

Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public School
Board of Trustees Annual Retreat
Approved Minutes
Saturday, July 18, 2009 8:30am
Hampton Inn, 735 Union St., Franklin, MA

Attendance: Trustees President Lori Clements, Vice President Richard Frongillo, Treasurer Anna dos Santos, Clerk Thomas Viveiros, Nav Chander, Stephan Katinas, John Neas, Donald Tappin, Cathy Tomasso, Tim Tracy, Heather Zolnowski, Dr. O'Malley (10 a.m.)

Absent: Cheryl O'Donnell, Gail Trotin, Poh-Lin Yeoh, Joe Perna

Call to order, Comments by the Chair (9:00am):

Lori welcomes everyone and thanks them for coming. She also welcomes Stephan and Don who are now approved by the Board of Education and ready to vote.

Election of New Officers:

For the office of clerk; **Rich made a motion to elect Thom Viveiros and John seconded the motion. The vote for Thom was unanimous. For the office of Vice President; Anna made a motion to elect Richard Frongillo and Nav seconded the motion. The vote for Richard was unanimous.**

Approval of June 10 minutes:

Anna made a motion to approve the June 10th minutes and Stephan seconded the motion. John abstained from the vote and all others voted to approve.

Honoring of outgoing Board President (John Neas):

Lori summarizes John's board presidency and comments about him being in the right place at the right time. She mentions how John has the perfect skill set for the job of presidency by his tireless work as a great ambassador for the school. Lori then presents a gift to John as a token of appreciation for his work.

The board then works on a teambuilding exercise which was given as homework before the meeting. The exercise is to manipulate a puzzle containing various characteristics of each board member in a bingo-like matrix. The team works on matching each of the characteristics to a particular board member. We each learn interesting facts about each other and it is a great way to start the day.

Review of Board Responsibilities (9:30am):

Lori reviews the roles and responsibilities of each of the board members. She emphasizes that our primary role is to act as a body of governance for the school. She also mentions that we are all public agents that are responsible for adhering to the charter. Although one of our responsibilities is to hire the head of school, all other hiring is done by Dr O'Malley. We must also ensure that we are always in compliance with federal and state laws.

As board members, we also have individual responsibilities as public employees and non-profit board members. As such, board members may not profit as a result of Board membership. We are bound by the state's conflict of interest laws. Our duty of loyalty dictates that we cannot profit individually or indirectly as a result. Therefore, none of us should vote for things that present a conflict-of-interest.

Lastly, we are bound by a general code of conduct: we may not disclose confidential information to our spouses, our family, our friends, etc.

Review of Performance Expectations:

Lori recited a list of performance criteria to which each of the BFCCPS board members are expected to adhere.

- Believe in and be an active advocate for the school.
- Take off parent hat when sitting on board and try to look at each situation in a broad manner.
- Support board decisions once they are made.
- Regularly participate in board meetings by contributing to the discussions.
- Try to participate in school activities.
- Serve on committees.
- Respect and understand the relationship between board members, the HOS, and the school staff.
- Focus on **governance** role as opposed to the **management** role.
- Must comply with open-meeting law. Law requires we hold open, public discussions unless board votes to convene an executive session.
- When scheduling a meeting, the board needs to post the date, time, and place. We are NOT obligated to provide a meeting agenda.
- Keep accurate records of what occurs at our meetings.
- All meetings must be held in a place which is accessible to the handicapped. THIS meeting is subject to the open meeting law.
- Emails are one-way for informational purposes. Board members cannot start a discussion over email (this violates the open meeting law). Queries about a specific issue are acceptable, but conducting a dialogue via email is not appropriate.

Anna mentions that emails are looked at in a similar way to phone conversations. John mentioned that the open-meeting law is not meant to be restrictive. We just need to remember that emails are PUBLIC information. Lori continues:

- Keep detailed records of board meetings. Law specifies that the board records the DATE, TIME, and LOCATION of meeting; the members present or absent; and all action taken, including a list of the issues discussed and a formal record of votes taken.
- In limited circumstances, we can go into an executive session (closed meeting). If so, we must convene in an open session and the presiding officer needs to indicate why and whether we will come back. Minutes must be taken during executive session and MAY be kept secret – examples of why are given.
- Board decides whether or not the minutes become public.

The board should strive to avoid surprising the Head Of School (HOS) with new information at the board meeting. We should always inform HOS if people ask us board members about school issues. Always refer operational matters to Dr. O'Malley (HOS).

Cathy mentions that it is sometimes difficult to remember this role, but we should always remember that the HOS should have operational information forwarded to him. Lori asks to make sure we do not ask for special treatment from the staff because of our role.

Treasurer's Report (10:00am):

Treasurer's report is presented by Anna. She mentions that although local aid has been cut by 2%, Franklin will not cut from the school budget. Anna reports that tuition should stay the same for next year. Auditors have been reviewing our data and some of it needs to be cleaned up. They will be back on July 27 for a more thorough review.

At our first board meeting, we will get a copy of the report from the auditors. At this time, we will be approving the report. Also at this time, we will analyze the issues raised in the report and figure out what to do moving forward. We convene for a short break.

Return from Break (10:25am):

Lori talks about planning for next year. She focused on the phrase "Forward to the future". We have been existence for 15 years now. She elaborates on the changes that have happened at the school since its founding 15 years ago. During the beginning years of our school, the founders were able to interview candidate families. The laws have since changed and there must now be a blind lottery. The original school did not have to contend with MCAS and the HOS could totally control the curriculum. We've responded to all of the challenges along the way. For example, the founders were doing EVERYTHING at the beginning by taking on multiple roles. As we approach the new school year, Lori asks us to ask ourselves: "**What do we want to be in the future??**" We need to focus on our vision and may need to change some things. Lori now turns the meeting over to Dr. O'Malley.

Head of School (HOS) Report (10:30am):

Dr. O'Malley (HOS) begins by talking about this period of time as a "plateau" in our future. HOS says that he thinks this year went well and that he thought that we can't complain about the "tremendous" MCAS scores even though some are still not satisfied with them.

The HOS talks about Faculty Input Team (FIT) and says that it is taking on a life of its own; one which allows teachers to take on a power role. HOS mentions that the FIT initiative has been effective (e.g., character education, community service, field trips, etc.). HOS mentions that giving up power is not easy and that the board may have to accept decisions that they may or may not have made themselves.

Dr. O'Malley then talks about the charter renewal and mentions that it should have been renewed already. He also points out that the visit with the Department of Education went well.

HOS mentions how the administration recently had a reorganization to share responsibilities and have more people contributing to the well-being of the whole. He tells the board that the school is lucky to have both Heather Zolnowski and Joe Perna. The school is now about to do another reorganization. HOS is going to begin working on the central office and focusing on our business practices. He will be asking questions such as: "What should the Central Office do? One of the options he is considering is combining some business and Human Resources (HR) functions.

HOS also talks about things that did NOT go well. As we look to student enrollment, we are faced with a 1950's-style building. We are running out of room for staff. As an example, we are now using the CCD lunch room as office space and the days of K-8 assemblies are over. Lack of space continues to be a problem.

HOS also mentions that he was disappointed with the culture of the school last spring. We faced disproportionately small cuts and thought that we did a good job for the school. The HOS expected that the response would be better from the staff given the size of the recent pay raises.

Most recently, we had a difficult personnel month with a couple of resignations. The French /Latin teacher has resigned. Also, the business manager has resigned. Shannon from AMS, who has been coming in on a monthly basis to close the books, has been coming in on a weekly basis to help with the business manager function. HOS mentions that there is also good news: we have had very little staff and kid movement and we have added a Special Education (SPED) aid.

The school's budget has suffered cuts from the state. We had a deficit that caused us to cut some time from some of our positions. We also had an increase in our health insurance premium. We were under Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS). We have since realized that the Tufts plan is about 90% of BCBS. By moving from BCBS to Tufts, we saved \$92K – this helped tremendously. We have now brought back SPED, a librarian for four days, and the technology person has been brought back to a four day status. All staff either got a 5% raise or a bonus with the exception of Dr. O'Malley. HOS mentions his goals & vision (what will the school look like 5 years from now??). He mentions that this school is EXCELLENT now, but it won't be if it stays the same five years from now. Dr. O'Malley rates the board of trustees – he says we have studiously avoided intruding into the day-to-day operations of the school. He thinks that the lack of surprises at a board meeting is a critical component of the school. He feels that having issues arise at the board meeting is never a good idea.

Lori adds that she asked HOS for goals and asks board members to think about the ones he made and maybe add some??

Cathy uses her time to speak as a parent. She asks "... what is the HOS plan to communicate the administrative changes to the BFCCPS community??" Later, Nav asks about the process for suggesting HOS goals.

John asks the HOS to opine about the cause of low teacher morale. The HOS says that the low morale mostly derived from the small number of individuals who were affected by the budget cuts.

Tim talks about the concept of "teachers as power brokers". He asks if there are any expectations from teachers as to their roles in FIT. The HOS, says that the FIT is evolutionary. Tim asked HOS to elaborate on resignations. Lori says that it was important in helping us move forward.

Anna asks about whom to go to if there are questions about character education. Heather advises Anna to go to either Joe or Heather. The HOS mentions that character education has gotten more attention this year.

Cathy wonders as a parent who to contact for a specific issue: graduation, for example. Is there a "cheat sheet" available to the parents? Lori mentions that the organizational hierarchy is Dr. O'Malley, then Heather, then Joe.

Anna is glad that FIT is working well. She asks how we can get input on what they're doing and uses the discipline policy as an example. She would maybe see it differently and wants to make sure the members of the FIT are following the guidelines of the school's strategy. Rich mentions that we should not wait until the end of the study to approach the issue. Anna suggests that some of the board's work could be used as a framework. The HOS mentions that this year teacher evaluations will be a big issue. NAV asks whether FIT members should be compensated for an outstanding effort. He asks if there will be a merit pay initiative.

Heather talks about summer courses. She mentions that the teachers and students are all having fun. The summer workshop offerings range from math, writing, character education, etc. She mentions that she wants to make sure that teachers are recognized for their contributions. Heather also mentions that we are talking to Dean College about how we can work with them in the future. The administration is currently talking about a new 7th and 8th grade schedule. She mentions that one of the highlights from this discussion is that teachers wanted more time in class. The details are made available in the packet.

Anna asks about whether there will be supervision of flex recess and whether there will be any. Heather mentions that there will be. Anna also asks about the middle school organization (binder system in particular).

Packet Replacement Sections (11:30am):

Lori hands out updated sections for the board members packets. After the updated sections are handed out, the board breaks for lunch.

Reconvene after Lunch (12:35 pm):

Lori reconvened the session by mentioning that the trustees@bfccps.org address will get email to everyone on the board. The individuals in this distribution list are trustees ONLY so if someone wants to reach Dr. O'Malley or anyone else in the administration, they must copy them separately.

Rich mentioned that there was a protected area on the server for keeping documents that are important to the board members. He offers to show anyone interested at the end of the meeting.

Lori refers to the Elections Task Force report and has an idea as to how to get more conversation during the meetings. She is suggesting that we reduce the number of committees. The board refers to the list of committees that Lori has handed out to the board members.

Facilities Committee: Lori suggests that we continue to have a "facilities person" or contact. If we need more input, then we could have a meeting to address a particular issue.

Finance & Governance committee: stays the same

HR Committee: Lori recommends we eliminate this committee. We need a trained HR person to handle these at the school. As mentioned earlier, the roles of Business manager and HR will probably be merged together. The committee bylaws will be consulted before changes are made.

Mission Committee: no change

Nominating Committee: Lori Suggests that we do not need this.

Public Relations Committee: This should not be needed at the board level.

Thom comments that this is a good idea but will most likely change after strategic discussion.

Rich comments that a downside to this approach is that some things may not get the visibility that is needed. Anna mentions that some of these committees were formed because there wasn't anyone on to perform the particular task. As HOS hires staff, some of these committees may not be necessary anymore (e.g., Human Resources, etc.). Nav mentions that we need to focus on strategic plan as opposed to strategic planning. Anna asks whether or not we want to have a strategic planning committee.

Lori is looking for a vote. Her suggestion is to eliminate Facilities, H.R., technology, Nominating, and P.R. and replace them with a designated individual (delegate, representative, liaison, etc.). Facilities and HR delegates are all that we need

The board votes unanimously to adopt Lori's suggestions.

Lori brings up the size of the board. Lori mentioned that she had conversations with Matt Ginnetty (one of the founders) and he said that there were originally a large number of board members because of the amount of work that needed to be done during the school's infancy. Rich mentions that an odd number of board members make sense. Seven is a difficult number if someone is absent. Fifteen is unmanageable. Rich recommends either **9, 11, or 13** as an amount (inclusive of the faculty representative). Thom says that there needs to be a large number of perspectives in making decisions and that what is more important than the physical number of board members is the number of members with diverse backgrounds that can contribute to the discussions. Cathy mentions that it is important to get perspectives from both "upper" and "lower" grade school stakeholders. Lori suggests that we should have a range between 9 and 13. We can set this number each year. Lori is looking for consensus on a range. She is looking for a lower number as a ceiling. Nav has suggested 7 to 13, and 9 to 15.

The majority of the members expressed consensus as setting 7 to 15 as a board range. John commented that the board sometimes needs to be more disciplined during the meetings (e.g., not repeating points that were made earlier). Anna,

Rich, and Thom assign people for Strategic plan. Lori went through Task Forces and Liaisons and solicited board members for next year. She went through mission, facilities, annual appeal, and special education. The person interested in Special Education should contact Lori and she can contact Chuck.

Dress Code Discussion (1:42 pm):

Lori brought up the dress code. She mentioned that we need to identify a purpose for the dress code and generate a list of options to consider (see packet). Lori would like us to vote on the process for investigating the dress code. Tim says that having no dress code should NOT be an option. Rich asks if this would be implemented next year.

Anna reviews the goals and objectives (FY09 – FY13) included in the packet.

Lori discusses the Washington St. property and suggests that we no longer focus on that property. HOS was approached by Bob Harrington who is HOS in Worcester (largest charter school in the country). Mr. Harrington built a new charter school and did it without fundraising. The same group wants to meet our board to present their findings and maybe act as future consultants to the board. John asks whether we would have the \$100K+ to fund the study. Lori discusses a potential meeting format: build on what John has already done and leave enough time to thoroughly discuss issues.

Lori makes her closing comments by mentioning that she would like board meeting materials to be submitted to her in enough time so that they can go out in the packet BEFORE the meeting. Information ideally should NOT be distributed during the meeting. She mentions that she would prefer if the board would distribute information at one meeting and have a vote at the next meeting. Lori would like written committee reports sent to Rich. She suggests that we try to have a single recognition of the month and try to be timely. Lori mentions that she intends to keep the open comment period. Rich points trustees to the protected board member space on our website and distributes the password. Lori mentions optional board member donation to the President's fund (\$30) and suggests that board members contact Lori if interested.

Adjournment (2:30pm)