

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2010 7:00 pm**

Board Members Present: Becky Baehr, Rona Buchalter, John Eagen, Eli Lesser Rosina Miller Pedro Rodriguez, Elsie Stern

Board Members Absent: Kristin Nocco, Pam Prell

Others Present: Jurate Krokys, CEO; Ramzy Andrawos, Director of Operations; Stephanie Bungard, Principal; Jerry Santilli, Business Manager, Leonora Cravotta, Development Director; Michael Farrell, William Loskoch and Kelly Nelms, teachers; Megan Steelman, Administrative Assistant.

I. Call to Order

President Rona called the meeting to order at 7:07pm. Rona explained that there is a new format for the agenda, in an effort to make it more useful. If you want something noted in the “highlights” section, be sure to notify Rona and Megan before the agenda is circulated. Everyone was reminded that committee reports need to be circulated well before the board meeting.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the December meeting were approved unanimously without any changes.

III. Finance Report

Rona asked Jerry to review the financial statements. He stated that ICS has a strong cash flow. He pointed out that the major subsidy from the school district is on target; we have several students who live out of county. Those outside school districts pay for those students. Jerry had a meeting this month with a PNC representative regarding our interest rate. We’re not earning enough to pay off the bank costs. From Jerry’s research, this is happening with most banks. One alternative is to take out some of our money to invest in a state-approved account elsewhere. The law is very clear about where we would be allowed to invest. Jerry will do more research and come back to the Finance Committee with that information. Pedro stated that there is a national campaign to get people to invest locally. Eli stated that we also have to be aware of from what bank we may want to borrow money for future projects. Jerry agreed to include local banks in his research. Pedro asked whether we can invest in the Reinvestment Fund; Jerry said he does not think that we are allowed.

Jerry stated there are very few variances in the budget. Employee benefits are averaged across the budget, so the variances are not of concern because they balance out. Jerry stated that Jurate and the staff are doing a very good job with documentation for the stimulus funds and with the budget overall. Last week we were notified that the stimulus funding reporting form has been revised due to federal guidelines. The only unusual payment in November was the payment to the auditing company. Rosina asked whether the insurance payments are all monthly; Jerry said they are. Jerry stated that #5731, however, is an annual payment for ICS liability insurance. Rosina moved the disbursement resolution; Becky seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Jerry explained that this is the first budget adjustment of this fiscal year and is being made due to fiscal changes that took place after the budget was passed, such as the receipt of federal stimulus funding. Some expenses for which these funds

will be used will be things like additional classroom computers to be used by students who receive special education services. These adjustments do not change the bottom line of the budget, because all the funding will cover the expenses for which they will be used. The budget-to-actual will be changed to reflect the adjustments passed at tonight's meeting. Rosina moved the adjustment resolution; Elsie seconded. Eli stated that these are good reasons for budget adjustments---getting more funds. The motion passed unanimously.

Jurate gave information about the Race to the Top funds. She explained that charter schools were not included in the initial notice from the state. In December many charter schools wrote to the state, stating their intentions to apply for these funds, since charters are included under the federal guidelines. In early January an application form came out for charter schools, which only allows high performing charter schools to apply. The structure for the use of funds is very clear, regarding expectations. ICS submitted our application by yesterday's deadline. The funds would be used over 4 years (about \$60,000 per year). It is very data-intensive. Pennsylvania will find out later this month whether or not the funds have been approved. If Pennsylvania is approved, then ICS would decide at that time whether or not to accept the funds. Rosina asked about the other funds that will be available for building projects. Jerry stated that at this point, the School District has no plans to share that with charter schools. Jerry has asked the School District to respond, but hasn't received a response yet. Jerry stated that places like Washington, DC are giving all of their funds to charter schools. Rona asked whether there are people that we should be contacting. Jurate agreed to see if the Committee of 50,000 is already or might consider pursuing this as a coalition.

Jerry reviewed the November food services budget; he pointed out that the largest variance is that a lower than projected number of students with full-priced status are eating school lunch. There are also less than the number of projected students with free and reduced-priced status eating breakfast. Snack sales have increased since the *a la carte* menu has been expanded. Jerry stated he is, however, very pleased with the budget at this point. The state has said that we may not need to re-bid for next year. The final answer should come soon.

IV. CEO Report

Jurate asked for feedback on the new report format that was changed to reflect changes discussed at last Saturday's caucus. Our charter renewal site visit will take place tomorrow and Friday. Jurate was not able to attend a meeting of charter schools yesterday, but received a report that the charter school group has decided not to agree with the School District's compromise offer about enrollment numbers, because it does not align with state charter school law. Rona asked if anyone had questions. Eli asked about the many planned visits to ICS by different charter schools. Jurate stated that a lot of those people heard about us due to our Goldman Sachs award last year. We will also be hosting a training institute, using some of that award money, in May. Leonora is locating space for that training, most likely at the University of the Arts. We are also active in the state's International Education Advisory committee. Jurate can't attend their next meeting due to the special education audit; Pam will be attending in her place. Elsie suggested that the CEO report include why we do what we do---as to what ICS's approach is. Jurate stated that may be a little difficult to do. Rona asked whether we have that kind of information documented. Jurate stated that's not all in one place. Rona agreed that may be unrealistic for the board report. Jurate stated we can do that as a separate document.

V. Non-Board Committee Reports

PTA Report

The PTA report was circulated prior to the meeting. Rona clarified that she has told the PTA that the Board only needs a quarterly written report. They will continue to include the Board on their regular e-mail updates they send to parents and staff. Jurate clarified that she feels it's important that the PTA know they are still encouraged to send a representative to the monthly Board meetings.

Teachers' Report

William and Kelly had submitted a written teachers' report. Rona stated it may be interesting to have annual teacher goals. William said that could be a useful structure and help with reporting to the Board. William stated that he, Kelly and Stephanie met today and agreed that it makes more sense for them to meet to discuss teacher concerns before the report is written. Rona stated that makes sense because a lot of the staff concerns are items that need to be discussed with administration and would come to the Board level only if it was felt the issue wasn't being addressed. Jurate noted that she has been talking with Jerry regarding fleshing out possible salary scale changes. She hopes to have some specific examples in a month or so. Pedro asked whether or not we have a clear history of the pay scale. Becky said that for the first few years we didn't have a scale and salaries were negotiated individually. The first scale came into being in 2004. Jurate clarified that there was a template before that, but there was more interpretation that could be done. Rona stated it would be useful to look at who has left and why. Jurate explained that would be labor intensive, but could be done. Eli asked whether we can survey other charter schools. Jurate stated we could try, but that the Board had decided several years ago not to share our salary information when another charter school asked. Rosina suggested that we do a blind survey with the schools with which Jerry's office works.

Development Report

Leonora reported that ICS was not awarded a Lenfest grant this year; she said Lenfest explained they gave away very little money this year. Pam wrote a grant with Learn and Serve for \$8,000, which goes toward her Board member give-get of \$1,000. The funds will be used for service learning. Leonora also has submitted another grant application for a summer service learning grant.

Construction Update

No report was received; Robin Kohles was not in attendance.

IX. Committee Reports

Human Resources

Becky reported that the HR Committee didn't meet in January. She circulated an update. She clarified that the next meeting is February 5th (not the 6th) and she did not attach the draft policy because the committee still needs to finalize it. ICS legal counsel sent a response today, but Becky has not had a chance to review those comments.

Policy

There were no questions about the report that was circulated.

Curriculum

Pam was not able to attend; there were no questions about the report that was circulated. Becky asked whether we're planning anything to assist with people affected by yesterday's earthquake in Haiti. It was explained that William has

planned a meeting Friday for afternoon for staff who are interested in planning something that will involve the students.

Board Development

Pedro stated that Terry Johnson has decided not to run for a Board seat at this time. The next committee meeting will take place on January 27th; Pedro will let people know the time of the meeting.

Accreditation

Rona asked for an update on the process. Jurate stated that once the charter renewal is done, we will be at a good starting point. Rona stated that she's concerned that we'll be working for another year without an updated strategic plan. Rosina stated she feels okay about that because the work of the committees continues. Elsie stated that she feels it would be helpful to review the plan to see where we are in relation to it. It was pointed out that the Board did that in the Spring. Elsie stated that we should then be sure to review it again in the spring to be sure another year doesn't go by. Jurate stated she feels we should be done the bulk of the process by the end of June on the Middle States process. Elsie asked whether anyone has attended the Middle States training; Jurate said she'll look into it, because that may just be at the university level. John stated he wouldn't want us to go past June without something planned out. Rona summarized that June and July would be the time for us to reflect on what our goals are for the upcoming year, even if we aren't ready for making a 5-year plan at that time.

X. Board Education & Caucus Wrap Up

Rona explained that she would like to start using the second part of the Board meetings for discussion around specific topics. Rona stated that she wants to continue the discussion that started at the caucus on Saturday regarding members making planned visits to the school to see it in action. Members were reminded to send their availability to Jurate so she can schedule us all to see aspects of ICS about which we may not yet be familiar. After we understand ICS better, we'll start to plan visits to other charter schools.

At another meeting Rona has asked Jerry to talk more in depth about charter school finances. At another we'll talk more about the CEO's role and the things about which she needs to report to the Board. The hope is to make the substance of the Board meeting more meaningful and on-task to the responsibilities of the Board.

Rona circulated a draft of the ICS Board roles and asked people to review it. She asked what the top priorities are for the next five months for each member. Pedro stated he feels getting more diversity on the board---racially and by expertise. He feels this needs to be institutionalized as on-going work of the Board. His other priority is for the Board to decide where the school is going in the next five years. Elsie stated that fleshing out the development strategies is a priority, as well as figuring out what the Board's role is in the accreditation process. John stated he feels the board should be getting ready for the next step---such as replication. His second goal would be having the board members get out to see what other charter schools are doing. Becky stated that setting the stage for replication or expansion should be the goal of the next five months. She said another goal should be a balanced budget that includes changes to the teacher pay scale. A third goal for her is increasing diversity of the staff. Rosina stated that her understanding is that the accreditation process includes a similar process to what we went through for the last strategic plan. She also thinks a goal should be

working towards replication or expansion. Eli's goal is that Board members get out and let people know about ICS and our success. His other is making sure the Board reflects on its work and has specific goals and that we streamline meetings to be most effective. William said he thinks that the ambassador idea is a good one, since there are many people without children who need to hear about the school. Pedro said we might want to have a Facebook page. Elsie asked whether we have a relationship with the *Inquirer's* education writers. Jurate said that Martha Woodall has written some articles about us. Leonora stated that she does regular press releases, but they don't always get covered. Becky stated that in the annual parent survey we do ask about the parents' perception of how the Board is doing. Rona stated we haven't followed up on doing anything in response to that feedback. Pedro stated that we may want to work on getting journal articles, blogs, etc. to help get the word out. Rona cautioned that a blog is a lot of work and that something like an Op-Ed can be more effective. Pedro was congratulated on being appointment to the City's Civil Service Commission. Pedro said he looks forward to making an impact through his work on the commission.

Rona was asked to give her ideas for goals. Rona stated that institutionalizing some things in order to be able to pass on the information is important. Another goal is working on the accreditation. Institutionalizing best practices as a Board is also an important goal.

XI. Public Comment Period

No one signed up for the public comment period.

XII. Old Business

All old business was conducted earlier in the meeting.

XIII. Adjournment

Eli asked how many applications we had for our lottery for 2010-2011; Megan stated that we have about 325 kindergarten applications and about 400 for 1st through 8th grades. Pedro moved for adjournment; Elsie seconded. Jurate invited Board members to the exit meeting with renewal group on Friday at 5p.m.. The meeting was adjourned at 8:50p.m.

Handouts circulated at this meeting:

Agenda
Minutes from December 2009 meeting
CEO report
PTA Report
Teachers' Report
November financials
Development Report
Curriculum Report
Human Resources Committee Update
Draft document about Board Roles

**Independence Charter School
January 13, 2010
Resolutions**

ADOPTED

1. November Disbursements

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approve disbursements from the month of November 2009 in the amount of \$264,487.75 as presented to the Board.

2. 2009-2010 Budget Adjustments

Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees resolve to pass the attached budget adjustments for Fiscal Year 2010.

**Resolutions
DEFEATED
None**

**Resolutions
TABLED
None**