

SOAR Charter School Board Meeting

Date, Time and Place: May 13th, 2016, 4800 Telluride St. BLDG 1, Denver, CO 80249

Attendance of Board Members:

Present: Sue Sava, Shelli Brown, William Weintraub, Rona Wilensky,
Claudia Gutierrez, Ellin Keene, Dan Smink
Ethan Hemming (by phone for an hour, then in person)

Present by phone: Ethan Hemming (for an hour)

Recused: Laurie Godwin

Absent: Rosann Ward

Staff absent: Lacey Martinez

Quorum? Yes

Also in attendance: Marc Waxman, Sonia Sisneros, Brad Fischer, Kelly Moulton

Members of the public in attendance: n/a

Meeting brought to order – Rona moved, Bill seconded 8:49 AM

Agenda:

8:45-8:50 Public Comment – N/A

8:45-9:00 Consent Agenda – correction to the minutes regarding the DPS rating. Minutes were corrected prior to the meeting, but the updated version did not make it into the Board packet.

Monthly dashboard- No discussion.

Monthly financials – Comment from Sue: It seems like the COLA for the teachers is low at a 1% increase for them. Brad explained that we decided to tie it to PPR. It's been all over the board in the past, not consistent. This is a way to even out the projections, teachers don't actually get COLA. We have graduated "steps". We are actually on the high end of the charter pay scale. Sue asked Sonia and Brad to keep their eye on the scale because we don't want to lose people for having low compensation. Sue asked that as Sonia gets comparison information from the community and other charters, that she share it with the Board.

Rona also suggested making the general salary comparison information known to staff so they know where we are in comparison to other schools and networks. Marc isn't sure how beneficial it would be to be more public because salary, in general, is often not the deciding factor for a teacher leaving or staying. He didn't say "no", but he asked the Board to think about the impact. He suggested having a more "holistic" conversation about the benefits of working and staying at Soar, but not necessarily focusing solely on salary.

Also are we building in depreciation for furniture, etc.? We do have a budget for having to add new things to the building, like computers (expense and replacement).

Approval of Consent agenda: Shelli moved, Bill second. 9:02 AM.

9:02 Board pipeline

- There is a sense of urgency around recruitment of new Board members. Two individuals recently courted by Rona have not worked out. The urgency is due to Rosann and Ellin being termed. Shelli is stepping down, per her indication last year in August. Rosann has agreed to extend her term for the sake of legality to ensure that we have enough Board members. We are not sure about Ellin's ability to extend her term. Ethan has also resigned due to a new CEO position at Warren Village, which is effective after today's Board meeting. We are losing educators, parent/community/ finance person.
- Discussion took place about who to recruit and how. Ideally, 4 Board members are needed. We'd like to have solid commitments before the next Board meeting in June.
- Rona suggested Dave Fulton as a possibility as he is philosophically aligned with Soar's mission and vision. She also mentioned Jerry Osei-Tutu (parent who has served on the search committee). Also suggested was Charles Elbot, who has done a lot in Aurora Public Schools. He wasn't interested in the Interim Head of Schools position, but might be interested in Board work. He is also coaching principals in Denver Public Schools.
- Conversation around if we invite a parent, we need to be sure that they will get the vote so as not to damage relationships.
- Sonia will reach out to parent Jerry Osei-Tutu, Rona and Shelli will meet with him.
- Sonia also has another idea- Tykus Holloway who is a community resident, works for the mayor's office, and is a graduate from Montbello High School.
- Marc also suggested reaching out to the Mount Saint Vincent people either for ideas or to sit on the Board.
- We left the discussion with 5-6 options, all Board members will help meet with individuals so that we can get this done by June meeting.
- Marc's email will close June 30th. Between now and then, he will have an "away" message with Lori's contact information.
- Sue will send out email to staff with Lori's bio and welcome message.

9:20 – In order to extend Rosann's (and maybe Ellin's) terms, the By Laws must be changed.

Sue suggested two amendments:

- IIIf will be amended to say "A Director's term of office may be extended, beyond that for which the Director was elected, by amendment of the school's Bylaws or other Board action."
- XII "A majority of the Directors may adopt, amend or repeal these Bylaws subject to approval by amendment to school's ByLaws or other Board action."

Motion to approve: Bill moved, Ellin seconded. 9:23 am.

Sonia will send this updated information to Maya Laguna, Office of School Reform and Innovation at DPS. We must inform them when changes are made to the school's By Laws.

9:25 Finance Committee

Two big changes are coming: 1. Tabor is coming back. DPS will send us the Tabor reserves they have been holding since our inception. Why? They just don't want to hold the reserves anymore. 2. We will now get paid 25% in July, October, December, and April (as opposed to just 3 times in the year).

Vote – new signers for financial pieces. Marc is currently the only signer in the school and he leaves June 10th. There was a proposal to add Sonia and new Interim Head of Schools as signers.

Sue moved, Bill seconded, 9:31 AM.

A vote took place on the overall new revised budget, which will include new paras and a new interventionist for 3rd grade. Ellin moved, Bill seconded. 9:33 AM.

Update on Mill Levy from Shelli – The next full CPAC committee meeting will be on May 23rd, during which time recommendations from all subcommittees will be shared and moved forward to the DPS Board. The Mill Levy Subcommittee (on which Shelli sits) voted to recommend the following “big buckets” be funded with mill levy dollars based on several presentations and extensive debate on the specifics regarding money allocation: Invest Early: Early Literacy Support; Ready for College and Career; Classroom Technology; Great Teachers; Support for the Whole Child; Great Learning Environments; and Transportation. Nothing is written in stone until the DPS Board votes to move these requests to the voters. The DPS Board vote will take place in June and if they vote in the affirmative, it will go to the city of Denver voters in November.

Additional: Brad will be Sonia's financial coach beginning next school year.

9:50- Director's Report

State of the School – Marc feels like he has “fixed the problem” he created that began with the opening of Soar at Oakland when resources were stretched. He indicated that the charter has been renewed, teacher retention is much better, school population is stable, administrative capacity is positive with Sonia and Jess; and innovation is continuous (Mount Saint Vincent). His statements are not to be taken as a pat on the back, but he feels good about where and how he is leaving the school.

Staffing update – There is one current vacancy. There have been recent hires for Stanley interns and interventionists. The paras that have worked in Amanda's classroom have gone on to be teachers. Olga, a fifth grade teacher, will also move out of the classroom to provide teacher academic support. These are examples of growing leadership and building capacity. Staffing is good.

FY16 SPF process- DPS Board is approving a school performance compact. The DPS Board has been working to improve their process for dealing with failing or struggling schools and working to become more transparent. Because of this new process of dealing with SPF RED schools they have outlined, Soar is on the list to be evaluated (despite just having our charter renewed).

Three criteria for bringing attention to a school and considering it for closure or restart: A. if it is ranked in the lowest 5% (by SPF) in comparison to all schools. B. if there has been 50% or fewer growth points earned in the school year (Soar has struggled in this area in the past – we won't know about our growth scores until our PARCC scores are released in August). C if the site visit, based on an evaluation rubric, shows concerning scores.

If schools meet all three of these, they will be considered for restart or closure. The worst case scenario for Soar is that Part C will happen in the fall and will include staff and families that have been here for a while and feel positive about the school.

Other district run schools that are on the evaluation list are conducting school meetings now to inform their school communities of their status. Charters have been given the option of not holding meetings. Marc suggested not, because we will likely not even meet the first tier criteria and the meeting could be misleading to the school community.

Health and wellness – Soar is farther along than most schools in this area, but it is a core element that we have not put as much into recently in comparison to the past. Should the Board be thinking about new/innovative things to continuously address health and wellness? We would need a steward to take this on. A lot of things are already institutionalized, but we may need newer things.

Question from Ellin regarding work done in the classroom vs out of classroom work and interventions. Ex: gifted and talented work, etc. How do we think about the staff that provides the support? Interventionist or consultants? Sonia said we do have some good talent on our intervention team. We are doing some things to further develop that talent and skill. Marc indicated that going into next year, we will have the most experienced intervention team ever. There was further conversation around supporting both struggling and gifted and talented students.

10:18 FY17 Board calendar – vote to approve. Shelli moved, Ethan seconded. 10:19 AM.

- Note that we added a June 2016 meeting this year. A June meeting is not on the calendar for next year.
- Someone needs to send the Board calendar out to the Board – maybe in a calendar invite.

Additional items:

- Staff appreciation will take place on July 25th, which was actually scheduled to be a professional development day. We have reserved space at the Boettcher Mansion. Board members were encouraged to participate.
- Soar purchased Tattered Cover gift cards for the teachers that have served on the Search Committee as a thank you.

Motion to adjourn public meeting. Ethan moved, Ellin seconded. 10:22 AM

Note:

- Laurie Godwin was absent from today's meeting and has recused herself from further discussion about the Interim Head of Schools search and interviews due to her recent application to fill that position.
- Sue Sava has recused herself from the upcoming Interim Head of Schools interviews because of her personal relationship with one of the candidates – a conflict of interest.

11:00-3:00 Executive session: Interim Head of School Interviews

Ellin will audio tape entire executive sessions and keep for 90 days as is required