

**Independence Charter School  
Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
May 12, 2010 7:00 pm**

**Board Members Present:** Becky Baehr, Rona Buchalter, John Eagen, Rosina Miller, Kristin Nocco, Eli Lesser, Pam Prell, Pedro Rodriguez, Elsie Stern

**Board Member(s) Absent:** None

**Others Present:** Jurate Krokys, CEO; Stephanie Bungard, Principal; Ramzy Andrawos, Director of Operations; Leonora Cravotta, Development Director; Gerald (Jerry) Santilli, Santilli and Thomson; Kelly Nelms, teacher; Krista Pfeiffer, Founder; Robin Kohles, parent & Owner's Rep; Naomi Wyatt and Kier Bradford, prospective Board members.

**I. Call to Order**

**Rona** called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the April meeting were approved unanimously.

**III. Finance Report**

Jerry reviewed the financial report and noted there is a strong cash balance of \$3.4 million and that other income and expenses are normal for this time of year. He noted that there was a recent large payment made to PSERS (Pennsylvania State Employee Retirement System) and stated that the PSERS percentage rate paid by schools has gone up for the past five years. He noted that a recent newspaper article stated that PSERS may have some problems going forward and there is some discussion of reducing benefits to future retirees. He stated that our rate for next year will almost double. Jerry pointed out that the interest revenue continues to be extremely low as a result of the current business market and that charter schools are very limited in regard to what we're allowed to invest in in accordance with Act 72. Jerry pointed out Line 22 which notes the loan adjustment, (+\$94,000) because of our being given a discount for paying off our Citizens Alliance loan early. (This was a reduction in the cost of the loan, so "saved" (\$94,000.) We have received documentation from Paul Levy saying our loan has been satisfied.

Jerry stated that the salaries & instruction area is higher than usual due to medical leave for staff as our school matures and starts families. This has resulted in the use of more substitute teachers. He also noted that one part-time instructional position was accidentally left off of the budget. He stated there are no other particular items of concern and thanked Jurate for being diligent about keeping within the budget. He noted that some of the surplus seen on this statement is related to having not yet spent some of the stimulus funds; some will be spent before end of year, but we have until September 2011 to spend the rest.

Rosina moved to approve disbursement resolution; Becky seconded. Rosina noted that #6014 was an interest payment to Citizens Alliance; Jerry noted that was the original payment and then we made arrangements to pay off the loan early. Pedro asked what #6056 was for; Jerry stated that was related to special education matters. The motion passed unanimously.

Jerry reviewed the food services financials, noting that March was the first month with any significant surplus. He stated that breakfast sales still lag behind budget projections. Kristin asked if the mobile terminal has been set up to sell bagged breakfasts in the hallway by the cafeteria. Stephanie said it has not; instead we are working on getting the children in from the buses sooner to give them more time. Kristin recommended that a

freezer be purchased as was requested at the end of last year; the cost would be about \$10,000. Jerry stated he thinks that request would go to the Finance Committee and that this seems like a good year to make that purchase. Kristin reported that Linton will be our provider for next year and that no other bids were received. She stated that ICS has been mostly satisfied with Linton.

Jerry reported that in early May, ICS was notified that its rates for Keystone and Personal Choice coverage would be increased by more than 20%. He explained that to reduce costs last year, we took some categories that were previously fully paid and made them reimbursable to employees (i.e., in the prior year, there was no in-patient hospital co-pay, but with the current year's plan there is a \$250 per day co-pay, which ICS reimburses to the employee); this reduced our premium. He explained that in planning for next year, we have looked into possibly moving to Aetna and that it seems there may be dramatic savings by doing so. He noted that under Act 22, charter schools must provide equal benefits to what school district has and noted that Aetna benefits would be equal. Rosina stated that Aetna has different types of plans, very comparable to IBX and that the transition for the majority of the staff should be smooth. Rona added that staff would need to enroll one time, but that moving to Aetna would eliminate reimbursement system, except for prescriptions, so there would be less paperwork for employees overall. Rosina added that would mean that staff wouldn't have to put money out first and wait for reimbursement, except for prescriptions. Jerry noted there is an urgency, since we need to complete the whole re-enrollment process by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Jurate reported that she did present the possible change to the staff at today's meeting. Rosina stressed that she feels this is the right path to take given the budget; she stated she appreciates that change can be difficult, but that the budget is tight because we wanted to be sure to give decent raises to the teachers. Eli asked whether staff with pre-existing conditions such as pregnancy, would be possibly be able to opt to pay extra to keep their current policy for another year. Jerry stated that when there are fewer than 100 employees under the plan, we can only have one carrier and that pre-existing conditions do not matter. Rona noted that the resolution says the cost cannot exceed 5% above the current cost in order to give a little flexibility. Jerry stated that Aetna will be looking at our demographics in order to determine our rates. Rosina moved the Aetna resolution; Becky seconded. Elsie asked whether the savings would be sustained. Jerry stated there is no way to know that and that some places switch carriers year after year. The motion was passed unanimously.

Rosina noted that we had a windfall of interest from paying down bond, so in addition to the \$75,000 of original money that has never spent we also have \$ 250,000 in accrued interest from when the total was being held in the bank. She stated that Jurate and Robin and Ramzy will meet to prioritize ways to use this for renovations and improvement. Jerry emphasized that the money can only be used for capital expenditures. Kristin said there is a master plan for the garden, but the committee is still waiting to get prices. Rosina stated we may need resolutions for June meeting; Ramzy added that if the amount is over \$10,000 it would require bidding. Rosina recommended that one expenditure may be for recommended business management software, which would allow ICS and Santilli & Thomason to more easily track finances. She stated that Ramzy has previewed the software and Jerry recommends it. ICS would own the software. The cost would be \$36,146 to purchase and implement and then \$9,000+ per year for maintenance. Jerry clarified that it is used over the web and would have proper security. He noted the importance of ICS owning the software is that if ICS were to stop contracting with Santilli & Thomson, they would only need to change the security on the system. Rona asked if it is a standard product. Jerry stated specifically for non-profits and includes features for accounting for federal stimulus money and other federal auditing. It has the ability to follow transactions, where grant money is coming from and how it is spent. It allows for an electronic workflow, such as online requisition process and electronic checks for funds. It also allows you to track surpluses and have the ability to re-allocate

that money during the year. Rosina asked if it can also be used for student activity funds and petty cash; Jerry said that it can and that security features allow you to make only certain parts accessible to certain people. He said that the price includes training and a group discount, since many of Santilli & Thomson clients are purchasing it. Rosina moved the software resolution; Pam seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

It was agreed that Jurate will go to Rosina (Finance Committee) to get authorization to use the money. Jurate stated that some priorities include completing renovations that were planned for last summer, but for which money ran out, getting more wireless access points, and getting additional equipment for the science rooms. Rona stated that these won't require Board approval, but would like concerns shared with the Board. Jurate agreed that she will move quickly on this list.

Rosina noted that we'll be waiting until the June meeting to approve the 2010-2011 budget in hopes that we'll have more financial information from the Philadelphia School District by that time. Jerry stated that at this point, the School District is anticipating an increase in the per-student allotment of 5%-6%. The School District will be approving their budget later this month, so we should know soon after that. The School Reform Commission vote on requests for enrollment increases is scheduled to take place on June 16<sup>th</sup>. In our original draft budget, we used a 1% increase; if we get 6% increase, plus increased students, the financial increase could be about \$270,000. It was agreed that a complete list of priorities will be presented at the next finance meeting.

Eli asked Jerry to keep the Board updated on the issues that have recently been in the news; Jerry agreed to do that

#### **IV. CEO Report**

**Jurate** reported that she spoke at today's SRC meeting regarding ICS's request for a student enrollment increase. She stated that Pedro is making appointments to meet with various people before the June 16<sup>th</sup> vote. She reported that the date for the SRC charter renewal vote meeting has been changed from May 19<sup>th</sup> to May 26<sup>th</sup> and Jurate will be in D.C. on that day. She encouraged people to be sure to attend and applaud. Jurate emphasized that the School District appears to be non-committal regarding our request for up to 68 more student spaces over 5 years. She stated she and others are putting in a lot of legwork around the issue to ensure the School District understands that we have the space and will maintain a good staff-student ratio. She noted that we want this increase to happen for several reasons, including the ability to enact the new teacher salary scale. If the enrollment increase does not get approved, Jurate noted that we will need to go back to the drawing board regarding how to revamp the pay scale to include the changes we wanted.

Jurate reviewed the proposed 2010-2011 academic calendar. She reported that she had circulated it to staff and made a few changes based on the 35 responses she received. The school will be closed on President's Day and the day before Thanksgiving will be a regular early dismissal Wednesday. We will have three report card evenings in December, but will have a full report card day in the spring. We'll have 184 days to allow for the possibility of multiple snow days. We should have enough hours, even if it snows several days. The calendar includes three professional development days. PSSAs are in March next year, before spring break, which means there is a shorter teaching time period, reviewed with teachers. Becky asked if there are any problems about having difference schedules for report card days. Jurate stated that ICS just needs to be sure to inform parents really well. She stated that our schedule is similar to the School District's, which was approved today. Rona noted that the School District has two days off Rosh Hashanah, but that ICS is not closed. Jurate stated that ICS is starting kindergarteners later (the Monday after Labor Day) than usual due to Rosh Hashanah falling at the end of

the first week of school. Pam asked if there is an advantage to having different report card days as opposed to one whole day; Stephanie noted that attendance has generally been the same, but that we can look and see if the parents who miss it the first time will also miss it the second time. Rosina moved the calendar resolution; Pam seconded. Rona asked whether we'll be able to move up the last day of school if we end up not using a lot of snow days; Jurate said that we could and that we should be able to make that decision by the end of March to give parents ample notice. Kristin asked when clubs will start; Jurate said the goal is to get a detailed calendar with that type of information to parents by the end June, but that it is difficult to know at that point exactly what clubs will be available. The motion passed unanimously.

Jurate reported that she is working with our legal counsel to create a legal form for use of building and that she will bring that draft to the Policy Committee before it goes to the full Board. She also announced that Councilman Jim Kenny will be the speaker at graduation. She stated that this year's eighth graders received a huge number of acceptances to great high schools (i.e., 17 were accepted at Central). Jurate reported that that the Middle States Accreditation survey process has started. We are also arranging for Ken Rigby to come to speak to Steering Committee. Also Jurate will be participating as an accreditor, going as part of a team to E.L.Haynes Charter School in D.C. from May 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>. Jurate also noted that the Steering Committee has recommended that we ask for a spring visit date, rather than the fall. This means that we're pushing strategic plan a little further, but in the end it should be worthwhile, since we want to ensure that every single staff person is participating.

Kristin reported that we received 235 completed parent surveys. Parent Tina Kluetmeier helped streamline the survey and it is hoped that it will be helpful with curriculum. Four parents are running for the Parent Board Seat election; Kristin reported that as of today have 71 ballots have been received. Rona encouraged everyone to review the survey results, since they contain valuable information.

Rona introduced Naomi Wyatt and Kier Bradford, who are potential Board nominees.

Jurate noted that the Asia Society has included ICS in its Innovation 3 proposal. Thousands of organizations will be applying for this \$5 million grant. If the Asia Society received the grant, ICS would be studied, get training, and would get results of the studies.

Jurate reported that ICS received official notification of being awarded a FLAP and has a phone conference scheduled for May 18<sup>th</sup> to get more information about what it would entail. She noted that Leonora has reworked the budget down to one page and 30+ page narrative, award letter and it has all been e-mailed. The FLAP grant would be a total of \$597,000 over three years. It would include increasing the teaching of Arabic and hiring a teacher for that. Originally it was to be focused on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, but now the principal and Curriculum Committee is recommending that it also include 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Hiring a full-time teacher for Arabic, would allow that person to build a relationship with the students and the staff. Curriculum Specialist Kristen Long has worked out a draft schedule, with Arabic once a week for 6<sup>th</sup> grade and twice a week for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, which would not diminish other studies. The increased time in the second and third years would be done through extending the school day to 4p.m. on those days for those two grades. Students would end with some type of certificate. Part of the grant would be used to provide scholarships to some students to go to a summer language school at Oberlin College or to a more local language camp through Al-Bustan. This summertime learning could begin this summer. Leonora clarified that the Oberlin College camp is willing to take 15 students with ICS determining the application criteria. Jurate noted that she would like to make this available this summer to our current 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders,

since the 8<sup>th</sup> graders are still our kids after they graduate. The principal and Curriculum Specialist hope the Board will make an early decision about this, so that scheduling can be done and so that we know what our final teacher needs are for next year.

Pam noted that in order to officially approve the acceptance of the FLAP grant, the Board needs a resolution. She expects the Curriculum Committee will draft resolution for next month, since the Curriculum meeting is tomorrow. Pam asked by what process we can gauge specific board member questions in order for Jurate and her staff to move forward with scheduling, etc. if she has a sense that the board will approve this in June. Pam asked whether Jurate can move forward in good faith, or whether the Board members have concerns that make you think we can't approve this or anything the committee should pay close attention to? Elsie asked how instruction would be differentiated, since she feels the kids in immersion program will be ahead and asked whether there is coordination between the language studies and world studies. Stephanie stated that it is a global education connection and there is a connection with Arabic and Spanish with the fifth grade study of Afghanistan. In addition, differentiation of instruction is needed and expected in all subject areas. Eli asked why there is no indirect rate on budget. Jerry stated that ICS does not qualify. Jurate stated that ICS has 90 days to apply for the indirect rate plan. Jerry stated the indirect rate could offset the purchase of supplies, etc. Eli encouraged getting the indirect rate, because it could generate revenue for the school.

Elsie asked how whether ICS would be attentive to how this plays out in Immersion and Enhanced, because she worries about it getting tracked. Jurate stated that she would argue that Immersion kids do not necessarily learn faster than kids in Enhanced. Kristin asked how the 15 students would be selected for the Oberlin College camp. Jurate said we may use the "take flight" idea by selecting students who "haven't been anywhere" in order to support families letting their kids experience other places. Jurate noted that this year's fifth grade camping trip had the highest attendance yet. Pam noted that ICS can establish this, name it early and work hard to ensure what we want. Eli asked what would happen in year four in regard to the impact on larger curriculum, an additional teacher, etc. that would eventually return to the general budget. Pam stated we have only budgeted to have one full-time teacher. John ask how we going to find that teacher? Jurate stated the teacher would be hired on a year-to-year basis. Rona asked whether we would have an mechanism for kid to opt out of second language. Jurate stated we would not offer that, since this is part of our mission, and therefore not elective. Rona stated that Michael Farrell has talked about some kids who he feels were not benefitting from language. Pam stated that feeling may be offset by making it a more cohesive program. Rona asked Board members to send concerns to Pam before tomorrow's Curriculum Committee meeting. Pam asked if Leonora is able to attend the Curriculum Committee meeting tomorrow to answer questions. Leonora agreed to be there. Jurate stated she won't be able to attend due to having plans to go to Camp Onas, but Stephanie and Kristen Long will also be at the meeting.

Jurate reported that the group meeting with Nicole Kilcullen to review the ICS disciplinary code of conduct task force, includes the deans, the principal and Jurate. The goal is to complete the review by June 17<sup>th</sup> to ensure having it available for inclusion in the parent/student handbook for next year. Some areas to be reviewed are Responsive Classroom, communication, transparency, plagiarism and dealing with the cyber world.

Rona asked what about the status of the dress code. Jurate stated the decision about a vendor is being made and the final draft is being completed after an e-mail input from the committee with only a few minor changes being made. Feedback was received from parents, teachers and kids through surveys. The updated code includes specific shirts for middle schoolers and narrowing the colors for the lower school. The plan is for the code to fit on half a page. Kristin stated she feels the process worked well for parents and that

you can't please everybody, but many people were pleased because parents felt they were heard.

Rona asked where the Committee of 50,000 is in the process of hiring of marketing person. Jurate stated she was not at the last meeting, but that the **Jubilerer Strategies** has been hired and is now getting to know every school that belongs.

## V. Non-Board Committee Reports

**PTA report:** No report

**Teachers Report:** A written report was circulated.

**Development Report:** A written report was circulated. Leonora reported the ICS has received a Sprint Character Education Grant for \$5,000 which will be used toward Responsive Classroom/Developmental Designs training during the summer. She added that parents seem pleased with the program. Leonora also reported that the recent Global Education workshop survey results gave high ratings on content and interest in future attendance. ICS received the K-16 Collaboration Award from PACIE. The award includes a \$250 prize and formal recognition for ICS at PACIE's fall conference. The conference represents a great opportunity for ICS to promote its follow up workshop. Rosina said everyone did a nice job. Eli asked whether anyone follow up with the person from Temple who said he'd giving away money. Rona stated that Mary Ramirez told her that ICS should make a training video for others to see. Pam moved the Spring Character Education Grant resolution; Rona seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Construction Report:** A written report was circulated with a sketch of the proposed fence. The fence and gate will be dedicated to Beth Jacquot funded mostly from the Beth Jacquot fund. A plaque noting this will be located on the building wall next to the gate. The only change is that the fence panels will be cast aluminum instead of cast concrete. Warren hopes to hold a design competition of ideas and sketches submitted by 8th graders for the design of the square like panels. The gate and fence will be built in lieu of the trellis.

## VI. Committee Reports

**HR Committee:** No report. The next meeting is on Friday.

**Curriculum:** Pam noted that since she was absent last month absent, she submitted March and April reports this month. The committee's theme has been assessment and there's been a great group of teachers working on that in last few months. The committee is setting goals for where we'd like to be in months ahead. Eli asked about a zero tolerance policy. Pam stated there has been thoughtful work of teachers thinking about every kind of student to determine "what are we assessing?" and that it's not about being "quick and dirty" to get grades, but to really gauge learning. Stephanie said the committee is hoping that next Wednesday's meeting will be the last one and that the group will have something to present after that. The focus is currently on middle school; lower school will be looked at over the summer. She stated the group learned so much about who we are and why we're doing what we're doing, and finding ways we can use assessments to help our students learn and to record information for teachers, students and families. She stated that it is important for students to understand how they're being assessed and how they can assess their own work. Pam stated we can work these ideas into interviews; Stephanie said the group is asking every teacher how they use assessment to gauge student progress. We need to develop a philosophy of what assessment is and how we use that at ICS. This information gave a framework to determine percentage for grades. Pam talked about the idea of "zero" credit where if something was handed in a

day late, students got a zero. Zeros led to fewer late assignments, but did not help assess learning or improve learning. Other feedback includes some former 8<sup>th</sup> graders saying they weren't ready for high school because their ICS teachers were too easy on them. Elsie asked if global citizenship is included. Stephanie stated that while the zero policy led to fewer late assignments, we are also here to help children deal with real life and fix things when they go wrong, which is part of global education. She added that the group did extensive reading to help us come to our philosophy.

**Policy:** Eli reported that City Council had a meeting with Superintendent Arlene Ackerman regarding concerns with accountability of charter schools. He added that there has been a hearing in the state senate, which may result in strengthening the oath of office for board members. Pam remarked that what's being talked about is no different than the best practices that ICS has always followed. Jurate stated that one addition is that there's the possibility of the City Controller auditing charter schools.

**Board Development:** Pedro introduced Kier Bradford. He reported that Board members also met with Rhonda McKitten and that he will hopefully be scheduling meetings with two more potential Board members before the end of this month. He introduced the recommendation for a bylaws change regarding the length of terms for president and treasurer, who are both currently elected for one year terms. He stated it seems that two years is a more appropriate amount of time to allow people to grow into position and show expertise. Becky asked why that wouldn't be true for other positions. Pedro stated the president and treasurer have most involved positions and that it would help to have people think about the position that way before running for the office. Pam stated it would be about establishing tradition and expectation so that people in those positions can see it as a learning experience. Rosina added that if a vice president had to commit to two years as vice president and then two years as president that would be a very long commitment. Rona stated that having the vice president only be a one year term is good because if it's determined that s/he is not a very strong leader, there would be another chance for someone else. Pedro moved the bylaws change resolution; Eli seconded. A 2/3 vote in favor is needed for a bylaws change; the vote was unanimous.

Pedro put Dana Twyman's name into nomination; however, that process will need to be completed at the next meeting, since she was not present at this point in the meeting.

## **VII. Issues Discussion/Board Education**

Rona explained that she would like the Board to collectively agree on a few broad goals and noted that having greed-on goals is especially important as we will not have a strategic plan in place for the coming year. She read aloud the following goals that had been circulated:

1. Encourage implementation of Global Citizenship goals school-wide.
2. Develop and implement processes for articulating, aligning, and assessing goals (board, committees, members, school). Move to Board Reports and Board Training to align with goals.
3. Develop collaborative strategy/plan for board's role in external relations, development, outreach.

Pam stated she feels this puts us on the right path and that having global citizenship first and foremost captures a lot of what the Board needs to look at in terms of diversity, working collaboratively with administration, etc. Eli asked if we will be implementing this school and community-wide for purchasing decisions, etc. Rona and Becky stated

that it is to be school-wide. Becky suggested it would be helpful to have a checklist when constructing a resolution, etc. to ensure it complies with our global citizenship mission.

**VII. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

**IX. Old Business**

All old business was conducted earlier in the meeting.

**X. New Business**

Pam asked that Megan bring a copy of the most recent by-laws as well as Roberts Rules of Order to each meeting.

**XI. Adjournment**

Pam moved for adjournment; Becky seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:29 p.m.

**Handouts circulated at this meeting:**

Agenda

Minutes from April 2010 meeting

CEO report

Finance Committee Minutes

March 2010 financials

March Food Services financials

Development Report

Global Studies Workshop Survey Results

Catalyst Schools Survey Results

Construction Update

Curriculum Committee Minutes (March & April)

Teachers' Report

**Independence Charter School**

**May 12, 2010**

**Resolutions**

**ADOPTED**

**1. March Disbursements**

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees hereby approve disbursements from the month of March 2010 in the amount of \$560,153.26 as presented to the Board.

**2. Sprint Character Education Grant**

Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees of Independence Charter School accept the \$ 5,000 grant given by the Sprint Character Education Foundation for the purposes of supporting the training of ICS staff in the Responsive Classroom Model.

**3. Financial Software**

Be it resolved that the Board of Trustees of Independence Charter School approves the disbursement of \$ 46,011.00 for the purposes of acquiring financial software which will include the contract with the vendor, hosting and set-up, implementation, consultation and training for a total cost in year one of \$ 46,011.00 thereafter a yearly recurring fee of \$ 9,865.

#### **4. 2010-2011 School Calendar**

Be it resolved that that the Independence Charter School Board of Trustees adopts the 2010-2011 academic calendar as presented.

#### **5. Aetna Health Benefits**

Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees resolves to change employee health benefits to Aetna not to exceed more than 5% of the current health benefits costs at the end of the current health benefits contract.

#### **6. Bylaws Change**

Be it resolved that the Independence Charter School bylaws Section 5.4 (Terms, Vacancies) be amended to extend the elective terms of the President and Treasurer of the Board of Trustees, by inserting the following language:  
with the exception of the President and Treasurer, who shall be elected to two consecutive one year (1) terms.

**Resolutions  
DEFEATED  
None**

**Resolutions  
TABLED  
None**