

# **Paul Cuffee School**

## **Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting**

**March 19, 2009**

**A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Paul Cuffee School was held on March 19, 2009 at the Paul Cuffee Lower School in Providence, Rhode Island.**

**Present: Kathleen Alvarez, Luz Avila, Jon Bennett, David Burnham, Russell Carey, William Clifton, Sr., Elizabeth Colon, Joan Canady Countryman, Stefano Crema, Robin Y. Miles, Maria Monteiro, Joop Nagtegaal, Martha Newcomb, Esq., Ana Cecilia Rosado, Sarah Reis, Babak Taleghani.**

**Excused: Su Almeida, Philip Gould, Barrett Hazeltine, Keith Mathews, Carolyn Pemberton.**

**Paul Cuffee Staff Present: David Bourns, Jonathan Conklin, Nina Giannotti, Paul Graseck, Suzie Shaw.**

**The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. by President Joop Nagtegaal and began with a moment of silence. Joop commented briefly on events and developments effecting education outside of the school, including the recent speech by President Obama on**

education policy and reform. In that speech President Obama expressed continued support for charter schools and raised a number of issues and questions regarding funding and expenditures for education. Joop also commented on the recent release of the Governor's Fiscal Year 2010 budget and the inclusion in that budget of some potential funding for a Paul Cuffee High School, which would be a topic of discussion later in the meeting.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the January 22, 2009 meeting of the Board were approved unanimously. The motion to approve was made by Babak Taleghani and seconded by Judge Clifton.

### **Head of School's March Report**

David Bourns began his report by commenting on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing which was conducted by the United States Department of Education in January. These are nation-wide assessment tests, separate from the Rhode Island NECAP tests, administered periodically. He also noted the ongoing events surrounding pi week (3.14) and commented that a middle school student won the competition for who could memorize pi to the most places, in this case to well over one hundred digits.

There was discussion regarding the placement to date of students

from the current eighth grade in high schools. Students have been admitted to Classical as well a number of parochial and private high schools in the area. There was discussion of a developing partnership with the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Program and other initiatives around the maritime theme. The involvement of students and faculty from URI in the middle school science curriculum has been very valuable to date and there is promise of further benefits to both programs in further development of the partnership. David spoke to the stress felt within the school due to the recent SALT team visit, snow days, illness-related absences, and the number of staff on maternity and paternity leaves. All told, the school community is looking forward to spring.

David then spoke to the high school planning document which Paul Graseck has authored and substantially completed. David reported that Paul has, after much thought and patient delay, decided to accept a position as Director of Cultural Studies for the Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky. David thanked Paul for his very hard and excellent work planning a Paul Cuffee High School and noted that that work will invaluablely aid whoever takes on the leadership of establishing the high school when we are able to do so. Paul expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to work with Paul Cuffee School and about how much he has learned from the experience. Joop expressed the enormous appreciation the entire school community has for the outstanding effort Paul has contributed to Paul Cuffee. Judge Clifton moved that the Board of Directors adopt

**a resolution of appreciation for Paul Graseck and his lasting contributions to Paul Cuffee School and that he be so recognized in the minutes of this meeting. The motion was seconded simultaneously by numerous members of the Board and was passed unanimously.**

### **SALT Report/School Improvement Goals**

**Suzie Shaw led a presentation regarding the recent SALT (School Accountability for Learning and Teaching) visit. SALT assessments are conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). The school had participated in annual SALT surveys up until 2007 when they were discontinued by RIDE. In addition to the survey instruments, SALT visits are conducted on site every five years. This was Paul Cuffee School's first site visit. The process is comprised of collecting data from the surveys distributed to teachers and parents, the drafting of a self-study, and an evaluation visit by a team of Rhode Island educators. The focus areas of the visit included student learning, teaching for learning, and school support for teaching and learning. Additionally, the school focused on topics of communication and mathematics problem solving. The School Improvement Team (SIT) oversaw the process of self-study and developed result statements and action plans for both main focus areas. The visiting team spent three days at the lower and middle schools, truncated from the planned four days due to a snow day.**

**The chair of the team came back to the school the previous week to read the draft report and the staff is in the process of reviewing commendations and recommendations for overall learning. Members of the staff reported some lack of clarity around some of the findings and recommendations of the team and there was discussion about that. A final report is expected later in the spring. There was further discussions and questions regarding the visit and draft report, and Joop concluded the discussion by thanking Suzie for her report and the hard work of all the staff on the self-study and visit preparation.**

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Nominating Committee**

**Joan Countryman delivered the report of the Nominating Committee. She began by reviewing what the Nominating Committee is responsible for and also the role of the Board, which includes legal, financial, oversight, and representative responsibilities. Among the Board responsibilities, Joan particularly emphasized the mission and spirit of the school and the Board's role in establishing a clear mission and periodically evaluating the mission. The Board also must: select, support and evaluate the Head of School, approve the budget and monitor controls, secure resources, maintain accountability and ask good questions, participate in fundraising, and recruit and select new Board members. Members of the Board should individually and collectively assess Board performance, be active**

**advocates for the School, encourage the School leadership, be accountable, set a positive example, and enhance the School's public standing.**

**With that general overview as context, Joan explained that the Committee is focusing this year on evaluation of the Board and recommending new members for the Board. Assessment surveys are being completed by members of the Board and those will be reviewed by members of the Committee and the results and lessons learned reported back to the Board later this year. The Committee is looking for new members for vacancies next year and Joan asked members of the Board with suggestions of names to speak to her or any member of the Committee.**

### **Finance Committee**

**Babak Taleghani delivered the report of the Finance Committee. The School is hoping for a break-even budget this year, but staff are engaged in adjusting for a lower than anticipated amount of State revenue. The staff and the Committee are preparing projections for the 2009-2010 fiscal year to explore what it would mean if the School experienced a 10% cut in revenue (~ \$500K). A contingency plan is being developed and will be discussed with teachers and others, with regards to steps that could be taken, including: a salary freeze, some programmatic cuts, and other steps to arrive at a balanced budget with the goal of avoiding layoffs if at all possible. It was suggested**

that it would be prudent to think now about even worse case scenarios than a 10% drop in revenue in order to have contingency plans in place for a variety of outcomes, given the fluidity and unpredictability of the current economic crisis. The Board agreed with the position of the Finance Committee on these matters and supported the idea of the Head of School developing these plans and discussing them with the faculty and staff in the weeks and months ahead to prepare for further discussions with the Board at the May and June meetings. Babak concluded his report with a brief update on property acquisition matters.

## **Human Resources**

Jon Conklin delivered the report of the Human Resources Committee in the absence of Carolyn Pemberton. Matters reflected in the Committee's written report were briefly reviewed, including the project to review, update, and publish on-line the School's Human Resources Policy Manual.

## **High School Issues**

David Bourns opened the discussion regarding the High School planning effort by reporting the news that the Governor has included funding in his proposed budget for a Paul Cuffee High School. This is a preliminary budget subject to the approval of the General Assembly

and it is likely not to be known for quite some time whether any funding will be available for the High School in the next fiscal year. Given the late date in the year, and the fact that many of the current eighth graders have made plans for the next school year, there was discussion among members of the Board regarding whether it was realistic to consider opening a High School, if funding were available, in fall 2009 or if a preferred course of action was to seek approval and funding for opening in fall 2010. There was discussion of the pros and cons of both approaches as well as suggested next steps with regards to consultation and discussion with legislative leaders in the General Assembly. Members of the Board supported the next steps suggested by David and Joop, including: meeting and talking with key legislative leaders about the funding prospects and opportunities for the High School, working with parents of current students to develop support for the High School among the General Assembly and other key decision-makers, and exploring available options for as early as this fall which might include a smaller than planned version of the High School. Members of the Board recognized and agreed that success in opening the High School at any point will require sustained success in fundraising over the next several years. Joop concluded the discussion by noting that there may be a need to call a special meeting of the Board in April for further discussion of this topic if events warrant.

## **Other Business**

**There was no other business brought before the Board.**

## **Adjournment**

**Ana Cecilia Rosado moved to adjourn. Babak Taleghani seconded.  
The meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Russell C. Carey, Clerk**