

# Harambee Institute of Science and Technology Charter School Board of Trustees Public Meeting Minutes

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## **Board Meeting Minutes Wednesday, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2023**

The meeting of the Board of Trustees Public Meeting was held on Wednesday, May 31<sup>st</sup> 2023 via Zoom at 6:35 p.m.

### **Open Session**

#### **Meeting Called to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.  
by Board Chairman Maurice Baynard

#### **Board Members Present:**

Maurice Baynard  
C. Wade Mosely  
Larry Bell  
Jan Gillespie- Walton  
Charis Jackson  
Shawn Blue  
Donna Holmes Lockett

#### **Board Members Absent:**

Renee Whitby  
Joseph Foster

#### **Others Present:**

Gregory Shannon	CEO
Michelle Thornton	CFO
Deleah Archer	Assistant Principal of Specialized Services
Nakia Brown	Assistant Principal of Instruction
David Rosario	Assistant Principal of School Operations
Danielle Bryant	Executive Assistant to the CEO
Jenita Lunsford	Board Liaison

#### **Libation (Board member Renee Whitby)**

#### **Introduction of Visitors and Others Present**

There were no visitors in attendance for this public meeting

## **Roll Call**

Board Chairman Maurice Baynard asked Board members and the senior leadership team to give introductions. Board members and the senior leadership team introduced themselves, stated their names and titles.

## **Review of the April 26<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting Minutes (Approval of minutes)**

Dr. Baynard asked if there were any corrections and/or additions to the April 26<sup>th</sup> Board minutes. He opened the floor to Board members for comments. There were no additions or corrections. Board member Wade made a motion to accept the minutes as presented, all were in favor, none were opposed and there was a unanimous motion to accept the minutes as presented.

Board member Larry asked about the minutes from the March meeting that were due to be approved at this meeting. Dr. Baynard noted that those minutes needed to be uploaded to the Epicenter, therefore, review and approval of the March 29<sup>th</sup> minutes was done electronically by a quorum, all were in favor none were opposed and there was a unanimous motion to accept the minutes as presented.

Approval: 7                      AYE: 0                      Nays: 0                      Abstentions: 0                      Absent: 2

## **CEO Report, Greg Shannon**

Greg reported that he would share salient points of information and occurrences over the past 30 days. He gave a special welcome to Dr. Blue their newest Board member. He shared that he had a nice conversation with Doctor Blue last week about some therapeutic services that they are attempting to onboard at Harambee. He stated that the agenda for the evening would highlight a few brief organizational updates but the lion share of the agenda would encompass Michelle and the budget for next year. He said that in addition, they have a couple of voting items, which would include the budget and a requisition regarding change orders for their ICS Capital Improvement Projects.

## **ICS Capital Improvement Projects (Windows and Siding)**

Greg thanked David Rosario, Terrance and Board member Wade for their diligence in helping them get through and navigate what he said was a pretty complex and complicated system of capital improvements. He said that had it not been for the expertise of Board member Wade, Michelle and the others that were just mentioned, they would not be nearly at the point that they are now, where they are ready to execute those projects. He said that the first part of the projects would be windows and siding. He said that for the Board's review and approval this evening is a resolution, which will allow the CEO and team to give the authority to approve change orders that are in excess of \$10,000 dollars. This will help them not to slow down the process and not to have to wait month over month for those change orders to be approved. This document is before the Board for a vote this evening.

### **Leadership Retreat 2023**

Greg reported that they are well underway with planning for their 2023 Leadership Retreat. He said that this year's retreat from a school staffing standpoint is smaller than their traditional 30 or 35 individuals. He said that they are taking 13 staff members along with Board member Joe in person for the retreat this year. He reminded members that there will be a virtual option for Board members who wish to participate virtually, but the retreat this year will focus on keeping the main thing, the main thing with strong instructional practices. He indicated that they will focus solely and squarely on instructional practices and foci. He said that they have partnered with a dynamic instructional leader Dr. Tamara Thomas Smith the Deputy Superintendent from the Cheltenham School District. One of the areas that they discussed was having her on their academic team and rather than being the facilitators themselves, they will be participants to be developed around their instructional practices.

Greg informed members Nakia has had a number of conversations and meetings with Dr. Smith and her team. She comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience around strong instructional practices and she and her team will be the facilitators for the Retreat on Wednesday July 26<sup>th</sup>, Thursday July 27<sup>th</sup> and Friday July 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Fundraising and Development**

Greg reported that they had their signature fundraising event on Wednesday May 17<sup>th</sup>, which focused on University Presidents post secondary education with a theme of University Presidents "Then and Now". The panel of presidents articulated and discussed their journey and their experiences from Middle School to their University Presidency. Greg told members that there was a wealth of information shared. He said that it was an amazing time at the Pyramid Club last Wednesday. Greg mentioned that he and Michelle had a discussion with Board member Wade on their finance call yesterday and they will be providing the Board with a report on the Fundraising and Development relative to the dollars that were raised and the cost of the event.

Greg informed members that they are approaching the end of the school year and they have 12 school days remaining until June 16<sup>th</sup>. He reported that they are poised and set for another amazing closing exercise and they want to invite all of our their esteemed Board members to the closing exercises, which will take place at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday June 15<sup>th</sup>. Greg told members that it is always an amazing event. He said that they will close 66<sup>th</sup> street and will hold the event in front of the school. He stated that for the past two or three years they have had it outside and it has been an amazing event. He told members that he would have Danielle send a calendar invitation to all members inviting them to the closing exercises. He shared with members that they have an amazing group of Moore's 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who are going on as usual to some of the top high schools in the city and in the region.

In addition, Greg reported that next week on Wednesday, their African Street Festival will take place. He describes the event as a mini Odunde where they close all of the streets that surround Harambee and set the school up in carnival style and allow the children to have an amazing time celebrating their African heritage and culture. He said that there are African drummers, African dancers, African stilt walkers along with carnival games and great food. He invited all Board members and indicated that Danielle would send the information out tomorrow in a calendar invite.

Greg gave kudos to Tara Webb who is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade paraprofessional and also the community liaison and chair of their Street Festival Committee. He said that she has done yeoman's work and an amazing job pulling the event together. He urged members to drop her a line in the e-mail chat just to give her a shout out for doing an amazing job. Greg concluded his report and opened the floor for any questions, comments or concerns. Dr. Baynard asked Greg to place Tara's name and e-mail address in the chat for Board members.

Dr. Baynard asked when would they have some data back on PSSA scores. Greg responded that the preliminary data was supposed to be back on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and Nakia agreed that it is due around that time but it will not consist of all of the data. She said that it is early and they were able to get their ELA test information in time for early release and the final scores will be in around June 21<sup>st</sup>. She reported that it is a big report that has to be scrubbed. Greg said that they are very excited and are anxiously awaiting the results and hoping for great growth. Greg turned the meeting over to Michelle for a discussion on the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

### **2023-2024 Budget Presentation: Michelle Thornton**

Michelle shared her screen and advised members that she would be presenting their 2023-2024 budget. She noted that a copy of the budget was placed in everyone's Board packet and she would provide details of the budget. She noted that the agenda would consist of some assumptions that they are making within the projected budget. She said that she would go over some details and talk about the timelines and what would be next. She noted that there would be an opportunity for questions and answers during the presentation this time since it is interactive.

#### **Overview**

Michelle reported that there were some key focus areas for their 2023-2024 budget which included strong instruction, keeping the main thing the main thing, their coaching model, support staff, data driven and highly qualified teachers.

She indicated that they had a 12% decrease in their revenue so they had to shift some of their operating dollars from their ESSER funding and with that funding they maintained their support staff and even increased support staff in the

classroom. She said that this year having certified teachers has been a priority for them and also having highly qualified support staff as well. She noted that professional development is always a priority for them so coming into this new budget year 2023-2024, they were staying consistent with strong instruction and really pushing hard on their data and on their curriculum. She said that just like prior years, having certified teachers has been a priority so they have invested in staff by providing a development plan to help non-certified teachers become certified. They have also supported them with tuition reimbursement, meeting with them on a quarterly basis and helping them with the cost of taking the test. Their capital improvement projects will also be a focus for this budget year 2023-2024.

### **Assumptions**

Michelle reported that there are a number of assumptions in the budget on the revenue side. She said that they are proposing or projecting a 5% increase in their general education per pupil rate and a 3% increase in their special education rate. She reminded members again that they had a 12% decrease in their revenue for this current year which was historical. She said that in the 15 or 20 years that she has been in this line of work she has never seen a 12% decrease and so they were able to rely on their Stimulus funding and ESSER Cares Act funding to be able to fill in the gaps for this current year with the decrease. She said that she does not expect that there will be another decrease on top of this one, so they are proposing that there will be an 8% decrease, which is pretty average when you look at it historically over the past ten years.

Michelle stated that the other assumption in this budget is the average of 596 students. She said that she and Greg met yesterday about the projected enrollment for next year and they are sitting at 630 enrolled students and families for this upcoming year, which includes their returning students and those families that have enrolled through the lottery.

Michelle indicated that the other component of their revenue that is incorporated into this budget is that 13% of their total population will be Special Education and as most are aware, the rate for Special Education is higher than the General Education per pupil rate. She said that typically the Special Education population is about 10% of the population but they are proposing that there will be an increase to that percentage because of the system that Deleah has in place with identifying students and generally within the industry being post pandemic there will be an increase in the percentage of Special Education students.

Michelle indicated that those were the assumptions on the **revenue** side and on the **expense** side, incorporated in the budget is a \$525,000 grant for their 21st Century Community Learning Center. She added that you will also see those funds on the income side and also on the expense side but not noted on this slide that you are reviewing there's also another grant for \$140,000 that they

were awarded this year from the Pennsylvania Crime Commission. Those funds will be split between Their Counseling department and their Security department. She said that Greg has been in discussion with Board member Blue to develop the curriculum around that grant which is a component for therapeutic counseling for their families. The other component would be for security, which will support professional development for their Security and CRT staff.

Michelle reported that another assumption on the expense side is a decrease in their PSERS rate. She said that their Pennsylvania School Employees Retirement rate has a small decrease that will not likely remain down. She said that their contingency standard is 3% of their total operating budget and they are proposing a 5% increase in their salaries which will consist of a 2% cost of living increase for staff members and up to 3% for a performance increase, but overall budgeted for a 5% increase in salaries. She added that included in a couple of the other slides there is \$1.8 million from their ARP ESSER funding for their capital improvement projects. See below for a recap and breakdown of the 2023-2024 Budget Highlights and General Fund Operating Budget.

## **Assumptions**

### **Revenue**

5% increase in general education pupil rate

3% increase in special education pupil rate

Average enrollment at 596

Average classroom size is 30 students

13% special education population

County families - flat rate

### **Expenses**

Assumes \$525k 21st Century grant award

PSERS rate decrease from 35.26% to 34%

3% contingency

Up to 5% increase in the base salary

Assumes \$1m uses of ARP ESSER funds for facilities capital improvements

Michelle pointed out in the slides their enrollment by grade level and per pupil rates. She also showed the cap per grade level based upon a 630-count enrollment. She also indicated, that it gives a sense of the dollar amount per student that the school is funded for from a local level. Dr. Baynard asked what is the historical precedent for the decrease in General ED and the corresponding increase in Special ED. She said that generally because of the nature of Special Education the cost for educating a special education student has just been on the rise across all districts and even within the country. She said that it is really hard for there to be anything but decreases in their special education process because of the rate of rising costs to educate a special education child. Greg asked if he could jump in to provide an additional explanation. He noted that some of it is pandemic related, but there are more children being identified across the Commonwealth and across the country as needing specialized services along

with their disability types because of COVID. He said that the disability type is on the further end of the spectrum and the spectrum is from gifted on one end and on the other end ID, so because of COVID, for this disability type there are more cases on the further end. He reiterated that they are seeing that trend not just at Harambee or here locally, but it is a national trend across the country.

Michelle continued her presentation and moved on to the next couple of slides which she said would provide more detail in terms of the numbers and comparing their current year's budget versus the proposed budget for 2023-2024. She said that the first column is looking at their revenue, which is broken into three main categories local revenue, state revenue and federal revenue. She reviewed the changes from this current years budget vs. the proposed budget. Their local revenue has had significant changes, while their state revenue remained the same and has been consistent over a number of years except for a health grant reimbursement that was 9,000 dollars and a smaller grant of 36,000. The significant change in the federal funding is encumbering more of their ESSER funding to cover the cost of their capital improvement projects. She said that they have been working on this for a number of years, but now really seeing these projects come to fruition is what they are expecting to happen over the next 12 to 18 months. Board member Wade asked where do they capture the out of districts cost or income that comes in, is it under local. Michelle said yes it is captured under local and you will see it captured separately, but included in there is there out of district families and they remained flat for the projections with the outer district families. She noted that they have about 57 families that are from outside counties of Philadelphia so they proposed no change.

Michelle continued with her review of budgetary items and explained how they shifted dollars in order to sustain their operations. She explained to members that they are shifting funding back to their operating budget, which explains the 429,000 difference.

## **Food Service**

Michelle reported that there is an increase in the cost for Food Services because Greg met with the food service management company in the beginning of the year and demanded better service for the students. He asked for a change in the quality of food that was being served and a change in the menus. He spoke with the students and heard the students and made some changes with their meal planning. The result is that there is an increase in cost for their food service operations, but there has also been an increase in the number of students that are engaging in the system and therefore an increase in their revenue along with the expenses. Michelle mentioned that the food services consultant that they have been working with, Pam Gallagher has been a tremendous asset to the organization with helping them to stay on top of the reporting and getting through

their food service inspections. She said that the result of this is an increase in the overall operations and an increase in the revenue component as well.

### **Priorities**

Michelle reiterated that the overall priority that is embedded in the budget for next year is strong instruction and keeping the main thing the main thing. She said that the Special Education Department is under that category and they would like to continue that focus and to continue with the model that Deleah has developed.

Michelle said that another priority for them is highly qualified staff, not just certified teachers but highly qualified paraprofessionals as well. She said that there is a likely chance that there will be support staff that will be inspired to become good teachers, so this will be a priority along with Professional Development.

Michelle reported that Capital Improvement Projects will also be a focus this year and the last component that they want to have a conversation about at the retreat is refinancing their bond debt to save money. She said that they have had conversations with Jay Romanca who will provide a presentation at the retreat.

### **Next Steps**

Michelle said that the next steps would be to vote on the budget. She told members that she was hoping that they would vote tonight and then just to be prepared for their reporting that needs to take place over the next 30 days and then implementation for July 1st. Michelle opened the floor to questions on her presentation and indicated that before questions she wanted to share one of her favorite videos. She shared a video with a group of kids from Harambee in the after school program planting fresh mushrooms in their urban garden. She said that they were just so excited about it and it is one of her favorite programs and favorite clips from the program.

Michelle returned to questions regarding the budget and she thanked their Board treasurer Larry Bell, Board member Wade Mosely and CEO Greg Shannon for being consistent with meeting every month and working with them in reviewing their finances and the budget. Board member Larry asked for a quick update on the positions that are open so that the board could be involved and also to put feelers out. She responded that they interview year round and have been looking for certified Special ED teachers and certified regular Ed teachers. Michelle turned the meeting back to Greg and he indicated that this would conclude their updates for the month and asked for a vote on the ICS Change Order along with the Budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Dr. Baynard opened the floor for Board discussion before moving on to the two action items.

Board member Wade asked Greg, with having a new Superintendent and his new five year strategic plan, what does he think the Superintendents position is going to be on Charter schools and what does it look like going forward.



Greg responded that his position on Charter Schools aligns with the School Boards position on Charter Schools. He said that there are any number of Charter School Organizations, the African American Charter School Alliance as well as the Pennsylvania Charters for Excellence groups that are working with lawmakers in Harrisburg to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of service and support for Charter Schools, as well as to ensure that there is equality in the Charter renewal and the Charter oversight process. He said the biggest thing that the Charter community is focused on right now is insuring that there is equity and fidelity in the evaluation process.

Dr. Baynard opened the floor for a motion on the 2023-2024 Budget.

### **Action Items**

**Vote:** 2023-2024 Operating Budget

**Motion:** Board Member Larry made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 budget, seconded by Board member Wade. All were in favor, none were opposed and it was passed unanimously.

Approval: 7            AYE: 0            Nays: 0            Abstentions: 0            Absent: 2

**Footnote to the topic of the budget:** Board member Wade made a note that the budget is a fluid document and the Board will be looking at it especially when they get an affirmation for the per pupil rate. He said that there may be a need for adjustments or it may not. They will look at it periodically and come back to the Board if they need to make amendments. He said that it is a living document that they will adjust accordingly. Michelle said that they have not received their adjustment for the current year yet and they are hoping for an increase. She said that the announcement for their next year per pupil rate has not happened yet either. She said that they expect it to be announced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of June.

**Vote:** that the Resolution for Approval of Change Event and Change Order Decision-Making Authority be approved as presented.

**Motion:** Board member Wade made a motion to approve the Resolution for Approval of Change Event and Change Order Decision-Making Authority seconded by Board member Larry. All were in favor, none were opposed and it was passed unanimously.

The intent of the document states that upon receipt of contractor Change Event pricing, primary review of the contractor response shall be performed by ICS, to validate pricing and confirm conformance with the Change Event documents. Change Event pricing that has passed ICS primary review shall then undergo secondary review by the design team to further validate pricing and conformance with the Change Event documents. Change Event pricing that has passed primary and secondary review shall then be presented to the appropriate level of

Change Event Decision Making Authority for final approval and authorization to proceed. And it is also stated that at the end of each month, all duly approved Change Events shall be combined into a single Change Order and presented to the Harambee Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Gregory Shannon, for execution. Approval of this resolution is recommended by the Project Oversight Committee representing Harambee Institute of Science and Technology Charter School.

Please review the document for the following levels of Decision Making Authority per individual Change Event that are recommended by the Project Oversight Committee to streamline the approval process:

**Level 1 Approval Authority – (Name of Authorized Person(s))**  
Approval of all Change Events up to but not to exceed \$10,000 each

**Level 2 Approval Authority – Project Oversight Committee**  
Approval of all Change Events exceeding \$10,000 each, but not to exceed \$25,000 each

**Level 3 Approval Authority – Harambee Board of Trustees Approval of all**  
Change Events exceeding \$25,000.00 each

Approval: 7            AYE: 0            Nays: 0            Abstentions: 0            Absent: 2

Board member Wade posed an additional question to Nakia. He asked if we would know anything about the PSSA's before September. Nakia indicated that we will have some preliminary data by the end of June or the beginning of July. She said that some numbers will start coming in on June 2nd for the first set of tests that they send out and then they will get raw data around the 21<sup>st</sup>, but it will take some time for them to go through it and analyze it. There are pages of numbers and so they will have preliminary data first and then the actual student reports and parent reports will come out in September.

### **Old Business**

None

### **New Business**

None

### **Public Concerns**

None

**Motion:** Board Member Wade made a motion to adjourn the public session, seconded by Board member Charis. All were in favor none were opposed.

Approval: 7            AYE: 0            Nays: 0            Abstentions: 0            Absent: 2

**Next Public Meeting:** The next Public Board Meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> 2023.