

## **RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL**

### **Minutes**

#### **Board of Trustees Meeting**

**October 20, 2025**

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: Laura Stearns Flynn called the meeting to order at 7:04pm. In attendance were Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Sean Kelley, Jane Moskowitz, Eric Mello, Michael O'Keefe, and Chris Schelleng.

Eric Mello welcomed Colleen D'Alfonso, an auditor who has overseen the audit for the school for many years. Ralph Andre and Amy Norris were not present. This meeting marked Chris Schelleng's final board meeting after 12 years of dedicated service. Laura, Michael, and Eric expressed their gratitude on behalf of the Board and the school community for Chris's long-term contributions and leadership.

MEETING MINUTES - Chris Schelleng noted that he was not present at the last meeting as stated in the September minutes. Chris made a motion to approve the September minutes with the amendment of his absence. John seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously with noted amendment.

PUBLIC COMMENT - There were no guests aside from Colleen D'Alfonso, and no public comments.

#### **NEW BUSINESS -**

Auditor's report: Colleen presented a summary of the draft audit report for the fiscal year. The Audit found no significant deficiencies or instances of noncompliance – *the best possible result*. The school's financial ratio profile remains in the low-risk category, showing improvements over the prior year. Total assets increased due to operating surplus; liabilities will decrease as the building mortgage is paid down. Total revenues are consistent with FY24, primarily from tuition and federal grants. Total expenses show a continuing downward trend over the past three years. The school remains in strong financial health. Colleen credited Eric with accurate and timely reporting. No recommendations or significant adjustments required. The audit will be submitted to DESE by October 31 and to the Foundation by November 15. Sean made a motion to approve the audit report, Chris Talamo seconded the motion and the vote to approve the auditor's report was unanimous. Colleen departed the meeting following the vote.

Nomination of New Board Member: The Nominating and Governance Committee previously met with Tess Goldmann, an alumna of the school, to discuss joining the Board of Trustees. Tess expressed enthusiasm for learning about governance and contributing meaningfully to the team. Laura noted considerations about how younger members might feel sharing perspectives among more experienced trustees, but this concern was alleviated during their meeting. Chris Schelleng moved to appoint Tess Goldmann to the Board of Trustees. Sean seconded the motion, and the vote to approve Tess Goldmann to the Board was unanimous.

OLD BUSINESS: Laura and Chris Talamo reported that the Board refined its annual goals into three key categories:

1. The Board will work to maintain a list of 2–3 potential candidates aligned with desired qualities and characteristics.
2. On school community and advocacy – the Board will work towards strengthening engagement with the school community and parents, emphasizing retention and enrollment in grades 8–9.
3. On student evaluation and growth – the Board will continue to monitor student performance data to support academic rigor and growth.

Chris Talamo made a motion to accept the goals for the Board of Trustees for the 2025-2026 year. Sean seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

SCHOOL REPORT: Michael reported on MCAS results and noted that Zahra Williams, Assistant Head of School and Theresa Szczepanski, Academic Dean will report in further detail about the results at another meeting. Rising Tide has been recognized as one of 61 “Schools of Recognition” (A school that demonstrates progress toward annual accountability targets, with an emphasis on improved achievement in ELA and math). Rising Tide’s accountability percentile increased from 82-91%; a reflection of performance in academic achievement, high school graduation rate, advanced coursework completion, reduction in chronic absenteeism and progress towards efficiency for ELL. Scores in ELA were 3-25% above state average with the strongest showing in grades 6,7 and 10. Math scores were 6-25% above state average; grades 5 and 6 showed improvement over the past year which has been an area of focus for the school. In Civics, 8th graders scored 9% higher than the state average and Science scores were 6-8% above the state average in grades 5, 8 and 10.

Overall Rising Tide students are meeting or exceeding expectations across the board and in all grade levels. Of particular note were the scores from students with disabilities, ELL, and students from low income families significantly outperforming state averages in achievement and growth.

Chris noted that statewide MCAS scores have declined, making Rising Tide’s improvements particularly impressive. Laura expressed congratulations and appreciation to staff for their dedication and results.

FINANCIAL MATTERS: Eric Mello reviewed first quarter results (July–September) He remarked on the strength of the school board and the staff at the school noting that the future looks bright.

The school is operating under the preliminary budget (610 enrollment target; current 607). Although the student enrollment decreased, the per pupil tuition rate increased slightly. The school has a strong cash flow supported by last year's surplus with transportation reimbursements on track and salary savings from new hires. John motioned to approve the September financials, seconded by Chris Schelleng, and the vote to approve the first quarter financials was unanimous.

For the FY26 budget, enrollment will be adjusted down to 605 students. The projected per pupil funding increased from \$19,644 to \$19,872. Expenditures increased in the marketing department with an update to the school website video. Highlights for other expenditures include capital improvements for a new well and irrigation system for the playing field, or magnetic doors for the atrium, a new van with the school logo for extra-curricular activities, a new contractor for snow removal, (anticipating higher cost), new video equipment, printers, renewal on IT and principal payments on debt. Chris Schelleng asked about the cost of living adjustment for the faculty. The standard staff increase for FY26 was 3%. John made a motion to approve the proposed FY26 budget, Sean seconded the motion, and the vote to approve was unanimous.

The Webster Bank line of credit is due for renewal in November. The Finance Committee recommended a 3-year renewal, with preference for a 5-year term if available. Chris made a motion to approve the renewal, seconded by Sean and the vote was unanimous to approve.

#### Board Subcommittee Reports:

Nominating & Governance: The committee met with potential new board member Tess Goldman, and reviewed Board goals.

Communications & Advocacy: No recent meeting. Michael noted state-level anti-charter school legislation under discussion, with potential impacts if charter enrollment caps are reduced. He encouraged Board advocacy in support of charter autonomy and funding equity.

Finance & Audit: Covered during financial reports.

Other Business: No other matters were raised.

The Board expressed warm thanks to **Chris Schelleng** for 12 years of service, leadership, and commitment to the school.

Chris Schelleng made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Sean seconded, and the vote was unanimous.