



BOARD MEETING NOTES: Zoom Video Call

Wednesday, Aug 26, 2020

Apologies for absence: [Everybody present]

1. Welcome (Bishop Ed Stephens, Jr.)

Bishop Stephens referred to the academic break during the summer but shared that everyone is ready to press forward with the new school year. He thanked everyone for their commitment to STAR Academy and for their time this morning.

2. Academic / Operations Report (Mr. James Johnson / Dr. Ed Stephens III)

Dr. Stephens thanked the Board for all their support and energy that they continually pour into STAR Academy.

2.1 Introduce Dean of Students: Mrs. Renata McNeal

Dr. Stephens introduced Mrs. Renata McNeal to the Board as STAR's new "Dean of Academics". This position is similar to the traditional Assistant Principal and, amongst other responsibilities, is the staff member who would step up to run the day-to-day operations in the event that STAR's CAO is unable to.

Mrs. McNeal thanked everyone for the warm welcome and communicated that it has been amazing to work alongside Mr. Johnson for the past year, specifically mentioning his love for the STAR scholars and how he is "all in." Dr. Stephens concurred and thanked Mr. Johnson for all he does for the school.

2.2 What we've accomplished

2.2.1 Fully Virtual

Dr. Stephens explained that STAR is now fully virtual. School starts on Monday and he praised the staff and leadership for working around the clock to make sure we can hit the ground running.

2.2.2 Secured digital devices

We have managed to secure 315 digital devices for the students: 115 tablets for Lower Elementary and 200 for Upper Elementary. (Parents sign a waiver, saying they are responsible for the devices.) For every 3 tablets that were purchased, STAR will be reimbursed through the CARES act.

We also have new laptops for our teachers to ensure they have no technical challenges.

The Board may be aware that SCS is in the process of acquiring headsets. STAR has decided to stick to tablets and laptops for now. We know this works having gone through the online activities throughout the summer, but a headset may be introduced to specific students if it is deemed beneficial.

2.2.3 Teacher retention

Without COVID, this number would be 95%. Currently, we're at 75%. Dr. Stephens emphasized that this number is high considering the current climate, and we're thrilled to welcome back some great teachers, as well as hire some new ones.

2.2.4 Enrollment

Dr. Stephens reminded the Board that STAR set an aggressive goal of 350 students for this school year – an 11% increase on last year's 315. Currently, we're at 330 students. This is more than necessary to meet our budget projections (based on last year's 315 students), and we're still aiming to hit that target of 350.

2.2.5 Leveraged Leadership

Dr. Stephens & Mr. Johnson have been able to build a leadership team for the school that will encompass every aspect of the operational and academic portions of the school.

- Mrs. McNeal – Dean of Academics
- Ms. Deloach – Dean of Special Populations
- Ms. Jones – Dean of Students and Family Engagement Services

2.2.6 Continuous Learning Plan (CLP)

Mr. Johnson explained that every educational institution in the State was required to submit a plan for virtual learning. STAR Academy's CLP was approved within one week of submission with no edits needing to be made. Dr. Stephens commented on what a big deal this is – to have no adjustments required – and commended Mr. Johnson for making that happen.

2.3 Projects in the pipeline

Dr. Stephens highlighted some of the projects currently going on at STAR Academy.

2.3.1 Campus Rehab

We're in the middle of fixing the building up, for example smart lights, smart everything, new restrooms...

2.3.2 Safety Zone Construction

This is a stretch on James Rd, 100ft east and west of the school, where a reduced speed will be mandated with flashing lights during school drop-off and pick-up.

Dr. Stephens shared that we're working with Fisher Arnold on this project, who have been great to work with.

2.3.3 Middle School

Right now, we're K-6th Grade. Previously, we'd said that we want 2 years' worth of data before applying to become a Middle School. This has been delayed a year due to COVID, however the conversation is very active.

2.3.4 Land Acquisition

The property east of STAR Academy on James Rd has been a no-go up until now. However, there may be some interest from the owners to sell the land. This conversation is on-going.

2.3.5 Learning Center

Dr. Carson at The Dream Center is starting a Learning Center where working parents can drop their student(s) off for the "virtual" school day. They are waiting on grant approval right now, but they are willing to take 5-10 students before that happens to help those families who are really stuck. Dr. Stephens expressed gratitude for Dr. Carson and his compassion for the students in the city.

2.3.6 STAR Food Authority

It became apparent that students did not enjoy the food they were being served during the school day, so STAR applied to become a Food Authority. This could open many doors, including the opportunity to become a site for food distribution. The initial paperwork has been submitted, and it will be a 6-8 month process. Dr. Stephens thanked Mr. Middleton for running with this project.

2.4 Where we're headed

STAR's aim is for students to leave the Academy and be globally competitive, so we want to provide opportunities to build on scholars' other areas of interest. But what does it look like to build an inclusive curriculum?

2.4.1 Data / Machine Learning / AI

Mr. Johnson explained that this is something we have already introduced where students learn how to build apps and websites. It was very well received and we're looking at how we can expand that to start in an earlier grade.

2.4.2 Financial Literacy Inclusion

Current math simulations include real-world situations where students can apply what they're learning. Mr. Johnson expressed a desire to make the math curriculum even more authentic by including tutorials on subjects such as savings and budgeting, etc.

2.4.3 Executive Team Expansion (CPO + CMO)

Dr. Stephens shared that the future is bright for STAR with many opportunities for growth. We may adopt another school. We may expand to become a Middle School. We want to start preparing for what that looks like from a leadership perspective.

- Chief People Officer – someone who owns Human Resources.
- Chief Media Officer – an on-site team member rather than a third-party organization.

2.4.4 Expansion of the Arts

We're thinking through a robust strategy to increase the arts in the learning process, for example acting, music, golf, etc.

2.5 How you can help

- *Leverage your network.*
Giving is relational and emotional. Introductions are key.
- *Volunteer time and intellectual capital.*
For example, reading on career day, being present in a virtual town hall, a monthly walk through.
- *Become a STAR ambassador.*
Share and sell the STAR narrative and then pass the ball to the Executive Leadership Team.
- *Invest forward.*
We have increased the goal to \$100k. We have some very generous people supporting us who want to do more, so we're doubling this year's goal from last year.

Basically, whatever you're already doing, just keep on doing it!

Bishop thanked Mrs. McNeal for her stellar work so far and Executive leadership team for their hard work.

3. Financial Report (Mr. David Middleton)

3.1 Building acquisition

STAR Academy is continuing the process of acquiring 3240 James. Mr. Middleton submitted the application to Citizens Bank – this should be completed within the next few weeks. The bank wants to wait for the school to start back before closing on the loan.

3.2 Introduce CPA: Charell Speight, Luther Speight Company

Mr. Middleton introduced Ms. Speight who has been working with STAR since 2004 to make sure we stay compliant with the State and with SCS.

Ms. Speight thanked everyone for including her in today's meeting and expressed gratitude for the years she's been able to support the Finance Team at STAR.

Dr. Stephens and Mr. Middleton thanked Ms. Speight for all of her continuing help and support.

3.3 Budget approval

This year's budget is based on 315 students (last year's enrollment). Any additional students above that number will result in additional income.

Mr. Middleton and Dr. Stephens walked the Board through the budget document. If anyone has any questions about the budget, or about the flow of finances in general, please reach out to Mr. Middleton and he'll be glad to help.

Dr. Tharp approved the motion.

Dr. Carson seconded the motion.
The budget was approved and carried.

4. Closing Remarks (Bishop Ed Stephens, Jr.)

Bishop thanked everyone for their time and the meeting was adjourned.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 30th 2020, 7am