

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting – June 6, 2024
Hybrid (some attendees in person at TA, some via Zoom)

DRAFT MINUTES

Donna Steinberg (Board President) called the meeting to order at 6:46 p.m. Attendance was as follows:

Trustees present: Donna Steinberg, Dana Grossman, Paul Mutone, Marty Jacobs, Lucy Wagner, Erin Boyd, Ashley Woo, Francine A’Ness, Harry Kinne, Sheilagh Smith, Marisa Donovan, Cara Ray, Katie Saunders, Jeff Jamele, Erika Hoffman-Kiess, Sam Perry, Darin Knaus

Trustees absent: None

Others present: Carrie Brennan (TA Head of School), Mark Pichette (TA Director of Counseling), Chris Leitao, Susanna French, Tony Strat-Cortez, Tippi Oshoniyi, Abby MacGregor, Casey Huling, Stephanie Joyce, Betsy Pond, Natalie Drescher, Caroline Watts, Vin Wylie

1. Welcome & President’s Report

Board President Donna Steinberg welcomed everyone in attendance. She began by mentioning a recent letter she had received from 19 students involved in the group Students for Justice in Palestine, related to a review that is underway of the school’s policy on student freedom of expression. She said the trustees who are reviewing the policy will welcome having a conversation with the students.

She concluded by noting that this would be her last meeting both chairing the board and as a member of the board, and she expressed appreciation to her board colleagues for the privilege of serving with them—adding that she felt she and the other departing trustees were leaving the board and the school in good order.

2. Public Comment

TA senior Natalie Drescher identified themselves as a trans student and said they wanted to share with the board some recent upsetting events, including the use by another student of the n-word and the defacement of a Pride flag in a chalk art installation. Two other students also present—Caroline Watts and Vin Wylie—said they too have observed casual racism and microaggressions on campus and added that perpetrators often receive only minor punishment, which leads to repeat offenses.

Several members of the board expressed deep regret at the occurrence of such events and commended the students for their bravery in sharing their concerns with the board. Carrie Brennan expressed deep regret as well and said the administration would redouble their efforts to address such incidents forcefully. The students thanked the board for listening to their concerns.

3. Consent Agenda

- Approve meeting minutes — May 9, 2024
- Elect trustee candidates:

Peter Blodgett
Sue Kruse
Chris Leitao
Karen McPhee
John P iecuch

- Elect board officers:
Ashley Woo, president
Francine A’Ness, vice president
Erin Boyd, clerk
- Policy D06 — Class Size

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Lucy Wagner

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Thank-you to Departing Trustees

While Carrie Brennan loaded the slide show for her Head of School Report, this agenda item was moved up, and Erin Boyd, chair of the Board Management Committee, and Ashley Woo, incoming board president, distributed some “TA swag” and expressed appreciation to the five retiring members of the board for their service:

Marisa Donovan
Dana Grossman
Harry Kinne
Cara Ray
Donna Steinberg

5. Head of School Report

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

- A focus on the graduating seniors, including a photo of most of the class on the summit of Mount Moosilauke on last fall’s Mountain Day.
- A review by Mark Pichette, director of counseling, of the class’s post-graduation plans, including these facts:
 - Of the approximately 5,000 graduating seniors in Vermont each year, only about 50% on average go on to a four-year college or university, but at TA that figure is 64%.
 - Most competitive colleges accept half their incoming class via early decision nowadays—a big shift since before the pandemic; eight of TA’s graduating seniors this year were admitted early.
 - The counseling office focused on guiding students and families through an especially complex year for college admissions, given the upheaval in the federal financial aid arena and the return by many competitive schools to requiring standardized test results.
 - 48% of current seniors took some form of dual enrollment class.
 - 16% of current seniors designed and completed a Challenge Course (an independent study, under the guidance of a community mentor), in fields ranging from biomechanics to German.

- 24% of current seniors completed a program at the River Bend Career and Technical Center.
- Of the TA students enrolled at River Bend, the percentage doing employer-based co-ops has increased from 40% to 70%.
- Given the rising demand in the region for workers skilled in the trades, there is now a waiting list for many River Bend programs.
- Most of the seniors who plan to enter the workforce directly are now graduating with good-paying jobs in hand.
- The ability of local high school students to enroll in Dartmouth courses was restored this year, for the first time since before the pandemic, and TA's participation in that program is second in the region only to Hanover HS.
- Recognition of the members of the TA faculty and staff who are departing this year.
- Increasing attendance by parents/families at seniors' capstone roundtable presentations; last year, 18% of seniors had one or more family members in attendance, and this year almost 50% did.
- An enrollment/recruitment update; projections are that the student count in the fall will be slightly ahead of the number on which the budget is based.
- The roster of free community events being held on campus over the summer, including a return of the family-friendly concert series.

Discussion followed, including about the return to colleges requiring standardized testing, TA students' enrollment in Dartmouth classes, and the guidance available to students who are entering the workforce.

6. Action Item: Vote to Confer Diplomas on the Graduating Seniors

Motion: To confer diplomas on the seniors who have been approved by the faculty for graduation.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Ashley Woo

The motion passed unanimously.

7. Select Town and Committee Reports

a. Lyme

Darin Knaus, the representative from Lyme, said two of the graduating 8th graders from Lyme will be coming to TA; one will go to St. Johnsbury Academy; and the remainder of the class, about 19 students, will go to Hanover HS. He also noted that bids for the renovations that were going to be undertaken this summer on the Lyme School came in higher than expected, so the work has been postponed until 2025.

In response to a question, he said he suspects the work on the Thetford-Lyme bridge was a factor in this year's high school decisions, even though the bridge is slated to reopen this fall.

b. Board Management Committee

Erin Boyd, chair of the Board Management Committee, said the committee has been continuing to review and revise policies. She also said they would be in touch with the five new trustees soon about orienting them to their responsibilities on the board. And she extended a reminder about the in-person, on-campus board retreat on August 29.

In response to a question, she said the committee is also continuing to look at adding both student and employee representation to the board—and possibly adding more sending-town representatives as well—and hopes to be able to present a suggested process to the board sometime in the fall.

c. Resources Committee

Paul Mutone, chair of the Resources Committee, said it appears that the school will end the 2023-24 fiscal year on June 30 with a break-even bottom line, or perhaps a slight deficit. And as of the end of March, he said TA's endowment stood at \$5.5 million and its long-term debt at \$4.9 million. He added that it may be possible to transition into the 2024-25 fiscal year without tapping the school's line of credit.

He also updated the board on a recent decision the committee had made regarding the possibility of putting out a request for proposals to seek a new auditing firm; after weighing the pros and cons, the committee decided not to rush into an RFP process now and instead seek proposals in late fall or early winter for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

In addition, he shared with the board a recent change in TA's defined contribution retirement plan. The committee voted at its last meeting to replace a previous target date fund offering with a similar offering from TIAA—one of the country's leading providers of financial services, especially to educational institutions; the TIAA fund has both a lower cost and a better ability to blend assets, Paul noted.

d. Advancement Committee

Marisa Donovan, chair of the Advancement Committee, said there was a significant increase this year in Annual Fund gifts. She asked for trustees' help in contacting donors who have made gifts in past years but have not yet made one this year. Carrie Brennan mentioned that she had just received a check for \$8,000 toward the annual fund from an alum, and Marisa noted that that put this year's annual fund tally over \$90,000—making it possible that the total might go over \$100,000 by the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

She added that the committee had arranged a concert series again for the coming summer, with each one featuring a different family-friendly band and food available from Tug Mountain Pizza.

In addition, although a formal town report from Thetford was not on the agenda, Jeff Jamele, the Thetford representative to the board, noted that Thetford Elementary School has recently sent out a parent survey and that the school had applied for a grant to have several Level 3 EV chargers installed in its parking lot. Brief discussion followed as to how the results from the survey would be shared; Jeff said he would check.

8. Executive Session: Capital Campaign Strategy

Motion: To go into executive session with Carrie Brennan to discuss capital campaign strategy.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Marisa Donovan

The motion passed unanimously. The board went into executive session at 7:55 p.m. and came out of executive session at 8:27 p.m.

9. Action Item: Continue TA's Agreement with Gade & Associates

Motion: To extend the agreement with Gade & Associates fundraising consultants, as TA continues to explore conducting a capital campaign.

Moved: Dana Grossman

Seconded: Harry Kinne

The motion passed unanimously.

10. Executive Session: Personnel Issue

Motion: To go into executive session to discuss a personnel issue.

Moved: Paul Mutone

Seconded: Lucy Wagner

The motion passed unanimously. The board went into executive session at 8:29 p.m. and came out of executive session at 8:48 p.m.

11. Other Business / Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

Erin Boyd reminded board members who had not yet completed their Head of School evaluation questionnaires to do so soon.

9. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn.

Moved: Marty Jacobs

Seconded: Erin Boyd

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Dana Grossman (Clerk)