

<b>Polaris Charter Academy</b>	<b>Scheduled Date:</b>	<b>Monday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025</b>
<b>Board Meeting Minutes</b>	<b>Scheduled Time:</b>	<b>6:30pm (Via Zoom)</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval of April Meeting Minutes</li> <li>• State of the School Presentation (Year-End Celebrations; Academic Data—STAR &amp; IAR; Teacher Retention; Programmatic Highlights)</li> <li>• Enrollment Update</li> <li>• Development Committee Update (YTD Fundraising; Spring Benefit Debrief; Corporate Giving &amp; Grants)</li> <li>• Finance Committee Update (FY26 Budget Overview &amp; Approval; Cash Position; Funding Environment)</li> <li>• Governance Committee Update (Board Recruitment; FOIA/OMA &amp; COI Compliance)</li> <li>• Partnerships &amp; Grants (Transcend/Gates Opportunity; IP Considerations)</li> <li>• External Recognition &amp; Communications (EL Credentialing Recap; Building Hope Award; Media/Publication Highlights)</li> <li>• Upcoming Key Dates</li> </ul>
	<b>Start:</b>	Tina Yarovsky, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:38 PM CST.

<b>ATTENDANCE CATEGORY</b>	<b>BOARD MEMBERS &amp; FELLOWS</b>	<b>SCHOOL STAFF</b>
Attending via Zoom	Yaa Boakye Roel Vivit Antonio Gonzalez Tina Yarovsky Ayanna Berry Bennett Brenton Mike Davison Wendy Silva	John Lydon Michelle Navarre Elizabeth Whiting Lissette Sanchez
Attending by In-Person		
Unable to Attend		Francesca Peck
<b>EXPECTED GUESTS &amp; VISITORS</b>		
None/NA		

## **Approval of December Meeting Minutes**

**Discussion:** The previous meeting minutes were circulated prior to the meeting. One correction was noted: Stahili was listed as attending but had rolled off the board in February and was not present at the previous meeting.

**Motion:** Ben moved to approve the minutes with the correction to remove Stahili from attendance.

**Second:** Mike seconded.

**Vote:**

- **In Favor:** Unanimous "Aye"
- **Opposed:** None
- Motion carried, and minutes approved.

## **Public Comments**

No public comments were presented.

## **State of the School**

**Presenters:** Michelle Navarre and John Lydon

*(Note: Francesca Peck was unable to attend due to back spasms from lifting her dog)*

## **Academic Performance Update**

**STAR Assessment Results:** Michelle presented strong academic growth data from STAR 360 assessments:

- **Early Literacy (K-2):** Almost two years of growth achieved
- **Reading Literacy (3-8):** Just over one year of growth
- **Mathematics:** 1.2 years of growth

The exceptional early literacy results were attributed to Nora Ryan's multi-year intervention work and transition to coaching teachers on Tier 1 and Tier 2 strategies. The middle school gains reflected Katie Saison's literacy coaching and Zoe Walker's mathematics instructional guidance.

**Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR):** While state comparison data wasn't yet available, Polaris showed positive momentum with decreasing numbers of students in the "red" (needs serious intervention) category. Michelle noted that IAR results don't always align with internal assessments but provide useful data for identifying areas needing deeper analysis.

**Teacher Retention Achievement:** For the first time in recent memory, Polaris achieved 100% teacher retention with no new hires needed for the upcoming year. Michelle attributed this to:

- Post-pandemic stabilization in education sector
- Strong instructional guide support system
- Balance between structured expectations and teacher autonomy
- Improved work-life balance for educators

## Programmatic Updates

**EL Education Credential Renewal:** John reported on the successful three-hour credential renewal presentation featuring student panels, graduate speakers, and national school leaders discussing Polaris's impact. The presentation showcased the school's influence both locally and nationally in the EL Education network.

**Building Hope Summit Results:** Despite Michelle experiencing severe food poisoning that required IV fluids in her hotel room, she successfully delivered her presentation without incident on stage. The team returned with a \$10,000 prize and valuable networking connections, including potential partnerships with organizations like Ziegler Foundation.

### National Recognition:

- **NAESP Podcast:** Francesca was featured on the National Association of Elementary School Principals podcast
- **Student Blog Publication:** Graduating 8th grader Christopher Tate authored a powerful piece for EL Education on leadership and growth
- **Stanford Publication:** Dr. Gregory Walton's upcoming book "Ordinary Magic" features Polaris based on his school visit

**Transcend Partnership Opportunity:** Michelle described a promising collaboration opportunity with Transcend, an organization focused on codifying and disseminating outstanding educational practices. They have received millions in Gates Foundation funding for mathematics work and are interested in Polaris's practices, potentially bringing tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars while protecting the school's intellectual property.

**Pahara Fellowship Nomination:** Michelle announced her nomination for the prestigious Pahara Fellowship from the Aspen Institute Foundation, noting that single-site charter leaders are rarely selected.

## Enrollment and Outreach

**Current Challenges:** Enrollment stands at just under 300 students, creating budget pressures. The closure of Plato Learning Academy (a CPS contract school) provided an opportunity for strategic outreach to displaced families. Michelle's team conducted multiple recruitment visits, emphasizing that no middle school student should be told they're unwanted.

**Grant-Funded Transportation:** A new \$1.2 million grant includes 15-passenger vehicles that could enable transportation routes for new families from the closed school.

**Conservative Budget Approach:** For planning purposes, the school budgeted for 330 students while expecting to reach previous year's levels, accounting for potential staffing additions as enrollment grows.

*No motion required.*

## Development Committee Update

**Presenter:** Roel Vivit

### Fundraising Performance

#### Year-End Results:

- **Total Raised:** \$355,444 (compared to \$332,215 last year)
- **Goal Achievement:** 85% of \$440,000 goal (\$85k short)
- **Year-over-Year Growth:** \$23,000 increase

#### Revenue Stream Breakdown:

- Major gifts continuing strong performance with potential additional \$25,000 pending
- Awards and recognition (including Michelle's \$10,000 Building Hope donation)
- Corporate giving identified as area of opportunity
- Events and campaigns exceeded goals by \$15,000

#### Spring Benefit Analysis

#### Financial Results:

- **Net Return:** \$86,655 (goal was \$115,000-\$125,000)
- **Attendance Challenge:** Approximately 90 guests (including staff), with only 36 tickets sold

#### Event Highlights:

- Student choir performance received outstanding feedback
- Student emcees effectively showcased school culture
- High-quality organization and execution noted by attendees
- Tina Yarovsky received inaugural Shining Star award

#### Critical Board Discussion: Event Attendance

Michelle initiated a frank conversation about board engagement, noting that only four board members attended the benefit despite it being a key fundraising event requiring significant student and staff preparation.

#### Board Member Feedback on Challenges:

- **Timing Issues:** May proved particularly difficult with graduations, Mother's Day, travel, and work commitments
- **Personal Emergencies:** Family situations and health issues prevented attendance
- **Travel Conflicts:** Work travel and pre-existing commitments
- **Invitation Timing:** Board members acknowledged reaching out to networks too late

#### Proposed Solutions Discussed:

- **Fall Event Option:** Development committee to explore September/October timing
- **Format Changes:** Consider more casual, interactive events (cookouts, back-to-school nights)
- **Earlier Planning:** Improved timeline for board member outreach to networks
- **Tax Benefit Timing:** Winter events for year-end giving advantages

**Board Commitment:** Development committee agreed to develop fall event proposal by mid-July, with board feedback by July 11th. Discussion included preference polling for weeknight vs. weekend timing.

*No motion required.*

## **Finance Committee Update**

**Presenter:** Mike Davison and Michelle Navarre

### **Current Financial Position**

#### **Year-to-Date Performance (through April):**

- **Net Income:** Positive \$250,000 (unusual due to timing)
- **Special Education Funding Recovery:** \$350,000 received after appeal
- **ERC Reversal Impact:** \$287,000 unfavorable variance after withdrawing application
- **Cash Position:** \$2.55 million (down from \$2.76 million last year, \$3.1 million two years ago)

#### **Financial Health Indicators:**

- **Months of Cash on Hand:** 4.5 months (above 4-month concern threshold)
- **Change in Net Assets Ratio:** Declining due to consecutive loss years, requiring attention for charter renewal
- **Enrollment Impact:** Primary driver of cash burn requiring strategic focus

### **FY2026 Budget Presentation**

**Funding Structure Challenges:** Michelle provided detailed explanation of Illinois per-capita tuition charge (PCTC) funding:

#### **Legal vs. Actual Funding:**

- **State PCTC Calculation:** \$20,352.85 per student (FY24 basis for FY26)
- **Required 97% Match:** \$19,742.27
- **Actual Funding Received:** \$14,807 per student

#### **CPS Deductions from Charter Schools:**

- **Long-term Debt:** \$2,800 per student (only schools in CPS facilities)
- **Short-term Debt:** \$46 per student
- **Pension Obligations:** \$2,089 per student (for CPS pension holidays despite charters paying on time)

**Special Education Funding Elimination:** Previously separate federal special education funding now rolled into the reduced PCTC amount, with approximately \$4,800 of the \$14,807 designated for special education use.

#### **Budget Parameters:**

- **Student Enrollment:** 330 students (conservative projection)
- **Staff Reduction:** 5 positions eliminated
- **Salary Increases:** None included (priority for revision if enrollment grows)
- **Grant Funding:** \$745,000 from Charter Schools Program grant

- **Fundraising Goal:** Just under \$500,000
- **Net Result:** Balanced budget

**Board Discussion:** Members expressed concern about no salary increases impacting teacher retention. Michelle emphasized this would be the first priority for budget revision with increased enrollment.

**Motion:** Mike moved to approve the FY2026 budget as presented.

**Second:** Antonio seconded.

**Vote:**

- **In Favor:** Unanimous "Aye"
- **Opposed:** None

Motion carried, and budget approved.

## **Governance Committee Update**

**Presenter:** Tina Yarovsky

### **Board Composition**

**Departures:** Lauren Levine formally stepped off the board due to relocation to the East Coast and engagement challenges.

**Recruitment Needs:** Active search continues for board members with expertise in finance, legal, and development. Leadership team developing strategies for targeted recruitment.

### **Compliance and Training**

**Annual Requirements:** Charter board training must be completed in the second half of the year. Members not attending two live sessions will need to purchase access to recorded training library.

**Conflict of Interest:** All board members successfully completed conflict of interest forms with quick turnaround.

*No motion required.*

## **Action Items and Next Steps**

1. **Development Committee:** Develop fall event proposal by mid-July
2. **Board Members:** Provide feedback on fall event proposal by July 11th
3. **Finance Committee:** Monitor enrollment trends and budget impacts
4. **Governance Committee:** Continue board recruitment efforts
5. **Leadership Team:** Prioritize salary adjustments if enrollment targets are met

## **Upcoming Key Dates**

- **July 11, 2025:** Board feedback due on fall event proposal
- **August 2025:** Next board meeting
- **Fall 2025:** Potential new fundraising event (pending board approval)

### **Adjournment**

#### **Motion:**

- Roel moved to adjourn the meeting.

#### **Vote:**

- **In Favor:** Antonio Unanimous "Aye"
- **Opposed:** None. Unanimous "Aye"

Motion carried, and minutes approved.

**Meeting adjourned at:**

08:26 PM CST