

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

January 26, 2026

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 7:03pm. In attendance: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Tess Goldmann, Sean Kelly, Jane Moskowitz, and Amy Norris. Also in attendance were Michael O'Keefe, Zahra Williams, Eric Mello. Laura thanked everyone for making it to the remote meeting even though school was cancelled earlier due to the snow storm.

Introduction/Welcome to guests - The Board welcomed Arts and Physical Education Department Chair, Barnet Senegal; Athletic Director, Thom Holdgate; and Rising Tide students, Quintin Baecker, and Molly Young to the meeting for updates on the Arts and Athletics programs at Rising Tide.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes - December 15, 2025 Meeting Minutes - with Board vote. Sean made a motion to approve the minutes from December 15, 2025. John seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment - No public comment.

School Report- Enrollment Period Update - Michael O'Keefe, Head of School. Michael reported that enrollment hovered at 595 students, which is slightly lower than expected. The school is in the final month of the enrollment period for the upcoming year, which is a critical time for outreach and promotion. A successful in-person open house was held at the school last Thursday, with another virtual event scheduled for this week and an additional event planned for early February. Historically, January and February are the strongest months for applications. To date, approximately 250 applications have been received, with enrollment typically exceeding 400 applicants by February. There are currently over 110 applicants for Grade 5, with 92 seats available. For Grade 9, there are more than 30 new applicants; last year's total was around 40. These two key entry points are tracking well. Michael highlighted a successful session where high school juniors and seniors visited eighth-grade classrooms. Quintin reported that the experience created strong connections, with thoughtful questions from students about athletics and college preparation. Enrollment runs up to February 13th ahead of the break after which, the lottery for selection will be held. Ken Sweezy will serve as the honored guest at the

enrollment lottery drawing. Last year's guest was Dylan Fernandes. Michael noted that involving local elected officials from both sides of the aisle has become a positive practice for the school. Laura expressed appreciation for the new enrollment and outreach efforts.

Professional Learning Groups (PLGs) - Zahra Williams reviewed the school's approach to Professional Learning Groups over the past couple years. Last year, PLGs focused on cross-curricular collaboration by grade level, for example: 6th-grade science and English teachers worked together. This approach was more successful in the middle school, where there are fewer teachers, and proved more challenging in the upper school due to a wider range of curricula. Some teachers expressed interest in having greater flexibility within the PLG structure. Looking ahead, the goal is to hold 8–9 PLG sessions on Wednesday afternoons by the end of June. The sessions are intended to be intercurricular, with teachers grouped by discipline. Zahra expressed gratitude for the presence of both students and staff at the meeting.

Arts Update - Mr. Senegal, Upper School Theater Teacher and Arts Department Chair, provided an update on the arts program. He reported on the success of Winter Arts Night held two weeks prior, which featured music, dance, and theater performances alongside student art displays. Attendance was strong, and Mr. Senegal highlighted the participation of 8th-grade students, thanking Ms. Johnson for her support in making that possible. An in-school arts showcase was also held for the upper school- allowing students to present work from their coursework. Students performed well, and a middle school talent show was held just before winter break. Mr. Senegal emphasized the importance of fostering student curiosity in the arts through electives and programs such as Theater for Social Change, dance classes, and band, as well as a range of extracurricular opportunities. The fall production of *Captain Hook* was successful, involving 37 students from grades 5–12, with strong audience attendance of 84 and 96 across performances. The department is currently rehearsing the winter play, *Antigone Now*, scheduled to open the first week of February for a two-night run. Mr. Senegal extended an invitation to Board members to attend. Students will also be attending the Massachusetts Thespian Festival, marking the school's first participation in a theater festival since 2020. The event will include workshops, monologue competitions, and a performance of *Antigone Now*. Looking ahead, a spring musical for students in grades 8–12 is planned, continuing a successful model from the past two years that allows 8th graders to collaborate with upper school students.

Mr. Senegal noted that this year's productions have strengthened connections with alumni, several of whom have returned to assist with after-school programs and productions, serving as role models and gaining additional practice in their craft. He expressed gratitude for his role and the program's growth. Laura congratulated the department on its intentional connection between middle and upper school students, noting that this often occurs organically in athletics. Chris asked about factors contributing to the program's growth. Mr. Senegal cited consistency in programming and staffing, including support from Ms. Tew and Ms. Barnhard in theater instruction and the music director, which has provided students with reliable mentorship. John asked whether the arts department had any needs from the Board. Mr. Senegal emphasized the importance of continued budgetary support, noting that strong programming enhances student engagement in after-school activities. Rising Tide student, Molly Young shared that having dance included in the curriculum—something she pursued outside of school—was particularly

meaningful and highlighted the uniqueness of the program at RT. Molly noted that the arts encourage self-expression, help students step outside their comfort zones (especially in 9th grade), build improvisational and critical-thinking skills, and develop abilities that are transferable beyond the classroom. Molly appreciates that Rising Tide encourages students to try more than one type of arts which allows the student to then follow up with specific arts in electives.

Athletic Update - Thom Holdgate, Athletic Director, provided an update on the athletics program. He noted that this is his fifth year working with the school and his second year serving as the full-time Athletic Director. Soccer and cross country remain the most popular programs and are primarily held at Rising Tide. This year, a flag football program was introduced for the middle school, engaging over 50 students, with upper school students serving as coaches and referees. The winter season currently includes basketball as the sole sport, with the Dance team participating at some games. High school teams now play games at Massachusetts Maritime Academy and use the Wolves Den for some practices. Mr. Holdgate shared a proposal to introduce indoor track, with league meets held at Wheaton College while practices would take place at the school. Spring sports are held at various locations, including baseball at Seaver's Field, softball at Stephens Field, tennis at Eel River, and volleyball at Pinehills. High school soccer teams played at Forge's Field this fall; the girls' team had its deepest postseason run to date, reaching the state quarterfinals, while the boys' team also qualified for the tournament and won their first game, which was hosted on campus. Mr. Holdgate noted that Homecoming was brought back to campus this year to increase engagement and included participation from Riverview School. He emphasized openness to expanding athletic offerings as student interests evolve, including potential options such as wrestling or cooperative (co-op) programs with other schools. When students express interest in a sport not currently offered, the athletics department works to connect with partner schools where possible. Laura raised transportation as a significant challenge, noting that limited access can negatively affect participation. The school is in the process of purchasing a van to help alleviate transportation barriers, as away games requiring buses can be costly. When asked about additional challenges, Mr. Holdgate identified participation and finding consistent, accessible venues as ongoing concerns, particularly following the loss of Sacred Heart as a facility. He also noted the need to increase student attendance and support at athletic events. Rising Tide student Quintin Baecker shared his perspective as a three-sport athlete (golf, basketball, and baseball). Quintin expressed interest in increasing fan attendance, noting the challenge of hosting events at venues located up to 30 minutes from campus, and emphasized the potential impact on community spirit. While social media updates have been effective, he encouraged continued exploration of strategies to grow the student fan base. Guests were then invited to leave the meeting. Laura thanked the staff and students for their participation and contributions.

New Business - Head of School 2024–2025 Evaluation with Board Vote - The Nomination and Governance Committee reviewed the Head of School's goals for the year. Michael shared a self-assessment, emphasizing the importance of keeping the school's mission at the forefront of all evaluation measures. Sean and Chris participated in the committee discussion. Sean noted that this year's process reflects an evolution in the Board's approach to evaluation and that the development of a scoring framework provides a foundation to build upon in future years. The

committee provided a score for each goal, summarizing Michael's overall performance with a final letter-grade equivalent. Sean clarified that the overall score is tied to the percentage of the performance-based bonus. Sean made a motion to accept the Head of School's evaluation as presented. Chris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business - Update from Head of School Search Committee - The Board expressed appreciation to Chris for his leadership of the Head of School Search Committee. Chris reported that the committee is meeting weekly and is working diligently to secure a strong replacement as soon as possible. The application remains open through Wednesday, with 52 applicants to date—far exceeding expectations. Chris noted that the pool includes a sufficient number of strong candidates to identify a highly qualified successor. Following the close of the application period, the committee will begin reviewing materials and conducting initial phone screenings. The goal is to narrow the pool to approximately 10 candidates who will meet with members of the subcommittee in February. Final round interviews may include engagement with the full Board and opportunities for candidates to interact with members of the school community in some capacity, with details still to be determined.

Financial Matters Review of December 2025 Financials with Board Vote - Eric presented the financial report for the period ending December 2025, marking the midpoint of the fiscal year. The original budget was based on an enrollment projection of 610 students. The updated budget reflects a revised enrollment of 605 students, along with an increase in the per-pupil rate. Current enrollment is approximately 595 students, with a projected year-end enrollment of 600 students. The projected per-pupil rate is \$19,872; however, DESE figures have not yet been verified and confirmation is expected soon. Income is trending below budget due to lower-than-projected enrollment. On the expense side, the school is under budget by approximately \$98,000. The largest savings are attributed to staff members on PFML. Coverage has been managed through substitutes or redistribution of responsibilities among existing staff. Additional savings have been realized in health insurance expenses. Cash flow remains strong. The school's goal is to maintain at least \$2 million in reserves at all times, and current reserves exceed that benchmark. The school has ordered a van, which will be used primarily for athletics and other trip transportation needs. The vehicle will display the school logo. Administration will evaluate its effectiveness and cost savings compared to bus transportation and may consider purchasing a second van if appropriate. The expectation is that this investment may generate long-term savings. Net income remains positive at this time. While there may be additional snow removal expenses later in the season, the budget already includes an increased allocation for snow removal. Overall, the school remains in strong financial condition. An update on the DESE per-pupil rate will be provided at a future meeting. With the Board's prior approval of the Head of School evaluation, Michael's bonus will be processed through payroll. Amy made a motion to approve the December 2025 financials as presented. Chris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Subcommittee Reports - Nomination and Governance

The committee report was previously delivered earlier in the meeting.

Communications and Advocacy - Michael reported that the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association will be promoting participation in Charter School Advocacy Week next week.

He highlighted the ongoing fair funding issue affecting charter public schools, particularly in the area of facilities funding. Charter schools receive facilities funding that covers approximately 50% of capital costs, requiring schools to allocate operating funds toward non-operating expenses each year. This funding structure limits the school's ability to invest fully in programming and creates challenges in maintaining salary parity for teachers compared to local public school districts. Michael encouraged Board members to raise awareness about these funding inequities whenever possible.

Finance Subcommittee - Eric Mello reported that updated salary ranges were shared with the committee. The discussion included a review of how salary levels are determined. The MA Charter Public School Association shares salary data with member schools, allowing for benchmarking based on school size and comparison with other charter schools. The school is now including salary ranges in job postings, and the committee agreed this is an appropriate time to review and refine compensation practices. Sean noted that financial stability ultimately depends on student enrollment and attendance. Eric added that the recently ordered van, costing approximately \$60,300, is equivalent to the per-pupil revenue generated by roughly two students. An increase of approximately 20 additional students would provide the revenue necessary to hire additional teaching staff. The need to maintain and grow enrollment remains critical.

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