
Minutes
Jan. 29, 2021 Special Meeting
UChicago Charter School Board of Directors

Jan. 29, 2021, 5:00 to 6:10 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, P. Ziegler

Board of Directors Members absent: None

Also in attendance were numerous UCCS Staff, UEI staff and Charter School parents.

I. Welcome and Purpose of the Meeting

President Abebe called the meeting to order on the Zoom platform at 5:00 p.m. He thanked everyone for attending, observing that there was a quorum. President Abebe thanked everyone in UChicago Charter leadership for the work that has been done in the Fall Semester using remote platforms. He noted that the purpose of the Special Meeting was to review for the Board's approval, plans for a phased in return to in person learning at UCCS beginning March 1, 2021..

President Abebe introduced Donoghue Parent Ms. Patrice Ziegler as the newest Board Member. President Abebe reviewed that Illinois law now required a parent on all Charter Boards. President Abebe shared that the recommendation to President Zimmer to appoint Ms. Ziegler had been granted, effective Jan. 1, 2021. He thanked Ms. Ziegler for joining the Board. Ms. Ziegler shared her gratitude for the appointment and her commitment to UChicago Charter School.

III. Public Comment (5:10 p.m.)

President Abebe called for any members of the public who wished to comment. The Zoom link had been posted on the UCCS public website. Ms. Pascale Leblanc, a special education teacher at the Middle School had signed up to speak, and President Abebe welcomed her to do so. Ms. Leblanc stated that she loved her job, and also appreciated having been given access to the vaccine for COVID-19 through the University. She expressed concern however regarding the proposed plan to return in person on March 1 and suggested that it would be safer to wait until after Spring Break, i.e., April 5, 2021. Ms. Leblanc noted that there was still not enough research regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine against new variants, and that the communities served by UCCS, of black and brown families had been hit hardest by the virus, and might suffer more with too early an opening. Ms. Leblanc also stated that the students were learning well on the remote platforms, and that while no scenario was ideal, she urged the Board to be cautious and delay opening till after Spring Break. President Abebe noted her 3-minute time was up and thanked her for making her concerns known in a professional and courteous manner. No member of the public entered the Zoom meeting for purposes of making public comments.

IV. CEO's Report & Plan for Phase I Return to In Person Learning (5:11 p.m.)

CEO Island Childress opened by first welcoming Parent Representative Ziegler and noting how much Ms. Ziegler has done over the years for Donoghue and the UCCS network.

The CEO then thanked the University for the opportunity for all UCCS staff Pre-K-12 and affiliates to be vaccinated by the University starting Jan. 31 and finishing Feb. 28, 2021. She stated this meant a great deal to the Charter staff, and many people had contacted her to express their thanks to the University.

The CEO then began to outline the Phase I Plan in PowerPoint slides via screen sharing. The PowerPoint is attached hereto as Exhibit A. She noted that UCCS proposed a phased return to in person learning in two phases with Phase 1 beginning March 1. During Phase 1 all teachers and staff in grades Pre-K to 8 would return to campus. Slightly over 325 students network wide would be invited back to campus, based on academic and SEL need. All teacher in Pre-K-8 will return to campus on March 1 and teach virtually from their classrooms 4 days a week, with Wednesdays remaining a professional development day, and a day for deep cleaning on UCCS campuses.

The CEO explained the rationale for the targeted/invited students for Phase 1. At the elementary level, UCCS proposes to invite all students with IEP's, Kindergarten students with attendance below 90%, and students from grades 1-5 with a GPA below 2.0. The precise number at each grade level are set out on slide 3 of Exhibit A, At the middle school, all 84 6th graders will be invited to return on March 1st using a hybrid model. 6th graders are being invited as the most at risk due to the transition from a single classroom in elementary school.

Like CPS, High School students will remain fully remote, but UCCS will offer additional supports in the form of meetings with the CGO team, check ins with our SEL/Social Work team, and additional academic support in the form of office hours.

Finally, she addressed the costs of the Robust COVID-19 Protocols and PPE, including projected substitute costs.

The CEO asked for questions, and Member Samstein thanked the CEO and her team for the hard work throughout this past year, and in the development of the plan. Member Samstein asked about the distribution of meals to the UCCS community, given the Free and Reduced Lunch rates. Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships Barnett and Family Coordinator Hill credited the UCCS teachers and staff who knew families personally and could provide targeted aid. A few UCCS families who has suffered fires in their homes were discussed in terms of outreach provided. Coordinator Hill also emphasized the fine work that UCCS social workers and operations managers were doing to assist families in transitional living situations. Member Samstein emphasized his continuing concern for the "most vulnerable."

The CEO then asked Ms. Nowaczewski as COVID-19 liaison to review the protocols in place to keep UCCS schools as safe as possible and mitigate risks. Ms. Nowaczewski reviewed the plans

for low density in the schools, and how each classroom had been “bubble mapped” by University architects to provide proper distance. She reviewed that masking is required, frequent hand washing and sanitization and instruction on the reasons for these protocols for staff and students alike. Classroom ventilation, nursing staff and daily temperature checks were also discussed.

Chief Academic Officer Washington added context, noting that UCCS had been among the first school to close when the pandemic hit, and that all actions since then have been made very deliberately, and with the input of the Directors and staff, as well as with parents, and a lot of time has been spent listening. He emphasized that the phased plan allowed for more students to return when the weather turns better. He shared that at CPS only a 25% return rate was experienced so far, and that this demonstrated that parents are understandably concerned and want to be assured of risk mitigation activities.

Dean Gorman-Smith asked Ms. Nowaczewski to highlight the number of events in which students had been brought in for testing since the fall. Ms. Nowaczewski reviewed the 3 testing events offered by the Middle School, 2 testing events by the High School, a 2 day Driver’s Education Testing program and a number of one on one Special Education Testing events that had safely been held at the Woodlawn Campus from October through January.

Board Members asked Middle School Director Gordon to say more about the 6th grade plan, and the Director shared that if enough 6th graders chose to return they would be grouped into two “pods” for a Group A and Group B two day rotation during each week. No more than 8 students would be in any given classroom or pod. Recess and lunch were still being planned. Town halls were planned to reach out to parents and provide information.

Member Ziegler asked about parent pick up at Donoghue and NKO, and Directors Slack and Sergeant shared that they were working on protocols that would be shared at the school level for these activities which would insure social distancing. The possibility of hiring additional part time staff for this activity was explored.

Member Callow-Wright asked for a review of the use of COVID-19 Protocol Trainings, Attestations and Daily Health Screeners. COVID-19 Liaison Nowaczewski shared that the Charter School had adopted and adapted with the assistance of the Office of Legal Counsel the trainings, attestations and Daily Screeners developed for the Lab School and the University. All 180 UCCS staff have fully completed this training and attestation activity, and over 200 parents, who students were involved in the testing events mentioned above, also have completed this important activity. Nowaczewski shared that once it was clear which students chose to return in Phase I, then UCCS would reach out to insure that these parents also completed the training and attestation before March 1, and the Daily Health Screener every day that the child came to the UCCS campus.

Member Vasquez asked what the charter school needed from the University or other sources to do a good job in opening. The CEO responded that she was grateful for the expertise and partnership that the University and the Board had already provided, including masks, and

vaccines, among other items. She noted that some complications could arise because two of the UCCS campuses are managed by CPS, while the other is managed by the University, in terms of maintenance and cleaning. She asked for help in navigating the unexpected when it would arise.

President Abebe noted the time was approaching 6:00 p.m. and reiterated that every Board Member had a deep appreciation and gratitude for the heroic work that the UCCS leadership team had undertaken throughout the pandemic. He asked if there was a motion to approve the Phase I plan presented by the CEO. Member Callow-Wright made the motion to approve the Phase I plan as presented, and Member Vasquez seconded the motion. The Board President asked each Board Member to speak to the plan before casting their vote.

Member Callow-Wright stated that the Phase I plan was sensible, and she appreciated that March began with a smaller population. She thought the April 5 date for inviting all Pre-K to 8 in person would take us to a time when more was known about the variants and mitigation risks could be further provided.

Member Samstein reiterated his thoughts that all the kids and families should return to school as soon as possible, given that he worried about “harms we can’t see.” He asked that more data on mandated reporter calls and other ways of insuring that students don’t fall through the cracks during remote learning. He did acknowledge how much he appreciates the hard work of all of the UCCS team.

Member Ziegler noted that coming up with the Phase I Plan, “couldn’t have been easy, and she urged the leadership to continue to collect data both on students returning and students staying remote.

Vice President Dean Gorman-Smith noted she “could not say enough” how appreciative the Board was, and that the leadership of the school should feel that it has the support of the Board “beyond a zoom call.” She stated the Board was committed to making sure that Phase I goes well, and again praised the gradual phased-in approach.

Hearing no more comments from Board Members, the President called for a vote on the Motion made by Callow-Wright and seconded by Vasquez, and all 7 of the Board Members voted to approve the plan, on a 7 to 0 vote.

Member Samstein took a moment to praise teacher Leblanc who spoke during public session and stated he had really listened to her. Member Samstein emphasized that the Board Meetings were public meetings, and UCCS leadership should strive to do as much as possible to publicize the meetings, so all could participate. Director Nowaczewski noted that at 5:28 p.m., zoom recorded 100 people on the call, the largest participation in recent memory in a Charter School Board Meeting.

President Abebe closed by noting that the Budget, normally covered in regular meetings, would be addressed at the next regular meeting on Feb. 25, 2021. The President also alerted Board Members that it was likely that another meeting would need to be added in March to the Board Schedule, given the plan for Phase II would need to be approved before April.

VIII. Adjournment.

The Chair called for a motion to adjourn. On a unanimous voice vote, all seven members of the Board who were present voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:08 p.m.

**FINAL APPROVED Minutes of Jan. 29, 2021 Meeting FINAL
APPROVED**