

MINUTES
Excel Academy Massachusetts Board Meeting
Friday, June 16, 2023 – 8:30-11am
Location: Zoom

Board Members in Attendance: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Board Members Absent: Nery Castro

Staff Attending: Owen Stearns, Andrew Solomon, Arthur Kaynor, Nina Keough, Ferny Reyes

Members of the Public Attending: Caitlin Brumme

1. Call to Order & Welcome

Howe called the meeting to order at 8:33 am and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes. Howe provided opening comments about his tenure with the Board and his hopes for the Board's continued success.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Board Candidate Introduction & Vote

Klein updated the Board on efforts to recruit new members and recruitment priorities for the Board. The Board is preparing for upcoming transitions as some members approach term limits. The Board is seeking prospective candidates with strong ties to the community as well as a background in education. Klein introduced a prospective new Board member, Caitlin Brumme, who previously served on the Board for many years. The Board asked questions and learned about Brumme's background in the community, business experience, and interest in rejoining the Board.

Howe motioned to approve adding Brumme to the Board, and Ottmer seconded, and the motion was approved.

All those in favor: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

4. Board Business - Approval of Slate of Votes

Howe motioned to approve the following votes as a combined slate, and Lytle seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

Slate of votes approved:

4a. Approval of 5.5.23 Meeting Minutes

4b. Approval of FY24 Board Meeting Calendar (meetings are 8:30-10am via Zoom unless noted otherwise)

- 9/22/23
- 11/9/23
- 12/15/23
- 2/2/24
- 3/15/24

- 5/3/24
- 6/14/24

4c. Approval of new Board member terms, beginning on July 1, 2023

2nd 3-year term (2023-2026):

- Bernabe Rodriguez
- David Stolow
- Nery Castro

3rd 3-year term (2023-2026):

- Devon Petersmeyer Johnson

4d. Approval of Officers for FY24

- Chair: Caitlin Brumme
- Vice Chair: Bernabe Rodriguez
- Treasurer: David Stolow
- Clerk: Nery Castro

5. Academic Update & Annual Report

Kaynor and Stearns provided an update to the Board on the enclosed Action Plan to respond to constructive feedback from DESE that was provided as part of the charter renewal process.

The Academic Committee and Network Academic Team presented on their efforts to-date to respond to this feedback. Keough introduced the Board to Ferny Reyes, Network Director of Data & Assessment, and Reyes and Keough updated the Board on the role that Reyes has been playing to help to develop a more effective and predictable cadence of reporting and reviewing critical academic data with the Board throughout the school year – aligned to when that data is expected to become available.

Keough provided a summary of the Academic Team update slides that were presented to the Board in advance of the meeting (enclosed for reference, along with Academic Committee meeting minutes), which included the School’s approach to thinking about academic outcomes pre- and post-COVID, bright spots in the school year as well as challenges, and the School’s strategies to continue to improve student outcomes moving forward. The School and kids were significantly impacted by COVID, and we are continuing to see that impact. We are also seeing this impact with our entering 5th graders and the loss of learning that occurred before they started at Excel. The School has also made progress and growth from the past low point in student performance. The School is in its first year of MAP implementation as a predictive tool and also in its first year of new, standards-aligned curriculum implementation across the middle school campuses. It is expected to take longer than one year to start to see student growth as a direct result of the new curriculum implementation, as it will take time for students and teachers to adapt, but the early signs are encouraging. The curriculum adoption has been embraced by the team.

Some other notable updates:

- The School is observing strength in our 5th grade classes as indicated by results of the student survey and also early ELA test results, which show strong growth.
- The School has experienced no major disruptions to school culture, despite two new Heads of School and also one Head of School parental leave this year.
- The Network Academic Team’s capacity has been stretched this year due to challenges with the launch of a new school in Rhode Island.
- The School has experienced great loss this year, with the passing of a student, an alum, and a High School Dean.

As the School looks ahead to next year, the following are some areas of focus:

- The School is not implementing many new initiatives next year, given that the School has just worked through many new implementations and changes for the last couple years, and is now wanting to dig into and refine what has already been started.
- We are making some important structural investments to improve the Team's capacity moving forward, including hiring Stephanie Patton as Deputy Chief Schools Officer. Patton was the founding Head of School at Excel Academy Chelsea and then the Senior Director of the BES fellowship before returning to Excel, where she will now manage Excel's Middle School Heads of School.
- The All Means All initiative is being implemented, to grow leadership capacity across schools and the Network to better serve all students.

Zrike, Chair of the Board's Academic Committee, provided a more detailed overview of the new and improved Academic Committee structure that is being implemented for SY23-24. Zrike also shared his agreement with the Network Academic Team's perspective on standard curriculum implementation and the timeframe to start to see results and emphasize that this is the right decision for the School, in order to establish more stability and consistency year-to-year and campus-to-campus. Zrike has also witnessed similar impacts from COVID in his work in other public school districts in MA and is particularly focused on understanding and problem-solving chronic absenteeism, which is a new challenge for Excel Academy and needs to be monitored very closely. Zrike emphasized the importance of reviewing results of interim assessments both as indicators, and also more importantly to monitor growth trends. Zrike would also like to monitor Excel's growth relative to district schools and other peer charters in MA. Putting high quality instructional materials and teaching practices in front of students who are present is the greatest lever for success. The students of today are also more attuned than ever before to questions of relevancy in their academic instruction.

The Board discussed the need to engage deeply with academics in the coming years, particularly as the School continues recovery from COVID and also considers the possibility of future expansion. The Board also discussed potential risks with the increasingly challenging talent market to recruit and hire excellent teachers. Keough noted that talent has also been a new challenge for Excel post-pandemic, due to the influx of relatively new and junior teaching staff, which is pushing the need for even greater, more explicit guidelines for staff about Excel's model for high quality leadership and instruction.

Sachs, in reviewing the Middle School MCAS data on pg. 4 of the enclosed materials, asked to understand the results in more detail, with a dip in performance in Math results relative to charter peers, while ELA results appeared to remain fairly consistent relative to benchmarks and peers. The Board discussed that talent has contributed to the decline in Math performance due to challenges recruiting excellent and experienced Math teachers for Middle School grades in particular, and the Board also discussed that the new Math curriculum is an important move to try to boost performance in this area. This data was a big driver in the curriculum decision. The Board also noted the importance of analyzing data in cohorts, given the widely variations the School observes year-to-year in the starting point for each 5th grade class once they get to Excel.

The Board also discussed that it would like to learn more from the Academic Committee work in Rhode Island and noted that the Board's new Academic Committee structure in MA was designed in part based on learnings from establishing a similar Academic Committee structure in RI.

6. Votes on updated 2023-2028 Accountability Plan & FY23 Annual Report Votes

Kaynor and Reyes provided a summary of the proposed update to the 23-28 Accountability Plan and an update on the FY23 Annual Report. As the School begins its next charter term, the school reflected on updates to include more specific goals related to college and post-secondary success, internal assessments, and using MAP testing to measure growth. The Network Academic Team completed four rounds of review and edits with DESE and

received provisional approval on the updated plan. The Team has also prepared a draft of the FY23 Annual Report, which is expected to be ready for submission by the deadline in August, pending some additional data that needs to be incorporated in July.

Howe motioned to authorize the Chair to submit a minor amendment request to DESE to update the School's 2023-2028 Accountability plan, which was provisionally approved by DESE on 5.30.23, and to authorize the Chair to submit the FY23 Annual Report once finalized, and Lytle seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

7. Approval of FY24 Budget

Solomon presented the FY24 budget (see enclosed materials), as reviewed previously by the Finance Committee and as detailed in the FY24 Budget Memo that was sent to the Board in May and is enclosed with the Board meeting packet. The Board asked clarifying questions about the budget, which Solomon answered. The Board expressed a desire to explore joint Finance Committee meetings with the Friends of Excel Academy Board next year and to seek more regular opportunities to work in very close partnership with their colleagues on the Friends Board, given the integrated and deeply interconnected nature of the organizations' finances.

Howe motioned to approve to the FY24, and Lytle seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

8. Approval of FY24-28 CMO Agreement

Kaynor updated the Board on the process to develop an updated FY24-28 CMO Agreement to align to the School's next five-year charter term and the Finance Committee's rigorous review of the proposed five-year CMO fee schedule. Kaynor answered questions about the final draft of the FY24-28 CMO Agreement which was provided to the Board in advance for review.

Lytle motioned to approve the FY24-28 CMO agreement & authorize the Chair to make technical changes if required by DESE prior to signing, and Howe seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: David Stolow, Matt Ottmer, Pam Klein, Bernabe Rodriguez, Ben Howe, Dave Sachs, Rob Lytle, Devon Petersmeyer Johnson, Steve Zrike

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

9. Discussion of Chelsea Opportunity

Stearns updated the Board on progress exploring the potential for a K-4 expansion in Chelsea, MA and reviewed next steps to continue exploring this opportunity. The Finance Committee will work with the Network Finance

Team to assess financial modeling and potential tradeoffs. The Board would also like to be updated on staff capacity and staff feedback on pros and cons of the proposed expansion. The Board also expressed a desire to see additional evidence of community support for the proposal, before making a decision to proceed.

10. Adjourn

Howe moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:11 am, seconded by Ottmer, and the meeting was adjourned.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 5.5.23
3. Bio for prospective new member
4. Proposed FY24 Board Meeting Calendar
5. Proposed FY24 Officers and updated Board member terms
6. Report from the Academic Committee and Network Academic Team
7. Action Plan to respond to DESE feedback during charter renewal process
8. Updated 2023-2028 Accountability Plan and draft FY23 Annual Report
9. FY24 Budget and FY24 Budget Memo
10. FY24-28 CMO Agreement