

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

March 23, 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 7:01. In attendance were: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Tess Goldmann, Sean Kelly, Jane Moskowitz, and Ralph Andre. Amy Norris joined at 7:08. Also in attendance were Michael O'Keefe, Eric Mello and Theresa Szczepanski.

Introduction/Welcome to guests: The board welcomed Academic Dean, Theresa Szczepanski to make a presentation on the recent STAR Testing results.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Review and approval of Meeting Minutes: Chris motioned to approve the minutes from March 2nd. Sean seconded the motion, and the minutes passed unanimously.

School Report: Michael reported on Accepted Students Day with an emphasis on feedback from students, teachers, the leadership team, and families. Overall, the feedback has been positive. The RT Family Group shared that the event felt warm and welcoming. Laura also reported receiving positive feedback. Attendance included approximately 80 middle school participants, primarily 5th graders with some 6th graders, as well as 45 high school students. Students were divided into separate areas of the building and participated in community-building activities. The school has admitted 15 students from the waitlist and is working to fill classes to capacity in preparation for the start of the school year. The school currently maintains a healthy waitlist at the middle school level, particularly for incoming 7th and 8th grades. However, the waitlist for 9th grade has been exhausted, and there is no remaining waitlist for the rest of the high school grades. As a result, the school plans to open an additional enrollment cycle for the high school, consistent with patterns from recent years. The goal is to make the acceptance and enrollment process as seamless as possible for incoming families.

Winter STAR testing results: Theresa presented an overview of the winter STAR assessment results in literacy and mathematics, noting that the purpose of the update was to focus on key outcomes rather than revisit background information on the assessments. The January winter screening centered on achievement benchmarks, with a schoolwide goal of 80% of students

performing at or above benchmark in both subjects. Results indicate that the school is meeting its goal in ELA, with 81–83% of students at or above benchmark. In math, performance is approaching the goal, with 73–76% of students meeting the benchmark goal. At the high school level, math performance is stronger at 80–82%, while middle school math remains lower at 71–75%. Theresa highlighted that entry points, particularly in 5th and 9th grade math, revealed notable gaps in readiness; however, students in these grades have made meaningful progress since the fall, with new students closing gaps relative to their peers from prior years. A key initiative this year focused on supporting 9th grade students in numeracy and algebra readiness. Narrowing the curriculum to prioritize essential algebraic and numeracy skills, resulted in a median growth percentile of 67%, indicating strong progress. Theresa noted this as a successful model that will continue to be refined by the math team. At the middle school level, efforts to build fact fluency in 5th and 6th grades using the “Mind Facts in a Flash” program have shown encouraging results. There has been clear growth, particularly in division fluency following multiplication instruction. Teachers report that these improvements are translating into stronger conceptual understanding, and showing that students are more proficient in adding and subtracting fractions. Theresa emphasized that early results are promising, with the next step being a deeper analysis from the spring assessments.

Growth data by grade level shows strong performance in grades 6 and 7. While 5th grade growth percentiles appear lower at 49%, this is consistent with typical patterns. Eighth grade growth, while improved from last year, is not as strong as in grades 6 and 7. Theresa noted that 8th graders are engaging in more writing, which may not be fully captured in STAR results. Eighth grade represents the first point in the curriculum with a heavier emphasis on algebra and where students begin to diverge into accelerated and standard pathways. In response, the school is working to better align middle school and high school math curricula and increase collaboration among teachers to ensure continuity and coherence.

Theresa also noted that STAR assessments do not measure all domains, and it will be important to compare these results with upcoming MCAS data. All middle school students completed the winter screening and have been placed into targeted support groups as needed. Family reports were distributed via ParentSquare, and another round of screening will take place in the spring, providing more detailed data on grade-level skill mastery. Overall, Theresa expressed pride in the staff and the progress students have made, highlighting that the school is gaining momentum in its instructional adjustments and demonstrating strong growth. Laura echoed this sentiment, expressing enthusiasm about the clarity of the growth data and the opportunity to strengthen alignment between 8th grade and high school math instruction.

New Business - none

Old Business - Chris Talamo Head, of the search committee for the new Head of School reported that after nine semi-finalist panel interviews, with candidates showing a wide range of talent, skill and backgrounds, that two candidates stood out: Chris Nace from Washington DC and Zahra Williams from Rising Tide. The Search Committee had deliberated whether to advance a third candidate but ultimately decided to proceed with the two most outstanding candidates. Interviews had been scheduled for March 18 and March 19; however, on March 16,

the Committee learned that Chris had accepted a position at Martha's Vineyard Charter School and withdrew his candidacy. The Committee continued with Zahra's in-person interview process, during which she met with students, families, administrators, and staff members. Participants were asked to evaluate her performance, and the summary of feedback showed strong agreement regarding her abilities and leadership skills. The Subcommittee then discussed whether to recommend Zahra or reopen the search process. After consideration, the Committee decided to confidently recommend Zahra as the candidate to advance for the Head of School position. It was noted that the Board of Trustees would need to conduct a formal interview with the candidate, deliberate in a public forum, and discuss compensation and contract terms. Laura reiterated that the Search Committee had remained committed throughout the process to identifying and nominating the best candidate.

Sean made a motion to accept Zahra as the candidate for the Head of School position. Ralph seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. The Board then discussed scheduling the final interview. Availability was reviewed, and Laura expressed a preference for an in-person meeting, though a hybrid option was also considered to allow public participation. Tess suggested that a hybrid format would better accommodate members of the public who wished to attend. The Board proposed scheduling the final interview for Friday at 6:00 p.m. Michael shared that he felt anxious about departing but expressed gratitude for the work of the Committee. Laura also thanked Chris and Sarah, the consultant, for their guidance and support throughout the search process.

Financials: Eric Mello presented the financial report through the end of February, representing eight months of the fiscal year. Total enrollment at the end of February was 585 students, while the year-end projection remains 595. Eric noted that he had recently spoken with DESE regarding projections for per-pupil enrollment, which appeared higher than normal. DESE indicated confidence in those figures, and the School is currently forecasting a 4% increase in the per-pupil rate from the prior year, which will be beneficial for budget planning. On the expense side, despite higher snow removal and storm plowing costs, expenses are under budget. Overall, the School is operating close to break-even at this point in the year. Eric reported that the balance sheet remains healthy, with a strong cash position. State transportation reimbursement had been budgeted at 80% of prior-year expenses. Current spending equates to approximately \$20,069 per student. Some administrative categories are over budget, including legal and recruiting expenses. However, savings have been realized in instructional services due to PFML leave coverage and in special education transportation, where services were reduced from two private providers to one. Additional savings have also come from health insurance and certain non-operating costs. Overall, Eric projected another break-even year, with the potential for a positive year-end result. He noted that financial forecasting should become more accurate over the next few months. He also emphasized the importance of increasing high school enrollment, while noting that the per-pupil rate continues to grow each year. Sean made a motion to accept the February financial statements. Ralph seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Other issues not anticipated by the Board - none

Board Subcommittee reports: none. Finance committee hoping to meet next month

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