

MINUTES
Excel Academy Rhode Island Board Meeting
Thursday, September 14, 2023 – 5:30 pm
622 Woonasquatucket Ave, North Providence, RI 02911

Board Members in Attendance: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng

Board Members Absent: Gary Goldberg, Mayor Charles Lombardi

Staff Attending: Owen Stearns, Andrew Solomon, Arthur Kaynor, Chris Reed

Members of the Public Attending: N/A

1. Call to Order

Smiley called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm and presided over the meeting. Kaynor kept the minutes of the meeting.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Team Builder

Stearns facilitated a team-building activity with the Board.

4. Board Business

Cariaga-Lo moved to approve the minutes from 6.27.23, and Chhay seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

5. State of the School Update

Stearns provided the Board with an update on the state of the school. The school year is off to a strong start, with momentum from last spring carrying through into the fall. We are seeing the deep work that staff did to improve systems, values, and expectations pay off. Classrooms are calm and safe, and there is consistency across classrooms. Staff are working towards specific 8-Week Win goals, with support, coaching, and classroom from the Academic Team. Currently the school is in Week 2 of observations. The new Head of School and her leadership team are off to a great start this year. Professional development has been well planned and executed. The school culture team is aligned and establishing strong systems to support school culture. With respect to staffing, most open positions are filled, and the unfilled positions are non-essential, though they would be very helpful to have, especially to boost capacity and to plan for parental leaves and other needs. The school experienced 14% student attrition last year, meaning 101 of 118 students returned this year. Typically we would expect to see attrition closer to a range of 7-10%, although higher rates can be more common at grade break years between elementary, middle, and high school. Given challenges of last school year, this rate of retention is encouraging, although lower than what the Board would like to see in the future. The school is currently fully enrolled. The Board discussed potential reasons for attrition. Among other possible factors, the school's current location in North Providence may be difficult for some families, the majority of whom live in Providence.

6. Real Estate Planning Updates & Votes

Reed updated the Board on the real estate search. The Board reviewed and discussed the current status of real estate prospects, including a mix of permanent and temporary potential options. The Board also reviewed short-term and long-term real estate capacity needs relative to its enrollment growth plan and discussed several potential scenarios for how the real estate search may inform short-term decisions about enrollment. The real estate search team expects to know much more about the likelihood of several of these options over the next 4-6 weeks. The Board will need to confirm which grades XLRI will enroll in SY24-25, prior to the launch of the EnrollRI application in November, and the status of the real estate search at that point will inform what is realistic for the school's enrollment plan and in the best interest of the school.

Over the next couple months, it may become necessary for the Board to move quickly to make decisions about short-term space needs. The Board discussed delegating approval authority to the Treasurer, or otherwise to the Chair if the Treasurer is not available, to make such decisions if needed.

Chhay motioned to authorize the Treasurer – or the Chair if the Treasurer is not available – to work with management staff to make decisions regarding short-term space needs for the school for a dollar amount not to exceed the current fiscal year's budget. Rivera seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously approved.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

Solomon updated the Board on the status of the existing Promissory Note between XLRI and Friends of Excel and the need to extend the maturity date, currently set at Dec. 31, 2023. A draft update to the Promissory Note was provided to the Board in advance of the meeting.

Rivera motioned to approve authorizing the Treasurer – of the Chair if the Treasurer is not available – to update the Promissory Note to extend the maturity date to June 30, 2024, and Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

The Board discussed political, zoning, and environmental considerations and the timeline and cost for due diligence on a potential long-term real estate prospect (the 1 Baker Street property). A \$250k deposit will be needed, along with an estimated \$250k to fund due diligence and design costs. Reed outlined the following expected timeline for the process and deposit:

- September 18: Make refundable deposit for \$250K
- December 1: Complete environmental diligence; \$100K deposit becomes non-refundable.
- January 1: Total of \$150K becomes non-refundable
- February 1: Total of \$200K becomes non-refundable

- March 1: Target to complete re-zoning; total of \$250K becomes non-refundable
- September 2024: Deadline to submit Stage 2 SBA application to RIDE
- December 2024: SBA Approval
- January 2025: Start Construction
- Summer 2026: School Opens

Heng motioned to approve a due diligence budget for the 1 Baker Street property of up to \$250k and the additional \$250k deposit, refundable along the schedule as noted, and to authorize the Treasurer – or the Chair if the Treasurer is not available – to establish a new 0% interest promissory note with Friends of Excel to make these funds available to XLRI. Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

7. Approve Board Goals & Confirm Committee Assignments

Kaynor and Stearns reviewed draft SY23-24 Board Goals and Committee assignments with the Board, and the Board discussed ongoing priorities around Board recruitment to support these goals and Committee needs.

Giordano motion to approve the SY23-24 Board Goals and Committee assignments as presented, and Cariaga-Lo seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

All those in favor: Mayor Brett Smiley, Channavy Chhay, Mayor Maria Rivera, Liz Giordano, Dr. Liza Cariaga-Lo, Chiv Heng

Opposed: None

Abstain: None

8. Adjourn

Having completed the Board's business, Rivera motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Giordano seconded, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 6:42pm.

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from 6.27.23 Board Meeting
3. Draft update to Promissory Note
4. Real Estate Search Update Slides
5. Draft SY23-24 Board Goals
6. Summary of SY23-24 committee assignments