

**Boston Renaissance Charter Public School**

**Board of Trustees  
Minutes**

**Wednesday, January 6, 2010**

In attendance:

K. Saxon, G. Martin, E. Carrasco, C. Corbe, K. Vander Laan, H. Raymond, L. Bligen, R. Harris, D. Mulhern, K. leong

Absent:

A. Pless, N. Hays\*, E. Washington\*

Guests:

J. Nescos, A. Buckmire, C. Engerman, K. Cherry, E. Lee-Jones, J. Xu, K. Tisa (Mass. DEP), C. Pyottt (US EPA), J. Wadsworth (Brown Rudnick), A. Donovan

Chaired by:

K. Saxon

**Approval of November 18, 2009 minutes**

K. leong moved to approve the minutes of the November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 meeting of the Board of Trustees, with clarification of the Superintendent's report regarding the grades to which Chinese language and culture instruction is now being offered (K1 and K2 only). K. Saxon seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

**Public comment**

None presented

**Committee updates**

**Building committee:**

Trustees were presented with a timeline of events regarding the discovery of PCB contamination at the site of the new campus, located at 1415 Hyde Park Ave., in Hyde Park. A. Donovan detailed that PCBs were found in late August of 2009 in an approximately 61,000 sq. ft. area in the northwest corner of the site where the parking lot and a portion of the K1 and K2 play areas are will be located.

At that time, Mass. DEP and U.S. EPA were notified and a plan for extensive testing was implemented. The soil was tested in a grid pattern down to a depth of 4 to 6-7 feet to define the contaminated area. The method of disposal of contaminated soil is dependent upon PCB concentration.

A RAMP (Relocation and Abatement Measure Plan) plan was submitted to the Mass. DEP. A self-implemented clean-up plan was also submitted to the U.S. EPA, which describes the methodology of segregation and removal of contaminated material. Removal began in earnest after January 1, 2010. About 10,000 cubic yards of soil needed to be removed, a process estimated to continue through February. The contaminated soil is being taken to Michigan and New York by truck and by rail. After removal, a physical barrier will be put in place to separate the 3-7 feet of clean, new soil from what lies below.

After the clean-up has been completed, a report will be made to Mass. DEP and U.S. EPA. Remediation will be made to a threshold of an average of PCB concentration of 10ppm. This level meets Federal and State standards and constitutes "clean to level of no-risk", but will still result in the issuance of a Deed Notice/Activity and Use Limitation (AUL). This document will ensure that there is full public record and disclosure of the presence and location of PCB contamination and details what future activities are allowable and under which specific conditions. Remediation to 2ppm will obviate the need for an AUL, but at significant extra cost.

It was noted that no contamination was found in the soil beneath the newly constructed buildings at the new campus. Out of an abundance of caution, however, a system of pipes were installed beneath the building to collect any vapors that may arise from the soil and release them into the air above the building. The purpose of the system is to protect indoor air quality. Indoor air will be tested, the exhaust from the vapor collection system will not.

A public outreach campaign will be conducted to educate members of the Hyde Park and BRCPS communities regarding the PCB discovery and remediation efforts. It was noted that previous environmental work in the area of the Mother Brook was designated a public improvement project and that therefore, the local residents had likely already been briefed extensively.

H. Raymond reported that the construction project was 54% completed and on-budget. The project's completion date had slipped to 7/14/2010 due to soil removal and replacement activities.

### **Chinese Bridge Delegation and Chinese Language and Culture Program Presentation:**

K. Saxon presented details of her recent trip with R. Harris to China as a participant in the Chinese Bridge Delegation. The program is sponsored by the College Board. The purpose of the program is to bring about 800 educational leaders from the U.S. to China to foster interactions with the Chinese educational system. R. Harris and K. Saxon attended various workshops on building partnerships, discovering resources to support programs and distance learning techniques. They also visited the Dagan Primary School in Hangzhou in the Zhejiang province, which specializes in the arts and would like to establish a "sister school" relationship with BRCPS.

Jinhui Xu spoke about the genesis of the Chinese Language and Culture Program at BRCPS. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the U. Mass. Boston's Urban Superintendent's Program, after spending 3 years teaching in the Cambridge Public Schools and 10 years in marketing and management in China. She presented a plan to create a competitive advantage for BRCPS students by developing an educational model that integrates best practices of the U.S. and Chinese educational systems. The result would be a Global Education model, driving BRCPS toward "International Charter School" status. Formation of a "sister-school" relationship is an important step toward that goal.

Funding for this process is available from the Chinese government (Confucius Classroom), the U.S. government (Depts. of State and Education), other U.S. non-governmental organizations (e.g. the Asia Society), and educational institutions such as a U. Mass. Boston and Harvard University.

J. Xu detailed her experience thus far at BRCPS. She began by teaching Chinese language and culture to 8 classes each day. Cultural instruction was dropped and classes taught per day were reduced to 4 in order to make time and space for curriculum development. The approach now is to focus on organizing language and some cultural events within the BRCPS community and create an excitement.

#### **Governance Committee:**

\*Verbal intent to resign from the Board of Trustees has been received from N. Hays and E. Washington. Both expressed a willingness to continue their service to the school in an advisory capacity.

R. Harris presented Dr. Muriel Leonard to the Board of Trustees for consideration for membership. She brings extensive experience in Boston Public Schools at all levels from bottom to top. Dr. Leonard is a proponent of Charter schools that are committed to the mission of educating a diverse population of students.

K. leong moved to vote to elect Dr. Leonard to the Board of Trustees, L. Bligen seconded the motion. All voted in favor, none were opposed.

#### **Academic Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction Committee:**

C. Corbe briefly discussed recent GLA results, which show a drop in scores compared to the same point last year. This dip is not a student performance issue, but rather reflects a lack of alignment of the assessment with instruction, as students demonstrate mastery later. In January, MCAS preparation classes will meet before school, after school and on Saturdays. Lori Likis will be asked for a final Root Cause Analysis.

G. Martin moved to accept C. Corbe's report and R. Harris seconded the motion.

### **Finance Committee:**

L. Bligen presented the Committee's report. Through the Community Action Project (CAP), BRCPS will receive pro bono assistance from a group of retired business executives. The goal specifically will be to develop a plan to reduce student enrollment in preparation to move the school to Hyde Park.

L. Bligen will look into a question from K. Vander Laan regarding a \$1.5M capital project contribution referenced at the bottom of the Budget Update.

R. Harris and L. Bligen explained that there is a predicted FY2011 shortfall due to the fact that budget reductions to meet the goal have not yet been made. Funds will be reallocated in order to assure that the integrity of educational programming is maintained.

There was some discussion regarding an apparent budget surplus. R. Harris explained that quarterly payments from the state can vary in both directions. Therefore, the PPA (per pupil allowance) is always budgeted at 97% to create a margin of safety to reduce the possibility of staff reductions etc. in the middle of the year. Excess is not carried over, but is swept into a reserve account.

K. leong moved to accept the Finance Committee report, R. Harris seconded the motion.

### **Human Resources Committee:**

K. leong presented the report. She has stated her intent to continue to serve on the Committee.

The Committee continues to work on staff "Intent to Return" forms. The rate of return is stated to be high, although this is likely to be an overestimate. With regard to the move, some staff members have asked about on-site day-care and potential shuttle service from Forest Hills T station after the school moves to the new site.

The Committee has undertaken a revision of poorly and ambiguously worded short-term disability policies and is considering strategies to increase the diversity of the teaching staff.

### **Development Committee:**

K. Vander Laan expressed the need and desire to meet with the Forunato Consulting Group representatives regarding fundraising strategies. There was an expressed concern about the role of the Trustees in fundraising and what FCG was expecting. K. Saxon reiterated that the Board does not have a fundraising focus and is in need of guidance from FCG as far as tactics and next

steps. R. Harris mentioned that new branding was being developed along with PR materials. D. Mulhern volunteered to organize an informal Trustee cocktail hour at Smith and Wollensky and each bring a friend or acquaintance.

R. Harris has been briefed by FCG and received a written plan. The strategy has been to focus on Trustee networks and relationships, while work is under way to identify a Capital Campaign Committee Chair.

Concern was expressed regarding Trustee participation in the Annual Appeal, the goal of which (100%) was not met. Some mechanisms were discussed by which this could be increased, including making contributions at Board of Trustee meetings. There was also some discussion about participation in the Appeal correlating to attendance at Board of Trustee retreats.

The dollar amount which was placed on the collective Board contribution was calculated to be approximately \$800/person. A less arbitrary and possibly more realistic goal might be arrived at by using Trustee pledges as a starting point.

#### **Parent Advisory Board:**

E. Carrasco told the Board that PAB meetings appear to be growing larger and becoming more energized. The Executive Committee is in the process of recruiting members and will ratify new Bylaws at the January PAB meeting.

#### **Superintendent's Report:**

R. Harris reported that the Charter was renewed, yet the probationary status remained. While BRCPS realized clear academic success as evidenced by MCAS gains and making AYP, the reduction of enrollment to 880 is not yet possible. Frustration was expressed at this situation, since it would make fundraising more difficult. The reduction of enrollment will necessitate the elimination of 59 staff/teacher positions, possibly dealing BRCPS students a dangerous academic setback. D. Mulhern stated that a strong public safety argument could be made against the requirement of such a move. The Board took under consideration options for appealing the decision. D. Mulhern and K. Saxon volunteered to accompany R. Harris to meet with the DESE Commissioner to express these concerns.

There was an expressed interest in the analysis of the CAP group and reduction solutions that will have the least negative impact.

#### **Old Business**

None

#### **New Business**

None

#### **Motion to Adjourn:**

Made by K. leong at 8:15pm