



**PROVIDENT CHARTER SCHOOL – CENTRAL  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF PROVIDENT CHARTER SCHOOL**

February 11, 2025

6:00 PM

HELD AT PROVIDENT CHARTER SCHOOL AND VIA ZOOM

<b>BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT</b>	<b>BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT</b>	<b>OTHERS PRESENT</b>
Dan Lynch*	Dan Sponseller	Maria Paluselli
Dr. Jean Ferketish*	Terry Smith	Alan Shuckrow
Curtis Kossman		Kathryn Clark*
David Baker		Vivi Besteman
Sheila Conway		Rachel Owens
Mike Brady*		Sallie Richards
		Meghan Karn
		Rebecca Wasserstein*
		Hugh Kelly*
		James Roche*
		Russ Loyd*

\*Via Zoom

Curtis Kossman convened the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

**Public Comment**

Meghan Karn shared that she has a sixth grade student enrolled at Provident and an older son currently in high school. Ms. Karn noted that many colleges want students to have at least two years of language courses completed when applying and asked the Board to consider adding a language course to the Provident curriculum to prepare students to meet language requirements. Maria Paluselli shared that language was previously an elective course that has been since removed from course offerings. Sheila Conway also shared that at many schools, including the University of Pittsburgh, students are able to take alternative courses such as culture or ASL in lieu of a traditional language to satisfy their requirements.

Meghan Karn also suggested introducing typing instruction to the Provident curriculum to promote proficiency in typing, and noted that although students are able to use assisted technology in class,

there have been some practical challenges with doing so (e.g., classrooms are too loud for the technology to work well). Mr. Kossman thanked Ms. Karns for her comments and indicated that the Board would take this proposal into consideration.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The meeting minutes from the November 2024 regular Board meeting were reviewed by the Board.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Sheila Conway, seconded by David Baker, the meeting minutes from the November 2024 regular Board meeting were unanimously approved.

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### **Richard King Mellon Foundation Grant**

Rebecca Wasserstein, Director of Partnerships, Vanta, gave a presentation regarding a grant proposal with the Richard King Mellon Foundation, which grant would be used to fund an e-sports program for the students of PCS and other Western Pennsylvania schools. The grant proposal is in the amount of \$3.3 million dollars, with the goal of enrolling 300+ students in the program (charter schools being prioritized). The plan is for the Provident Education Foundation to be the primary recipient and administrator of the grant.

Ms. Wasserstein indicated that Vanta would like to submit its grant proposal by February 14, 2025, with the goal of launching the e-sports program in summer 2025 via summer camps, and the official start of the e-sports league taking place in fall 2025.

The Richard King Mellon Foundation is a nonprofit focused on economic mobility and workforce development through public-private partnerships. Vanta is an e-sports platform providing software, professional coaching and development for the proposed program. Rezzanine Sports, an e-sports facility is the intended venue for the program. Mr. Kossman disclosed that his family has an ownership interest in Rezzanine. Because of his personal connection to this matter, Curtis Kossman indicated that he would recuse himself from the grant negotiations moving forward. He also indicated that Rezzanine would be donating the time and not charging fees for Provident students who participate in the esports program.

Ms. Wasserstein shared that e-sports have grown significantly over the last few years, especially post-COVID. Moreover, 95% of children under the age of 18 are video game players, and many colleges now have varsity e-sports teams and offer e-sports scholarships for students. Benefits of e-sports include teamwork, accountability, increased memory capacity, social skills, hand-eye coordination, dexterity and reaction time, community engagement, and STEM learning. Ms. Wasserstein shared that students who participate in e-sports tend to get better grades, stay out of trouble, make friends, and develop confidence and new skills. These benefits are particularly impactful for students with communication issues like dyslexia.

Ms. Wasserstein shared that the grant would include stipends for transportation and food for students, allowing them to travel to Rezzanine two times per week for training. The grant would also include stipends for teachers to facilitate the program for students.

Sheila Conway inquired about how the proposal was initiated. Ms. Wasserstein shared that she has always had an interest in charter schools and communication-based needs, and had a pre-existing relationship with the Mellon Foundation. Ms. Wasserstein toured Provident in November 2024 and had a conversation with Rachel Owens regarding using e-sports to help students achieve success in schools. Ms. Wasserstein was thereafter connected with Curtis Kossman.

Dan Lynch inquired about which grade levels would be eligible to participate in the program. Ms. Wasserstein indicated that the program is open to all grade levels, though middle school is an important age group because most children choose whether they will pursue a STEM career by eighth grade. Ms. Wasserstein also shared that the program is important because many of the students at PCS and other charter schools will not have the opportunity to be star athletes, and e-sports provide that opportunity.

David Baker inquired about the statistics regarding the benefits of e-sports for children with learning challenges. Hugh Kelly, Grant Writer with Forward, shared that there is 20 years of research related to e-sports and children with special healthcare needs which suggests that e-sports programs increase cognition and social skills and help children with communication disabilities to enter the mainstream. Mr. Kossman also shared that e-sports create a community for kids who would otherwise feel out of place, and allow those kids to transcend their socioeconomic status and other limiting factors.

Mr. Kossman inquired about whether there are any other charter schools that have expressed an interest in participating in the program. Ms. Wasserstein shared that there are some schools in Western Pennsylvania who may join the program, but that the program will start with both PCS schools and expand thereafter pursuant to recruiting efforts. Mr. Kossman suggested a collaboration with the Charter School Coalition to increase participation in the program.

Alan Shuckrow indicated that because the proposal is for the Provident Education Foundation to be the entity submitting the grant, this matter will need to be considered by the Foundation Board and no firm commitment can be made this evening by the School's Board. Mr. Shuckrow indicated that further discussion is needed between Vanta and the Foundation as to the details of the grant, and within the Foundation Board itself, regarding the practical implications of the program, including with respect to Provident's administrative expenses in connection with the program, transportation and other considerations. Mr. Shuckrow stated that while the School Board cannot officially approve anything, it could make a motion expressing support for the concept subject to Foundation approval. An effort will be made to quickly assemble the Foundation Board for consideration of this matter.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by David Baker, seconded by Sheila Conway, the Board unanimously approved a motion to support participation in the esports program subject to approval by the Provident Education Foundation.

## **Governance**

Alan Shuckrow shared that the Board held a working session in November 2024 to discuss revisions to the Bylaws, which were updated pursuant to the comments received during that working session and subsequent conversations with Dan Sponseller, Terry Smith and Dr. Jean Ferketish. Vivi Besteman provided an overview of the revisions to the Bylaws, which included, *inter alia*, the addition of Parent Board Members; removal of the Executive Committee; addition of an Audit Committee; and addition of an Academic and Student Affairs Committee.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Curtis Kossman, seconded by Dr. Jean Ferketish, the revised Bylaws were unanimously approved.

Alan Shuckrow also introduced the Board Member Commitment Letter, which was created to provide information to prospective Board Members regarding the duties and responsibilities of the position and which contains a brief application for completion by prospective members. Current Board Members are not required to sign the Commitment Letter but can choose to do so to recommit to their Board responsibilities.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Curtis Kossman, seconded by David Baker, the Board Member Commitment Letter was unanimously approved.

## **Enrollment and Hiring Reports**

Maria Paluselli shared that enrollment for all grade levels at PCS Central is currently at 309 students for the 2024-2025 school year. Enrollment for the 2025-2026 school year opened February 1, 2025, and as of February 11, 2025, there are 41 students applying across all grade levels, with most students (10) applying for sixth grade and least students (0) applying for eighth grade.

In addition, Maria Paluselli shared that there have been three new hires at PCS Central, including Brooke DesLauriers as Building Substitute, effective February 10, 2025; Jamie Druga as 5<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA/SS Teacher, effective February 7, 2025; and Mary Schmitt as 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher, effective January 1, 2025. Ethan Putt has been promoted from Building Substitute to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Math Teacher, effective January 2, 2025. There were two separations, Katelyn McCallister, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA/SS Teacher, effective December 20, 2024, and Kathleen Reeder, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Math Teacher, effective December 20, 2024.

## **Finance Report/Vendor Payments**

Mike Brady, Treasurer, presented both the vendor payments for December 2024 through January 2025 and the financial reports as of January 31, 2025. Mr. Brady commented that there have been increases in the money market account and accounts receivable for this period. All vendor payments and the financial statements are in order.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Curtis Kossman, seconded by Mike Brady, the vendor purchases for December 2024 through January 2025 were unanimously approved.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Mike Brady, seconded by David Baker, the finance report as of January 31, 2025 was unanimously approved.

## **Other**

### *Alumni Scholarship and Business Grant*

Rachel Owens gave an update on the Alumni Scholarship and Business Grant. Both opportunities went active the first week of February and are available to current/former students until March 14<sup>th</sup>.

### *International Trip 2026*

Rachel Owens shared that Provident will be hosting an international trip for students in London during the summer of 2026. As of February 11, 2025, 20 students across sixth and seventh grade have committed to the trip along with five staff members. The trip will be organized by EF Tours and comes at a total cost of \$4,000 per student, which includes airfare; a seven night stay in London; the cost of excursions; and most meals. Rachel Owens indicated that students have been fundraising to cover trip costs and have raised a total of \$1,400 to date.

Curtis Kossman asked the Board to consider raising funds for students who want to attend but are financially unable to do so. Mike Brady suggested finding a way to cover passport costs for all students. Rachel Owens indicated that enrollment for the trip is still open, though there was a \$200 discount for students who signed up early. Rachel Owens will contact EF Tours and see if there are able to reopen the discount pricing, and Sallie Richards will notify families at the next parent group meeting that enrollment for the trip is still open and that financial costs should not be a barrier to attending based on ongoing fundraising and donation efforts.

### *Annual Fund Campaign*

Rachel Owens indicated that there was a slight decrease in the Annual Fund Campaign as compared to prior years. While there were more donors this year, some contributed to the Foundation rather than to the Annual Fund, and the overall average donation was less per person.

The Board discussed the need to decide what to use the Annual Fund for and Maria Paluselli suggested dedicating the Fund to a new playground. Rachel Owens suggested gathering input from students and parents regarding the proposed use of the Fund. The Board also discussed that historically the Annual Fund has not been separated from the General Fund, and discussed separating the two.

### *Gift Giving*

Rachel Owens provided an update on Gift Giving Campaign. There were 136 gift sponsors and as a result of the campaign, 143 students received gifts and 37 students received gift cards. In

addition, the campaign resulted in the payoff of \$2,100 in overdue lunch balances across PCS Central and PCS West, and \$1,000 was contributed to PCS Central Pantry.

### *Cafeteria Finance Update*

Rachel Owens shared that the amount the cafeteria needed covered decreased from \$175,000 in 2021 to \$0 during the 2023/2024 school year. This has been a product of utilizing in-house staff along with government reimbursements. The Board suggested organizing an appreciation event for cafeteria staff in recognition of the significant progress that has been made.

### *PCS Central Summer Programs*

Rachel Owens shared that PCS Central will be hosting five academic summer programs in 2025, including an Algebra Bootcamp; Math and Reading Program; Sentence and Paragraph Writing Workshop; Text Dependent Analysis Workshop; and Understanding Fractions Program.

### *Upcoming Events*

Rachel Owens shared that PCS Central will host a panel discussion titled High School and Beyond, offering insight from young professionals. The panel will take place after school, and though student attendance is not required, students may choose to attend with their parents. Meghan Karn suggested making the panel an assembly for all students to attend.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.