

## **Achievement First Hartford Academy**

### **Board of Directors Meeting**

Monday, March 23, 2015, 5:00 – 6:30 pm

AF Hartford High School, 305 Greenfield Street, Hartford

The following board members, constituting a quorum, and Achievement First Staff were in attendance:

#### **I. Call to Order & Attendance**

The meeting was called to order at 5:08 pm by John Motley.

Barry Jacobson, AFHA Board -yes

James Morton, AFHA Board -no

John Motley, AFHA Board -yes

Nyema Pinkney, AFHA Board -yes

Marshall Ruben, AFHA Board -no

Angela Scott, AFHA Board -no

Nancy Zwiener, AFHA Board - yes (phone)

Jean LaVecchia, AFHA Board -yes

Colleen Palmer, AFHA Board - yes (phone)

Lankford Wade, AFHA Board - yes

Emily Banks, School Leadership - Yes

Benjamin Cruse, School Leadership - Yes

Ernest Peterson, School Leadership - Yes

Sorby Grant, School Leadership - Yes

Nick Lebron, AF Network Support - Yes

Sarah Blanton, AF Network Support - Yes

Ken Paul, AF Network Support - Yes

Guest: Carl Hardrick

#### **II. Open Session For Public Comment**

No public comment.

#### **III. Principal Reports**

- A. Mr. Ernest Peterson, Principal of Achievement First Hartford Elementary School, provided a school report.

Mr. Peterson described the academic curriculum for the remainder of the school year. Teachers will be implementing more small group instruction and focusing on individualized learning. Teachers will also receive more professional development on Common Core standards. Ms. Jean LaVecchia asked which grades will be tested on the new common core aligned SBAC assessments. Mr. Peterson confirmed that the SBAC assessments begin in third grade. Mr. Peterson provided an update on Teacher retention and the mechanisms used to retain talented teachers and leaders. Mr. Peterson is proud of the student's accomplishments and expressed an overall sense of stability in the school. Mr. John Motley asked how the school is managing kindergarten behavior, specifically suspensions. Mr. Peterson shared that small group instruction and individualized attention for students has made a

positive impact on school culture. In addition, the school will "double down" on this academic approach during the 2015-16 school year.

- B. Ms. Sorby Grant, Principal of Achievement First Hartford Middle School, provided a school report.

Ms. Grant described improvements to school culture in the recent weeks. She confirmed that parents and families are noting the positive changes. Ms. Grant retold the story of a student with a disability who has shown tremendous improvement. Ms. Grant believes that while the school is on the right path to improving culture, there is still work to be done. Student suspensions remain high due to learned behaviors, particularly behavior that prompts automatic suspension. School leaders and teachers continue to reach out to and work with repeat offenders in an effort to reduce suspensions and improve relationships. Ms. Grant and teachers are focused on reinvesting in student engagement. Ms. Grant described a March Madness bracket related to academics that has created enthusiasm at the school.

Ms. Grant shared plans for the end of the school year including the testing dates for the SBAC assessments. Jean LaVecchia inquired about summer school. Ms. Grant confirmed that she will be having discussions with AF Superintendents regarding summer school as well as planning and hiring for the 2015-16 school year..

- C. Mr. Ben Cruse, Principal of Achievement First Summit Middle School, provided a report.

Mr. Cruse described student attendance benchmarks at AF Summit. He shared that school leaders and teachers have been reaching out to parents to promote student attendance. He shared that five students transitioned to different schools with two moving out of the district and three matriculating to traditional schools within Hartford Public Schools. Mr. Cruse also discussed student behavior citing 10 students who received out of school suspension for repeat offences of school policy and one student who faces expulsion for carrying a knife to and from school for security purposes. In a coordinated effort to improve academic and school culture, AF Summit hosted two events. First, an overnight with the aim of promoting reading achievement at school. Second, an Honor roll banquet for students and families to recognize students for their exemplary work. As a result, students actively engaged in academics to achieve honor roll status. Mr. Cruse also shared that he is focusing on staff retention and involving parents in advocacy initiatives.

- D. Ms. Emile Banks, Principal of Achievement First Hartford High School, provided a report.

Ms. Banks provided an update on teacher retention and confirmed that only two teachers may not be returning next year. She stated that the strong retention rate of teachers inspires confidence in the school and the academic program. Ms. Banks also discussed the improved partnership with Jumoke Academy. In regards to academics, teachers and students are focusing on AP standards and AP tests

to a greater extent than SBAC test preparation. Ms. Banks confirmed that five new AP courses will be offered in the 2015-16 school year.

#### **IV. Community Engagement Report (Nick Lebron)**

Mr. Nick Lebron, Community Outreach Associate, provided an update. He shared that student recruitment has been challenging. He described the student recruitment process. In order for AF to recruit students, Hartford Public Schools must provide a list of rising kindergarteners and 5th graders. The lists of students were delayed and the information available on the Hartford Public Schools website was incorrect. In addition, zoning areas were slow to be corrected. Mr. Lebron shared that he had to do much more door to door recruitment than anticipated. Once the situation was remedied and AF finally received the accurate information about students in February, Mr. Lebron was able to actively recruit students and AF's Hartford schools were among the top schools selected by families.

Post lottery, AF met with the district to discuss the challenges faced. The meeting was positive and Mr. Lebron recently received forms and approval to continue to recruit students up until and even after the lottery date. The student application deadline was posted at end of February but the lottery had still not occurred. Hartford Public Schools corrected the website on February 1st. Currently, AF's applications are tremendously short in 5th grade.

Overall, AF is making efforts to reach out to families by sending mailings, placing ads on busses, attending school fairs, and hosting parent information sessions. Mr. Lebron confirmed that every parent who attended the information sessions submitted an application for their child to attend an AF school. Mr. John Motley believes we need to do more, especially in the north side to counter other schools to get the open seats filled. Mr. Ken Paul articulated that Hartford has been the most difficult geography to recruit students in the entire AF Network. He believes we need a continued, extraordinary effort utilizing targeted strategies that extends well into the summer to achieve full enrollment.

Mr. John Motley and Mr. Ken Paul both praised Mr. Lebron for his student recruitment work in an environment that has always been challenging. Mr. Lebron articulated that despite many challenges, this is his favorite part of his work having personally signed up 101 families. Mr. Lebron provided an illustrative example of the challenges associated with completing the student application for Hartford Public Schools. He retold the story of a mother who took the bus, arrived at 3:00 p.m. but didn't have her child's ID number. She left on the bus to go to the public school to get the ID number and later called Mr. Lebron at 8:00 p.m. with her child's ID number and together they complete the application. Ultimately, Mr. Lebron is confident that AF will fill the open student seats. Canvassing support in addition to parents and students is being provided by Voice of Women of Color.

Ms Jean LaVecchia inquired about local, community newspapers and whether AF could feature students into those papers and highlight the successes at AF schools. She also inquired about local colleges who might provide Mr. Lebron with an intern to help support the great work he is doing.

**V. Teacher Certification (Laurie Bussmann)**

Ms. Bussmann provided an update on teacher certification. She shared that tracking certification is a priority for the operations staff. Ms. Bussmann announced that the vast majority of AF teachers are certified in Hartford. Teacher certification may change for the 2015-16 school year depending on teacher retention. School leadership will be focusing on certification for new hires and plan for staffing changes if a teacher is unwilling or unable to get certified within two years. Ms. Jean LaVecchia asked how TFA teachers are certified. Ms. Bussmann confirmed that TFA teachers have a residency certificate for the first year and can subsequently apply for full certification.

**VI. Board Giving (John Motley)**

Mr. John Motley reminded board members that they need to make a gift, of any size, before June 30, 2015.

**VII. Summer Internships (Sarah Blanton)**

Ms. Blanton discussed the need for summer internships for high school scholars.

**VIII. Board Member Resignation (John Motley)**

Mr. John Motley announced the resignation of James Morton who is moving to Boston to lead the Boston YMCA.

**IX. New Member recruitment (John Motley)**

Mr. John Motley requested that the board consider potential new candidates.

**X. Summer Retreat (John Motley)**

Ms. Blanton discussed potential dates for the summer retreat.

**XI. Financial Report (John Motley)**

Mr. John Motley provided the financial report and explained the budget surplus.

**XII. Board Business**

Mr. John Motley discussed Connecticut a Senate Bill 1096 and the potential for a moratorium on charter schools in Connecticut.

**Resolution 1:**

RESOLVED, the Achievement First Hartford Board of Directors hereby approves the Joint AF Connecticut meeting minutes on January 21, 2015.

John Motley motioned to approved, Nyema Pinckney seconded, all in favor.

RESOLVED, the Achievement First Hartford Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes January 21, 2015 and February 12, 2015.

John Motley motioned to approved, Jean LaVecchia seconded, all in favor.

**Resolution 2:**

RESOLVED, the Achievement First Hartford Board of Directors hereby approves the financial report as presented.

Jean LaVecchia motioned to approve, Barry Jacobsen seconded, all in favor.

**Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 pm by Barry Jacobson.