

Minutes of the Governing Council: **Monday, March 3, 2014, at 6:00pm**

Present: Tim Dutton, Yadira Vargas, Maria Rivas, Ramon Bulerin, Bridget Krauss, Rachel Allison, Suzanne O'Brien, Christopher James, Shandra Sanders, Levon Sanders, Elisa Martinez, Brandon DeJesus, Taylor Riley, Kayla Rowland, Chris Moffat, Micolm Cardona-Vargas, Tamara Warren, Markel McKnight, Carrie Buster, Nataya Riley, David Reyes, Abigail Reyes, Icela Reyes.

The meeting was called to order at 6:10pm.

Welcome and Agenda Review: Mr. Dutton began the meeting saying that we have tried to develop a format that allows everyone to speak openly. Ms. O'Brien will lead the discussion and Ms. Allison will take minutes that will be sent to all present.

Introductions: Every participant introduced themselves.

Ground Rules Discussion: Mr. Dutton read and explained the ground rules and handed a copy of the rules to every participant.

Introduction of Main Discussion Topic: Mr. Dutton explained that more and more schools are making character a part of their curriculum and some even grade students on character. What is loyalty? What is character? Talking about these questions is very important but can also be tricky; values differ from family to family.

Discussion: Ms. O'Brien talked about how values begin to be formed when we are very young. She talked about Mr. Rogers and how gentle and kind he was on TV and how his message was warm and welcoming and he worked to inspire kids to feel valued and important. Like Fred Rogers at an awards ceremony, she asked the group present to think about the people who love us and help make us who we are. Brandon shared that Chris James is the person he thought of who helps and inspires him. Mr. James named his mother; thinking about her always makes him think of love. She was tough but her love for him was always there. Ms. Rivas said that she learns from and is inspired by her children every day. Ms. O'Brien spoke about her father, who was always a very non-judgmental person. She told a story about how her father once told her, in response to someone yelling at their child in front of them, that one never knows what another person is going through. She learned how to be patient and tolerant from his example. Mr. Moffat shared a story about his high school track coach who included every athlete and made everyone feel important. Ms. Reyes shared that she admires her father for his perseverance; her father lost his leg when he was five and he never let that stop him. He got married and works as a carpenter. Mr. Bulerin's dad passed away 24 years ago. His dad had a strong Puerto Rican accent but always taught his kids to stand up for others and always help when you can even if it isn't the popular thing to do. Kaylah Rowland talked about her older sister who always helps her and motivates her to do her work. Her sister is starting college soon and inspires her to work harder. Mr. Dutton named his wife who he always feels "has his back". He appreciates her "fierce loyalty". He also said that his father is very loyal and has always been there for him.

Ms. O'Brien said that perseverance, loyalty, and stability were traits we mentioned and said that these qualities mirror the six pillars of character. Ms. O'Brien passed out "Tips for Parents" from the Character Counts organization. The six pillars of character named in the handout are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

Mr. Dutton said he feels that loyalty is the most important trait to school kids; they don't want to be disloyal to peers. He said that the worst thing you can call a kid in Bridgeport is a "rat". Mr. Bulerin disagreed and said that people should always stand up for what is

right. Ms. Rivas said that she has good communication with her children about what is going on in their lives. Mr. Dutton also mentioned cheating as a character issue in schools. Ms. Allison mentioned a story she remembers from a few years ago; a girl was attacked after a high school basketball game. Many students joined in the attack and many others filmed it and encouraged the attackers. She wondered that if a Bridge Academy student had been there if they would have done something to stop the attack or at least call the police. What is a school's role in creating that kind of character? Did the school where the attack happened fail those children? Ms. Buster said that teaching character needs to be a joint effort between families and the schools.

Ms. Buster said that her child is loyal to the point of lying to protect her and she has to remind him to be honest at all times.

Mr. Bulerin talked about a student he knows who does not have character guidance. He suggested that we have students role play situations where they are faced with difficult situations and act out how to do the right thing. Mr. Dutton said that is basically what the staff tries to do all day, constantly model how to handle difficult situations honestly and well. Mr. Bulerin has seen improvements in the child he was talking with.

Mr. Dutton said that he began his career in Darien and can attest to the character of our students; the honesty and integrity in our students is wonderful. Our students are more resilient, resourceful and accepting than kids in many other places. Mr. Moffat seconded that thought.

Wrap-up and next steps: Mr. Dutton said that what he is hearing is that the participants of the meeting accept the idea of the school working to instill character in our students. We will try to create role plays to model character and spark discussion. Taylor Riley suggested that students perform the role plays. Ms. O'Brien suggested a mix-up day at lunch where every student gets a number and has to sit at with different students to get to know others better. She also suggested that we have students mentor each other. Mr. James mentioned a show called "What Would You Do?" on which people are put in in tricky ethical situations. He thinks this show might act as a bridge to conversation. Ms. Allison asked how we can inspire grit in our students; how do we get kids to work hard and persevere even, or especially, when things are difficult? Taylor said that she thinks kids should get more of an opportunity to help each other, particularly on Mathfacts. Ms. O'Brien agreed that grit is important; her husband is a college professor who sees students who want everything done for them rather than working hard for themselves.

Must Fail Removal: At the end of the meeting the members of the Governing Board met to take one student off of the Must Fail list.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 7:00.