

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SESSION
OF THE SOUTH BEND EMPOWERMENT ZONE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
4/16/24**

MINUTES

- Meeting time start: 6:08 pm
- Meeting called to order: Sam Centellas, Board President
- Meeting video is available on [Youtube](#)
- Meeting presentation is available on the [Zone website](#)

LOCATION

- Harrison Elementary School

QUORUM

- Attendees
 - Sam Centellas, Board President
 - Jeff Rea, Board Vice President
 - Rosa Hiestand, Board Secretary (virtual)
 - Stephanie Ball
 - Duane Wilson
 - Sonya Watkins (virtual)
- Absent:
 - Ryan Matthys, Board Treasurer
 - Kareemah Fowler
 - Leslie Wesley
- Quorum Established (Y/N): Yes

SUMMARY

The meeting focused primarily on a robust discussion of a potential partnership with the Robinson Community Learning Center at Notre Dame for Pre-K at the Zone. The board voted to approve the exploration of potential partnership options. The intention is for the board to vote on a specific partnership MOU at the May board meeting.

Other topics discussed included (1) elementary to middle school transition supports; (2) the use of a framework and tool to support the improvement of schools overall, and specifically teacher effectiveness; and (3) IREAD 3.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

The consent agenda includes the adoption of the agenda for April 16, 2024 and the meeting minutes from March 19, 2024.

- Motion: Jeff Rea
- Seconded: Duane Wilson
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously

II. BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

The board president recognized the Zone teachers of the year Patience Trowbridge from Coquillard, Courtney Mitchell from Harrison, Steven Smith from Navarre, Douglas Clark from Warren, and Tiffany Mason from Wilson. For National Library Week, the board president also recognized Isaiah Abdullah from Coquillard, Michelle Bond from Harrison, Katie Wicker from Navarre, Jayne Klockow from Warren, and Sandra Scott from Wilson.

The board president gave a reminder of the upcoming Zone event, West Side Refresh, on May 11th at Washington High School. He also invited all community members to attend the Walk-Thru Wednesday on April 17th.

III. BUSINESS SERVICES REPORT

Finance

The Zone's 501(c)3 has expended almost 81% of its budget at this point in the school year, which is close to where it should be. The Zone has expended 79% of the "All funds" budget, where the Zone's expenditures are outpacing this point in the year by 4% due to a slight decrease in enrollment.

- Motion to approve the finance report: Jeff Rea
- Seconded: Stephanie Ball
- Comments or questions: none
- Public Comments: None
- Approved: unanimously.

Personnel

In March, the Zone hired four non-certified staff and one departure of a certified staff member.

IV. FOCUS REPORTS

Empowering Leaders: School Effectiveness & Improvement

Roxana Zapata, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, presented the data framework the Zone uses to ensure that the practices, areas, and strategies it is working on are essential to transforming the students' outcomes. The framework is UChicago Impact's 5Essentials, which includes Effective Leaders, Supportive Environments, Collaborative Teachers, Ambitious Instructions, and Involved Families.

Ms. Zapata went on to describe how the Zone uses survey data to monitor the implementation of the 5Essentials, and to identify opportunities for school improvement. The Zone designed its School Effectiveness Framework based on the 5Essentials. Survey data was shared on slide 17.

Dr. Victor Simon and Elliot Ransom, leaders of UChicago Impact, attended virtually to share additional information about the 5Essentials, including research, data, and implementation at over 6,500 schools.

Board Questions and Comments:

- *What are the first steps we should take with this data, and what kind of progress can we expect?*
 - This is a baseline year. Therefore we are just starting to gather information we didn't have before. This is the starting point for discussing what needs improvement and how we can work on those areas. We can expect to look at a school compared to itself over time instead of being compared to another cohort of schools.
- *Is there a specific Essential that should be addressed first before the others?*
 - School leaders are the ones who bring about change. They play a crucial role in setting the tone for the school. It is their responsibility to identify the areas that require attention and create systems for consistent improvement.
- *Dr. Lewis noted that four schools in the SBEZ have made significant progress over the past four years. According to the graphics presented on page 17, three key areas in these schools are close to the green rating, "Organized for Improvement." This is an encouraging sign, and shows that positive change takes time. After four years of hard work, it is satisfying to see two of the five schools in the best position for long-term improvement.*
- *How are we ensuring that parents participate in the surveys?*
 - Around 20% of parents from each of our schools have completed the survey, which is a commendable number, especially since we had been struggling to engage them in the past.

Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Student Transitions.

Viressa Davis, Executive Director of Student Services, discussed students' needs during the transition from elementary to middle school. These include for example:

independence, academic rigor, and social development. She also described the potential risks to students who do not receive support for these needs.

Mrs. Davis then reported on programs and partnerships the Zone offers to students, based on these issues. These include, for example: the Boys & Girls Club, the Zone's Rising Jaguar program, and Five Star Life. These programs and partnerships will continue during the summer and the following school year. Mrs. Davis shared additional information about each program's goals, components, and impact.

Board Questions and Comments:

- *Regarding Five Star Life, how did the students' perspectives change once they participated?*
 - Students were more excited and collaborative with their peers. They took responsibility and advocated for themselves to meet the requirements for participation. Additionally, sixth grade attendance increased by 11.7% on Fridays.
 - Staff participation also increased, has strengthened relationships and contributed to a culture shift.

LessonLoop: Student Voice at the Center of Instructional Improvement:

Ms. Zapata introduced LessonLoop as part of the 5Essentials. LessonLoop is a data-gathering tool that teachers can use during each period of instruction to receive direct student feedback. Nona Ullman, LessonLoop founder and Chief Executive Officer, attended virtually to share more information.

LessonLoop was created to address the problem of 86% of students not being engaged in learning. Research shows that students who are highly engaged in class learn an average of four and a half months more of math content per school year. With a tool to assess student engagement in each lesson, in addition to personalized and evidence-based coaching tips, educators can create more rigorous and equitable class lessons.

In attendance at the meeting were Navarre's assistant principal, Jennifer Roden, eighth grade social studies teachers, Ms. Brambley and Mr. Smith, and Ja'Dae Sambo, a student in Ms. Brambley's class. Collectively, they shared the goals and experience of implementing LessonLoop and the positive results. Based on students' LessonLoop data, Ms. Brambley tried different instructional strategies from week to week. Between the first LessonLoop survey results and the second, her students' engagement increased, and their test scores increased by 80%.

Mr. Smith also shared his experience with LessonLoop, and that he decided to try it in his classroom after seeing Ms. Brambley's positive results. He noted in particular that LessonLoop assisted him in designing lesson plans that provide improved support for emerging language students.

Navarre student Ja'Dae Sambo, spoke about her experience using LessonLoop and the benefits to her and her peers. In particular, they feel like they can use their voice without feeling rude, disrespectful, or scared. LessonLoop is anonymous, and the students noticed the changes in the classroom almost immediately.

Ms. Roden closed by sharing how, at Navarre, LessonLoop contributes to the 5Essentials by allowing the teachers to be highly efficient and consistent in their practice, which has resulted in a noticeable improvement in students' academic performance.

Board Questions and Comments:

- *How do we ensure we get a high percentage of the students to give input, which helps drive that feedback to be best?*
 - Teachers know the percentage of their students who complete each survey. One tactic to increase participation has been to embed the LessonLoop survey into quizzes. At the end of a quiz, the students are redirected to the survey, and once completed, they can submit their quiz.
- *Does this add to your workload and pressure as a teacher? How do you promote this to others?*
 - Learning to use the system was rough in the beginning. But in reality, it is extremely easy for the teacher. Once you learn how to administer the survey, it shouldn't take longer than two minutes to create one survey.
 - LessonLoop focuses on specific domains and provides questions tailored to those areas. This targeted approach makes it quicker for students to complete as they only need to answer a few specific questions instead of all of them.
- *It is good to see that the Zone is trying new things. Seeing the success of LessonLoop at Navarre, are there any thoughts on expanding this to the rest of the schools?*
 - We have engaged our schools' leadership teams in sessions to explore methods to collect data, including LessonLoop data, and how they, as leaders, could support LessonLoop in their schools. Since then, the Assistant Principal at Wilson has engaged in a professional learning session with teachers about using LessonLoop.
 - This year, the implementation is optional, and we are intentionally looking for early adopters. Next year, it will be required in all of our schools.
- *Have you noticed a difference in culture in the classroom after LessonLoop?*
 - Ms. Brambley shared how she intentionally tells students the feedback they gave her and how she is changing her method of instruction as a

result. The way her classroom functions has improved from before using LessonLoop in this way.

IREAD 3: Spring Preliminary Results

Ms. Zapata reported on the status of IREAD 3 testing, and compared the results of the March session to prior years. She noted in particular that there is typically a jump in passing rates between the March session and the retest session in May for students who did not pass in March.

Pre-K: Innovating Forward

Ms. Zapata provided an update on the current status of Pre-K in the Zone. The update included information about the Pre-K curriculum and the expansion of the program to five classrooms at four schools. Over the past three years, the Zone has served 247 Pre-K students. During the first two years, the program was implemented as a half-day program. Last year, all schools in the Zone achieved Paths to Quality Level Three, which has enabled the Zone to offer full-day Pre-K.

For the upcoming school year of 2024-2025, there will be four classrooms across three schools, due to Warren's closure. However, class sizes will increase. The Zone also plans improvements in the enrollment process to increase voucher reimbursement. No bus transportation will be provided.

In attendance was Susan Devetski, Director of the Robinson Community Learning Center at Notre Dame, to speak about the Center's outreach programs and the opportunity for a Pre-K partnership with Zone. The Robinson Center serves under-resourced and vulnerable members of the South Bend community, from infants to senior citizens. One of their most successful programs is their Pre-K, which has been operating since 2011 and offers full-day preschool education. The Robinson Center uses the same curriculum as the Zone uses.

Family engagement is a priority for the Robinson Center. Every two weeks, the Pre-K community is invited to a family event, which includes topics such as literacy at home and wrap-around support services. The Center also uses surveys to assess the community's most urgent needs.

In the proposed partnership, the Robinson Center would operate all aspects of the Pre-K program in Zone schools, including staff employment. Board members discussed the pros and cons of the potential partnership. Ms. Hiestand, Board Secretary, expressed the specific concern about the Robinson Center's use of both Pre-K teachers and Americorps volunteers in the classroom. The board expressed the desire for more detailed information, including the potential financial model of the partnership.

Dr. Lewis explained the intention at the meeting is to receive board approval to explore what type of partnership would be the best fit for the Zone. The type of

partnership could range from the Robinson Center administering the Pre-K program at the Zone, to simply supporting the Zone in areas such as parent engagement or teacher engagement. The plan would be to develop a specific MOU for a type of partnership, and during that process share more information with the board, prior to bringing the MOU for approval in the May board meeting.

There was no public comment prior to the board's vote.

- Motion to explore creating an MOU with the Robinson Community Learning Center Preschool Program: Duane Wilson
- Seconded: Jeff Rea
- Discussion: none
- Yeas: Centellas, Rea, Hiestand, Ball, and Wilson
- Nos: none
- Abstentions: Watkins
- Approved: yes

Public Comment

None.

V. BOARD COMMUNICATIONS

The next board meeting will be on Tuesday, May 21st, at 6 pm at Warren Elementary School. The West Side Refresh will be on May 11th.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.