

Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved on November 16, 2021)

January 27, 2021 at 6:00 PM

Location: Teleconference

The following directors were present and constituted a quorum: Principal Brian Condon, Karen Curzio, Benjamin Fung, Shari Gruber, Mrs. Irina Kimyagar, Dr. Selina Lee, Kimberly Lo, Gary Mellow, Debra Michlewitz, Craig L. Slutzkin, Lara Traum, David Zarowin.

The following guests were in attendance: Lauren Caiaccia, current THHS faculty, Jillissa Drayton, alum, Yanique Fletcher, alum, Kevin McDonough, current THHS UFT chapter chair, and Kea Richardson, alum.

- I. Co-President Lara Traum called this virtual meeting to order at 6:07 PM.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes.** The Board reviewed the minutes of the November 16, 2020 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Selina Lee and was seconded by Craig Slutzkin. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Do Better Together Committee Report.** The Committee presented the following report:
 - A. The Outreach Initiative, a targeted effort to recruit potential students who reflect the diversity of the city will be led by Yanique Fletcher, Gary Mellow, and Kea Richardson.
 1. The plan is to tie this initiative to the Alumni mentoring work that has been led by Mr. Mellow.
 2. Ms. Richardson has focused her outreach to her alumni class.
 3. Ms. Fletcher conducted focus groups with current Black students to gain insight into the advantages that the school could highlight for prospective students of color; she reported her findings to the Board, with a conclusion that mentoring programs for this community will be critical.
 - B. Dr. Lee briefly reviewed the progress achieved in other areas of our program.
 1. **Antiracist Education / Resources.** Dr Selina Lee reported.
 - a. Dr. Lee, Debra Michlewitz, and Michelle Gan have worked with School Librarian Arlene Laverde to develop an acquisition list of ebooks related to this topic. The Board discussed the complement of ebooks to be included and the process.
 - b. The Equity and Access Speakers program's progress was updated. Dr. Selina Lee reported that Tanya Odom spoke to students as part of the Speaker's Program in November and Captain Roy Love spoke in December 2020. Louis Ramos and Lara Rios are on deck for future dates.
 2. **Sexual Harassment** - Dr. Lee reported that we are waiting to hear from Know Your Rights. Aquib Yacoob had tried to set this up. Dr. Lee added that the committee welcomes any additional support.
 3. **BiPOC Outreach** – The Board returned to the findings of Ms. Fletcher's discussions with focus groups and discussed various serious concerns of current BiPOC students. Ms. Fletcher will follow up with Veronica York and Brian Condon.
 4. **Communications** – Jillissa Drayton reported on the distribution of the newly formatted newsletter. This newsletter included a spotlight on alumnus Rodney Lopez, the first in what will be an on-going feature, as well as alumni updates. Ms. Drayton discussed plans for future newsletters.

IV. **School Relations Reports.**

A. **School Report.** Principal Brian Condon reported.

1. At today's meeting of principals, there was no definitive date set for the return of high school students to school. The only speculation was mid-March.
2. Mr. Condon reported on the focus of the school administration on ensuring the well-being of students and staff, for providing support for remote learning to all students and for a reexamination of teaching practices in light of such remote learning.
3. The college application process has moved forward, with good results for the early action and early decision applicants.
4. Principal Condon will share information about next year's admissions to THHS. He made the choice that THHS would remain a screened school. Improved diversity is a constant goal.
 - a. The Board discussed various diversity initiatives, both at the Department of Education (DOE) and individual school level.
 - b. For Fall 2021 admissions, there will be Digital Open Houses, first, for students considering application to the school and, later, for accepted students to encourage their choosing the school.
 - c. Other points about admissions criteria were raised. Mr. Slutzkin added that DOE criteria can not specify any demographic group. Ms. Fletcher underscored that there are middle- and upper-income families of color that would be missed by a purely economic approach to the problem.
 - d. Discussants reviewed possible admissions criteria, citing academic averages, state exam scores, and percentages of reserved seats for economic diversity. Principal Condon added that the school could receive additional Title I funding if the school accepted more Title I students, perhaps enough to cover the senior QC Bridge Year budget.
 - e. Principal Condon reiterated that the desire to maintain academic standards is a key goal for THHS.

B. **PTA Report.** PTA Liaison Irina Kimyagar reported.

1. Ms. Kimyagar reported on the parent community's reaction to the new admission standards of the school, which was largely mixed.
2. Ms. Kimyagar reported on a PTA survey of parents regarding asynchronous learning. There was a mixed response. A key concern is the choice of more or less time on the computer. Students are conducting their own survey.
3. Alum Vincent Yuen's recent interview workshop was a great success, with 80 students participating.
4. There are new fundraising ideas, one including Shoe Collection which will be posted on the PTA website. The Student Union is working with the PTA, allowing the two groups to collaborate rather than compete for donations.
5. PTA Board members have inquired about a Legislative Breakfast, a staple in previous years' planning.
6. Many parents are joining PLACE, a parent educational advocacy group, to advocate for screened schools and rigorous academics.
 - a. References to Bard College HS's admissions process recur.
 - b. The Board discussed the real substance of the debate to change or "lower" admission standards or screens. It was noted that proposed policies or procedures to create equity in the system encounter many complex, overlapping, colliding, and sensitive issues.

- c. Ms. Traum recommended that the Board add as a future agenda item the task of parsing all the language surrounding the issues that are subsumed into the discussions of screens, including racial diversity and academic qualifications.

V. **Committee Reports.** Craig Slutzkin, Selina Lee, and Karen Curzio reported.

- A. **Nominating Committee.** Mr. Slutzkin nominated Yanique Fletcher and Jillissa Drayton to fill seats on the Board of Directors, vacated by Aquib Yacoob and Jesse Ash.
 - a. Debra Michlewitz seconded the nominations.
 - b. Approval was unanimous.
- B. **Events Committee.** Dr. Lee and Ms. Curzio reported:
 - a. The Class of 1990 had a highly successful virtual reunion through DISCORD technology platform.
 - b. Ms. Curzio noted that other events could follow suit with DISCORD.

VI. **Treasurer's Report.** Treasurer Craig Slutzkin reported.

- A. Our portfolio returns have been positive.
- B. Dues are now due for the academic year. The Association has delayed payment requests due to the pandemic and severe economic downturn.

VII. **Executive Committee Report.** Lara Traum reported.

- A. The Board discussed the calendar for future meetings.
- B. The Board discussed the process by which alumni can be nominated to the Board. Ms. Traum noted that service to the Association need not be through a Board obligation; rather interested parties could work on specific areas that they may have a particular interest in.

VIII. **Compliance.** The report was deferred.

IX. **New Business.**

- A. Ms. Kimyagar reported that PSAT was administered at the school without any solid organization or real notice. Two students took the exam in the building.

A motion to adjourn was made by Shari Gruber, was seconded by Mr. Slutzkin and was passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Michlewitz
Secretary