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ASPIRA Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, April 2, 2025
Minutes

Directors Present:

Debra Cruz, V.C. Programs
Yolanda Frontany, V.C. Personnel
Rosemary Lugo-Gross, V.C. Development
David Rodriguez, Chairman
Cynthia Yuqui, Secretary
Edgar Lopez, President & CEO

Directors Absent:

Luis Diaz-Perez, Director, (Excused)
Luis Martinez, Director
Astrid Miranda, High School Rep
Marco Morales, Treasurer, (Excused)

1. Call to Order

Chairman Rodriguez called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm

2. Roll Call

Secretary Yuqui called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

3. Approval of the Agenda

**R. Lugo-Gross made a motion to approve the agenda. Seconded by C. Yuqui.
Motion prevailed unanimously.**

4. Public Comment:

No members of the public addressed the board

5. Approval of the minutes of January 8, 2025 Regular Meeting

D. Cruz made a motion to approve the the Minutes of the January 8, 2025 regular board meeting. Seconded by Y. Frontany. Motion prevailed.

6. Chairman Report

Chairman Rodriguez gave an update on the progress so far in ASPIRA's Transformational Journey. Together with CEO Lopez and ASPIRA leadership staff, work is centered around seven key objectives designed to position Aspira for long term sustainability, relevance and impact. Highlights include:

- Implementation of cost-saving strategies, improving operational efficiencies and continuing working with the finance department to reduce the deficit and strengthen internal systems.
- Making significant progress in updating financial and human resources platforms.
- Remain committed to developing innovative programs and strategic partnerships by researching funding best practices.
- Conduct a board of directors training in April focusing on building an effective committee structure within the board and strengthen the role of board committees.

7. CEO Report

CEO Lopez gave his report. Highlights include:

- Chicago Board of Education has once again delayed the vote for the charter school renewal. Originally scheduled for January, the vote is now scheduled for April 24th. The delaying of the renewal presents a significant challenge to our long-term planning and financial stability. Banks are hesitant to finance schools without a confirmed renewal or long-term commitment.
- Several board of education members have visited the school in the last few weeks, most of them charter school supporters.
- Cynthia Yuqui, the parent rep on ASPIRA's board of directors, and many of the parents from our schools have been advocating for ASPIRA at the Board of Education meetings and in Springfield. CEO Lopez will be one of the speakers at an INCs rally before the April 24th board meeting.
- ASPIRA Finance Department has overcome structural barriers that had caused a delay in monthly closings and hindered production of accurate financial documents. Vouchers are now consistently issued each month and collection efforts have been stepped up to collect receivables owed to the organization.
- Another priority is addressing the funding gap by developing fundraising strategies targeting foundations.
- Mr. Lopez has been meeting with legislators in Springfield and locally over the past six months asking for their support with capital funding for the proposed youth center at the property located on Central Ave. We own the property but it needs to be built out to house youth programs.
- Leslie-Foster Ramsey, the Director of Curriculum has taken on the role of Interim Head of Schools. She is a very experienced educator who worked at CPS before coming to Aspira. Cassandra Venable, the current registrar for Haugan Middle School, will be taking over Data and Compliance duties.

CEO Lopez asked the board to make sure they read the four documents provided in their folders outlining a strategic transformation to ensure Aspira's continued relevance in education, workforce development, and community services. The documents provided were:

- ***The ASPIRA Journey:*** describes the seven areas of focus and the transformational process
- ***The Aspira Vision:*** a fundraising strategy to be used to develop a proposal for programs, services and growth.
- ***ASPIRA Youth Envision Center Document:*** a document being presented to our legislators and other funders to request Capital Development funding, as well as additional funding for programs, services, and projects that enhance existing ASPIRA for our students and families.
- ***CPS Questionnaire-March 2025:*** developed in response to the Remediation Questions posed by CPS as part of the renewal application. The document describes how ASPIRA is correcting, reorganizing and improving transparency and accountability with CPS, with the goal of resolving, correcting and removing ASPIRA from remediation as soon as possible.

8. Finance Committee Report

CEO Lopez reported on behalf of Treasurer Morales who was absent. Highlights include:

- The current accounting system is being replaced to a more efficient system.
C. Yuqui asked when will the new system take effect.
Mr. Lopez stated that the change will take place on July 1st, however it may take another 6-8 weeks to complete the transition.
R. Lugo-Gross asked if there will be an increase in cost for a new system.
Mr. Lopez stated that he believes that there will be a slight increase, however he won't know for sure until they have finalized their selection. Mr. Lopez and accounting staff have been meeting with different vendors to determine which system will work best for the organization and will make a final decision.
- Financial statements provided in the board folders included Balance Sheet; Statement of Revenue and Expenses broken down by schools and administration; and Income & Expense report. There is currently a deficit of \$900,000.
Y. Frontany asked who are the private corporations and foundations that Aspira has been meeting with for support. She stated that maybe some board members have relationships with these individuals, and it may be useful for them to attend the meetings with Aspira staff.
Mr. Lopez asked the board to connect him with any contacts that they may have and to help facilitate a meeting with them.

- 26 employees have been laid off in the past year due to budget deficit. No teachers or school support has been laid off.
D. Cruz asked if this number included the staff at Haugan.
Mr. Lopez stated that the number did not include Haugan staff. Teachers at Haugan have bumping rights according to seniority. Mr. Lopez has provided the union with a list of teachers and is awaiting a response as to how many teachers with seniority plan on staying with ASPIRA.
- Mr. Lopez is waiting for CPS to inform ASPIRA what the amount they will be receiving to start working on next fiscal year's budget.
- Alderman Cardona has arranged for the ABF prom to be held at a hall in his ward for free. The only cost to ASPIRA is the cleaning fee.

9. Personnel Committee Report

Y. Frontany reported that the committee is comprised of herself as Chairperson, R. Lugo-Gross; D. Cruz, and C. Yuqui, as well as ASPIRA HR Representative Rachel Reid. The committee has met twice to review and update the ASPIRA Personnel Policy. They made several recommendations for changes and set a timeline for those changes to be reviewed and approved by ASPIRA staff, then sent back to the committee before being presented to the board of directors for final approval. The committee is currently waiting for the changes to be approved by staff.

Mr. Lopez stated that any time a document needs to be reviewed by staff pending approval, it can be sent to him.

Y. Frontany asked for volunteers to assist with the inventory at Haugan.

10. Closed Session

D. Cruz made a motion to enter closed session to consider the following subjects:

- The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors, specific volunteers, or legal counsel for ASPIRA. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1)**
- The selection of a person to fill a public office, or the discipline, performance or removal of the occupant of a public office. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(3)**

Seconded by C. Yuqui. Motion prevailed unanimously.

11. Return to Open Session

R. Lugo-Gross made a motion to return to open session. Seconded by D. Cruz. Motion prevailed unanimously.

12. Motion to Approve New Board Member

Chairman Rodriguez deferred the approval of the new member to next meeting.

13. Motion to Approve the Fiscal Agreement for Aspira Illinois Foundation NFP

R. Lugo- Gross made a motion to approve the Fiscal Agreement for Aspira Illinois Foundation NFP. D. Cruz seconded.

D. Cruz asked if everyone was cleared on what the fiscal agreement does.

Chairman Rodriguez explained that the agreements with Aspira Inc. would clear the way for the organizations to apply for their 501 c 3. Aspira Inc. would serve as their fiscal agent. The agreement does not create the 501 c 3. It is something that needs to be in place in order for the organizations to apply.

Motion prevailed as follows: D. Cruz: Yes; R. Lugo-Gross: Yes; D. Rodriguez: Yes; C. Yuqui: Yes. Y. Frontany: abstained.

14. Motion to Approve the Fiscal Agreement for Aspira Service Organization NFP

D. Cruz made a motion to approve the Fiscal Agreement for Aspira Service Organization. R. Lugo-Gross seconded.

Motion prevailed as follows: D. Cruz: Yes; R. Lugo-Gross: Yes; D. Rodriguez: Yes; C. Yuqui: Yes. Y. Frontany: abstained.

15. Adjournment

D. Cruz made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by C. Yuqui. Motion prevailed unanimously.

Prepared by Sonia Sanchez-Galarza, Board Liaison

Approved on June 25, 2025