

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

September 15, 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 called the meeting to order at 7:02pm. In attendance were Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Sean Kelly, Amy Norris. Jane Moskowitz and Ralph Andre were welcomed as guests as their roles as board members had not yet been officially approved by DESE. Jane and Ralph were therefore not allowed to vote as board members at this meeting.

MEETING MINUTES - John made the motion to approve the minutes from the August 18, 2025 meeting. Amy seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT - There were no guests (aside from Jane and Ralph). No public comment.

SCHOOL REPORT - Michael reported on Rising Tide enrollment. The school is basically at the same number as last month with 613 students at the time of the meeting. This number is as expected and planned for with the understanding that some shifts in enrollment will occur. There is still room in the upper school for more students who would like to join.

Zahra Williams reported that the school community had just finished the first full week of classes and that the students and faculty and staff were getting back into the routines of daily life at Rising Tide. Zahra commented on the efforts to fulfill the mission and goal of a strong academic program with emphasis on skills and community building as stated in the "Principles and Priorities for 2025-2026."

The first check in for students' grades was available on the community portal - an example of the effort to raise the value of assessment and feedback with transparency, and an opportunity for communication with students and their families. She also reported that the upper school students had already had a day of field work in an effort to build connections and learn what it is to be a member of the Plymouth community. Laura asked how the use of rubrics was working for the faculty. Zahra reported that the staff seemed less intimidated by the use and implementation of the rubrics and had accepted and embraced the system. Zahra also reported on the efforts to ensure that the school is providing and maintaining rigorous academic standards for the students as well as a supportive and compassionate learning environment

with an emphasis on building a strong school community. Zahra was then excused from the rest of the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS - Michael welcomed the new board members with thanks for participating.

Annual report & Accountability plan: Michael provided an overview of how all public schools are held accountable annually for performance standards, noting that charter schools, in addition, undergo a rigorous five-year renewal process. Laura wrote the letter for the first time as chair of the Board of Directors. The Annual Report highlights school performance, accountability, and ongoing efforts to foster diversity and transparency.

Over the past decade, the school community has become more diverse — the number of students from Plymouth has shifted from 75%-45% of the student body, reflecting stronger community representation. And there was a shift in students who identify as solely white from 95% to 80%. Plans include outreach workshops to continue this progress.

Michael reviewed how the school sets its own objectives for accountability within a five-year plan. Not all goals are expected to be achieved simultaneously. Rising Tide's accountability plan includes three main objectives: Providing a strong academic program that fosters the development of skills, providing opportunities for students to connect to the Plymouth region, and providing students with a strong school community.

**On Measuring a strong academic program-** Early data from Spring 2024 shows strong results, with continued improvement in STAR testing. STAR testing has been a valuable tool for tracking improvement and growth. Reading proficiency exceeded targets; math results are improving but just below goal. High-needs students continue to make gains, though the performance gap remains slightly above the target; the goal to reduce the performance gap among high-needs students to below 15% was narrowly missed: Another measure of academic rigor is participation in advanced coursework. 85% of all students and 76% of high-needs students completed at least one advanced course. Michael also reported on the continued focus to ensure support for all students, including English Language Learners (ELL), low-income students, and students with special needs.

**On connection with the community** - Students are actively engaged in community outreach activities across middle and high school levels. Examples include a day of field work with the upper school, Thanksgiving basket drives and senior internships connecting students to the Plymouth region.

**On providing a strong school community** - Though survey data can be subjective, engagement in extracurricular activities is a positive indicator. The measure was for 75% of students to participate in at least one extracurricular activity (sports, clubs, theater), and 78% of students participated in at least one activity. Participation among high-needs students was slightly lower, with a 4.9% difference. Two staff-developed rubrics were created to measure staffing levels, though staff transitions affected progress. (Mr. Howard departed and was

replaced by Mrs. Dennehy mid-year; another program leader went on parental leave earlier than anticipated.)

**Dissemination Efforts:** Efforts to offer educator workshops are ongoing and expected to expand over the next three years. The school's most successful dissemination occurred in 2017–2018, when a state grant supported staff outreach. Chris suggested implementing measures to track progress on dissemination goals.

OLD BUSINESS - Review of the August board Retreat- Laura shared that the retreat was highly positive and reaffirmed the board's shared direction and goals. Facilitator Kate Scott helped review the Board's roles in supporting—without micromanaging—the school's leadership. The retreat included “what-if” scenario exercises to clarify Board responses and strengthen communication. Kate also helped direct goals for the board in the coming year. Jane commented that the review was helpful as a new member. John commented that meeting in person made it easier to connect with the other members.

FINANCIAL MATTERS - The October meeting will include auditors presenting the finalized budget for Board approval. No significant changes from July's report. Enrollment remains at 610 students with per-pupil funding: \$19,644 (expected to increase slightly) There is anticipation of a higher baseline going into FY26. New teacher hires have reduced average salary costs. Transportation is budgeted for 80% reimbursement. There has been some improved interest income due to higher rates, though a decrease is anticipated later in the year. There is still one open staff position and one employee is on PFML, reducing short-term expenses. Overall, the financial outlook is positive for both staffing and enrollment. Chris moved to approve the financial report; John seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

#### BOARD SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Nominating and Governance Committee - In addition to welcoming the newly nominated board members Jane and Ralph, the committee was to meet later in the week and anticipated inviting a Rising Tide Alumni to join the Board of Trustees.

Communications and Advocacy Committee - Amy reported having a meeting with Martha Popoloski, the Communications Coordinator, and Cate Massey, a Rising Tide parent, regarding 2026–2027 enrollment plans. Postcards will be distributed in the fall to promote December and January open houses before the February enrollment period. Martha mentioned there is some continuation of playing defense with state legislators - There may be a need to ask parents and board members to be prepared to advocate for charter schools across the state.

Finance and Audit-committee - Nothing to report- there will be a committee meeting next month.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - a closed meeting, not open to the public regarding concerns related to a former staff member. Sean made a motion to move to executive session, John seconded the motion and the board voted unanimously.

ADJOURN -Sean made a motion to adjourn, Chris T. seconded the motion and all voted in favor to adjourn.