MINUTES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
COUNCIL OF THE GREAT CITY SCHOOLS
MINUTES
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
March 20, 2021

Present:

Officers:

Michael O’Neill, Chair, Boston School Committee
Barbara Jenkins, Chair-Elect, Orange County Superintendent
Kelly Gonez, Secretary/Treasurer, Los Angeles School Board
Eric Gordon, Immediate Past Chair, Cleveland CEO

Members:

Tom Ahart, Des Moines Superintendent
Siad Ali, Minneapolis School Board
Marcia Andrews, Palm Beach County School Board
Marcelo Cavazos, Arlington Superintendent
Sharon Contreras, Guilford County Superintendent
Valerie Davis, Fresno School Board
Leslie Grant, Atlanta School Board
Guadalupe Guerrero, Portland Superintendent
William Hite, Philadelphia Superintendent
Shavonna Hollman, Omaha School Board
Ashley Paz, Fort Worth School Board
Sonja Santelises, Baltimore CEO
Darrel Woo, Sacramento School Board
Deborah Shanley, Brooklyn College, CUNY Dean

Absent:

Richard Carranza, New York City Chancellor
Michael Hinojosa, Dallas Superintendent
Robert Runcie, Broward County Superintendent
Elisa Vakalis, Anchorage School Board
Van Henri White, Rochester School Board
Sylvia Wilson, Pittsburgh School Board

Michael O’Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the virtual meeting to order at 11:00 am ET. A quorum was established. He called attention to the fact that this was the last Executive Committee meeting for three members: Eric Gordon, Richard Carranza, and Ashley Paz. Michael Casserly, Executive Director, thanked them for their commitment and service, and presented them each with a commemorative plaque.

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

Michael O’Neill presented the minutes of the January 22-23, 2021 virtual meeting of the Executive Committee and October 17, 2020 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors.

A motion to approve the minutes passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Appointments and Nominations

Eric Gordon reminded the Committee that at the last meeting we confirmed new officers:

Officers

1) Barbara Jenkins (Orange County Superintendent) to serve as Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

2) Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board) to serve as Chair-Elect of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

3) Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent) to serve as Secretary/Treasurer of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

4) Michael O’Neill (Boston School Committee) to serve as Immediate Past Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

In addition, the following recommendations were made to extend terms, confirm appointments, and fill vacancies on the Executive Committee:

1) Robert Runcie (Broward Superintendent) to serve a first three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

2) Elisa Vakalis (Anchorage School Board) to serve a second three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

3) Marcelo Cavazos (Arlington Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Juan Cabrera whose term expires on June 30, 2023.

4) Diane Porter (Jefferson County School Board) to fill the vacancy created by Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board), whose term was set to expire June 30, 2022.

5) Joe Gothard (St. Paul Superintendent) to fill the vacancy created by new Secretary/Treasurer, Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent, whose term was set to expire June 30, 2023.

6) Jesus Jara (Clark County Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Linda Cavazos (Clark County School Board) whose term was set to expire June 30, 2023.

7) Shavonna Holman (Omaha School Board) to serve the unexpired term of Richard Carranza (New York City Chancellor) whose term was set to expire June 30, 2023.
Chair O’Neill then reported to the group that the issue of racial representation on the committee, particularly among school board members, had been discussed by the officers, and they agreed to undertake outreach efforts to promote greater engagement among African American and LatinX school board presidents and board members, so that there would be a more diverse bench for potential Executive Committee appointments. Casserly then provided an historical context on the issue.

A question was raised about whether the organization should open Executive Committee membership up to more than one representative per district. This provision (that districts could have only one member on the Committee) was meant to avoid the perception that any one district had an outsized influence on the priorities of the organization. Members agreed to keep this rule in place.

A motion to approve all appointments and nominations passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Membership

East Baton Rouge, a former Council member, has reapplied for membership. Casserly indicated that the district continues to meet all membership criteria (data were provided in the membership section of the materials).

A motion to approve the membership application of East Baton Rouge passed without dissent by virtual vote.

By-Laws

No report.

Audit

Kelly Gonez, Audit Subcommittee Chair, presented the audit report. This was the same report the committee reviewed in detail in January, except it has been finalized by the external auditors.

Casserly then described in greater detail the results of the external audit that showed no material findings or weaknesses. He then went on to describe the status of the general operating budget, categorical budget, and combined budgets for 2020-21, including the status of dues payments for the year. He noted that some 97% of expected revenues for the year had been received and about 40% of anticipated expenditures had been incurred. (Overall costs were lower because of the pivot to virtual work and the lack of travel expenses due to the pandemic.) In addition, Casserly noted that the organization’s carryover amount had increased to $12.7 million because of fund raising efforts over the last six months of 2020.

Casserly also noted that several districts were not able to pay dues for the 2020–21 program year, including Manchester, Stockton, and Bridgeport. In addition, Hawaii could only pay
for half the year. Otherwise, all dues had been received. Board Chair Michael O’Neill indicated that he would reach out to the three districts and report back.

The budget for FY21-22 was then presented by Casserly. The budget assumed a 1.2% increase in dues based on the CPI. A balanced budget was also assumed for FY21-22.

Finally, Casserly highlighted the Council’s paycheck protection program loan and indicated that the organization did not know whether it will need to be repaid. If we are forgiven the loan, this will go into our revenue line.

The Council is not applying for further loans as the organization would not qualify because of the financial loss requirements that the group would not meet.

A motion to accept the audit report passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Conferences and Meetings

As of the current date, the Council is planning on holding its summer Executive Committee meeting in person in Portland, Oregon. The group is also in the middle of planning for the fall conference in Philadelphia (also in person).

The committee has tentatively agreed to be in Palm Beach for January 2022, but it has not selected a location for summer 2022. Michael O’Neill recommended that we wait and see if the Portland meeting is held in person before selecting a location for the following summer. There will be an ongoing discussion with the officers and Portland Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero regarding the unfolding situation there, and the feasibility of holding this meeting.

Executive Director Report

Michael Casserly explained that he would be going into greater detail tomorrow, at the Board of Directors meeting, concerning his perspective on the work and direction of the organization. Today’s meeting marks his 176th Executive Committee meeting, and his last one as Executive Director. He thanked all committee members, past and present, for the time and commitment they have devoted to organization. The priorities and direction set by this body has been key to the work of the staff and success of the Council.

The Committee then went into executive session at 12:50 pm (ET).

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Michael O’Neill, Chair of the Board of Directors, called the virtual meeting to order at 11:00 am ET. A quorum of the Board was established later in the meeting.

Minutes

Michael O’Neill presented the minutes of the October 17, 2020 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors and January 22-23, 2021 virtual meeting of the Executive Committee.

A motion to approve the minutes passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Executive Directors Report

Michael Casserly reported that there is an extraordinary amount of new federal funding coming, so the Council was going to convene a set of working groups to help identify the most effective uses for these resources. He indicated that districts will likely be the target of criticism if the funds aren’t carefully spent, so we want to put together recommendations for using the aid strategically.

Casserly reported that over the past year, the Council held regular weekly calls with staff and leaders across districts. We received feedback that these calls provided not only technical and strategic guidance, but they were a forum for connecting with peers. The Council has also published a series of guides and publications, held hundreds of press interviews, and set up a tracking system to track reopenings across districts (eventually partnering with Education Week to support the work).

He also reported that the group had lobbied for relief funds over the months and worked to protect the targeted Title I formula for allocate the aid. In addition, the Council challenged regulations passed by the former education secretary on private schools, filed recommendations with the Biden transition team, and conducted outreach to the new education secretary, agency leaders, and staff. Moving forward, Casserly reported that the Council should be in good stead with the new administration, Congressional committees, and agencies.

On the research side, Casserly reported that the group had nearly finished its special NAEP analysis, revised our professional development framework, maintained the collection and reporting of KPIs, and submitted comments to NAGB on the new reading frameworks.

Finally, the Council has helped support vaccination efforts and shared information on evolving CDC guidance. So, the group has tried to provide support where it was needed in this very unusual year.

Board members then discussed the value of the ZOOM calls over the past year, as well as the need and urgency for guidance in spending education funds.
Coronavirus Resources
This section of the materials provided an updated list of ZOOM calls, a screenshot of the Council’s coronavirus resource web page, copies of the resources released over the past year, a joint letter regarding the loosening of guidelines, and other correspondence.

Appointments and Nominations
The Chair of the Board presented the following nominations.

Officers

1) Barbara Jenkins (Orange County Superintendent) to serve as Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

2) Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board) to serve as Chair-Elect of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

3) Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent) to serve as Secretary/Treasurer of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

4) Michael O’Neill (Boston School Committee) to serve as Immediate Past Chair of the Board beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.

Extend Terms/Confirm Appointments

1) Robert Runcie (Broward Superintendent) to serve a first three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

2) Elisa Vakalis (Anchorage School Board) to serve a second three-year term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2024.

3) Marcelo Cavazos (Arlington Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Juan Cabrera whose term expires on June 30, 2023.

4) Diane Porter (Jefferson County School Board) to fill the vacancy created by Kelly Gonez (Los Angeles School Board), whose term was set to expire June 30, 2022.

5) Joe Gothard (St. Paul Superintendent) to fill the vacancy created by new Secretary/Treasurer, Bill Hite (Philadelphia Superintendent, whose term was set to expire June 30, 2023.

There were also two new vacancies on the Executive Committee. The officers have nominated Jesus Jara (Clark County Superintendent) to serve the unexpired term of Linda Cavazos (Clark County School Board), and Shavonna Holman (Omaha School Board) to serve the unexpired term of Susana Cordova (Denver Superintendent). Both terms were set to expire on June 30, 2023.

Michael O’Neil then encouraged members to ensure that their district board representatives—particularly LatinX board members—attend these Board of Directors meetings and participate actively in the task forces and other Council work. The officers
want to ensure that the Council has a balanced and representative Board of Directors, as well as a deep and diverse bench for future Executive Committee appointments.

A motion to approve the nominations passed without dissent by virtual vote.

Conferences and Meetings

The Annual Fall Conference will be held in person October 20-24, 2021 in Philadelphia. The group will revisit this decision for an in-person conference if there are still health or safety concerns.

The fall conference in 2022 will be held in Orlando, the 2023 conference will be held in San Diego, the 2024 conference will now be held in Dallas (postponed from 2020), and the 2025 conference will be held in Boston.

Communications

Michael Casserly, Executive Director, gave the report on the Council’s communications activities. This section includes information from a February Zoom call held with communication officials from the U.S. Department of Education.

Briefing materials includes sample articles that feature quotes from Council staff or highlight Council activities and resources, press releases, statements, the latest Urban Educator (which is now all digital), the organization’s monthly social media report, and application guidelines for the Bernard Harris scholarship program.

Legislation

Legislative materials were included in the conference legislative briefing book. The group will have an extensive briefing on legislation and policy starting this afternoon after hearing from Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward.

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. Yesterday’s discussion started out with Ray Hart presenting an overview of the NAEP special analysis report, and how to interpret and access the data. This will be discussed further in the research section.

Shanley called the group’s attention to a few additional materials and activities discussed during the task force meeting, including—

- The launch of the special education KPI dashboard.
- A near-final draft of the Professional Development Framework. This resource includes a review of research and lessons from the field, a discussion of preconditions and design principles of effective professional development, and a set of exemplars from districts across the country.
• An overview of issues being discussed during regularly scheduled CAO ZOOM calls.
• Information on early reading and the work the Council is doing in partnership with SAP, including a series of webinars on unfinished learning.
• The NAEP reading framework.
• A review of Omaha’s special education services and programming.

The materials also included an overview of the priorities and activities of the academic team, and a catalogue of resources and tools.

Gabriela Uro, the Council’s Director of Language Policy, then gave an overview of the Council’s work around English Language Learner education. An overview of materials and other Council ELL activities was provided in the Board of Directors briefing book. There was also information on a four-part training series as part of the Professional Development Platform (PLP), a listing of supports we provide individually to districts on a case-by-case basis, updates on the materials procurement project, and a new writing project that is underway.

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

Sharon Contreras, Task Force Co-chair, gave the report of the Task Force on Black and Latina Young Women and Girls. She reviewed revised goals, heard from Janice Jackson in Chicago about their SWAG program, as well as from co-chair Kelly Gonez on what they are doing in LAUSD. Both discussed where there were programmatic weaknesses and where stronger partnerships were needed. Bringing in student voices was a theme throughout the discussion. The Task Force’s next step will be to address safety and policing in schools. Also discussed was the possibility of bringing together a panel of female students of color for the fall conference. The Chairs agree that they needed to address how to work on males of color issues without detracting from the support and work we need to do to support females of color.

Bill Hite, Task Force Co-chair, acknowledged the great work of the females of color chairs and task force. Hite indicated that they were reviewing the males of color task force goals considering the work and direction the female task force was doing. Disproportionality is an issue that applies to both groups. Hite said the task force was thinking through how to look at data around males of color without under-emphasizing the work that needs to be done around females of color. He agreed that recognizing the importance of incorporating student voice and tapping into their perspectives for potential future directions was critical.

In terms of future work, the task forces discussed research focused on tracking disproportionality across Council member districts. We would also like to identify who is doing good work on this front and figure out how we could highlight it and take it to scale.

**Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance**
Barbara Jenkins, Task Force Co-chair, gave the report of the Task Force on Leadership, Governance, Management, and Finance.

This section of the materials started with information on the Harvard school board/superintendent governance program. Dr. Jenkins described the Harvard’s case study approach as unparalleled. Michael O’Neill and Michael Casserly have had the opportunity to sit in on a virtual case study and were impressed with the depth and quality of the coursework.

The Institute will be held virtually July 19-23, 2021. Presently, 12 districts will be participating.

There were also materials in the briefing book describing the governance and technical assistance work of the Council. AJ Crabill continues to provide hands-on support to districts across the country to help build board governance and leadership through coaching. In addition, the Council is growing out a series of coach-training sessions to augment the work and further build district capacity.

During the discussion, Bob Carlson, the Council’s Director Management Services, updated the Task Force on the Council’s continuing strategic support reviews over the past year.

Task Force materials also presented information on a project being launched to address issues of Technology Interoperability.

The group then discussed the Council’s governance reviews. These are hard hitting reviews, and members should be prepared if they ask for a visit.

Research

Ray Hart, the Council’s Director of Research, gave the report on the Council’s research activities.

The research materials included information on the TUDA task force and the Council’s work with NAGB, including our comments on the NAEP reading frameworks.

The research section also provided copies of two surveys that have been released, as well as a report on Kansas City in support of their bid to become fully accredited.

Finally, members found the latest draft of the NAEP district effects report in the briefing book. Hart walked members through the research questions, methodology, and main findings. This report is currently being reviewed by NCES, and will then be released, most likely in the next month or two. Hart also called the group’s attention to the technology functionality in the Council’s KPI system. Users will be able to look at the data in several ways. He then shared login information and guidance for EdWires, the Council’s fileshare platform for sharing materials across districts.

By-Laws
No report.

**Membership**

East Baton Rouge, a former Council member, has reapplied for membership. Casserly indicated that the district meets all membership criteria (data are provided in the membership section of the materials).

A motion to approve the membership application of East Baton Rouge passed without dissent by virtual vote.

**Audit**

Casserly gave the report on the Audit subcommittee. Members found the results of the Council’s external audit for last fiscal year presented in the Board of Directors materials. The audit was completely clean, with no material findings or weaknesses. He thanked Teri Trinidad and Alisa Adams for their work and oversight.

The audit report included details on overall assets and liabilities, restricted and unrestricted revenues and expenses, a statement of functional expenditures, a report on the organization’s cash flow and accounting policies, various contract receivables, investment types, etc. The external audit report also included the value of property and equipment, revenues from sponsorships, dues, contracts, etc. Notably, despite various hotel cancellations, the Council has not incurred any penalties (thanks to Teri Trinidad and Peter Green’s exemplary work).

In 2020 the organization also received a PPP loan, which has not been counted as revenue yet as the Council waits to hear if this loan will be forgiven. There was also data on grant funds received, information on retirement plans, categorical revenues and expenses, and a letter from the auditors stating there were no disagreements or issues in conducting the audit.

Following the audit, Casserly reviewed materials on the 2019-20 budget numbers, which were the same as those contained in the audit. This included combined general operating and categorical budgets, as well as the status of last year’s dues.

Casserly then reviewed the 2020-21 budget, reported through December 31, 2020, and the status of dues payments. He invited members to ensure that they had paid. For the current program year, Casserly reported that the group had received 97% of expected revenues for the year, and about 40% of anticipated expenditures had been incurred in the first six months. In addition, the organization’s carryover amount had increased to $12.7 million because of fund raising efforts over the last six months of 2020. We expect this number to go down as we spend down these grants.

In terms of the investment data provided in the materials, Casserly pointed out that the Council maintained a conservative investment approach.
Finally, the last section of the Audit materials provided a proposed budget for 2021-22, including a new dues structure, operating budget, and projected expenses. This was expected to be a balanced budget as well.

Kelly Gonenz applauded the Council staff for their prudent stewardship of the organization’s finances.

A motion to accept the audit report passed without dissent by a virtual vote.

Strategic plan

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

Wrap up

Michael O’Neill then thanked Michael Casserly for his exemplary leadership, noting this was his final Board of Directors meeting as Executive Director, and presented him with a plaque. It was also Michael O’Neill’s final meeting as Board Chair, and Casserly presented him with a crystal gavel.

Executive Session

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

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Casserly
Executive Director