

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Thursday, May 11, 2017
Thetford Academy Library

**JOINT MEETING OF THE THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
AND THE THETFORD SCHOOL BOARD**

DRAFT MINUTES

Cameron Cudhea (President of TA Board of Trustees) convened the meeting at 7:10 p.m. In attendance were the following:

TA Trustees: Cameron Cudhea, Giovanni Bosco, Peter Boyd, Shannon Darrah, Karl Furstenberg, Lindsey Klecan, Suzanna Liepmann, Therese Linehan, Jonathan Stableford, Donna Steinberg, Susie Weider, Andy Welch, Carrie Wells, Jim Wilson (8:20 p.m.)

Thetford School Board Members: Shannon Darrah (Chair of Thetford School Board), Julie Acker, Charlie Buttrey, Kristen Downey, Scott MacPhee

TA Administration: Bill Bugg (Head of School), Deb Sanders-Dame (Director of Special Education Services)

Thetford Elementary School Administration: Kevin Petrone (Principal)

Other: Erik Goodling (Chair of Strafford School Board), sitting in for Hilary Linehan (Strafford Town Representative to the TA Board)

Absent: Ann Bumpus, Bob Christensen, Kate Hesser, Zoe Keller, Hilary Linehan, Ben Williams (TA Trustees)

1. Special Education

Shannon explained that the Thetford School Board (TSB) has the ultimate legal responsibility for students in special education at TA, and must ensure that students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans are followed appropriately. Therefore, between the TSB and TA, there is a constant sharing of information and also a flow of money back and forth related to special ed. While everything usually works fine, recently the TSB became aware of situations where students' plans were not completely followed. Everyone involved is working hard to make the necessary adjustments and improvements.

Deb Sanders-Dame (TA's Director of Special Education Services) reported that she is striving to ensure that the Special Education Department sustains itself and is not a burden financially on other parts of the school. She provided a detailed explanation both of the challenges facing the Special Education Department and of the changes that

have been put in place to address these challenges since she started work at TA this academic year:

Many issues with plan compliance are attributable to the complexities surrounding paperwork and processes. TA has students in special ed from twelve different towns (five school districts). Each district's Legal Education Agency has to approve its students' special ed plans. State regulations are different for Vermont vs. New Hampshire. Different towns also use different platforms (i.e., different software and different forms). In addition, TA does all of the paperwork for students' Medicaid reimbursements.

The Special Ed Department has been providing additional training for staff members with respect to paperwork and understanding the myriad processes for making referrals, meeting deadines, etc. Deb praised the special ed staff for their dedication and receptivity to trying new things. Some of the new initiatives underway in the department to enhance training and boost efficiency include the following:

- Wednesday office hours are being utilized, in addition to regular department meetings, as time for special educators and paraprofessionals to communicate.
- Paraprofessionals have received training on executive function and autism.
- On the recent in-service day, special educators spent four hours in training on paperwork, processes, etc.
- The department has started holding 504 Plan meetings during the school day instead of after school, which has increased attendance and engagement by parents and teachers. Due to the success of this initiative, IEP meetings also will be held during the school day starting next academic year.
- Other sources of increased efficiency this year: New ways of calendaring and of entering grades from the Learning Center; giving paraprofessionals the option of taking on more leadership responsibilities; revising plan documents for students in real time during meetings; signing up students for College Board accommodations automatically when they reach 9th grade to avoid missing deadlines later; making IEPs available online to students' teachers for their reference.

Regarding special ed services provided to students: Deb reported that one way the department hopes to improve efficiency in service provision is to ensure that the special-ed needs of some students are taken into account by scheduling their classes prior to the whole school's scheduling being done. This will allow students with similar needs (e.g., reading instruction) to have the same class block free to receive services together, thereby enabling the department to provide more individualized services and to provide those services more efficiently than in the past.

Karl asked about projected enrollment trends in special education in the years to come. Kevin Petrone responded that he is seeing not so much an increase in numbers as an increase in needs. Instead of students having one specific need, the needs are more complex (academic plus social/emotional). This may be due to better identification of needs than in the past. There is a focus now on the whole child — i.e., trying to get at

the basis of what is causing or has caused the child's challenges — rather than simply focusing on a single obvious area of deficit.

Cameron asked if there exists any shared training among schools. Deb replied in the affirmative: shared training with the OESU and its Director of Student Services, Sandra Stanley. Charlie noted the challenge of having to do the budget in the fall, but not necessarily knowing the extent of special ed needs until later.

Julie asked if there exist internal systems to catch problems early before a student gets too off-track. Deb said that teachers communicate with the Special Ed Department, and special ed staff check in with students during Learning Center time as well as providing extra support during after-school homework time. Finding effective and efficient ways to communicate with parents continues to be a work in progress. Scott MacPhee shared that, at Thetford Elementary School, core teachers meet weekly with the Special Ed Department to check in about students, and the school also utilizes a universal grading system. Deb said that meetings like this do occur some at TA, and the department is trying to do this more. Bill reported that TA has been looking into a universal grading system and had just received a quote from one company, but it would be a nontrivial annual expense.

Cameron asked Deb if she has any specific wants for the Special Ed Department for next year. Deb said that the department would benefit from having more time to work together to build closer relationships among its members, which is helpful when difficult and uncomfortable situations arise due to the nature of their work. She also wishes for more training time for the department, perhaps by using some of TA's professional development funds. Of particular need is to bring in a consultant for training around transition planning for students. It also would be ideal to have two (paid) days of training for special educators before school starts in the fall. Deb thanked TA for funding her trips to meet with other directors in the state, which she has found to be very helpful.

Kevin complimented Deb on her work over the past year. Shannon stated that the TSB wants to help facilitate and support her efforts at TA. Lastly, Cameron expressed thanks on behalf of the TA Board to Deb for all that she has done and continues to do.

2. Act 46 Updates

Shannon reported that the Blue Mountain/Bradford/Newbury/Oxbow study committee has disbanded, due to Blue Mountain deciding to pursue other options. Bradford, Newbury, and Oxbow are deciding if they want to merge, and they have asked Thetford if it wants to be a "side."

Waits River is waiting to see what happens with Chelsea and other towns before taking additional steps.

A Sharon/Strafford/Thetford/Tunbridge alternative educational structure does not appear to be feasible for Thetford given the financial numbers, but nonetheless this option is not totally off the table.

The most logical partner for Thetford is Strafford, and vice versa. There is motivation on both sides to continue this conversation.

Cameron and Shannon met recently with Tim Briglin (Vermont State Representative) and the chair of the Norwich School Board. Norwich has indicated possible interest in a "side-by-side" arrangement with Thetford, which would allow for a second high-school option for both towns.

Rivendell has indicated in the past that the only option it would consider with Thetford is a merger. Thetford may ask Rivendell if it now would reconsider having Thetford as a "side."

The uncertainty about Act 46 is currently having no direct effect on TA for the 2017-2018 school year. More information will be forthcoming in January, by which time other towns are expected to have made some decisions.

Cameron expressed thanks to the Thetford School Board for their participation in this joint meeting.

The joint meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m. Julie, Charlie, Kristen, Scott M., and Kevin departed.

MEETING OF THE THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

DRAFT MINUTES

Cameron convened the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

1. Approval of April 13, 2017, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Accept the minutes of April 13, 2017.

Moved: Carrie Wells

Seconded: Donna Steinberg

Abstained: Suzanna Liepmann, Susie Weider

The motion passed.

2. Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

- 3. Motion: That a State-certified academic high-school graduation diploma be conferred on the students recommended by the Faculty at their meeting on June 8, 2017.**

Moved: Jon Stableford

Seconded: Gio Bosco

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Head of School Report

Outdoor Initiative Update

Bill introduced Scott Ellis, the newly-hired coordinator of the Outdoor Initiative (one-third FTE) and teacher of the half-day Environmental Studies and Outdoor Education class that will be offered starting in 2017-2018 (two-thirds FTE). Bill noted that TA chose Scott from a pool of 40 excellent applicants.

Bill reported that the foundation has been poured for the outdoor classroom, the timbers are ready to go, and the Raising Day will be happening at a date to be announced soon. The outdoor classroom will be completed next spring, and will be open for all teachers to use. The site for the proposed Outdoor Center is located next-door to the outdoor classroom. Smith & Vansant Architects will be bringing the plans for the Center to the Board meeting in June. TA anticipates receiving continuing financial support from the Woodbury Foundation next year for the Outdoor Initiative.

Scott E. spoke to the Board of how outdoor experiences are capable of changing a person, and he shared his excitement about creating opportunities for TA students to have such experiences. With the half-day class, Scott expects to get to know the students very well. The students will go outside every day, connecting the outdoors to their academic coursework through, for example, the study of fluvial or snow science or the reading of Thoreau's Walden. Scott has started working part-time at TA this spring, learning about the community and how the Outdoor Program can best support its students. Scott feels that the Outdoor Initiative has great potential to serve as a successful "niche" for TA and to entice more students to consider enrolling in the school.

Cameron thanked Scott for coming and asked him to return in January 2018 to provide an update to the Board.

End-of-School-Year Activities

Bill reported that the Honors Banquet last night had the biggest crowd in memory. Faculty and staff members performed a speak chorus and helped serve food, and Stacy Barton (Social Studies teacher) was the keynote speaker. Cameron thanked Carrie for representing the Board at the banquet.

Bill strongly encouraged trustees to attend some of the upcoming end-of-school-year activities:

- Spring Musical, "Starmites," May 18-20

- Arts Night, May 24 — A celebration of all of the arts at TA (culinary, woodshop, instrumental and choral music, art)
- Baccalaureate, June 4 — Bill asked trustees to check in with him if planning to attend in order to ensure a seat
- Graduation, June 9 — Bill said that Graduation is a great time for trustees to get a feel for the school, by seeing what the students do in speech and song
- Alumni Banquet, June 10

5. Advancement Office Updates

Annual Fund Report

Bill reported that annual giving to date is \$5,000 greater than last year. The first night of the Parent Phonathon was particularly successful.

60x60 Campaign

The 60x60 Campaign is an effort, via Facebook and email, to reach alumni and other constituents with the goal of receiving 60 gifts in 60 days (through June 30). The Facebook page has been doing very well, with over 1800 followers at present. Bill asked for Board members' help with the 60x60 Campaign, by sharing about it on their own Facebook pages, commenting on posts, clicking the "like" button, etc. Bill also reported that the Advancement Office will be supporting alumni classes who are holding reunion events this summer and will be making sure that class fundraising is a component of the reunions.

Bicentennial Task Force

Cameron reported that the previous Bicentennial task force had gone dormant. He is resurrecting it, has spoken with some Board members and Patty McIlvaine (Director of Development & Communications) already, and will be coming to the Board next month with more information. The task force's planning phase will be the 2017-2018 school year, and the action phase will be the following year. Cameron expressed his hope that Board members will help with and support the Bicentennial Task Force.

Peter pointed out that there are significant alumni financial contributions to TA over and above what was listed on the Advancement Report handed out to Board members. The Thetford Academy Alumni Association (TAAA) annually contributes \$10,000–\$15,000 to the school from TAAA's fundraising activities — contributions not to the annual fund but to support particular needs of classes, departments, and programs at TA (for example, TAAA provided startup funds for the Robotics program). The consensus of the Board was that grants from TAAA should be included in financial reports of restricted giving. Bill will ensure that this is the case going forward.

6. Financial Report

Cameron clarified that, from a financial perspective, the Board has only approved funding to take the Outdoor Center project through the design phase. The Board soon will be asked to decide whether to commit funds to the next phase of the project.

Suzanna reviewed the Statement of Financial Position as of March 31, 2017, which had been distributed to Board members. She noted that TA has very strong cash and investment positions, debt is declining, and the school is not taking on new debt, which all together put the school in a very good financial position.

Peter shared that there is a rumor afoot in Thetford that TA has cash flow issues of such significance that it will have to borrow money from the town. Suzanna stated that this rumor was absolutely false. Occasionally there is an issue with the timing of cash flows, because TA incurs expenses for the school year starting in July but tuition revenues mostly don't arrive until September. However, TA has a line of credit into which it can dip if necessary (although there has not been much need recently). Shannon provided some insight into the possible genesis of the rumor, by sharing that the Thetford School Board currently has cash flow issues and is going to have to take out a note right now to cover them, but she emphasized that this is a problem only of the TSB, not of TA.

Suzanna reviewed the Statement of Activities through March 31, 2017, which had been distributed to Board members. She noted that the number of students was higher than budgeted for this school year, which is both driving some expenses higher and also helping to cover those expenses. The Budget vs. Actual numbers will be provided in June. Suzanna said that she expects TA to end the year ahead of budget.

Jim noted that depreciation is outpacing fixed-asset additions. Suzanna said that TA needs a long-term plan for replacement and maintenance, which will be a task for the new Director of Buildings & Grounds, John Brown. However, compared to other schools, TA's physical plant is not particularly old.

7. Lyme Partnership Agreement

Karl (Lyme Town Representative) reported that he had obtained Lyme's partnership agreements with both Hanover High School and St. Johnsbury Academy for comparison with Lyme's partnership agreement with TA. Hanover High School's agreement is almost identical to TA's: HHS accepts all Lyme students who wish to attend, and HHS has the obligation to maintain a special ed program that meets certain standards. However, HHS's agreement goes through 2025 (ten years), as compared to TA's three-year agreement. St. Johnsbury's agreement is very different, focusing mostly on special ed and with no guarantee of admission (although in practice St. Johnsbury appears to be taking all Lyme students that want to attend).

Karl noted that Lyme is required by law to have a contract with a school in order to send its tax dollars there for tuition. Karl suggested that the most straightforward approach would be to adopt an agreement with Lyme which has the same language as before, although TA might want to have more in the agreement about special ed, since TA's language on this subject is the thinnest of the three schools. A subcommittee would draft the new agreement, involving the Lyme School principal in the process.

The Board's consensus was that TA should renew its agreement with Lyme; however there was not immediate consensus on what form that agreement should take. Donna

asked whether the Board wants the TA agreement to look more like HHS's or St. Johnsbury's.

Cameron will provide copies of all three schools' agreements to Board members for their review. At the Board meeting in June, discussion will be held regarding the form of the Lyme agreement, with particular focus on admission policy and special ed expenses. The Board will seek to vote on and adopt a new agreement at the August meeting.

Bill raised a "big-picture" question: TA currently has special agreements with three towns — Thetford, Strafford, and Lyme. However, TA also has strong relationships with other towns, such as Hartland and Waits River. Looking at the big picture, does TA want to continue to have special agreements with just the current three towns, or move to have special agreements with multiple towns as a way of doing business, or switch to a St. Johnsbury model?

8. Board Management Committee

Board Elections

Therese reported that Carrie, Ann, and Andy are up for re-election in June, but Andy has decided not to run again. Therefore, there will be two open slots on the Board (since one slot was unfilled this year), for which the Board currently has one candidate. This candidate is planning to attend the June meeting.

Therese suggested that the Board not move to fill the remaining empty seat until it is clear which committees will have openings next year, so that the Board will know for which skills it needs to recruit.

Policy Review

- Student Attendance

Motion: Adopt the policy on "Student Attendance."

Moved: Andy Welch

Seconded: Lindsey Klecan

The motion passed unanimously.

- Weapons Prohibition

Lindsey explained the primary reasons for needing an update to this policy at this time: prohibition of threat-making by students; clarification of TA's policy regarding hunters' possession of weapons in areas that may be utilized by the Outdoor Initiative; and notification of this policy via appropriate signage. Susie pointed out that the new wording regarding hunters only refers to "persons other than students," and she questioned what the school's policy should be regarding students who wish to hunt on school property or in the Thetford Hill State Forest outside of school

hours. Bill and the Board Management Committee will revisit this issue and bring the Weapons Prohibition policy back to the full Board at a future meeting.

9. Executive Session: Personnel

At 9:51 p.m., the Board chose to go into executive session.

Motion: Move into Executive Session to discuss personnel issues.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Cameron Cudhea

The motion passed unanimously.

Out of executive session at 10:07 p.m.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 10:08 p.m.

Moved: Andy Welch

Seconded: Gio Bosco

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)