

**Independence Charter School
Board of Trustees Meeting
November 8, 2006, 7:00 pm**

Board Members Present: Becky Baehr, Anyabwile Banko'le, Ryan Boyer, Michelle Campbell, Joana Davis-Diaz, Susan Gobreski, Sean Hennessy, Rosina Miller, Nicole Perkins Kilcullen, Pam Prell

Board Members Absent: Eric Cramer, Laval Miller-Wilson, Lisa Nelson-Haynes

Others Present: Sean Gallagher, Vice Principal; Jurate Krokys, Principal/CEO; Jerry Santilli, Santilli and Thomson; Ramzy Andrawos, Operations Manager; Megan Steelman, Administrative Assistant; Claudia Lee, Amy Leigh, Kristen Long, Yerodin Lucas, Tienne Martin, teachers; Rona Buchalter, Jody Graff, Tina Kluetmeier, Troy Kofroth, Fran Melmed, Cristina Vea, David Webber, parents; Joel Bradshaw, strategic planning consultant; Pat Barr-Harrison, immersion consultant; Anthony Bracali and Peter Kountz, CHAD

I. Call to Order

President Rosina Miller called the meeting to order at 7:12 pm.

II. Special Presentation on Immersion Education

Becky introduced Dr. Pat Barr-Harrison, who is a consultant and is the former Supervisor of Foreign Languages K-12, Prince George's County, Maryland, Public Schools. Dr. Barr-Harrison gave an overview of several different varieties of immersion programs. She circulated a packet of information to those in attendance. She explained that in the 1970's most immersion programs simply taught the curriculum in the new language, but that immersion models have changed a lot since then and there are many different models being modified all the time. There are currently over 285 immersion programs in the United States.

Dr. Barr-Harrison stressed that successful immersion programs have a focused vision and they stick to it. She stated that most research has not found student performance gaps based on students' economic backgrounds. She emphasized that it's crucial to have parent/guardian involvement in immersion programs. She noted that tutoring during or after school tends to work best for struggling immersion students. She added that if a school decides to become a total immersion program, the school needs a really good marketing strategy to make sure you reach missing groups of people.

When asked at what age or grade students should be given the choice of whether or not to be in the immersion program, Dr. Barr-Harrison replied that parents don't give a choice about taking other subjects. One suggestion she made was to find some good teen magazines from Spanish-speaking countries to help keep up the interest of the older students. Other projects such as pen pals can help students keep up with the acquired language. She also noted that planning for high school needs to begin several years before high school in order to help the students make a smooth transition and not lose their language skills.

When asked how to combat the myth that immersion programs are only for very bright students, Dr. Barr-Harrison replied that research has found that students who have language processing problems will have difficulty with another language; otherwise, her feeling is that an immersion program can suit any student. However, she stated that parents need to know what the program expectations are. When asked whether students needing special education

services can be best served in an immersion program, she responded that the special education services can be taught in Spanish.

Dr. Barr-Harrison stated that her preference is for the immersion language to be taught through social studies, as well as other subject areas. She recommends splitting the planning into three groups: K-3, 4-5 and 6-8. When asked whether she feels ICS is doing a disservice to students by only offering immersion K-8, she replied that there just needs to be good planning in regard to high school. She warned that some students who have gone through immersion programs in elementary school find the transition to traditional language classes difficult due to the teaching methods used (i.e., immersion students usually learn conjugating verbs through speaking as opposed to learning grammar rules about it).

When asked how she feels if ICS should move forward (i.e., keep two programs or reorganize into one), Dr. Barr-Harrison stated that she likes the idea of the FLES and Immersion programs, but feels the FLES content areas could be modified. She emphasized that gathering as much information as possible about what has and hasn't worked in other schools can be extremely useful in the planning process.

III. Budget Impact of School Size

Rosina asked Jerry to talk briefly about school size as it relates to the ICS budget. Jerry stated that in order to keep the types of specialist programs that ICS wants, the total school enrollment needs to be at about 600 students. He noted that a school usually needs one specialist teacher for every five classroom teachers. He also pointed out that school funding that ICS receives is actually based on an estimated class size of 32. In addition to that, charter schools receive only 80 cents on the dollar in school funding. Jerry stated that 23 seems to be a reasonable class size and that research seems to show that reducing a class from 23 to 20 doesn't make any major difference. A difference is felt if the size is reduced to 15-18. He also said that research indicates that if you need to have larger classes, it's better to keep the lower grades smaller and increase in the higher grades. Michelle asked what Jerry would recommend as the highest enrollment ICS should consider; Jerry stated 700 would be the highest.

Rosina asked Jerry to explain how in the budget projections for Durham we'd actually be able to have more money with a lower number of classes. Jerry stated that was due to class size being increased. Jurate asked whether there might be the possibility of finding benefactors to contribute funds in order to reduce class size; Jerry said that would be unlikely. Amy stated that if there was a group of teachers at this meeting, they'd probably all agree that smaller classes are better; however, she stated that the teachers would probably also agree that having larger classes in the upper grades is not a good idea. Kristen noted that even two more students in a class can mean a lot in terms of classroom management.

IV. CHAD Proposal

Rosina introduced Anthony Bracali, the President of the CHAD Board of Trustees, and Peter Kountz, the CHAD Head of School. Rosina explained that within the last few weeks, CHAD has approached ICS about the possibility of ICS becoming part owners in the building. Mr. Kountz and Mr. Bracali both acknowledged that the timing for this proposal is not good, but that CHAD's board felt that the plan should be considered.

Nicole clarified that ICS currently uses 44,000 square feet of space; the CHAD proposal is for approximately 61,000 square feet. Board members asked for

clarification on Landmark's current lease. Rosina replied that Landmark's lease goes to 2010; Peter Kountz added that CHAD wants to wait until after having further discussions with ICS before talking to Landmark about buying out the lease. He was also asked whether he anticipated any feelings of animosity by CHAD Board members or staff if ICS were to become a partner; he replied that the Board and staff have worked out their concerns and are ready to move forward. When asked whether CHAD would consider having ICS use the first floor "fishbowl" area instead of the basement space, Mr. Bracali stated that nothing is set in stone at this point. Nicole added that one of the ICS parents who is an architect has seen the basement space and feels it would be very difficult and expensive to renovate it. Nicole also clarified that the current proposal for Durham is to use 54,000 square feet and that Durham has the potential for the courtyard area and outside space. She noted that without the basement space that CHAD is proposing, the space available in our current location would be about 51,000 square feet. Mr. Bracali added that CHAD would be interested in aggressively pursue the building of a gym or a rooftop space to be used by both schools. CHAD representatives said they were uncertain whether they have any first floor windows that open. The CHAD representatives ended by saying CHAD is extremely interested in sitting down with ICS to discuss their proposal further.

V. Update from Board Workshop

Rosina reported that most of the Board members attended a Board workshop before tonight's meeting. At that workshop, consultant Joel Bradshaw shared his observations about how the ICS Board functions and his recommendations for changes. The Board will discuss his findings again at a later date. However, one item agreed on tonight was to try to run the meeting using some agreed upon ground rules. The ground rules are:

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. We make a point only once.
3. Set and respect time limits.
4. Encourage brevity (no folding forth).
5. Honor the process we agree to.
6. We have clear goals for our meetings (meaningful deliberation is one).
7. No side bar conversations.
8. We would like to hear from everyone.
9. Always assume positive intent.

After clarifying that these rules were established to try at tonight's meeting, Rosina asked whether anyone disagrees with any of these or if anyone has suggestions for additional ones. Everyone agreed to try these for tonight's meeting.

VI. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the October 11th Board meeting were circulated. Nicole noted that a few changes were made to the draft minutes that had been circulated via e-mail: clarification was made regarding punctuation. Becky motioned to accept the minutes as circulated tonight; Anyabwile seconded. The minutes were approved.

VII. CEO Report

Rosina asked Jurate to mention any additions to her written CEO report. Jurate noted that she is grateful to the group of ICS parents who are taking the lead in working on the calendar event at the end of November, as well as with working on boosting calendar sales, inside and outside of the school, this year. She also noted that we are adding a small section of Algebra this year for 10 eighth grade students who will be pulled out of their regular math class during Algebra.

VIII. PTA Report

Cristina reported that the PTA made good profits from the Cherrydale and photo sales. She stated that the PTA agreed to have a funding allotment per grade (pro-rated according to the total number of classes, etc) this year; funding requests need to be approved by Pr. Jurate and the PTA). She reported that there was a lively discussion on homework at the November meeting. The sense of the parents at the meeting was that for lower grades, it's helpful if the students get the week's homework assignments in the beginning of the week, so families can plan it into their schedules and that for older students, project-based assignments are requested. She added that the ideal situation would be individualized homework.

IX. Teachers' Report

Amy reported that there was an 8th grade parent meeting before this meeting. Several staff attended, but only four 8th grade parents attended. The committee will work on ways to get more parents involved. The 8th graders want to have many events to start 8th grade traditions at ICS (i.e., a dance, t-shirts with all 8th graders' names, a trip, etc). Ryan suggested finding out how much public schools are spending on 8th grade events to get an idea of costs. Cristina added that the 8th graders will be raising some money by providing child care at PTA meetings.

X. Committee Reports

A. Finance

Rosina asked Sean H. to explain the new process for review of ICS monthly financial information. Sean explained that the Finance Committee will first review the financial statements and then those financial statements will be presented at the next Board meeting. Therefore, to start this process, there were no financial statements reviewed at tonight's meeting.

B. Curriculum

Pam circulated meeting minutes before the meeting. No further report was given. Becky asked what was happening with the homework guidelines. Pam responded that teachers weren't at the PTA meeting, so the feedback given so far has been from parents at that meeting. More feedback is needed from the teachers.

C. Facility

Nicole reported that the committee has not met recently and that most of the work around the Durham project has been done through the Executive Committee. The zoning paperwork has been submitted and we anticipate having zoning approval by the closing date in March. The next phase of the project will be design. Nicole explained that in order to go to closing on the sale in March, we need to meet all bond requirements. So in order to not have to rush the design phase, the Executive Committee has decided to request a bridge loan for closing and then to get the bond once the design is completed.

D. Human Resources

Becky reported that the next meeting was scheduled for the same day as the retreat, so the meeting will be re-scheduled. The teacher pay scale is the major focus of the committee this year.

Becky moved resolution #1 regarding a teacher resignation; Nicole seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ryan moved resolution #2 regarding new hires; Nicole seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Anyabwile moved resolution #3; Becky seconded. Susan offered a friendly amendment, changing the term “FMLA” to “Leave,” since the employee is taking a leave of absence for the remainder of the school year and ICS is allowing her not to fulfill her contract. The amended motion passed unanimously.

E. Development

A written report was circulated before the meeting; no report was given at the meeting.

F. Community Relations

No report.

G. Discipline

No report.

H Healthy Kids

No report.

I. Diversity

No report.

J. Policy

Susan stated that this committee will soon start to meet again.

K. Legal

No report.

L. Executive

No report.

XI. Public Comment Period

Rosina opened the floor for a brief public comment period. Fran Melmed asked that Board please communicate its plan if the Board decides to take CHAD’s offer into consideration. Jody Graff requested that the Board communicate more regularly. She noted that she had no idea that the Durham closing date had changed. Nicole responded that the date was a recent change that was not communicated because it has no effect on the scheduled move-in date. Rosina acknowledged that the point regarding communication was taken.

XII. Old Business

None.

XIII. New Business

Rosina asked for input from the Board regarding the CHAD proposal; it was agreed to go around the table for comments. Ryan stated that he’ll support Jurate’s preference. Jurate noted that while the offer seems intriguing, she feels that for the future of ICS Durham is the better choice. Otherwise, we’ll be locked into the space. She added that she feels the Durham site is more kid-friendly and that although cost is a factor, it is not a vast difference in the long run. Sean H. passed on his turn to comment. Becky stated that the financial

savings means a lot, but that she hasn't yet been able to determine which the better option is. Pam stated that she's interested in how the numbers work out in regard to class size, since she realizes that we're making concessions with the Durham plan. Susan stated that she feels the cost difference is significant, since it's a matter of millions of dollars. She added that this is urban education and that she'd like to spend the money on teacher salary and teacher development. Nicole stated that it is hard to come to a decision. The CHAD proposal would save about \$300,000 per year. She added that while she is so invested in Durham, if the CHAD offer had come earlier, she would have leaned toward it. She finished by saying at this point, she feels we need to hear more from CHAD.

Anyabwile stated that he'd be very uncomfortable making a decision tonight and that we need to be clear about what we really want. Michelle passed on her turn to comment. Tienne stated that she feels teachers always want what is best for the kids and that there are so many factors involved that she just couldn't voice how the majority of teachers would feel. Amy added that there are so many fresh and new factors to weigh that some time needs to be given to deciding. Rosina clarified that some of these issues will be addressed at the retreat. She added that she proposes that a small group from the Board, plus Jurate, meet with CHAD representatives sometime soon. She also added that we will most likely be having another special Board meeting on November 21st where this can be discussed further. Ryan asked how much we would lose if the Durham plan doesn't go through. Nicole stated that we'd lose the \$150,000 deposit and whatever has already been paid for architects' costs, etc. Susan stated that she feels we should try to find the best possible deal. Michelle reminded everyone that we will not be negotiating anything with CHAD, only having discussions. Nicole stated that it's important for the Board to hear from the teachers. Rosina agreed to try to have a teachers' meeting before any final decision needs to be made.

Nicole added that one other item of new business is that Kevin McKenna called, noting that his bill is higher than to what was first agreed. Rosina recommended that this issue be given to the Executive and Finance Committees to discuss.

XIV. Adjournment

Susan moved that the meeting be adjourned; Pam seconded. Joel asked to be recognized; Rosina agreed. Joel reminded everyone to please be on time for the retreat and ready to start work at 9a.m. sharp on both days. The meeting was adjourned at 10:16p.m.

Handouts circulated at this meeting:

Agenda
Minutes from the October 2006 meeting
CEO report
Curriculum Committee minutes
Development Committee minutes
Immersion Presentation Packet
Homework Resource Sheet

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Resolutions

1. Teacher Resignation

Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees acknowledges the resignation of Allyson Rourke, grade 7/8 Math/Science teacher.

2. New Hires

Be it resolved that the following individuals be offered full time positions, as listed, for the 2006-2007 school year under the terms and conditions specified by the CEO and the ICS contract:

Maria Carrera Maestre, FLES

Lynn Eckerman, 7th Grade Math/Science

3. Leave Request

Be it resolved that the ICS Board of Trustees approve Krista Pfeiffer's request to take an unpaid leave of absence until June 30, 2007.