

Board Minutes

The New Academy Charter School

Minutes of the general meeting of the Board of Directors of The New Academy Charter School held on December 12, 2024.

- I. The meeting was called to order by Mr. William Nunn. Representative Joseph Preston, Mr. Kenneth Curcio, Ms. Katie Micco, Ms. Susan Creighton and Mr. David Caliguiri were in attendance.
- II. In accordance with applicable law, Notice of Publication of the meeting was advertised in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette on February 29, 2024 and the meeting was conducted at the 900 Agnew Road facility.
- III. Comments were requested from the public but there were none.
- IV. Minutes from the meeting of September 19, 2024 were reviewed and approved unanimously.
- V. Financial Report

The Financial Report was presented by Mr. Kenneth Curcio. He indicated that the report was positive. He stated that revenue was up 22% over budget and that the student census was up 20%.

VI. Report of Executive Director

Ms. Kristen Harpster began her report by indicating that New Academy Charter School's current enrollment is 89 students with 62 of them attending from Pittsburgh Public Schools. She further reported that the number of students with programs for exceptionalities is 44, with 30 of them from Pittsburgh Public Schools. The breakdown is listed below:

Exceptionality	# of Students
Autism and Other Health Impairment	1 Student
Emotional Disturbance	5 Students
Emotional Disturbance and Specific Learning Disability	4 Students

Emotional Disturbance and Other Health Impairment	2 Students
Specific Learning Disability	13 Students
Specific Learning Disability and Other Health Impairment	3 Students
Intellectual Disability and Emotional Disturbance	1 Student
Other Health Impairment	9 Students
Other Health Impairment and Emotional Disturbance	1 Student
Other Health Impairment and Specific Learning Disability	2 Students
Gifted IEP	0 Student
504 Plan	3 Students
Under Review	2 Students
Enrolled but waiting on special education records	2 Students

Ms. Harpster then discussed the current list of awarded and open grants for the New Academy Charter School. See below for the full breakdown of grants including the amounts and their purpose:

Awarded & Open Grants

Grant	Amount	Purpose
USDA School Breakfast Expansion	\$5,165.75	New Grab & Go Breakfast Program
Title I	\$53,768	Curriculum Enrichment
Title II Part A	\$2,683	Professional Development
Title IV	\$10,000	Student Enrichment
School Improvement	\$75,000	Student and Staff Support
ESSER III	\$380,061	School & Safety
Ready to Learn	\$9,277	Professional Development/Incentives
ESSER Fund (ARP ESSER) 7% Set Asides	\$29,560	Learning Loss due to Pandemic
AEO Foundation	\$5,000	Educational Supplies and Equipment

		Enhancements
GrowMoreGood 2024	\$500	Student Vegetable Garden
PCCD School Mental Health Grant	\$70,000	Noncompetitive funding for mental health. Supports Phase 1 of Think:Kids training and Hiring of a Licensed Mental Health Worker
Total	641,014.75	

Completed/Closed Grants

Grant	Amount	Purpose
United Ways STEM School Champions	\$10,000	Preconstruction Program
Ayn Rand Institute	\$142.50	In-Kind donation of Ayn Rand books for Student Library
Half Priced Books-Monroeville	\$160	In-Kind donation of books for Student Library
Total	\$10,302.50	

Pending Grants

Grant	Amount	Purpose
Dr. Squatch	N/A	In-kind donations of soaps and other personal care/hygiene products
In a Heartbeat	\$1,500	AED in-kind donation
Snapdragon Book Foundation	\$2,000	Student Library funding for diverse collection of books
Highmark Foundation School-Based Health	\$7,500	Vape Detectors
PA Department of Health	N/A	In-Kind donation of 7 devices to mitigate illness and eliminate viruses, bacteria, and mold
Gwyenth's Gift	\$1,900	AED in-kind donation

Foundation		
Hopey's Heart Foundation	\$2,000	AED in-kind donation
PNC Foundation	\$10,000	Vape Detectors
Covid-19 ARPA Capital Projects Fund Multi-Purpose Community Facilities Program	\$359,248.91	Roof replacement
Classics for Kids Foundation	?- TBD based on what music teacher wants	Matching Grant for Stringed Instruments for Music Education
DW Music Foundation	\$1,000	Music Grant and/or in-kind donation of music instrument for Music Education
PCCD 2024-2025 School Safety & Mental Health Grant	\$70,000	Noncompetitive funding for mental health & security enhancements. Applying for Phase 2 of Think:Kids and Outdoor Security Camera upgrade.
Total	\$455,148.91	

Ms. Harpster then reported on the progress of The New Academy Charter School renewal this year. She indicated that the letter of intention has been submitted and acknowledged by Pittsburgh Public Schools and the school has addressed the findings from the previous year's audit and are currently preparing for the upcoming audit in the spring. Ms. Harpster indicated that she plans to maintain ongoing communication with Lisa Augustin. Mr. Moser then discussed how the prior audit issues were being addressed.

Ms. Harpster then discussed the School Improvement Plan, approved by PDE on 9/10/2024, and how it will be further enriched by the Informed Retention Strategies pilot project. Led by Meagan Steiner, State Lead – K-12 Human Capital Strategies, this project is a significant step towards addressing the issue of educator retention or attrition in schools. Schools and LEAs will gather more information about these factors and select/refine and implement one or more strategies to increase the retention of effective educators.

Ms. Harpster also noted that the state Lead- K-12 District and School Leadership Services will be overseeing the LEA Routines. These routines are designed to engage leaders at the LEA level, providing them with a clear understanding of their role in the school improvement process. Ms. Harpster indicated that the intent is to ensure that:

- LEAs will have a systemic process for understanding the implementation rate and impact of school improvement plans.
- Be knowledgeable about the support that schools have been receiving.
- Clarify the types of support that are still needed for the schools to implement their plans and/or reach their targets.
- Ensure that schools receive the resources/support necessary to implement their plan and meet goals.

Ms. Harpster also reported that Holly Pope and Vicki Ryan will continue to assist in weekly meetings, classroom observations, and professional development.

Ms. Harpster then reviewed the Implementation Team Action Plan Working Document detailing how much the New Academy Charter School has completed and what is yet to be done.

Ms. Harpster reported that the student recruitment strategy at New Academy Charter School's aim is to attract students from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds as the school believes that a diverse student body enriches the academic environment, introduces different perspectives, and fosters inclusion.

Ms. Harpster indicated that a successful recruitment strategy not only brings in students but also leads to positive student experiences and that these students become ambassadors of the school, attracting more students through referrals and personal stories about their experiences.

Ms. Harpster reported that we know that a successful recruitment strategy helps to ensure the long term success of the school and that our vision is to implement our strategy by making several changes to how the school is currently structured.

Ms. Harpster and Mr. Moser then reported that staff member Tomeka Burress has been actively engaging with approximately 25 Magistrates in Allegheny County to promote our schools as an alternative school option for children struggling with truancy or delinquent behavior. She has also communicated with Juvenile Probation to discuss enrollment opportunities, successfully enrolling several children into The New Academy Charter School. Mr. Moser then noted that Tamika and Judge DeAngelis attended the Chief of Police luncheon.

Ms. Harpster then explained our current plans to help with student retention, outlined below:

Behavior Rewards: The New Academy Charter School Climate and Culture Committee has been working diligently to put together fun events that highlight the successes of our students. These events, named the Student Success Celebrations, are held biweekly each month. One event each month is voted on by the staff members and includes criteria such as: arriving to class on time, completing classwork, being respectful towards staff and peers and exhibiting positive language. Some of the events we have put on so far this year include: movie trips, hayrides and pumpkin picking, The Andy Warhol Museum and Dave and Busters. The other event each month is a school wide positive incentive celebration. Some of the school wide events we have put on include a turkey bowl and a fall festival. For the month of December, we will be doing a holiday hallway decorating contest!

10th Period Activities - The New Academy Charter School is happy to announce the introduction of our 10th period activities. These activities run for a half hour each day and allow students the opportunity to either discover a new interest to them or continue exploring an interest they already had. Some of the activities include: cooking, music, art, drivers education, student council, Pokémon, book club, etc. Students will have the opportunity to change each activity quarterly and try out a new interest for the following quarter.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) - For this academic year we have placed an emphasis on finding a social/emotional learning curriculum that meets the needs of every learner's social and emotional needs. Everyday Speech is a MTSS-based digital curriculum that supports staff in helping develop communication, behavior, emotional, and academic skills with their students.

Everyday Speech supports both neurotypical and neurodivergent learners in grades k-12, ensuring every student receives the targeted instruction they need to thrive. Each student has 20 minutes of SEL instruction they receive daily.

Ms. Harpster then indicated that The New Academy Charter School is dedicated to strengthening their ties with the Arlington community. In September, Representative Bantam and Senator Costa organized a free shredding event in the school parking lot for community members and in October, the school hosted the Arlington Civic Council's Trunk or Treat event, which had a fantastic turnout. Ms. Harpster reported that staff members enjoyed handing out treats and getting to know our neighbors and as a gesture of appreciation, the Council presented us with a new American flag for our flagpole.

Ms. Harpster then reported that Brentwood Bank has committed to sponsoring New Academy Charter School through The Education Partnership's Adopt-A-School program this school year and that each of our students received their own School Supply Kit, which the students helped select through a survey.

She further reported that on November 13th, the school celebrated being "adopted" by Brentwood Bank. Representatives from the bank, along with those from the Education Partnership, visited the school to engage with our students. They talked about various roles within a bank, answered student questions, and, most excitingly, provided all our students with grade-level school supply kits. She further indicated that the school will be working with Brentwood Bank on further initiatives like financial literacy courses and job shadowing opportunities.

Ms. Harpster then reported that with the assistance of a PCCD School Safety Grant, The New Academy Charter School has begun the implementation of Think Kids. At Think Kids, they recognize that kids with challenging behavior don't lack the *will* to behave well - they lack the *skills* to behave well. She also indicated that their Collaborative Problem Solving® (CPS) approach is proven to reduce challenging behavior, teach kids the skills they lack, and build relationships with the adults in their lives. She indicated that the school has kicked off a series of implementation and coaching calls with a Think Kids representative and that during these sessions, we share real examples involving students to foster collaboration and encourage questions.

She further indicated that the school has secured grant funding for the second year of implementation and that this initiative will significantly benefit our staff and students by nurturing meaningful relationships while addressing the students' educational needs.

Ms. Harpster then indicated that the Threat Assessment Team at the New Academy Charter School has been actively meeting on a regular basis to ensure the safety and well-being of the school community. Since the beginning of the first quarter, the team has convened to thoroughly identify, evaluate, and address four distinct situations that were brought to their attention. She further indicated that fortunately, after careful investigation and consideration, none of these incidents were found to pose any serious threats to students or staff. The team's proactive approach has contributed to a safer environment for everyone involved.

Ms. Harpster then reported that with funding from the PCCD School Safety and Security Grant, the school is set to enhance security by replacing two exterior doors. These new doors will feature robust materials and advanced locking mechanisms, significantly improving protection against unauthorized access and potential tampering during after-hours. She indicated that this proactive measure is aimed at ensuring a safer environment for our students and staff, reinforcing our commitment to school safety and security.

Ms. Harpster then reported on IXL School Achievement. She indicated that the first data checkpoint was September 30th and the second data check point is December 30th. See the results to date below:

171 – Skills Mastered
211 – Skills Proficient
380 – Skills Practiced
9,473 questions answered so far

Skill Gains per Student

4.5 skills practiced
2.5 skills proficient
2 skills mastered

Time spent so far on IXL: 13,063 minutes:

Practice(25%)
54 hrs 26 min
Assessment(75%)
162 hrs 44 min

Mr. Moser indicated that IXL should improve performance on the Keystone exams.

Ms. Harpster concluded her report by discussing the Positive Behavior Support Policy, the Confidentiality of Special Education Student Information Policy and The Admission Policy. She then requested that the policies be approved. The policies were then approved unanimously.

VII. Legal

Mr. Norris first reported that there were no new claims. He then discussed the need to appoint an audit committee and Mr. Curcio and Mr. Caliguiri were appointed as its members. Mr. Norris then indicated that the school should continue its efforts to find a parent willing to sit on the Board. The meeting schedule for 2025 was then established. Meetings will take place on Thursday, March 13, Thursday, June 12, Thursday, September 11 and Thursday, December 11.

VIII. New Business

The next scheduled meeting of the Board is set for Thursday, March 13, 2025.

VIV. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and approved unanimously.