

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Monthly Board Meeting — Nov 12, 2020

Via Zoom

MINUTES

Gio Bosco (Board President) called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. In attendance (all virtually) were the following:

Trustees: Gio Bosco, Dana Grossman, Donna Steinberg, Marisa Donovan, John Ziegler, Melody Burkins, Karl Furstenberg, Ann Bumpus, Robin Junker, Harry Kinne

Absent: Mary Dan Pomeroy, Shannon Darrah, Lindsey Klecan

Employees: Derek Burkins (Science Teacher), Carrie Brennan (Head of School, arrived 8:20 p.m.)

Members of the public: Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

1. Welcome & President's Report

Gio welcomed everyone and noted the increasing COVID numbers in Vermont.

2. Public Comment

None

3. Consent Agenda

- a. Approve the Meeting Minutes – Oct 8, 2020, Board of Trustees regular meeting.*
- b. Adopt the policies on "Personnel Recruitment, Selection, Appointment, and Background Checks" [B20] and "Distribution of Non-School-Sponsored Literature in the School" [E21].
- c. Delete the policy from Linda's desk on "Public Solicitations/Advertising in Schools" (H4 under the old numbering system). This policy will be superseded by E21, which follows the VSBA model policy on this topic.

**Dana requested that, in Item 5 of the 10/8/20 minutes, her comment should be corrected to: "Dana expressed hope that all members of ARTF will be members of the TA community or of the towns it serves."*

Motion: Approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Dana Grossman

Abstained from minutes approval: None

The motion passed unanimously.

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

- ARTF got a large dedicated pool of applicants from which to form group.
 - Theresa Hernandez (consultant), Siobhan Lopez (Dean of Students), and Donna met to send out invitations; of the six invitees, they received five positive responses. They are waiting for a response from the sixth invitee.
 - ARTF hopes to have one or two meetings in December and get to work quickly.
- Gio asked if there was a plan to include current TA students. Donna said that was the original plan (for two students), but that none has yet applied to join the ARTF. In the absence of student applications, she will work to ensure that student voices are heard through the student-connected members of the Task Force.

5. Town Reports

- a. Lyme, NH (Karl Furstenberg)
 - Karl reported that the one COVID case publicly reported in the Lyme School was contained and did not spread (no additional tests came back positive). The school has reported it has returned to normal operations.
- b. Thetford, VT
 - Shannon absent; no update at this time.
- c. Strafford, VT (Gio Bosco)
 - Gio formed a working group to focus on with Strafford relationship discussion of Dana Grossman, Dan Grossman, Curtis Richardson, Charlie Buttrey, Therese Linehan, Carrie Brennan, and Patty McIlvaine. Their goal is to make recommendations as to the most productive way to move forward.
 - Trustees noted the Board is presently without a representative from Strafford after rotations of previous representatives. The TA Board continues to request Strafford representation.
 - Gio, Dana, and Carrie noted they had attended a recent Strafford School Board meeting and reported that the Strafford residents are discussing, with some urgency, several issues that are relevant to the future of Strafford students choosing to matriculate at Thetford Academy. Some of these issues will be decided by the Strafford School Board, other decisions may go to town votes.

6. Committee Reports

- a. Board Management (Donna Steinberg)
 - Lindsey led the BMC effort to successfully update two additional policies, both now formally approved (see Item 3: Consent Agenda).
 - BMC continues to work on increasing the overall number of Trustees and is meeting with at least one potential candidate who is expected to submit materials by 12/3/20.
 - BMC will be meeting with Carrie to discuss overall TA Board of Trustee recruitment strategies and planning that will benefit TA short- and long-term.
 - Marisa asked whether the TA Board has a matrix of needs for filling positions on the Board (e.g., needs for specific expertise, affiliations, or background). Donna responded that there is no formal matrix, but that Board needs are continually assessed and that goes into the discussions for strategic recruitment and nominations. Melody added that Board composition is an ongoing discussion and that developing a diverse, strategic bench of potential recruits is ongoing work in BMC.
- b. Personnel (Harry Kinne)
 - The three-year personnel contract is now successfully ratified, complementing the successful, three-year faculty contract ratification earlier this year.
 - Gio asked the members of the Personnel Committee to review their process in this last round of Board of Trustee discussions with faculty and staff to establish a template for positive practices leading to successful negotiations. He noted this could help future members of the Board of Trustees and Personnel Committee.
- c. Resources (John Ziegler)
 - John reported that the committee met the week before last to go over budgets, forecasts, and tuition timeline, then presented an overview of last year's budget projections with actual budget outlays to-date, noting COVID changes.

- John noted that the partnership with Thetford Elementary School for buildings and grounds staffing and services has been highly successful in both outcomes and budget savings.
 - John noted that there are no final budget numbers yet for the first quarter (Q1), but that preliminary forecasts are that school revenue will come in higher due to COVID-related changes, specifically in the reductions in athletics spending and additional revenue from the federal (PPP) grant.
 - Dana asked if there were any restrictions on use of the federal grant funds – John replied that they are all going to unrestricted funds.
 - John reported that Resources Committee is still working through the process of moving TA endowment funds to Merrill Lynch.
 - The next Resources Committee meeting will be a meeting regarding setting the preliminary budget, including tuition, for FY22. In addition, TA Trustees will receive a preliminary budget at the next (December) Board meeting.
 - TA Trustees will be expected to vote on finalizing the FY22 budget at the January Board meeting in order to send budget and tuition information to the State of Vermont by January 15, 2021.
- d. Advancement (Karl Furstenberg)
- Fundraising
 - Karl noted that TA fundraising is entering “end-of-year” solicitation phase. Solicitations will go out before Thanksgiving with new materials developed by Patty and a consulting firm. Karl said he thinks that fundraising needs to be re-energized -- e.g., get younger TA alumni more involved and other partners, including formal TA alumni groups, more involved and engaged.
 - Karl suggested the TA Board may want to discuss creation of a designated Development Committee. TA Board of Trustees currently has Advancement and Admissions together in one committee, but Karl suggested the Board consider a single committee focused on fundraising efforts. Gio agreed. Marisa added that this type of committee would help support Patty. Dana suggested that Wendy Cole, now retired, would be a good member to recruit.
 - Karl suggested that our goal should be to get 100% of TA Trustees to pledge their support each year as that kind of pledge can help secure additional donors.
 - Private-Pay students.
 - The Board discussed how TA manages private-pay student interest and noted TA continues to:
 - encourage and recruit private-pay students on its website and in its marketing materials, and
 - manage requests of tuition assistance on a case-by-case manner, with the understanding that additional policies and procedures may be developed by the Board.
 - Karl pointed out that every town in VT & NH is obligated to provide free education for children, so the Board should understand that the number of families seeking private-pay tuition assistance will likely remain small.
 - Board discussion on this topic then focused on how the Board might debrief families that have participated in private-pay at TA to better understand their experience, how the Board can learn more about different town experiences with private pay through discussions with TA alumni, and how the Board might focus future recruitment efforts throughout the Upper

Valley.

7. Head of School Report (Carrie Brennan)

- Carrie presented her monthly Head of School report via a series of slides (see archive) that included – among other topics – the highly positive NEASC feedback on recently submitted NEASC two-year update documents, ongoing Open House events at TA, and the future of winter sports.
- John congratulated the TA team on the positive NEASC feedback.
- Dana asked Carrie if she had takeaways from Open House events so far. Carrie replied that it is still too early to know how they went, but that – aside from minor technology glitches that were managed – they seemed to go very well, and everyone did an excellent job.
- Robin noted her concern that there are contradictory messages being sent by TA to the community in allowing large groups to play indoor winter sports (basketball) while TA students must continue to follow small-group restrictions for in-class (pod) instruction on campus and maintain other remote engagement requirements. She was highly concerned about the cognitive dissonance and believed that families and students need to understand how both make sense as TA policy (as she does not believe they do).
- Board members discussed the concern and expressed their unanimous opinion that indoor winter sports were not a good idea and that, in fact, TA students should not participate in basketball given those concerns. The Board also recognized they could not take any binding action at this time because such an action would (a) need to be warned, and (b) would need a thoughtful communications plan if TA were to act to suspend the sport without Vermont State leadership making the same declaration (though many expected that to happen). Carrie asked for additional time to consider this request by the Board and manage communications should the State not make the decision itself.

8. Executive Session: Personnel Compensation

At 9:10 p.m., the Board chose to go into executive session.

Motion: Move into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter.

Moved: John Ziegler

Seconded: Ann Bumpus

The motion passed unanimously.

Leif LaWhite left the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Out of executive session at 9:15 p.m.

9. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)

