

**MINUTES**  
**Excel Academy Massachusetts Board Meeting**  
**Thursday, November 9, 2023 – 8:30-10am**  
**Location: Zoom**

**Board Members in Attendance:** Caitlin Brumme, David Stolow, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Nery Castro, Traci Griffith Walker, Steve Zrike

**Board Members Absent:** Devon Petersmeyer Johnson

**Staff Attending:** Owen Stearns, Andrew Solomon, Arthur Kaynor, Alejandra Gil, Aaron Stelson

**Members of the Public Attending:** Maher Colaylat

**1. Call to Order & Welcome**

Brumme called the meeting to order at 8:35 am and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes.

**2. Public Comment**

None

**3. Board Business**

Lytle motioned to approve the 9.22.23 meeting minutes, and Stolow seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Caitlin Brumme, David Stolow, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Nery Castro, Traci Griffith Walker, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

**4. Governance Updates**

Kaynor updated the Board on work to respond to feedback from DESE following the charter renewal process last spring. Brumme reminded the Board that we remain deeply focused this year on engagement on critical topics, including academic oversight, in addition to other Committee work. Kaynor summarized the status of the enclosed Action Plan in response to DESE's observations, which was provided to the Board in advance of the meeting. Many items on the plan are complete, although the work is ongoing. Evidence of the Board's efforts was submitted to DESE, and DESE responded positively that the evidence submitted indicates that the Board has taken concrete steps to address the concerns that were identified during the renewal process. DESE shared that they appreciate the Board's efforts and look forward to seeing further evidence of the board's efforts to oversee academic performance and engage in strategic and long-term continuous improvement planning when DESE conducts its next accountability visit at the school. Kaynor and Brumme thanked the members of the Boards and Committees for all of their work to achieve this result and re-emphasized that the work continues. The Board will be holding its first Governance & Nominating Committee meeting of the school year in December, along with the next Academic Oversight Committee meeting, and the Finance Committee is preparing for its second joint meeting with members of Excel's other Boards.

Kaynor also updated the Board on the status of the CMO agreement process. We are still awaiting feedback from DESE on the updated FY24-28 CMO agreement that was approved by the Board and submitted to DESE in June. Once DESE provides feedback and any required edits are incorporated, the anticipated process is that then DESE will grant provisional approval, after which point the agreement can be signed by both parties and resubmitted to DESE and the Commissioner as a formal amendment request for final approval. We are hopeful that we will hear back soon and be able to move forward with this process. For efficiency, we also intend to submit the amendment request to remove the Administrative Committee as a standing committee in the Board's by-laws as part of the same amendment request that will be submitted to finalize the CMO agreement approval process. We will keep the Board apprised of any developments.

Kaynor and Brumme also noted that the Dec. 15 meeting will need to be rescheduled to ensure quorum. Kaynor

will circulate a Doodle poll to find a new time when the Board can meet in December.

### **5. Annual Audit Review Update**

Stolow summarized the results of the annual audit review meeting and expressed gratitude and congratulations to Excel's Finance Team – in particular to Lina Tsankova, Karen Cuevas Torres, Aaron Stelson, and Andrew Solomon – for running such a successful audit. Stolow noted that the auditors commended the staff Excel's Finance Team for their exceptional work, particularly in a year when there was extra complexity to manage as Excel moved to its current multi-state structure and conducted separate audits of each of the three Excel entities, rather than the single consolidated audit approach that we have done in the past. Stolow also summarized the purpose of the annual audit review. One purpose is to report independently on the financial statements of the school and verify independently that Excel is a financially sound organization. Of course we do not wait to verify this fact only once per year; the Board reviews monthly financial statements to monitor the school's fiscal health in a more ongoing manner. However the audit provides independent verification for the Board. The audit also provides the Board with an independent view of the financial management system and controls that are in place and allows an outside party to report to the Board on this. The auditors provided extremely complementary feedback about our staff and the processes that they use. The result is that we can have very high confidence in the regular financial reporting that we receive from staff.

### **6. Talent Update**

Gil updated the Board on the priorities and efforts of the Talent Team and Talent Leaders across the Network. First Gil introduced the members of the Talent Team, how we define our Talent function, and who the key players are across the Network in this work – including Network Based Core Talent Staff, Network Owners of Talent Strategy, School Owners of Talent Strategy, and more than 35 Hiring Managers across the organization. Gil also presented summary staff recruitment and hiring metrics to the Board and answered clarifying questions about the data. Next, Gil summarized changes and challenges the talent function has experienced since last school year, including a shallower talent pool, more mid-year vacancies, and increased data needs. She also highlighted successes, such as success in meeting KPI goals in hiring and the overall, multi-year successful trend in shifting the diversity of Excel's staff from 84% White Non-Latinx and 16% BIPOC in '15-'16 to 51% BIPOC and 49% White Non-Latinx in '23-'24. Lastly, Gil shared an overview of the Talent Team's responses to challenges and then highlighted one area of success – the Talent Team has implemented 30-Day Conversations with new hires to better understand the positive and negative aspects of the new hire onboarding experience, which is helping both to improve the hiring and onboarding process and also to strengthen retention of new hires.

The Board discussed the possibility of forming a task force or other mechanism for Board members to support talent needs in their work. Brumme and Lytle would potentially be interested and may have experience from their work that could be useful. Gil and Solomon also summarized other ways for the Board to get involved directly in support of Talent objectives.

### **7. CEO/Fundraising Update & Team Builder**

Stearns and Brumme updated the Board on fundraising and network-building priorities. Excel has historically had a very strong external support network, including generous donors and also other key community members/leaders and other stakeholders. We would like to continue to invest in these relationships over the organization's next important stretch. Stearns summarized anticipated fundraising needs over the next 10 years. While some of the fundraising need is to support capital projects in Rhode Island, there is also a need in Massachusetts to restrengthen the school's annual giving program to support the school's ongoing needs in Massachusetts, given recent Board member transitions. While the school is self-sufficient on the public dollar, there is ongoing need to continue funding exceptional programming, primarily CAPS. Strengthening the school's annual fundraising capacity would also put the school in a more advantageous position with respect to potential capital needs, if the school were to decide to pursue expansion opportunities in the future. In addition to seeking

to build additional fundraising capacity, the Board is also looking to broaden the school's network in other ways, such as by making connections to prospective new Board members, staff, families, and community partners. We are in the process of planning school site visits and other events and opportunities to facilitate this work. The Board briefly discussed this topic and then agreed to revisit at the next meeting due to timing constraints. Brumme also reminded the Board about the upcoming Board site visit to Excel Academy Charter High School and Excel Academy Greenway on November 20, 2023.

### **8. Adjourn**

Brumme motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:04 am, and the motion was seconded by Lytle, and the meeting was adjourned unanimously.

#### List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 9.22.23
3. Updated Action Plan to respond to DESE charter renewal observations, including the Board's Strategic Plan that was approved at the September Board meeting for reference
4. Memo summarizing the school's FY23 financial performance and future outlook, along with associated FY23 financials
5. Excel Academy's FY23 audit reports, financial statements, and related files for all three entities