



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

9:00 am – 11:00 am

Board Members Present: Bob Buesing, Larry Pintacuda, Ted Granger, Kyle Baltuch, Allison Davis, Christian Winterbottom, Rebecca Kapusta, Gege Kreischer, Christopher Card, Claudia Davant

**The number of board members present met the requirements for a quorum.

Staff Members Present: Erin Smeltzer, Lauren Wofford, Denise Bishop, Lori Stegmeyer, Melissa Clements, Bill Kirchhoff, Jessica Cherry

Board Chair Bob Buesing welcomed those in attendance and called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. He asked Larry Pintacuda to request a motion to approve the minutes from January.

Larry Pintacuda motioned to approve the minutes from the January 24, 2024, board meeting. Christian Winterbottom seconded the motion. There were no corrections or improvements and unanimous approval was given by the board.

Mission Minute - Larry stated that there is a lot of work involved in planning and executing Children's Week, and the Forum staff, under Erin's leadership, pulled off a magnificent week of events, including Children's Day. Bob noted the same sentiment.

Chair's Report – Bob shared that he continues to serve on a foundation board that is interested in early learning. He is pleased to announce that Hillsborough County has been able to restart the pre-covid group of foundations that previously expressed interest. The purpose for convening is to get the foundations on the same page regarding supporting early learning improvement. Obviously, the Children's Forum programs get a lot of play in those settings. He continues to see movement and wants the Forum staff to know that programs like T.E.A.C.H. will be part of the effort at the local level to help schools in the future.

Staff Handbook Update – Erin stated the biggest intent of updating the Forum's Staff Handbook is:

- 1) Create a leave policy that is comparable and competitive with the State of Florida,

2) Create an organizational culture that is family-friendly, allowing parents to be home with their babies and providing a leave policy that reinforces that, and

3) Develop a remote work policy that works well for both the employee and the employer.

Jessica Cherry, Senior Human Resources Director, stated the major changes in the update are the Remote work policy, PTO accrual and Payout, and FMLA-paid leave.

PTO - Staff will accrue 260 hours per year. Staff will be able to use it any time throughout the year if it is approved by their immediate supervisor. It will be considered “use-it-or-lose-it” PTO for the period of January 1 to December 31. There will be no rollover or payout. The PTO that is in the account at the time of this change will be moved to an account called “Legacy PTO” and will be frozen, at the employee’s rate of pay when the legacy account was debited, until the staff member leaves employment. At that time, they will receive the payout.

FMLA – Staff will be given 9 weeks (360 hours) of paid leave for FMLA qualifying events. Erin noted that if there is any FMLA leave left over upon returning to work, the staff member would be able to use it if the use is for the same, or relating to, the same condition as it was approved.

Jessica noted that the Forum can’t compete with most businesses in terms of salary compensation but can offer employees a family-friendly environment where the Forum treats you like they appreciate you. This is a helpful recruiting tool.

Bob asked if once approved, would it go into the billing cycle and Lauren confirmed that it would.

Jessica shared that these were the major changes. The only other thing added to the handbook was the Forum’s ability to approve administrative leave for emergencies and office closures. This has already been put into place, but it was not written in the handbook. Jessica thanked Bob’s wife Karen for working on this with her.

Christian Winterbottom – moved; Rebecca Kapusta – seconded.

Ted entered a point of clarification to the discussion asking if the Forum is approving this as a final or if there will be an opportunity to suggest minor edits. Erin said suggestions will be accepted and stated that these are the new policies that would like to put into effect July 1, 2024, as part of the total document. Erin stated for the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Forum may dig a little deeper and have revisions for the following July.

Bob asked if there were any further discussions on policy changes. None were noted. Bob asked for all in favor to aye. All agreed and the motion passed.

Jessica Cherry left the meeting.

Finance Committee Report: Lauren shared the financials for July 1, 2023 – February 29, 2024, by showing the financial reports on the screen with a thorough review. Year-to-Date February revenue is just over \$18 million. Expenses are \$17,972 million. There is a funding-hold as of February for the T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship funding. Not much more is being paid out of the

scholarship funds for T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships funding, but still billing for operations. Help Me Grow still has a significant amount available for expenditure due to the late contract award from DEL. An uptick should be seen in spending towards the end of this year. The unexpended revenue is shown at a total of \$108,000 right now.

Erin discussed the seasonal payment cycle for T.E.A.C.H which can cause an ebb and flow on revenue. She also shared that T.E.A.C.H. has 700 scholars on the waiting list and that's part of the data used with the legislature this year to be able to advocate for an increase in funding for the program.

Chris stated that the popularity of the program is incredible and congratulated the team. Ted asked how many of those 700 applicants will be accommodated with the appropriation, and Lori said all of them should be able to be accommodated.

Erin shared that the other thing that is being worked on right now is enrolling ELC staff in T.E.A.C.H., but the continuing contract does not allow for that. Lori's team is pulling data, and working with the Chancellor to see if the contract can sustain enrollment of the ELC staff too. The overlapping and cross training that is happening between the INCENTIVE\$ program and T.E.A.C.H. is helpful, especially in terms of outreach. The \$17 million will likely be spent quickly, based on this year's program demands.

Lauren moved on to the balance sheet. As of February, assets are showing \$5.2 million. Because of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, Accounts Receivable are high due to the number of scholarship payments made. Cash flow was received. Ratios were reviewed. All are in the desired range.

Bob asked Allison if she wanted to add anything, and Allison said she was all set.

Budget Projection for next year:

Erin shared that last year it was talked about trying to get the budget projections well before the start of the fiscal year. The Governor has not yet signed the budget, and this is the last meeting before the next fiscal year. Erin stated that this was a first look at what the budget predictions are for next year that we would like to review for a preliminary approval. A supplemental board meeting will be scheduled before the fiscal year for a formal vote.

Bob shared that the Board should know that Erin was asked if this will affect staffing or office space for next year.

Erin said there are places where decreases are being seen. Cross training is being done, especially in the Workforce Initiatives because those staff can be moved around based on the caseload. A lot of the programs showing decreases will shift staff over to the T.E.A.C.H. The other is the Trust Scholarship and Registry. The Children's Trust (TCT) in Miami is sunsetting that program and merging it with the ELC program. The Forum was encouraged to apply for a new contract, but the team decided to opt out. The leadership decided to invest time in other areas. The team is shifting all the staff from those funds into the new T.E.A.C.H. funding except for two employees. A project from JP Morgan is still awaiting approval. There is confidence about receiving funding and the two directors from TCT will move to the coaching model with JP Morgan.

The Iowa SaaS contract for a new IT (Software as a Service (SaaS) project has been executed and started. Funding was increased for evaluation services comprised of Gold Seal and the FCCPC approval process, so the Forum was able to build that team with the current staff. If JP Morgan funding is awarded, it is confident that everyone will have a job. Only one new staff member will need to be hired because there is a shift from funding that is going away to funding that is coming in. The other Miami staff member will join the front desk team. She has previous administrative support experience and should succeed in that position. Erin said there shouldn't need to be a significant increase in staffing. Eventually, more support in the HR and Fiscal departments may be needed, but it will be monitored closely. Again, none of those decisions for extra staff will be made until final numbers are given closer to May and June.

Bob asked for a motion to approve the financials as presented today.

Ted –moved. Rebecca – seconded.

Bob asked if there were any questions or comments and there were none. All in favor and motion was approved.

Forum Updates:

Erin shared that she wanted to start with our Partnerships. It was noted that there was a fantastic legislative session. \$4.5M in funding to Help Me Grow was sustained, and T.E.A.C.H. was increased by \$7M. It was restated that having those data numbers was incredibly helpful. Erin said that for the advocacy efforts, Claudia was present too to ensure the right steps were taken. The Forum in general and programs more specifically are very well-received by the legislature. They count on us for ECE content and data. Notes to take away from the session is early learning is a hot topic. More bills are present now than ever before. Erin dropped a document in the Chat for the meeting that is an overview of all the Bills, where they landed, whether they were amended, just in case there was a desire to see where things landed.

Partnership Update: Erin mentioned JP Morgan briefly earlier in the meeting, but expanded the discussion to share that they asked the Forum to partner with Teaching Strategies to submit a grant for \$500,000 that will function similar to what T.E.A.C.H. does, but it would be for achieving the Teaching Strategies CDA and then attaching it to a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship for a National CDA. The Forum's team would play a couple of distinct roles, administration, coaching, and outreach activities in partnership with the ELC. There are five different regions that volunteered to be early adopters of this project. The two staff from the Miami Trust contracts that are ending would be responsible for portfolio coaching and any other coaching demands that emerge from the students in the program. Lori's WI team would ensure they have the career counseling they need to progress to T.E.A.C.H. once they finish their 120 hours. Many emails have been received from JP Morgan and regional partners saying there is still interest in the project. The submission portal and data system to process the proposal are down right now but they are working to finalize it. Melissa Clements shared that they have said it should be up by the end of this month. Erin clarified that it is an extension of T.E.A.C.H. but it must go outside of T.E.A.C.H. because Teaching Strategies' CDA isn't approved for the FCCPC list yet.

Connecting the program with the national CDA is happening to make sure it meets the state's staff credential requirements.

Erin shared that the work in Iowa is like the SaaS contract with Arkansas; however, Iowa is more focused on INCENTIVE\$ while Arkansas is more focused on T.E.A.C.H. This gives the ability to mirror the current system and pilot it with other states. While at the national conference two weeks ago, there was interest from Tennessee and North Carolina as well.

Erin said that Melissa's team has added quite a bit of work as well.

Melissa shared that her team is doing quite a bit of LENA Coaching. They will conduct coaching in 235 classrooms this year. They have about 110 classrooms for next year. They are also doing MMCI training. Finally, they will probably complete about 4300 assessments this year. Melissa said "We are quite busy, but it has been great to have new revenue sources with the coaching. Our team really loves the coaching, and they are seeing a lot of positive outcomes for educators with that and LENA and ELCs seem to be happy with our team."

Erin stated that there is also a review of the mission and vision statements. One of the spaces is that of trying to position the Forum both in the state and nationally is answering the call to whatever is needed in the early childhood education space.. Another contract has been awarded that was applied for alongside Florida Afterschool. It is for Broward County and entails providing specific kinds of training courses for their community. Erin shared that there is effort to secure these small projects that don't take massive amounts of work, but really incorporate beautifully with the current scope. Denise shared that a federal grant on the horizon may be interested in Infant and Toddler services. We were approached by the Ounce of Prevention requesting that we partner on a proposal. The Ounce of Prevention had approached requesting a partner on a proposal. The RFP hasn't been released yet but there have been some preliminary discussions with Jennifer Ohlsen about it. They have stated that the content knowledge in the Early Education workforce would be invaluable to the proposal. They've got some research support in their organization, and it could come up with a pretty good marriage with that. Once that is released, there will be further partnership discussions. There is a meeting on the books to collaborate. In terms of other research work, there is pursuit of the program evaluation side of the research arm and focusing on community needs assessments and regional workforce studies.

Building Update:

Denise provided an update on the building sharing that we have begun to move in. Staff are excited. It is a safe, comfortable environment. All the desks have been ordered and should be delivered next week. Lili has been amazing at coordinating that part of the process. The company that was ordered from is going to assemble the furniture, which will expedite the process and get staff more permanently into their workspaces. Quite a few staff are coming in on a hybrid basis (2-3 days per week) and a few staff who are on site full-time. A couple of things that are being worked on:

1. There is an issue with the HVAC system regarding temperature variability across zones. Denise has spoken to the building superintendent and has an HVAC tech coming to the

building today. It was proactive in getting temperatures by zone and then showing them the variability. They are responding to that approach.

2. Bill has been working on the security SONITROL system through REDWIRE. There is one employee who is dependent on use of the elevator, and trying to make sure that fobs will work for that main entrance on a consistent basis. We are getting a metal key for her so she can enter through the door off the elevator on the second floor while we are working on security and fobs. We are excited to see staff coming together again.

Gege added that she is very pleased with the work the Forum is doing with T.E.A.C.H. in the education world she works in because of the turnover they have seen after Covid. It is critical to get them back up and running and educated. "I don't know that T.E.A.C.H. is as connected to the Forum's work in how the educators perceive it and those are the people that we want to grow as advocates. I love where it is going. I agree with Christian that filling in "gaps" is maybe not the right phrase and perhaps we want to focus on remediation of problems. I love the programs research and policy, but we have an opportunity with our T.E.A.C.H. community to morph them into advocates. That would be a focus in your strategic planning that would really serve the state well."

Bob shared his elevator speech. "We put the quality in quality early learning." He added that he then shares the Forum "provides scholarships for teachers and connects with parents. But, he said, his headline is always "we put the quality in quality early learning."

Bob moved to the Closed Executive Session, so staff left the meeting. In closing, he said "For Erin and staff, thank you so much for what you do. We remain totally impressed. All we ask is that you keep doing it."

Meeting concluded at 3:54 p.m.

Closed Executive Session.