

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting — December 6, 2022
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some remote via Zoom)
MINUTES

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:48 p.m. In attendance were the following:

Trustees: Donna Steinberg, Cara Ray, Dana Grossman, Sarah Adams, Harry Kinne, Paul Mutone, Erin Boyd, Marisa Donovan, Lucy Wagner, Rebecca Hanissian, Julie Acker, Sheilagh Smith, Ashley Woo

Absent: Blythe Keane, Katie Saunders, Sam Perry

Employees: Carrie Brennan (Head of School), Patty McIlvaine (Director of Advancement), Ben Bailey (Director of Finance), Kristen Downey (English Faculty), Ehrin Lingeman (School Garden Coordinator)

Members of the Public: Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk), Billy Ulz, Monica Mathias, Rachel Orenstein, Emily Brown, Jesse Dewey, Jeremy Bauer, Meg Darrow Williams, Amber Braley, Fabienne Sterns, plus about half a dozen other people who did not give their names (or full names)

1. Welcome & President's Report

Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance and began by sharing the good news that board member Katie Saunders had her baby girl, Ada, on November 29 and that all in the family are well. Donna mentioned the importance of the board marking happy events like that, as well as working through hard issues when they arise—pointing out the larger attendance than usual at this meeting and noting that some of those in attendance would likely want to participate in the Public Comment period to express concerns they have.

2. Public Comment

Billy Ulz introduced himself as a 2012 graduate of TA and a former special educator at the school and read a statement expressing concern about interactions he had had with his supervisor and events surrounding his departure from the staff. Monica Mathias also read a statement, supportive of Billy and describing her recent move to Vermont and her own experiences as a paraeducator. Amber Braley commented that she is disheartened by the events Billy described. Fabienne Sterns expressed concern about students who have IEPs and who experience bullying and harassment and wondered about the board's role in such matters. Jesse Dewey introduced herself as a former special educator who resigned from TA because she did not feel supported. A few other members of the public introduced themselves but said they had no comment to make, and a few chose not to introduce themselves.

In closing, Fabienne asked how the matter would proceed. Board member Julie Acker explained that the board would need to gather more information before responding, and that they would do that and get back to the individuals who expressed concerns.

3. Consent Agenda

- Meeting Minutes — November 10, 2022, Board of Trustees monthly meeting

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Julie Acker

Seconded: Rebecca Hanissian

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Head of School Report

Carrie Brennan began by acknowledging the matters that were brought up during the Public Comment period and said, “We hear your concerns.” She went on to introduce the school’s new director of finance, Ben Bailey. Then she presented a slide show (archived separately); the topics she covered included:

- Efforts that have been undertaken to strengthen the office hours structure.
- The fact that the fall semester has been hampered by a lot of illnesses, among employees and students alike.
- How wonderful it has been to have arts residencies and guest speakers once again on campus—including a Shakespeare actor, a bookbinder, an outreach educator from WISE (and a TA alumna), a veteran (and parent of a TA alumna), and more.
- Recent “Taste of TA” student recruitment events.
- The all-school Thanksgiving meal, which resumed after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic.
- The status of the two school-approval processes TA regularly takes part in.

5. FY24 Budget Process Update and Discussion

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, said the committee had met that morning with the school’s external auditors. The auditors had delivered a draft of their annual audit, which expressed an “unqualified” opinion of the status of the school’s finances. This is the best assessment possible; no deficiencies or weaknesses were identified. Paul said the auditors needed to make only two journal entry adjustments, for amounts that are “insignificant” in the context of TA’s \$8 million budget. There is one outstanding item they still need to look at—why the level of accounts receivable is higher than usual. Once that point has been clarified, Paul will share more detail on the audit, but he doesn’t want to do that until we have the final report—though he did want to share this summary assessment now.

Paul then reviewed the issues involved in setting the FY24 tuition rate, following a discussion of the same subject at the November board meeting. The board needs to set the FY24 tuition at the January board meeting in order to meet state reporting requirements. He again laid out a range of tuition rate increase possibilities—from 3% to 7%—and explored the budgetary consequences of each one. He noted that the FY22 tuition was increased 1.5% from the previous year, but expenses that year rose 7%. And for this current year, FY23, tuition was increased 5%, but inflation is exceeding that percentage. Discussion about the pros and cons of various increases were discussed.

Julie Acker, who serves on both the TA board and the Town of Thetford School Board, pointed out that the biggest impact of a higher percentage increase is on the Thetford school budget, and she reminded the members of the TA board about the joint budget discussion between the Thetford School Board and the TA Board scheduled for Tuesday, December 13. She said she hoped many TA trustees would be able to be present, either in person or virtually; the meeting begins at 6:00 p.m., and the budget discussion will probably start about 6:45.

6. Code of Conduct

Erin Boyd, interim chair of the Board Management Committee, said the committee has decided to reinstate an annual board code of conduct pledge. She said she would be sending a signable PDF to everyone and asked all members of the board to sign it and send it back to her. In light of the issue brought up during the Public Comment period, she asked trustees to take particular note of item 3, asking them to “not become involved directly in specific management, personnel, or curricular issues unless they are brought to the Board through appropriate channels.”

7. Thetford-Lyme Bridge Update and Discussion

Donna Steinberg noted that board member Ashley Woo has stepped in to be the board’s liaison with the discussions taking place about the renovation and associated 18-month closure of the Lyme-Thetford bridge.

Ashley said she had attended the public meeting held on November 28 at TA, at which the New Hampshire Department of Transportation engineer who is overseeing the project described the process the DOT has followed. Some discussion about the project and its impact on TA followed, and the question was raised whether the board should take a position on the closure. There was no decision on that matter, but Harry reminded everyone that the board had sent a letter expressing concern about the impact of the closure about a year and a half ago—though the project now is at a different point in its timeline.

8. Select Committee Reports

a. Personnel Committee

Dana Grossman, chair of the Personnel Committee, reported that the negotiations with faculty are proceeding well, with most language issues having been wrapped up and the salary negotiations now being on the third round of offers/counteroffers. She said negotiations with staff are handled as a separate process, which has just begun to get underway.

b. Advancement

Marisa Donovan, chair of the Advancement Committee, reported that the returns on Giving Tuesday were better this year than last year and that the annual appeal had just gone in the mail and should be arriving soon. She also said that Patty McIlvaine has readvertised the advancement assistant position and has interviewed two candidates. Finally, Marisa noted that the advancement office recently received a report making recommendations for renovation/replacement of the lighting system in the Martha Jane Rich Theater. The total cost of the suggested upgrades is \$100,000, so the next step will be to place the various aspects of the project in priority order.

9. Executive Session: Personnel Issue

Motion: To enter executive session to discuss a confidential personnel issue.

Moved: Julie Acker

Seconded: Marisa Donovan

The motion passed unanimously.

Everyone still present except for the members of the board and the head of school left the meeting, and the board entered executive session at 8:04 p.m.

The board came out of executive session at 8:30 p.m.

10. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

None.

11. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Marisa Donovan

Seconded: Julie Acker

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Drafted by Leif LaWhite (Recording Clerk)

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)