

MINUTES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS
MINUTES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
October 15, 2020**

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Present:

Officers:

Michael O'Neill, Chair, Boston School Committee
Barbara Jenkins, Chair Elect, Orange County Superintendent
Ashley Paz, Secretary/Treasurer, Fort Worth School Board
Eric Gordon, Immediate Past Chair, Cleveland CEO

Members:

Tom Ahart, Des Moines Superintendent
Marcia Andrews, Palm Beach County School Board
Juan Cabrera, El Paso Superintendent
Richard Carranza, New York City Chancellor
Linda Cavazos, Clark County School Board
Sharon Contreras, Guilford County Superintendent
Valerie Davis, Fresno School Board
Kelly Gonez, Los Angeles School Board
Leslie Grant, Atlanta School Board
Guadalupe Guerrero, Portland Superintendent
Michael Hinojosa, Dallas Superintendent
Robert Runcie, Broward County Superintendent
Sonja Santelises, Baltimore CEO
Deborah Shanley, Brooklyn College, CUNY Dean
Elisa Vakalis, Anchorage School Board
Van Henri White, Rochester School Board
Darrel Woo, Sacramento School Board

Absent:

Siad Ali, Minneapolis School Board
Susana Cordova, Denver Superintendent
William Hite, Philadelphia Superintendent
Sylvia Wilson, Pittsburgh School Board

Michael O'Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the virtual meeting to order at 4:30 pm ET. A quorum was established. One member of the committee, Paul Cruz, stepped down from his position as superintendent in Austin, and committee members thanked him

and presented him with a plaque for his commitment and work on behalf of urban schoolchildren.

Members then introduced themselves and gave a short update on events in their districts.

Minutes

Michael O'Neill presented the minutes of the July 10 and 11, 2020 virtual meeting of the Executive Committee and March 23, 2020 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors.

A motion to approve the minutes passed by virtual vote.

Appointments and Nominations

Robert Runcie, Superintendent of Broward County, has been appointed by the Board Chair to fill the vacancy created by Paul Cruz, Superintendent of Austin, whose term was set to expire June 30, 2021. Superintendent Runcie was also appointed to the Audit Subcommittee.

A motion to approve the nomination of Robert Runcie passed by virtual vote.

Membership

No report.

By-Laws

No report.

Audit

Ashley Paz, Audit Subcommittee Chair, informed the group that the organization has approved a new audit firm, and that the Audit subcommittee will meet in advance of our January Executive Committee meeting.

Preliminary numbers are provided in the audit section of Committee materials. The organization is in good shape for the time being. Paz then asked Michael Casserly, executive director, to present the materials. In this section, members will find the 2019-20 budget, including both general operating expenses and categorical program spending, the 2020-21 budget, the Council's investment policy and guidelines, and asset allocations.

Casserly made note of several items. There is a surplus of \$283K in general operations, and about a \$500K deficit in categorical funds. These reflect multi-year grant funded programs, and the amounts fluctuate according to how fast we spend grant dollars.

Also, the organization has a net carryover of \$9.2 million. This number has been fluctuating between \$8 million and \$10 million for the last several years.

In terms of dues payments, the organization has received dues from 63 districts. Hawaii, Manchester, Stockton, Santa Ana have informed us that they will not be able to pay their dues this year. Additionally, New Orleans and Puerto Rico are waived.

Concerning general operations revenues and expenditures for the first quarter, about 73 percent of anticipated revenue is in hand, and the organization has slightly underspent in the first quarter, because travel and other expenses have been lower than usual.

Casserly then walked the group through the organization's various grants to provide further detail on categorical spending and projects for the first part of the year. The Council also applied for and received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan of \$457,411. Casserly noted that it was unclear how much of the loan we would have to pay back.

Casserly also pointed out that there had been a decline in conference revenues and expenditures over the past several months, but that the fall conference would operate in the black. Casserly indicated that because the financial situation among the members was uncertain, he had been fundraising aggressively to offset any potential shortfall.

Moving forward, the organization will continue to monitor and report on the financial impact of the pandemic. After the first of the year, Casserly indicated that he will restart outreach to foundations to ensure we have funds for next fiscal year and beyond.

A motion to accept the audit report passed by a virtual vote.

Conferences and Meetings

Michael O'Neill informed the Committee that they are scheduled to meet in Palm Beach in January. Committee members then took a vote on whether to make the meeting virtual, and to move Palm Beach to January 2022.

A motion to hold the 2021 winter Executive Committee meeting virtually, and to hold the January 2022 in Palm Beach, passed by virtual vote.

Strategic Plan

A copy of the Council's strategic plan was included in Committee materials, along with an update on various elements of the plan and what we have accomplished so far.

Casserly indicated that there was an additional issue that several members had raised for discussion, i.e., relations with the teacher unions. Members asked Casserly for his perspective. He indicated that the last time the group had talked about the issue was some eight years ago, and the executive committee had advised staying out of the issue. Casserly did indicate that the group had several options, including exchanging information, creating a database of teacher contracts in districts across the country, producing an analysis of teacher contracts, researching the effects of various contracts on student achievement and outcomes, and releasing statements of support for districts during contract negotiations.

We could also provide technical assistance teams from peer cities to districts in contract negotiations.

The Committee then went into executive session at 5:10 pm (ET).

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
OCTOBER 17, 2020**

Michael O’Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the virtual meeting to order at 11:10 am ET. A quorum of the Executive Committee was established, and a quorum of the Board was established later in the meeting.

Executive Directors Report

Michael Casserly, executive director, was asked by Chair O’Neill to give an overview of Council activities since the last board meeting. Casserly indicated that the organization had to pivot a lot of its work to deal with the global pandemic and the challenges it was presenting for the membership. He indicated that the staff initiated a series of conference calls with superintendents back in March, and these calls expanded to other job alike groups. Since mid-March, the group has held over 325 such calls, not counting separate working groups. There are currently about 12 regularly scheduled calls each week, and we estimate that between 15,000 and 18,000 district staff members have participated. These individuals use these weekly forums to share information, trade tactics and tips, and to provide mutual support.

The Council has also produced a set of guidance documents (i.e., the “Returning to School Series”) to help members with various aspects of the pandemic. More recently, staff has launched a set of shorter briefs on more technical issues, such as water safety, air quality, and the like. These publications were produced in partnership with our job-alike groups, along with external consultants. The Council has also created a public-facing website, as well as a password-protected online space for districts to share draft documents and resources confidentially.

In addition to helping the membership share information and best practices, the Council has spent the past several months actively engaging the U.S. Congress, the Departments of Education and Agriculture, and the federal courts in support of urban districts. The Council joined with its colleagues in developing and signing onto comments and correspondence to Congress and the agencies on a variety of issues including—

- Supplemental appropriations for elementary and secondary schools
- School meals and meal flexibility
- The Senate’s HEALS Act
- Equitable services under the CARES Act
- Letter to Secretary DeVos on IDEA flexibility
- Comments to the U.S. Department of Education on CARES Act equitable services rules
- Comments to USDA on simplifying school meal services and monitoring requirements
- Letter to Congress endorsing HR 1636 to establish a national commission on the social status of Black Men and Boys.

The Council also identified legislative areas of concern that others missed, such as the prohibition on school districts from offsetting Social Security payroll withholding payments.

In addition, the Council, along with a coalition of member districts, filed suit against the U.S. Department of Education to block its proposed guidance to interpret the federal CARES Act in a way that would have distributed disproportionate and unprecedented aid to private schools. The Council was successful in these suits and saved the membership several hundred million dollars.

Moreover, the ELL team successfully petitioned DoE to ensure that provisionally identified students were eligible for Title III funding.

In communications, the Council has been very active with the press. The group has conducted about 250 interviews with press outlets across the country, as well as drafting or contributing to articles for various publications to update the public on what urban districts were doing to support students, staff, and families during the pandemic.

During this period, the Council also surveyed its members regarding the feasibility of NAEP testing. According to our findings, 21 of the 27 TUDA districts indicated they did not want to go ahead with spring TUDA testing due to safety and validity issues. So, the Council recommended to NAGB that we not oversample students in big cities. Again, we prevailed and there will not be TUDA in 2021.

To ensure our financial stability, the Council has also raised over \$3 million from foundations and applied for (and received) a small business loan. It is still unclear whether we will need to repay this. Dues payments, in general, have remained strong, despite a small drop-off by some districts.

Casserly indicated that the organization has had to curtail certain activities, such as planned initiatives on vaping and bonding. The group has also conducted a limited number of strategic support team reviews, but not as many as normal. Moreover, the Council has had to postpone several job alike meetings, and while our work to establish our newest task force—the Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls—continued, it was not as much as was planned for this year.

Aside from these examples, the group has been able to sustain a lot of its core work, including school board technical assistance, KPI data collection, the annual report and individual benefits reports for each member district, the Bernard Harris scholarship program, the external audit, the *Urban Educator* newsletter, regular legal webinars, quarterly Executive Committee meetings, and of course, the planning and convening of the virtual annual fall conference. Casserly noted that a key strength of the organization is that it can be flexible and nimble enough to meet member needs as they evolve. Casserly then thanked Council staff, as well as Board members for their efforts on behalf of kids over the past several months.

Board Chair Michael O’Neill echoed the applause for the work, thanked the lead districts in the equitable services case, and reiterated the point about incorporating students in a more official capacity moving forward. One suggestion might be to establish a rotating student advisory council of around ten students from member districts.

Coronavirus Resources

This section of the materials included all the reports Casserly described earlier, as well as a copy of the Council’s coronavirus webpage.

Appointments and Nominations

The Board materials provided a complete list of subcommittee and task force appointments that the chair made in July.

Appointments include Robert Runcie, superintendent of the Broward County Public Schools to replace Paul Cruz who was stepping down as Superintendent of the Austin Independent School District.

A motion to accept the appointment of Robert Runcie to join the Executive Committee passed by virtual vote.

Minutes

Michael O’Neill presented the minutes of the March 23, 2020 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors and the July 10 and 11, 2020 virtual meeting of the Executive Committee.

A motion to approve the minutes passed by a virtual vote.

Annual Report

Eric Gordon, immediate past chair, gave a summary of the 2019-20 annual report, and thanked the Council for his glass gavel.

Conferences and Meetings

Michael O’Neill presented the annual conference lineup. Next year’s conference is scheduled to be held in Philadelphia, the 2022 conference will be held in Orlando, the 2023 conference will be held in San Diego, the 2024 conference will now be held in Dallas (this was postponed from this year), and the 2025 conference will be held in Boston.

Communications

Casserly gave the report on the Council’s communications activities. We have conducted some 250 interviews over the past six months. A sample collection of these articles is provided in the materials. The materials also included press releases, statements, the latest *Urban Educator* (which is now all digital), the organization’s monthly social media report, and Bernard Harris scholarship winners.

A question was raised from Rochester concerning a recent letter they sent to the College Board advocating for AP courses in African studies. They wanted to know how the Council could support this effort. Casserly responded that he has spoken with the head of the College Board about this issue, and they have indicated interest. Casserly asked members to send him similar letters, so we can package them together and make official outreach to the College Board.

Legislation

Jeff Simering, legislative director, gave an overview of policy and legislative developments from Washington. Despite a flurry of federal legislative action in March and April (which resulted in the passage of four relief bills), action has now been replaced by rhetoric leading up to the election. The level of K-12 education recovery aid has been woefully inadequate. The \$13 billion in direct aid represents 6/10ths of one percent of aid overall. Comparatively, we received \$100 billion in ARRA funds. Being shortchanged in the first three bills prompted education groups to submit a joint request to Congress for \$200 billion in funding. The Council followed with its own letter in April, signed by 60+ superintendents.

Simering then covered details of recent proposals for a recovery package, as well as the “skinny” recovery bill, which include \$70 billion in education stabilization aid. These funds, however, were tied to conditions, including the physical reopening of schools.

A change of administrations or control of Congress could result in additional coronavirus aid, but we need to keep in mind that democratic control will also increase regulatory requirements.

Julie Wright Halbert, the organization’s internal counsel, then reviewed the Council’s legal activities. Over the past six months the Council has been in six federal courts. We have also hosted numerous legal webinars, as well as weekly meetings with special education staff and general counsels. These calls cover topics such as MOUs, labor relations issues, due process, and COVID testing, to name a few. The calls allow staff to respond to immediate needs as they arise. An example of this involved a recent national class action case filed in New York.

Research

Ray Hart, the Council’s research director, gave the report on the Council’s research activities. The group is holding weekly meetings of research directors and staff and providing research and backup that research directors need.

Research materials in the board’s briefing book included information on the TUDA task force and our work with NAGB, including our comments on the NAEP reading frameworks. We have also released a number of TUDA briefs that focus on individual districts. The latest draft of the NAEP special analysis is also provided in the materials. We have been working on this for a number of years. We have now received the final data set for 2019 (a restricted data set), and staff hope to release the analysis soon.

Dr. Hart also previewed the Council's new data dashboard system, which included academic KPI data and special education data.

He also described a contract with the RAND Corporation to participate in the American School Panel research project, which will entail fielding surveys of members on current administrative practices.

He also described the Edwires fileshare platform for sharing materials across districts. Staff are now building this out to include forums and discussion features, where members will be able to directly contact colleagues and share files.

Finally, we recently received a small grant from the Casey Foundation to produce a series of research briefs. These will be brief, three- to four-page summaries of research topics and will include a review of current district practices. The topics will be gathered from suggestions from research teams.

Achievement and Professional Development Task Force/Task Force on English Language Learners and Bilingual Education

Deb Shanley gave the report of the Achievement and Professional Development Task Force. She called the group's attention to a few key materials provided in the Board book—

- An overview of priorities and activities of the academic team, and a catalogue of resources and tools, including an extensive guide on *Addressing Unfinished Learning after COVID 19 School Closures*
- The NAEP reading framework
- A principal supervisor survey report, which provided a before and after look at how the role of principal supervisors had changed over the years.
- A report on Academic KPI data across districts
- NAEP 2019 data

The materials also included the agenda from the joint meeting of the Task Forces on Achievement and Professional Development and English Language Learners and Bilingual Education, held at the start of the virtual conference this week.

Gabriela Uro, the Council's director of language policy, then gave an overview of the Council's work around English Language Learner education during the pandemic, pointing out various resources for ELLs that staff and members have developed from their weekly conference calls. She also informed the group that this year's BIRE meeting, coming up in November, will be virtual.

Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls/ Task Force on Black and Latino Young Men and Boys

Kelly Gonez, task force co-chair, gave the report on the joint task force meeting. She shared the latest changes to task force goals, which reflected feedback from participants. She then called the Board's attention to data on access and achievement for girls of colors in STEAM

fields, provided in the meeting materials. And she shared a recent *New York Times* article on barriers facing girls of color, and the impact of COVID on these barriers.

Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance

Barbara Jenkins, task force co-chair and chair-elect of the Council, gave the report of the Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance. Materials included information on the Harvard school board-superintendents governance institute. And there were materials describing the governance and technical assistance work of the Council.

The latest *Managing for Results* report was also included in materials, and members were urged to share this with their operational leadership teams.

Audit

Casserly gave the report on the Audit subcommittee. Materials included summaries of general operational spending and categorical funding and expenses, including breakouts of categorical funding sources.

Materials also provided a report on the first quarter of 2020-21. Casserly called attention to the status of dues payments for the program year, having received dues from 63 districts so far. Several districts weren't able to pay this year, including Stockton, Hawaii, San Antonio, and Manchester. The group has not heard from 5-6 other districts, although staff are following up.

The Council has spent out approximately 20 percent of its budget by the end of the first quarter, and staff expect a balanced budget for the year. Staff have also secured several outside grants and a small business loan. By and large, the organization is in good financial shape for the current year. The revenue picture for 2021-22 might be tighter if additional stimulus funds are not approved by Congress, resulting in financial strain to the membership.

The audit materials also provided a status update on Council investments and asset allocations, all of which were within target ranges.

Ashley Paz, secretary-treasurer, then urged members to share their individual member services reports, so all communities are aware of the substantial value and return on investment that membership in the Council brings.

Michael O'Neill applauded the Council staff and the prudent stewardship of the organization's finances. He also noted that the virtual fall conference operated in the black.

A motion to accept the audit report passed by virtual vote.

By-Laws

No report.

Membership

No report.

Strategic plan

The materials included the strategic plan, and an update on its status.

Executive Session

The Board then went into Executive Session at 1:45pm (ET).

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director