MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

JUNE 11, 2025 | 8 AM
Meeting ID: 835 1299 7457
LOCATION: FREIRE CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL (1026 MARKET ST., PHILA., PA 19107)

Board Members Present: Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, Kathleen O'Connell

Others Present: Leigh Botwinik, Doreese Bull, Olivia Burgess, Kelly Davenport, Brian Galetto, Johnny Mills, Chris Moore, Katie Pollard, Tanza Pugliese, Paul Ramirez Melanie Reiser, Anthony Royster, Scott Solomon, Ben Wainwright, Nathan Yufer, Andrea Zepp

Meeting Start, 8:00 AM

I. **Public Comment**
   A. No public comment
II. **Minutes**
   A. Review & Approve Minutes from April 9, 2025 (Attachment 1)*
      1. The board reviews the minutes from the April 9, 2025 board meeting.
      2. Raquel Leach makes a motion to approve. Bruce Lesser seconds.
      3. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.
III. **Elections**
   A. Renewal of Freire Charter School Board Members & Election of Officers (Attachment 2A)*
      1. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to approve term renewals for Kiara Allison, Lisa Hoffstein and Raquel Leach. Linda Kilpatrick seconds.
      2. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.
      3. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to approve the renewal and election of the following officers: Kathleen O'Connell as Chair, Bruce Lesser as Vice Chair, Nicole Jenkins as Co-Secretary, Paul Archibald as Exec. Committee At-Large Member, Lisa Hoffstein as Co-Secretary, Linda Kilpatrick as Treasurer. Linda Kilpatrick seconds.
      4. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.
   B. Renewal of TECH Freire Charter School Board Members (Attachment 2B)*
      1. The Freire Charter School board reviews the recommended renewals for the TECH Freire Board.
      2. Raquel Leach makes a motion to approve. Linda Kilpatrick seconds.
      3. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.
IV. **Resolutions**
   A. Review & Approve FY 2026 Budget (Attachment 3A)*
      1. Paul Ramirez notes an update regarding newly received revenue information:The School District has increased its capitation rates.
         a) Originally, the budget was built assuming a 10% increase in funding based on consultant guidance.
         b) Updated figures will reflect an 18% increase for General Education and a 14% increase for Special Education.
         c) Leadership recommends proceeding to discuss the current draft budget, as it is required to be passed by the end of June. Throughout the summer, there will be meetings with Board Chairs and Treasurers to continue to refine the budget based on the newly identified revenue increases and other potential changes.

        d) A revised and final version of the budget will be brought to the Board for approval at the September meeting.
    2. Nathan Yufer shared that the current draft assumes a 10% increase in the capitation rate for next year.
    3. The ESSER federal grant, which provided $900,000 in FY25, ended on September 30, 2024, resulting in a $900,000 revenue loss for FY26.
    4. An average 5% salary increase is budgeted for staff.
    5. Medical insurance costs are projected to increase by 20%.
    6. Three additional buses have been added for the middle school to support enrollment growth. Due to the projected increase in enrollment, the budget includes two additional FTEs at the middle school.
    7. The school is budgeting $1.5 million for approved private school tuition, an ongoing challenge that leadership is actively working to address.
    8. The budget includes new Chromebooks and Chromebook carts.
    9. The current draft shows a $135,000 surplus, which is expected to increase based on the revised capitation rate assumptions.
    10. Raquel Leach makes a motion to approve. Nicole Jenkins seconds.
    11. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

B. Review & Approve Donation Approvals (Attachment 3B)*
    1. Nathan Yufer reviews proposed Unrestricted Donation to Freire Charter School from the Freire Foundation with the board.
    2. The final amount donated will be based on the need at the end of the fiscal year. Leadership proposes approving up to $300,000.
    3. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to approve. David Bryant seconds.
    4. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

C. Review & Approve Employee Handbook (Attachment 3C)*
    1. Katie Pollard shares updated Employee Handbook for the upcoming school year.
    2. Minor updates and revisions were made this year, including:
        a) Organizational Chart – Updated to reflect recent leadership changes and updated contact information.
        b) Instructional Principles Summary – Revised to align with the school's most recent Deeper Learning Rubric.
        c) Cultural Principles and Anti-Bullying Policy – Now included in the handbook; these policies were previously approved but had not yet been incorporated into the most recent handbook version
        d) Appendix A was removed, with its content now integrated into the Employee Handbook Acknowledgement Form, which staff sign at the end.
    3. Additional Items Added to the Handbook:
        a) A brief section on conflicts of interest was removed and replaced with the full Conflict of Interest Policy, now included directly in the handbook.
        b) The Secondary Employment Disclosure Form, which was previously a separate document, is now included for convenience and streamlined sign-off.
    4. These updates aim to consolidate documents, reduce redundant signatures, and ensure staff have access to the most current policies in one place.
    5. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to approve. David Bryant seconds.
    6. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

D. Review & Approve Amended Title IX Policy (Attachment 3D)*
    1. Tanza Pugliese shares February 19, 2025, U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor issued a decision that vacated the Department of Education's 2024 final rule for Title IX.
        a) This ruling prevents enforcement of the 2024 Title IX revisions and reinstates the 2020 regulations.
    2. In response, the school has worked with legal counsel to propose amendments to the existing Title IX policy to reflect compliance with the reinstated 2020 rules.
    3. Key changes to the Title IX policy include:
        a) Terminology:
            (1) "Sex-based harassment" is now referred to as "sexual harassment."
        b) Scope of Coverage:

(1) Discrimination or harassment claims based on sex stereotypes, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and pregnancy-related conditions are no longer covered under Title IX.

c) Definitions:

(1) Definitions of quid pro quo, hostile environments, sexual assault, and formal complaints have been abbreviated and generalized.

d) Procedural Adjustments:

(1) The timeline to review evidence and reports has been extended from 5 to 10 days.

(2) The decision-maker in Title IX investigations must now be separate from both the Title IX Coordinator and the Investigator.

4. While these updates may appear to limit protections, the school maintains its commitment to a safe and inclusive environment, consistent with state and local law, through other board-approved policies, including:

a) Non-Discrimination Policy

b) Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students Policy

c) Bullying and Cyberbullying Policy

d) Married, Pregnant, and Parenting Student Policy

e) Student Code of Conduct and other related disciplinary policies

5. These existing policies provide a framework for addressing and responding to harassment and discrimination outside of Title IX.

6. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to approve. Linda Kilpatrick seconds.

7. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

V. Executive SessionT

A. Settlement & Release - T.D. (Attachment 4A)

B. Personnel Matter - Review Head of School Evaluation - Andrea Zepp (Attachment 4B)

C. Personnel Matter - Review Head of School Evaluation - Chris Moore (Attachment 4C)

D. Annual Security and Safety Report - (Attachment 4D)

1. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to move into Executive Session at 8:33 AM to discuss: ***II.a.ii.: 65 Pa. C.S.A. § 708 (1) "To discuss any matter involving the ... evaluation of performance ...of any specific ... current ... employee... employed ... by the agency.", II.a.ii.: 65 Pa. C.S.A. § 708(a) (5): "To review and discuss agency business which, if conducted in public, would violate a lawful privilege or lead to the disclosure of information or confidentiality protected by law, including matters related to the initiation and conduct of investigations of possible or certain violations of the law and quasi-judicial deliberations.",*** and ***II.a.i.: 65 Pa. C.S. § 708 (a)(7) "To discuss, plan or review matters and records that are deemed necessary for emergency preparedness, protection of public safety and security of all property in a manner that if disclosed would be reasonably likely to jeopardize or threaten public safety or preparedness or public protection."*** David Bryant seconds.

2. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

3. Bruce Lesser makes a motion to exit Executive Session at 9:33 AM. David Bryant seconds.

4. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

VI. Approve Settlement & Release of T.D.*

A. The board reviews the Settlement & Release for T.D.

B. Linda Kilpatrick makes a motion to approve. Bruce Lesser seconds.

C. Kiara Allison, David Bryant, Nicole Jenkins, Linda Kilpatrick, Raquel Leach, Bruce Lesser, and Kathleen O'Connell vote in favor of the motion. There are no votes against and no abstentions.

VII. Executive & Network Update

A. FSNO CEO Transition & Vision Draft from Paul Ramirez

a. Paul Ramirez shares an abbreviated summary of the recent Board Retreat for members who were unable to attend.

b. At the retreat, the CEO presented a first draft of a multi-year vision for the organization and outlined plans to gather community input and finalize the vision for release in January 2026.

c. The draft vision includes four main components:

i. Renewed focus on core academics

1. Reaffirming the importance of reading, writing, math, and critical thinking as foundational learning.

2. Acknowledges the ongoing public debate about the purpose and focus of schools.

ii. Professional preparation and career exploration

1. Expanding students' awareness of career pathways, in addition to college preparation.

2. Creating a vibrant advising ecosystem that reflects the evolving job market.

3. Aims to give students a stronger sense of purpose from grades 8–12.

iii. Strengthening community and belonging

1. Recognizes school as one of the last institutions where students find belonging and form social connections.
2. Commits to fostering relationships and a sense of meaning in students' school experiences.

iv. Preparing students for the era of Artificial Intelligence

1. Proposes a new focus on helping students thrive in a world transformed by AI.
2. Raises concerns about the impact of AI on critical thinking, identity, and purpose.
3. Compares the scale of change to the impact of the internet, cell phones, and social media—but exponentially larger.
4. Stresses the need for schools to lead—not lag—on AI integration and its psychological, academic, and ethical implications.

d. Paul clarifies that the first three components represent renewals of long-standing values, while the fourth (AI) introduces a new, urgent focus.

e. A roadmap to finalize and share the vision includes:

i. At the September board meeting, two proposed dates will be shared for small group discussions in October and November.

ii. These vision working groups will include board members, staff, students, and community members.

iii. Sessions will include readings, discussion, and critical interrogation of the draft vision.

iv. Feedback and insights from these groups will be brought to the CEO's Council for review and finalization.

v. A final version of the vision will be shared with the broader community in January 2026, supported by the communications team.

VIII. School Report

A. Heads Report

1. Freire Network Dashboard (Attachment 5A)

a) Chris Moore shared key end-of-year outcomes across attendance, academics, behavior, enrollment, staffing, and planning for summer programming,

b) The school exceeded its attendance targets this year. Improvements were seen in both average daily attendance and the percentage of students attending 95% or more of school days, a key charter comparison benchmark. Leadership at Freire High School views this as a major win for the school community.

c) Preliminary academic data is encouraging. While final Keystone Exam results are expected in July, early indicators support a positive outlook.

d) The suspension rate remained consistent with the prior year. Leadership sees strong potential to reduce suspensions further in FY26 with more proactive strategies and targeted student support.

e) Initial enrollment met targets, but has plateaued - Leadership is identifying strategies to improve student retention and year-over-year continuity for families.

f) The school is in its strongest staffing position in recent years. A majority of staff are returning, and most departures have been mutual and appropriate. The team is nearly fully staffed as of early June, allowing for more intentional and selective hiring. Special recognition was given to Gloria from the network office for sending high-quality candidates.

g) Planning is underway for summer school and enrichment programming in the school building.

h) Leadership expects a brief break before shifting focus to preparations for the 2025–26 school year.

i) Andrea Zepp shared a reflective and forward-looking update on the middle school's performance, emphasizing continued growth and strategic priorities for the year ahead. Leadership described the school as "the little engine that could," continuing to make steady, determined progress despite some challenges.

j) Suspension rates declined, reflecting gains in student behavior and school culture.

k) Math: PSSA scores increased by five percentage points, surpassing the school's ten-point growth goal by reaching an eleven-point gain.

l) ELA: Scores declined by eight percentage points, which leadership acknowledged as a disappointment.

m) The results were described as a "mixed bag," with some cause for celebration and some areas needing renewed focus.

n) Staff are now analyzing the data and working to identify improvement strategies.
o) Leadership emphasized that student outcomes improve over time the longer students remain enrolled. The goal remains to enroll students by fifth grade and support them through eighth grade and transition to the high school.
p) A new fifth-grade section has been added and is nearly fully enrolled. Overall enrollment is strong, with only a few remaining open seats in upper grades. New bus routes have been added to further support recruitment and retention.
q) Leadership referenced 2018–2019 benchmarks of 54% reading and 20% math proficiency as achievable targets.
r) The team is committed to rebuilding and exceeding those results.
s) Only six staff members are not returning next year - A strong math teacher was recently hired, addressing a key academic need.
t) Remaining vacancies include a dean and a school psychologist.
u) Continued appreciation was expressed for Gloria from the network office, who has helped identify high-quality candidates and has been instrumental in strengthening the school's hiring efforts.

2. College Report (Attachment 5B)
   a) Freire High School had 100% of graduates apply to and receive an acceptance from at least one 2 or 4 year college. To date, Freire High School Seniors have been awarded $5,078,222 in scholarships and grants.

IX. Financials

A. April 2025 Financial Report (Attachment 6)

1. Ben Wainwright shares the Freire Charter School remains in strong financial standing, with a projected surplus of $113,000.
2. At Freire High School, the elevator modernization and repair project is ongoing and is expected to be completed by the end of August 2025.
3. As of April 2025:
   a) Freire Charter Middle School has an enrollment of 425 students, with a projected year-end average daily enrollment of 452.
   b) Freire High School has an enrollment of 442 students, with a projected year-end average enrollment is 478.
   c) Combined, Freire Charter school is forecasting a total average enrollment of 930 students for the year. With a charter-approved capacity of 1,000 students, this equates to operating at 90% capacity.

X. Advancement

A. Advancement Report (Attachment 7)

1. Melanie Reiser shares that the FY25 unrestricted fundraising target is set to $775,000 which is $150,000 per Freire campus.
2. Currently, the Advancement Team has raised $538,079 in donations and pledges toward the goal.
3. FY25 fundraising progress surrounds the following:
   a) The success of holding the Bridge to Wisdom event which honored Kelly Davenport and the 25 years of Freire Schools on May 13, 2025 at the Independence Visitor Center.
   b) The Advancement Team notes that they raised approximately $195,000 as part of the Bridge to Wisdom campaign, which included sponsorships and sponsor-level gifts to the Kelly Fund, which includes:
      (1) $180,000 in event sponsorships and sponsor-level gifts to the Kelly Fund.
      (2) $5,182 in ticket sales.
   c) The event cost approximately $62,000 to produce, about $4,000 more than last year's event.
   d) There were over 217 people in attendance which included 112 guests, 19 board members, 56 staff/staff volunteers, 4 parents, and 26 students.
4. Other advancement updates include:
   a) The Advancement Team is finishing out the year with additional personal donor solicitation.
   b) Recently, the advancement team received $58,000 in EITC donation, which supports innovative educational programming at our Philadelphia campuses, namely our professional prep work. This brings our EITC to nearly $117,000 for the fiscal year of 2025, which is then to be spent in fiscal year 2026.
   c) There is a $30,000 grant request under consideration with the Laffey-McHugh Foundation to support student interventions at Freire Wilmington. A decision will be made by the end of June.

    d) Also, the Advancement Team is preparing to do a "Meet the Grads" Class of 2025 donor update, which will then go out in late June/early July.
    e) Melanie notes her team is nearing the end of a multi month transition to a new donor database and communications platform.

B. Political Landscape

1. Freire Schools continues to pay close attention to any proposed charter regulation, budget cuts or proposed changes to the charter school renewal process.

XI. Governance

A. Annual Evaluation of Freire Schools Collaborative (Attachment 8A)

1. Leigh Botwinik shares that each year, both board members and Heads of School are asked to complete surveys evaluating the support provided by the Network Office to schools.
2. This feedback informs efforts to strengthen internal services and responsiveness.
3. The Finance and Business Operations team, led by Nathan, received notably high marks for the quality of service and support provided to schools. Appreciation was expressed for the team's professionalism and consistency.
4. Areas for Improvement:
    a) Special Education Compliance
        (1) Cited as an area needing enhanced support; steps are already being taken to address it.
        (2) The network is in the process of hiring a new position to be housed in the Network Office specifically to strengthen special education programming and compliance across schools.
    b) External Affairs:
        (1) Feedback pointed to the desire for increased visibility and relationship-building with local political figures and key community stakeholders.
        (2) Leadership acknowledged this and committed to exploring ways to strengthen external engagement.
    c) IT Communication:
        (1) From Heads of School: a need for improved coordination between the Network IT team and school-based IT teams.
        (2) The team will evaluate structures and processes to better align communication and support systems.

B. Board Member Self Evaluation (Attachment 8B)

1. Leigh Botwinik notes that this year's board self evaluation results were shared at the recent Board retreat.
2. Paul Ramirez notes one key takeaway from the evaluation and retreat discussion:
    a) The board's most important governance priority moving forward is building and sustaining a strong, diverse pipeline of future board members.
    b) All board members are encouraged to identify and recommend strong candidates as we seek to expand and strengthen the board.

C. David Bryant Resignation (Attachment 8C)

1. The board acknowledges the resignation of David Bryant.

Meeting Adjourned, 10:21 AM