

MINUTES
Excel Academy Rhode Island Board Meeting
Thursday, December 14, 2023 – 5:30 pm
270 Elmwood Ave, North Providence, RI 02911

Board Members in Attendance: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Gary Goldberg

Board Members Absent: Mayor Maria Rivera, Chiv Heng, Mayor Charles Lombardi

Staff Attending: Owen Stearns, Andrew Solomon, Aaron Stelson, Chris Reed, Lina Tsankova, Arthur Kaynor

Members of the Public Attending: Nichole Reilly, John Buckley, Imani Blake, Brian Guzman

1. Call to Order

Smiley called the meeting to order at 5:33pm and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes of the meeting.

Stearns noted that Imani Blake, a prospective new Board member, is attending to observe the meeting today and will likely be nominated for a vote at the next Board meeting.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Board Business

Chhay moved to approve the minutes from 11.2.23, and Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Gary Goldberg

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

Chhay moved to approve the enclosed update to the Academic Oversight Committee/SIT membership, and Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously. Kaynor summarized that this update includes adding staff members who expressed interest in joining the Committee.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Gary Goldberg

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

4. FY23 Audit Presentation & Approval

Reilly presented the results of the FY23 financial audit, and the Board asked clarifying questions. The audit found no significant internal controls issues or adjustments and was a clean audit. Reilly commended 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.

Reilly presented the financial statements and assets and liabilities for Excel Academy RI and summarized the enclosed audit documents and findings that were provided to the Board in advance. Reilly noted a few additional highlights, and Solomon provided brief summary reflections of the organization's overall financial performance and future outlook. The Board discussed the need to prioritize working on how the Excel Academy Rhode Island model may need to look different than the Excel Academy Massachusetts model due to structural differences between the regions. This will be a continued topic of discussion in joint finance committee meetings between Excel's three Boards.

The Board agreed that they did not see a need to meet privately with auditors without management staff present. The Board had an opportunity to ask the auditors additional questions about the performance of each entity and staff. No concerns or issues were identified.

Chhay motioned to approve the FY23 audit and to accept the FY23 audit report and financial statements as presented for Excel Academy RI, and Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Chhnavy Chhay, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Gary Goldberg

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

5. State of the School Update

Stearns provided an update on the State of the School, including the following highlights:

- Academics & School Culture:
 - School culture continues to be in a strong place and was our top priority for the first half of the year. Key indicators are observations, attendance, and discipline data. Our average daily attendance is 94.5% (goal is 95%), chronic absenteeism is 18%, continuing to track towards our goal. Suspensions remain at 4%.
 - As we shift into the second half of the year, the focus will be on improving instruction and student academic outcomes. We will have data at our next Academic Committee meeting in January (including MAP, which students are just finishing). Teacher initial evaluations are also showing strong culture indicators and needed improvement on academic instruction. Stearns also noted that academic indicators often lag behind culture indicators during resets and turnarounds, so we anticipate that to be true in our January practice RICAS and MAP data.
- Leadership:
 - The school's leadership continues to be in a strong place.
- Staffing:
 - Having completed a few additional hires this winter, the school is fully staffed and in the process of conducting RIDE evaluations (which continue through the spring).
- Additional Updates:
 - First family conferences are being held this evening, and family investment and engagement continues to be high.
 - Sports have started at the school, which has been a student highlight, including more than 50 students (out of <200) trying out for cheerleading and having our first-ever basketball team.

The Board discussed efforts at the school to dig into academic performance and will revisit the topic in more detail at future Academic Committee meetings. Giordano noted that it was very helpful to hear from the Head of School directly at the Board and Academic Committee meeting in November and asked for an update on student recruitment. The school so far has 66 applicants and is targeting 260, with several active months of recruitment remaining before the lottery.

6. Team Builder & Fundraising Update

Stearns updated the Board on fundraising and highlighted key priorities and areas of focus, including revitalizing Excel's visitor program, strengthening the annual fund program in MA, building an annual fund program in RI, and capital/growth needs. Additionally, we are seeking to broaden the Excel network in other ways and looking to the Board for assistance making connections to prospective new donors, Board members, hires, families, and community leaders. Stearns facilitated a teambuilding exercise about how Board members were first introduced to Excel.

Stearns asked each member of the Board to take 5-10 minutes and send a list of 3-10 potential connections to Stearns and Kaynor for follow-up. This is the start of an effort that we will continue discussing in future meetings.

7. Update on Real Estate Search & Vote on Enrollment

Reed provided updates on the Rhode Island real estate search and reviewed the current landscape of options and prospects, as well as the latest timeline and milestones related to enrollment planning and facility decisions, as outlined in slides that were provided to the Board.

Reed updated the Board on a re-zoning ordinance vote of the North Providence City Council that makes it possible to install modular units at the 622 Woonasquatucket Ave. campus in North Providence, so that the school can continue its enrollment plan. The Board expressed gratitude to Mayor Lombardi, the North Providence City Council, and the real estate team for their work to make this possible for the school, and for the benefit of Excel Academy Rhode Island's students and families.

The Board expects to update its lease for the 622 Woon. property to reflect the addition of the modular units. The Treasurer will negotiate this lease update with the Friends Board in early 2024. It will continue to be aligned to the charitable nature of the existing lease agreement. Solomon will coordinate with the Treasurers of both Boards in 2024 to complete this lease update.

8. Adjourn

Having completed the Board's business, Cariaga-Lo motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Giordano seconded, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:35pm.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 11.2.23 Board Meeting
3. Resume and Bio for prospective new Board member
4. FY23 Audit Documents and Financial Statements
5. Real Estate Search Update slides