

**MEETING MINUTES  
OF  
CATALYST ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL**

**February 6, 2024**

**Held in Person at Catalyst Academy Charter School and virtually Via Zoom**

Trustee Attendees: Rachel Amankulor, Carey Harris, Erin Stiling, Majestic Lane

Other Attendees: Brian Smith, Kathy Clark, Meghan Lawrence (joined at 6:30 pm)

Rachel Amankulor called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M.

**Public Comment:** None

**Approval of Minutes.** The minutes of the December 5, 2023, meeting were reviewed. There were no changes. Although there was not a quorum at the January 2, 2024 meeting, so not action was taken, the minutes from that meeting were also reviewed. *Carey Harris moved to approve the minutes from the December 5, 2023 and the January 2, 2024 minutes.. The motion was seconded by Rachel Amankulor and carried unanimously.*

**Monthly Financial Update.** Brian Smith provided a review of the financials to the Board. Mr. Smith noted that 2023 ended with \$1.4 million and has 103 days of cash on hand which is up from 86 days of cash on hand at the end of 2023. Mr. Smith reminded the Board that the goal is to have more than 90 days of cash on hand. In addition, Mr. Smith reported that the school operated with a \$353,576 surplus through the first six months into the 2024 fiscal year. The audited fiscal balance at the end of the 2023 fiscal year was \$1,713,427.

**Payment of Bills.** Brian Smith reviewed the expenses for November and December 2023. *Majestic Lane moved to approve the payment of bills as presented. The motion was seconded by Carey Harris and carried unanimously.*

**Human Resources Report.** Brian Smith provided the following updated resignations/terminations: Melissa Tipton (General Education teacher) and new hires: Megan Diggans (Grade Level Support teacher); Marissa Fircak (STEM teacher); Deena Gray (P-T Wednesday Enrichment Support); and Alaijha Smith (P-T Wednesday Enrichment Support). The Board discussed the stabilization of staffing and the overall improvement of staff culture. *Erin Stiling moved to approve the Human Resources Report as presented. The motion was seconded by Carey Harris and carried unanimously.*

**Technology Services Contract.** Mr. Smith discussed with the Board the current technology services contract and a new proposal. The original IT services provider from 2020 to present was Ricoh. Mr. Smith sought and received three proposals for a new IT service provider; Ricoh was one of the submissions of a new proposal. The request for proposals focused on criteria including:

cost (both recurring and ad hoc); completeness of proposal; estimate of service level (“help desk” vs. “IT manager”); estimate of service responsiveness (speed of resolution/local availability); flexibility to respond to the school’s needs as the organization grows; and relevant experience. Mr. Smith reported that he would like to hire FSA Consulting based upon the proposals received. FSA Consulting presented a similar cost to the current contract, but the difference came with the in-person support and service. In addition, there will be a one-time \$6,000 on-boarding expense. Mr. Smith requested that the Board approve the agreement with FSA Consulting subject to review and approval of the contract by the solicitor. *Majestic Lane moved to approve the agreement with FSA Consulting subject to review and approval by SMGG. The motion was seconded by Carey Harris and carried unanimously.*

**PA Legislative Update.** Mr. Smith discussed with the Board the budget address delivered by Gov. Shapiro which occurred earlier today. Gov. Shapiro proposed additional education spending (\$1.1B) across the board but targeted towards districts with low per-pupil funding to address inequity. In addition, Mr. Smith noted that Gov. Shapiro indicated support for HB 1422 which is largely focused on cyber charter schools and sets statewide cyber charter tuition rate at \$8,000/student. According to the proposal, this will reduce cyber funding by \$262 million. Mr. Smith noted that at this time it is unclear if the Governor supports tiered special education funding for cyber charters that is contained in HB 1422. Mr. Smith and Ms. Clark engaged in a conversation with the Board about special education funding and charter schools. Mr. Smith noted that the PA Coalition of Public Charter Schools (PCPCS) is lobbying against changes to cyber charter funding.

**Governance Update.** Rachel Amankulor spoke with the Board about the need to find additional board members. She reminded the Board that there has not been a replacement for Gretchen Generett since she left the Board. Ms. Amankulor recommended Kaylan Moore as a potential new board member, and previously circulated her resume and information. Mr. Smith has previously spoken with Ms. Moore and she has already toured Catalyst and is interested in being on the Board. Ms. Amankulor reported that Ms. Moore is involved with education, but works for a company that is located in Boston, however she works remotely and resides in Pittsburgh. The Board discussed Ms. Moore’s qualifications. *Carey Harris moved to approve Kaylan Moore as a Board Member for Catalyst Board of Trustees effective March 5, 2024. The motion was seconded by Erin Stiling and carried unanimously.*

**Attendance Update.** Brian Smith provided a general update on absences. Overall the attendance rate is around 88% through January. Mr. Smith noted that there was a 2-hour delay on January 9<sup>th</sup> which resulted in the worst attendance (62%) but was a one-time occurrence.

**General Update.** Mr. Smith provided an overview of recent improved growth in STEP/University of Chicago growth, particularly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. In addition, MAPA testing showed improved achievement in math and ELA over last year. It was noted that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade the School switched from administering the K-2<sup>nd</sup> MAP test to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> MAP test. This test is more rigorous because scholars can no longer have questions read to them by the testing app. Mr. Smith also discussed with the Board various ways the school is preparing for PSSAs. He noted that key issues with PSSAs include academic gaps, testing stamina, academic frustration, differentiation of

support and resources. Some of the components of preparing for the PSSAs include academic planning, homework, staff preparation and operational preparation, student investment, family communication, and additional supports.

Finally, Mr. Smith discussed the recent special education monitoring by the PA Bureau of Special Education which just concluded. He noted that a formal report will be issued in the coming months, but based on the exit interview he believes that the school may need some board policy updated, some additional extended school year support and some additional parent training. Overall, Mr. Smith thought the monitoring went well and the Board was appreciative of all the hard work by Mr. Smith and the administration.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 P.M.