**BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING**

**Minutes of April 29, 2020 Meeting**

**Location:** Meeting held via Zoom teleconference at 5:30 pm.

**Present:**

Ellen Eagen, Founder & President

Stephen Kimatian, Secretary/Treasurer

Pastor Willie K Mitchell, Trustee

Karen McMahon, Trustee

Vicki Girratanno, Trustee

Bill Sanford, Trustee Emeritus

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

Theodore Jones, Student Culture

Nakisha Graves, Student Culture

Fahtima Manuel, Student Assistant

Morgan Boerman, Teacher

Omar Gonzales, Teacher

Samantha Vernold, Teacher

Earl Evans, Teacher

Teresa Greene, Teacher

Jeff Clark, Teacher

Jaime Raines, Teacher

Cristin Aboff, Teacher

Tailor Edmund, Teacher

Colleen Bland, Teacher

Nashawn Stenson, Student

Zaire White, Student

Dominique Elizabeth, Community Member

Jimmy Oliver, Deputy Commissioner, Syracuse Parks & Rec

**1.** **WELCOME**

OnTECH Trustee, Steve Kimatian, serving as chairperson, opened the meeting and welcomed the Trustees, staff and community members. 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 March 25, 2020. He asked whether there were any additions, corrections or modifications. There being none, the minutes were accepted as presented.

**3. REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The chairperson asked for the report of Executive Director, Don Miller. Mr. Miller reported that the transition from classroom to online was a challenging one, but the staff had handled it very well. He said the person who was the catalyst and driver of making the transition successful was the Founder, Ellen Eagen. He credited the Head of Academics, Jana Rogers and Head of Community and Culture, Ta’Quell Morris with maintaining the right balance with staff and students and Keil White with overseeing the physical facilities and also ensuring delivery of students of needed items such as laptops. He said that student engagement was good, from 40-60%, and many found that they were able to work online effectively, while there were still others who were more challenged.

**4. TREASURER’S REPORT**

The Treasurer then gave the finance report. Revenue to date was under budget by 6% while expenses were also under budget by 24%. The net operating income was 60 % over budget. The CFO, Beth Gavenda, explained that there were two outstanding invoices owed by the Syracuse City School District to OnTECH. She said that a verbal request and an email request had been made for payment but the monies to date had not been forthcoming. The Treasurer then stated that if payment was not promised by a certain date, steps would be taken to advise the authorizer to seek State Intercept Assistance.

**5. DIRECTOR OF FACILITIES REPORT**

The Chairperson called upon the Director of Facilities, Keil White, to give his report. Mr. White stated that the physical plant was in good shape. He said a submission had been made for a State Stimulus Grant for renovation of the Church in anticipation of it being needed for the incoming September class when the school population would outgrow the school building. He further reported that for next year there were 34 applicants for the 9th grade, 7 for the 10th grade and 2 for the 11th grade. Next week there was a scheduled virtual tour for students and parents. A Lottery was unnecessary as the school did not have more applicants than spaces as of April 1.

**6. FOUNDER’S REPORT**

Founder, Ellen Eagen, was then asked to give her report. She said that she had participated in several teleconferences discussing the COVID environment and what steps schools were taking to continue their educational instruction. She said that there were still many uncertainties with respect to the length of time that schools would be physically closed, what levels of funding were going to be provided and what additional directives would be given by the authorizer. Since the stay at home orders were going to expire on May 15, 2020 and she did not see the possibility of returning by then, she asked the Board for a resolution that would adopt whatever forthcoming Executive Orders required through June 30, 2020. Trustee McMahon made a motion for OnTECH to adopt such directives, which was seconded by Trustee Mitchell and passed unanimously by the Board.

The Founder stated there were also several conversations with the authorizers with respect to the closing, one fact brought out being that the closed days would be deducted from 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.

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

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 discussed the success of OnTECH 1.0 which had a PBL academic component, an attendance component where students report to Advisory, and a third component of doing Daily DINs in their classes. On an ongoing basis students meet with their mentors to insure their progress. Two students were in attendance at this Board meeting to show what they have been doing. Nashawn Stenson then presented his report on the impact of Ebola cases on Black and Spanish population using charts and infographics. Zaire White also presented his project using visual materials relating to the impact of the Ebola disease. Founder Eagen said that doing such projects as these two students had done were executing one of the key design elements of the school. Other elements of the program was for students to compose a five paragraph essay. The essay and presentations incorporated multiple subjects: math, science, history and English.

She then said OnTECH was iterating on this program and moving to OnTECH 2.0: Passport to the Future. She then showed an illustration that tracked the different components of the Passport. There were a series of assignments that each student had to complete on his or her own time that enabled them to get credit for that particular part of the Passport. The sum total of the assignments was intended to build student skills, earn college credits and help formulate careers, all toward making them lifelong learners. An important aspect was also to create technical literacy as well. She called upon math teacher Omar Gonzales to speak to that point. Founder Eagen stated that students were also expected to learn soft skills. She called upon living science teacher Morgan Boerman to address that point. She explained that soft skills were part of the “Thoughtful Thursdays” meetings with a focus toward creating a positive mindset. All these activities were tied to the Passport to the Future program.

**7. HEAD OF CULTURE AND COMMUNITY REPORT**

The chairperson then called on Ta’Quell Morris to report on culture and community. Mr. Morris said the school Advisories were very active places. He said students were shown videos from Mayor Walsh and Jimmy Oliver, as well as a video by Nakisha Graves. The Founder stated that Advisory questions were targeted toward the Passport to the Future program. In support of their individual work, students developed their own music mantras. Mr. Morris stated there are seven mentors who were in constant contact with students everyday. In addition, needs were provided to families with 14 deliveries of groceries. Mr. Morris pointed out as an example of mentor relationship, Jaime Raines calls the students every evening to hold them accountable. Mr. Morris meets with the mentors on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. Mentors also attend grading meetings. He emphasized that these communications demonstrated a way of caring for our students. On Fridays there are community circle meetings when the students get a chance to see each other. What is obvious, Mr. Morris said, is the students, even some who act up a bit and can create issues, show they miss getting together and interacting in school, with their friends and in many cases even with those who were not their friends. He singled out some students who completed their work online in ways more effective lythan when they were in school.

The Founder stated that the school is working on another program called Operation Gray Wolf which is premised on students helping students. In that sense she said they were working as a group, as a “wolf pack” taking care of each other.

Mr. Morris continued saying what we do is create community everyday. He credited Mr. Gonzalez for the work he has done on this with social media. Families are welcome to join the online classrooms, they can ask questions and they can also communicate on Facebook and Instagram. The school held a live Zoom dance party last Friday and it turned out to be a great success. Teachers and staff joined the students. Teacher raised $400 toward a worthy cause. Every Sunday Mr. Morris makes a video to reflect the week. Parent participation is 37%. The Founder stated that she interacts with many other schools across the country and OnTECH is one of the few who have been able to create a very special relationship with students and family.

The Founder then explained that while OnTECH was doing an excellent job working with students during this stay-in-place period, the online environment was very challenging in keeping engagement with students. It was another reason why getting back into the classroom is so important.At that point, the discussion turned toward grading and Regent exams. The curve ball was that New York State students were going to be exempt from taking regents but the question is what are the metrics for getting the exemption. Mr. Miller said that though students are exempt from taking the regents, they must still meet certain performance criteria to meet the learning standards. The Founder said that this would be a consideration for the Board to adopt a procedure.

The Founder then brought up the need to consider continuing payment to staff while online. After discussion among the Board it was moved by Trustee McMahon that OnTECH continue to pay all employees through June 30, 2020 when we would expect to have more information on the status of revenue support. The motion was seconded by Trustee Mitchell and passed unanimously.

Lastly, the question of enrollment and building capacity was discussed. In bringing on additional students, it was important to consider the need to not only provide the classrooms and infrastructure, but also to be able to introduce those who are new into the curriculum in the most effective way. The right balance will ensure being able to address the unique needs of each individual student. Additional information will be gathered on this matter for further discussion.

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business the Trustees by motion to adjourn duly seconded and unanimously passed, concluded the meeting.