

University Prep Board Meeting (Retreat) – 11/4/21

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Minutes

Board Attendance: Cuneyt Akay, Bev Sloan, Emily Eikelberner, Renae Bellew, Nicholas Martinez, Brenna Copeland, Juan Pena, Recardo Brooks and Tracey Lovett

Board Absences: Kimberlee Sia

Staff Attendance: David Singer (Executive Director), Alastair Dawe (COO), and Liz Suarez (CAO)

The U Prep Board came together for its annual retreat on November 4th, 2021, which was hosted at the Greenberg Traurig office (1144 15th St UNIT 3300, Denver, CO 80202). Four major areas of discussion were on the agenda and a brief summary of those focus areas / conversations follows.

1 – Vision of Excellence (VOE)

- Liz Suarez, CAO, reviewed the full Vision of Excellence (VOE) framework that was established over the course of a year with more than twenty key stakeholders (alumni families, current families, educators, leaders, etc.). The VOE fully encompasses an updated definition of “true excellence” within U Prep campuses that includes foundational elements as well as four tenets of effective instruction (all driving towards academic outcomes).
- The board discussed various components of the VOE, ensuring an understanding of how the VOE incorporates both the original U Prep, and an evolution of the organizations’ approaches/practices over the last few years. Ultimately, the VOE establishes a new north star for the network to go after at each of its schools.
- A great deal of discussion was focused on efforts to ensure teacher success with the VOE, and in particular, processes for rolling out the rubric and implications tied to teacher evaluation. Board members shared approaches they’ve seen that were successful and unsuccessful in the past when establishing buy-in, ensuring transparency, and overall managing large-scale change. Ms. Suarez reviewed the “hold harmless” year we’re currently operating in as everyone gets their footing with the new tool and new approach while also narrating the process to take things fully live in the 2022-23 year ahead and how to ensure everyone comes along, together.

2 – Enrollment

- Given the realities of enrollment in the region of Denver that U Prep operates in, and the overall context of DPS (including ongoing, projected enrollment declines), the board discussed challenges that lay ahead when it comes to enrollment at existing campuses.
- The board agreed to keep a diligent eye on enrollment figures for Oct. count 2022 and Oct. count 2023, with Oct. count 2023 being used to engage in what would be a more significant conversation (if needed).
 - In the interim, the board named that it will continue using the COO’s financial analysis (which will be updated as more information comes to light) to recognize the kind of deficit spending, if any, that may be needed in the short-term to maintain consistency for adults and children.
- Board discussion further engaged with “what if” alternatives for the years ahead with a range of strategies and directions to be revisited in future meeting.

3 – Talent

- The board took time to understand what is happening in the broader labor markets within and outside of education – all of which impact our ability to attract/retain high quality talent.
- Discussion focused on various approaches and pathways to pursue that would leverage what’s happening in the workforce outside of education, i.e. flexibility, that may be applicable in the education space and lead to a more competitive approach to talent. Board members were supportive of exploring a range of possibilities that would continue to best attract and retain strong talent given the ever-shifting experiences of employees in a number of industries.
- Separate from the larger economic context and impacts of the pandemic on what “work looks like,” Board members named a desire to see efforts to better understand what folks really need who are on the ground.
- David Singer, Executive Director, named that this is the kind of work that’s taking place within the VOE Task Force (*a composition of U Prep teachers and leaders being facilitated through a contract with Promise 54*). The core focus of that group this year is to narrow in on the “adult experience” and better understand what folks want/need moving forward.
- On a closing note, the board suggested an ongoing effort to share love/appreciation for members of our teaching force – recognizing their incredible efforts.

4 – School # 3 / Expansion

- The board discussed where efforts were in Adams 14 with the submitted charter application and work in motion to reach a hopeful approval by the local BOE.
- Further, the board discussed what would likely occur if an approval was reached or if there was a denial. In particular, board members focused on the timeline that would accompany an approval to reach contract status with the district, and in turn, based on that timeline, what the implications would be for the opening of the proposed, new campus.
- As another key component to discussion, the Board reviewed original greenlighting criteria (internal and external) that should be used to drive decision making for opening a new campus.