

Agenda
Achievement First Rhode Island
Board of Directors Meeting

Venue: Achievement First Providence High School
 206 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI 02907
 Zoom: <https://achievementfirst.zoom.us/j/89012442891>
 Tuesday, May 21, 2024 5:30 - 7:00 pm

I. Call to Order

Name	Present	Name	Present
Mayor Brett Smiley	X	Macky McCleary	X
Maryellen Butke	X	John Iglizzi	
James Wiley		Mayor Charles Lombardi	
Jo-Ann Schofield	X		

AF staff present: Lisa Margosian, Michael Rabin, John Sharkey, Jillian Fain, Kevin Lohela, Tiffany Bostic, Ketki Harale, Xanthe Jory, Karolyn Belcher, Cassidy McKee, Teghan Delane, Omar Mayyasi, LaNelle Alexander, and Ru Sharma.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment. The Mayor noted follow up from public comments at the board meeting on December 11, 2023. AF parent Ms. Diana Ferreira made a comment about the need for an advanced math trajectory in middle school to ensure students are prepared for college requirements. AF Chief Academic Officer John Sharkey responded via email that AF is working to expand Algebra 1 offerings in middle schools, considering student readiness, to ensure success in this foundational course before higher-level math.

Also at that board meeting AF parent Ms. Jennifer Efflandt and her daughter, Leila Naguru commented on the need for world language offerings in middle school. Mr. Sharkey responded to them via email that the enrichment team is working to codify our enrichment offerings, including world languages. This is something we hope to offer (and expand our offering of) in the future.

III. Discussion with Achievement First

A. CEO Welcome and Mission Moment

Two Achievement First Providence High School students spoke to the board about their experiences at the school.

B. Strategic Planning for AF's Future

Lisa Margosian shared a strategic plan overview focused on clarifying the value proposition and future direction of the organization. Ms. Margosian emphasized the AF graduate aims centered on college, career, and life excellence, with a particular focus on self-knowledge within communities and preparing students for leadership. She presented the new mission and vision statements.

Ms. Margosian shared that the multi-year plan was informed by data from instructional quality reviews, academic performance, and various surveys. She contextualized the plan within the broader educational environment, taking into account sector challenges such as talent acquisition and retention post-COVID, changing workforce expectations, regulatory complexities in Connecticut and Rhode Island, shifts in philanthropic focus and funding sources, and declining student enrollment due to demographic changes and gentrification.

Ms. Margosian highlighted the mission-driven culture of Achievement First as a key organizational strength, noting the commitment and devotion of staff to the mission. An open discussion followed, inviting feedback on the multi-year plan and additional sector challenges, but no new challenges were noted.

Ms. Margosian noted the universal acknowledgment of the strengths of Achievement First (AF), which are consistent across all surveys and data from employees. The mission-driven culture and strong stakeholder engagement were underscored as unique aspects that set AF apart. Plans are in place to address stakeholder engagement more robustly, with working groups focused on this area as part of the year one strategic initiatives.

Ms. Margosian also addressed the organizational challenges, including suboptimal student outcomes that predate COVID-19 and the need for increased instructional rigor. There are inconsistencies in teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer interactions that need to be addressed. Additionally, the need for a shared vision and clarity around the roles of the network versus the schools was highlighted. Organizational design and administrative infrastructure were discussed, with an acknowledgment that AF must balance being the right size for current needs while planning for medium and long-term visions.

Ms. Margosian shared the four strategic priorities and introduced the concept of mission measures to ensure the realization of the organization's mission over time. The focus will be on post-secondary outcomes, readiness measures, and quarterly assessments of progress using a red, yellow, green system for transparency and accountability.

1. Rigorous Core Model (10 mins)

John Sharkey focused on the first strategic priority: improving the core academic model. This is not a new initiative but rather an extension of the work started this year. Mr. Sharkey emphasized that the goal is to build on the learnings from year one to accelerate success across the academies.

Mr. Sharkey presented a set of sub-initiatives under strategic priority one, all aimed at enhancing the core academic model and the continuous experience for students from K through 12. This includes increasing opportunities for in-person experiential learning, expanding access to Algebra 1 in eighth grade, and providing more access to world languages.

The first year saw the implementation of a new academic program, which was largely successful and

set the stage for future years. Mr. Sharkey highlighted several bright spots, noting positive year-over-year gains in internal measures across many content areas and academies. However, there are areas that require further attention, such as middle school math and elementary reading proficiency in third and fourth grades.

Looking ahead to the 2024-25 school year, the focus will be on scaling the work of curriculum adoption. Additionally, there will be a high school redesign to define what it means to graduate from an AF high school. This redesign will ensure that the model is cohesive from elementary through high school, adjusting as needed to support students throughout their academic journey.

By the 2027-28 school year, a fully revised academic program model is anticipated, which will include holistic support for teacher and leader development, updated teacher evaluation frameworks, and a comprehensive rewards package. This revised model aims to clearly define the vision of teaching and learning for parents choosing an Achievement First school for their children.

2. Vibrant Schools (10 mins)

Tiffany Bostic presented on strategic priority two, Vibrant Schools. She emphasized the organization's focus on ensuring vibrant school environments for students, covering aspects such as social-emotional learning, school culture, and addressing gaps in policies exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly chronic absenteeism.

Ms. Bostic highlighted efforts post-pandemic, emphasizing the importance of student mental health. Initiatives included a teletherapy pilot with Cartwheel Mental Health and a partnership with the JED Foundation to enhance SEL programming across all high schools. These efforts aim to provide accessible therapeutic services and support for students.

The Cartwheel Teletherapy pilot aimed to address long waiting lists for therapeutic services, especially in native languages, and provided counseling and evaluations. Initial results showed significant impacts on reducing anxiety and depression among students, underscoring the need to sustain and expand these services.

The three-year partnership with the JED Foundation focused on assessing mental wellness attitudes among high school students. Recommendations from JED led to the implementation of social-emotional learning curricula and the development of a multi-tiered support system across schools. Yearly assessments will track progress and impact on student wellness.

Ms. Bostic emphasized ongoing efforts to build capacity among school-based social workers and counselors, as well as network-wide support teams. The focus remains on managing outlier behaviors and gathering comprehensive data to support student wellness alongside academic success.

3. Equity Centered Talent (10 mins)

LaNelle Alexander centered her discussion on two initiatives under Strategic Priority Three: Equity, Talent, and Mission-Vision Alignment. She emphasized the ongoing work to refresh the organization's values and operationalize them through clear behaviors, aiming for a fresh rollout in the upcoming

school year.

Addressing DE&I, Ms. Alexander outlined plans for a multi-year framework focusing on five pillars to advance equity within team interactions, schools, and communities. Initiatives include cultural observances and events like mental health awareness sessions, aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and reducing stigma.

Moving forward, Ms. Alexander highlighted plans to operationalize values through cultural workshops for new hires and existing leaders, promoting skills and community practices aligned with organizational values. She noted the success of the Leading for Racial Equity Fellowship pilot and plans to launch its second year to support school leaders in providing effective leadership training.

Ms. Alexander introduced the creation of a Senior DE&I Leadership Advisory Council aimed at identifying and addressing systemic inequities within organizational practices over the next few years. Additionally, establishing comprehensive scorecards and metrics was emphasized to effectively measure and manage equity initiatives.

4. Equitable and Sustainable Systems (10 mins)

Michael Rabin began by acknowledging the board's awareness of regional facilities challenges and school portfolio plans, emphasizing the need for a sustainable staffing and facilities plan. He provided updates on portfolio management efforts over the past year, highlighting achievements such as securing the Carl Lauro building bid and implementing a dual campus model for Envision Elementary School. He also announced the transition of Promesa Elementary School to a K-5 model to enhance regional sustainability.

Looking forward, Mr. Rabin discussed pending decisions for Promesa Middle School in late fall or early winter, pending facility acquisition, and considerations for Envision Middle School to ensure long-term sustainability and scholar support in the region. He emphasized that these efforts are part of a continuous strategic plan extending into the next year and beyond, aiming to address ongoing and future needs within the region's educational landscape.

C. Finance Committee Report (15 mins)

Omar Mayyasi introduced the finance portion of the meeting, providing updates on fiscal year 24 results and forecasting for fiscal year 25, highlighting key revenue and expense drivers. He reported a 14% increase in the per-pupil rate to \$17,900 and an additional \$2 million in ESSER funding, contributing to positive revenue growth. He noted a positive variance in salaries due to 30 vacant positions and adjustments in non-personnel expenses to accommodate increases in special education, transportation, and cafeteria costs.

Mr. Mayyasi presented the forecasted year-end results for fiscal year 24, projecting a surplus approaching \$1 million despite initial budgeted assumptions, reflecting sound financial management and adjustments throughout the year.

Mr. Mayyasi outlined the fiscal year 25 budget, highlighting major revenue drivers such as enrollment growth of over 300 students and adjustments in ESSER funding. He discussed planned expenses, including a 3% across-the-board salary increase and investments in technology and transportation, aligning with strategic priorities and debt covenants.

IV. Board Business

A. Board Resolutions and Approvals: Finance Approvals and Meeting Minutes (5 mins)

Mayor Smiley shared the finance resolutions with the board and asked for a motion to approve. Maryellen Butke motioned, Mackey McCleary seconded. All were in favor, none opposed or abstained.

1. BE IT RESOLVED, that the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby approves the financial budget for the 2024-2025 fiscal year as presented.
2. BE IT RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby ratifies the re-appointment of CohnReznick to perform the financial audit of the 2023-24 fiscal year and prepare the IRS Form 990s.

Mayor Smiley shared the resolution approving the meeting minutes. Jo-Ann Schofield motioned, Maryellen Butke seconded. All were in favor, none opposed or abstained.

1. BE IT RESOLVED, the AF Rhode Island Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from March 18, 2024.

B. Executive Session: RFP update and Cranston Expansion (10 mins)

Mayor Smiley asked for a motion to enter into executive session. Maryellen Butke motioned, Jo-Ann Schofield seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

The board exited executive session at 7:01 pm. Mayor Smiley noted that no action was taken in executive session.

V. Adjourn

Mayor Smiley asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jo-Ann Schofield motioned, Maryellen Butke seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

The meeting adjourned at 7:02 pm.