



Elm City College Prep Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 4, 2025 from 5:30 to 7:00 PM EST

Virtual via Zoom: <https://achievementfirst.zoom.us/j/83180282225>

Attendance

Present:

Members: LaVonta Bryant, Dick Ferguson, Stephanie Ma, Laura Saverin, Alejandra Lopez Valdes

AF Staff: Amy D'Angelo, Kristin Damo, Tanesha Forman, Kiah Hufane, Serena Johnson, Chamayne Joseph, Samantha Lucky, Lisa Margosian, Omar Mayyasi, Shannon Miller, Aaron Obrochta, Dumar Paden, Michael Rabin, Ru Sharma

I. Call to Order (Board Business) (Presenters: Dick Ferguson)

Elm City College Prep Board Chair, Richard Ferguson, called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

II. Public Comment (Board Business) (Presenters: Dick Ferguson)

There were no members of the public present.

III. Board Resolutions and Approvals (Decision) (Presenters: Dick Ferguson)

Richard Ferguson introduced the approval of the consent agenda, including the previous meeting's minutes and voting in a new Yale fellow. A motion was made by LaVonta and seconded by Laura Saverin. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

Consent Agenda

- I. BE IT RESOLVED, the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from December 12, 2024.
- II. BE IT RESOLVED, the Elm City College Preparatory Board of Directors hereby approves Sanjana Nayak to serve as a Yale SOM Board Fellow for an 18-month term, ending June 30, 2026.

IV. CEO Agenda Overview (Inform) (Presenters: Lisa Margosian)

Lisa Margosian, CEO of Achievement First, provided an overview of the meeting agenda, which included principal presentations, an executive session for principal mid-year reviews, an update on ESSER funding, and a deep dive into AF's talent strategy.

V. Principal Presentations (Inform) (Presenters: Serena Johnson, Tanesha Foreman)

Serena Johnson, Elm City College Prep Elementary School Principal, provided an overview of Elm City's performance in key areas such as chronic absenteeism, reading

proficiency, and math achievement. While the high-level data indicated some areas were off track, she highlighted the significant progress made since the beginning of the year. Chronic absenteeism had decreased by 7% year-over-year, and proactive measures such as weekly attendance meetings and incentive programs had contributed to this improvement. Serena also detailed strategies for improving reading proficiency, including targeted small-group instruction and professional development for teachers. Math outcomes, while showing progress in upper grades, required additional support in lower grades, prompting structural changes in instructional delivery.

Tanesha Forman, Elm City College Prep Middle School Principal, shared updates on middle school performance, noting an improvement in chronic absenteeism rates, which had declined to 17%. She emphasized the importance of targeted intervention and strategic partnerships in driving student success. Reading proficiency had shown strong gains, particularly on interim assessments, and math scores were also improving, particularly in grades five through seven. Eighth grade remained a focus area due to previous staffing challenges, but progress was being made with a newly hired math teacher.

Both Serena and Tanesha reported increased family engagement through events such as the Love of Reading Day, Winter Wonderland Family Night, and Black History Month celebrations. Parent attendance and involvement had been strong, contributing to positive school culture and student success.

VI. Executive Session: Principal Mid Year Reviews (Inform) (Presenters: Kristin Damo, Charmayne Joseph, Dumar Paden)

Richard Ferguson asked for a motion to go into executive session. Laura Saverin motioned. Lavonta Bryant seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

VII. AF: Building a Talent First Organization (Inform) (Presenters: Ru Sharma, Kiah Hufane)

Ru Sharma, Chief People Officer, and Kiah Hufane, Head of Recruitment, led a deep dive into Achievement First's talent strategy. Ru emphasized the strong interdependence between student achievement and a successful talent strategy, noting that high-caliber teachers thrive under strong school leadership, which in turn enhances school culture and teacher retention.

The discussion highlighted Elm City's teacher retention trends, showing some volatility over recent years due to COVID-related challenges. While elementary retention has stabilized, middle school retention remains a concern. Ru shared external benchmarks, noting that the Charter School Growth Fund reports an average 75% retention rate for charter networks, with a range of 61% to 84%. She also provided insight into key leading indicators, including leadership intent to return and the results of the Fall Organizational Health Survey, which showed strong ratings for middle school but weaker scores for elementary.

Kiah elaborated on recruitment efforts, explaining the network's increased focus on attracting certified teachers. Currently, 40% of the applicant pool is certified, compared to 30% in previous years, due to a more targeted strategy. However, this shift has resulted in a lower total applicant pool, reflecting the tradeoff between quantity and quality. The recruitment team has restructured to focus on regional hiring, allowing for a more tailored approach to staffing needs.

Richard Ferguson and Laura Saverin engaged in a discussion on AF's historical approach to certification, noting that the organization previously prioritized strong teaching talent over certification requirements. While that approach worked in the past, shifting state policies now require a greater focus on certification. The board discussed how to balance the need for certified teachers while maintaining AF's standards for teacher excellence.

VIII. Finance Committee Report (Inform) (Presenters: Omar Mayyasi)

Omar Mayyasi presented the financial report, providing an update on the financial status as of December 31, 2024. He reported that the organization is forecasting a slight surplus for the fiscal year, driven primarily by additional ESSER funding and lower-than-expected personnel costs due to some open positions. The board reviewed balance sheet changes, including a slight decline in cash due to timing of payments. The finance committee had previously reviewed these details in depth, and Omar addressed board members' questions on financial planning post-ESSER funding.

IX. AF 25th Anniversary Summit

Lisa Margosian provided an update on the upcoming AF25 Summit, scheduled for May 29-30 in New Haven. She emphasized that this event will celebrate Achievement First's 25-year history while also looking ahead to the future. The summit will bring together students, families, staff, funders, elected officials, and community partners. Programming will include classroom showcases, alumni panels, and discussions on the future of education. Lisa encouraged all board members to attend and confirmed that media outreach is planned for the event.

X. Adjourn

Richard Ferguson asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Laura Saverin motioned. Lavonta Bryant seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained. The meeting adjourned at 7:03 pm.