

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
February 17, 2010 7:00 pm
(rescheduled from 2/10/10 due to inclement weather)**

Board Members Present: Becky Baehr (via phone), Rona Buchalter, John Eagen, Eli Lesser Rosina Miller, Kristin Nocco, Pedro Rodriguez, Elsie Stern

Board Member(s) Absent: Pam Prell

Others Present: Jurate Krokys, CEO; Stephanie Bungard, Principal; Leonora Cravotta, Development Director; Michael Farrell, William Loskoch and Kelly Nelms & Andrea Yanez, teachers; Claudia Lee, Jose Ramirez, Felicia Sarner, Ingrid Schafroth, Susan Segal, David Webber, parents.

I. Executive Session

The Board went into an executive session at 6:55p.m.

II. Call to Order

Rona called the meeting to order at 7:28p.m.

III. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the January meeting were approved unanimously with two corrections in the Development Report section: the Board member give-get is \$1,000 (not \$10,000) and the grant is Learn and Serve (not SERVE).

IV. Public Comment

It was agreed that the public comment period would be moved up on the agenda.

Claudia Lee: Good evening everyone, my name is Claudia Lee. I am the mother of Ana Ramirez in 7th grade; I am here to talk about how the late policy impacts grades. I want to make sure that this is in no way is a reflection on teacher performance. I want to make it clear to you that I have been in contact with Principal Stephanie already. This policy is of concern greatly and I do not think it takes in consideration child development and that middle school students are children. The policy is currently in place for our middle school students. My concern is that a student who did not complete an assignment is receiving the same grade as a student that forgot their project at home or did not write their name on their paper. I would like you take this policy into effect and hope that this can be taken into effect before the next grading period. I do not think that every teacher is giving a grade that reflects the performance of the grade under the new policy. Another concern is that one of the teacher's grade percentages are not adding up to 100 percent. My daughter is a talented writer and is not getting good grades in Language arts. I hope you look into this for the next marking period.

Jose Ramirez: I am here to support John Doe (JD). I would like to ask the board to treat JD with respect and understanding. We want ICS to be understanding and show a better understanding.

Mother of John Doe: Thank you very much. We did not expect to make comments, but feel that we have been seriously mistreated in this process. We need the Board's direction and oversight at this point. JD has been out of school since January 21st. JD brought a small Swiss army knife to school as he was carrying it from one home to another. He brought it to school to bring to the other home, that's all he was doing. He is model ICS citizen, and the most loving obedient child that you would ever meet. We gathered a number of letters from parents, teachers, and even from the teacher that saw

him with the knife that it was taken from in class. Number one: the board has the authority over discipline matters. If the CEO recommends against expulsion, which we are very thankful for, we are being told you can not say anything. We have been told that if he does not do the logical consequences that he is being given he will then be expelled. We are being told that you do not have any say; that is not correct. We have consulted with other lawyers at The Education Law Center and have been told that you have the absolute authority. We have been told that he should not have to have his pockets and book bags checked when he returns to school. He is not a criminal who tried to conceal anything in this situation. From the beginning we have received pockets of information. The CEO has not even spoken to him. The policy that is being used here is Act 26 which gives discretion to the CEO and does not take away your discretion as the board. We have a letter that has been addressed to the board and letters from parents and teachers. We also have the three written proposals to settle this matter. We will be giving them to Rona to show the inconsistent and not logical way that this has been handled. We are asking the Board to revisit the code of conduct in this situation. The code of conduct does not give fair notice to teachers, parents, or students about Act 26. Many parents have said to us that we have no clue that such a thing could lead to this matter. We have been told that the code of conduct is quite clear. Whatever happens with JD's situation we do not want anyone else to have to go through this. You need to make your code of conduct and weapons policy more clear. We have been told that if a child takes a plastic knife from the cafeteria to the classroom they will face expulsion. If this is the case then teachers and students need to know what this is. There also needs to be a clear list of consequences. If someone has a plastic knife, it is not a weapon. What JD had was not a weapon as he was not going to use this to hurt someone. They are first proposing that he be isolated at home for the rest of the school year. Then twice a week that he was going to have to go to visit the Kindergarten 1st, and 2nd grade classrooms and speak about what the code of conduct is. My son is shy and the thought of having to get up in front of those grades is awful, and my daughter is in 2nd grade. JD should not have to do that. He could write a letter for the newspaper. He should not have to do what the staff of ICS should be doing themselves. Lastly they proposed that the staff will then educate the rest of the school and with grades 7 and 8 they will have to address the situation with JD and will have to explain why the exception was made in the case of JD, but will not be discussing the particulars of JD's case. My son will be shamed and humiliated; he just wasn't thinking. We have to have some common sense here. I am off my soap box. I have a letter from JD's dad and I that asks you to rework the code of conduct, and the copies of the three different proposals and the collection of letters from JD's supporters, and other letters from people that have known him for years.

Father of John Doe: JD's mother summarized it very well. I wish I was not here tonight; this is not where I want to be and should not have to be. The only reasons I am here is far beyond the pale of what should have happened. I will not be silent for the other students; I don't want to see this happen. It took us seven single pages to explain what we have been through over the last few weeks. I have sat through these meeting and know what it is like. I am not here because I was on the board; I do not want special consideration. What we want should happen to any kids. It is wrong and the only word I have to use is injustice. We trusted that our children would be treated safely; the great irony is that in the name of safety the biggest harm was done to our son in that name. I hope that the board gets to the bottom of the administration treating us this way and makes this a better and safer place.

V. **Finance Report**

Jerry couldn't attend, but did submit a brief written summary of the December financial information. Rosina reviewed Jerry's report and stated we have a strong cash balance and also money due from the Commonwealth. The current surplus is \$328,217. Pedro asked about the leave adjustments. Jurate explained how we come up with that number

and how it changed this year. Rosina moved the December disbursement resolution and it passed unanimously. Rosina moved the Patricia Kind Foundation resolution and it also passed unanimously.

Jurate reported that Ramzy will soon have the financial numbers for the food services RFP and will be able to release it soon. Jurate explained that we have more information for the RFP from this year; she explained that the program was in a bigger deficit last year, so those numbers were not helpful. One item that will be included in the RFP is that we want the best quality food. Kristin added that once the RFP is almost complete, the RFP committee will send it to the board to highlight the changes, so everyone is aware of what we are doing. At that point, we'll need to decide if we are going to compost, offer more vegetarian options, etc. Kristin clarified that we do not have to take the lowest bid, but can come up with a judging criteria on which to decide the winning bid. Jurate reiterated that the RFP will be sent out for feedback within the next week, so that we can send it out. Kristin clarified that we need to include what Nezya does so that companies don't think they have to do work that is done here. Kristin also pointed out the variances this year are getting smaller in the overall budget.

VI. CEO Report

Eli asked about the snow and how everything is holding up. Jurate updated that we need to hire someone to move some of the remaining snow and that the facilities are holding up. She stated the bigger impact is on the calendar. We think we may have to make up some time---at least for the 7th and 8th graders. One possibility could include adding 15 minutes to the end of the day. We are trying not to impact on family vacations and teachers breaks. Rona clarified that the middle school is required to be in school more hours than the lower school. Eli suggested if we have another snow storm that we should include the neighbors in our plowing to be a good neighbor.

Jurate stated that we have been working on the draft budget for next year with thinking about teacher salaries first, which is different from our approach in the past. We are looking at a greater salary increase than usual and needing to look at other ways to do that. She added that we are only looking at significant salary increases for teaching staff, not for other staff members. The other piece is that we are going through a renewal and said we would put in a request for up to 800 students. The main reason for that request is to ensure we get the student allotment for all our students (instead of payment being capped at 732 students). This year we are not being paid between \$70,000-\$80,000 dollars because of the limit. Jurate pointed out that it was agreed that she would come to the board if we need to fill in a large number of spots beyond our current enrollment. Jurate stated she has received one call from the Charter School Office asking about our enrollment request and it sounded positive. Rona asked when we will hear from the SRC about our renewal; Jurate said that it could be early March, but nothing has been truly defined. Jurate briefly mentioned the SchoolWorks report, which was one part of the renewal process. She said she was shocked that we have not gotten the final draft and has heard that we will get it when the SRC gets a copy. Elsie asked when the Board will get a copy of the report. Jurate said she wished she had a final copy to give the Board; she will review what she has at the next meeting. Jurate shared some examples about feedback including transitions, pacing guides, chaotic dismissal. Jurate stated that we are proud of what we do and was taken back by some of their comments and is not worried about getting renewed or getting an increase in students. Pedro asked if the report was made public, Jurate was not sure.

Rona asked if anything was done with the Committee of 50,000 Students. Jurate stated that one of the last schools signed and the money is being collected; approximately 14 or 15 schools have signed on. The schools that have signed on are the top, strong charter schools. Jurate reported that Schools that Can have accepted us. She urged Board

members to attend the Schools that Can spring conference in Newark, New Jersey. Jurate will send everyone the internet link. Jurate reported that she is moving the Middle States accreditation process forward. Committee members will be picking up their packets, which contain instructions for everything that needs to be done. Committees will be convening in early March. The Steering Committee will work through mid-May and will hopefully accept a site visit in the fall.

VII. Non-Board Committee Reports

PTA report: There was no report; they are going to do quarterly reports and include the board on the weekly reports.

Teachers Report: John asked about the staff morale comment on the teacher report. Elsie asked Tr. William's opinion on the staff morale. Tr. William shared that he was not comfortable speculating on that. He did say that he thought it was more of a problem this year, at least something that it is being noticed more. Eli asked whether there are there a core group of people that would like to address it. Tr. William said that it is being addressed and things are being planned to address it. Jurate added that there is an ongoing process with the teacher salary scale and that in the next few weeks they will come up with a salary schedule that reflects all of the things. Elsie stated she wants to make it clear that the Board is interested and concerned about being responsible for the teacher morale and encourages teacher to bring systemic issues to the Board. Kristin reiterated that we care and the Board is concerned about it as well.

Development Report: Rona asked about the language training institute and how it is connected with the double anniversary. Leonora said that we are trying to use constant messaging of the double anniversary in events, such as the PTA silent auction and want to make it clear that we are embedding the double anniversary theme in all of our events, but the language training is not directly related to the double anniversary.

Construction Update: Kristin spoke about the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society meeting that is coming up. PHS will present a plan for how to better use the space in our schoolyard. Kristin would like someone from the Board to represent our vision and is requesting that PHS send associated costs with their plans.

VIII. Committee Reports

HR Committee: Becky reported that there will be a meeting next week to discuss the latest draft of the teacher salary pay scale. Pedro recommended looking at our tuition reimbursement policy; Jurate said that it is something that we could look at, but that may not be fiscally possible if we are making significant salary changes. Tr. William mentioned that perhaps teachers could use the \$1,200 for one class, instead of the current policy of a separate \$600 for up to two classes.

Curriculum: No report was circulated, because the last meeting had to be re-scheduled to next Monday due to the snow.

Policy: There was no report.

Board Development: Some of the Board members did not receive the report that was sent out by Pedro, so Pedro summarized what was on the report. There is discussion about possibly adding three more seats to the board and developing a tool for board assessment to use to use on an on-going basis to check on about strategic plan goals and other tasks for which the board is responsible. There has also been discussion about the Board member's \$1,000 Give-Get commitment. Elsie spoke about her concern specifically around the parent seat. She is concerned that the expectation may be too much for parents that are not familiar with the concept. And, that although 100 percent

giving from the board is important, we may have a different expectation from the board. Rona discussed that it's important to take the temperature on this now so we can be clear with the role of the board. Kristin stated that we need more information so we can include that in the letter that goes out to the parents next month. Elsie suggested that she, Pedro, and Leonora can come up with a recommendation for the next meeting. Rona mentioned that Pam made the comment that it is a goal for the board to get the give-get, but not an obligation. Jurate cautioned that in the past when we used the language of it not being a requirement we did not get 100% participation. Rosina noted that she recommends that the Board should stay at nine members and not thinking about moving the total to 11 or 15 until people are knocking down the door to get on the board. She noted that it has always been a problem to fill these seats with committed people that we have the time. Kristin mentioned that maybe we should not be so specific with exactly what we want for the ideal candidate with five distinct characteristics, but should be happy to expand the board to someone that may fit with two of those characteristics. Pedro stated there are two more potential candidates for the Board. Pedro agreed to circulate their information. Eli asked what happened to the three candidates who were met with in the fall; Pedro stated that two decided not to run and the third joined a committee. He added that he and Jurate are scheduled to meet with someone from the *Tribune*.

IX. Issues Discussion/Board Education

Site Visits/Internal Processes – Jurate spoke about the board members coming to visit ICS for a two hour block of time. She requested that board members let her know their availability by Thursday, so she can set up a schedule for them to come. Jurate stated that Russell Byers, Wissahickon, FACTS, Young Scholars and First Philadelphia Literacy charter schools have all said they'd welcome visits from our board members. Pam developed questions to keep in mind when visiting ICS.

What did you learn about students at ICS?

What did you learn about staff/teachers at ICS?

What did you learn about administration at ICS?

What stood out from your visit?

X. Old Business

All old business was conducted earlier in the meeting

XI. New Business

Kristin stated that parents at the PTA meeting seemed to be caught off guard about the possibility of changes to the dress code and that many parents were vocal about their concerns. Kristin reiterated that it is up to the administration, but it important to consult the parents and hear about their points as well. Jurate noted that after nine years we are still spending way too much time and energy managing the current dress code. She stated that we are keeping in mind minimizing parent expenses and keeping in mind student expression. She added that she had been in contact with Susan Burrows from the PTA and that we are in the process of thinking about how to introduce the changes. Kristin suggested maybe we keep in mind having a year grace period. Pr. Stephanie mentioned that from her experience that it is better to be cut and dry about the dress code. Rona suggested that there be parent involvement and a long lead time.

XII. Executive Session

The Board went into a brief executive session at this point.

XIII. Adjournment

Pedro moved for adjournment; John seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:33p.m.

Handouts circulated at this meeting:

Agenda

Minutes from January 2010 meeting
CEO report
Teachers' Report
December 2009 financials
Financial narrative
Development Report
Construction Update
Human Resources Committee Report
Board Development Report

Independence Charter School

February 17, 2010

Resolutions

ADOPTED

1. December Disbursements

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approve disbursements from the month of December 2009 in the amount of \$157,206.22 as presented to the Board.

2. Patricia Kind Grant

Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees of Independence Charter School accept the Patricia Kind Family Foundation Grant second installment of \$10,000 (from a two year grant totaling \$20,000) for summer school programming at ICS for the 2010 summer school year.

Resolutions

DEFEATED

None

Resolutions

TABLED

None