



Please note that due to the reinstatement of the Executive Order from the Governor allowing virtual meetings, we are offering Zoom meetings again. If you attend in person, you must wear a mask and must be cleared through our COVID-19 protocols.

**September Meeting Minutes  
New Dawn Charter Schools Board of Trustees**

**Tuesday, September 28, 2021  
11:00 a.m.**

**New Dawn Charter High School  
242 Hoyt Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11217**

**New Dawn Charter High School II  
89-25 161<sup>st</sup> Street  
Jamaica, NY 11432**

**347-505-9101**

**Board Members Present:** Mr. Ronald Tabano, Chair, Ms. Jane Sun, Vice Chair, Ms. Katharine Urbati, Treasurer, Mr. Brian Baer, Board member.

**Board Members Absent:** Mr. Jonathon Carrington, Board Member.

**Staff Members/ Visitors Present:** Dr. Sara Asmussen, Executive Director, NDCS, Mr. Jose Obregon, Director of Student Support & Operations, NDCS, Mr. Steve Ramkissoo, Director of Finance & HR, NDCS, Ms. Donna Lobato, Principal NDCHS, Mr. Zach Flory, Principal NDCHS II

**I. Agenda**

**Resolution: September 2021 Agenda**

**Motion:** Ms. Katharine Urbati motioned to accept and approve the September 2021, Board of Trustees meeting agenda.

**Motion Seconded:** Ms. Jane Sun seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The board voted unanimously to accept and approve the September 2021 agenda.

**II. Minutes**



**Resolution:** August 2021 Minutes

**Motion:** Ms. Katharine Urbati motioned to accept and approve the August 2021, Board of Trustees meeting minutes.

**Motion Seconded:** Ms. Jane Sun seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The board voted unanimously to accept and approve the August 2021, Board of Trustees meeting minutes.

**III. Financials—Steve Ramkissoon**  
**Benchmark 4: Financial Condition**  
**Benchmark 5: Financial Management**

**a. Audit update**

Mr. Steve Ramkissoon informed the board that a financial audit must be completed before the end of October 2021 for submission to NYSED by November 1. He has provided the auditors with all the necessary documentation to proceed with the audit. The auditors have visited both schools already and everything is on track to meet the deadline. Administration will keep the Board updated as we move forward.

Steve Ramkissoon also reported that he believes that one thing the auditors will point out is the multiple accounts open because of the bond. He stated that he will try to consolidate as many of those accounts as possible. This consolidation was delayed because of COVID constraints. Mr. Ramkissoon is working on completing all the paperwork necessary to close the bond out for the year. Currently there is approximately \$1.6M in a Bank of Melon account of which all will be withdrawn once all necessary documentation is presented to the Bond holders.

**a. Friends of update**

How this impacts real estate will be discussed in detail during an Executive session. Steve Ramkissoon also informed the board that he participated in a call with the school lawyer and Barone Management. It was discussed that it was acceptable that the school start the contribution of \$25,000 to “Friends Of” one year after the school receives an IRS tax approval letter. Additionally, it will be necessary to get a signed letter by both parties indicating that if the condo agreement fails, the school will revert to the original lease agreement. Finally, Steve Ramkissoon stated that he believes that “Friends Of” is in good shape.

**b. Resolution: Monthly Financials**



Steve Ramkissoon asked if it is acceptable to share the financial report without slides. All agreed that they read the monthly financial report that was emailed to all the Board members. Mr. Tabano asked Ms. Katharine Urbati if there was anything that was of concern to her or if Mr. Ramkissoon should highlight anything in the monthly financial report. Steve Ramkissoon stated that since it is the summer months and the school was in recess during the last part of August, it is expected that the financials are going to look better than usual since the schools have fewer expenditures. He also informed the board that an additional security guard in Queens and in Brooklyn will be contracted to prepare for the new influx of students and especially considering the possibility of potential post-COVID student behavior issues. He explained that there will be an increase in expenses as the months progress due to all students returning full time.

The Brooklyn school is reaching its target financial goals in revenue holding at 16% and is achieving a 14% expenditure rate instead of the projected 16.6 % expenditure rate. The Queens school has a revenue rate of 18% revenue and only 9% expenses. Mr. Flory, at the Queens school, has also kept down supply expenses. In summation, Mr. Ramkissoon stated that the financials are in good shape for both schools.

Mr. Tabano asked for a motion to accept the monthly financials.

**Motion:** Ms. Katharine Urbati motioned to accept and approve the August 2021 monthly financials.

**Motion Seconded:** Ms. Jane Sun seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The board members voted unanimously to accept and approve the August 2021 monthly financials.

#### IV. Hiring

##### **Benchmark 7: Organizational Capacity**

Ms. Donna Lobato informed the board that there are six new staff members that started with the Brooklyn school in September 2021. They will introduce themselves during the November meeting. Ms. Lobato confirmed that all jobs for the few remaining positions have been posted. Ms. Lobato also stated that the school will reach out to colleges for staff recruitment. Additionally, the school will be seeking out potential college graduates or students who are getting their master's degree and may have their provisional certification.

Ms. Lobato also stated that the school is working on student recruitment. Open houses will be conducted next week and the week after virtually. Additionally, the school will be sending out flyers and postcards to students and to the usual agencies that New Dawn works with.

#### V. Facilities—Jose Obregon

## Benchmark 6: Board Oversight & Governance

### a. Update on both buildings

Regarding the Queens school, Mr. Obregon reported that a work proposal from Barone management was received to complete some outstanding projects. However, some of the bids were excessive so Mr. Obregon will be getting further bids. Mr. Obregon reached out to Barone and asked if the school can get its own contractors to do the work since there is a stipulation in the lease agreement that indicates that the school must get permission from the landlord before any structural changes are made or any type of contracted work is conducted. Once Barone approves, Mr. Obregon stated that he can start submitting bids for facility work for the board's review. Additionally, for the Queens school, Mr. Obregon asked Barone for a security key to limit access to the elevator and especially for students.

Regarding the Brooklyn school, Mr. Obregon reported that there will be a Category I (CAT I) elevator inspection that will be conducted and filed with the Department of Buildings. This is a NYC DOB annual requirement. Mr. Obregon also reported to the board that during a recent major rainstorm, water came through the ceiling on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. After inspecting the leak, Mr. Obregon along with Mr. Ed Cinni from Benchmark determined that the water came into the mechanical room from the exposed rooftop. This water saturated the drains on the roof and the excess water overflowed from the rooftop area into the mechanical room causing the leak. Benchmark will visit the school and inspect the roof. Mr. Obregon also reported that after several rainfalls after the major storm, there were no other leaks observed.

### b. Resolution: Cameras in Queens

Mr. Jose Obregon informed the board that there is a bid by MSP Networks, who installed the current cameras in Queens, for the board's review and approval. The school is seeking to install 12 additional security cameras which will cover the entrance ways and the exits from inside and outside of the school. The bid includes the licensing, the cabling, and the installation of such cameras and the monitoring of the cameras.

**Motion:** Ms. Katharine Urbati motioned to accept and approve the security camera installation bid for the Queens school for twelve (12) additional security cameras.

**Motion Seconded:** Mr. Brian Baer seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The board voted unanimously to accept and approve the security camera installation bid for the Queens school for twelve (12) additional security cameras.

## VI. Grants & Reports—Sara Asmussen

### Benchmark 1: Student Performance

### Benchmark 3: Culture, Climate, and Student & Family Engagement

## **Benchmark 8: Mission & Key Design Elements**

### **a. ESSER grant updates**

Dr. Asmussen reminded the board members about the projects that will be completed under the ESSER grant. This includes the pavers on the Brooklyn school roof and the setting up a classroom up on the fifth floor also in Brooklyn. At Queens school, the plan is to remodel the kitchen. Pertaining to the design of the new kitchen in Queens, Mr. Brian Baer introduced Illya Azaroff from +LAB architect PLLC to Dr. Asmussen. Mr. Azaroff developed cost proposals for both schools for submission to the NYSED by the September deadline. The Queens' school project costs are higher than the money available through the ESSER grant. The cost estimates for both proposals were discussed. These proposals must be submitted by this coming Thursday. Dr. Asmussen also stated that she is going to tap into SUNY for stimulus monies when they become available for Queens. If Stimulus money is ever released and awarded, this would offset the remaining money needed for Queens.

For the Brooklyn school, project costs are projected to be below what is being awarded so the remaining money will go to the new Outreach Staff and support staff for Brooklyn. This proposal will also be submitted by Thursday. Since these are construction projects, the schools will have to work with SCD, which is a version of the school construction authority at the state level, to complete these projects. Dr. Asmussen stated that overall, the schools are in really good shape with those two grants. Both grants are posted to the school website for public comment. Further, the plans were based on a survey that the school conducted in the spring with students and parents. Dr. Asmussen stated that she has not received any comments yet, but that New Dawn is fully in compliance with the new ESSER regulations.

### **b. Consolidated Application**

Dr Asmussen confirmed that the consolidated applications for both schools went out August 31.

### **c. Walton Foundation**

Dr Asmussen confirmed that the school received an extension for submission of the final report until Thursday. Also, she confirmed that Mr. Tabano signed the budget modification. At this time, due to COVID, the school could not do things like college visits. Therefore, that money had to be shifted over to pay for things already allocated in the original grant (paid for a part time counselor, shifted this to full time, etc.). The budget modification did not change the overall goals of the grant. She is just waiting for the budget approvals and then it will go in on Thursday. Dr. Asmussen confirmed that the school is up to date, and everything is completed on the school's end in respect to grants. Mr. Tabano asked how much the school received from the Walton grant and Dr.





Asmussen stated that it received \$325,000. and that this submittal will close out the grant.

## **VII. COVID-19 Plan for Return to School** **Benchmark 6: Board Oversight & Governance**

### **a. Update on Vaccine Mandate—Dr. Sara Asmussen**

Dr. Asmussen stated that court of appeals case regarding the vaccine mandate have been stressful to the entire school. She stated that it has wreaked havoc on the culture throughout both schools. For example, three very popular staff members, which includes one that is a good teacher, decided not to get vaccinated. Therefore, there were tears and goodbyes on Thursday and then because of the court appeal, they showed up for work on Monday. Dr. Asmussen stated that this was not part of the reopening plan, since the Court made another decision late last night that the mandate will hold. Subsequently, since it is not in the reopening plan, Dr. Asmussen proposed that the entire New Dawn Staff be required to be vaccinated. Dr. Asmussen also stated that she would like to pay those that refuse to get vaccinated their sick and personal time until this Friday, October 2, 2021. The vaccine mandate is clear that everyone must be vaccinated by 5pm on October 2, 2021. Dr. Asmussen stated that, subsequently, the school would like to pay those un-vaccinated staff members until the mandated date is reached.

Dr. Asmussen reiterated that the mandate has taken a severe toll on staff culture and climate. Currently, there is a 93% vaccination rate in Brooklyn and she feels that it is unfair to all those that have complied if New Dawn continues to procrastinate for the sake of five (5) people. Mr. Tabano stated that he was surprised at what seems like a high total of un-vaccinated staff and that some are so unwilling to comply. Mr. Tabano also stated that he realizes that it is the staff member's choice. However, he also stated that the school cannot wait any longer to enforce the mandate. Mr. Tabano stated that he believes that the schools are doing the right thing to enforce the mandates. He then asked if there was a motion to revise the reopening plan to state that schools are 100% staff vaccinated.

### **b. Resolution: Reopening Plan**

**Motion:** Ms. Jane Sun motioned to revise the reopening plan to state that schools are 100% staff vaccinated.

**Motion Seconded:** Ms. Katharine Urbati seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The board voted unanimously to revise the reopening plan to state that schools are 100% staff vaccinated.

Dr. Asmussen asked the board if there was a vote need to participate in the DOE's COVID testing program for students. Dr. Asmussen further stated that the reason New Dawn must have this testing program in place is because the DOE is going to test weekly 30% of the unvaccinated student population. Therefore, New Dawn also needs to get to that number. Dr. Asmussen stated that Parent coordinators at both schools are calling parents and getting the information over the phone. Dr. Asmussen stated that she is still working on a Queens contract. Under that contract, once testing starts, they will then send us the results. They will also send the parents the results and they will bill the DOE.

Mr. Tabano stated that his school started the testing program today and is working with Bio Reference, the same company New Dawn is contracting. Mr. Tabano said that he was happy to see that his school got so many consents not only from parents, but from the students themselves who are at least 18 years old. He also stated that his school is testing at least 20 students and confirmed that you can test 10% of the entire student population. Mr. Tabano also stated that the testing company takes care of all the results and notifies the parents. He also stated that his school issued a letter to parents requiring that parents share the results with the school. Finally, Mr. Tabano stated that we the board did not need a vote or a resolution to begin the student testing program.

## **VIII. School Reports & Hiring**

### **Benchmark 6: Board Oversight & Governance**

### **Benchmark 9: Enrollment, Recruitment, & Retention**

#### **a. Brooklyn—Donna Lobato**

Ms. Lobato confirmed that the school opened successfully and students are returning and seemed happy to be back. She also stated that staff is doing well with the students. The school is continuing to work with the NYPD's community affair officers and despite some conflicts among students, things are mostly going smoothly. Staff is continuing to reach out to students. Additionally, Ms. Lobato has paired new staff members with old staff to show new staff how to reach out to students with the goal of getting students to return to school and increase student participation. Ms. Lobato also stated that the school received from the Brooklyn borough president another \$235,000 to continue the STEM projects from last year. Also, the mentee "meet and greet" will begin on Thursday. Ms. Lobato also stated that despite all the challenges that COVID has presented, the onboarding of new staff, and other challenges, the school is doing well. She also stated that there are items that still need to be addressed regarding the



internship program and the acquisition of internship sites which Jose Obregon will address.

## **b. Queens—Zach Flory**

Mr. Flory stated that there are nine (9) new staff members this year. New staff includes new teachers and an additional guidance counselor. Additionally, there is a new SPED teacher and aspiring teachers on board as well. Mr. Flory stated that since there is a teacher who has refused to get vaccinated, the school is interviewing for that position as well. Student enrollment is at 219 on ATS. Two students transferred out and there were three (3) graduates in August who had transferred to Brooklyn. Last week, the school added eight (8) new students. There are also ten (10) students that have completed the enrollment process and three (3) that are pending. Mr. Flory also advised the board that there are students who are finding it difficult to get appointments for physicals. Regarding student enrollment, the school is getting many students through the online application system. The school has reestablished a connection with Hillcrest Hill School, which is a big recruiting resource. The school is also sending out postcards to counselors in other schools as well. Mr. Flory stated that he is hoping that as BEDS Day approaches, other schools will consider New Dawn as a school where they can place their students. Mr. Flory believes that over the next couple of weeks, the school should see enrollment in Queens increase.

## **c. Internship Program—Jose Obregon**

Mr. Obregon reiterated to the board that the new vaccine policy has affected the internship staff and that Dr. Asmussen will discuss this in greater detail with the board members during the executive portion of the board meeting. He also stated that he is enthusiastic about the internship program at both schools. Mr. Obregon informed the board that there is good student participation, both at the Brooklyn and Queens school. Students are engaged, the internship staff is engaged, and the teachers that are spearheading the internship paper are also engaged. Mr. Obregon also stated that there is room for improvement, and he will continue to work with the internship staff to make sure the program's objectives are met. Mr. Obregon also informed the board that both schools are utilizing the Myers-Briggs assessment to determine what are each student's strengths relative to possible career fields. The identification of these strengths will allow students to focus on what career fields they are most likely to do well in. Mr. Obregon also informed the board that he will be focusing re-starting student participation at physical internship worksites. Since COVID student participation at work sites has diminished and the goal is to reestablish those sites.

## **IX. Enrollment—Sara Asmussen**



## **Benchmark 1: Student Performance**

### **a. Enrollment Numbers to Date**

Dr Asmussen reported to the board that enrollment changes daily. The last report will read that there were 256 students returning to school from last year in Brooklyn. As of last week, 93 students came back, which is a 36% return rate. However, this means that there are still 163 students unaccounted for. However, since then, the school is now up to a 53% return rate. Dr. Asmussen stated that this means that the outreach work is having an effect. At the Queens school last week, there was a 37% return rate. This week at Queens, 57% of the students have returned. However, that still leaves a huge number of students that need reach out so they can return.

### **b. Outreach**

Considering all the support that students in the schools need, it is too difficult for existing staff to deal with this. Dr. Asmussen stated, that this is the reason that she is pleased to say that the board agreed to hire an outreach team. One of the outreach workers, Anthony, is starting on Monday. The second outreach worker, Clintonia, will start the following Tuesday, after Indigenous Peoples Day. Dr. Asmussen stated that this is the reason that she is very excited about the work that they will do at both schools. Mentors will be putting lists together of those students who need to be visited immediately. Dr. Asmussen also stated that both outreach workers are very well versed in working in the community. Dr. Asmussen further stated that Clintonia has worked on an ACT team, which is the model the school is trying to emulate without the psychiatrists, nurse, and other professional practitioners. Both Anthony and Clintonia understand that they are going to be building this program as they go along. Both outreach workers will be working directly with Nazli Askin since she oversees the discharge process. Nazli also has experience in the mental health field and is very familiar with ACT teams. Dr. Asmussen also mentioned that the Brooklyn school enrolled 62 new students during the COVID quarantine. Queens enrolled 94 students. Dr. Asmussen stated that she is very hopeful that enrollment numbers will increase significantly over the next two months.

## **X. Charter Renewal Update—Dr. Sara Asmussen**

To expedite the process, Dr. Asmussen asked the board members to let her know what they needed. Mr. Tabano suggested that the board schedule a meeting just to review the oversight process and discuss concerns at that time. Mr. Tabano stated that he believes that Dr. Asmussen already has a good idea what the charter renewal team will be asking. He also suggested everyone thoroughly review items that will be essential that board members should be able to reply to. The board members agreed that



possible dates for such a review would be the 1<sup>st</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> of November prior to the charter renewal visit.

**XI. New Business**

There was no new business discussed.

**XII. Public Comment:** None

**XIII. Adjournment**

The board meeting adjourned at 12:05 P.M.

**XIV. Executive Session**