

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

December 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."

1. **Call to Order** - Laura called the meeting to order at 7:02pm. In attendance were: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, Erin Koh, Ralph Andre, Sean Kelly, Jane Moskowitz, Amy Norris, Eric Mello, Tess Goldmann, Michael O'Keefe, and Zahra Williams. John Polvere was absent.
2. **Introduction/Welcome to Guests** - There were no guests at the call to order. (Jannat Elmahyaoui was mentioned in the chat after the time for public comment.)
3. **Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes** - with Board Vote. Amy noted that in the minutes from November 17, some motions did not identify who made or seconded them. Erin will review the notes and amend them, where possible, to include the names of the members who made and seconded each motion. Sean made a motion to approve the minutes with an addendum, and Chris seconded the motion. The provisional minutes were approved unanimously.
4. **Public Comment** - There was no public comment.
5. **School Report - 5.1 Professional Development Update- Zahra Williams, Principal/Assistant Head of School**
Staff were in the building on Wednesday for the first of two professional development full-day sessions; the second session is scheduled for March. After spending the first part of the morning together in the Atrium, the Middle School and Upper School staff met separately. The staff then split off into grade-level and curriculum teams, by subject area and examined the implementation of standardized goals, with a particular focus on formative versus summative assessments. The session focused on coming together to establish clarity around presenting a unified approach with students. The focus was reinforcing standards by raising the value of assessment and feedback and promoting academic rigor, transparency, and fairness. This is accomplished with the consistent use of rubrics, grading weights, and regular communication regarding student progress, growth, and development as learners.

5.2 Enrollment Update - Michael O'Keefe, Head of School

Michael reviewed the current total number of applications compared to prior years, noting a particular focus on increasing enrollment in Grades 9 and 10. Several outreach strategies are being implemented, including the distribution of two versions of postcards—one targeted to middle school families and one to upper school families. A new initiative involves a group of four seniors, working with Martha Popoloski, who have created a Rising Tide TikTok account and are producing videos aimed at directly engaging a younger audience. Additional outreach includes plans to send a mailer to approximately 800 businesses through the Chamber of Commerce, highlighting the school as a regional resource and a school of recognition. Upcoming efforts include an alumni panel featuring 8th graders in January, followed later in the month by panels of current high school students presenting to 8th graders to share their high school experiences. Laura noted that these panels have been engaging and successful in sharing student experiences.

- 6. New Business -6.1 Review of Proposed School SY27 Calendar** - with Board vote
Michael presented the proposed 2026–2027 school year calendar, highlighting key dates and structures for the academic year. He noted that the leadership team has been satisfied with the overall pattern of the school year since COVID. One proposed adjustment includes four all-staff meeting days prior to the start of the school year, with one of those days designated as a full professional development day. Laura noted that the proposed calendar closely aligns with the Plymouth Public Schools calendar. A motion to approve the SY27 school calendar was made by Amy and seconded by Chris. The motion passed unanimously.

- 7. Old Business - 7.1 Review of Proposed Update to Student Competence Determination Policy -with Board Vote**

Michael provided an overview of how the state-level graduation requirements had changed following the voter decision to remove MCAS as a measure for graduation. As a result of this change, districts were required to establish local standards for competency determination. It was noted that some Board members were not serving in March when the initial guidelines were developed, and this review was intended to provide context and clarity. Leaders and staff at Rising Tide came up with a framework for competency determination that included satisfactory completion of required coursework and passing the final assessment for each required course, or successfully completing a performance task, or meeting or exceeding expectations on the MCAS. Subsequent to this work, DESE issued official guidance outlining required components for local competency determination policies, including coursework requirements, measures used to demonstrate mastery, considerations for students with disabilities and English learners, considerations for late-enrolling students, limited circumstances under which MCAS scores may be used, the process for appeals related to competency determinations, and procedures for transcript requests. Michael explained that the revised policy provides greater clarity and alignment with the updated DESE guidance.

Updates include allowing students additional opportunities to retake final assessments prior to June 30 of the school year and permitting successful completion of a more advanced course, with a passing score, to substitute for not passing a prior course final. In cases where prior passing grades or assessment records are unavailable, including for late-enrolling students, the policy allows for the use of MCAS scores or successful completion of a more advanced course. Additional guidance was added for students with disabilities and English learners, including the option to develop an individualized Competency Determination Proficiency Plan (CDPP). The revised policy also clarifies the appeals process for competency determinations and the procedure for requesting transcripts.

Chris T. made a motion to approve the updated Student Competency Determination Policy. Amy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7.2 Update from Head of School Search Committee and Budget Request – with Board Vote

The committee has been meeting weekly, with Chris Talamo completing substantial preparatory work to advance the process. The committee has developed and workshopped a draft job description and has been coordinating with the MCPSA (Massachusetts Charter Public School Association) to explore opportunities for collaboration and shared resources. The committee outlined its proposed timeline, with the goal of posting the position upon return from the January holiday break, reviewing applications on a rolling basis, and extending an offer by mid-April. Chris explained that the committee explored hiring national search firms but determined that those options were outside the available budget and more comprehensive than needed. Instead, the committee expressed a preference for a more local approach, utilizing a consultant to support and advise the committee throughout the search process. Based on a recommendation from Michael to look at vChief, Chris has identified at least one promising candidate who has experience with charter schools on the East coast. Following discussions with Eric Mello, the committee requested Board approval of a \$15,000 retainer for the consultant.

Amy asked about the process used during the prior Head of School transition. Michael explained that there was no formal succession plan at that time. After Jill notified the Board of her retirement, the Board discussed whether to conduct a full search or proceed based on Jill's recommendation that Michael succeed her. Michael was the sole applicant, and the Board ultimately voted to appoint him and subsequently negotiated salary. Sean added that this experience highlighted the need for a more formal and transparent process for future leadership transitions, which the current committee is aiming to establish. Laura made a motion to approve \$15,000 in funds for the consultant, the motion was seconded by Amy. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Financial Matters 8.1 Review of November 2025 Financials

Eric presented the November 2025 financial reports. On the income side, year-to-date revenue was reported as \$14,666 above budget. Current enrollment stands at 599 students, with 370 in the middle school and 229 in the high school, which is below the budgeted enrollment. However, additional revenue in other income categories has resulted in a positive overall variance. On the expense side, expenditures are currently under budget due to savings in health insurance costs and lower salary expenses related to staff on Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) and delayed salary starts. The school continues to experience positive cash flow.

Reviewing the profit and loss statement, Eric noted that tuition revenue was budgeted based on a full-year enrollment of 605 students, though actual enrollment is now projected to be closer to 602. The school is awaiting confirmation of total state tuition revenue for the year. Additional savings were noted in instructional services and health insurance. Overall, Eric reported that there were no significant surprises in the financial statements. The budget assumes a 3% increase over the prior year's per-pupil rate with the hope that the final rate increase will meet or exceed 3%. Amy made a motion to approve the November 2025 financials. Jane seconded the motion. The Board approved the financials by vote.

9. Board of Subcommittee Reports

9.1 Nominating and Governance

9.2 communications and Advocacy

9.3 Finance and Audit

None of the subcommittee meetings had met since November.

10. Other business not anticipated by the chair 24 hours in advance- Michael noted that Jannat Elmaahyaoui had joined the meeting late and was given the opportunity to make a public comment. No comment.

11. Adjourn - a motion to adjourn was made by Sean, Amy seconded and the vote was unanimous. Michael reminded members about the invitation to the upcoming staff holiday party.