

Paul Cuffee School

Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting

September 18, 2008

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Paul Cuffee School was held on September 18, 2008 at the Paul Cuffee Lower School in Providence, Rhode Island.

Present: Kathleen Alvarez, Luz Avila, Jon Bennett, David Burnham, Russell Carey, Elizabeth Colon, Stefano Crema, Philip Gould, Barrett Hazeltine, Keith Mathews, Maria Monteiro, Joop Nagtegaal, Martha Newcomb, Esq., Carolyn Pemberton, Sarah Reis, Ana Cecilia Rosada.

Excused: Su Almeida, William Clifton, Sr., Joan Canady Countryman, Robin Y. Miles, Fraser Preston, Betsy Pollack Shimberg, Babak Taleghani.

Paul Cuffee Staff Present: David Bourns, Jonathan Conklin, Nina Giannotti, Paul Graseck, Julia Karahalidis, Nell Sears, Suzie Shaw.

Guest: Eric Charlesworth.

The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. with a moment of silence, followed by a welcome by President Joop Nagtegaal. Joop informed the board of the resignations of two members – Mary Sylvia

Harrison and Kay Lisle – and noted that information regarding final committee assignments would be completed and circulated soon. In his comments opening the meeting Joop spoke briefly about how since the time of the last board meeting the proposed mayoral academies in Rhode Island had been approved and that this was a continuing indication of the great interest in the state for alternative public education models. He made reference to an article from the September 7, 2008 New York Times entitled “24/7 School Reform,” which had been circulated to the board in advance of the meeting by David Bourns, and read aloud the following paraphrased excerpt:

The real challenge [we] face is to convince [Americans] that the underperformance of poor children is truly a national issue – that it should matter to anyone who isn’t poor...we should address the problem not only out of any mushy sense of moral obligation, but for hardheaded reasons of global competitiveness. At a moment when nations compete mostly through the skill level of their work force...we cannot afford to let that level decline.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of June 19, 2008 were approved unanimously. The motion to approve was made by Barrett Hazeltine and seconded by Martha Newcomb.

Head of School’s September Report

David Bourns reported that the school year is off to a strong start. The results from the science NECAP assessment tests were recently received and are in the process of being reviewed, and the students and faculty are anticipating the next round of testing in October. He noted that Eric Charlesworth had attended an intensive Spanish language learning program over the summer and Eric commented briefly on what a positive experience it was for him. A question was asked about the process for review of the admissions policy and procedures for the coming year and David reported that there had been a recent meeting of Rhode Island charter school heads on this topic. It is anticipated that an open lottery will be the admission mechanism again this year but further guidance and direction from the state is hoped for.

“Working on the Work” in the Middle School

David introduced the presentation by Eric Charlesworth, sixth grade math instructor and chair of the Middle School mathematics department. Eric began his presentation by leading the board in a round of Spin-a-Place, a math instructional game designed to teach students about place value and probability. Following the playing of the game Eric commented that such an exercise can be best viewed as a beginning point for students but an end point for teachers. In shaping the curriculum, instructional goals and objectives, and

individual lesson plans, everything begins with the Rhode Island standards. The report cards used by Paul Cuffee School faculty to assess student performance are aligned with those standards to the fullest extent possible and the Middle School mathematics departments seeks to always clarify what they mean by each standard and criteria. An example of a relevant standard is: “The student solves problems involving decimals,” and the time spent in class needs to adequately prepare students for success in achieving competency at that skill. The faculty think carefully about what students should be doing and learning at each grade level and how that work flows together from year to year. In addition, the mathematics faculty have come up with benchmark problems for each level and a pre- and post-exam is used at the beginning and end of the year to help assess student progress and the effectiveness of teaching methods. The overall goals for the faculty include: students learn developmentally appropriate material; students are prepared for the work they will encounter at the subsequent grade level; students are prepared for the NECAP exams (and Eric noted that the pre- and post-assessment exams are modeled closely from NECAP questions). Methods for achieving these goals through instruction include: practice and problems; concept-building tasks; projects and games. There was discussion with the Board regarding differentiation in teaching among varying skill levels in the class. Joop and the board thanked Eric for his presentation and discussion.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Human Resources Committee

Carolyn Pemberton delivered the report of the Human Resources Committee. In introduction, Joop thanked Carolyn for taking on the responsibility of chairing this committee and thanked Martha Newcomb for her service in leading it last year. Carolyn reported on matters that had been the subject of discussion before the committee, including the process for evaluating employee performance, which will now include three opportunities for evaluation in the first year of employment and annually thereafter, and the school's personal days policy. There was discussion also among the committee regarding what items needs to come from the committee to the full Board for approval and it was agreed that matters of policy which have a significant potential legal or fiduciary impact on the School will normally be referred to the Board for consideration and action. The Committee will evaluate items of business against this criteria on case by case basis.

Finance Committee

Jon Conklin delivered the report of the Finance Committee in Babak's absence. The committee reviewed the unaudited financial statements from the prior fiscal year and anticipates a surplus of about \$700,000. Also reviewed were the long-term projections and the 2008-2009

budget, which was distributed to the Board at the meeting. Members were asked to review the budget and contact Jon with any feedback or questions and a formal vote to approve the budget will take place at the next meeting of the Board. There was a brief discussion of class size and the impact on teaching, and it was noted that even the slightly increased sizes of Paul Cuffee classes resulted in numbers significantly lower than most public schools.

Plant and Property Committee

Joop delivered the report of the Plant and Property Committee in Fraser Preston's absence. The focus of the work of the committee has been on locating a site for the high school. Joop reviewed the various options which are actively under consideration and review and noted that they remain hopeful that a suitable location will be identified in the near future. Efforts are also underway to explore the possibility of securing additional space for parking at the lower school.

Institutional Advancement

Julia Karahalidis delivered the report of the Institutional Advancement Committee on behalf of Betsy Pollack Shimberg. She reported that it is the desire of the committee to encourage Board members to bring visitors to the school to broaden and deepen the base of friends and supporters of Paul Cuffee School. She reviewed the discussion the

committee had had of the Annual Fund and whether or not the annual goal should be linked to an appropriate index, such as 3% of the school's operating budget. The Annual Fund had a spectacular year in 2007-2008, raising \$151,000 against a goal of \$150,000 with 100% participation by the Board, 36% of parents, and 48% of faculty and staff. Following discussion of this issue among members of the Board, Keith Mathews moved, and David Burnham seconded, that the Paul Cuffee School Annual Fund goal for 2008-2009 be established at \$175,000. The motion was passed unanimously.

Board Retreat Plans

Joop reported that the fall retreat of the Board will be held the morning of Saturday, October 18 at the home of Angus Davis, 10 Brown Street. Further information will be forthcoming but Joop noted in particular that we will be joined by new Providence Superintendent of Public Schools Tom Brady. Mr. Brady has been asked to speak about school reform and the role charter schools play in this work, as well as his views about the long-term future of charter schools. Questions for discussion include:

- What are the crucial leverage points determining academic performance in urban America?**
- Will charter schools eventually be merged with the regular public schools, and in what form?**

- **Will there be a continuing role for charter schools as a “laboratory” for regular schools?**

The retreat will also include ample opportunity for discussion of strategic issues and decisions the Paul Cuffee School and Board of Directors will be facing in the time ahead. Joop requested that all members try their best to attend the board retreat on October 18.

New Business

No new business was brought before the Board.

Adjournment

Carolyn Pemberton moved to adjourn. Maria Monteiro seconded. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell C. Carey, Clerk