

THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Thursday, October 12, 2017
Thetford Academy Library

MINUTES

Cameron Cudhea (President) convened the meeting at 7:07 p.m. In attendance were the following:

Trustees: Cameron Cudhea, Peter Boyd, Ann Bumpus, Melody Burkins, Bob Christensen, Shannon Darrah, Karl Furstenberg, Kate Hesser, Zoe Keller (telephonically), Lindsey Klecan, Suzanna Liepmann, Hilary Linehan, Therese Linehan, Jonathan Stableford, Donna Steinberg, Susie Weider, Carrie Wells, Ben Williams

Administration: Bill Bugg (Head of School)

Absent: Giovanni Bosco, Jim Wilson

1. Approval of September 14, 2017, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Accept the minutes of September 14, 2017.

Moved: Donna Steinberg

Seconded: Jonathan Stableford

Abstained: Peter Boyd, Therese Linehan

The motion passed.

2. Public Comment Period

Cameron reported that Prill Hall, a former TA Board president who is involved with the First Congregational Church in Thetford, had asked whether Thetford Academy could serve as one of the sponsors for the church's "Extravaganza"—a fundraiser both for the church's building fund and for the Floyd Dexter Fund (which provides financial help for families in urgent need). Thetford Academy has been using the church building at no expense for Baccalaureate, and TA families have been recipients of assistance from the Floyd Dexter Fund. Sponsorship would be \$100 to \$200. Concerns were raised about TA serving as a sponsor for a religious organization's event, both from the point of view of taxpayers whose tax dollars are part of TA's revenues and given the precedent this might set for other organizations seeking donations from TA. However, the consensus of the Board was that TA should be compensating the church for the use of its building for Baccalaureate, and therefore TA will give the church \$200 in June for this purpose.

Lindsey asked whether TA does anything to recognize employees who reach certain milestones (such as 10 years of employment, 20 years, etc.). Bill said that this currently happens at a faculty meeting, but the school should consider whether to do this in a more public way in the future.

3. Head of School Report

One of TA's stated goals for the year is to strengthen, nurture, and grow the school's culture of caring—among both students and employees—through the values of sympathy, empathy,

and compassion. Bill shared the following updates:

- The faculty have been utilizing some one-hour faculty meetings to work on this goal, with the assistance of Ray Chin (a local psychologist) and Becky DiFrancesco (who retired from TA's special education department and now spends 40 hours per month at TA working with faculty for various purposes).
- The Student Life Committee has been making special presentations to the faculty about particularly difficult situations that some students are facing, without using students' names but with the students' permission. These presentations have led to very meaningful discussions, have increased awareness of the needs some students may face, and have served as an important reminder of why we do the work we do.
- The faculty participated in a "Privilege Walk" during inservice, and it was such a powerful experience that they wanted to repeat it with the students. Joe Deffner (English Teacher) and Karen Heinzmann (French & Math Teacher) led an all-school assembly for this purpose. Approximately 40 faculty and staff members lined up across the gym floor. They were given instructions such as "Take one step forward if you had access to a car in high school." "Take one step forward for each parent with a high-school diploma." "Take one step back if your parents divorced when you were a child." Faculty/Staff will be following up with students in advisory about this assembly.
- Cindy Pierce (a local sex educator, author, comedian, and speaker) talked to students recently about making good choices in relationships. She will be giving a talk for parents on Monday, October 23rd.
- TA also will be working with Bill Brown (a local therapist and mental health counselor), who will be teaching how adverse childhood experiences can affect the brain, and helping to build a program for students that promotes resilience.

Jane Chambers (French & Spanish Teacher, attending as a member of the audience) added that TA has always worked hard to ensure that each child has a connection with at least one adult at school. The "privilege walk" was a good way for students to see that the adults around them have had to face challenges in their lives that may be similar to some students' own experiences, and thus it may help some students to connect with additional adults at school.

Peter asked what is happening at the federal and state level regarding this type of work. Bill replied that Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe has advocated strongly for schools to work on promoting compassion. Peter asked specifically whether there is state funding to put toward this work. Hilary replied that there are people at the state who are trying to get funds to schools for this purpose.

Bill reported that the Admissions Open House was a big success, with 35 families in attendance, including 9 from Strafford and 14 from Lyme. Cameron expressed gratitude to the faculty and students who gave two hours of their time, resulting in a great team effort on behalf of TA. Jane C. also offered kudos to Patty McIlvaine (Director of Development &

Communications) for her marketing efforts, and she shared that students had reported seeing some very nice ads on the internet about TA.

Bill passed along a report from Linda Lanteigne Magoon (CFO), who was unable to attend the meeting: Tuition payments were due today from sending towns, but only one town has paid so far. Due to the absence of these revenues, TA has reached the end of its line of credit and is now dipping into endowment to cover costs for the short run. Sending towns are reporting that delinquent payments from taxpayers are causing the towns to be delinquent in their tuition payments to TA. This situation is different from past years and may reflect increased financial pressures facing residents of the Upper Valley. However, TA itself is fine financially, and will repay these borrowed funds as soon as the tuition payments from sending towns arrive.

4. Act 46 Update

Shannon (Thetford Town Representative) gave an update on Act 46 as it relates to the Town of Thetford. She reported that there have been many discussions but not much action so far. Within the Orange East Supervisory Union, town voting needs to happen by November in order to take advantage of tax incentives from the state for merging school districts, creating preferred structures, etc. The Town of Thetford will not make that deadline. The next deadline the town faces, for submitting a plan to the state, is in January.

Situations within and outside of the OESU which could potentially impact Thetford include the following:

- Newbury/Bradford/Oxbow are considering merging into a single district.
- Waits River has been waiting to see what happens with Orange/Washington and Chelsea/Tunbridge. Waits River would like to keep its K-8 choice structure. However, opting to be a stand-alone district in the OESU may be a risky plan, because the state could force Waits River to merge with a similar nearby district.
- Blue Mountain could be incorporated into the OESU, since it is currently on its own.
- The board chairs in the OESU have been invited to talk with the Secretary of Education about how to make progress relative to the requirements of Act 46.
- Norwich previously contacted Thetford and indicated its interest in having another high-school option. Norwich had looked at the Dresden compact and said it could be opened up to allow another town in. Thetford responded that it is not interested in merging with Dresden, but might be interested in being a "side." There has been no response yet from Norwich, but this discussion could continue even after the January deadline has passed.
- Rivendell so far has been willing to consider only a merger with Thetford, not having Thetford as a side.
- Thetford's current plan is to advocate to the state for keeping things the same as they are now for the Thetford school district.

Karl asked if there was any way to predict what these myriad discussions might mean for enrollment at Thetford Academy down the road. Shannon replied that the greatest uncertainty is regarding Hartland, which has been considering different governance structures. The state can't change a district's governance structures; it has to happen by town vote. Bill added that TA almost surely will lose Brownsville because it is likely to merge with Windsor and designate Windsor High School. TA currently has four Brownsville students, and the hope is that they will be grandfathered in.

Hilary (Strafford Town Representative) reported that Strafford, like Thetford, has no one to merge with unless it changes its operating structure. Hancock/Granville have been approved as a side, and are looking for another side. South Royalton/Bethel are voting on a merger. Chelsea/Tunbridge are having a vote to combine as K-8. Stockbridge/Rochester are looking at K-6 choice, and are waiting for state approval before hopefully having a vote. These four sides plus Sharon and Strafford would comprise the supervisory union.

Cameron concluded the discussion by saying that the Board will have a much clearer sense of where things stand at its December meeting, after the November voting results are in.

5. Lyme Partnership Agreement

Donna described the two recent meetings with Lyme regarding the TA/Lyme Partnership Agreement. These meetings were attended by Bill, the Lyme School Principal, several TA Board members (including Karl, the Lyme Town Representative), and—at the second meeting—one member of the Lyme School Board.

Lyme requested minor adjustments to the wording in the partnership agreement regarding the enrollment guarantee and the provisions for review and renewal of the agreement. Those adjustments to the wording have now been made. Lyme also had two questions about financial matters: busing costs and the flat rate fee for students on a 504 Plan.

Regarding busing: The Lyme School Board has a policy of not providing transportation to/from high school for Lyme students, and so they asked about the inclusion of transportation costs in the calculation of TA's tuition rate. TA explained that transportation for athletics and other activities comprises a large portion of the school's total transportation costs. For the portion of costs related to busing students to/from school, Lyme represents only one single bus stop on a route that serves two other towns, so the contribution of this bus stop to TA's total busing costs is minor. More fundamentally, TA ensures the availability of transportation because it feels strongly about providing equal access for all students, and denying this to Lyme students would be antithetical to TA's mission.

Regarding the fee for 504 Plans: Bill reported that Linda had supplied to Lyme a detailed explanation of the finances behind this fee, and Karl reported that Lyme was satisfied with this explanation and with the fee. Karl also shared that the Lyme School Board's finance group will be meeting soon to settle the busing question, but—regardless of the resolution—the wording in the partnership agreement works as is.

Motion: Accept the TA/Lyme Partnership Agreement as presented this evening, and authorize the President of the Board to sign the Agreement on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

Moved: Susie Weider

Seconded: Donna Steinberg

The motion passed unanimously.

6. Board Management Committee: Announcements & Policy Updates

Therese reported that Kate would like to step down as Vice-President. She asked that anyone who is interested in the position please let the Board Management Committee know. She

also reminded the Board that the Vice-President is intended to be in training to be President.

Therese also provided a reminder from the Board Management Committee to the rest of the Board of the importance of being mindful of how (and whether) we speak about Board matters outside of meetings. Our comments may not be properly understood by others when taken out of context and/or our comments may not be repeated accurately when passed subsequently from person to person in the community.

Donna presented the following three policies to the Board for adoption:

Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace

Ann expressed concerns about the necessity of having this policy, because drug testing is very invasive. Bill explained that there does not exist a legal basis for TA to test an employee for alcohol and drug use, and so this policy is an effort to allow TA to do this through school policy if needed.

Motion: Adopt the policy on Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace.

Moved: Hilary Linehan

Seconded: Kate Hesser

The motion passed unanimously.

Responsible Computer, Network, and Internet Use

Donna explained that this policy was reviewed last year, but since then there have been questions from the faculty regarding the privacy of electronic communication, and so additional language was added to make clear the circumstances under which employee computer and network use could be scrutinized. Cameron asked whether the provision of having the Head of School consult with two other administrators would violate the confidentiality of personnel files. Jon explained that a personnel file is a legal document that is separate altogether from any information to which the two administrators would be privy in such a situation. Bill added that putting this additional language in the policy allows for privacy for employees which is not provided by the VSBA model policy on this subject. Board members offered several suggestions for clarifying the wording of the policy on this one point.

Motion: Adopt the policy on Responsible Computer, Network, and Internet Use with the suggested edits.

Moved: Kate Hesser

Seconded: Jon Stableford

The motion passed unanimously.

Bill recommended that there be clear communication with faculty and staff about the policies adopted today that affect them. It is not clear on the website when policies have been changed. Therese said that the BMC had already planned to report to TAEA on the new Responsible Computer, Network, and Internet Use policy. Jon suggested that the Head of School forward the school's policies to employees at the beginning of each school year. Suzanna asked whether there is a reference to the policies in the Employee Handbook. Bill replied that there currently is no Employee Handbook, but the school is working on creating one.

Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace (Revisited)

Bill shared his worries about the Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace policy catching employees off guard because there has been no discussion of it. He was concerned about adopting this policy without employees being able to weigh in. A comparison of TA's policy to the VSBA's model policy was made. A number of Board members hadn't realized that the provision for testing in TA's policy was not contained in the VSBA's model policy. It was decided that the BMC would work on this policy and bring it back to the Board at a future meeting.

Motion: Change the status of the policy on Alcohol- and Drug-Free Workplace from adopted to reviewed.

Moved: Therese Linehan

Seconded: Cameron Cudhea

The motion passed unanimously.

Admission of Day Students (Revisited from the September Meeting)

Several changes had been made to this policy since its adoption at the September meeting, necessitating a re-adoption.

Motion: Adopt the policy on Admission of Day Students.

Moved: Ann Bumpus

Seconded: Therese Linehan

The motion passed unanimously.

7. Other Business

Kate reminded the Board that the shepherding of the Strategic Plan will now be the Vice-President's role, and she hopes to review the Plan quarterly. She distributed copies of the most recent Strategic Plan to the Board, and she requested that trustees review the parts for which their committees are responsible and provide a status report to her by November 5th.

Cameron reported that no one has volunteered yet to join the Personnel Committee. He encouraged trustees to consider serving, because he may have to make assignments if no one comes forward.

Motion: Adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m.

Moved: Hilary Linehan

Seconded: Donna Steinberg

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lindsey Klecan (Clerk)