

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

Accountability and Support Committee

Wednesday, December 11, 2019
450 Columbus Plaza North Hearing Room J
Hartford, Connecticut

Draft Minutes
(Approved on: January 5, 2020)

I. Call to Order

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Committee Chairperson Dr. Estela López called the meeting to order at 2:59 p.m.

Committee Dr. Estela López, Chairperson
Members Present: Erin D. Benham
 Donald F. Harris, Jr.

Committee William Davenport
Member Absent:

Staff Present: Desi Nesmith
 Lisa Lamenzo
 Robert Kelly
 Felicia Canty
 Megan Alubicki-Flick
 Attorney Louis Todisco
 Leslie Navarrete

Guests Present: Andrea Weller, Principal of Stamford Academy, Stamford
 Rick D'Avino, Board Chairperson of Stamford Academy, Stamford
 Craig Baker, Chief Education Officer of Domus Kids, Stamford

 John Scalice, Executive Director/Principal of Great Oaks Charter School,
 Bridgeport
 Susan Briggs, Board Chairperson of Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport
 Latoya Hubbard, Director of Operations, Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport

II. Approval of Minutes

Estela López moved, Donald F. Harris, Jr. seconded, that the committee approve the minutes of the December 10, 2018 Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

Vote: In Favor: Lopez, Benham, and Harris
 Abstained: 0
 Opposed: 0
 Absent: Davenport

III. Stamford Academy, Stamford

Turnaround Office Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo opened the meeting by commending Stamford Academy for their collaborative efforts with the Turnaround Office in helping reduce the charter's chronic

absenteeism rate and increase ELA and SAT scores. Members echoed Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo's comments. However, due to financial difficulties and the lack of the necessary funds to operate, Stamford Academy has decided to move forward with the school's closure after this academic year. Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo turned it over to Mr. Rick D'Avino, Board Chairperson of Stamford Academy. Mr. D'Avino went into detail about the school's fiscal challenges and school leadership's attempts to mitigate them in order to keep Stamford Academy open. To ensure the student body and their parents and guardians land on equal footing, Stamford Academy leadership is creating and has already adopted phases of a transition plan. Ms. Andrea Weller added that the transition plan was designed with a two-track structure – 1) Academic, absenteeism, discipline 2) Transition placement, in order to focus on supporting students and parents and guardians. School leadership is in the process of creating a transition team and carrying out various communication efforts to make sure the student body and their parents and guardians are well-informed about the transition plan processes, feel supported and confident that student's success will continue on.

Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo strongly recommended that Stamford Academy connect with Trailblazers Academy leadership for additional guidance and help in their transition plan to make certain all necessary areas and school district partnerships are in place for a successful transition. Additionally, she encouraged Stamford Academy to review Trailblazers Academy's transition plan as a reference since they are well versed in the process and the student population comes from same host districts. Mr. Craig Baker added that they plan to model Trailblazers' transition plan and are in communication with the Trailblazers Administration. Ms. Andrea Weller shared their plans to create an individualized student portfolio to help host school districts better support transferring students. Mr. D'Avino went on to stress the importance of the host districts providing Stamford Academy students equal educational opportunities. Mr. Craig Baker commented that Stamford Academy Administration is looking into choice schools and staying on top of their deadlines to inform parents.

The committee underscored the importance of ensuring every student is placed and accounted for throughout the transition process. Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith confirmed that the Turnaround Office can track and monitor transferring students by making it a standing objective in their meetings with the Stamford School District Superintendent. Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo closed the meeting with following up objective – Stamford Academy Administration shall collaborate with host district Superintendents and submit a plan to the Turnaround Office for approval.

IV. Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport

Turnaround Office Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo provided a brief overview of Great Oaks Charter School, its state charter school renewal status, conditions, and corrective action plan. Additionally, she

briefed the committee on the meeting Mr. John Scalice, Executive Director/Principal of Great Oaks Charter School, had with Michael Kent from the Turnaround Office on August 5, 2019 to ensure the school administration understood the importance of having coherency and alignment among the SIG federal plan, the school improvement plan, and the corrective action plan. Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo shared with the committee that the school's 2018-19 ELA score increased 3 percentage points and suspension rate was reduced by approximately 13 percentage points. Also noted a regression in mathematics as evidenced by SBA results, and a spike in chronic absenteeism rate. She added that Great Oaks Administration's goal is to reach 100 percent certification compliance by next school year, with an interim benchmark goal of 80 percent by this academic year. As of November 12, 2019, the school is at 61 percent certification compliance. She turned it over to Mr. John Scalice, Executive Director/Principal of Great Oaks Charter School.

The Great Oaks Charter School Administration reported to the committee that they approached the corrective action plan as a way to use the same systems and structures without creating multiple plans for stronger alignment. The school administration spent the majority of last year analyzing their data and student demographics and identifying historical learning gaps in ELA and mathematics to make projections and to strategize on how to get students ahead of the curve. This approach drove ELA and mathematics curriculum reform. School leadership attributes the progress achieved in ELA to the administration being able to hire more certified teachers last year, which gave the school a jump start in improving this focus area, unlike mathematics. However, this year the Great Oaks Charter School Administration has placed strong recruitment efforts towards recruiting qualified and certified mathematics staff and has hired a Math Coach in order to reform the curriculum. Additionally, the school developed common assessments for teachers to utilize, and is training teaching staff on how to analyze and use NWA data collection to better help them in their classrooms. Moreover, for this academic year, the school leadership has placed a heavy focus on tier 1 structures and less on tier 2 and 3 pull-out structures. The school has also changed their pedagogical model to be more inclusive.

From examining their school data, the school administration has placed focus on strengthening their tier 1 support structures in order to address school climate and culture issues. School administration supported staff and faculty development through restorative practices trainings, restorative conferences between adults and students to repair and develop relationships, and attendance and improving incentives. As a result of these incentives along with the learning culture Great Oaks Charter School Administration has been building they have been able to attract more certified teacher candidates, retain certified teaching staff, motivate faculty to seek leadership opportunities, and take advantage of professional development, coaching and mentoring opportunities, and transition program.

The committee thanked the Great Oaks Charter School for the briefing. However, the committee expressed concern due to school's lack of progress in the majority of the focus areas –mathematics, certification, chronic absenteeism, and bilingual education.

Additionally, Mrs. Megan Alubicki-Flick, English Learner Consultant, pointed out that from several conversations with the school administration they have yet to apply for Title III and Bilingual Grants since its opening, forgoing additional funding to support the service of eligible students. Furthermore, she highlighted the backwards trend the school is showing with its enrolled EL student population in comparison to the state and host district where the EL student population is steadily growing. Great Oaks Administration explained that the school hired a TESOL certified teacher who is proficient in Spanish and Portuguese to provide the EL students with language exposure during tutorial time and high dosages of language exploration instead of an EL certified teacher because none applied. Additionally, bilingual teachers provide EL students, who are showing close to proficiency level, assistance during tutorial time. Mrs. Alubicki-Flick stressed the importance of following the bilingual Statue 10-17 to qualify for funding –submitting a TESOL letter in lieu of to the Commissioner – and adhere to grant application and extension deadlines as it delays funding disbursements for all participating districts. She went on to reclarify the recruitment processes and condition under the bilingual statue and consortium process.

Turnaround Office Bureau Chief Lisa Lamenzo closed the meeting mentioning that the plan Great Oak submitted to the Turnaround Office is a solid plan and now it is a matter of implementing, supporting and monitoring that plan.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete