



Amistad Academy Board Meeting

Wednesday, March 5, 2025 at 5:30 to 7:00 PM EST

Zoom: <https://achievementfirst.zoom.us/j/89590973368>

Attendance

Present:

Members: Jen Alexander, Lorraine Gibbons, Shannon Miller, Camila Novo-Viano, Patricia Sweet, Shannelle Whyte, Yahira Zwisler

Guests: Lisa Margosian, Shannon Miller, Ru Sharma, Amy D'Angelo, Dumar Paden, Charmayne Joseph, Jasmine Watts, Lauren Raimondi, Aaron Obrochta, AJ Lowe, Samatha Lucky, Marissa Morgan, Kiersten Gibson-Cooper, Kristen Damo, Peter Butler, Kiah Hufane

I. Call to Order (Board Business) (Presenters: Lorraine Gibbons)

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Lorraine Gibbons at 5:31 pm.

II. Public Comment (Board Business) (Presenters: Lorraine Gibbons)

There were no members of the public present.

III. Board Resolutions and Approvals (Decision) (Presenters: Lorraine Gibbons)

Ms. Gibbons introduced the consent agenda which included the minutes from the December 12th meeting and the appointment of Henry Melzer to the Finance Committee. A minor correction was noted regarding Jim Baron's last name, which was listed incorrectly in the minutes. With no additional comments, Jim Baron made a motion to approve. Yashira Zwisler seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

Consent Agenda

BE IT RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby approves the meeting minutes from December 12, 2024.

BE IT RESOLVED, the Amistad Academy Board of Directors hereby appoints the following committee members:

Finance Committee: Henry Melzer

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: Lauren Raimondi, Jasmine Watts, AJ Lowe)

Amy D'Angelo introduced the principal discussions, explaining that each principal would share insights into the Connecticut Corrective Action Plan (CAP) and provide an update on parent engagement efforts.

Lauren Raimondi, Principal of Amistad Elementary, shared progress on chronic absenteeism, noting a decrease in absences among at-risk students due to targeted interventions by the attendance team. She also highlighted gains in reading and math proficiency, particularly in kindergarten and fourth grade. She explained that while overall data remains a challenge, the school is seeing significant improvements due to individualized coaching and instructional adjustments.

Jasmine Watts, Principal of Amistad Middle School, provided updates on attendance, reading, and math progress. She noted a reduction in chronic absenteeism and emphasized the school's strong results in Lexia, an intervention program supporting literacy growth. Additionally, Amistad Middle School is leading the network in math proficiency using IXL, a new math intervention tool. She credited these gains to teacher engagement and the intentional focus on reading and math. Principal Watts also highlighted the school's increased parent engagement, including a well-attended Black History Month event and growing after-school programs.

AJ Lowe, Principal of Amistad High School, detailed the school's efforts to improve attendance, particularly among SPED and MLL students, through direct outreach and relationship-building with families. They described a new system of consistent communication that has helped the school better understand and address student absences. Principal Lowe also shared strong reading growth data, attributing it to a stable humanities department and the implementation of the Lexia program. Math progress remains a challenge due to staffing shortages, but efforts are underway to improve hiring practices and support current teachers. They closed by emphasizing the importance of reestablishing family and community connections, including a revitalized Parent Leadership Council and increased student participation in community programs and competitions.

Board members commended the principals for their work and engaged in a brief discussion on attendance trends, instructional strategies, and ways to further strengthen family partnerships.

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

Ms. Gibbons asked for a motion to enter executive session to discuss principal mid year reviews. Pat Sweet motioned. Yashira Zwisler seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained.

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

Ru Sharma, alongside recruitment lead Kiah Hufane, presented Achievement First's talent strategy, emphasizing the interconnection between strong teaching, leadership, and student achievement. Ms. Sharma provided an overview of the network's current retention trends, hiring challenges, and certification requirements. She highlighted the network's shift toward recruiting certified teachers while also working to develop internal pipelines for teacher certification. Additionally, she outlined new initiatives, including regional hiring teams, targeted ad campaigns, and a strengthened leadership development program.

The board discussed the importance of advocacy around teacher certification policies, with several members noting opportunities for engagement with state legislators. Board members also highlighted AF's strong record of recruiting and retaining diverse teachers and discussed how to frame certification policies as a potential barrier to maintaining a diverse workforce.

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

Omar Mayyasi provided a financial update, reporting that AF is operating within a balanced budget. He noted that underspending on personnel costs due to staffing vacancies is being offset by contract hires. He also reported that cash balances remain stable and there are no significant concerns coming out of the second quarter.

IX. AF 25th Anniversary Summit

Lisa Margosian reminded board members about Achievement First's upcoming 25th Anniversary Summit in May, encouraging their participation.

X. Adjourn

Ms. Gibbons asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jim Baron motioned, Yashira Zwisler seconded. All in favor, none opposed or abstained. The meeting was adjourned at 7:03 pm.