big picture” caution to the Board. He notes that the infrastructure remains fragile. He states that the closer the Board gets to the operations of the school the more chance there is that the Board will upset the fragility. He expresses that there needs to be breathing room to let the school be the school.

John concurs that the daily operations of the school are not for the Board; just for the HOS.

Kevin continues stating that the 2007-08 year was a phenomenal year at the school. The goal for this year is to improve where we are not yet perfect. He acknowledges that even after thirteen years we are still, in some ways, figuring out how we do certain things.

Visit by State, January 2009: Documentation is due in by September, in advance of the meeting. He feels no fear of the meeting but recognizes that we must follow through with the recommendations given by the State. This upcoming charter renewal is being done in a new environment within the state’s educational system.

Graffiti on building: Around July 4 it was discovered that oil-based spray paint was used on brick at the school and its surrounding wall. It was removed on 7/11 by BFCCPS staff after it had remained for too long. The church had been notified the day after the discovery.

Building space changes: The school has limited space to work with kids; the staff is looking at taking some space from the choral area to use for 1-on-1 meetings with kids in addition to use by the school councillor; changes required architect signature and will involve taking some space outside Ben’s office. Semi-permanent outside storage is being considered. There may be an appeal to Finance Committee for associated costs. Lisa wondered about having an outside office for counselling; Kevin prefers to have kids remain inside.

Building usage: Kevin notes that although our current landlord is anxious to keep us as tenants, there has been a small deterioration of service (e.g. grass moving). Kevin did provide input to the church’s budget process, as requested, but no response was received.

State Education: The state has begun the Readiness Project, perhaps the stamp of Governor Patrick. The report says that the educational community has been doing okay but not enough. Kevin states that MCAS drives curriculum; the bar has been raised by the state on the needed results to graduate, extending to high school in Math, English, History, and Science.

BFCCPS will use a guidance councillor and specialists to have an EPP (a plan for those that fail a test) to get them back on track and passing the test. We will start in 5th grade. The state requires this be done in 10th grade. Kevin believes this program would have been used by twenty students at BFCCPS last year. Heather states that the councillor will be a leader, working with teachers, assisting with EPP.

Kevin refers to the Readiness Report and its content: need more innovation (new ways to improve test scores) and need to serve minority populations systematically with new initiatives. The report does not mention charter schools except to note that they have large waiting lists. The report calls for Readiness Schools; it remains to be seen how these will work. BFCCPS is much like a Readiness School but we do not have any number of free-and-reduced-lunch population. We can only wonder what the effect on fund allocation will be in the future. Lisa asks why the state is looking for a solution (i.e. Readiness Schools) when one exists (i.e. Charter Schools). Kevin points to the political landscape in which superintendents and teachers unions have a role to play in shaping the readiness program. One wonders how the current leaders of the schools that need fixing will serve well in the role of innovation of fixes.

Kevin concludes that BFCCPS is not at risk but perhaps the Charter School movement may be at risk. Change is in the wind.

Math Program: The math program is fantastic. Kevin is looking forward to improving the English program similarly. Heather explains how children were placed in math programs: a form was created with MCAS results, placement tests (created by BFCCPS math specialist to bridge two programs together), final grade in math, and a recommendation by the teacher. So far, only a

small number of parental concerns have been expressed. Levelling is not being done in 5th grade this year. Rich wonders about access during the summer. Heather expects access to the online portal will be available by the end of July as registering children with the system is underway. "Study Island" is a separate grant for 4th graders for MCAS preparation. Heather notes that the "in grade" curriculum is very rigorous.

Faculty Input Team: Kevin states that FIT activity has been a highlight of the year as it was much more than advisory, it was decision-making. Part of the work was on discipline within the school; 5 students were suspended during the year. Joe speaks to the issue: staff wanted common language and expectation for behavior; the group had signs of "student expectations" produced, almost like a school pledge to be covered in home room and on a daily basis. Joe points to a storyboard with the language:

As students of BFCCPS we will do our best to show good character at all times. We will build a respectful, safe, and positive learning environment. We strive to be courageous when faced with challenges, temperate in our actions, wise when faced with difficult decisions, and just and compassionate in our dealing with people. This is who we hope to be, even when no one is looking.

John mentions the alignment of home room teachers in grades 6-8: Ward/Duque (6), Sharistanian/Callahan (7), and Buckley/Salley (8). Heather notes that it is recommended that home room and advising be for two years with the same children.

Kevin is very optimistic for the year ahead!

Break (11:03)

Board Notebooks and New Pages (11:21)

John distributes books to Nav and Lisa and distributes loose papers for replacement in current books by returning trustees.

Orientation for New Board Members (11:28)

For the benefit of Nav and Lisa and as a refresher for returning Board members, John reviews several points related to being a Trustee and, as such, a special employee of the state. Board efficiency is discussed with a consensus that reports need to be more concise.

Committee Assignments (12:15)

John notes the list of Board committees and associates names for chair people with the consent of the trustees:

Public Relations: Lisa, Poh-Lin
Facilities: NOT John [Cathy would help]
Finance: Anna
Governance: Tim
Human Resources: Lori
Nominating: [Lori/Tim continue as co-chairs?]
Mission: Rich [Anna, Chuck]
Election Task Force: Nav
Enrollment Task Force: ??? John is considering [Cathy would help]
Legislative Liaison: Thom?

John wonders whether we should start a Capital Fund Raising Task Force. It may be too soon. The Annual Appeal raised \$20,750 from 50 (of 200) families.

Nav asks about a Technology Committee. John and Kevin state that technology is close to the school and is best supported there

John decided not to form a Special Education committee but Chuck is interested in the topic. There are a myriad of complex issues and responsibilities and he is interested in being a conduit for information related to the topic.

Cathy asks about minutes at the committee level. Anna believes Governance should address.

Break (12:41)

Where do we go from here - what we do well and what we need to do better (1:05)

John acknowledges this as his “pet peeve” section of the meeting. First off, if a trustee has a personality issue with another trustee, he encourages folks to deal with them directly.

John is somewhat disappointed with the results of the Annual Appeal and where the monies went. He had hoped for more money and for the money to be used for something special rather than be taken into the general fund. He also prefers not to manage the Annual Appeal next year.

John is not working with Facilities unless there is a specific task. Efforts are stalled by the Washington Street status and no clear direction to pursue other properties. He is turning pursuit of the Pond Street property to the Finance Committee.

Rich expresses his concern about the relationship between the Foundation and the Board which has not improved significantly this year. There is little involvement among the school community in the Foundation. Anna has sent a note to Foundation President Matt Ginnetty wondering about no minuted meetings of the Foundation.

Strategic Plan (1:29)

Anna distributes a new version of the plan and reviews it in detail. There is much discussion, particularly referencing the mission-related objective 3. Kevin had expressed concerns to Anna offline about the action items and the potential for discord. He strenuously objects to a hint of the school telling parents what to do in this context. Anna proposes specific changes in various sections and will distribute an updated version in coming weeks.

Adjournment (2:17)

MOTION: By Lori/Anna to adjourn.

RESULT: Pass (unanimous)