

Minutes
October 8, 2020 Meeting
UChicago Charter School Board of Directors

Oct. 8, 2020, 5:02 to 6:20 p.m.

The University of Chicago Charter School
Via ZOOM

Attendees

Board of Directors Members in attendance: D. Abebe (presiding); D. Gorman-Smith; I. Samstein; T. Island; S. Vasquez; K. Callow-Wright

Board of Directors Members absent: None

Also in attendance: UEI/UCCS Staff: C. Epstein; U. Mardyla; J. Washington; T. Barnett; A. Hull; J. Nowaczewski

I. Welcome and Review of Advisory Council Meeting

President Abebe called the meeting to order on the Zoom platform at 5:03 p.m., noting that it was the first Board meeting since the opening of the 2020 School Year, and thanking the Board for its 100% attendance at this first meeting.

President Abebe highlighted the Board members' upcoming obligation to complete Board training by Dec. 31, 2020, as mandated by Illinois law, noting this matter would be discussed later in the Board meeting.

President Abebe asked Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith to review the Advisory Council Meeting of Sept. 24, 2020. Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith noted that the meeting was well-attended and that the Council Members greatly appreciated hearing from each of the four Directors regarding the opening of school for students using 100% Remote Learning. Vice President Gorman-Smith noted that the Council Members had raised two questions for future discussion: (1) an update on UCCS' alums progress in college, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) suggestions for ways that Council Members could provide support to the staff and students during Remote Learning. Vice-President Gorman-Smith asked CEO Island Childress to add other matters, and the CEO noted that Council Members had asked how UChicago Charter was addressing the current social climate, including social protests against racism. The CEO noted that the Charter's first line of defense was its choice of "who is in front of our students," noting the strength and diversity of UCCS' four Directors and its teachers.

President Abebe highlighted for the Board that an upcoming Agenda item included the addition of a Parent Representative to the Board, and that the process for this appointment would be detailed later in the Meeting.

III. Public Comment (5:11 p.m.)

President Abebe called for any members of the public who wished to make public comment. The Zoom link had been posted on the UCCS public website, along with a contact email. No member

of the public entered the Zoom meeting, or contacted the email, for purposes of making public comments.

II. Minutes (5:13 p.m.)

Member Callow Wright made a motion to approve as written both the Draft Minutes of the July 11, 2020 Special Board Meeting and the Draft Minutes of the August 7, 2011 Special Board Meeting. Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith seconded the motion, and on a unanimous voice vote, both sets of draft minutes for July 11 and August 7 were approved as final by the Board.

IV. CEO's Report

CEO Island Childress opened her CEO's report by noting that UCCS opened school with 1,507 students, all of whom were utilizing the Remote Learning platforms created by UCCS that is notably higher than past years. She stated 1,437 Chrome Books and other devices had been distributed to students since the summer, and that teachers were teaching for 5 hours daily providing synchronous learning to UCCS students. She observed that the Fall was a significantly more robust learning schedule, and also presented its own challenges. She noted particularly with the younger grades, the amount of parent oversight needed during remote learning was stressful on families. She explained that staff was feeling burn-out in new ways, and that learning how to "turn it off," was one of the lessons from the pandemic. The CEO noted that, despite challenges, some UCCS High School students were taking pre-med classes at the College of the University of Chicago, an option made easier through Remote Learning. The CEO concluded that both the Middle School and High School Directors were involved in 5 Essentials coaching for leadership, which they found helpful.

Member Callow-Wright asked about engagement vs participation, and the "mood" of the students. Chief Academic Officer noted that over-all the attendance of the network was 87.1%, which was significantly more than the spring, but less than the in-person attendance UCCS was accustomed to, which averaged 94% or higher network-wide, pre-pandemic. The CAO noted that attendance was logged in the morning and the afternoon, and that, overall, the older students were observed to be doing better than grades K-2. He noted that he and the CEO had observed zoom classrooms with first graders where the students were fidgeting a great deal, and needed to be reminded of many basics, such as how to refresh the screen, all of which was heart-breaking to watch. The CAO noted that while CPS would not be assigning SQRP assessments to schools this year, UCCS intended to continue to take its own attendance metrics.

Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith noted that the Consortium was working through SQRP "3.0" with CPS. She agreed that for many people, it has felt that there "was no summer." The CEO and Dean Gorman-Smith shared with the Board that the typical communal expressions of thanks that helped motivate and support staff, such as communal buffets, and other treats on campus, were not available during the pandemic, and, accordingly, UCCS leadership was trying to look differently at time, giving "Flex Fridays," and similar options.

Member Vasquez asked whether what the impact of CPS restrictions, if any, were on UCCS potentially planning to bring students into campus, perhaps at the lower grades, as Lab was

doing. The CEO noted that the charters had the authority to make their own decisions, with notifications to CPS, as UCCS had done in August. Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith noted that such plans were being looked at, but that, as the Board had seen in the August meeting, nearly 70% of teachers and 70% of families and students preferred the remote model and had concerns regarding the return to campus. The Board noted that since UCCS was in CPS buildings for two of its locations, the interface at those campuses between UCCS and CPS would need to be more closely watched.

The CEO introduced Chief Technology Officer Pajakowski to give the Technology portion of the CEO's report. The CTO reported that the Tech Team has essentially 1 to 1 ½ team members to support the technology needs of approximately 1,500 students and 170 staff members. The Tech team offered Live Chat help from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., including live phone calls. To date, the support team had had approximately 40 individual appointments to troubleshoot technology issues. The Tech Team sent a survey to which 526 parents (33%) responded, wherein approximately 20% stated that they had some type of technological issue. 2 of those responding stated that had no internet service, and both of those were being addressed and connected to Chicago Connect.

Regarding the use of the Zoom platform, approximately 40 staff members responded to issues regarding Zoom usage. Member Callow-Wright noted that IT are the heroes of the pandemic, and suggested that perhaps the UCCS Tech Team could connect with the University's Tech Team, as the CFO had noted that Zoom was unresponsive to UCCS' requests for assistance. The CFO noted that UCCS was using the free Zoom account, and to date, the issue of not having CNET-Ids for UCCS staff presented challenges to simply using the University's paid accounts. The CFO noted the cost of a paid account with Zoom would be \$90 per teacher per year. The Board agreed to investigate this matter further.

The CEO asked HR Director Nowaczewski to review UCCS' response to COVID-19 Protocols. HR Director Nowaczewski noted three topics for review: UCCS staff responses to COVID-19 training, quizzes and attestations; UCCS staff usage of campus buildings for teaching during the Remote Learning period, and UCCS Special Events bringing students and families to UCCS buildings and grounds.

Regarding the COVID-19 training for UCCS Staff, the HR Director informed the Board that as of Sept. 23, 2020, 100% of the UCCS staff had taken the training, passed the quiz and signed the multi-part attestation in 12 days, record time. She thanked CTO Pajakowski for his help in setting up all aspects of this project in Qualtrics. In terms of campus usage, Nowaczewski noted that once staff had completed the training, they were allowed to teach from campus under certain circumstances. She noted that since Sept. 12, 2020, approximately 2 to 6 teachers were teaching per day from UCCS campuses. Each campus has posted signs reinforcing the protocols of mask-wearing, social distancing and hand hygiene. Signage is posted on floors establishing 6 foot social distancing, and one way traffic patterns. She described observing teachers from their classrooms, during spot checks she made weekly at each campus, and noted the engagement of these teachers with their students via 2 or 3 screens at a time, despite the lonely feeling of the

empty classrooms. Regarding the Events, HR Director Nowaczewski noted that the Middle School had just successfully completed a 3 day NWEA testing event at the UCW campus, where approximately 44 8th graders, 39 7th graders and 35 6th graders took the optional reading and math assessment exams. Each day featured one grade, and each student was required to register the week before, complete a health self-certification the day before, and submit to a temperature check upon entry. Nowaczewski reported that the testing event went very well, and that COVID-19 protocols were adhered to by the 18 teachers who proctored the exam over the 3 days, the 7 security guards who escorted students in and out of the building, as well as by the students themselves. Nowaczewski ascribed the success of the event to Director Gordon's careful planning with his administrative team, and she thanked Dean Gorman-Smith for her approval of the request for the testing event at the University level. Nowaczewski noted that a High School testing event had just been approved by the University for Oct. 14 and Oct. 27, and that a Garden Event for Middle School families was also in process for later in October.

Member Callow-Wright asked about whether the students and staff enjoyed their University of Chicago COVID-19 masks, and the HR Director affirmed that, while the mask had not been distributed on the first day, (everyone wore their own), the masks were greatly appreciated on the second day when they were distributed.

The CEO asked Chief Financial Officer of the Urban Education Institute, Ursula Mardyla, to give the Quarterly Budget Report to the Board. UEI CFO Mardyla referred to the Budget materials included in the Board Book, where last year's budget reflected an excess in revenue over expenses. This was planned after 2 years of losses, and was due in part to unfilled positions at the Woodlawn High School, and savings on copying and other activities during the Spring of 2020, due to the physical closure of UCCS' campuses because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CFO informed the Board that the annual audit of UCCS appeared to be complete, and that a meeting between the Auditors and the President and the Treasurer was set for Monday, Oct. 26, 2020, and that the Audit Report was due to CPS on Monday, Nov. 2, 2020. Treasurer Samstein asked whether the typical interviews with teachers and students had taken place this year in the audit, and the CFO noted that they had not, given the pandemic. The CFO noted that CPS was operating under the same constraints.

The CFO reviewed the current budget actuals to estimates for FY21 and noted that the Pre-K funding had not been awarded to UCCS from either the City or CPS, despite numerous attempts to negotiate on this point with both of these potential sources. Member Callow-Wright asked whether other charters offer Pre-K, and CEO Island Childress indicated that many did not, although some, like for example, LEARN did. The CEO noted that she was grateful that Board could find funding for the Pre-K program, as 90% of the students from UCCS' Kindergarten Program matriculated from the Pre-K program, and 70% of UCCS' superhighway students started with UCCS in pre-school. The CEO noted that CPS appeared to be awarding its limited Pre-K funds to poorest neighborhoods in the city. Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith expressed gratitude for a recent gift that would likely be used to support Pre-K for this year. The CEO noted that UCCS was looking into the possibility of utilizing Head Start funds in the future.

Finally, the CFO noted that in line 4 of the FY21 budget, there was a big difference given that \$90,000 of private philanthropic support was added. She noted that otherwise, the revenue did not change. She believes that school fees will drop by \$75,000 for NKO due to the fact that after school activities would likely not be happening this school year. In terms of the expenses for payroll there were still a few open positions where benefits selections could make a difference. She noted that there have been an increase in facilities fees of approximately \$60,000. In terms of non-payroll expenses, these were on the low side for the first quarter probably in large part due to the pandemic, and also to the fact that the campuses had expended dollars in the spring to cover certain e-learning expenses anticipated for the fall.

In conclusion, the CFO noted that there is no cushion in the bottom line but that the budget looks healthy. She referenced the University's transfer of \$200,000 for COVID-19 related supplies. Finally, she noted that the enrollment was in a good place for the beginning of the year, currently showing 1507 students. The budget was based on 1441 students, which was the end count for FY 20. Donohue appears to be short few students while NKO and UCS are above their student counts.

Member Vasquez asked when the charter school would need to determine whether it would offer Pre-K for the 2021-2022 school year. The CEO noted that typically the lottery is held in March.

The CEO asked the HR Director to share the context in which the Annual Discipline Report, the next Agenda item in the CEO's report, was presented to the Board. HR Director Nowaczewski noted that the terms of CPS' renewal and five-year contract with UCCS provided that UCCS should annually share its data on student discipline, including expulsions and suspensions with the Board. Noting that the Report had been included in the Board Book, Nowaczewski highlighted that there had been no expulsions during the FY20 school year, and that suspensions and other disciplinary restrictions had been trending down even before the physical closure of UCCS campuses due to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 17, 2020. President Abebe noted that had there been any expulsions, those would have, by law, come to the Board for review and approval.

V.a. Action Items: Approve Amendment to Policy and Practices re: Private Information.

President Abebe asked HR Director Nowaczewski to address the proposed Amendments on the Policy for the Protection of Private Information, and related implementation protocols. Director Nowaczewski noted that the Board had approved this Policy at the May 2020 meeting, after CPS had asked that UCCS codify its practices into a written policy. She shared that this summer, Illinois State Board of Education auditors had reviewed this policy and indicated that the redlined portion should be added to the policy in order to conform to best practices. This proposed amendment added a reference to protocols related to the exact steps that would be taken in the event of a data breach. The draft protocols were also attached for Board review. Member Callow-Wright asked whether all UCCS policies were reviewed by the University's Office of Legal Counsel. Director Nowaczewski replied that policies were often reviewed by the OLC, and in some cases by outside counsel, but that this particular policy and protocol had not been reviewed. President Abebe suggested that UCCS take the time before the next Board

Meeting, when this matter would be before the Board for its Second Reading, to seek OLC review, and UCCS leadership agreed to do so.

V.b. Approve Revised Annual Calendar of Board & Council Meetings 2020-2021(6:20 p.m.)

Ms. Nowaczewski shared the proposed Annual Calendar of Board and Advisory Council Meetings for 2020-2021 had been updated to provide the new Fall dates, and that all Meetings would be via Zoom in 2020-2021. Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith made a motion to approve the Revised Annual Schedule of Meetings as submitted, and Member Callow-Wright seconded the motion. On a unanimous voice vote, the Revised Annual Schedule was adopted as submitted.

VI. Updates (6:27 p.m.)

President Abebe asked HR Director Nowaczewski to briefly discuss the UCCS Employee Handbook for 2020-2021, noting that it contained new Title IX regulations. The Director recalled for the Board that the Employee Handbook was submitted annually to the Board for informational purposes. She further noted that this year's Employee Handbook had been extensively reviewed by the Office of Legal Counsel and Bridget Collier, the University's Equal Opportunity Director, given that the current federal administration had issued new regulations which required more stringent Title IX procedures to be in place by August, 2020 at all Universities and K-12 schools which receive federal funding. The Director noted that the Lab School had also been required to change its policies, and that the collective work at the University, Lab and Charter level on these issues had been helpful. President Abebe shared that he was aware and appreciative of the extensive efforts required by so many University employees and affiliates to insure compliance with the new regulations.

VII. New Business (6:28 p.m.)

President Abebe asked if any members had any new business. CEO Island Childress asked Director Barnett to address the topic of graduation. Director Barnett stated that UCCS hoped to provide graduating seniors with an in person graduation this year, in the event that the pandemic was at least somewhat under control, and because of the privations the seniors have experienced so far in terms of the loss of normal senior year experiences. Director Barnett suggested that UCCS leaders were investigating the possible reservation of Stagg Field for a graduation ceremony where the graduating senior and one parent, perhaps, would be present. Diplomas and awards would be provided at this ceremony. He noted it was not likely that Rockefeller Chapel would be usable by June 2021. Member Callow-Wright noted she would review this matter.

Member Callow-Wright expressed her thanks for the work of the Charter School leadership team. Her fellow Board members joined in sharing her appreciations.

VIII. Adjournment.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn. On a unanimous voice vote, all six members present voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

FINAL Minutes of Oct. 8 Meeting APPROVED Dec. 3, 2020.