**School Board Meetings Are A Joke At Charter Schools**

19 Great Hearts Schools held one board meeting this school year - most lasted less than five minutes

Charter school boards only are required by state law to make policy decisions but many charters, like Great Hearts Academies, do not allow school boards to even make informed policy decisions. 19 Great Hearts Schools had the only governing board meeting of the school year on December 4, 2018. All had the same agenda and were individually held telephonically at the Great Hearts Lead Office at 4801 E. Washington St., Suite 250 in Phoenix.[[1]](#footnote-1) The 19 board meetings were completed between 9:04 AM and 11:31 AM with 8 taking three minutes or less to complete:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Time Started | Time Adjourned | Meeting Length |
| Maryvale Prep | 9:04 | 9:13 | 9 |
| Arete Prep | 9:14 | 9:21 | 7 |
| Archway Arete | 9:18 | 9:21 | 3 |
| Chandler Prep | 9:30 | 9:44 | 14 |
| Archway Cicero | 9:43 | 9:46 | 3 |
| Cicero Prep | 9:46 | 9:47 | 1 |
| Archway Lincoln | 9:50 | 9:56 | 6 |
| Veritas Prep | 9:56 | 10:05 | 9 |
| Lincoln Prep | 10:05 | 10:07 | 2 |
| Archway Veritas | 10:07 | 10:19 | 17 |
| Anthem Prep/Archway Anthem | 10:32 | 10:36 | 4 |
| Glendale Prep | 10:40 | 10:42 | 2 |
| Archway Glendale | 10:42 | 10:44 | 2 |
| Archway North Phoenix | 10:53 | 11:00 | 7 |
| Scottsdale Prep | 11:06 | 11:08 | 2 |
| Archway Scottsdale | 11:09 | 11:12 | 3 |
| Trivum Prep | 11:17 | 11:22 | 5 |
| Archway Trivum East | 11:22 | 11:26 | 4 |
| Archway Trivum West | 11:26 | 11:31 | 5 |

If all the schools had the same board members, it would be conceivable that these meetings could be run back to back like this. But the schools, for the most part, have completely different school board members. There were 52 different board members on the phone and somehow 7 meetings were started at the same time the last meeting ended (two started *before* the prior meeting ended?). If the meetings were being held in separate rooms this would be possible – but former State School Superintendent Diane Bishop, Director of Academy Governance for Great Hearts, was present in person at all meetings.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Board Officers Present | Board Officers on Phone | Corporate Officials Present |
| Maryvale Prep |   | Jackson,Benett, Brook, Erickson, Quayle, Matteis | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Arete Prep | Denton |  Papke, Poppleton, Atolagbe | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Archway Arete |   | Denton,Papke,Fawcett,Atolagbe | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Chandler Prep | Denton |  Barger, Fawcett, Hayes | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Archway Cicero | Denton | Sanders, Discher, Weisse, Levine | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Ciciero Prep | Denton | Vlahovich, Weisse,  | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Archway Lincoln |   | Denton,Mitchel,Thomas,Jacobson | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Veritas Prep | Denton | Knoell, Hall, Clancy, Jefferies, Fee | Bishop, Doebler,Siegel |
| Lincoln Prep | Denton | Thomas, Atolagbe, Jacobson | Bishop, Doebler |
| Archway Veritas | Denton | Huseth, Dean, Fee, Openden | Bishop, Doebler |
| Anthem Prep/Archway Anthem |   | Ellison,Sherwood,Black,Sandhu,Crowe,Yano | Bishop, Doebler |
| Glendale Prep |   | Ellison, McClendon, Tinlin, Kerstling, Goodtich, Richards | Bishop, Doebler |
| Archway Glendale | Richards | Ellison,McClendon,Tinlin,Clark,Crowe | Bishop, Doebler |
| Archway North Phoenix |   | Elison,Erikson,Coley,Taylor,Weinhold | Bishop, Doebler |
| Scottsdale Prep |   | Ellison,Shearer, Armstrong, Coughlon | Bishop, Doebler |
| Archway Scottsdale |   | Chaney, Shearer, Kersting, Bohannon, Minnaugh, Coughlon | Bishop, Doebler |
| Trivum Prep | Deobler | Twaedeck, Washburn, Pangrazio | Bishop |
| Archway Trivum East |   | Doebler,Keys,Darby,Vasilof, Twardeck | Bishop |
| Archway Trivum West |   | Doebler, Washburn, Darby, Vasilof | Bishop |

If you have ever been a part of a telephonic meeting with 5-7 people on the phone, you have surely experienced the cumbersome task of getting everyone’s feedback in this way. Great Hearts ran the entire Archway Scottsdale board meeting with six board members on the phone in just 3 minutes. It would take us that long to call the roll.

The 19 schools boards all unanimously approved the same items:

* The minutes of the last meeting on July 10, 2018
* A change in the mailing address for the school
* Approval of the 2019-20 school calendar
* Approval of Great Hearts Gift Acceptance and Fundraising Policy
* Approval of each school’s Special Education Policies and Procedures

Here is how the Cicero Prep Academy governing board did this in one minute:[[2]](#footnote-2)

**CICERO PREPARATORY ACADEMY Board of Directors**

**Unapproved Minutes**Date: December 4, 2018

Time: 9:20 am.  Location: Great Hearts Lead Office

A meeting of the Great Hearts Academies- Cicero Preparatory Academy Board of Directors was held at Great Hearts Lead Office, 4801 E. Washington St., Suite 250, Phoenix, AZ 85034, pursuant to A.R.S. 38-431.02, notice having been duly given.

**I. Call to Order**

*David Denton called the meeting to order at* ***9:46 a.m.*** *The following directors/administrators were present/absent: David Denton present. Matthew Viahovich and Zach Weise by phone. Dr. Mark Disher, Headmaster, Great Hearts representatives Carrie Siegel, Diane Bishop, Tom Doebler all present in person.*

**II. Call to the Public**

*Mr. Denton made a call to the public at* ***9:46 a.m****. No public was presen*t

**III. Approval of Consent Agenda**

A. Approval of minutes from June and July meetings

B. Approval of change of the mailing address of the school from 3102 N. 56th St., Suite 300, Phoenix, AZ 85018 to 4801 E. Washington St., Suite 250, Phoenix, AZ 85034

C. Approval of 2019-2020 School Calendar

D. Approval of Great Hearts Gift Acceptance and Fundraising Policy

-Carrie Siegal is present for questions regarding gifts and fundraising policy

*Mr. Weisse made a motion that the Board approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Mr. Vlahovich, all in favor, none opposed, motion carried at* ***9:46 a.m.***

**IV. Approval of the School Special Education Policies and Procedures**

*Mr. Vlahovich made a motion that the Board approve the Cicero Preparatory Academy Special Education Policies and Procedures seconded by Mr. Weisse all in favor, none opposed, motion carried at* ***9:47 am***

**IV . Announcements/Adjournment**

Mr. Denton adjourned the meeting at **9:47 a.m**

Let’s say, for the sake of argument, that these meetings were actually held. Did the meetings have anything to do with the operation and concerns of each individual school? Were any of the policies reviewed by staff to inform the board members? Did any of the boards provide oversight and feedback regarding such an important decision as the approval the special education policy for the school? They did not.

This is standard operating procedure at Great Hearts. Chandler Prep Academy had two board meetings regarding the adoption of their $6 million 2018-19 budget. The first on June 19, 2018 was to approve the proposed budget. The meeting lasted 1 minute.[[3]](#footnote-3) The required budget hearing and final approval of the budget was held on July 10, 2018. That meeting also lasted 1 minute.[[4]](#footnote-4) Board members Darrel Barger, David, Denton, Helen Hayes, Leanne Fawcett, and Dan Scoggin must be very proud of approving a $6 million budget without hearing a word about it.

School board meetings are a complete inconvenience to Great Hearts Academies and are treated as a joke. It is sad that the 52 board members, many of whom are not Great Heart employees, conspired to facilitate this farce by rubber stamping all policies coming from corporate headquarters in pretend public meetings, while all real operational decisions are being made in secret at Great Hearts Corporate Offices.

Great Hearts, and other large charter chains, purposely make board meetings into a race to adjourn, avoiding proper consideration of policies and rubber-stamping the will of the corporate board. Local needs and concerns of individual schools are not addressed at charter school board meetings – only the lock-step approval of corporate policies. All real decisions – expenditures, hiring and firing, student discipline, and even curriculum are made in secret by the corporate board. The process is cynical and arrogant.

The Legislature needs to step up and address the secrecy of governance in charter schools. SB 1394, that is making its way through the legislative process, requires school board members to not all be family members and mandates training on procurement and discipline – activities charter schools boards take no part in. It is smoke and mirrors written by the Charter Association to allow charter corporate boards to continue to make all decisions in secret. Charter school boards should either be given authority to make operational decisions for the schools or be eliminated.

1. Minutes for the December 4, 2018 board meetings for each school can be found on the bottom right of the school’s homepage under the heading “Finance and Compliance” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://ciceroprep.greatheartsacademies.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2018/12/Cicero-Prep-unapproved-minuts-12-4-18.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://chandlerprep.greatheartsacademies.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/02/Chandler-Prep-signed-minutes-6-19-18.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://chandlerprep.greatheartsacademies.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2018/09/Chandler-Prep-unapproved-minutes-7-10-18.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)