

RISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Special Meeting

March 27, 2026

Hybrid Meeting - In-Person and Virtual

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 Stearns Flynn called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. In physical attendance were Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, Ralph Andre, Sean Kelley, Tess Goldmann, Michael O’Keefe, Zahra Williams. Erin Koh attended via Zoom. Not present were John Polvere, Jane Moskowitz, and Amy Norris.

2. INTERVIEW WITH HEAD OF SCHOOL FINALIST

Laura F. welcomed everyone to the Special Meeting and introduced Zahra Williams, Finalist in the current search for our new Head of School. She turned the meeting over to Ms. Williams, who began with a presentation outlining her background, both personal and profession, her education, work experience, and her vision for the future of Rising Tide Charter Public School should she be extended the role of Head of School.

Ms. Williams was born in London and moved to NYC, USA where she spent the majority of her childhood and became a US citizen. She graduated from the NY Public School system and went on to receive her BA in Spanish from Wellesley College in May 2010. From there she received her MEd from Boston College in Curriculum and Instruction (3.91 GPA) in May 2012. Ms. Williams returned to her home community in NY and began teaching at Queens Collegiate: A College Board School (public school) in Jamaica, NY where she taught MS, HS Spanish from 2012-2017 and then was raised up to Middle School Testing Coordinator from 2014-2016.

Ms. Williams joined Rising Tide in 2017 as a Upper School Spanish Teacher in 2017 and has progressed forward to become Faculty Mentor and DBIE Faculty Liaison (2021-2022), Senior Internship Coordinator (2021-2023), and has been serving as Principal/Assistance Head of School from July 2023-Present.

Ms. Williams outlined her opinion regarding the strengths of RT, specifically discussing its academic success, noting RT being recognized as a “School of Recognition” and being in the top 10% of MA public schools. She highlighted a number of initiatives that have helped RT meet this distinction, including early detection and built in structures to support student learning that concentrate on identifying needs early and by focusing on student growth. She paralleled these

efforts to initiatives around supporting academic consistency through the addition of grading rubrics, staff observations and support, and continued opportunities for professional development that are encouraged and supported by the school. Ms. Williams then discussed our school community and her commitment to inclusion and equity for all students (faculty and families) and urged us to look at equality as educational opportunity and proper supports for all. For Ms. Williams, diversity also includes socio-economic status, differences in religion/political beliefs, and family structure. Her wish is that all students, families and faculty to truly feel like they belong here at RT, and she discussed the importance of clubs, community events, and open/honest communications in building this trust and sense of belonging. Lastly, Ms. Williams explained how both of these paths lead to the current challenge of RT, which is a viable and thriving enrollment. She urged for an active approach to building the HS enrolment that is based on connection (building these connections with families, strengthening ties between the MS and US, encouraging staff to see these connections as part of their role) and making efforts to get out into the community to share RT and increase its presence.

Following Ms. Williams' presentation, the meeting was opened up for direct questions.

Sean K. asked a followup question regarding her approach to enrollment and stressed its importance to the overall viability of the school from a financial standpoint. Ms. Williams agreed and spoke to how she would like to continue to grow the transparency of the importance of this financial piece with staff to help grow understanding around how overall enrollment (and its per pupil monetary amount) affects RT's ability for programming and staffing. She again stressed a pro-active approach of bringing RT out into the community and educating our regions to its presence, being an active force in clarifying misconceptions regarding its cost (free and public), admissions (lottery not by application), school choice (not needed to join the lottery), and its current offerings for students.

Ralph A. asked a follow-up question regarding not just recruitment but also efforts for retention of current students, especially during the 8th-9th grade transition from MS to US. Here Ms. Williams spoke about the importance of connections and specifically described some initiatives that build these moments between the MS-US, specially the drama program (RT now has 3 separate theatre productions and are combining the efforts of both MS and US), athletics - focusing on both long term (what would we need to do to plan out a long term approach for our own athletics facility and what would those priorities be) and short term (what can we do/add now that is within our current infrastructure (have we explored track, or other uses for our field, a growth to our relationship with Plymouth Fitness that would include their pool, etc.), and for really working hard to hear RT can work toward making students and families truly feel like they belong to its community.

Chris T. asked what immediate change (if any) Ms. Williams would make if she were in the HOS position. Here Ms. Williams focused on enrollment and working toward building a community where everyone saw a role in how they can help build connections, improve retention, aid with recruitment by going out into their community and sharing their experience of RT.

3. FINAL DELIBERATIONS REGARDING HEAD OF SCHOOL ROLE

Following the interview portion of this meeting, Ms. Williams was informed that she was welcome to stay for the final deliberations as it was an open meeting, and she opted to excuse herself for this portion of the meeting.

Laura F. began by outlining that the first step of the deliberations would be to determine if the BOT felt it appropriate to move to making a formal offer to Zahra Williams for the HOS position.

Sean K. began by saying that while he felt that Ms. Williams was an exceptional candidate, he wondered if the process would have been better if there had been more than one finalist. Chris T (VP and Chair of Search Committee) went through the process of how the final two candidates were chosen and how they had clearly distinguished themselves from all other candidates. Laura F. confirmed this and shared that the second candidate had given all indications that he was fully committed to the full process, going so far as to submit his plane ticket receipt and slide deck the Friday before the on-site panel days. Both Chris T. and Laura F. shared how the other semi-finalist candidates at that point were clearly below the measure of these two finalists. They named specifically not sharing the perspective of community and collaboration, presenting a more didactic approach to oversight. Other candidates struggled with staying on task and answering the specific questions asked or presenting other staff member/Board efforts as their examples to how challenges were addressed in their current schools. During these interviews, Zahra Williams showed strong leadership capabilities in keeping with the collaborative and growth-minded approach established here at RT. Sean K. also acknowledged the specificity of her answers and her use of measures to ensure action not just talk and brainstorming.

Following this discussion, all members present agreed that she was an exceptional candidate and moved toward the specifics of the contract.

Laura F. provided salary ranges for the HOS position at RT, MA Charter School Association, and Sturgis and reminded us that the job posting for this position was listed at \$150,000 - \$180,000. She started the discussion by recommending a base salary of \$160,000 with a 3-year contract. The current HOS position is a 3-year contract and that is in keeping with the MCSA and Sturgis contracts.

Chris T. spoke to the strength of Ms. Williams as a candidate and also pointed out that this salary is in keeping with her work experience as she has not yet held a HOS position. Sean K. suggested moving toward a \$155,000 base salary. Laura F. and Ralph A. spoke to wanting Zahra Williams to feel the confidence in her felt by the Board and agreed that the 3-year contract that included the BOT approved cost of living percentage increase for each fiscal year be written in, as is consistent with the current HOS contract. Sean K. agreed and suggested changing the current bonus structure to allow for acknowledgement for a job well done. He suggested changing that bonus from its established \$5,000 to “up to \$10,000” using the performance metric already established and used by the BOT.

Members felt comfortable with that change and Sean K. made a motion to extend a formal offer of \$155,000 + board approved cost of living percent increase for the fiscal year for years 2 and 3 of the contract, with the additional bonus of up to \$10,000 using the currently established metric of the BOT.

Chris T. seconded the motion.

Laura F. opened for any further discussion. Upon hearing and seeing none, the motion was passed unanimously.

4. ADJOURN

Sean K. made a motion to adjourn. Tess G. seconded. Motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:24pm.