

POLARIS

CHARTER ACADEMY

WHERE LEARNING HAS NO BOUNDARIES

BOARD MEETING MINUTES			
Date	August 26, 2025	Time	6:30pm
Location	Polaris Charter Academy, 620 North Sawyer Avenue, Chicago, Illinois		
Board Members in Attendance		Board Members Absent	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tina Yarovsky—Chair• Roel Vivit—Vice Chair• Yaa Boakye—Secretary• Mike Davison—Treasurer• Ayanna Berry• Antonio Gonzalez• Sam Bottum• Bennett Brenton• Wendy Silva—Parent Representative• Michelle Navarre—Ex Officio		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None	
School Staff in Attendance		Guests in Attendance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Francesca Peck• Lissette Sanchez• John Lydon• Elizabeth Whiting		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None	
Call to Order			
The meeting of the Board of Directors of Polaris Charter Academy was called to order by the Chair at 6:34pm . A quorum was established.			
AGENDA ITEM: Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes			
Discussion	The June meeting minutes were circulated prior to the meeting. Corrections noted:		
Motion	Roel moved to approve the minutes with the corrections noted. Antonio seconded the motion.		
Vote	In Favor: Unanimous “Aye” Opposed: None Motion carried, and minutes approved.		

AGENDA ITEM: Public Comments

Open space for public comment was provided. No one was present and public comments were neither presented at the meeting nor submitted in advance.

AGENDA ITEM: Governance Committee Report

Discussion

Presenter(s): Tina Yarovsky

Board Pipeline Development

Outreach Results: Tina conducted targeted outreach to Chicago legal associations, receiving six initial responses with interest in Polaris. After follow-up communications, three candidates remained engaged, leading to one-on-one calls with two prospects.

Primary Candidate - Luis:

- Attorney living in northwest proximity to Polaris
- Demonstrated genuine interest by conducting independent drive-by school visit
- Engaged in substantive conversation about school commitment and community involvement
- Responded same evening with resume and LinkedIn profile
- Successfully completed initial call with Roel Vivit

Luis - Board Member Assessment (Roel Vivit): Luis asked thoughtful questions about board onboarding requirements, charter school knowledge, and Polaris vision communication. He demonstrated strong interest in financial aspects including development-district funding percentages. His professional experience suggests capacity for meaningful board guidance.

Michelle's Follow-up: Michelle reached out via email to schedule connection with Luis.

Secondary Candidate: Initial conversation occurred but candidate showed less engagement and failed to respond to follow-up communications despite expressing interest. No further pursuit planned.

Additional Pipeline:

- **Tom Erlach** - Recommended by Francesca as potential board candidate
- Long-time Polaris supporter (annual Bears tickets donor)
- Identified strength: social networking and community connection capabilities
- Lives adjacent to Francesca, deeply committed to children's education
- Willing to engage in exploratory conversations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Francesca to provide contact information to Tina for initial outreach <p>Annual Training Requirements</p> <p>Training Format: Board decided to purchase access to a recorded training library for all members rather than requiring live webinar attendance only.</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two hours for continuing board members Four hours for new members (Wendy Silva) Remaining compliance items (FOIA/OMA training, conflict of interest forms) completed This represents final mandatory training for 2025
Motion	—
Vote	—

AGENDA ITEM: State of the School Report	
Discussion	<p>Presenter(s): Michelle Navarre and Francesca Peck</p> <p>Academic Program Launch</p> <p>Staff Retention Achievement: Polaris achieved unprecedented 100% staff retention with no new hires required.</p> <p>Professional Development Focus: With returning staff, PD Week concentrated on elevating curriculum implementation rather than basic onboarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on "expeditionizing" curriculum for authentic student connections Focus on high-quality work serving community purposes Return to expeditionary learning roots with immersive student experiences Integration of celebrations of learning, expert partnerships, and community-connected projects <p>Strong Academic Start: Fourth day of school exhibited characteristics typically seen later in the academic year, indicating exceptional foundation and student engagement.</p> <p>Strategic Plan - Academic Priorities and Oversight</p>

Continuity Approach: Academic strategic priorities (Mastery of Knowledge & Skills, Character, High Quality Work) carried forward from previous year as multi-year implementation targets.

Implementation Analysis: Francesca's team conducted comprehensive analysis categorizing progress:

- **Green:** Solidified practices teachers confidently implement
- **Yellow:** Areas requiring additional support
- **Red:** Unaddressed priorities requiring focused attention

Current Year Focus: Deepening expedition quality, enhancing reflection practices, systematizing daily crew lesson planning, and elevating community-connected high-quality work.

AI Integration Initiative

Strategic Implementation: Introduction of AI tools to enhance rather than replace teaching capabilities, focusing on administrative efficiency to enable teacher focus on critical thinking and student-centered instruction.

Teacher Preparation Philosophy: Staff must become AI explorers before guiding students through technology integration. Current focus remains entirely on educator capability building.

Practical Application: Teachers utilizing ChatGPT for lesson planning enhancement, curriculum development, and partnership identification. Initial resistance evolving into engaged adoption with positive feedback on AI-generated suggestions.

Tool Selection: Currently using free ChatGPT accounts for most purposes. Michelle and John maintain ChatGPT Plus for grant writing requiring document upload capabilities. Evaluated but postponed Magic School adoption due to complexity and cost.

Environmental Consciousness: Emphasizing intentional, purpose-driven AI usage mindful of environmental impact considerations.

Enrollment and Recruitment

Current Status: 305 students enrolled in Aspen system with 28 additional students in enrollment pipeline (applications completed, working through final documentation/transfer processes).

Budget Target: 340 students budgeted; current trajectory suggests potential achievement of 333 students if pipeline converts successfully.

Enrollment Stability: No unexpected student transfers occurred on the first day of school; typically a problematic period for charter enrollment.

Recruitment Activities: Tammy's team conducted two back-to-school events over the weekend, generating additional prospective family interest.

Community Outreach Strategy

Bloomwell Partnership: Entering third year of collaboration with increasingly realistic benchmark setting based on organizational cycle understanding.

Infrastructure Improvements:

- Playground installation delayed to mid-late September (tariff-related supply chain issues)
- Outdoor classroom development coordinated with playground installation

Branding Initiative: Comprehensive brand consistency project planned including:

- Uniform design updates (bold "Polaris Charter Academy" front, seal on back)
- Website overhaul funded through CSP grant
- Material standardization (consistent colors, logos, fonts)
- Strategic brand recognition through community visibility

Brand Strategy Consultation (Ayanna Berry): Discussed successful educational brand examples (Ron Clark Academy), emphasizing short-form video content for contemporary engagement. Ayanna offered to provide strategic consultation including implementation planning and goal clarification beyond recruitment.

First Grade Expedition Highlight

"Magnificent Things" Expedition: First graders exploring magnificence through community lens, examining magnificent people and community contributors including potential board member interviews as expert resources.

Community Engagement Opportunities: Board members invited to serve as expedition experts and potentially host site work experiences at their businesses and organizations.

Grant Focus: Continuing programmatic product development with emphasis on South by Southwest EDU opportunity (detailed later in agenda).

Staffing Updates & Personnel Changes

Mathematics Teacher Recruitment: Active recruitment underway for seventh and eighth grade mathematics teacher position.

Special Education Staffing Need: Current learning specialists needs due to student enrollment requiring additional service minutes.

Promising Candidate - Breé Connolly (Polaris Graduate)

Financial Challenges and Facilities Issues

Budget Pressures

Enrollment Impact: Current 305 enrollment creates significant budget gap even if 340 target achieved.

Strategic Response: Michelle committed to presenting balanced budget and stopping financial losses through difficult decisions prioritizing minimal student impact.

Position Eliminations: Focus on non-student-facing positions while preserving direct instruction and student services.

Unforeseen Facility Expenses

Room 304 Lead Paint Issue:

- Slate chalkboard fell from wall during occupied class period (no student injuries)
- CPS inspection revealed lead paint contamination requiring professional mitigation
- Estimated cost: \$15,000
- CPS initially committed to funding but withdrew support citing budget crisis

Staff Bathroom Asbestos Discovery:

- Floor tiles contain asbestos-based adhesive requiring specialized remediation
- Combined facility remediation costs exceed \$20,000 (Lisette provided breakdown: \$8,000 + \$14,000)
- Essential for staff safety and regulatory compliance

CPS Responsibility Questions: Michelle expressed frustration with inconsistent CPS commitment to facility maintenance responsibilities under lease agreement terms.

Health Insurance Crisis

Budget vs. Reality: Budgeted 10% health insurance increase; actual increase proposal 24%.

	<p>Staff Retention Risk: Health insurance quality identified as key staff retention factor in exit interviews and surveys. No salary increases provided for current year, creating additional pressure against benefit reductions.</p> <p>Decision Timeline: Resolution required by month-end to finalize coverage options and cost structures.</p> <p>South by Southwest EDU Opportunity</p> <p>Conference Application</p> <p>Session Proposal: "The Role of Reflection in the Age of AI" - focusing on deep critical thinking and humanity preservation through reflection practices in AI-integrated education.</p> <p>Selection Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30% community voting through Panel Picker crowdsourcing platform • 40% South by Southwest staff evaluation • 30% additional criteria <p>Board Support Requested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote for proposal through provided Bitly link • Social media promotion using provided materials • Network outreach to expand voting base <p>Strategic Value: Premier education conference participation would enhance Polaris visibility and organizational reputation within the national education community.</p> <p>John Lydon provided technical voting instructions and social media promotion materials through chat functions.</p>
Motion	—
Vote	—

AGENDA ITEM: Development Committee Report	
Discussion	<p>Presenter(s): Roel Vivit</p> <p>Giving Crew Day Campaign</p>

	<p>Event Date: September 26, 2025 (three weeks from meeting date)</p> <p>Historical Context: Commemorates Polaris's first day of school - September 4, 2007</p> <p>Fundraising Goal: \$15,000 (ambitious target compared to historical \$5,000-\$10,000 range; previous year achieved \$7,500)</p> <p>Focus Area: Arts and music programs supporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra partnership • United Voices Chicago collaboration • Music and art teacher positions • Instrument and art material resources • High-quality student work showcased at spring benefit <p>Strategic Rationale: Arts programming represents distinctive Polaris characteristics requiring sustained investment for continued excellence and family attraction.</p> <p>Board Support Strategy</p> <p>Social Media Engagement: Follow Polaris accounts and share campaign posts Personal Fundraising Pages: Create individual social media fundraising features Network Outreach: \$25 average gift strategy targeting broad community engagement Timeline: Social media launch completed; email campaigns beginning current week</p> <p>Grant Opportunity: Creative Schools Fund application in development for dance/art programming partnership with working artists (September deadline).</p> <p>Development Committee Planning</p> <p>Fall Event Discussion: Committee postponing October event decision pending enrollment clarity and goal setting completion.</p> <p>Annual Targets: Approximately \$500,000 development goal for current year (increase from previous \$400,000 target; achieved \$350,000 last year representing \$20,000 growth).</p> <p>Strategic Focus Areas: Corporate giving identified as a significant opportunity area requiring targeted development work.</p>
Motion	—
Vote	—

AGENDA ITEM: Finance & Operations Committee Report	
Discussion	<p>Presenter(s): Lissette Sanchez and Michelle Navarre</p> <p>Annual Audit Update</p> <p>Audit Status: Field work completed previous week with only three-day on-site requirement (reduced from typical week-long process).</p> <p>Digital Transition Benefits: Mid-year transition to Ramp digital system streamlined documentation and receipt submission, facilitating a more efficient audit process.</p> <p>Preliminary Results: No issues identified; clean audit anticipated. Remaining work consists of back-end analysis conducted remotely.</p> <p>Process Recognition: Auditors utilize Polaris as a training site for new staff due to exceptional documentation quality and process cleanliness.</p> <p>CPS Funding Concerns</p> <p>Budget Uncertainty: Chicago Public Schools facing significant budget crisis with unclear gap-filling strategies.</p> <p>Funding Reliability: Michelle expressed skepticism about projected funding levels based on historical experience with CPS budget adjustments and position eliminations.</p> <p>Strategic Caution: Planning conservatively while monitoring CPS budget development and potential charter school funding impacts.</p>
Motion	—
Vote	—

AGENDA ITEM: Action Items and Next Steps	
Discussion	<p>Presenter(s): Tina Yarovsky</p> <p>Immediate Priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luis Board Candidate: Tina to follow up on Michelle-Luis connection • Tom Erlach Contact: Francesca to provide contact information to Tina • Giving Crew Day: All board members vote and promote through networks • South by Southwest: All board members vote through Panel Picker platform

	<p>Committee Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Committee: Schedule meeting for strategic plan support and event planning • Board Calendar: Michelle to distribute proposed meeting dates for approval <p>Ongoing Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment Tracking: 20th day count critical for budget adjustments • Mathematics Teacher Search: Active recruitment for certified educator • Facility Remediation: Coordinate lead paint and asbestos mitigation projects • Health Insurance: Finalize coverage decisions by month-end
Motion	—
Vote	—

CALL TO CLOSE	
Motion	There being no further business, Ben motioned to close the meeting. Roel seconded.
Vote	<p>In Favor: Unanimous “Aye”</p> <p>Opposed: None</p> <p>Motion carried, meeting adjourned at 7:48pm.</p>