

**THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
Monthly Board Meeting – December 14, 2023  
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some via Zoom)

**MINUTES**

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:49 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Dana Grossman, Darin Knaus, Harry Kinne, Paul Mutone, Jeff Jamele, Katie Saunders, Marty Jacobs, Ashley Woo, Francine A’Ness, Marisa Donovan (left the meeting at 8:00 p.m.), Sheilagh Smith (joined the meeting at 6:53 p.m. and left the meeting at 7:15 p.m.), Sam Perry (joined the meeting at 7:15 p.m.), Erin Boyd (joined the meeting at 7:19 p.m.), Erika Hoffman-Kiess (joined the meeting at 7:23 p.m.)

Trustees absent: Lucy Wagner, Cara Ray

Others present: Carrie Brennan (TA Head of School), Ben Bailey (TA Director of Finance), Patty McIlvaine (TA Director of Advancement), Betsy Pond (TA Teacher), Stephanie Joyce (TA Teacher), Casey Huling (TA Teacher)

**1. Welcome & President’s Report**

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance. She noted the wonderful participation in the recent TA Winter Concert — which featured performances by the school chorus, the stage band, and the instrumental ensemble.

**2. Public Comment**

None.

**3. Consent Agenda**

- Approve meeting minutes — November 9, 2023

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Harry Kinne

Seconded: Francine A’Ness

The motion passed unanimously.

**4. Head of School Report**

Head of School Carrie Brennan presented a slide show (archived separately); the topics she covered included:

- A review of the advisory program; each advisory includes 10 to 12 students, and the program’s goals include ensuring that each student has a connection to a TA educator who knows them well, promoting a sense of belonging, fostering each student’s academic and social-emotional growth, and building school spirit
- An update on the Annual Fund
- A brief report on recent recruitment events, including “Taste of TA” programs during the school day for both prospective 9<sup>th</sup> graders and rising middle-schoolers

- A review of the weekly Head of School email communication; it is part of the school's parent engagement strategy, serving both practical and mission-focused purposes
- An update on the campus master planning process, including work with Banwell Architects and Gade and Associates fund-raising consultants

A brief discussion followed about the degree of engagement that students exhibit within the advisory program.

## **5. Select Town Reports**

### **a. Thetford**

Jeff Jamele, the Thetford representative to the TA Board, noted that the Thetford Town School Board had assumed that they would have the FY25 state aid to education figures by now, but they've learned they won't have them until mid-January. However, he added that they did get some good news in the form of better equalized pupil numbers (i.e., the pupil count based on weighting that takes into account students' socioeconomic and educational needs) than they had expected.

He also noted that Bernice Mills, the Thetford Elementary School (TES) principal, has submitted notice that she is retiring, and that TES's social and emotional learning coordinator, Caitlin Toleno, has been named by the School Board as the new principal and will take on the role as of July 1, 2024.

### **b. Lyme**

Darin Knaus, the Lyme representative to the TA Board, said the Lyme School Board has set its FY25 budget, and it reflects an increase over FY24 of 6%.

## **6. Executive Session**

Motion: To enter executive session to discuss personnel- and negotiations-related matters relevant to the FY25 tuition rate and budget.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Katie Saunders

The motion passed unanimously, and the members of the Board, Carrie Brennan, and Ben Bailey entered executive session at 7:33 p.m.

The Board came out of executive session at 8:17 p.m. (and the members of the public who had been attending the meeting virtually who'd asked to be notified when the executive session ended were texted). The meeting resumed at 8:22 p.m.

## **7. Tuition and Budget Planning Discussion for FY2024-25**

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, explained that the annual percentage increase in the TA tuition, when averaged over the previous five years, had fallen behind the Vermont state average tuition, well behind the CPI, and behind virtually all other area high schools. He said, as a result, the Resources Committee was unanimously recommending a 6.5% increase in TA's tuition for the 2024-25 school year.

He noted that additional budget actions would still be necessary to achieve a balanced budget for FY25 and that the administration and the Resources Committee have been working on the details of those actions, but that a 6.5% tuition increase would bring a balanced budget within reach.

It was also noted that setting the 2024-25 tuition in December, rather than waiting until January (when doing so is mandated by state law), would allow more than the usual amount of time to communicate with sending school districts about next year's tuition rate and the reasons for it.

Motion: To increase the TA tuition from 2023-24 to 2024-25 by 6.5%, from \$22,430 to \$23,890.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously.

#### **8. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items**

None.

#### **8. Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Ashley Woo

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk), with note-taking support from Erin Boyd