



Our Mission: We disrupt generational poverty through a primary focus on children & young adults and the specific challenges they face at distinct stages of life.

**Northwestern University Settlement Association
Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee**

Executive Committee members present in person: Chair Amy O'Donnell, Robert Best, Sami ElSaden, Kathy Elliott, William Welnhofner.

Board of Directors members present: Virginia Burnstine, Tracey Rayner, Larry Weithers.

Board of Director members on Zoom: Lieke Hakkenberg, Sarah Shumway.

Staff present in person: CEO Carole Wood, CFOO Christian Feaman, Danielle LaPointe Chief of Staff, Rowe Principal Jason Smith, Assistant Secretary Alison Armstead.

Amy O'Donnell, Board of Directors Chair, called the meeting to order 12:03 PM.

Amy requested for the Assistant Secretary Alison Armstead to take the roll.

Public comment

No members of the public were in attendance.

Approval of Minutes

Robert Best made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Sami ElSaden seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote.

Board Chair's Report

The board chair expressed gratitude to the staff for the festive atmosphere and for providing lunch. Larry Withers, the newest board member, was introduced and welcomed to the meeting.

Updates on board training hours were provided, emphasizing the importance of compliance, especially during the ongoing charter renewal process. It was noted that two on-demand training sessions available: finance and board governance. It was recommended completing these trainings before the January 2 deadline. Additional free classes will be available later in the year, with specific schedules pending. The Open Meetings Act training was also highlighted as a requirement.

Amy thanked board members for their contributions to the Adopt-a-Family initiative, end-of-year giving, and Thanksgiving food distribution. It was noted that for 2024 contributions, donors might consider giving in the first or second quarter of 2025 to aid in bank compliance, unless end-of-year tax benefits were a priority.

CEO's Report

Carole Wood began the CEO report by informing board members of the holiday schedule with the settlement staff returning on January 2. The Family Cares program saw significant growth, serving 78 families, up 27 from the previous year. It expanded services to additional schools, including Wells Community High School and Noble Street College Prep. The food pantry had a busy season, distributing food to over 300 families for the Thanksgiving distribution event. The Adopt-a-Family Program served 205 families, with gifts distributed in the gym.

The public is welcome to attend the meeting.

Discrimination based on disability, race, creed, color, gender, national origin, religion, ancestry, marital status, or need for special education services is prohibited.



Enrollment included 167 in after-school programs and 29 in the teen program. Efforts were underway to increase teen program participation by embedding recruitment at Rowe for 7th and 8th graders. Challenges persisted in enrollment for ECE due to city and CPS certification requirements. Collaboration with Christopher House was initiated to address these issues. Planning for a new Head Start proposal for 2025 was underway.

The development team raised \$1.4 million as of November 30 and was on track to meet annual fundraising goals. Members discussed the difference between "funds secured" and "funds in the door," clarifying the distinction between pledges and actual received funds. Carole and Christian led the members in a discussion the financial impact of pending funds and the importance of accurate forecasting.

Rowe enrollment stood at 624 students. The school, began year-one planning for its Continuous Improvement Work Plan. An interim assistant principal was hired following the previous AP's departure.

Danielle LaPointe reviewed early childhood education data with the Chicago Benchmarking Collaborative, noting that students were generally within expectations for their age. Areas for improvement included emotional and cognitive development. Collaborative members shared best practices to address gaps and improve outcomes. Danielle informed members that the programs aimed to refine strategies based on CBC insights and was actively engaging with other members to elevate program effectiveness.

The discussion on charter renewal and related matters centered on the timing of the vote. The charter renewal vote by the CPS board was anticipated for January or February, though it could vary. Historical precedence suggests January, but the timing is uncertain. CPS introduced a new three-year budget projection template requiring details about debt service, marking a shift toward proactive financial oversight of charter schools.

Letters of support from aldermen, state representatives, senators, and community partners were gathered to strengthen the charter renewal case. Community impact was a focal point, requiring schools to demonstrate the positive or neutral effects of changes on families and neighborhoods.

Christian led the discussion on exploring budget scenarios for the upcoming year. Budget scenarios modeled for the next year assumed operations in two buildings with reduced enrollment (586 students, funded at 635). Operating costs and facility supplements were critical factors. Adjustments like reassigning grades between buildings could improve financial outcomes, but the school would need CPS approval for that.

The models aimed to remain conservative, not factoring in potential growth in CPS funding, and included flexibility for updates based on changes in assumptions. The finance team reviewed forecasts weekly to ensure accuracy and reliability. The document was described as a cash-based model with depreciation as the primary non-cash expense.

The school is in the process of charter renewal, and received visits from CPS to assess culture, climate, and special education (SPED) services. Carole continued to discuss the challenges of meeting special education minutes and the impact on charter renewal. Preliminary ISBE data shows Rowe's status shifted from "commendable" to "targeted," largely due to underperformance within the scholars with disabilities (DL) subgroup. Development of targeted strategies to improve subgroup performance is a priority.

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Financials

Christian began the review stating that revenue came in approximately \$400,000 higher than projected, primarily due to a higher allocation from CPS than initially anticipated when the budget was approved in June. Expenses were accurately forecasted and aligned with expectations, with spending trends solidifying for the school year in September and October.

On a trailing 12-month basis, the debt service coverage ratio stood above 2.0 in October. However, it was expected to decline in November and December, as cash typically burned during these months. The forecasted ratio remained well over 1.5 in the model. The financial outlook appeared strong, with higher-than-expected revenues and controlled expenses.

Questions/Other

The executive committee members decided not to enter a closed session, as there were no updates requiring discussion. Amy O'Donnell reminded members of the upcoming meetings. The next Board of Directors meeting was scheduled for January 27, 2025. The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for February 24. Members were encouraged to monitor their inboxes for updates due to ongoing activities.

Meeting adjourned 1:50 pm

Minutes submitted by Alison Armstead

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