

Charter School of Inquiry

Regular Monthly Board Meeting Minutes



May 4, 2021

1. Call to Order:

The regular monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees (the “Board”) of the Charter School of Inquiry (the “School”) was called to order by Helene Kramer, the presiding officer, a lawful quorum being present, on Tuesday, May 4, 2021, at 4:50 p.m. The meeting was held via Zoom videoconference (Meeting ID 859 0775 6585), in accordance with Executive Orders by the Governor of the State of New York.

Trustees Present: Melvin “Trey” Bankhead III
Richard “Bruce” Haydon
Anne Nguyen Henry
Mary Jo Pfeiffer
Peter Dow
Nichelle Gray
Helene Kramer
Valerie Nolan
Janet Peters
Deborah Porter

Excused: Latise Hairston

CSI Staff: John Sheffield, Head of School

Board Counsel: Steve Polowitz

2. Proof of Public Notice:

Pursuant to the Open Meetings Law, Ms. Kramer announced that she had a notarized affidavit listing the places where the Notice of Meeting held on May 4, 2021, were posted and a list of media outlets asked to publicize the meeting on their community calendars, in their print notices or broadcasts. This notarized affidavit will be kept on file.

3. Conflict of Interest.

Ms. Kramer reminded board members that anyone with a potential conflict of interest concerning a subject under discussion by the Board has an obligation to disclose the potential conflict and, if deemed a conflict, recuse themselves and leave the room during any discussion and vote on the subject. *No such declarations were made at this time.*

4. Approve Minutes

A motion to approve minutes of the business meeting on April 6, 2021, was made by Mr. Dow, seconded by Mr. Bankhead, and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion passed.

Ms. Kramer reminded the trustees that minutes of the Academic Committee (March 19, 2021), Audit and Finance Committee (March 23, 2021), and Governance Committee (March 23, 2021) were included with the board packet and will be posted on the website.



5. Announcements / Updates

- a. Birthdays: The Board wished John Sheffield a happy birthday - May 14
- b. Mr. Bankhead report of his medical condition. Mr. Bankhead related that, at some point over the spring/summer months, he'll be "pulling back a bit" from Board activities due to his autosomal dominant polycystic kidney disease negatively impacting his kidney function, and his needing a kidney transplant. Board's response was positive and supportive.

6. Academic Committee Report- Peter Dow, Chair

- a. STAR Assessment Data Report: Tool is becoming extremely valuable, as it provides a great deal of data regarding individual skill developments for each student, as well as the ability to compare CSI students' performance to state, national, and international norms. CSI students are doing slightly better than the national averages.
- b. Summer School: Committee not yet ready to present a proposal, but ideas are being discussed. Mr. Sheffield, David Hetherly and Marie Giancarlo serve on committee, which is discussing a 5-week program, with an academic curriculum in the morning and an enrichment curriculum in the afternoon. The program would serve 72 students in grades K-5, with a tentative budget of \$40,000.
 - Mr. Hetherly has agreed to serve as principal of the summer school program. Committee hopes to propose a final program proposal at June meeting.
 - Mr. Sheffield notes that committee is trying to establish a partnership with the Boys & Girls Club, in which CSI provides academic component, while they provide the enrichment component.
 - Ms. Kramer suggested that the committee might wish to provide give parents a 'heads up' about the summer school program.

Ms. Kramer requested a motion to approve the development of a summer school program and authorize the Head of School and Academic Committee to "formalize and finalize" the program.

A motion to approve the development of a summer school program was made by Ms. Nolan, seconded by Ms. Kramer, and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion approved.

- c. Mr. Dow noted that committee is moving ahead with the "African American infusion task force" to help find ways to demonstrate CSI's infusion of African American history and culture more clearly into its academic design. Mr. Sheffield is working on the contract issues, but the committee is expected to be functional by summer.

7. Parent Association Report: Nichelle Gray, Parent Representative

- a. Ms. Gray did not have a report.

8. Board Professional Development – CSO Mid-Term Renewal Site Visit

- a. Ms. Kramer led Board in a professional development session, ensuring that trustees were up to date on the latest information related to CSI's progress toward the 10 academic benchmarks.

- b.



- c. Mr. Sheffield briefed the Board on the virtual site visit. The Charter School Office requested multiple documents in the weeks surrounding the visit and had access to CSI's virtual classrooms (via Google and Zoom). CSO reps met with CSI Student Services Focus Group. Community Partners told CSO reps what CSI means to them and the community at large. Highlight of visit was when every teacher in the focus group shared their screens with CSO's representatives during classes, demonstrating concrete examples of student-led investigations and integration of the arts.
- d. **Board of Trustees Focus Group:** Ms. Nolan noted that CSO seems to have a real concern toward "evidence of what we're doing" regarding progress toward the benchmarks.
- e. **Discussion:** Ms. Kramer notes that the discussion part of the meeting is supposed to be a dialogue between the Head of School and the Board "so that we understand our respective roles."
- f. Ms. Kramer asked who is monitoring the overall charter renewal process to ensure that CSI's goals are being met, along with evidence of the work. Mr. Sheffield noted that Andrea Rogers Barry of Empire Charter Consultants is working on it.
- g. Mr. Sheffield also suggested that each committee study the charter renewal application and call out concerns that are part of their respective areas of responsibility, particularly as it related to the academic benchmarks.
- h. Mr. Sheffield and Ms. Nolan advised a review of current charter renewal application to compare it to previous such applications in order to identify inconsistencies.
- i. Ms. Kramer asked Mr. Sheffield to seek a timeline from Empire Charter Consultants on when the revised academic benchmarks will be drafted. Mr. Sheffield said he could, but he warned that it's a very complicated, ever-evolving issue.
- j. Ms. Kramer asked what CSI could do to achieve more effective advocacy. Ms. Nolan noted that business leaders and local political figures, as well as parents, are powerful advocates. The Board discussed inviting Board of Regents member Catherine Fisher Collins for a return visit to the school.

9. Head of School Report – John Sheffield

- a. **Enrollment:** Mr. Sheffield notes that current enrollment remains at 292. Final numbers are not in for fall 2021, but 28 Kindergartners are enrolled for the fall, and that CSI has put a moratorium on accepting new students as it prepares to return students to full time in the building.
- b. **Staffing:** No resignations, terminations, or new hires.
- c. **Special Education:** Mr. Sheffield noted that 10 special ed students are "in the pipeline" for enrollment in the fall.
- d. **Progress Monitoring:** All students in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 were administered progress monitoring assessments in ELA, and are currently being progress monitored in math.
- e. **School Reopening Plans:** Grade 4 students returned this week (May 3); Grades 5 and 6 will return next week (May 10).
- f. **Community Engagement:** Heroes Day was facilitated by CSI's partnership with African American Police Association.
- g. **ELA Assessments:** CSI students are showing progress toward end-year ELA scoring goals. In addition, 48 percent of CSI students took the ELA, compared with only 16 percent of Buffalo Public Schools students.



10. Finance/Audit Committee Report – Bruce Haydon, Treasurer

- a. Financial News
 - *PPP Loan.* Application for forgiveness of the PPP Loan will soon be submitted, and Mr. Haydon thinks there's an "excellent" chance the loan will be forgiven.
 - *Mortgage.* The committee is investigating the possibility of finding a mortgage in order to purchase the school building. M&T Bank refuses to have that discussion until CSI's charter is renewed. The committee is seeking alternative lenders.
- b. Review of Fiscal Policies and Procedures: For months, the committee has been reviewing all of CSI's fiscal policies and procedures and revising them where needed.
- c. Appreciation Bonus for Union and Non-union Staff. Mr. Sheffield noted that, despite this being an exceptionally stressful year, largely due to COVID-19 and the charter renewal site visit, CSI's staff and teachers have performed above and beyond. Ms. Kramer asked for two motions, one to approve the bonus for union staff and one for non-union staff.

A motion to authorize Mr. Sheffield, Head of School, to execute a Memorandum of Agreement with the CSI union to provide a \$500 bonus to each union member was made by Ms. Peters, seconded by Ms. Nolan and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion approved.

A motion to authorize Mr. Sheffield, Head of School, to provide a \$500 bonus to each non-union employee was made by Mr. Dow, seconded by Mr. Bankhead and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion approved.

- d. Financial Statement & Narrative for period ending March 31, 2021. Mr. Haydon explained that "things continue to be good; we're ahead, revenue-wise." Expenses were considerably under budget projections. New expenses include a recruitment campaign in local media in a bid to fill positions.

A motion to accept the financial statements for the period ending March 31, 2020, was made by Ms. Nolan, seconded by Mr. Haydon, and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion passed.

11. Governance Committee – Jan Peters, Chair

- a. HOS Succession Planning: Assistant Principal. Mr. Sheffield has identified some candidates, who are being vetted by Mindstream Consulting and Joan Graci of APA Solutions. Ms. Peters anticipates that the position will be filled soon.
- b. Administrative Assistant search. Ms. Peters has reached out to Remedy Staffing for assistance.
- c. Board Officers – Job Descriptions. As part of its Succession Planning initiative, the Governance Committee has revised job descriptions of Board officers: Board Chair and Vice-chair, Secretary and Treasurer.
- d. Onboarding Manual for New Trustees. The committee discussed making the manual a digital one, accessible online.
- e. Evaluation of Board consultants. The committee has created a form to evaluate consultants and Board partners that satisfies the state's requirements.
- f. Board of Trustees Self-Evaluation. Ms. Peters noted that the committee will be acting on this matter in the June timeframe.



A motion to accept the Governance Committee report, including acceptance of the new board officer job descriptions, was made by Mr. Bankhead, seconded by Mr. Haydon, and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion passed.

12. Old Business.

- a. Outreach Committee - Website RFP. Mr. Bankhead reported that, of the three website developers that expressed interest, only two submitted proposals. The committee evaluated the proposals by Otherwisz Creative Corp. and Typework Studio. The committee determined that Otherwisz's proposal is more flexible and efficient, despite being the more expensive proposal.
 - Mr. Bankhead answered questions from Board regarding the proposed site's features and maintenance and said he would be emailing full details of each proposal to Board members.
 - Ms. Gray noted that Otherwisz's proposal specified that it would be using CSI's mission to guide the website design. She went on to detail other aspects of the proposal that the committee found attractive, such as the "rotating" images on the homepage, the Google Translate feature, and the cross-device functionality.
 - Mr. Polowitz requested a copy of the Otherwisz contract for his review. Mr. Bankhead said he'd pass that request on to Otherwisz.
 - Ms. Henry expressed concern on the small amount of training noted in the proposal and noted that more than one hour would be needed.

13. New Business

- a. Resolution to Approve Revised Bylaws. Ms. Kramer and Mr. Polowitz, Board Counsel, reviewed the proposed revisions to the current bylaws, including:
 - Language to clarify how and when the size of the Board of Trustees may be changed (Article II: Board of Trustees, Section 2.2. Number and Qualifications);
 - Verification of non-eligibility of employees of CSI to be members of the Board of Trustees (Article II: Section 2.2. Number and Qualifications);
 - Clarifying language about conflicts of interest (Article II: Board of Trustees, Section 2.10. Contracts with the Corporation);
 - Updated board officer job descriptions (Article V: Section 5.1: Officers);
 - Complaint process revised to clarify procedures (Article IX: Complaint Process);
 - Language to confirm that CSI will comply with the authorizer's closing procedures in the event of dissolution (Article X: Closure or Dissolution);
 - Language to confirm that CSI will seek approval of the Charter School Office when amending bylaws (Article XI; Bylaw Amendments).

Ms. Kramer asked for a motion to approve the revised bylaws, as amended. Once approved, CSI will request approval from the Charter School Office of the revised bylaws as a non-material revision.

A motion to approve the revised bylaws, as amended, was made by Mr. Bankhead, seconded by Ms. Gray and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion passed.



14. Other / Open Discussion. None

15. Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 1, 2021, 4:45 pm

16. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Dow, seconded by Ms. Nolan, and approved unanimously by the trustees. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:



Melvin Bankhead III, Board Secretary

2 June 2021
Date