**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**Minutes of March 25, 2020 Meeting**

**Location:** Meeting held via video-conferencing in accordance with the emergency regulations in effect adapting Open Meetings Law under Covid environment.

**Present:**

Ellen Eagen, Founder & President

Stephen Kimatian, Secretary/Treasurer

Pastor Willie K Mitchell, Trustee

Karen McMahon, Trustee

Victoria Giarratano, Trustee

Beth Gavenda, CFO/Human Resources

Don Miller, Executive Director

Fran Coudriet, Administrator

Jana Rogers, Head of Academics

Keil White, Director of Facilities

Ta’Quell Morris, Head of Community and Culture

Nakisha Graves, Student Culture

Fahtima Manuel, Student Assistant

Morgan Boerman, Teacher

Omar Gonzales, Teacher

Samantha Vernold, Teacher

Teresa Greene, Teacher

Jeff Clark, Teacher

Dominique Elizabeth, Community Member

**1.** **WELCOME**

OnTECH Trustee, Steve Kimatian, serving as chairperson, opened the meeting and welcomed the staff and all attendees. He stated that a quorum was present for the conduct of business.

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The chairperson asked for approval of the prior month’s meeting minutes of February 24, 2020. He asked whether there were any additions, corrections or modifications. There being none, the minutes were accepted as presented. There were also Special Meeting minutes of the Board of Trustees which were needed as a result of the Onondaga County Executive order to close all county schools effective 4 pm on March 16, 2020. The chairperson asked for a motion for approval. Trustee Mitchell moved for approval of the Special Meeting Minutes and the motion was seconded by Trustee McMahon. The chairperson asked for discussion. Trustee Eagen pointed out that OnTECH was not given a choice on whether to close or not, rather the directive was mandated by the county executive and supported by the governor.

**3. REPORT OF FOUNDER**

Given the quarantine requirements of the Coronavirus with the stay-at-home in place, the chairperson asked the Founder to present an update.

The Founder said that with the Coronavirus issue we have entered a new environment and have to do our best to adjust to it. Obviously this means that we need to find ways to teach effectively online. She referenced the Special Meeting of the Trustees on March 16, 2020 in response to the order of the County Executive and the Governor that required schools to operate online even if they thought they could do otherwise. She said that the directive was that schools would discontinue on-site teaching effective 4:00 PM that day. She said it is important for all staff to work within this environment. There were many uncertainties. One is the extent of the stay in place order. At this point it was stated to continue through March 31, 2020 and probably at least to April 14, 2020 and perhaps longer. Another important consideration is the extent to which school funding will be continued or altered in any way. There have been no assurances to this date that charter schools will continue to be funded in the same way they have been. The Founder states that she needed the support of all staff to continue providing and supporting instruction. If individuals did not want to continue under these circumstances, then it would be their decision and it would require them to be furloughed during the interim. Otherwise, assignments would be given and the school would operate with its online plan. She stressed that this was an open meeting and was glad to see so many of the teachers, staff and community participating.

The Founder stated there were also several conversations with the authorizer with respect to the closing, one fact brought out being that the closing days would not count against the 180 day State required minimum school days. A waiver may be requested. She also reported that there was, to date, no assurance of continuity of funding under these circumstances.

The Founder further reported that the Authorizer requested that each school present a plan for continuing education while the stay-in-place order was in effect. She said that a plan had been developed designated OnTECH 2.0. She then presented the plan to the Trustees explaining that there were several components to it, including classroom work, online work, research work and written assignments to be handed in at specified times. Coupled with this was a grading system and a procedure for mentoring. She suggested that the plan had just been in place the last two weeks and that it would be experientially refined as needed.

**4. REPORT ON BLENDED REMOTE LEARNING PLATFORM AT ONTECH**

1. **The Academic Program**

The chairperson asked the Founder to give further information on the learning platform for the students. She stated with a caveat that the plan was devised quickly and had many facets. Continuing evaluations would be done to increase its effectiveness. In the online world, students enter the class through Google Classroom. They work on a DIN which is tethered to the Regents examinations. Students are also asked to do a complete independent research project that would culminate in a written paper. Another component is that each student has an adult mentor. Mentors also communicate with families.

Executive Director, Don Miller, said the online platform is from the same software that is currently used in the classroom. One of the main initial challenges was to make sure that every student student is “in” the right classroom. PowerSchool software would be a basic tool used for attendance and recording of grades and for comments relating to each student. The Founder stated that it was essential to gather data that would show the progress made by the students. The role of the teacher relates to the students as well as the parents. Should students not show up or their work was not as expected, calls would be made to parents. She said she was very proud of two elements of the OnTECH program: a Mentor Program and a PBL piece: both elements supported the key design elements of the school.

Jana Rogers, Head of Academics, spoke about the challenges of distance or online learning. She said she had several years of experience of online instruction and one of the take-aways is that high school students generally are challenged to learn in an online environment. There is an element of independence that they face without the kind of direction they would receive in a school environment. Knowing this, the program needs to be very discretely defined for the students and presented in incremental steps where they can see the growth and build on the past work. They do best when there is a tangible artifact integral to the project, such as a video, Podcast, Infographic which then can be incorporated into research, a written document or a final presentation. Feedback to the student is the final part of the loop. Teacher Morgan Boerman is working on making this a part of every student’s learning plan. The Founder stated that it is important for PBL to be incorporated into the teaching plan as that is a key design element of OnTECH. She also said that the Advisory Program was another key design element and that has now transitioned to the whole mentor relationship. She pointed out that because teachers and staff had established relationships with the students, it would enable effective communication within the online universe. She also noted that because our students had their own computer devices and were already using google classrooms in the building, the transition was relatively easier for our students.

**B. Community/ Culture Platform**

The chairperson then called upon Ta’Quell Morris to speak about the community and cultural aspects of the online instruction. Mr. Morris explained that the mission of the deans, advisors and support staff was to insure that every student received the help needed to make him or her successful in the online environment. He said that different support would be needed depending upon the student. Each student has a designated mentor and each mentor would be in touch with their mentees everyday. At the outset the very basics were necessary, such as making sure each student had a computer and that each student was placed in a “class” and attendance was taken. He said Fridays were the days when students celebrated each other and the week with a “community circle.” The Founder stated that the Advisor relationship in the Advisories starting and ending the day was a key design element and it was excellent that this concept was carried over to the online world of instruction. She said that a goal would be to find ways for students to help other students. She also said that many students seemed to adapt well to the online environment and some who were not good class participants in the physical building were actually more engaged in the online world.

Trustee McMahon said that from the reports it appears that the online instructional plan was well thought out, particularly given the short time frame. Pastor Mitchell said he wanted every student to know that the church pantry was full and they were ready to fill any need. Jana Rogers said there was also a diaper bank to which OnTECH had access.

**5. FINANCIAL/ TREASURER’S REPORT**

The chair then gave the Treasurer’s report. He said that revenues were under budget primarily because of lower enrollment, but that expenses were also under budget which yielded a net cash flow that was over budget. Beth Gavenda, the CFO, brought up the support programs that were being offered to small companies and not-for-profit’s as a result of the change in business economics by the Coronavirus. The Payroll Protection Program enabled small entities of under 500 employees to receive a forgivable loan that would maintain operations for eight weeks, provided the employees were offered continued employment. The Founder stated that the state had not committed to continue the school funding while the stay-in-place orders were in effect and that funding might be significantly reduced going forward. Given the COVID-19 circumstances and the unknowns, Trustee Kimatian said he thought it worthwhile to apply to the program. Trustee Mitchell made a motion to that effect that OnTECH should apply to the program, which was seconded by Trustee McMahon, and carried unanimously. Trustee Eagen then brought up the fact the Syracuse City School District had not paid the SPED invoice submitted over a month ago and that when the CFO requested payment the response was that the District was not paying vendors. After speaking with the Authorizer, Trustee Eagen said there was a procedure called State Aid Intercept wherein the money could be paid directly from the State and bypass the City district. A motion was made by Trustee Kimatian that OnTECH should pursue the State Intercept program for these monies if another request was made and payment was not forthcoming. The motion was seconded by Trustee Mitchell and carried unanimously.

**6. REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

The chair called upon Keil White, Director of Facilities, to give the facilities report. Mr. White stated that since students were not in the school building he had taken the opportunity to have the cleaning company do a thorough deep clean of the building, including antiviral cleaning given the Coronavirus crisis. He said the cleaning company personnel were trained in cleaning procedures to eliminate any viral contamination. Given the fact that there would not be students in the school and daily cleaning would not be necessary, he said he gave the cleaning company notice that their services would be suspended until the students returned. He further reported that 118 laptops had been given out so far, with each parent signing the agreement of responsibility. He said that enrollment was stable and that 24 students had enrolled for the next school year. The Trustees discussed the continuance of payroll for employees at this time of the Coronavirus. Since there were several unknowns on continuing revenue for the school, it was agreed that the payroll for current employees who performed their work should continue through April 30 2020. Trustee Kimatian moved to authorize this payment, which was seconded by Trustee Mitchell and carried unanimously.

**7. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the chairperson called for a motion to adjourn. A motion made by Trustee Mitchell and seconded by Trustee McMahon to adjourn the meeting was carried unanimously.