

## TSCS Board Meeting Minutes

Date: February 26, 2025

Time: 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Location: Hybrid– via Zoom and in-person at TSCS

### Attendees:

- Elizabeth Montgomery Brown, CFO, Soulsville Foundation & Soulsville Charter School
- Maya Robinson, Executive Director, The Soulsville Charter School
- Samson Mobashar, COO, Soulsville Foundation
- Liz Glatzbach, Teacher
- Tom Marino, Poplar Foundation
- Steve Gwen, Semi-retired Commercial Real Estate Broker
- Tavita Williams Duluth, Mom, UT Martin Senior, 30-year veteran teacher (Roselle Performing Arts Elementary School)
- Jeff Barnes, Treasurer, CBIZ (Institutional Investment Advisor / Retirement Plan Consultant)
- Debra Waters Turner, Senior Advocate / Reestablishing business
- Chris Soper, Maintenance Director, Valero
- Pat Mitchell Worley, CEO, The Soulsville Foundation
- Deanie Parker

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## I. Call to Order / Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM. Attendees introduced themselves, with some joining remotely.

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## II. Financial Update

Elizabeth Montgomery Brown presented the financial update.

- FY25 Forecast: The FY25 forecast has been updated to reflect a more likely outcome, anticipating a net outcome aligning with revenue, with total expenses around \$5.8 million.
- Payroll & Benefits: A decrease of approximately \$300,000 against budget in payroll and benefits was noted, providing cost savings.

- Supplies & Materials: An increase in supplies and materials was noted, directly tied to reimbursable Tag 4 and SIG 2 grant funding, which was not initially budgeted for.
- In-Kind Expenses: Approximately \$252,000 in in-kind expenses reflects the partnership with Community and Schools.
- Reimbursable Funding: A concern was raised regarding securing all reimbursable funding, ensuring proper paperwork, and staying within grant budget limits.
- Balance Sheet (as of January 31, 2025):
  - Cash on hand: Approximately \$5.3 million, representing about 192 days of cash.
  - The organization has a strong balance sheet and is meeting all loan covenants.
  - Debt service coverage has increased since September reporting.
  - The building's approximate book value is \$10 million, with a \$9.2 million loan.
  - Cash is held in three bank accounts: Truist operating account (approx. \$2 million), Truist money market (approx. \$1 million, soon to be transferred to Duncan Williams), and Duncan Williams (managed between laddered CDs and treasuries).
- Loan Refinance: Discussion occurred regarding the loan refinance date, which was estimated to be about five years ago, pre-COVID. Terms are available.
- Monthly Finance Update: It was suggested to establish a monthly finance update meeting including Jeff Barnes and Steve, with the full board invited. This meeting would allow for more detailed discussion of budget line items. Elizabeth indicated this could begin next month, after the previous month's financial statements are closed.
- FY24 Audit: The finished audit for FY24 was received and a clean audit report was issued. Elizabeth encouraged all board members to review the audit, noting it's a charter school audit and different from a typical non-profit audit.
  - The audit firm, Watkins, uncovered and helped correct errors made by the previous bookkeeping firm, Ed Tech, particularly concerning lease accounting and state retirement.
  - The new accounting system, QuickBooks Online, and payment portal, bill.com, have significantly improved transparency and documentation for auditors.
- 990 Filing: The 990 for FY24 has been filed.

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### III. Executive Director's Report

Maya Robinson presented the Executive Director's Report, highlighting school progress and key initiatives.

- Instructional Walkthroughs:
  - Three walkthroughs are conducted per school year by school directors and instructional coaches using the "critical seven" rubric.
  - Teachers are rated on a five-point scale, and overall scores are averaged.
  - Strongest Area: Participation ratio (90-100% student engagement) was strong.
  - Greatest Area of Need/Focus: Student mastery (average score 2.3) was identified as an area where teachers are doing too much of the work, rather than actively engaging students to do the work of the lesson.
  - Professional development will focus on strategies for active student engagement.
  - Instructional walkthroughs are co-observations for whole-school strategic planning, distinct from individual teacher coaching cycles. The "critical seven" rubric is new this year.
  - Growth was seen in participation ratio, student production, and data-driven instruction.
  - Individual teacher reports are provided, and full school numbers are discussed during data days.
- Soulsville Scholar Interim Assessments (SSIAs):
  - These practice assessments are conducted quarterly in preparation for state testing.
  - Data from the second interim assessment (December) was presented, showing ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies performance. The goal is to reduce "red" (below rate) and increase "green" (proficiency) and "blue" (exceeding expectations).
  - Key Takeaways:
    - Math and Social Studies departments exceeded their AMO (Annual Measurable Objective) achievement targets.
    - ELA is close to its target, having met it last year.
    - Science is the content area struggling the most (48% at Level 1). This is attributed to two persistent teacher vacancies (6th grade science, 8th grade science) throughout the year.
    - A virtual teacher program (EDMentum) was piloted for 6th and 8th grade science but proved ineffective for middle school.
    - Currently, the middle school director and dean of students are writing daily lessons for long-term substitutes in those classes.
  - Discussion ensued regarding the meaning of the data, the state's projections for Level 4 attainment (typically not exceeding 5% at the

school), and the importance of moving students from "orange" (approaching expectations) to "green" (proficient).

- After-school tutoring targets "bubble students" in the green to push them to blue.
- The state's AMO targets for proficiency were presented: ELA (22.8%), Math (16.4%), Science (23.4%), Social Studies (25.3%).
- Staffing and Compensation Discussion:
  - Concern was raised about attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, particularly in critical areas like science and math, given the competitive landscape with Memphis Shelby County Schools (MSCS) salary scales.
  - Maya highlighted that Soulsville's current salary scale is similar to the state of Tennessee's but less competitive than MSCS, which tiers salaries by degree level in addition to years of experience.
  - The importance of retaining current dedicated staff was emphasized over solely recruiting external "all-star" teachers, as offering higher salaries to new hires could negatively impact existing staff morale and school culture.
  - A compensation manual is being developed to provide transparency regarding pay structure and to address differences in overall compensation packages compared to MSCS (e.g., benefits, free periods).
  - Tavita Williams Duluth suggested exploring incentives tied to professional development hours (similar to "plus 30" on MSCS scales) as a way to reward and retain existing teachers.
  - It was suggested that the board's educators (Liz, Tavita, and Deborah) form a special committee to provide input on the compensation manual and strategies.
  - The current strategy for filling open roles (6th, 8th grade science, 11th grade math) is to continue recruiting through strategic partnerships with teacher prep programs and job fairs, as hiring mid-year is challenging due to teachers' commitment to their current students. The average age of teachers is around 27.
  - The possibility of a staff daycare on campus was briefly discussed as a potential game-changer for family support and retention.
- Five-Year Charter Review:
  - The MSCS department conducted a site visit yesterday (Feb 25, 2025) as part of the five-year charter review process.
  - The review went well. Notes will be taken on the process for future reference.
  - Suspension Rate Discussion: The district highlighted Soulsville's suspension rate as above their average (stated as 5%).

- Soulsville's suspension rate at the end of last school year was approximately 30.2%.
  - This school year, the running percentage is 18%, indicating a significant reduction.
  - The rate is based on the number of students who received an out-of-school suspension, not instances of suspension (to be confirmed).
  - The school uses a progressive discipline matrix (Level 1-5 behaviors) to determine consequences.
  - Substance abuse (vapes, edibles, marijuana) is a significant ongoing issue.
  - The leadership team has not yet proactively developed a prevention strategy for substance abuse beyond reactive measures and external counseling partnerships.
  - Fighting incidents, previously a major issue, have significantly decreased on campus, with students moving off-campus for such incidents. An "hours until they get home" policy was reinstated after three off-campus incidents.
  - Suspensions impact ADA (money received) as they count as excused absences.
  - Suspensions longer than 10 days are considered expulsions and often lead to students being remanded to alternative schools.
- Comprehensive Stock Take (with Davidson Hill Consultants):
  - Samson Mobashar provided an update on the comprehensive stock take.
  - David Hill, the founding principal of Soulsville, is serving as a consultant.
  - Phase 1: Quantitative data analysis (test scores, post-secondary completion, etc.) to establish a shared narrative.
  - Phase 2: Classroom walkthroughs and analysis of findings through a "best practice" lens, leveraging David Hill's expertise.
  - Phase 3 (concurrent): Developing a "logic model" or "DNA of the school" to clarify priorities, essence, and identity, with a focus on achievement and beyond (e.g., staffing, curriculum, social-emotional learning). This "North Star" will guide future strategies and innovations.
  - Deanie expressed a desire for clarity on where music is positioned throughout the organization for grant applications and marketing.
  - The stock take is intended to address unanswered questions from the previous strategic plan, support the school's efforts to secure more funding, and drive its academic performance.
  - The staffing model and compensation strategy will be incorporated into the final considerations of the stock take.

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## **IV. Upcoming Events**

- Summer Growth Experience Fair: Next Wednesday, [March 5, 2025, assuming the meeting is on Feb 26], 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM. Organizations with summer programs are invited to set up a table.
- Spring Break: March 10 - March 14, 2025.
- State Testing Window: May 6, 2025.
- Soulsville Positive Youth Conferences: April 25, 2025.
- Class of 2025 Graduation: Friday, May 16, 2025. Board members are encouraged to attend.
- 8th Grade Bridging Ceremony: Tuesday, May 20, 2025. Location TBD. Alumni Kyler Gilkey is being sought as the keynote speaker.
- An invitation to the "Women of the Greater Memphis Chamber" event at the FedEx Forum will be sent to the ladies on the board.

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## **V. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.

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