

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting
January 11, 2006 7:00 PM**

Board Members Present: Becky Baehr, Anyabwile Banko'le, Michelle Campbell, Christine Chisholm, Joana Davis-Diaz, Susan Gobreski, Sean Hennessy, Nicole Perkins Kilcullen, Rosina Miller, Laval Miller-Wilson, Lisa Nelson-Haynes

Board Members Absent: Ryan Boyer, Eric Cramer, Pam Prell, Ingrid Schafroth

Others Present: Jurate Krokys, CEO; Jerry Santilli, Santilli and Thomson; Ramzy Andrawos, Operations Manager; Richard Taggart, Teacher Representative; Kerri Tobin, Teacher Representative; Sheba Verma, Development Director; Megan Steelman, Administrative Assistant; Kelly Smith Espinoza, Luz Angela Bolivar Poveda, Jamel Henderson, Amy Leigh, Allison Wanaselja, Kristen Long, Anne Hall, Leslie Burton, and Andrea Soelter, ICS staff members; Kristin Nocco, Cara Carroccia, Stephanie Kindt, Cassandra Carponter, David Webber, Robin Kohles, Ellen Pannell, Rona Buchalter, Jim Zwolak, parents

I. Call to Order

President Susan Gobreski called the meeting to order at 7:11 pm. Susan circulated Statement of Financial Interests forms and asked each member to complete and return them to Megan as soon as possible; likewise, members were asked to return their meeting folders to Megan after each meeting---leaving in the folder any information they wish, taking with them items they want to keep at home or discard.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the last Board meeting were circulated. Rosina pointed out that a few minor changes had been made to the original minutes that were circulated earlier this week by e-mail; one was a typo and the other was that some additional information was added to the facility summary section. Sean motioned to accept the minutes. Nicole seconded. Unanimous to approve.

III. CEO Report

Since the CEO report was circulated earlier this week for the Board to review, Jurate mentioned just a few highlights:

- World Cultures- ICS will be hosting 15 Korean students for one week this winter; their goal is to learn more English. They will be mixed in among several middle school classes. ICS has registered its first exchange student, who will be in fifth grade at ICS through part of March; her parents are guests of the Annenberg School for Communication. ICS will also be hosting a student from the Plymouth Meeting School while his class is on a trip; he is fluent in Spanish. Also, over 100 students participated in yesterday's National Geography Bee; the winner was Bajaan French, a sixth grader. He took the written test this morning and it was sent to the Bee headquarters in Washington, D.C.

- Middle School Development- The Curriculum Committee held an organizational meeting this week and will be forging ahead with planning in this area.
- Teacher Development- On 1/16/06 all of our 3rd-7th grade teachers will be participating in GLOBE training. The size of the group is limited to 24, so the lower grade teachers' staff development focus that day will be on math and reading
- Enrollment and Attendance- Over the past few weeks, we've had an unexpected fluctuation in our enrollment. After the holidays, several parents transferred students for various reasons (moving out of state, school closer to home, etc). We also continue to have several available slots in our second grade Immersion classes; referrals are welcomed.
- Performance Tests- A summary of our Fall 2005 TerraNova test (when students took the same test as last Spring) results is included in the Board packet; as always, results can be affected by the students that make up the student body at the time of the testing. The 1st and 2nd graders were not tested in the Fall. The School District has not yet decided whether they will be tested in the Spring. The District's decision to switch the TerraNova tests from the Spring to the Fall was to avoid testing "fatigue," since the PSSAs take place in the Spring.

Susan requested that the approved professional development plan be circulated to the Board; Jurate agreed to do that. Susan asked if the Board will be receiving a report from Maestra Claudia in February (as requested at the December meeting), regarding reasons why students transitioned out of Immersion classes in the 2004-2005 school year. Jurate agreed to remind Claudia about this. Susan also asked whether Sheba had submitted a monthly development report that includes information about funds raised; Jurate said we don't have a report yet, but that we have been receiving checks in response to our fundraising appeal. Sheba will be reminded to complete that report for subsequent Board meetings.

IV. PTA Report

Cassandra reported that there was no January PTA meeting. The PTA is helping to subsidize the January 20th theatre outing for the 4th-7th grades to the "Afterschoolsical" at the Gershwin Y. The February 1st meeting will be a business meeting.

V. Teachers' Report

Kerri reported that the Target gift cards were a huge success with staff (Sean clarified that these were the holiday gift to staff). Other than input to be given later in the meeting, the only items raised by staff were a request for the Board to look at the current policy of not having an incentive for staff who use few sick days and a request to get the monthly Board meeting agenda a few days before the meeting. Susan reiterated her request that she and the teachers' representatives meet to discuss what everyone would like to see in the Teachers' Report section of the Board meetings.

VI. Committee Reports:

A. Curriculum

Christine reported that there has been no Curriculum Committee meeting since the last Board meeting. However, Christine and Committee member Cameron Voss (an ICS parent) have drafted homework policy surveys; there is one survey for teachers and one for parents. She also circulated an outline for planning the Middle School curriculum; each Board member on the committee has received a “study topic;” other Board members are welcome to join. She also mentioned that the committee is considering contracting with consultant Lana Gold.

B. Human Resources

Becky reported that the committee has not met since the December Board meeting; the next meeting will be this Friday morning. Board members are encouraged to attend. The current major topics of the committee are looking at health care benefit costs and long-term staffing plans.

C. Finance

Sean gave the floor to Jerry, who reviewed the financial sheet that ended 12/31/05. He stated that finances are fine at this point. He pointed out that the “Allocated Budget” column is the budgeted amount year-to-date, as opposed to the spent amount. He stated that most of the variances are due to timing issues, such as paying the health premiums ahead of time before the holidays. Christine asked for more details on line 2196 of the Treasurer Operations report. Jerry explained that we’re nearing the end of a 2-year technology grant and most if not all of that is in relation to spending that was in conjunction with that grant. He agreed to look into it to give more details at a later time.

Sean moved to accept the 12/31/05 report; Rosina seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Jerry then went through the “Multi-Year Budgeting Forecast” that was distributed at the meeting, which is a 5-year projection. Jerry and Jurate pointed out that the projection was done being very practical about attrition in the Immersion program. Further, staffing additions are projected based on standard requirements of the number of specialists needed, etc. No administrative staff additions are projected in this plan. Jerry reminded the Board that the current subsidy received is about \$8,000 per student; the school is paid by the number of days the students is enrolled at the school. The School District gives an initial allotment based on the projected enrollment and then reconciles with actual enrollment at the end of the school year. Jerry states we are building up a reserve in case something unforeseen occurs. He explained that the debt service amount we have is due to current renovation debt. He also cautioned that the development part of the budget is not included in the projection. Becky asked how the projection is made for benefits. Jerry stated that FICA automatically increases when salaries increase and that the projected increase in medical benefits is 5%. Jerry clarified that the projections are based on enrolling four kindergarten classes, but having

class size lowered in the upper grades. Nicole asked whether any of the “added” program is included in the projections. Jerry said it is not. Jerry pointed out that the last page of projections are building cost scenarios; he explained that getting a bond would be less expensive than a traditional loan. He estimates the bond rate would be about 6.5% for a 25-30 year bond. Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s look not only at the school’s finances, but also at a variety of other factors, such as student and staff retention, testing progress and whether the school would likely lose a significant number of students due to a move to a different location. He said ICS may want to look into the cost of an insurance policy on the debt. Rosina asked how long it takes to get a bond decision; Jerry stated it usually takes 45-60 days and clarified that it is not a political issue. Anyabwile asked whether any renovation costs are included in the rental projection; Jerry said they are not included. Sean pointed out that the debt service cost eventually goes away, but rent does not. Susan noted that if a rental agreement is for a big enough amount, most landlords do offer some funds towards renovations. Nicole clarified that in acquiring a building or renting, based on the budget projections, the program would remain the same without making any additions to the program. Laval asked whether all the charter school bonds have so far gone for “bricks and mortar” projects; Jerry replied that is the case.

D. Facility

Nicole reported that she, Susan and several members of the Facility Committee met with a large group of ICS staff one afternoon last week. The staff was given an overview of the Committee’s work to date and received a lot of feedback from the staff. She thanked the staff for their input, including the list of concerns and wishes that was e-mailed to the Board this week. After that meeting, architect/ICS parent Robin Kohles was asked to do new test fits on both Durham and Liberty Square to address some of the major staff concerns. Robin handed out the draft plans and gave an overview of each plan, which were based on the “reduced program” that was discussed at last month’s meeting. That includes 36 classrooms (4 per grade level).

The Durham test fit (with a small addition that would bring the building up to code) would include: 8 “extra” rooms for things such as art, a library, etc), a principal’s office and 12 additional offices, a cafeteria, a dance/gym room, a nurse’s office and one meeting room.

Assuming a \$10 million budget, the “reduced” plan “sort of” fits at Durham. The classrooms at Durham currently have movable partitions and very wide corridors. The basement is only 3 feet below grade, so it has good lighting. The average classroom size would be 700-750 sq ft. All classrooms seem to have operable windows. Robin clarified that the basic cost projections (including estimated building purchase cost) are: \$9.4 million for the basic plan, \$12.6 million to add a separate gym and another wing of classrooms, \$16.64 million to add a separate gym, another wing of classrooms and 4 more classrooms. Rosina asked if we can look at the renovation/construction costs without the purchase price. Robin said the projections would then be: \$5.4 million, \$8.69 million and \$10.46 million.

The Liberty Square test fit was configured to allay some of the concerns raised by staff about exiting in an emergency, children being stressed due to cramped space, allowing space for small group work, having operable windows and having space for a full grade to meet together. The premise is that ICS would rent most of the 1st floor, all of the second floor and a portion of the 3rd floor (there is a plan A & a plan B for what portion of the 3rd floor we might lease). It is unclear whether ICS would have the 1st floor cafeteria; if we didn't, the current cafeteria would be enlarged to include the kitchen and the art room and would be used as both a gym and a cafeteria. The columns would not be removed. A central fire stair would be added in the area that is the nurse's office. There would be a stairway to connect the 2nd and 3rd floors. Nicole interjected that all 36 classrooms would be on the perimeter and would have windows. Due to having space on three contiguous floors, there would be very little interaction with CHAD and, hopefully, there would help connect the lower and upper sections of ICS. The average classroom size would be about the same as now (about 650 sq ft). One issue that would need to be worked out would be whether we'd need to share bathrooms on the third floor. Also, we would need at least one staff bathroom on each floor.

Susan opened the floor for comments from the Board on both plans; comments included:

- Anyabwile: Is the Liberty Square plan based on our staying here a certain length of time? Nicole responded that the Liberty Square plan is a long-term lease plan and is not a plan for the next one or two years at our current location.
- Jurate: What is CHAD offering right now? Susan responded that they would be offering about 51,000 without the 1st floor cafeteria and about 54,000 with the cafeteria.
- Rosina: Why don't we ask CHAD for what we want, as opposed to waiting to hear what they are willing to offer?
- Susan: The Board needs time to debate the issue.
- Nicole: The "years" on the handouts may not be accurate due to the projected costs changing over the last few months.
- Laval: We may be able to restructure our debt over time.
- Sean: The diagram for Liberty Square was for 66,000; however, the building projections are for less space

Susan opened the floor for public comments and questions:

- Leslie: What is the timeline for renovations if we stay at the current location? Susan responded that the renovations being discussed are for the long-term plan and would be done over the summer before ICS would be in that newly renovated space.
- Amy: I'm concerned about the A & B plan and those classrooms that would be on the 3rd floor.
- Jim: Didn't one option at Durham include a renovated playground? Robin responded that we could do that, but it is not included in the plan being presented now.

- Jamel: Would there be enough money to do all the projected programs in the Northern Liberties location? Nicole responded that we haven't done the plans for that location yet.
- Anne: The staff has prepared a 5-minute presentation to summarize our concerns.

It was agreed that this was a good time for the presentation.

- Luz Angela opened the presentation in Spanish and Kelly translated, stating we need space to enhance the ICS mission and vision. We need for the children and staff to feel safe and stable.
- Leslie: Some positive points of our current location include being accessible to SEPTA, close to a park, having a clean, modern building. However, some of the staff concerns include: limited and in some cases awkward shaped spaces (i.e., pillars in some classrooms), lack of adequate storage space, having specialists such as the speech therapist have to work in crowded hallways, having no outdoor space we can call our own, and exiting safely during an emergency.
- Anne: We have a lot of volunteers at ICS and have the potential to get a lot more. However, volunteers voice their concerns about not having places to meet (i.e., Big Brothers/Big Sisters), so programs can't be expanded to their fullest.
- Amy: We need flexible space; we can't follow through on a lot of creative ideas, because of lack of space.
- Kristen: We need adequate space for big group events, such as last night's National Geographic Bee and theater productions.
- Kerri: Although there is a park nearby, it is not a secure space. We've witnessed men approaching 7th girls and today witnessed a person defecating. In the building, we've been made to feel unwelcome by CHAD and other tenants.
- Allison: We're concerned about cuts in staff.
- Anne: There are concerns about job security and benefits.
- Rona: Whatever we decide, let's make a decision and not linger on the issue. I fear prolonging the decision will drain too much energy from the Board, staff and parents.
- Jim: If ICS moves to the North American Street location, our family would probably leave the school.
- Ellen (speaking as a parent, not an architect): I feel a capital campaign would bring in more money that we can imagine. Buying a building would probably put us in a better capital campaign position.
- Stephanie: We need to have an ICS identity. I like it here, but I feel we need our own building. People need to identify more with the school. What's our goal when we're fundraising? I would be inclined to contribute more if there was a specific goal.
- Cara: ICS is a bright, happy place, but moving to the school to a school building would be my preference. Most successful schools have their own space.
- Kelly: Our kids and staff make our space the intimate way that it is. We'll create that wherever we go.
- Andrea: If we stay here, can we get windows that open? Susan responded that would be a negotiating point.

- Rona: I worry that a move to a larger space would “deaden” things.
- Sean G: This is a tiny space, and it’s incredible what we’re able to accomplish here. I’d like to see what our teachers could do with even more space.
- Kristin: We keep getting more information; we need to move forward. The Marion Anderson Recreation Center is about 3 blocks from Durham. Likewise, the Plays & Players Theatre is a few blocks away. We can build community partnerships in that part of center city.
- Kelly: I feel that the teachers are getting tired of long waits and the noise level of our current space.
- Cassandra: I think Northern Liberties will soon be part of the center city area.

Susan asked that each of the Board members have an opportunity to comment.

- Becky: Thanks to the staff for the presentation; it brought a lot things to the forefront. I didn’t understand that the stress level was so high and want to do whatever I can to relieve that. We need to take the time to make the right decision. I don’t think we should take the other choice just because we haven’t heard from CHAD yet.
- Joana: Thank you for the fabulous presentation from the architects. As a teacher, I could feel the teachers’ stress in the e-mail that was sent, listing their concerns. It seems like a no-brainer, that we should move to buy Durham and have the feeling of “our school.” Financially it doesn’t make sense to stay here.
- Laval: Debt service on a building you own makes a lot of sense. Starting on that soon, if you can find a good price, without over reaching. I’m concerned about the intangibles like salary increases, health benefits, and more support staff. I believe the identity of the school is in the curriculum, not in bricks and mortar. Any capital campaign should focus on our unique curriculum, not a building. Is there a chance that members of our Board could meet with members of CHAD’s Board?
- Lisa: I feel we need to move. This space was great to get us started, but we need to move on. If Durham doesn’t work fiscally, then we need to find a different space that will work.
- Christine: I think we should go to CHAD with the drawings of this location and say this is what we need. I’m concerned about the financial projections, worried that we’ll find ourselves in a situation where we can’t afford programs we want.
- Anyabwile: There is no long-term in this building; it’s not an adequate space. I don’t think we should stay here for another 5 years. The Board needs to make a decision. The 2007-2008 school year scares me; where will we be? (Robin and Ellen responded that we could not be moved into Durham until September 2008). Tie something down for 2 years and go full speed ahead with Durham. If that doesn’t work, look at the Northern Liberties space. It’s time to move.

- Rosina: Thank you teachers! We always want to know what you need. We're trying our hardest to make difficult decisions.
- Nicole: We have been getting there! We're all losing sleep. We want to make the best choice; we all agree that our current configuration of space stinks. Salaries and benefits in my mind are secure. Durham is the better option, but with the "reduced" program. But, we need a solid top purchase number; it's about getting the best program you can afford.
- Susan: Our program/curriculum and our vision are most important. I feel better about the financial situation to buy Durham. Job security is here. Look around and think about what is special about the things we've done to this space and take those ideas with us. I think we need to be respectful that some people really like this space. We need to value others in the community.
- Jurate: ICS Founders fought for this school through appeals. The amount of space at this location would probably work for a more traditional school, but people who come to ICS think "out of the box." We need more space to let the creativity flow. Without more space, it puts a stop on creativity. Dealing with a landlord is always going to be an issue, whether or not the landlord is a school. I urge a bold move. I am concerned that there will be 3 high school in the surrounding area---CHAD, Mastery and the new one in the Balch building. I want our school to have some control over its environment.
- Sean: At the last Board meeting, we resolved to give the Executive Committee to move on a letter of intent, let's move on that.
- Laval: After hearing these concerns and proposals, I feel that moving to Durham won't give us that much more space, but will be safer.
- Rosina: Now's the time for people to be clear if they feel we should try to stay at this location.
- Anyabwile: We need to be tactful; we don't want to burn our bridges.
- Michelle: no comments
- Laval: Please address the communication issue with CHAD.
- Jurate: Several administrative meetings have been held in regard to safety issues. CHAD does not expect its classroom teachers to be responsible outside of their classrooms, so there are often large groups of unsupervised students
- Susan: CHAD is not as responsive as we'd like, but I don't feel that's intentional.

E. Development

No report.

F. Community Relations

No report was given; a written report was included in the Board packet.

G. Discipline

No report.

H. Healthy Kids

No report.

I. Diversity

No report was given; a written report was included in the Board packet.

J. Policy

No report.

VII. Old Business

None

VIII. New Business

Susan noted that the April Board meeting is scheduled during Spring Break and on the first night of Passover; it was agreed that the meeting will be re-scheduled via e-mail.

IX. Executive Session

At 10:40 pm the Board went into Executive Session to discuss site-specific negotiations; all non-Board members were asked to leave the room.

X. Adjournment

The Board returned from Executive Session and Becky moved for adjournment; Anyabwile seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 11:01 pm.

Handouts circulated at this meeting:

Agenda

Minutes from December 2005 meeting

CEO report

Terranova Cohort Summary

Facility Committee report

Revised floor plan for Liberty Square

Revised floor plan for Durham

Facility Committee's "Preliminary Schedule based on Durham School" timeline

Facility Committee's "Priority Highlights" table

Staff "Wish" and "Problem" lists

Finance Committee minutes

Financial Operations Report (ending 12/31/05)

Multi-Year Budgeting Forecast

Committee on Diversity Report

Curriculum Committee Middle School Planning Outline

Statement of Financial Interests form

Resolution Updates for Board binders