

**Seven Hills Charter Public School Board of Trustees**  
**Retreat Minutes**  
**Monday November 23, 2009**  
**5:00-9:00pm**  
**Held at Peppercorns, Park Ave, Worcester**

**Welcome:** Mr. Watson welcomed all present, introductions were made, and the meeting began at 5:15pm.

**Present:** Carlton Watson, Krista Piazza, Melissa Haffty, Kevin Bradley, Suzanne Biglione, Joseph Hungler, Miranna Islam, Beverley Bell, Joanne Newcombe, Cynthia Krackovic, Michelle Hennessy, Jessica Fede (principal intern under Ms. Piazza) Nilsse Ramirez and Robert Ramirez (potential board member)

**Public Comments:** Nilsse and Robert Ramirez spoke about their concern for child safety resulting from not having seat belts on the busses. A discussion was had around the connection between general safety and learning.

**Presentation: Reflection and refinement of School Improvement and Board Work Plan**

Ms. Piazza went over the agenda and the information provided that will be used as a guide for the retreat. "School Accountability Plan" is provided for review. "2009-2010 School Improvement Plan" as a reflection on the "DESE Essential Conditions for School Effectiveness" were provided as a catalyst for discussion on ways the board could be involved. End result being to establish specific goals and sub-committees to implement action items that will assist with the effective implementation of the improvement plan.

The following are notes from the open forum discussions that took place. In order to provide more fluent and clear information from the discussions the numerous names of the contributors have been removed.

**Parent involvement/Student Motivation** and the need to address how to get parents more involved was discussed along with what attempts have been made in the past to engage parents/guardians and motivate students. A parent survey is done each year. To increase participation data was collected through Worcester State so that confidentiality was not an issue. The parent survey is provided both electronically and hard copy. Response is low. Drug Free School grant is used to provide the "Guiding Good Choices", a state approved program for parents. Participation is low even with targeting groups showing interest and need with multiple venues, dates and times scheduled to accommodate. Ideas flowed including discussion around looking into what types of parent forums/focus groups might be successful, how to structure these groups to maximize attendance. The concept of the "shadow a student" to try and involve the parent in the school experience was discussed with feedback on similar events being mixed. The child can act completely different with the parent on site or the parent is disruptive to the class. A desire for further discussion on how this concept might be effective was noted. Might the issue be how to get the parent concerned enough to get involved? You can't assume all

strategies will work with all parents. The understanding of where they are coming from and what might be getting in the way of being involved in the education of their child. Need to obtain an understanding of the different “involvement levels” and how to gauge where they are to determine how to impact them, and get them involved. It’s difficult to get to truly know the parent population. We have been very effective with a student profile. We could improve in the area of parent profile to make determination of how to engage them more effectively. Getting a handle on what parental involvement would look like in the home. A parent involvement survey is already done trying to obtain this profile, and that this could be reviewed and re-crafted. If we build a parent profile...that maybe level 4-5 mode, parents could do home visits. Find out what the parental access to the web is. IE: how many parents can be accessed via electronic method. Documentation of the various different strategies and attendance to events held to obtain parent involvement to see actually how many are being reached effectively. This data is already retained and it appears to be the same parents. Since the population is not a “neighborhood” school that maybe varying the location of the events may increase parental attendance. More verbal interaction in a meeting environment might share more of an understanding and build parental comfort with involvement. Take note of geographical locations to assist in determination of potential locations. Do teachers take the opportunity at the start of the year to make that phone call to the parent to engage them at the instructional level? The communication that is done via the “agenda book” and that praise needs to be noted expanded upon and sent home as communication as well as items of concern was discussed. It is also important to raise the standard instructors expect from the students and make them aware of higher expectations. Provide an environment to encourage dialog between parents on how to motivate their child further, and to expand the parental interaction. Not going broader and wider, but deeper. Looking at an adult learning approach and helping others to understand that approach. Experience at the SAC meeting was that if the parents don’t understand (IE directions, language homework) how is it expected that they can be involved in that fashion. The role homework plays in family constructive time, the parent should not be put in the role of “teacher”. There are barriers with the communication with the teacher. These can be impacted by the parent’s language skills, or knowledge skills and effect their comfort zone to engage in dialog with an instructor around their child. Homework workshops were discussed, but back to the problem of “how to get the parents there”. Also noted is that math is different now, English is taught different now then in the parents day. Creating tools maybe on line for parents to be able to access to help them understand in order to assist their child. There can also be fear of the parent to engage the teacher with out repercussion. A parent network outreach was in the newsletter, and no takers (expand?). Be our own lending library around homework help. It comes down to FIRST getting information on the parent profile as a path to engage parents more and increase expectations. Goal setting, what does the child want/expect from themselves, and working with the teachers. **Student’s Social Emotional Health Needs**, utilize our Social Worker. Educate teachers and parents on how to utilize this resource. Question was raised about risk behavior in public school and maybe doing a comparison against other communities.

Ms. Piazza spoke to the new **administrative structure model** that was put into place this year, and that the implemented model is not what was originally planned. At the last minute the loss of one of the administrators required a change to the structure due to available staff for a good fit. In addition one of the administrators was out on a sick leave at the start of the year which

made for a difficult start due to the inability to properly implement the structure as a result of this absence. To date some of the anticipated routines and meetings in the structure have not been implemented. Initial feedback received has been mixed. Some staff feel they are being held too accountable, and other staff feel they are not getting enough support. Ms. Newcombe volunteered to come into the school over 4 days and do interviews, etc. in order to provide feedback on the leadership structures effectiveness, and present an analysis. She would ensure that they do not feel that there will be any repercussions from their input. Ms. Piazza noted that it is the responsibility of the board to evaluate her position and that she is ultimately responsible for the achievement. Ms. Bell spoke about an outside consulting firm that came into another charter school and was very successful in turning around its AYP. A fresh pair of eyes does not always have to come in the form of new leadership. Look at schools that are successful, ones with similar demographics. Identify criteria that would be used to determine what schools to look at.

**Teacher recruitment/Promotion of Charter movement:** This continues to remain an issue. Colleges have partnerships with certain schools and it is very political. There is a meeting of the college consortium and utilization of charter schools will be brought to their attention. Expect that it will be a slow moving process. It would be difficult to encourage a school that works on a year to year contract to a placement department. Along with the year to year contract are other issues, like the protection of the union, the varied schedule of their children's school verses SHCPS and the child care issues. Ms. Bell noted that her pre-service students have to her knowledge when placed at SHCPS not been approached about working there. Teach for America is focused on the southern states, so may not be a solution for us. The question was raised if there is a survey around what is the **motivational factor for teachers** when they go to select a school. Although there is a large pool of applicants, the number of qualified applications are minimal. There is a misconception that you do not need the same qualifications to work at a charter school. When targeting these experienced qualified teachers they need to be made aware that charter schools are public schools and you are eligible for the related benefits like MTRS, training and professional development and loan forgiveness, etc.. Some other potential areas to tap during our recruitment efforts would be; NEAEE (New England Associations for Employment of Educators), MERC Boston, large placement for UMASS Amherst graduates. Two main things that effect our recruitment are the number of slots to fill, 6-10 position each year, and those that sign contracts and then decline at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. We are then left to fill a position last minute, which reduces the quality of the candidate pool. **Educating the community about charter schools** would benefit recruitment by making working for a charter school more understood and attractive. Also continue with the task from the prior board to engage the local politicians. The utilization of the exit interviews might be more effective being done by a non biased party in HR verses their supervisor of record. Push out this information through board contacts.

**Best practices and dissemination to your host district** as a requirement of charter schools was addressed, with the arts being a good area to target due to the need.

**Resources and budget:** No new sub committed needed at this time.

**Board Report:**

- a. Board Work Plan: Goal/ Sub-Committee Summary created, and will be distributed to board members at December meeting.
- b. Update on Recruitment: As of December there will be a full 9 person board. Use the sub-committees as an opportunity for continued recruitment efforts.
- c. Discussion on Officer Elections: Carlton Watson went over the positions and roles as outlined in the by-laws. Board members interested in being put on the December agenda for vote are:
  - a) Joanne Newcombe, Vice Chair
  - b) Kevin Bradley, Treasurer
  - c) Suzanne Biglione, Secretary/Clerk

The board asked about the site visit and what items we need to be addressing in order to be best prepared for this. Mr. Watson noted that there will be focus on this and the school accountability plan, uniformity in our understanding of it and ability to articulate it. Where this is a relatively new board, they may question more about how the board members are being moved forward. Items that will be targeted will be the improvement plan, but the big question will be student achievement.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Cynthia Krackovic