Democracy Prep Baton Rouge

Minutes

Board Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday September 3rd, 2019 at 6:00 PM

Location

4055 Prescott Rd. Baton Rouge, LA 70805

Directors Present

E. Martin, C. Lamond, E. Campbell, J. Richey, A. D’Aquín

Directors Absent

M. Walters

Guests Present

C. Raymond, K. Daniels, K. Anker, L. Jones Easton, M. Gieg, T. Allen, A. Ntem

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance and Guests

Eddrick Martin, Board Chairperson for Democracy Prep Baton Rouge, welcomed Tara Allen, prospective Board member, to the DPBR Board meeting. The Board inquired on Ms. Allen’s perspective regarding the role of a Board member.

Ms. Allen stated that since the Board sets the tone and the vision for the schools, there must be accountability shared between Board members and the Executive Director. The Board must honor consistent communication with the Executive
Director to ensure transparency and alignment with the goals and visions of the school.

Ms. Allen inquired about the financial requirements of a Board member, and it was noted that there are no financial requirements of being a Board member and that being on the Board is a three-year term that can be renewed twice.

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Mr. Martin called a meeting of the Board of Directors of Democracy Prep Baton Rouge to order on Tuesday September 3rd, 2019 @ 6:12 PM at 4055 Prescott Rd. Baton Rouge, LA 70805.

C. Approve Minutes

Mr. Martin made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 6th, 2019 Board Meeting.

Michelle Gieg, Executive Director of Democracy Prep Baton Rouge, noted that DPBR has a budget built for 535 scholars and not 524 scholars so that needs to be amended in the minutes.

Motion to Amend the number of scholars from 524 to 535 scholars

The board VOTED unanimously to approve the motion.

D. Public Comments: None Applicable

II. Finance Committee Update

A. Updated Financials

Collin Raymond, Senior Financial Manager with Charter School Business Management (CSBM), went through the financial documents and noted that the revenue did not match the pace of the expenditures, therefore future planning and goals in addressing this, should honor recurring weekly check-ins, cash flow overviews, and producing the monthly financial reporting with the aim of creating clear frameworks in managing budgets.

The Board inquired about the management fee and Kent Anker, Executive Vice President of Democracy Prep Public Schools, noted that the $800,000 listed for 18-19 SY is an expense that has not been paid. Additionally, Mr. Raymond added that $800,000 and $112,000 have not been paid, which has been stated
and noted for 19-20 SY. He stated that due to late billing, there have been challenges developed in identifying causes of the current expense.

Ms. Richey, Board member, inquired about the liability of the current assets in the FY19 balance sheet. Mr. Raymond confirmed that there are many entries listed which demonstrates current assets as a liability and that there needs to be a high cash balance and a high accounts payable due to receiving late invoices. Ms. Gieg noted the importance of lining the expenditures to the correct line item and thinking through accurately re-coding and tagging items accordingly.

Mr. Anker mentioned the letters from the Louisiana Department of Education noting that less than 70% of the DPBR budget was school-based and that highlighted the deficit at DPBR. He noted that DPBR’s counsel, Patty McMurray, advised going through the budget to make sure that costs are allocated to the correct category. We believe that a review should show that certain expenses were actually school-building based. Mr. Raymond echoed Mr. Anker’s statement and added that each item goes to the functional expense and are coded as such.

Mr. Anker noted that DPBR would respond by September 13, explaining the many cost savings measures and plans for FY19 and FY20 taken by the school and would clarify the proper expense categories such that DPBR would be in compliance with the 70% funding requirement in the future.

II. School Update

A. School Update

Ms. Gieg noted that DPBR used the K-12 Diagnostic data to inform their comprehensive tutoring efforts where families are encouraged to attend tutoring. Two days are dedicated to ELA and two days are dedicated to Math. This initiative aligns with DPBR’s focus on increasing attendance and decreasing suspension rates because it allows scholars who are struggling in classes to get the extra support. Ms. Gieg noted that growth data from the LEAP 2025 was recently released from the Louisiana Department of Education for the 18-19 school year. DPBR is in the same growth range as other charter schools, and are outsourcig the growth of comparable public schools. ELA is scored as a 54 in growth and Math is scored as a 46 in growth. However, she also noted that Algebra I scores were coded incorrectly, thus the score of 46 may increase once the data has been updated.
B. Enrollment Update

Ms. Gieg highlighted the growth of enrollment at DPBR. She mentioned that 337 scholars were present on the first day of school, 404 scholars were present the day of the August 6th Board meeting and currently, there are 549 scholars enrolled.

Ms. Gieg stated that part of this growth is a combination of a few factors. One of them being staff incentives as well as the DPBR operations team and Ashley Livingston, school leader of DPBR, prioritizing enrollment as a vision for the school. She stated that the support with having a canvasser from New York, daily phone calls to discuss strategy and contracting with MatterLab, a digital ad campaign resulted in several high quality applications. Moving forward, the goal is to prevent attrition and maintain 90% of scholar retention. The focus for the rest of this year is to start efforts earlier in February and leverage practices other schools use to inform their strategic plans moving forward.

III. Network Update

A. Network Update

Linda Jones Easton, Executive Vice President, stated that civics and empowerment will remain a huge part of the network’s DNA. Given that there needs to be a strategic plan in setting the network up for success in the next three to five years, Evan Rudall, Co-Founder and Partner of Attuned Education Partners, will assist in the execution of a strategic plan which will ensure the strengthening of the Democracy Prep network. Mr. Rudall was the co-founder of Zearn, CEO of Uncommon Schools, and founder and former co-director of Roxbury Prep, thus is equipped to consult in the strategy for Democracy Prep. Ms. Easton highlighted an additional development in rebuilding the brand of Democracy Prep, which entails conducting an anthem video for internal and external use by the end of September or early October. This anthem highlights core values and DNA of Democracy Prep.

The Board inquired on the availability of social media, and Ms. Gieg stated DP’s presence on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as their social media platform.

V. Governance and Material Items

A. Discipline Policy
Ms. Gieg led the Board into a discussion on revised suspension protocols for DPBR, given high suspension rates at the school in its first four years of operation. She stated that since DPBR is unapologetically a high expectations school, we must also offer high support to our scholars and families so that they are supported in meeting our expectations. She shared that the school follows a Tiered Behavior System which includes lots of feedback provided by teachers, DREAM Coaches and other staff. Ms. Gieg explained the Tiered Behavior system which entails positive rewards, incentives as well as deductions. She noted that K-5 parents at DPBR receive a daily behavior report which shows variation among grade levels. The Middle school receives weekly reports.

Additionally, Ms. Gieg noted that the out-of-school suspension rates have decreased in the last three years due to an increase in positive school culture. However, last year, the out-of-school suspension rates were still 25.6% where the state average is 7.8%, which is three and a half times the state's suspension rate. As a result of this high rate, the school is pursuing solutions to shift the protocol for a first offence to be less severe and provide alternatives to out-of-school suspension.

Ms. Gieg acknowledged that since the start of the school year, eight scholars have been suspended out of 549 scholars. Decreasing the number of scholars suspended on the first offence and reducing the extent of suspensions moving forward aligns with the “Purpose Over Power” goal, an Office of the Superintendent goal for the 19-20 school year. Ms. Gieg added that shifts will also include 1) incorporation of restorative practices of active scholar reflection about the choice made in the reset office prior to heading back to class, 2) working with the community to train staff on Adverse Childhood Experiences, which will assist in scholars dealing with traumatic experiences, and 3) learning more about crisis intervention in partnership with Sharese Maine, Director of Scholar Support at DPPS.

Ms. Gieg shared that this protocol shift may lead to changes in the Scholar and Family Handbook, which requires Board approval and may be on a forthcoming board agenda.

B. Approval of a New Director

Mr. Martin made a motion to approve Tara Allen as a Board member.

The board VOTED unanimously to approve the motion 8:13pm.

C. Adjustment to Transportation Language Discussion in Scholar and Family Handbooks
The state requested that DPBR’s Scholar and Family Handbook should state in its policy that scholars under the age of 10 or scholars who have an IEP must have a parent or guardian pick them up at the Bus stop. It is a non-material change, which is now noted in the Scholar and Family Handbook.

VI. Closing Items

The Board noted prioritizing a retreat and having a designated personnel facilitate discussion about Board priorities to assist in grounding not only principles and core values at Democracy Prep, but key items the Board can prioritize in support of Democracy Prep. Ms. Gieg explained a retreat that happened on the offset of Democracy Prep Baton Rouge as well as utilizing the network and Patty McMurray, Board Attorney, to hone in on requests for facilitation.

Ms. Gieg noted the importance of prioritizing Board retreat in November prior to the charter renewal set for the 10th and 11th of December from BESE. The Board discussed dates and settled on November 15th for the Board Retreat.

Mr. Martin followed up on fiscal updates pertaining to the Management Agreement. Mr. Anker noted the $300,000 debt would be proposed to the DPPS Board for approval in its September meeting. Ms. Goodart confirmed that $300,000 would be in place of $912,000 and Mr. Anker confirmed.

A. Adjourn Meeting
   Meeting adjourned at 8:39pm.

Respectfully Submitted, E. Martin