

Baxter Academy for Technology and Science

Board of Directors Meeting

5:30 to 7 p.m., Wednesday, September 14, 2021

185 Lancaster Street, Portland, Maine

Available on Zoom:

<https://baxter-academy-org.zoom.us/j/89063378749?pwd=RnlnaC90Z3J3eHhpNWc0d0FnbzRpdz09>

Present in person: Patti Oldmixon (chair), Christian Sparling (vice chair), Nik Charov (secretary), Thorn Dickinson, Simon McGurk, Jana Lapoint (joined at 5:45pm)

Absent: Peter Montano (treasurer)

Agenda item

I. Opening Items

Chair Patti Oldmixon called the meeting to order at 5:32pm with five board members present.

A. Approval of minutes

Patti made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 24, 2021, meeting as presented. Thorn Dickinson seconded. All present voted in favor, 5-0.

II. Finance

A. Funding

With no financial updates to share since the last meeting, BA Executive Director Kelli Pryor took the opportunity to present more information on BA's funding model, in particular the pros and cons of access to federal Title I or II funds. BA is a flexible and innovative school, but its funding is more rigid and keeps margins tight. Charter schools in Maine operate on Essential Programs and Services (ESP) support directly from the State. This is an annually adjusted per-student amount (based on the October 1 student body count); it is based on staff and program costs aggregated across all school districts in Maine. For BA in School Year 2022 (SY22), EPS is a base of \$7,988, with adjustments including for special education and socio-economically disadvantaged percentages, that bring it to \$11,276 per student. There is no local funding for BA or any other charter school. It is also important to note that 2.35% of the EPS pool is taken to support the Maine Charter School Commission (MCSC).

BA's goal and budget projections had been based on EPS allocations for an enrollment stabilizing at 400, with potential to increase by up to 10% (440). However, during the pandemic, 10/1 enrollments have decreased. The SY21 count was 390, down from 412 in the prior, pre-pandemic school year. This represented effectively an ~\$85,000 in decrease for SY22; the impact would

have been greater if the board had not scaled back its SY21 budget by ten percent to brace for unknown impacts of the pandemic. Coming up on October 1 this year, BA is currently looking at 379 students, due to homeschooling, mask/vaccination requirements, and continued pandemic concerns. This could result in another decrease of ~\$124k to SY23's state subsidy.

Some have asked whether BA should participate in Title I funding, a federal program that supports high poverty schools and which recently offered an additional, restricted round of pandemic relief funding. The BA Administration estimates that BA could receive ~\$26k of Title I funds annually, based on having 36% of students in the socioeconomic profile Title I supports. However, there are significant compliance and reporting requirements for that annual allocation. The Portland School District has an entire department of people to handle federal support; BA would need to hire a specialist, at a cost of ~\$50-70k, to manage this work, the Comprehensive Needs Assessment associated with it, and the State monitoring process as well. If BA had a higher poverty rate, the allocation could be \$100k or more, and Title IV funding might also be available, but through the lottery and space caps and 25-mile-radius catchment area, there is no way to "optimize" for Title I demographics. With the current student body profile, it would be a net loss to BA to pursue Title I, in the opinion of BA Administration, in consultation with the Board treasurer. BA does receive Title II support for teacher professional development, ~\$17k per year.

Vice chair Christian Sparling and Special Education Director Laura Parks shared their experiences with Title I management.

Kelli reiterated that BA does need to diversify its revenue streams, including private donations and industry partnerships. Currently, however, the executive director's time is occupied with the pressures of the pandemic on school operations, as well as Title II and MCSC compliance, among other duties.

III. School program

A. SY 2022 reopening

Kelli Pryor continued with an update on reopening plans. The goal is "safe, full-time, in-person learning with minimal disruptions." At the moment, with 93% of BA staff and contractors (including transportation, janitorial) and 97% of 309 reporting students declaring themselves to be vaccinated, that means potentially close to 80% of the entire school is vaccinated. BA is not mandating vaccinations until there is more guidance from MCSC on that issue. This will be a challenging fall. Covid rates among Mainers <20 years old are increasing, but the Maine DOE wants to keep students in-person as long as possible. BA's universal masking, physical distancing, new HVAC and air filters, and symptom isolation will help; pooled testing will start soon. The attached handout on BA COVID-19 Response Protocol has more information. Triggers for transitioning to remote learning in SY22 will include an outbreak (3 unrelated cases) and/or teacher, administrative, or bus driver absences that outnumber capacity to open the school safely. Students kept home with symptoms or a diagnosis will still be able to participate via remote means.

B. Head of School report

Head of School Cicy Po, via Zoom, gave an update on school operations. Masking has not seen any objections. Staff are focusing on structure and stability in the first weeks, with an intentional presence by Administration and Faculty at contact points throughout the days. The student club fair is this week; school portrait day will be in October. Flex Fridays will start up next week. Vice principal Mary King then joined via Zoom to present more on Flex Friday's expectations, requirements, the FF handbook, and the 4 project templates. This year, FF participants will be in three levels: Apprentices, who are first-time FFers and will take a semester-long intro to FF; Practitioners, 11-12th graders in full FF projects; and Internships, 11-12th graders with out-of-school professional opportunities aligned with FF goals.

Thorn Dickinson and Nik Charov asked for summaries of past Flex Friday projects, like Mary's summary slide, if they were already created.

IV. Public Comment

There were no public comments at this time.

V. Executive Session*

Patti Oldmixon motioned to go into Executive Session* at 6:36pm, Christian Sparling seconded, all in favor 6-0.

The board exited Executive Session and Patti motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:20pm. Nik Charov seconded, all in favor 6-0.

Next regular meeting: October 12, 2021

** Executive session for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining pursuant to Section 405(6)(D) of Title 1 of the Maine Revised Statutes.*