

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Monthly Board Meeting — Jan. 7, 2020

Via Zoom

MINUTES

Gio Bosco (Board President) called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and welcomed everyone. In attendance (all virtually) were the following:

Trustees: Gio Bosco, Dana Grossman, Donna Steinberg, John Ziegler, Melody Burkins, Karl Furstenberg, Ann Bumpus, Robin Junker, Harry Kinne, Lindsey Klecan, Mary Dan Pomeroy, Katie Saunders (and her baby), Shannon Darrah

Absent: Marisa Donovan

Employees: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Deb Sanders-Dame (Director of Special Education Services), Betsy Pond (Social Studies Teacher), Sadie Mayfield (Special Education Faculty), Siobhan Lopez (Dean of Students), Joseph Deffner (English Teacher), Becky Sarazin (Special Education Paraprofessional), Blendon Salls (Director of Athletics), Eric Ward (Basketball Coach), Jason Gray (Basketball Coach), Jennifer McCall (English Teacher), Jessica Soulia (Special Education Faculty), Joanne Parker (Special Education Paraprofessional), Julie Goodrich (Counseling Team Coordinator), Linda Lanteigne Magoon (CFO), Melissa Perry (Math Teacher), Molly Dugan-Sullivan (Coordinator of College Planning and Counseling Affairs), Patty McIlvaine (Director of Advancement), Rebecca Walter (School Counselor), Stacy Barton (Social Studies Teacher), Tim Ouellette (Assistant Basketball Coach), Scott Ellis (Coordinator of Thetford Outdoor Program)

Members of the Public: Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk), Melissa Thaxton, Patricia Smith, Loretta Gray, Stephanie Daniels, Nick Reo, Angie Spickard, Tippi Oshoniyi, Krystal McGovern, Gregory Kasten, Jill Koppers, Karen Colby, Kelly Mousley, Kelly Smith, Kevin Perron, Kyle, Laurel Mackin, Kristen Downey, Mario, Patrick Perry, Sarah Ireland

Students: Charlize Brown, Gretta Koppers

1. Welcome & President's Report (Gio Bosco)

With so many people in attendance, Gio outlined some guidelines to keep the meeting running well. Members of Public were invited to share their opinions during the Public Comment period.

Gio asked the trustees to introduce themselves – which they all did.

Gio shared a vignette about visiting Washington, DC, last weekend, how different it is, and how fortunate he feels to live in Thetford, VT. He welcomed everyone to speak honestly and to listen respectfully.

2. Public Comment

Gio called on attendees in sequence:

Greg Kasten: The pod experience has not worked for his son, who started at 4 days on campus and is now doing 0.

Gretta Koppers: Has played basketball for 4 years but is more concerned with the lack of in-person classes. That outweighs basketball.

Jill Koppers: Works at another school and has been in-person all year. Considers it a very valuable experience, speaks in favor of more in-person classes at TA.

Karen Colby: Has been teaching in-person 5 days per week all year.

Kelly Smith: Supports the basketball program.

Kevin Perron: The last semester-and-a-half has been a real struggle. Lack of interaction has played a role – 4 days of homework and one day of classes. Wants to get back to a place where more learning is happening.

Krystal McGovern: Is a nurse. Appreciates all that TA staff & community has done to keep us as safe as we are. We are entering winter where we are more inside. Not sure that this is the right time to make any staggering changes, but if any changes are made they should be in the realm of education. But the primary goal is safety.

Laurel Mackin: Appreciates all the good work of the board and staff. Wants to increase interaction among students, but hopes not to frame it as a choice between basketball and academia. Wants us to be ready to pivot open when given the go-ahead.

Melissa Perry: Making a personal statement about the plan that will be presented later in the meeting. The plan leaves her with concerns about safety. Wants to raise concerns about her own mental health and that of her colleagues. Asks the board to reject the plan and continue the same as the first semester.

Melissa Thaxton: Works at Lebanon High School, which has gone back and forth between hybrid & in-person. Her kids are missing in-person. Wants teachers to be part of the plan. But if can't go in-person, would like more online opportunity for interaction.

Nick Reo: Combines Gretta and Krystal McGovern's sentiments. If the rationale for the pod system is to keep kids separate, then adding basketball is in conflict.

Angie Spickard: If we're going to take risks, take them with instruction rather than sports.

Patricia Smith: Urges the board to find ways to get kids back in front of teachers. Suggests that the pod model isn't all that effective for education. If it's safe to play sports then it's safe to have kids masked in classroom with teachers.

Patrick Perry: The pod structure isn't permanent, it's a bridge. 4000 Americans died yesterday. Safety is paramount, everything else is secondary.

Rebecca Walter: Supports conversations about more in-person instruction. Very important to support teachers & staff.

Sadie Mayfield: Teachers were notified of this plan at 2:46 p.m. Wednesday by email. Haven't had time yet to review it for contractual implications.

Sarah Ireland: When her kids heard about basketball, they thought about other ways to establish contact.

Scott Ellis: Supports Carrie's academic plan.

Stephanie Daniels: Wants to prioritize in-person learning. Wants to thank faculty & staff. We have data and models around us of how to work safely. Her kid isn't learning well. How can we be safe AND increase in-person interaction?

Gio read 2 sentences from Loretta Gray's letter: "He [Jason Gray] understands that academics are essential ... He also knows that sports must be in place to balance the academic rigor."

Gio encouraged everyone to seek a balance for the students, faculty, staff, and community.

3. Consent Agenda

Meeting Minutes – December 10, 2020

Motion: Approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: John Ziegler

Abstained from minutes' approval: None

4. Anti-Racism Task Force Update (Donna Steinberg)

Donna reported that the task force had two meetings in December and a third is upcoming on Monday. They have intensive homework to do. They will be moving to meeting every other week.

5. New Business: Spring Semester 2021 Plan (Carrie Brennan)

Carrie said that the caring of the community is evident. She acknowledged that the plan was just presented via video to teachers yesterday. While TA had much time over the summer to make the fall-semester plan, this is a faster-paced process as it's happening while school is in session. The fall plan was intended as a one-term plan, and now it's time to propose a second-semester program.

Carrie presented her proposal via a slideshow (archived separately):

- Academics: Keep the pod structure in the mornings, but add a single, in-person, in-the-classroom block in the afternoon four days per week, beginning on Feb. 1 (i.e., A block on Mondays, B on Tuesdays, C on Thursdays, and D on Fridays).
- Athletics: Follow Governor Scott's guidance. At this moment, it would permit indoor, non-contact practice sessions.

Board members engaged in a robust discussion:

Melody: Recognizes that Covid numbers are increasing rapidly, and wonders why we're opening up now when it seems that everything is getting alarmingly worse. Do we expect the state to revert to Level 2 or below? Carrie: TA opted for a safer fall plan than most schools, and the proposed changes are less aggressive than most nearby schools.

Ann: Asks whether the added block is really two half blocks. Carrie: Yes. Ann: Also asks if there still will be a remote option. Carrie: Yes.

Robin: Wonders how we can best support the faculty's sense of safety and well-being. Can we do anything to help? Carrie: Says that she has heard two concerns: (1) the shift in exposure, health & safety; and (2) there's been an incredible work investment in getting us this far, and there would be another investment needed to make another shift. Might also need staff adjustments.

Gio: Asks whether we've considered an extended break between semesters to give more preparation time. Carrie: Her plan doesn't include that, but there is the possibility to pay staff who opt-in to work over the upcoming break. She also notes that on the present schedule we will just reach the 170-day requirement with no days to spare without extending the school year.

Robin: Wonders how we actually do a no-contact basketball practice. Carrie: Says to trust Blendon and the coaches to do it properly. The students can do passing drills, weights, etc.

Ann: Adds that the state guidelines were for teams to be all masked and have no scrimmages.

Katie : Asks if we are still willing/able to make changes to the plan. Carrie: The plan is just unfolding this week. As such it hasn't had the iterative honing like the summer's plan had. There's a lot of work to be done regarding implementation.

Katie's Baby: gurgle

Mary Dan: Wants to clarify that the remote option continues under this plan, and that teachers may choose to continue to teach remotely through the blocks. Carrie: Yes to both.

Dana: Really likes the plan, recognizes that it's very complex. Has insight regarding safety through her work as a medical editor: Even in places where cases are soaring, schools have continued to have very low Covid rates – and that's surprising but it's very clear in the data. Opines that this plan is a very low-risk move.

Karl: Asks about how much more time students will spend on campus. Carrie: There is no change to the length of the school day. She clarifies that teachers will go from interacting with just their pod students to interacting with all their classes over the course of a week.

Lindsey: Notes that the new plan supports more synchronous learning – even if we end up having to pivot to fully remote later. Also notes this is up to 5x more weekly interactions. Can we roll out this new plan in a more step-wise fashion to increase the comfort level for those with safety concerns? For example, could we keep the physical pod aspect but implement the schedule change? Carrie replies that this exact proposal was considered in August, but it was shelved because it was deemed too difficult to implement given that some teachers teach both middle- and high-school students (i.e., these teachers couldn't turn their back on their middle-school pod students in the afternoon while teaching their high-school students online).

Melody: Hopes we wait a bit. Mentions that the science about all of this is very young – There's a lot we don't know. Would also like TA to be able to do regular Covid-testing, but recognizes that we might not be able to.

Siobhan: Adds that the plan could be modified as Covid caseloads change. The plan doesn't begin until Feb. 1 – we can delay its implementation if necessary. But thinks it's important to have a plan in place – and then see when we can start to implement it.

Blendon: Thinks we can offer the kids a path to normalcy through athletics. Kids are really seeking that.

Robin: Recognizes what Lindsey said about 5x more contact points. Thinks that the pod system has been so good that it's makes it hard to break out.

Katie: Points out that the low-Covid-spread data is more for schools with younger kids, not for older kids.

There was a somewhat-lengthy discussion of whether the Board needed to make a motion and, if so, what that motion should say. The Board had previously, in August, voted to authorize Carrie to develop a pandemic plan and revise it as needed. Gio felt that it was important at this juncture for the Board to take a new vote as a re-confirmation. Carrie asked for support of the specific plan she presented, rather than just delegation to make a plan. Gio said that if the state decides to permit

interscholastic athletic competition for indoor sports, he would want us to discuss that before TA moves ahead with it. Melody re-iterated that she has safety concerns about the plan as presented, but recognizes that Carrie has the authority to make said plan.

Motion: The Thetford Academy Board of Trustees delegates to the Head of School, Carrie Brennan, the authority to develop and implement a pandemic plan, consistent with the concepts outlined at the January 7 Board of Trustees meeting, for the second semester of the 2020-2021 school year, in consultation with stakeholders, including employees, students, parents, and trustees. Further, the Head of School may make changes to the plan as appropriate and needed to respond to changing circumstances.

Moved: Ann Bumpus

Seconded: Dana Grossman

Abstained: Katie Saunders, Melody Burkins

The motion passed.

(Shannon had to leave the meeting before the vote, but prior to leaving she wrote in the Zoom "Chat" that she supports the plan.)

6. Town Reports

Lyme, NH (Karl Furstenberg)

The budget is consuming the Lyme board's attention.

Carrie, Karl, and Lindsey will begin work on the partnership agreement in January.

Thetford, VT (Shannon Darrah)

Shannon sent a text to say that Thetford's town and school budgets are moving forward. She will have updates for the February meeting.

Strafford, VT (Gio Bosco)

Carrie and Gio met with Sarah Root (Chair of Strafford School Board) and Jamie Kinnarney (Superintendent of WRVSU) to discuss last month's letter. The letter was well received and will be discussed at their school board's meeting next week.

7. Committee Reports

Board Management (Donna Steinberg)

BMC has discussed the safety measures for hiring coaches and prioritizing diversity in the recruitment of Board candidates.

Personnel (Harry Kinne)

Harry and Dana have been working on a memorandum of understanding for reimbursement arrangements.

Resources (John Ziegler)

John has checked with Linda, and nothing has changed that would require a need to revisit the 1.5% tuition increase approved at the last meeting. TA's PPP loan has been forgiven.

Advancement (Karl Furstenberg)

The committee met yesterday. The admissions picture looks quite good. An interesting side effect of the pandemic is that we've had much more contact with people because everything is virtual. Fundraising is running a bit ahead of last year (which was not a great year for fundraising, following the Bicentennial year which was very good). TA is doing well at retaining donors and generating new donors, but is not doing as well at raising large gifts. This would likely require additional staff dedicated to fundraising.

8. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

None.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 10:31 p.m.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Katie Saunders

The motion passed unanimously.

Recorded by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk).

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)