

RIISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

June 15, 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 order at 7:02. In attendance were: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, John Polvere, Erin Koh, Ralph Andre, Tess Goldmann, Sean Kelly, Michael O'Keefe, Zahra Williams, Eric Mello.

Introduction and Welcome to guests - Theresa Szczepanski, Academic Dean was present.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes - John made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from May 18, 2026. Chris seconded the motion and the vote to approve the minutes was unanimous.

Public Comment - there was no public comment.

School Report -Current enrollment stands at 585 students, which is below the projected carrying number but similar to where enrollment was at this time last year. The middle school remains very full. There are waiting lists for grades 5 through 8, with particularly strong demand in grades 6, 7, and 8. Although the incoming 5th grade class is full, there are still approximately 20 students on the waiting list. Upper school enrollment continues to be the primary area of uncertainty. Depending on summer enrollment activity, the school is projecting an incoming 9th grade class of 50–60 students. The school also completed a second round of rolling admissions for the upper school. Twenty-four students were admitted during this round, with eight or nine having enrolled so far. An additional 15 applications have already been received, and recruitment efforts will continue throughout the summer with regular admission checkpoints every few weeks. Upper school enrollment continues to level off at cohorts of approximately 60 students, compared to middle school cohorts of about 90 students. Laura noted that the overall enrollment picture looks very similar to last year. Board members agreed that increasing upper school enrollment should remain an area of focus, and that future discussions should explore new ideas for raising awareness of the school and encouraging more families to consider enrollment.

Spring STAR Testing Results - Academic Dean, Theresa Szczepanski reports: Theresa Szczepanski presented the results of the spring STAR assessment, the third and final screening

of the school year for students in grades 5–10. Middle school students were assessed in early April, with high school testing completed later in the spring due to scheduling considerations. STAR measures student achievement and growth in both reading and mathematics. Students scoring at or above the 40th percentile are considered at benchmark, and the school's goal is for 80% of students to meet or exceed that benchmark. STAR also measures student growth by comparing progress over the year to that of academically similar students nationwide.

Schoolwide, 80% of students met or exceeded the benchmark in ELA, meeting the school's goal. In mathematics, 73% of students reached benchmark, an improvement from approximately 65% at the beginning of the year, although still below the 80% target. High school students scored 88% at or above the benchmark in ELA compared to 77% in middle school. In mathematics, the high school reached the 80% benchmark goal, while the middle school finished at 71%. Theresa noted that the school's two primary entry points—grades 5 and 9—entered the year with a larger percentage of students below benchmark in mathematics than previous cohorts. Despite this, teachers in both grades achieved strong student growth, particularly in high school, reflecting effective instructional interventions.

Growth data showed encouraging results overall. High school students, especially in grades 9 and 10, achieved median growth scores above the national median (50th percentile). While middle school growth as a whole was slightly below the national median, most individual grade levels met or exceeded the 50th percentile. Sixth grade again demonstrated lower growth, similar to last year, and staff continue examining the transition into introductory middle school mathematics. Theresa explained that interpretation of eighth-grade math results is complicated because roughly half of eighth graders take Algebra I rather than standard Grade 8 mathematics. Students remaining in Grade 8 math demonstrated stronger growth, and upcoming MCAS data may provide additional insight. Seventh grade is also split between standard and accelerated pathways, although all students receive Grade 7 math instruction. Staff are also examining how Grade 5 math instruction aligns with Grade 6 to better bridge learning gaps.

ELA growth remained positive overall. Ninth grade again showed the strongest gains in the high school, while sixth and seventh grades exceeded the national median for growth. Fifth and eighth grades posted the lowest growth scores. Theresa noted that STAR assesses reading but not writing, and that increased emphasis on writing instruction—particularly in eighth grade—may be reflected more clearly in upcoming MCAS results. A major focus this year was strengthening students' foundational math fluency through the MIND Facts on Fire program for grades 5 and 6. The 12-week intervention included 45 lessons focused on multiplication and division fact fluency. Before the program, only 29% of fifth graders and 15% of sixth graders could complete 40 math facts per minute. After the intervention, those numbers increased to 69% of fifth graders and 67% of sixth graders. Teachers reported that stronger basic fact fluency made it noticeably easier to teach grade-level mathematics. Theresa emphasized that weaknesses in foundational skills from earlier elementary grades continue to create barriers, and while no single intervention will solve the problem, improving automaticity with basic facts is an important step.

The school also continued its focus on increasing student proficiency with informational texts. Historically, students have performed more strongly in literature than informational reading. Teacher goals this year intentionally emphasized informational text instruction, and for the first time the school saw improvement in both literature and informational text performance. Ninth grade showed particularly strong gains, and tenth grade avoided the decline seen in previous years. Theresa described the two-year trend as clear evidence that the instructional focus is producing results.

Looking ahead, STAR screening has concluded for the year, and results will be shared with families before the end of the school year. Preliminary English MCAS results appear encouraging, although a more complete picture will be available in the fall when STAR and MCAS data can be analyzed together. Instructional priorities for next year include maintaining the emphasis on informational texts, continuing the Facts on Fire program for grades 5 and 6, expanding support into seventh grade, and strengthening alignment between eighth-grade mathematics and Algebra I coursework as students transition into Grade 9.

Laura thanked Theresa for presenting the data in a way that was accessible to the Board and noted how encouraging it was to see measurable improvement so quickly. Theresa credited the teachers for embracing the instructional changes, consistently implementing the new strategies, and building momentum throughout the year. Laura asked that the Board's appreciation be shared with the faculty. Sean asked how incoming students compare academically with those from the school's sending districts and how Rising Tide's growth compares statewide. Theresa explained that statewide growth reports consistently show Rising Tide achieving the highest student growth among schools in its sending districts in both ELA and mathematics at the middle and high school levels. **She noted that this is a compelling message for recruitment, demonstrating that enrolling at Rising Tide is an investment in student growth.** She also observed that many incoming middle school students, particularly from larger sending districts, arrive with greater weaknesses in mathematics than in ELA, reinforcing the need to address foundational numeracy skills early. Tess asked whether STAR and MCAS results are shared directly with students so they can better understand their own progress. Theresa shared that when improved results were discussed with one group of students, they took pride in seeing their growth. She agreed that finding more opportunities to share assessment results with students is worth exploring, particularly at the high school level where students are well positioned to understand how their progress connects to future coursework and academic goals.

New Business -Laura proposed holding a half-day, in-person retreat at Rising Tide in August as an opportunity for the Board and school leadership to meet face-to-face, build energy for the coming year, and focus on upcoming goals. She noted that last year's retreat was successful and suggested it would be a good setting for a more in-depth conversation about enrollment and other strategic priorities. Chris agreed, saying it would be valuable to have a larger, more focused discussion and that the retreat could be both productive and inspirational. Zahra offered to identify a few possible dates and send them to Laura, who will then distribute a Doodle poll to determine availability. Zahra also asked whether staff members would be invited. Laura responded that senior staff would likely be included and said she is open to inviting

additional staff as well. She also welcomed suggestions for other topics to include on the retreat agenda.

Old Business - none

Financial Matters - Eric presented the May 2026 financial report, noting that there is one month remaining in the fiscal year and that the school is in a strong financial position. Final results will depend on the remaining payments received from DESE over the next few weeks. The budget was built on an enrollment of 605 students, while actual enrollment finished at 595. Revenue is currently over budget, primarily because the per-pupil tuition rate was higher than anticipated. Expenses remain under budget, with significant savings in health insurance costs contributing to a positive year-to-date balance. The school's cash position remains healthy. Eric noted that the school has not yet received all expected state reimbursements, including approximately 80% of the transportation reimbursement, which is typically received near the end of the school year. The food service program is currently under budget on both revenue and expenses, resulting in little overall financial impact. The school recently met with the food service to discuss taking on more administrative responsibility and upgrading some kitchen equipment, with the goal of improving both the quality and taste of meals served to students. Higher-than-budgeted expenses included costs associated with the Head of School search, snow removal, and electricity. These were offset by savings in the school lunch program, special education transportation, health insurance, and other operational areas. Overall, the school is performing better than budgeted. Sean made a motion to approve the May 2026 financial statements. Tess seconded the motion, and the Board approved unanimously.

Board Subcommittee Reports - need to make some dates to meet with subcommittees

Other business not anticipated by the chair 24 hours in advance - This was Michael O'Keefe's last meeting with the Board. The board expressed thanks for his work with the school. Sean suggested (jokingly) that Michael make the motion to adjourn - Sean made the motion to adjourn, Michael seconded and the vote to adjourn was unanimous.