

## CHAPTER 9

### **INITIAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES COMMUNICATIONS**

When I first arrived, there were 7 Board members listed on the web site.

- Andrew Rivers, Board Chair, Chief of Staff, Howard University.
- Tanya Hales, Secretary, Parent.
- Eric Key, Director University of Maryland University College Arts Program.
- Marco McMillan, Executive Director, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc.
- Samantha Smith, Community Member.
- Jeanette M. Staton Parent.
- Sandra Wallace, Community Member.

The first meeting (September 9, 2012), I attended was led by John Goldman, the acting Executive Director. The two parent representatives, Jeanette Staton and Tanya Hales, were present. John Manahan, Rita Lawson and I were also there with Marco McMillan present on a conference call line. At the meeting, Goldman indicated that several Board members would not be attending. At the start of the meeting I recall Marco welcoming Manahan and I to the fold and after about twenty minutes, he could no longer take part in the conference call. Manahan shared his COO report that consisted of outlining the cash flow situation and discussion about enrollment numbers. Part of Manahan's report had been prepared by EdOps, a company hired by Goldman to manage school finances. In addition to speaking about the operational side of the school, he also spoke about the Early Childhood Education score of 0/4, following the surprise visit by a representative from the DC Charter Board. Manahan discussed the ANET standardized testing process and shared initial concerns about classroom management challenges faced by many of the new arts guest teachers.

I then shared the Academic Plan for improvement after initial observation and examination of strengths and limitations that were affecting the quality of teaching and learning at WEDJ. In the meeting, I detailed the strengths of the program: the quality of the teaching staff, the passion and commitment of the support staff, the Arts partnerships and updates on the School Support Team (Special Education, English Language Learning, Counseling).

I shared a detailed analysis of the academic challenges with solutions and goals for moving forward. The Academic Plan outlined the following poor performance factors and planned changes for school improvement:

## CHAPTER 9

### 1. *Lack of Curriculum Alignment and Specific Academic Direction*

*Solution:* Replacing *America's Choice* program with more updated curriculum resources, textbooks and developing in-house learning materials. No longer can a single program be relied on or assumed to be all that students need to succeed.

### 2. *Lack of Re-teaching and Differentiated Practice to Ensure Mastery*

*Solution:* The focus has to shift from what is taught to what is learned. Students learn in different ways and at different paces. What is critically important is that they learn. Rather than teach 150 lessons of which a small portion of students would master, it is best to teach fewer more difficult units of study to ensure that concepts stick. In this way there is time for re-teaching and more importantly teaching to the learning style of each student, so they all can master the concept and feel confident about moving forward...

### 3. *Lack of Instructional Time for Teaching English Language Arts and Math*

*Solution:* The amount of time for math has been increased by 30–60 minutes per day in the Grades 2 to 8 schedule and we added an additional 30 minutes for language arts. (90 minutes per day)

### 4. *Lack of Meaningful Benchmark Data*

*Solution:* WEDJ has invested in ANET. Their turn around time for providing testing results is ideal (48 hours). They support teachers to learn how to examine data and act on it. In this way re-teaching can be very targeted to students' individual needs...

### 5. *Need for a Coordinated System for Accessing, Sharing and Acting on Data*

*Solution:* Establishing a systematic way for collecting and backing up data and providing mastery profiles for accessing all student data.

### 6. *Lack of Regular Teacher Observation, Feedback and Support*

*Solution:* The criteria that ground the assessment tools (Charlotte Danielson's work) are sound, but the implementation needs to be more strategic, systematic and accountable. Teachers will be assessed three times a year. I met with each teacher in August 2012 and gathered specific goals for the course of the 2012–2013 school year.

([http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/FFY.2013.Con\\_App\\_Program.Evaluation\\_WEDJ.PCS\\_09-14-13.pdf](http://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/FFY.2013.Con_App_Program.Evaluation_WEDJ.PCS_09-14-13.pdf))

I was not able to find much evidence that the WEDJ Board or administration had been working on a formalized School Improvement Plan, Strategic Plan or efforts to gather survey data from parents, students or teachers. I was not left with any files from the former administration with respect to formal staff performance reviews. In my report to the Board, I also shared information about new signature programming (character and health education curriculum, a research and technology course, a peer teaching course, chess instruction, and everyday violin classes for grades K-2), as well as the following additional initiatives to improve academic achievement:

#### INITIAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES COMMUNICATIONS

1. Initiation of WEDJ Commitment – an agreement for how we (students, staff and parents) operate in a positive and supportive manner. Minimizing discipline problems will increase time on task.
2. Establishment of the WEDJ ‘Essential Skills and Understandings’ that target rigorous and progressive Common Core standards in English (ELA) and Math for each grade
3. Students taught by specialists in science and social studies from grades 3 to 8
4. Team Teaching programs where master teachers in math and English (ELA) support the Kindergarten, grade 1 and 2 programming (with weekly planning time for weekly teaching time together)
5. A culture of professionalism (encouraging teachers to do graduate programming, apply for National Board certification, present/organize conference)
6. Specific PD and assessment process for TA’s and substitute teachers
7. Parent Education Workshops in consultation with the PTA

After presenting this comprehensive list of actions and solutions, I was surprised that no one on the Board of Trustees posed questions or added commentary. While I was looking forward to connecting with each Board member, I never met Mr. Rivers, Mr. Key, Ms. Smith or Ms. Wallace. Mr. Goldman informed me after the meeting that these Board members were in the process of resigning. I simply summarized my report so the remaining Board members could finish their meeting on time. Goldman was quite insistent that we complete Board meeting, within the sixty-minute allotted time frame.

By the end of September, I had one meeting with my direct supervisor, John Goldman, who in addition to being in the Executive Director role at WEDJ, had also taken on the responsibility as the Executive Director of IDEA, a local DC charter high school. At this meeting, he indicated that the WEDJ staff had shared with him how much they enjoyed the professional development weeks and were inspired by the new leadership at the school. I was informed at this time that my colleague, John Manahan, would be taking over as the Executive Director, once Goldman had officially retired from WEDJ. He did mention that he wanted to continue to be involved in the role as Board Chair at WEDJ. I recall that Ms. Hales expressed reservation about Goldman becoming Chair of the Board, however, it made sense to me, as he seemed to know the history and rationale for all the school changes better than anyone else. I rarely had face-to-face contact with Mr. Goldman; I communicated mostly through e-mail and assumed that he was satisfied with the progress the school was making at the start. There was much work that went into setting the table for school improvement at the William E. Doar, Jr., Public Charter School for the Performing Arts. I assumed the ‘hands off’ approach by Mr. Goldman was his way of letting us learn and lead – without interfering in the operations of the school. We did, however, have ambitious initiatives that would require more collaboration, patience, flexibility and as it turns out, time to shift the academic culture.