

Polaris Charter Academy	Scheduled Date:	Monday, Dec 16th, 2024
Board Meeting Minutes	Scheduled Time:	6:30pm (Via Zoom)
	Topic(s):	• Approval of October Meeting Minutes • Vote on New Board Member (Wendy Silva) • Strategic Plan & State of the School Updates • Student Council, Life Leader Council, & Student Awards Ceremony • Enrollment Update & Illinois Impact Initiative Grant • EL Credentialing Renewal Process & Evaluation of EL Education Partnership • Building Hope Award Nomination & External Partnerships (including consultation with Mark Conrad) • Documentary “Sizzle” Filming Overview • Finance Committee Report • Governance Committee Report • Development Committee Report & Spring Benefit Date
	Start:	Tina Yarovsky, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:25 PM CST.

ATTENDANCE CATEGORY	BOARD MEMBERS & FELLOWS	SCHOOL STAFF
Attending via Zoom	Yaa Boakye Stahili Muhammad	John Lydon
Attending by In-Person	Antonio Gonzalez Ayanna Berry Tina Yarovsky Lauren Levine Roel Vivit Sam Bottum	Michelle Navarre Zoe Walker Tammy Vance Francesca Peck Elizabeth Whiting Lisette Sanchez John Lydon Kris Brailey
Unable to Attend	Mike Davison	
EXPECTED GUESTS & VISITORS		
None/NA		

Approval of October Meeting Minutes

Discussion: The October board meeting minutes were circulated the previous night/early this morning. The Chair opened the floor for corrections; no comments were raised despite minor audio/technical issues.

Motion:

Fran moved to approve the August meeting minutes with the attendance corrections discussed.

Second: Antonio Gonzalez

Vote:

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

Open Session for Public Comment

No one was present for public comment.

Board Elections & Assignments

New Board Member Vote:

- **Candidate:** Wendy Silva, a parent with longstanding ties to Polaris (parent of a seventh and an eighth grader, plus an alumna in college). **Summary of Wendy's Introduction:** "My name is Wendy Silva. I'm a parent of two current Polaris students and have a college-aged alumna. I'm excited to share my perspective and contribute to our board."
- **Motion:** Sam moved to approve Wendy Silva as the newest board member.
- **Second:** Roel
- **Vote:** Unanimous approval.
Motion carried; Wendy Silva officially joined the board.

State of the School

Presenter: Michelle Navarre

Strategic Plan Update

- **Overview:** Michelle provided an abbreviated update on Polaris 'strategic plan regarding enrollment and programmatic areas. A more in-depth review is scheduled for the February meeting.

Student Council & Life Leader Council

- **Student Council:**

- Functions as a traditional student government elected by peers, addressing internal school issues (e.g., school spirit, culture, classroom relationships).
- **Life Leader Council:**
 - Launched by Michelle, this group meets bimonthly and focuses on external partnerships and community impact.
 - The council is engaged in brainstorming community issues and will undertake a “Light Leader expedition” culminating in a Gutter World Day project.

Student Awards Ceremony

- **Awards Introduced:**
 - **Responsible Attendance (“Perfect Attendance”):** Recognizes consistent engagement and communication despite occasional absences.
 - **Shining Star Award:** Honors students who demonstrate exceptional effort, participation, preparedness, and strong character.
 - **Middle School Honor:** Celebrates academic excellence and the sustained effort in meeting standards through engaged assessment practices.
- **Tradition:** These awards are presented at an end-of-trimester ceremony to spotlight student character and scholarship.

Additional Academic & Leadership Updates

- **Student Advisory Council:**
 - Christopher Tate, an eighth grader serving his second (and final) year on the EL Education student advisory council, presented at a national conference on topics including academia/inclusion and AI in the classroom.
 - Plans are in place to nominate a new student for next year; Christopher intends to apply to the graduate council.
- **Daniel Murphy Scholars:**
 - This year’s recipients include Kareem and Ivory, with Nevaeh on the waitlist.
 - Polaris has produced 23 Daniel Murphy Scholars over the past decade. Special acknowledgment was given to Ms. Braley for her early mentorship and rigorous essay support.
- **Winter Family Fun Fest:**
 - The event provided families with activities such as ornament crafting, hot cocoa, professional portraits, bingo, and a performance by the Uniting Voices Chicago choir, along with a debut karaoke session.

Enrollment & Grant Update

- **Enrollment:**
 - Current enrollment stands at **355 students**, aligning with the three-year plan to reach full capacity.
 - Notably, the kindergarten cohort is at 19 students—a potential strategic opportunity.
- **Illinois Impact Initiative Charter School Program Subgrant:**

- Polaris qualifies for this grant (up to \$1M) to expand from one kindergarten/first-grade classroom to two sections in each.
- If awarded, funds will support a planning year starting in April and subsequent capital improvements, with expenditures reimbursed quarterly.

EL Credentialing Renewal

- **Application Process:**
 - A detailed 10-page application covering dimensions of student achievement (self-mastery, knowledge/skills, character, and high-quality work) has been submitted.
 - A three-hour virtual presentation (featuring teacher and student panels) is planned as part of the renewal process.
- **Discussion:**
 - Concerns were raised about the increasing workload (e.g., production of student videos and scripted materials) and whether EL Education is still meeting Polaris' evolving needs.
 - Leadership is set to discuss these concerns following the national conference.

Building Hope Award & External Partnerships

- **Award Nomination:**
 - Polaris applied for a national charter school award in the student empowerment category.
 - The award offers prizes ranging from \$10K (for second/third place) to \$20K (for the winner), plus an all-expenses-paid trip to a conference in Miami for semifinalists (announced in January, with final awards in May).
- **External Collaboration:**
 - Discussions included potential networking benefits for Michelle and new opportunities to elevate the program.
- **Consultation with Mark Conrad:**
 - A meeting was held with Mark Conrad (formerly of Yale Education, now with Transcend) to explore replicable practices at Polaris.
 - Follow-up discussions are scheduled for January.
- **Documentary "Sizzle" Filming:**
 - Filmmakers (including Sarah Gavron, Daisy Donovan, and Ed Perkins) spent five days at Polaris capturing footage for a 10-minute trailer to pitch a full documentary.
 - The process was characterized by enthusiastic participation from students and families, with final content pending board approval.

No motion required.

Finance Committee Update

Presenter: Mike Davison

1. **Financial Overview:**

- Year-to-date revenue (through October) is approximately **\$2,700,000**.
- Major costs: Personnel expenses of about **\$1.6M** and administrative costs of approximately **\$500K**, resulting in an operating income near **\$600K** (subject to quarterly CPS funding fluctuations).

2. **Staffing & Reporting Challenges:**

- Carol, responsible for budgeting and financial reporting, has resigned, leaving a gap that needs to be filled.
- Efforts are underway to identify a more junior candidate to assist Lisette with financial reconciliation, especially regarding credit card receipts which are currently behind schedule.

3. **Employee Retention Credit (ERC) Adjustment:**

- Polaris initially filed for an ERC credit of roughly **\$350K**; however, following auditor and legal advice regarding eligibility risks, the decision was made to forgo this credit.
- This adjustment impacts the overall revenue projection and necessitates revised fundraising targets.

4. **Cash Flow Concerns:**

- Analysis of monthly cash balances indicates a slight decline compared to prior years, with reserves briefly dipping to a four-month operating cushion in September.
- Continued monitoring of enrollment is deemed critical to sustaining cash flow.

No motion required.

Governance Committee Update

Presenter: Stahili Muhammad

1. **Board Member Pipeline:**

- No new candidates are in the pipeline aside from the recent addition of Wendy Silva.
- There is a continued need for board members with finance expertise.

2. **Training & Compliance:**

- Most board members have completed the required training hours.
- Michelle is responsible for uploading final proof of training to ensure compliance for future charter renewal.

No motion required.

Development Committee Update

Presenter: Roel

1. Fundraising Campaign:

- The school is in its end-of-year fundraising campaign with a current contribution total of **\$300** against a target of **\$20,000**.
- Initiatives such as an Amazon book drive and personal invites through board members' networks are in progress.

2. Spring Benefit:

- The proposed date for the spring benefit is **May 15** (chosen due to the availability of the Uniting Voices Polaris Choir).
- A quick vote confirmed the date, and Roel will send out calendar invites to ensure attendance.

No motion required.

Upcoming Key Dates

- **Spring Benefit:** May 15, 2025 (*Tentative – confirm year as needed*)
- **February Board Meeting:** In-depth review of strategic plan and programmatic areas (Exact date TBD)

No motion required.

Adjournment

Motion:

- Roel moved to adjourn the meeting, and Sam seconded the motion.

Vote:

- All in favor ("Aye"); none opposed.

Meeting adjourned at:

07:33 PM CST