

**Erie Elementary Charter School
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2025, 6:00pm
1405 N Washtenaw Ave, Chicago, IL 60622**

Board members who attended in person: Sarah Airola, Board Chair; Keith Ellett, Chair of Board Finance Committee; Mary Boehler; Maria Hawilo; Victor Sy Nelson and Vivek Sadanand

Board members who attended virtually: April Kennedy, Parent Representative; Leslie Pigozzi, Staff Representative; Tony Sutton

Staff who attended in person: Karem Gomez, Principal and Executive Director; Aimee Frantzen, Assistant Principal; Marisol Martinez, Business Operations Director; Diana Morquecho, Business Operations Coordinator

Guests: Jeanne Perkins Varwig

The meeting was brought to order at approximately 6:10pm

Chair Sarah Airola asked if there were any public comments/new business? There were none

Ms. Airola: The next order of business is the approval of the minutes of the May 14, 2025, board meeting.

Maria Hawilo moved to approve the minutes as presented.

Sy Nelson seconded the motion to approve the minutes.

All who voted in favor: Sarah Airola, Board Chair; Keith Ellett, Chair of Board Finance Committee; Mary Boehler; Maria Hawilo; Victor Sy Nelson; Rajiv Naidu; Vivek Sadanand

All who voted against: None

Directors who Abstained: None

Ms. Airola: Are there any public comments- new business? None

Finance Committee Report:

Keith Ellett, Finance Committee Chair: It has been a busy month for the committee. Lower student enrollment numbers have greatly affected the 2025-2026 budget. The committee has met a couple of times to discuss the situation, and Karem, Marisol and VKA consulting have been working on the budget.

The deficit created by under-enrollment is in the range of several hundred thousand dollars. It is a serious number. The committee has discussed strategies discussed to mitigate the risk including lowering spending:

- \$120K budgeted for building maintenance which can be delayed
- There are staff vacancies that we are not going to fill- will not be hired
- There are some conferences to which we planned to send staff; we will skip those

Those things get us 75% of the way to a balanced budget. We are trying to get answers about discretionary funding from CPS.

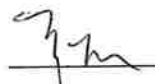
Directors asked for more explanation re: Discretionary funding.

Ms. Gomez: Regular CPS schools will not get a cut in funding if they are underenrolled, whereas Charter Schools will be penalized for not being at full enrollment.

Mr. Naidu: This means we *do* have to tighten spending, but we are OK. We have resources.

Mr. Ellett: The committee has also discussed some operational processes. Karem and school leadership are going to meet with RSM accounting to work on line-items and accounts. The finance committee will stay on top of financials a bit more frequently given our situation.

Ms. Boehler: Once the detailed budget is created, we will work on a new forecast for the year. There is a meeting set with VKA consulting for 10/17/25. She asked if board members are OK with VKA consulting continuing to offer support for financials? Directors agreed that we need VKA consulting for the time being.

 Initials of Marisol Martinez

 Initials of Rajiv Naidu

Ms. Gomez: Mari Martinez [Business Operations] and I started to interview candidates for the open financial consultant position yesterday. We are scheduling more interviews.

Board members commented that we want to hire someone for the position sooner v. later for many reasons. That person would take over the piece VKA is handling and manage financial operations.

Development Report:

Ms. Airola: The candidate for the board, Ricardo Villalobos, was going to attend tonight's board meeting, but he's very involved in helping people detained by ICE. He's at a detention center now. His resume was shared with everyone, and she would like to vote regarding Mr. Villalobos joining the board. He would be a great asset to the board.

Mary Boehler moved to vote to approve Ricardo Villalobos to join the Erie board of directors.

Sy Nelson seconded the motion.

Directors who voted in favor: Sarah Airola; Keith Ellett, Mary Boehler; Maria Hawilo; Victor Sy Nelson; Vivek Sadanand; Rajiv Naidu

Directors who voted against the motion: None

Directors who abstained: None

Mary Boehler introduced guest Jeanne Perkins Varwig. She is the daughter of former board member Ken Perkins. Ms. Perkins Varwig may be a candidate to join the board, and she is here to observe today.

Ms. Perkins expressed her thanks for the invitation to observe and learn more about Erie.

Keith Ellett shared that he and board member Melanie Madigan met with another perspective board member Loreen [spelling]. She seemed excited about joining and had several creative ideas for the school. She will next meet with Karem. Mr. Ellett specifically asked Loreen if she has the drive and the time for the commitment, and she said she was looking for something like a board on which to serve. She has a background in both non-profit and education.

Karem Gomez will meet with the perspective board member on Thursday, 10/09.

Update on the Annual Fundraising Gala:

Kreagan Carbone, who provides Development support to the event planning committee, shared that the event will be a little bit different than the last few years. It will be held at the school, and we will celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the school this year.

Ms. Carbone shared details regarding similarities to past events and new aspects for this year.

She reported that we currently have 130 RSVPs from those who will attend including staff and students. She shared figures for pre-event donations. Having the event at the school is saving us a lot of money. The cost is \$30K below what we spent last year.

Ms. Carbone and Ms. Airola indicated that the planning committee is still looking for invitees and sponsors. If there is anyone board members would like to reach out to and invite, there is no limit on seating. If directors try to do one more push for guests in the upcoming week, they would love to have more guests. We did also invite Erie families.

There was a discussion of how parking for guests will be handled. Staff were doing multiple things to try to provide accessible street parking near the school as the school parking lot is small.

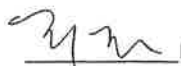
Mr. Naidu is willing to sponsor the cost of the valet service. Several directors agree that it would be best given the time of day and helping guests to feel safe.

There were questions about whether students would be presenting or giving testimonials at the event. Mr. Naidu opined that having kids present at the event is a huge factor. The testimonial from the student at a past event was very touching.

There are no kids in the program getting up and speaking as the goal is to try to keep the time of the event down. The goal is to have it be more immersive and about community. There will be tours led by the students. There was discussion of possibly having staff member Alexandra Molina speak at the event. She is an Erie alum, she graduated from DePaul University, and she now works for Erie. Ms. Molina will certainly consider speaking at the event.

ACADEMIC REPORT:

Karem Gomez reported that the school is in year one of the Continuous School Improvement Plan. There are no formal supports from CPS. Those were taken away due to funding issues. The school is on track to meet all our priority items.

 Initials of Marisol Martinez

 Initials of Rajiv Naidu

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In Curriculum and Instruction, the focus is on: Standards based assessment for Math; Inclusive environments; Differentiation

Our ISBE designation goes public on 10/30. Ms. Gomez was told they were not final designations.
Our primary metric is that we want 80% of classrooms with 60% of students at proficiency

Big Rocks for semester one that runs to 1/17/26:

1) High performing Team – Want 90% of staff agreeing there is clarity
100% scoring proficient on non-negotiables; we are also asking staff to rate Leadership Team on non-negotiables

2) Constructive Environment- based on teachers submitting referrals for disruptive behavior.
2nd key result 85% of teachers assign consequences for behaviors 1, 2 and 3

3) Black Belt Teaching

Do teachers believe that we are meeting their professional development needs? Are pro development sessions high quality and meaningful? We are on track to meet Big Rocks- the Goals for the year.

For Social Emotional Learning and Academic Data- we don't have assessment data yet. The I-Ready Screener is up, and they will be able to report data in the next month.

Attendance for the school was 94.2% last week
Some classes are at 95%

Erie 8th graders took the High School Entrance Exam today. The school provided breakfast for the 8th grade students.

Teacher evaluations are starting. What is different this year is that we got all Leadership Team members certified to do instructional evaluations. Aimee Frantzen and Karem Gomez will be with the academic leaders as they evaluate.

Parent Committee:

Ms. Airola asked how we are doing with the Parent Committee?

Ms. Gomez: Last week we had the 2nd parent committee meeting of the year with the principal.

Parent Paloma Sanchez from the committee shared that last year it was more about parents getting to know each other. They worked with Mr. Vallejo's classroom and had a picnic, and they held a fundraiser for Mother's Day.

The goal for this year is to get more parents involved. More volunteer parents are needed. They will continue to work with Natalie Restrepo, the parent liaison, on what the goal is for the school.

Mr. Sutton asked about the strategies that the Attendance Committee is working on. The attendance numbers are better, but he is concerned about the numbers given the time of year.

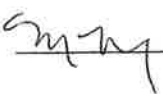
Karem Gomez shared a # of strategies being used including continuing Tier 1 tracking; we giving students stickers and other incentives; we are awarding perfect attendance certificates and awards; we also want to do incentives for families/parents; we requested access from CPS to the attendance dashboard; home visits could help for students with high absences- a home visit had just been done last Wednesday, and the students were there this week; we also have Brian Rivera working with us through the BUILD organization (that provides after-school programming at Erie) reaching out to families.

The committee is looking at the root causes of issues.

Ms. Pigozzi (the staff representative to the board) wants to circle back to the importance of including more parents; she believes there can be much better lines of communication and making sure we are posting correct notices for parents meetings and board meetings.

For the last Quesitos with Karem meeting with parents, the wrong time was posted; we want to be sure the correct time is being posted in the DOJO messaging platform. She believes if we have good communication, we'll see more parents want to be involved.

School staff shared that the board meetings must be posted on the school website and that was done. Staff mentioned various things that can be done to make sure notice goes out to parents about meetings including posting on Dojo platform, putting up a sign at the school entrance, sending home hard copy flyers.



Initials of Marisol Martinez



Initials of Rajiv Naidu

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Adjournment:

Maria Hawilo moved to adjourn the meeting.

Mary Boehler seconded the motion to adjourn.

Directors who voted in favor: Sarah Airola; Keith Ellett, Mary Boehler; Maria Hawilo; Victor Sy Nelson; Vivek Sadanand; Rajiv Naidu

Directors who voted against the motion: None

Directors who abstained: None

These minutes were prepared by Marisol Martinez

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M Martinez', written over a horizontal line.

Signature of Marisol Martinez, Business Operations Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rajiv Naidu', written over a horizontal line.

Signature of Rajiv Naidu, Board Secretary