

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting – April 11, 2024
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some via Zoom)

MINUTES

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:47 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Dana Grossman, Jeff Jamele, Paul Mutone, Erika Hoffman-Kiess, Marisa Donovan, Marty Jacobs, Darin Knaus, Sam Perry, Lucy Wagner, Erin Boyd

Trustees absent: Katie Saunders, Ashley Woo, Francine A’Ness, Cara Ray, Harry Kinne, Sheilagh Smith

Others present: Carrie Brennan (TA Head of School), Patty McIlvaine (TA Director of Advancement), Ehrin Lingeman (TA Staff), John Piecuch (TA parent and Thetford resident), Chris Leitao (TES parent and Thetford resident), Tere Gade and Rick Blount (representatives of Gade Associates, fundraising consultants)

1. Welcome & President’s Report

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance. She commented that she has helped chaperone a TA field trip on Monday, to see the total solar eclipse at the Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury. She said it was awe-inspiring to experience such an event with a group excited, engaged of TA students. And she added that the trip resulted in a large front-page photo of the TA group, wearing matching T-shirts, in the next day’s *Valley News*.

She also noted a change to the published agenda — the fact that the board would be going into executive session to discuss the campaign planning report from Gade Associates, as it contains confidential information.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Consent Agenda

- Approve meeting minutes — March 14, 2024
- Approve Policy C07 — Student Attendance
- Approve Policy C12 — Prevention of Sexual Harassment as Prohibited by Title IX
- Approve Policy B5 — Prevention of Employee Harassment

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Marisa Donovan

Seconded: Darin Knaus

The motion passed unanimously, with one abstention.

4. Select Town and Committee Reports

a. Lyme

Darin Knaus, the representative from Lyme, noted that he has been reaching out to families of Lyme 8th-graders as part of TA's admissions process, to offer himself as a resource for learning more about TA. He also noted that both the school budget and a major asbestos remediation project passed at the Lyme town meeting — an indication of the town's support for important education-related projects.

b. Thetford

Jeff Jamele, the representative from Thetford, said the Thetford School Board had recently held its annual reorganization and that he is now the board's vice chair, as well as the liaison to the TA board. He also noted that TA Head of School Carrie Brennan's attendance at the most recent Thetford School Board meeting was helpful to the board in their discussion about the designation of TA as Thetford's high school.

c. Resources Committee

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, said the committee is focused primarily on finishing the development of a balanced budget for FY25, which they hope to be able to present to the board at the May meeting. They have about a gap of approximately \$180,000 that still needs to be closed, he said.

5. Action Item: Authorization to Move Forward on Annex Accessibility Project

Carrie described the functional benefits of the proposed Annex accessibility project, to add a lift to the middle school Annex Building so all its classrooms can be used by students or staff with mobility challenges, and Paul laid out the financial aspects of the project: the fact that \$150,000 is already committed toward the \$300,000 cost (based on two bids in hand), and the remaining funding is in process. Paul noted that the Resources Committee felt comfortable bringing the project to the board for approval.

He and Carrie both underlined the fact that if approval wasn't granted at this meeting, it would not be possible to get the project underway in time for it to be completed by the beginning of the FY25 school year. Paul added if the additional financing doesn't fall into place by this summer, it would be possible to tap the endowment for bridge funding. He and Carrie both noted that this is a "critical project that needs to happen."

Discussion followed their presentations, including about the risk of tapping the endowment should that be necessary. Carrie concluded by noting that the donors approached so far about the initiative have been "very sympathetic."

Motion: To approve the Annex Accessibility project.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Paul Mutone

The motion passed unanimously.

6. Head of School Report

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

- Enrollment projections for FY25. She explained that the projections are based on current demographics from sending towns, plus four-year rolling averages of previous years' yields from each sending town. The projections right now look good, with the FY25 budget predicated on 308 students, but the model looking like we may have 313 students. She added that they are being more conservative in their projections now, after the underperformance of the model in FY24.
- The receipt of a \$50,000 donation from the Poore Farm Family Trust toward the Annex Accessibility project. The Poore Farm Trust has been a longtime supporter of TA wellness and equity initiatives, and this is their largest gift to TA; she thinks it may even be their largest gift ever to any recipient and noted that TA is very grateful for the support from this community foundation.
- The campaign planning study, which the board will hear more about later in executive session. Carrie noted that Gade Associates had conducted 27 confidential interviews with major stakeholders in the process of formulating their recommendations.
- The selection and implementation of a new student information system — a platform called Alma. The new system will be launched for the FY25 school year, she said.
- The establishment of the FY25 school calendar. She mentioned the difficult juggling act to try to align TA's school breaks as much as possible with both Orange East Supervisory Union and sending school districts south and west of TA.

Brief discussion followed about the challenges of projecting student enrollment. Carrie noted that there is now very close collaboration in that process between the administrators who oversee admissions and the business office.

7. Executive Session

Motion: To go into executive session — with Head of School Carrie Brennan, Director of Advancement Patty McIlvaine, and Gade Associates officials Tere Gade and Rick Blount — to discuss the confidential campaign planning study.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Dana Grossman

The motion passed unanimously and the board, plus the four individuals noted in the motion, went into executive session at 7:38 p.m. The board came out of executive session at 8:44 p.m., having taken no action.

8. Executive Session

Motion: To go into executive session — with Head of School Carrie Brennan — to discuss contract negotiations and FY25 staffing.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Erika Hoffman-Kiess

The motion passed unanimously and the board, plus Carrie Brennan, went into executive session at 8:48 p.m. The board came out of executive session at 9:05 p.m., having taken no action.

9. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

Erin Boyd reminded board members that August 29 has been set as the date of the board's annual, in-person retreat, and that all board members should try, if at all possible, to attend the June 6 monthly board meeting in-person.

10. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Dana Grossman

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

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