THETFORD ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Monthly Board Meeting — August 13, 2020
Via Zoom

DRAFT MINUTES

Gio Bosco (board president) convened the meeting at 7:10 p.m. In attendance (all virtually) were the following:

Trustees: Gio Bosco, Harry Kinne, Dana Grossman, John Ziegler, Melody Burkins, Shannon Darrah, Ann Bumpus, Lindsey Klecan, Donna Steinberg, Marisa Donovan, Robin Junker-Boyce, Karl Furstenberg
Absent: Mary Dan Pomeroy, Sarah Root
Employees: Carrie Brennan, Siobhan Lopez, Patty McIlvaine
Members of the public: Francine Moody A-ness, Susanna French, Patricia Smith, Tippi Oshoniyi, Sarah Hill
Amanuensis: Leif LaWhite

1. **Welcome & President's Report**

Gio welcomed all to the Zoom meeting. The administrators and board members introduced themselves, as did the members of the public.

2. **Public Comment Period**

Gio invited the members of the public to ask any questions they had to be sure they would be addressed during the meeting. Francine expressed thanks for all work that is going into the reopening plans and said it was reassuring to know the situation is in good hands. She said she was at the meeting to offer support and also said she would like to learn more about the anti-racism task force.

Sarah Hill asked a couple of questions about the reopening plan:
1. Air quality: Does TA have an HVAC system?
2. She asked for more info on busses and the hours students will be on campus.
3. Will there be bus monitors?

Tippi introduced herself.

Gio advised everyone to remain muted except when speaking and reminded the members of the public that once the regular agenda is underway they should only listen/observe and not speak.

3. **Consent Agenda**

Approval of the draft minutes of the June 4, 2020, regular board meeting and deletion of four now dated or supplanted policies (C6-R, D1-R, D2, and H7), following the recommendation of the Board Management Committee.

Gio asked if there were any edits to the minutes. Donna and Ann proposed leaving out the name of an individual former trustee in the context of a discussion about adopting a protocol for naming honorary trustees. John proposed solving the issue by deleting the paragraph in which the former trustee was named.

Gio asked if there were any questions about the policy deletions. There were none.

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda with the minor edit to the minutes noted above.
Moved: Dana
Seconded: John
The motion passed unanimously.

4. **New Business**

Donna reported the following progress in the formation of the Anti-Racism Task Force:

- She has been busy making contacts with local anti-racism experts.
- The next stage in the process is to invite people from the target constituencies to apply to join the task force.
- There has been much support for this work.

5. **Head of School Report**

Carrie reported that enrollment will be about 290 — somewhat lower than usual because of a smaller than usual 7th Thetford grade class, but on target with the expected number.
She noted that the rest of her report would be the discussion of the school reopening plan.

6. **Action Items**
    a. **School Reopening Plan Discussion**

Carrie, with support from Siobhan, showed a PowerPoint presentation and discussed the plans for reopening school in the fall.

1) Title slide

2) Framework & Goals
    a. Mission, Relationships, Equity & Access were part of the mid-March shutdown.
    b. The focus is on learning, though we're still in the pandemic.
    c. Flexibility is important; we need to be able to adapt.
    d. Safety is paramount.
    e. Adherence to (changing) state guidelines will be ongoing.

3) Planning Process Timeline Review

- Has been an incredibly collaborative process involving employees, faculty, and families.

- Not always easy to do over summer when many are away, but the team was still able to make many points of contact with the community and the teachers over the summer.
- Siobhan focused on the areas of safety and student life.
- Patty worked on communications with the community about what we're doing.

4) Plan Overview
- 3 options: 4, 2, and 0 days/week on campus.
- Remote learning will be the primary method of learning.
- Students will be assigned to a pod of ~12 students. All students in a given pod will be in the same grade, and all students will be in a pod — whether or not they're on campus.
- Each pod will have a teacher who will serve as an academic coach.
- A middle-school–specific design is evolving to align with their specific developmental needs.

5) Anticipated Selections
Families have not made their final selections yet but have indicated the following preferences: 47% for the 4-day option, 31% for the 2-day option, 22% fully at home.

6) Remote Learning
- Will use the original remote plan.
- Will use Google Classroom.
- Are implementing schoolwide guidelines so protocols for classes are consistent.
- Focus on tech integration.
- Online platform will be used to share assignments and feedback, but not all learning will be online; students won't be on their laptops all day.

7) On-Campus Experience
- Mon.-Tues. and Thur.-Fri. from 9:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- 2-day options will be either Mon.-Tues. or Thur.-Fri.
- Pod environment will be a productive workspace with support. It will supplant the advisory structure for the time being.
- The middle school plan is in development; it will likely involve:
    - Synchronous learning with core teachers.
    - Weekly arts rotation.
    - Daily PE and outdoor learning.
- Outdoor learning will be emphasized. In addition to the existing outdoor spaces, three 20x40 tents have been purchased and will be set up around campus.
- Each pod will have required outdoor rotations and lunch will be served outside.

8) Synchronous Learning
- Wed. will be dedicated to synchronous learning (i.e., featuring teacher-student interaction in real time). All students will be at home, and the regular block scheduled will be followed.

9) Health & Safety

- TA will follow VT guidelines: daily temperature checks, health questions, masks, & cleaning protocols.
- 2 custodial shifts, day & night.
- TA has upgraded its HVAC system, using HEPA filters.
- Safety Committee has always existed and is now coordinating this effort.
- Sue Farrell, the school nurse, is the COVID coordinator, and her time has been increased to 100% FTE.

10) Additional Logistics
- Lunch will be served and eaten outdoors, the indoor café will be closed.
- There will be separate bus routes for TES and TA.
- New guidance was just announced by the state re bus monitors; will follow up as needed.
- Athletics will take place following state guidelines.
- 1:1 laptop access is essential, and each student will have one — provided by either their family or the school.

11) Budget Impact
- Tents — $15K
- Wifi expansion — $3K
- Nurse to 100% FTE — $10K
- 100 New Chromebooks — $25K (within the existing tech budget)
- PPE
- Software
- HVAC & other facility costs

12) Phases for COVID planning: Red - Yellow - Green - Blue
- Very fluid situation; important to remember we are not in any given stage forever.
- There will be pieces of the process we all wish were different.
- Began in March in Red (100% at home) and are now in Yellow (hybrid model).
- Goal: Can we get Green/Blue and meet in real time, with teachers and students in person?
- Realistically, we need to bear in mind that we might also need to revert back to Red; if that's necessary, TA would be able to make the pivot overnight.

Gio called for questions.
Karl: Given that interschool athletics will be very constrained given the guidelines, are they worth it — merging kids from other schools vs. keeping isolated?
Carrie: Nothing will be normal; including athletics. Have had a pretty successful soft athletics launch over the summer.
Siobhan: The decision on athletics is a statewide plan; the governor took over decision-making from the VPA. Athletics will start on Sept 8. The first 2 weeks will be focused on practicing and conditioning. When state moves to phase 3 (projected to be September 21) then traveling could be OK. But TA might not be OK with that; still unclear, might stick with intramurals depending upon how things develop.
Melody: All sports are masked, right?
Siobhan: All except for XC running, where distancing is presumed.

Question about HVAC.
Siobhan: HVAC systems are always operating. Set to exchange 5x/hour, which is beyond state recommendations.
Melody: Thank you for keeping everyone informed. There is a thoughtful sign at the entrance to the walking trail. She appreciates that it's hard communicating in the remote environment, but she's glad for all the efforts that demonstrate that everyone is being thoughtful and is dedicated to the details.

Gio called a final time for questions; there were none.

Gio: The state requires that school boards develop a pandemic plan or delegate that authority to someone. So he recommended that the board:
1) Approve the head of school as its delegate to develop a plan, and
2) Authorize the head of school make changes to it as necessary, without consulting the board.
He asked if there were questions regarding those actions; there were none.

Motion: That the Thetford Academy Board of Trustees delegate to the head of school, Carrie Brennan, the authority to develop a pandemic plan.
Moved: Melody
Seconded: Karl
The motion passed unanimously.

Motion: That the Thetford Academy Board of Trustees empower the head of school to change the plan without consultation with or approval from the Board of Trustees.
Moved: John
Seconded: Donna
The motion passed unanimously.

Gio thanked Carrie and Siobhan for the presentation.

b. Fund Manager Recommendation and Approval

John explained the process by which the Resources Committee came to its recommendation.
Motion: To approve the recommendation of the Resources Committee and hire Merrill Lynch as the manager of Thetford Academy's endowment funds.
Moved: Lindsey
Seconded: Donna
The motion passed unanimously.

7. **Town Reports**
   a. **Thetford**

Shannon reported that TES has also been very busy developing its reopening plans.

- Will be opening, offering up to 5 days/week in person or remote via the Digital Schoolhouse platform.
  - They are asking families to commit through December.
- Wed. will be a half-day; might be still in flux.

- Worked on busing to make it safer; for example, could have combined the afternoon bus run with TA's p.m. run, but felt safer with a second p.m. run.
- Butler Bus Company has been very flexible; would be willing to cut down to a single p.m. run if that proves advisable.
- Spent $16K on new desks instead of tables to maintain distance.
- Structure will be self-contained classrooms like TA's pods.
- Specials teachers will come to the classrooms rather than vice versa. The classes won't be mixing.
- The main hallway won't be used; everyone will enter and exit via the classrooms' outside doors.
    - Will try to maximize outdoor learning.
- There will be additional cost for the busing changes.
    - Busing for TA as well as TES is a Thetford School District expense.
- Have added an additional teacher to support kids from home.
- Keeping an eye on COVID expenses.
    - Guidance from the state is that they should be able to recoup such costs from the federal government, through the state.
    - But the state says don't be too confident that costs will actually be recovered.
- Still in the middle of teacher negotiations.

Carrie added:

- TES did a great job with its COVID handbook. TA is using it too.
- She has heard concerns from parents about TA's early dismissal busses being a hardship.
    - TA is still working out details but expects to have programs before and after its abbreviated school hours for those with transportation hardships.

b. **Lyme**

Karl reported that Lyme has not made a final decision on its plan yet.

- 10 days ago, the school board was leaning toward a full opening – but there was push-back from community.
- They surveyed parents, and the results were almost identical to TA's.
    - Majority did not favor a full reopening.
- Rumor is that there are groups of parents who are talking about organizing a home-school approach.
- At the moment it seems the preference is for a hybrid model.

c. **Strafford**

Gio reported that Sarah Root, who was recently named the Strafford representative to the board, has had to step down, so we are currently without a rep from Strafford. Gio is trying to arrange a meeting with Strafford to talk about the partnership agreement and the naming of another rep to the TA board.

Carrie reported that she attended the Strafford school board meeting on Tues. and noted:

- There is a standing agenda item for a TA board report.
- They were appreciative of TA's COVID approach.

8. **Committee Reports**
    a. **Advancement**

Karl reported that the Advancement Committee met this week to review admissions and fund-raising results. The consensus was that it was a successful year on both counts.

- Enrollment is on target — down slightly because of a small TES class entering 7th grade, but with strong numbers from other sending towns.
- Fundraising is down slightly, which is not unexpected given the bicentennial push last year. There is a new focus on donors able to make larger gifts.
- There is also a renewed effort to nurture appreciation of how important TA is to the community by reminding people of the trails and other amenities provided by TA.
- Patty has prepared a fundraising report that Karl will send to the board.

    b. **Board Management**

Donna reported that the Board Management Committee has worked on policies and the head of school evaluation for the past two months.
She also noted that now that the board is meeting only remotely, there is little chance for board members to get to know each other and become a cohesive group.

- She said the committee had proposed several alternate ways to promote good working relationships.
    - There was a consensus in favor of meeting informally for walks or other outdoor, socially distant gatherings.

    c. **Personnel**

Harry reported that the Personnel Committee has been focused on wrapping up the teacher contract.

- The committee has had positive interaction with the faculty reps.
- He is optimistic that they are close to a mutually agreeable contract.
- The next meeting is next week.

    d. **Resources:** John

John reported on the fact that TA received a PPP loan through the federal CARES Act.

- TA applied for and received a loan of $1,054,500.
    - TA complied with all SBA rules for the funds' disbursement and expects that the total loan amount will be forgiven.
- The loan covered personnel costs during the core COVID period and thus has allowed TA to absorb additional COVID-related costs, such as purchasing the tents.

Budget timeline is based upon last year's timeline:

- Will make a tuition rate recommendation in December.
    - It needs to be in to the state in January.
- Will look at the operating budget in March.
- Will have a proposal to the board in April.
- Will plan to vote on it in May.

9. **Other business**

Gio asked for any further comments or agenda items for next month. There were none.

10. Executive Session

Motion: To go into executive session to discuss a personnel matter (the Head of School's scheduled annual review).
Moved: Ann
Seconded: John

Melody recused herself from the executive session, pending clarification of whether her involvement in such matters is appropriate, since her husband is on the TA faculty.

The board entered executive session at 8:55 p.m.

Gio declared the executive session ended at 9:20 p.m.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting.
Moved: Ann
Seconded: John

The meeting was adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Leif LaWhite (Amanuensis)