

## Baxter Academy for Technology and Science

### Board of Directors Meeting

5:30 to 7 p.m., Tuesday, August 11, 2015

54 York Street, Portland, Maine

Directors Present: Kelli Pryor, Allison Crean Davis, Peter Montano, Peter Morrison, Ruth Dean, Kim Gustafson, Christian Sparling

Guests present: Carl Stasio, Executive director; Michele LaForge, Head of School; Dan Amory, attorney; Jonathan Amory, teacher and curriculum architect

Agenda item
<p><b>I. Opening items</b></p> <p><b>Kelli Pryor, board chair, called the meeting to order at 5:40 p.m.</b></p> <p>A. Minutes</p> <p>Ruth Dean made a motion to accept the minutes as written from the July 14, 2015, Board meeting. Peter Montano seconded. All board members approved the minutes unanimously.</p>
<p><b>II. Finances</b></p> <p>A. Finances</p> <p>Peter Montano, board treasurer, reported that the annual financial audit will be performed starting August 24. For the second year,</p> <p>B. Business/operation transition</p> <p>Peter Montano updated the board that, per board vote of July 14, 2015, the school is moving toward a contract with a new Chief Financial Officer, who has state education funding expertise, to handle the accounting and financial reporting and who will work half-time for Baxter and half-time for another charter school.</p> <p>C. Tech fee</p> <p>Michele updated the board concerning the tech fee that is part of the board-approved budget for 2015-16. In designing Baxter's tech policies and associated fees, Michele and the staff have done research on the tech policies and fees from other local school districts. Baxter's emphasis on technology puts cutting-edge computers and software in the hands of students, both in the two computer labs and through the 1:1 laptops. The Lenovo Thinkpads that are issued to each student have more than \$11,000 worth of industry-standard</p>

software. Michele will be reporting back to the board with a recommendation for how Baxter's tech policies and fees should reflect the school's commitment to a sophisticated tech education for all its students.

### **Executive Session**

Due to time constraints for a guest, Kelli Pryor made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss facilities, citing the provisions in MRSA § 405(6). Ruth seconded. Board approved unanimously the motion to enter executive session.

AT 6:30 p.m., the Board exited Executive Session and resumed the meeting in the order of the agenda.

### **VI. Partnerships**

#### **A. Presentation of USM proposal**

The board discussed a proposal by the University of Southern Maine in which Baxter Academy would promptly agree to reopen its charter contract to change its name and governance structure and to relocate to the college campus, where it would become part of a proposed early college program there that would include a distinct humanities track and a boarding program for international students. Discussions between leadership at USM and Baxter culminated in an August meeting in which Baxter was represented by Executive Director Carl Stasio, Head of School Michele LaForge, Curriculum Architect and Teacher Jon Amory, Board Chair Kelli Pryor, Board Treasurer Peter Montano, and School attorney Dan Amory. A principle objective of Baxter's leadership was to explore how the proposed merger might be structured so that the school would remain agile, responsive, student-centered, and innovative, with a strong emphasis on teacher autonomy.

The board considered the effect of an accelerated decision, on the short time line required by USM, on Baxter's other strategic options. The board reviewed the proposal's risks and benefits to Baxter and its students, including the effect on Baxter's agility, ability to innovate, and teacher-driven curriculum. It also discussed how the Charter Commission might receive a request to reopen and renegotiate the charter contract as proposed by USM, including giving USM a substantial role in Baxter's governance. .

The board asked Michele LaForge and Jon Amory for their recommendations as educators. Jon said that though he has been in favor of pursuing a large-scale partnership with USM, he had concerns that Baxter would need an appropriate space on the college campus in Portland that could house the entire student body. High school students need an age-appropriate environment in which they can interact with one another and with their teachers, especially during Flex Friday project work, and the school would need a distinct hub. It was unclear whether USM would be able to find an appropriate dedicated space for Baxter on its Portland campus. Michele spoke about the proposed merger's focus on "early college." Many Baxter upper-class students take college courses, but Baxter was founded on the idea that kids don't have to wait to enter or graduate from college to learn skills they need to do real work. Much work

and scaffolding goes into Baxter’s integrated four-year curriculum that teaches the design process, project management and experimentation with failure in the context of real-world problem solving. USM’s proposed focus on having juniors and seniors enroll in “early college” courses appeared to be inconsistent with Baxter’s scaffolded curriculum. She spoke of how much Baxter’s leadership values their ongoing collaborations with USM and respects USM, and that they want to help USM as leaders there identify its needs. If Baxter can be part of USM’S future in other ways, it will be.

The board weighed the proposal, too, in light of the ongoing long-term strategic planning that is moving the school toward its future by exploring various sustainability models. Cost-effective space for the school to grow and working with strong local partnerships are key to Baxter’s future. But the board has strong reservations about entering into any obligations that limit the school’s agility and ability to innovate, or the autonomy of the school leaders.

Peter Montano made a motion that “based on the recommendation of our educators, I make a motion not to move forward with this particular proposal from USM to partner with them.” Allison Crean Davis seconded. The board approved the motion unanimously.

### **III. Human resources**

#### **A. Hiring**

Michele updated about hiring. The teaching faculty is in place for the coming year. Baxter will also be offering 12 fellowship opportunities to teach specialized electives.

The board also discussed the shape of outreach/development role that fits Baxter’s needs. As an institution with no alumni, development for the school requires a different kind of skill set than more usual development efforts. Strong communication skills and a deep understanding of what makes Baxter’s educational program unique and valuable are both essential for meeting Baxter’s start-up needs as it seeks to establish partnerships that will benefit its students.

### **IV. Transportation**

#### **A. Roll out with families**

Michele described the new bus routes that were designed around where enrolled students live: Topsham down 295 with stops in Freeport and Yarmouth; Lewiston through Gray via 95; and a loop through Westbrook, Windham, Gorham, Scarborough. Public options through Zoom from Biddeford and Saco and the Falmouth Flyer from Falmouth are both options for students. Student drivers can park in a public park-and-ride and be picked up by one of the contract buses. The bus plan was developed in part from a meeting in the spring with families.

## **V. Facilities**

### **A. Satellite space**

Carl spoke about 561 Congress. The lease is signed and Carl is working with the architect. Everything is moving well toward receiving an occupancy permit in time for school to start.

At 7:50 p.m., Kelli Pryor moved to adjourn the meeting. Peter Morrison seconded. The board voted unanimously to adjourn.

## **VII. Public Discussion**

### **A. Executive session**

1MRSA § 405(6) provides as follows:

Deliberations on only the following matters may be conducted during an executive session: \* \* \*

C. Discussion or consideration of the condition, acquisition or the use of real or personal property permanently attached to real property or interests therein or disposition of publicly held property or economic development only if premature disclosures of the information would prejudice the competitive or bargaining position of the body or agency; \* \* \*

**Next meeting: 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, September 8;** 54 York Street