

**Rising Tide Charter Public School
Board of Trustees Meeting
Monday, January 27, 2025
7:00 PM**

Attendees:

John Polvere
Chris Schelleng
Amy Norris
Laura Flynn
Sean Kelly
Erin Koh
Michael O’Keefe
Eric Mello
Zahra Williams
Lauren MacPherson

1. Meeting call to order

Chris Schelleng opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

2. Introduction/Welcome to guests

The only guests were members of the leadership team for the school.

3. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

3.1 November 18, 2024, Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Amy Norris to approve the minutes from the November 18, 2024 board meeting. The motion was seconded by John Polvere and was unanimously approved.

4. Public Comment

None.

5. School Report

5.1 Student Support Services Presentation - Lauren Macpherson, Student Support Director

Lauren MacPherson opened with an overview of the increase of students on IEPs from 2014 to 2024. As a regional school, Rising Tide has seen an increase in students enrolling who require special education services. Last year, 20 families in grade 5 requested an evaluation. Staff may also recommend an evaluation following a “child study”, but most evaluations are at the request of the family.

Students on IEPs are re-evaluated every 3 years. Special education services are legally mandated.

The staff for supporting students with special education needs includes special education teachers, who each manage a case load of students as well as teach, an occupational therapist, a speech and language therapist, a reading specialist, adjustment counselors within our wellness team, and a school psychologist for testing. We also contract for support with physical therapy, vision impairment, a teacher of the deaf, and behavioral therapy. The school also has paraprofessionals and aides.

The planning for the upcoming year starts in the spring. Look at numbers of current and incoming students on IEPs for each grade level to determine the needed services. Changes to enrollment occurs throughout the year.

About 12% of students at Rising Tide are on a 504 plan. Accommodations for 504 plans are provided by the general education teachers.

The first English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled at Rising Tide in 2019. Currently approximately 1% of the students (7-8 total) are ELLs. Last year the number was close to 2% of the population, but a number of students tested out. The school has one English Language Learner teacher who is part of the Student Support department.

This year the school is undergoing an Integrated Monitoring Review. DESE reviews federal programs every three years to ensure compliance with federal laws. This year's review is focused on civil rights. The next cycle in three years will focus on special education.

Chris Schelleng asked if resources increase from the state when our numbers of students on IEPs increase. Lauren responded that they do not in a direct manner. Eric Mello gave an example of a number of students this year who require special transportation services as a part of their IEP, and the state does not provide additional financial resources to support this legally mandated need.

Laura Flynn asked if there are some students whose needs are greater than what Rising Tide can provide. Lauren responded that occasionally there are. There have been some families who have chosen Rising Tide even when their previous school's IEP team had recommended an out-of-district placement at a specialized school.

5.2 Professional Development Overview - Zahra Williams Principal/Assistant Head of School

Zahra Williams showed the schedule of meetings for the faculty on Wednesday afternoons. The schedule includes professional development workshops and collaborative meetings. There are also monthly meetings for new faculty member with their mentors. The two full-day professional development days are also important to supporting the teaching and learning.

In December, the areas of focus of the day were data-driven instruction, creating accessible reading and writing assignments, and bullying and harassment prevention.

In January and February, each department has been conducting a curriculum anti-bias review process. Teams have been following a protocol discussion with a framework for reviewing imagery and language in course materials.

Faulty members participate in Teachers as Scholars, a collection of academic seminars for K-12 teachers, as well as free workshops through the MA Charter Public School Association. This spring, Zahra Williams and Theresa Szczepanski will attend a four-day Instructional Leadership program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Chris Schelleng asked if the allotment of time for professional development compares to other schools. Zahra responded that there is more here than traditional schools. Most other schools have monthly PD afternoons, as opposed to Rising Tide having weekly PD afternoons in addition to common planning time imbedded within the schedule. Chris Schelleng asked if the amount of PD is attractive to potential employees, and Zahra responded that the reaction has been very positive from teachers either during the hiring process or early in their time at Rising Tide.

Chris Talamo asked what teachers would want if they were designing the time on Wednesday afternoons. Zahra responded that the response from a faculty survey was that most appreciate the balance of the time, but that teachers will advocate for more time for one group or another.

5.3 Enrollment Period Update - Michael O'Keefe, Head of School

Michael pulled up a dashboard with enrollment application data for the current year as well as previous years. As of January 27, 2025, the total number of applicants was down 37 from the number in late January, 2024.

6 New Business

6.1 Discussion of Student Competency Determination

Michael provided an overview of the need for Rising Tide, like all districts in the state, to develop its own Student Competency Determination. Previously, passing MCAS was a state-level requirement for students to meet their Student Competency Determination; in November that changed after voters decided to end MCAS as a requirement for graduation.

The Student Competency Determination and passing MCAS became a state level requirement for graduation in 2003. Over time state increased the bar, 2010, 2021 and set to review again in 2026.

Rising Tide already has very strong graduation requirements, with 28 full credits and additional requirements that go beyond the recommendations of MassCore, which was adopted in 2007 and amended in 2018.

Michael shared the possible options for Rising Tide's Student Competency Determination could be to require MCAS as a graduation requirement, to require the successful completion of certain courses and/or the passing of certain assessments.

Chris Talamo asked what the potential impact of requiring the MCAS as a local requirement may be. Others added questions about whether requiring something that a majority of voters decided to end it as a graduation requirement was wise for enrollment. Chris Schelleng suggested that there is an opportunity to reflect the strategic plan of the school and the culture of rigor and excellence at Rising Tide.

Several Board members expressed interest in meeting to further discuss the Student Competency Determination issue. Chris Schelleng, Laura Flynn, Chris Talamo, and Erin Koh volunteered to meet as a smaller group to discuss.

6.2 Proposed Calendar for 2025-2026 School Year

Michael shared the proposed calendar for the 2025-2026 school year. It includes 180 planned days, 5 make-up days, early release every Wednesday, and 2 full PD days during the school year. As in past years, it also includes a 4-day Labor Day weekend.

Chris Schelleng commented that it looked like the current school year's calendar. Michael responded that it was based on the same pattern.

A motion to approve was made by Laura Flynn and seconded by Sean Kelly. The motion was unanimously approved.

6.3 Head of School Review for 2023-2024

Chris Schelleng shared that the Nominating and Governance Subcommittee had recently conducted the review of the Head of School and performance related to his goals for the 2023-2024 school year. Sean Kelly and Laura Flynn joined Chris for the Head of School review, which included the Annual Report and the Auditors Report as a component of the review. The 4.0 metric was used for assessing the performance of the Head of School.

Goal # 1: Strategically adjust organizational structure to bring greater program alignment and fiscal responsibility

Actions:

- Implement shift from two Principals to a single Principal/Assistant Head of School as the instructional leader for grades 5-12

- 4
- Elevate the Curriculum Coordinators for each subject area to Department Chairs with increased responsibility, including serving as Assistant Supervisors for the teachers in their respective subject areas
 - 3
- Tightly monitor staffing needs and discretionary expenditures throughout the year
 - 3

Goal # 2: Further develop a rigorous academic program that raises the value of student assessment and feedback, takes an equity perspective, and implements excellence in approach

Actions:

- Implement the use of rubrics across the curriculum
 - 4
- Implement the use of common grading categories and weights
 - 3
- Share bi-weekly grade updates with students and families through the Community Portal
 - 3
- Emphasize the use of data from Reading and Math screening tools to provide additional data for teacher action planning and targeted support
 - 3
- Implement Spanish I course in grade 7, SNHU Dual Enrollment Program, and Aviation Maintenance Program with 4Cs
 - 3

Goal #3: Strengthen a culture of collaboration, development, and support within the leadership team

Actions:

- Revise and communicate principles and priorities for 2023-2024
 - 3
- Adjust structures for communication and collaboration, including a weekly Building Look-Ahead Meeting and weekly Cross-Division Meeting
 - 3
- Revise Program Leaders Professional Learning Group to emphasize teacher observation and coaching support
 - 3

Chris Talamo made a motion to approve the performance review conducted by the Nominating & Governance Subcommittee. Laura Flynn seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

6.4 Head of School Goals for 2024-2025

Michael shared his goals for the current school year.

Goal #1 Further develop accountability and support of effective teaching and learning with an inquiry and skills-based approach

Actions:

- Adjust the structure of Student Support Teams to be more efficient with identifying and communicating areas of concern and action steps
- Continue to develop the targeted support structure to meet the needs of students identified through the available data from STAR screenings and MCAS results
- Implement common structures for the use of Google Classroom for each course
- Continue to ensure implementation of professional development that supports tier I excellence as well as community-building and a DBIE lens
- Support a revised teacher observation structure that is led by the Principal and share with the Program Leaders

Goal #2: Further build community trust through increased transparency and engagement from stakeholders

Actions:

- Work with Board of Trustees to increase connections between school leaders and board members
- Collaborate with Rising Tide Parent Group to implement a Parent/Guardian Ambassador initiative
- Bring back volunteer staff committees to work through proactive initiatives and identified challenges
- Establish tiers of teacher excellence that integrate with a more transparent framework for teacher compensation
- Promote the use of communication tools to increase engagement with parents/guardians

Goal #3: Increase number of applications for enrollment for the Upper School and increase the retention of students from grade 8 to grade 9

Actions:

- Hone the messaging from the school in marketing and enrollment
- Build on existing avenues for sharing the story of Rising Tide and opportunities from attending the school
- Work with school leaders and faculty leaders to build natural programming connections between the middle school and upper school
- Revise timeline and communication for grade 8 future planning

John Polvere made a motion to accept the Head of School goals for 2024-2025. Laura Flynn seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

7 Old Business

6.1 None

8. Financial Matters

8.1 Review of December 2024 Financials

Eric Mello reviewed a mid-year report. Overall the finances are good. The budget was based on an estimated 618 Students @\$18,784 per student, and the regional transportation reimbursement was budgeted at 80% of total cost. As of the end of December, 2024, the income is \$14,496 over budget. The expenses are under budget by \$79,341. The Net Income compared to budget is \$93,837.

A motion to approve the financials was made by Amy Norris and seconded by Sean Kelly. The motion was unanimously approved.

9. Board Subcommittee Reports

9.1 Nominating and Governance

Chris Schelleng shared that the focus of the most recent meeting was on the performance review for the Head of School and the current year's goals.

9.2 Communications and Advocacy

Michael shared that the group discussed the current enrollment application numbers and the current efforts in the final weeks of the primary enrollment period. The group also discussed the upcoming Advocacy Week for charter public schools during the first week in February and ways for families to get involved. Michael encouraged board members to sign up for the kick-off event on February 3.

9.3 Finance and Audit

The group met just prior to the full board meeting to review in more detail the financials through December 31, 2024.

10. Other business not anticipated by the chair 24 hours in advance

11. Adjourn

Sean Kelly made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 p.m. The motion was seconded by John Polvere. The motion was unanimously approved.