

RIISING TIDE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

May 18, 2026

In person 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 7:04. In attendance were: Laura Stearns Flynn, Chris Talamo, Jane Moskowitz, Ralph André, John Polvere, Tess Goldmann, Erin Koh, Michael O'Keefe, Zahra Williams, and Eric Mello. Amy Norris and Sean Kelly were not present.

Introduction and Welcome to Guests: Dr. Joseph Fisher, Director of College and Future Planning, was present.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes: Tess noticed a typo in Chris Talamo's name. Apologies to Chris. Chris moved to approve the minutes and Ralph seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

School Report: Michael shared that the currently undefeated softball team has clinched its league title, capping off an outstanding season. The girls' tennis team has qualified for the state tournament for the second consecutive year. He also noted that rehearsals for the school musical are underway, with performances scheduled for Wednesday through Friday evening. Zahra provided information about the upcoming graduation which will take place on Friday, June 5, at 2:00 p.m. at Plymouth Memorial Hall. Seniors will participate in a rehearsal and luncheon before the ceremony. This will be an early-release day for the school. All students are welcome to attend, although transportation will not be provided. Free parking is available across the street from the venue, and parking placards are available for Board members. Zahra also reported that the Eighth Grade Celebration is planned for Tuesday, June 23 in the Rising Tide atrium. The event will include a moving-up ceremony led by the eighth-grade teachers, there will also be cake. Board members were invited to attend either or both events and were asked to confirm their availability.

Michael introduced Dr. Fisher, who, together with Theresa Szczepanski, has been leading the development of the school's new Advanced Academic Pathways program. Dr. Fisher explained that the Pathways are designed to enable students to pursue more specialized and rigorous coursework aligned with their interests and future goals. Through a combination of advanced

courses and electives, students will be better prepared for relevant college programs and career opportunities. The program builds upon Rising Tide's existing flexible academic structure, which already includes advanced courses with opportunities to earn college credit through AP tests as well as Dual Enrollment courses in partnership with SNHU. Six Pathways have been developed: Life and Health Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Software and Web Development, Arts and Performance, Language Arts and Communication, and Politics and Society. Dr. Fisher described two primary goals for the initiative. The first is to strengthen student recruitment and retention by clearly communicating to current and prospective students and families how Rising Tide can prepare students for high-demand fields in higher education and the workforce. The second is to provide greater structure and consistency within the elective program, ensuring that courses are aligned, well-developed, and maintain a high level of quality. An example Pathway was presented, demonstrating how students could fulfill pathway requirements through a combination of prerequisites, core courses, and elective options. Zahra added that electives offer opportunities for the faculty to be creative, allowing teachers to design courses both within Pathway areas and in subjects outside their primary academic disciplines. The school plans to create a summary outlining the available options for publicity promoting the school. Dr. Fisher reviewed the development timeline, noting that the Pathways were created through a collaborative process involving design work, teacher feedback, and planning around future elective offerings. The goal is to finalize elective offerings for the following school year early enough to provide teachers with additional curriculum planning time and to allow students to make informed course selections. Additional work over the summer will focus on refining program details and developing a comprehensive Program of Studies. The expectation is that the Pathway structure will be fully incorporated into the course selection process by March of the following year. Laura commented that the Pathways program highlights many of Rising Tide's strengths, including its rigorous core curriculum and diverse elective offerings. She asked how students would participate in the program and whether enrollment caps or an application process would be necessary. Dr. Fisher responded that those details are still being developed. He noted that communicating options early will help students identify first, second, and third choices. Because the pathways are designated as advanced, participation will likely require students to meet certain academic standards, including minimum grade point averages. In response to questions about flexibility, Dr. Fisher explained that the Pathways are primarily designed for students during their final two years of high school. Most students currently take between two and four electives per year. While students may choose to focus on a Pathway, participation is not required. Students will continue to have opportunities to explore a variety of electives without committing to a specific track. The Pathways are intended to provide greater structure, identity, and recognition for opportunities that largely already exist within the school's curriculum. Jane asked whether students would have sufficient time to explore different interests before committing to a Pathway. Dr. Fisher confirmed that exploration remains an important component of the middle school and early high school experience and that the Pathways are intended for students in later high school years. Erin asked what percentage of students might be expected to participate. Drawing on prior experience, Dr. Fisher estimated that approximately 20 percent of students might initially take advantage of the Pathways, though participation could increase with effective guidance and communication. Ralph noted that the structured approach, while still allowing student choice, may also provide reassurance to families. Several Board

members expressed appreciation for the work from Dr. Fisher and Theresa Szczepanski. Tess remarked that participation in a pathway could strengthen students' college applications, and Dr. Fisher agreed, noting that the program would provide an additional way to recognize and communicate students' academic accomplishments and areas of specialization. Dr. Fisher then left the meeting.

New Business: Board member departure - Amy Norris was a board member for 8 years. She was a parent of a Rising Tide student and also served as secretary and participated in weekly meetings during the covid epidemic. Michael expressed thanks for her efforts. He also noted that Amy participated in the Communication and Advocacy subcommittee so there might be a need for another board member to fill that role.

Nomination and election of FY27 officers - with Board vote: Laura reported that the current officers had all agreed to serve again. Laura as Chair with Chris as vice chair, John as Treasurer, and Erin as secretary. Ralph motioned to approve the nominations and Jane seconded the motion with a unanimous vote to approve the current board positions. The Board then approved the proposed Board meeting dates for 2027 for the third Monday of every month with some months usually paused one week for holidays or vacations. Chris mentioned he will be away March 15. Chris made the motion to approve the dates, John seconded the motion and the dates were approved unanimously.

Old Business: None.

Review of Financial Matters: Eric reported that the school is now ten months into the fiscal year. Overall, the school is in a positive financial position as the school continues to maintain a healthy cash balance. Eric noted that the proposed budget assumes an 80% transportation reimbursement from the state, but those funds will not be received until June. Revenue is currently above budget due primarily to an increase in the per-pupil rate rather than enrollment growth. Administrative expenses are running over budget because of consulting costs related to the Head of School search, along with legal and other consulting expenses. Snow removal and electricity costs have also been higher than anticipated. These increases have been partially offset by savings in health insurance and from positions that remained unfilled longer than expected. During the balance sheet review, Eric explained that the school's various bank accounts remain stable and continue to support normal operating expenses. Grants receivable are largely related to transportation reimbursements expected from the state. Fixed assets include the 59 Armstrong Road building and the improvements that have been made to it, along with furniture, the school van, computers, equipment, and land. Outstanding liabilities include bills that will be paid in May. The state tuition overage liability is expected to be reduced to zero by the end of the fiscal year. Eric also reviewed the school's long-term liabilities, noting that approximately \$8 million remains on the school's bank loans, which currently carry relatively low interest rates. Tess asked why the school plans to refinance a loan if interest rates are expected to increase. Eric explained that the current loan is reaching maturity and must be refinanced. He noted that the school intends to discuss options with Webster Bank but is not obligated to remain with that lender. The administration hopes the school's long-standing relationship with the bank will result in favorable refinancing terms. Jane asked what interest rate the bank might

offer. Eric explained that the financing structure is more similar to a bond than a traditional loan, making future rates difficult to predict. Jane asked whether the school had ever considered installing solar panels to offset electricity costs. Eric responded that several solar companies have evaluated the property in the past, and one consultant concluded that solar may not provide sufficient return on investment. He noted that Rising Tide has historically benefited from favorable electricity rates. However, the administration continues to explore options and remains open to new opportunities. Jane noted that tax credits and incentives may still be available and suggested the school continue investigating the possibility. Jane made a motion to approve the April financial report, Tess seconded the motion and the board approved unanimously.

Sub Committee reports: Nominating and Governance took a break after the Head of Search committee meetings.

Other business not anticipated by the chair: Laura wanted to bring attention to Michael's last in-person meeting as Head of School and acknowledged his 23 years of commitment to the school in different roles. Michael started at Rising Tide as a teacher when the school had just 220 students and witnessed the expansion to include a high school with 47 students. She noted it will be hard to fill Micheal's shoes, but the board is looking forward to working with Zahra Williams.

Ralph made a motion to adjourn, Tess approved and the motion was approved unanimously. (Chris departed the meeting at 7:50 as he had previously mentioned to Laura.)