

Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.
Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved on January 27, 2021)
November 16, 2020 at 6:00 PM
Location: Teleconference

The following directors were present and constituted a quorum: Karen Curzio, Shari Gruber, Irina Kimyagar, Peter Lee, Dr. Selina Lee, Gary Mellow, Debra Michlewitz, Craig L. Slutzkin, Lara Traum, David Zarowin.

The following guest was in attendance: Veronica York (AP).

- I. Co-President Craig Slutzkin called this virtual meeting to order at 6:07. Dr. Selina Lee served as co-host on the virtual platform.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes.** The Board reviewed the minutes of the September 16, 2020 meeting. Shari Gruber indicated the misspelling of David Rozsa's name. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Selina Lee and was seconded by Lara Traum. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Executive Committee Report.** Craig Slutzkin and Dr. Selina Lee presented the report.
 - A. Dr. Lee reported on the last two School Leadership Team (SLT) meetings.
 1. New PTA elections took place.
 2. The SLT which routinely updates the CEP and updated the school's mission statement. Next month, the SLT will revisit the translation of the Ephebic Oath because some of the wording is troubling, such as requiring blind obedience. Classical Languages teacher Chris Amana is looking at the original Greek.
 3. Funding for the Bridge Year has been removed. School representatives met with NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer. He is sympathetic but has no authority to allocate funds.
 - B. Mr. Slutzkin reported that the school has reopened but that could change any day based upon infection rate data. 90% of the student population has opted for remote learning.
 - C. Dr. Lee called on Veronica York to report on the virtual Founder's Day Celebration. Ms. York gave an overview of the various facets of the event, including the recitation of the Ephebic Oath.
 - D. Mr. Slutzkin opened the discussion of the in-limbo 2021 Screened Admissions Process.
 1. The DOE presides over the admissions process. Screened admission affects high school, specifically THHS, and middle school admissions. No date has been set for the SHSAT, affecting schools like Stuyvesant HS.
 - a. The Board discussed the entire process and potentially taking a position, but there was a consensus not to at this time without input from the alumni body.
 - b. Teens Take Charge, an advocacy group consisting primarily of high school students, is opposed to academic screens. PLACE, a parent advocacy group, is engaging in a letter writing campaign to maintain screened admissions as well as the SHSAT.

2. Mr. Slutzkin advised that the DOE admissions decision will be made in four weeks and perhaps this will be a question for a new Board, post pandemic. Shari Gruber thought we might bring this to the Do Better Group and Mr. Slutzkin noted that that group is changing, and we might never reach consensus.

- IV. **Do Better Together Committee.** Dr. Selina Lee reviewed recent progress in the wake of Aquib Yacoob's resignation from the Board.
- A. Selina Lee and /or Craig Slutzkin will reach out to Mr. Yacoob for guidance and input; There has been slow progress in light of Mr. Yacoob's resignation.
 - B. **Underrepresented Students:** Yanique Fletcher continues working on the Outreach initiative with a student group to engage with school districts which historically have been underrepresented in the school.
 - C. **Diversity in Literature:** Librarian Arlene LaVerde has been working with the Alumni Association in expanding the THHS electronic library with acquisitions that reflect diversity. Michelle Gans and Debbie Michlewitz are also part of this project.
 - a. There will be a meeting forthcoming to further understand the scope.
 - b. Mr. Slutzkin suggested that this be a gradual expenditure so we can gauge interest and raised the question of whether alumni could have access.
 - D. **Mentorship:** The Mentorship initiative continues to develop. Gary Mellow is coordinating for the Alumni Association. The group discussed various channels to engage this initiative and protections needed.
 - E. **Wall of Fame:** The new Wall of Fame development is ongoing with the goal of expanding and diversifying the cumulative picture of our school's alumni. Dr. Lee forwarded our 25@25 video to jumpstart the project.
 - F. **Sexual Harassment:** Michelle Gans advised about a resource to get trained professionals to speak about the problem of Sexual Harassment to current students. Ms. York did an in-house basic informational training for all students as an interim initiative.
 - G. **Professional Development and Staff Diversity:** \$875 was allocated to the school for the hiring of adjunct staff to diversify. On a positive note, other new staff is quite diverse.
 - H. **Speaker Series:** The school Speakers' Series is kicking off with Tanya Odom virtually in November. The Board discussed ways of highlighting this to the alumni body. Lisa Rosenthal was suggested as a future speaker.
 - I. **Communication:** Discussion of how to effectively communicate the Alumni Association's actions ensued, with the expectation of a "Town Hall" over the next few months.
- V. **Fundraising.** Mr. Slutzkin led the discussion about this issue which impacts many concerns of the Alumni Association.
- A. Craig Slutzkin previewed some ideas with the Executive Committee and the principal.
 - B. Mr. Slutzkin presented a plan outlining the key aspects of the problem facing THHS: the current situation, where the Bridge Year is unfunded for the Spring semester; fundraising challenges; a few possible routes and strategies to garner the dollars needed to fund any of a couple of Bridge Year concepts; some hypothetical mathematical scenarios; incentives to motivate donors; problems which thwart a successful outcome.
 1. The linchpin is identifying large donors who would commit to donating for 3 to 5 years.

2. One equation would involve 300 people who commit to a donation of \$2000 per year for 5 years which has never been done.
 3. Smaller donations could make up the difference to securing \$700,000 per year.
 4. Establishing a permanent endowment to fund the Bridge Year would require approximately \$14 million.
 5. One enumerated principle would be that the school maintains its traditional character, a screened admissions school.
 6. The Spring 2021 Bridge Year semester still requires \$150,000. The school's administration, as they successfully and admirably funded the fall semester, sees some access to a portion of the needed funds.
- C. The Board discussed the strategy, noting positives and numerous roadblocks including having to commit to raising these funds annually, as well as the potential for significant change in the whole program – positive or negative – in another year when there is a new Mayor.
- D. David Zarowin suggested EDX courses as a possible emergency stopgap measure. His NYU professors have recommended these online courses. They do not earn college credits.

VI. **Compliance.** The report was deferred due to the late hour.

VII. **School Relations Reports.**

- A. School Report. AP Veronica York reported.
1. Most students are learning remotely. Books and musical instruments have been distributed, even delivered.
 2. The school has been told that at any minute all in-person learning can be suspended.
 3. At the last PTA meeting, the school received positive feedback from parents. In response to previous feedback, the school is delivering more live instruction. Students now have a schedule with eight periods of instruction per day. The school continuous to try to improve and add some asynchronous learning.
 4. Every grade level received the sexual harassment presentation described above.
- B. PTA Report. Parent Irina Kimyagar reported.
1. There has been strong parent participation in the virtual elections and meetings.
 2. The PTA leadership has found that various technologies, like on-screen election results and the use of a Google form, have yielded greater engagement by parents. New board members are very active.
 3. The parents are requesting mentorships in the medical fields, specifically shadowing experiences.
 4. Parent Alan Stein is shepherding a survey to facilitate the creation of college mentorships pairing current students with alumni
 5. Parents were delighted with Career Day where 70 alumni participated.

VIII. **Events Committee.** Selina Lee and Karen Curzio reported.

- A. The approaching weekend will feature the first attempt at organizing a virtual reunion for the Class of 1990. Ms. Curzio talked about the gaming platform DISCORD which will allow guests to text, play games, hear music, view video, and join breakout rooms.
- B. Several other events are being planned including other reunions.

- IX. Treasurer's Report.** Treasurer Craig Slutzkin reported.
- A. Notices for the payment of dues will be sent post-annual meeting.
 - B. The portfolio recorded a 5% loss; however, it is rebounding in post-election activity.
- X. New Business.** David Zarowin introduced the idea of Remote Volunteering.
- A. Mr. Zarowin introduced the idea specifically in the context of helping current students who need service credits for their applications to Arista and Archon. He has participated in remote volunteering events organized by NYU. Opportunities are also available through the Queens Public Library. Some activities are long term events.
 - B. Ms. York added that the service requirements are being adjusted to accommodate the circumstances created by the pandemic.
 - C. Dr. Lee added that alumni can also volunteer remotely. PTA Liaison Kimyagar expressed the PTA's interest in a remote interviewing strategies presentation by Vincent Yue.

Mr. Slutzkin closed the meeting with thanks, noting these are trying times and he appreciates directors and others who have stayed with the Alumni Association. A motion to adjourn was made by Dr. Lee, was seconded by Ms. Michlewitz and was passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Michlewitz
Secretary