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**DEMOCRACY PREPSM BLACKSTONE VALLEY,
A RHODE ISLAND MAYORAL ACADEMYSM**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MINUTES

12 noon, October 23, 2009

Mayor's Office, Cumberland Town Hall

45 Broad Street, Cumberland

Mayor McKee called the meeting to order at 12:12 p.m. Present were:

Mayor Daniel J. McKee (Chair)
Administrator T. Joseph Almond
Mayor Charles D. Moreau

Also present were Jeremy Chiappetta, Seth Andrew, Michael Magee, and Daniel C. Waugh.

Minutes of August 27, 2009

Mr. McKee (seconded by Mr. Moreau) moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of August 27, 2009. AYE: McKee, Almond, Moreau. NAY: None.

Report from Head of School

Mr. Magee noted that DPBV-RIMA will be the only public kindergarten in the state whose students will take the Terra Nova exam.

Mr. Andrew reported that DPBV-RIMA caused a buzz at the National Conference for Charter School Growth, which he attended at the end of September. As a result, Rhode Island is on the map with national funders.

Democracy Builders is anticipating with excitement having an outside evaluation of the school. Accordingly, it has been arranged that Sue Walsh from the Building Excellent Schools Network will visit the school in mid-November and evaluate how the Mayoral AcademySM is doing and make recommendations for improvement. The external review of schools is part of Democracy Builder's annual routine. Mr. Chiappetta will continue his professional development by visiting additional excellent schools to continue refining his understanding of best practices. Mr. Andrew will be at the school two days a week.

Teacher hiring went really well, which bodes well not only for now, but also for the potential availability of good teachers as the Mayoral AcademySM grows.

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The Mayoral AcademySM won a federal grant in the amount of \$525,000 for charter school growth. If the Feds accept the proposition that the middle school is a separate school, DPBV-RIMA would be eligible for an additional \$525,000.

Mr. Chiappetta reported that kids come in happy, parents engaged. There is a strong commitment from parents from all four communities. Lincoln parents were very energized by a letter they received from Mr. Almond. The academic progress seen over the first 8 weeks is really impressive.

The school has developed plans to deal with emergency issues such as swine flu. For example, the school converted a part-timer to full-time so as to have a built-in substitute teacher, if needed. The physical education teacher is receiving literacy training, and he will serve as the second line of substitute teaching. Beyond that, the staff members of the Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM all have graduate degrees, and they are on file with the attorney general's office to be working with kids, so they would serve as the school's third line of substitutes. With the two-teacher model, it is not expected that teacher absences should be a problem, particularly with only 19 scholars in each classroom.

In terms of working with the communities, the Mayoral AcademySM had a great turn-out at the ribbon-cutting. The school has received tuition from Central Falls and Lincoln and is awaiting payment from Cumberland and Pawtucket. The school is working with Dr. Morelle to determine areas where the school should be working in concert with other schools, such as with weather emergencies.

Mr. Magee praised Democracy Builders for implementing from the beginning the STEP evaluation for literacy as a tool in the Mayoral AcademySM. It is a real-time method of evaluating how students are doing. Initial results have already come back from that. This is already proving to be a really good tool for teachers to see how what they are doing in the classroom is working and what may need to be changed. It will also provide a good method of showing academic progress over the year.

Mr. Andrew stated that the STEP results would probably be reported three times a year. This way, real changes can be made after 6 weeks; there is no need to wait for the third grade NECAP results.

Agreement with Democracy Builders

MR. MCKEE: When we left last time, there was a proposed agreement with Democracy Builders, but we asked Mr. Magee to go back and make sure that we were detailing any management fees so that there is accountability for that instead of just a straight fee. We want to make this as transparent as we can, so that when the public sees this, they can see that we did our due diligence to make sure that we get value for whatever fees go out.

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MR. ANDREW: The new form of agreement attempts to balance transparency and accountability in a way that does not interfere with school governance. The various elements of the management fee are specified. It turns out in the first year that a big chunk of the fee is my time, as well as back-office time in New York setting up the necessary systems.

MR. MCKEE: Are we going to be able to use some of the start-up money to cover the costs of establishing the new systems, so that it doesn't come out of the per pupil cost?

MR. MAGEE: That is part of the overall budget, yes.

MR. MCKEE: And will the fee be measured by certain reports that will detail what part has been earned? And will the cost be tracked so the overall fee does not exceed 10% of a certain number? And do we know what that number is?

MR. ANDREW: We do not know exactly what that number is, but we do have a projection. What usually happens is that the payments are made in accordance with the projection, but that after the audit is completed, usually around October, there is a reconciliation.

Mr. Andrew also explained that they had surveyed management fees charged by charter management organizations around the country, and they range from about 8% to 20%. So the proposed agreement provides a fee that is actually at the low end of the range. Mr. Andrews stated that this is the exact same agreement going to be used with the New York school. The 10% will be reassessed at the end of each year based on the services provided, but Mr. Andrew felt that it was at the low end of the market.

Mr. Andrew endorsed a view expressed by Brett Peiser of the Uncommon Schools network that a charter management organization "insulates the school leader from everything that does not directly affect student learning." Democracy Builders goes beyond this to also provide value by advising on best practices in the classroom, which does affect student learning. Thus, rather than being a bureaucratic dictator, a charter management organization supports principals with what they need in order to do the work of educating kids.

Mr. Magee pointed out that the Mayoral AcademySM's academic expectations are actually set out in the charter application that was submitted to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The charter application will also serve as the blueprint for RIMA's evaluation of the academy.

Mr. Magee noted that a minor change had been made to the license section of the memorandum from the version that had previously been circulated to the board. The last

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clause had been added: “and on documents and materials subject to such reasonable restrictions as the CMO may require.”

Mr. McKee expressed concern that while we did not want to do anything to water down the Democracy PrepSM name, it was also important to understand that the Mayoral AcademySM name is integral to the branding of the academy.

Mr. Andrew agreed that it was very helpful to be identified as a Mayoral AcademySM as well as a Democracy PrepSM school.

Mr. McKee observed that such a distinction also would assist funders in understanding how education is being delivered in Rhode Island.

MR. ANDREW: One other thing about the agreement which I think is important to make explicit. When we started this conversation we were looking at a much thicker document. In pretty much with everything we hope to do with RIMA and our growth, [we want it understood that] the idea of thin agreements, be it our agreement with our teachers or our agreement with RIMA, is a guiding principle. We want to keep things as clear and streamlined as possible. This MOU really does accomplish that goal, which I am very excited about.

MR. MCKEE: What is the term of this agreement?

MR. MAGEE: One year.

MR. MCKEE: So that's fine. We have to start somewhere. So if some things might not work for you that we bring back, and same thing for this board, some things might not work for this board, we come back and discuss it.

MR. ANDREW: I would hope that I am back before this board before the beginning of the next school year. My only hope is that, whether there are changes or not as there may be over time as we figure things out, the goal of thin documents as a sort of overriding concept is an important one to me, because they need to be understandable and clear and not bureaucratic and burdensome the way sometimes these kinds of things can be.

MR. MCKEE: With this MOU and the budget, are we certain we will not run a deficit?

MR. MAGEE: Yes, we are.

Mr. Andrew also indicated that if Democracy Builders was unable to raise some of the outside funding it expected to raise, it would waive or cut its fee.

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Mr. Moreau (seconded by Mr. Almond) moved to approve the Memorandum of Understanding. AYE: McKee, Almond, Moreau. NAY: None.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Magee presented a report.

Mr. Magee reported that the federal grant would come in at \$175,000 per year for 3 years and explained that this would help to offset some of the real start-up costs of the school. In addition, Mr. Andrew, as a member of Building Excellent Schools, is eligible to receive \$250,000 from the Walton Foundation. In Mr. Magee's view, the Mayoral AcademySM is highly likely to receive this grant and quickly, given that Ed Kirby (of the Walton Foundation) will be visiting the school on Wednesday, October 28, 2009.

Mr. McKee requested that when important people like that were scheduled to visit, that an e-mail be circulated so that board members would have a chance to meet with them if they wanted to.

Bank RI has made an offer to help DPBV-RIMA organize the business community to fund Mayoral AcademiesSM. Bank RI itself has already donated \$2,500, and Mr. Magee expects that in fairly short order the school will raise a total of about \$30,000 from local corporate donors. Except for this \$2,500-\$30,000, all of the rest of the money has been brought into the state from outside.

Mr. McKee urged the school not to spend all the money raised but to save some for a rainy day. Mr. Andrew indicated that the Harlem school's budget ran a surplus every year.

Establishment of Meeting Schedule

Mr. Magee suggested that the board meet next right after the first of the year, again in the spring, and at the end of the school year. No specific dates were selected. Mr. Moreau suggested that future meetings take place in the council chamber rather than the mayor's office.

Public Forum

The Chair asked for any public comment. None was offered.

Adjournment

Mr. Moreau (seconded by Mr. Almond) moved to adjourn. AYE: McKee, Almond, Moreau. NAY: None.

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The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Daniel C. Waugh, Secretary

“Democracy Prep”SM is a service mark of Democracy Builders.

“Mayoral Academy”SM is a service mark of Rhode Island Mayoral AcademiesSM.

“Achievement First” is a service mark of Achievement First, Inc.