

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

September 18, 2023

Virtual Meeting

Narrative Mission Statement:

What is the purpose of the school?

“...The Rising Tide Charter School provides students with community-based education each day, using the Town of Plymouth as a local yet dynamic textbook which will provide fertile ground for the development of higher-order thinking skills.”

Leadership and Governance:

“In accordance with MA Charter School Law, the Board of Trustees is ultimately accountable for the school’s educational mission, performance and adherence to its Charter.”

CALL TO ORDER: Chris Schelleng, Amy Norris, Sandy Kozlowsky, Sean Kelly, Laura Stearns-Flynn. Also in attendance were Michael O’Keefe, Head of School; Zahra Williams, Interim Principal/Assistant Head of School; Eric Mello, Director of Finance, Facilities, and HR; and Maureen Herrmann, Assistant to the Head of School.

GUESTS: Kelly Dunphy (parent)

HANDOUTS/ATTACHMENTS: September 18, 2023 Agenda; 2023 July Minutes; 2023 August (non-quorum notes); July 2023 financials; August 2023 financials; RTCPS 2023-2028 Accountability Plan; Board Goals

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

The minutes of the July meeting were reviewed and approved as there was not a quorum present to do so at the August meeting. Sandy moved to approve the minutes; Sean seconded the motion. All voted in favor of accepting the minutes.

As there was no quorum present in August, there were no minutes to approve.

SCHOOL REPORT: Michael reported that Rising Tide enjoyed a great start to the new school year. The organizational shift to one Principal serving both divisions has gone very smoothly with Zahra at the helm. Enrollment was slightly lower than expected at 635 versus 657. We lost a number of students in the last two weeks before school started. Today, we are at just under 630 in the building. He noted that it was good that they budgeted for a lower number.

He reported the school is happy to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the school at the Gala planned for Thursday, September 28, 2023, at the Jones River Trading Post in Kingston. He encouraged all to register as we need to provide the caterer with a headcount

on Thursday, September 20th. Michael was happy to connect with some of the founders, including Ben Brewster and Joe Macuch who expressed an interest in attending.

Zahra spoke of a new initiative at the school. The plan is to emphasize student conversations with teachers on a routine basis by providing constant access to student performance data - not just relying on mid-term progress reports. The plan is to have students advocate for themselves. Starting September 25th, every two weeks, Rising Tide will be refreshing grades on the community portal. Though it is just a snapshot in time, the students will be encouraged to ask their teachers how they can do better. Three snapshots will be provided by the end of the first term on November 3. This adds another important layer of communication between home and school. The school continues to work with teachers on rubrics for grading. Students and their families will have to actively log in to get this information - a reminder will be sent in the Monday Memo. Progress Reports may still be required of some students.

Laura Stearns-Flynn reported this was a very positive change - parents can use it as a tool to the responsibility back on the student to check in with the teacher.

NEW BUSINESS: Chris presented the newly developed Board Goals and described criteria behind each of the eight goals. When pressed for comments, Laura Stearns-Flynn thought the goals were excellent and achievable within the time frame noted.

Sean Kelly made a motion to approve the goals as presented; Laura-Stearns-Flynn seconded the motion; the vote to approve was unanimous.

It was noted that Norm DeCoste's term ended last March and he officially resigned on Monday, September 18th. After a round of discussion about the roles, the slate of officers for the 2023-2024 was noted as:

Chris Schelleng - Chair

Laura Stearns-Flynn - Vice Chair

Sean Kelly-Treasurer

Amy Norris-Clerk

Sandy Kozlowsky moved to approve the slate of officers; Sean Kelly seconded the motion; all voted in favor of the motion.

Michael explained how the Accountability Plan is unique to MA charter schools, while exams such as MCAS are expected of all schools. Last spring, he pulled together Program leaders at the school to discuss the various measures that would be both ambitious yet achievable in the 2023-2028 term. A draft was submitted to the charter office in August and the team was reassembled to tweak some of the objectives and measures back on feedback from the Charter office. The Plan was provisionally approved by the Charter office on August 29th. Chris Schelleng questioned if there are annual updates provided. Michael responded that the data does get reported in each Annual Report to the Commonwealth. He noted that in the 2018-2023 Plan, a lot of things were not met, primarily due to the pandemic, and this was the case for most districts. Esther from the Office of Charter Schools emphasized that it's important to raise the bar and at least show that you are making progress *toward* the goal, even if you don't quite *reach* the goal.

Our STAR data was first captured last year, so we will continue to use that as a measure. We want to make sure that our High Needs students's scores are no more than 15% different from the general student population. We also want to push 11th and 12th graders to take advanced

courses. Our alignment with SNHU for dual enrollment will help us achieve this goal, as will the Aviation course. We need to get a better measure on Club participation as that is essential for building community.

Laura Stearns-Flynn mentioned that many sports teams do community service work and Michael noted that advisories are working on a community-building rubric. Furthermore, there are plans to disseminate how we design, implement, and assess local performance tasks-something that would be of interests to districts across the Commonwealth.

Sean Kelly moved to approve the Accountability Plan as presented; Laura Stearns-Flynn seconded the motion. All voted in favor to approve the 2023-2028 Accountability Plan as presented.

OLD BUSINESS: None

FINANCIAL MATTERS: Eric Mello presented the July 2023 financial report, and noted that reimbursement rates from the state were lower than had been expected. For the preliminary budget established in April, 2023, figures were based on an enrollment of 635 with a reimbursement rate of \$18,404/pupil. In fact, the reimbursement rate was \$18,303, and the July projected year end enrollment was at 630; it was reduced to 620 in August. Transportation was reimbursed at 80% rather than the projected 90%. For the first month of the new fiscal year, there was a net income compared to budget deficit of \$8,269.

Laura Stearns-Flynn moved to approve the financial report as presented; Amy Norris seconded the motion. All voted in favor to approve the financial report.

Moving to the August financial report, Eric reiterated the lower-than-expected enrollment and reimbursement rate. He stressed the need to reduce expenses to balance the budget, and will provide a revised budget at the October board meeting. With the leadership restructuring and the staff reduction due to departures, Rising Tide saved some money. Eric emphasized we need to keep our cash reserves strong in order to meet our loan covenants. The Board voted last year's budget cognizant of a deficit of approximately \$416,037. In fact, the school now has an FY 23 unaudited deficit of \$588,330.

While it is likely state tuition will come in at a higher level this year, it cannot be assumed. Eric stressed it is impossible to know year-to-year what the amount will be. Even being very conservative last year, the reimbursement rate came in lower than we were expecting. He reminded the Board that we depleted the ESSER funds last year. We are working to look for more grant money and are mindful of staffing levels. He finished his presentation with a graph showing enrollment over the past 25 which highlighted the significant decline in high school enrollment over the past 3 years.

With regard to our cash reserves, Chris Schelleng questioned whether we were taking advantage of accounts now paying 4%-5% interest. Eric explained the funds with Webster Bank are in money market accounts, but he would look at options to increase returns on funds we have in all accounts.

Amy Norris moved to approve the August financial report; Laura Stearns-Flynn seconded the motion; all voted in favor to approve the August financial report.

BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

NOMINATING AND GOVERNANCE: Chris Schelleng shared that a potential new Board member removed their candidacy due to a compliance issue with his company- it would not approve of his role on the Board. He beseeched the members to source potential candidates - and noted this is one of the Board goals for the year. Chris also noted that they have initiated conversations on a succession plan for the Head of School and will be ready to share that next month.

FINANCE AND AUDIT: Eric Mello shared that the auditors will deliver their FY 23 report at the next board meeting, and he will deliver an updated FY 24 budget at the same meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY: Sandy mentioned that a number of gift cards have been received for the 25th Anniversary Gala. She encouraged all to RSVP for the event.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Kelly Dunphy was the sole member of the public in attendance - she did not share any comment.

OTHER BUSINESS NOT ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR 24 HOURS IN ADVANCE: None

ADJOURNMENT FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION: Complaints of two former staff members. Sean Kelly moved they adjourn for Executive Session; Sandy Kozlowsky seconded the motion. All voted in favor of adjourning to Executive Session.

Following the Executive Session, Sandy Kozlowsky moved to adjourn the regular meeting and Sean Kelly seconded the motion.

Prepared and submitted by: Maureen Herrmann, September 20, 2023