

Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved on May 17, 2017)

March 22, 2017

Location: New Leaf Venture Partners, 7 Times Square, Suite 3502, New York, New York 10036

The following directors were present and constituted a quorum:

Present: Jesse Ash, Ethan Felder, Benedict Fung, Shari Gruber, Debra Michlewitz, Dr. Malcolm G. Largmann, Dr. Selina W. Lee, Michael Rosen, Craig L. Slutzkin, Lara Traum, Aquib Yacoob

By Phone: Michael Byc, Jomaire Crawford, Karen Curzio, Kimberly Lo, Gary Mellow

Principal Rosemarie Jahoda (by phone at 8:00P.M.), Lara Traum, Gary Mellow (by phone), Karen Curzio (by phone), Aquib Yacoob, Jomaire Crawford (by phone), Ben Fung

Also in attendance were:

Present: Evelyn Gong '98, Joseph Halikas '10, Tanya M. Odom '88

By Phone: Rosemarie Jahoda, David Zarowin '16

- I. Co-President Craig Slutzkin called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM and welcomed the directors and other attendees. Attendees introduced themselves. Evelyn Gong and Joe Halikas were first time attendees. Mr. Halikas currently works in finance. Ms. Gong is an attorney who worked for the Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes.** The Board reviewed the minutes of the January 24, 2016 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Craig Slutzkin and seconded by Lara Traum. The motion to approve the minutes passed unanimously.
- III. **Discussion of Meeting Times / Venues.** Craig Slutzkin, who generously and graciously hosts most of our meetings, here at his office at Times Square Tower, opened a discussion to determine if the location and time work for other board members. Having the meeting here avoids a rental fee which generally costs \$1000. Hotels have been exorbitantly costly. He is happy to continue to meet here when he attends, commenting that he has only missed two meetings during his tenure when he was on paternity leave. He noted that many people come from disparate places. Some alternatives were reviewed. The Board used to meet on Sundays at 10:00 AM at a nursing home in Queens. Perhaps a meeting should be planned at the school though the annual meeting at the school did not show an increase in attendance. Sunday at the school would be a good option. Another possible venue is the Flushing Library where there is a free public room but we would have to end a meeting by 8:30 PM. A possible alternate location exists in Astoria. Ben Fung's office is another option. Aquib Yacoob's office also has a possible meeting space a couple of blocks away from this location. The group consensus for our next meeting on May 17th is to continue to meet at in our usual setting.
- IV. **Executive Committee Report.** Craig Slutzkin and Selina Lee reported the following activities and led several discussions.

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- a. **Principal's Search.** The Executive Committee continues to play a pivotal role. Our co-presidents, especially Selina Lee, work tirelessly and continuously, doing outreach, collating materials, faxing publicity packets, and attending meetings. Lara Traum has been doing a significant amount of work, providing her legal expertise and skills in interpreting documents and drafting letters.
 - i. The C30 Level 1 Interview took place on Wednesday, March 15th. Dr. Lee and Mr. Slutzkin participated in an advisory but non-voting capacity. They were part of the interview process of the five invited candidates. The selection process needs to be finalized within 90 days of the February 1st posting of the open position. Superintendent will now interview, with knowledge of the C30 Committee's recommendations, between 2 and 4 candidates.
 - ii. During the C30 Level 1, students organized a sit-in on the 3rd floor of the school, down the hall from the meeting, and posted students at the school's entrances in order to meet and talk to candidates. Students asked the candidates if they would answer questions for the Classic. Two candidates participated in student interviews. Students videotaped the conversations. The C30 meeting began at 3:30PM. Though the size of the student group diminished, two students waited in the hall until 10 P.M. when the whole process was over, seeking to witness the entire event. During the sit-in, Max Kurant, Freshman-Sophomore Class President, spoke to the students about the problems with the selection process.
 - iii. Max is going to speak at the monthly Panel for Education Policy meeting tonight, along with Mr. Tan, the new PTA Co-President. Selina Lee was able to stream pieces of their presentations for our meeting. To support their efforts, the Alumni Association has financially supported the students by providing stamps, paper and other supplies. Malcolm G. Largmann questioned the students' behavior and the response and lack of response to that behavior in the context of an official meeting. Videos on the Classic website, YouTube, and Facebook document the events.
 - iv. Discussion covered a wide range of aspects of the situation. Evelyn Gong (Class of '98) attended tonight's Board meeting because of her concerns about the process. She wants to be of support. She empathizes with the students and is glad that THAA has been working for the students. Ms. Gong, who is an attorney, said that she might be able to help with work on interpreting corporate documents and navigating the FOIA process for the Classic Editors.
 - v. Faculty members Franco Scardino and Brian Sweeney have been so engaged. Selina Lee with help from Lara Traum, on behalf of THAA, has reached out to the Mayor's Office, the Governor's office, and subsidiary agencies and officials. Joan Weston, former THHS PTA President, has been of great help including faxing a number of 300-page packets to elected officials and emailing the Chancellor daily.

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- vi. Tanya M. Odom has heard a wide range of complaints from members of our community and worries about the impact of the ongoing controversy, some just believing the it's "enough" and "how can we get back to normal?"
- vii. Joe Halikas reacted to a comment that Principal Jahoda made which was reported by the Classic. He wants to help a place that gave him so much. Our alumni lawyers have been helpful. .
- viii. Michael Rosen answered questions about parents' actions and concerns. Junior parents have been "shielded" by senior parents. The PTA maintains cordial interactions with Ms. Jahoda. Parents are concerned about the assistant principals, about their long term possibilities, about the work environment which can limit their effectiveness.
- ix. Dr. Largmann raised the issue of June graduation and the seniors relationship with the IA principal. We heard that seniors can't believe that this has stretched across the entire year. The problem of delayed transcripts was rectified by patch work repairs completed by Veronica York and the guidance staff. The delay was 1 ½ to 2 weeks with, according to Lara Traum, no real detrimental impact.
- x. Board members raised the question of, "What do we do now?" Students are working on some new action which will be focused on the Superintendent in Flushing.
- xi. Jesse Ash posed the question, "What if Jahoda is appointed?" One response is Dr. Largmann will address faculty about moving forward. We can "accept but don't have to support the way we would if there were a principal we supported."
- b. **SLT Team.** While they have been attending the meetings, Dr. Lee and Ms. Traum were not formal members. However, the SLT recently formally elected them as formal members.
- c. **Senior Gift.** Ms. Traum has designed and ordered the senior gift. It is a mug with a THHS theme, including a reference to the Ephebic Oath. A three year supply is being delivered to Dr. Lee's home.
- d. **Dues.** Dues payments for 2016 were discussed. Ben Fung's strategy to link dues payment to the Class of 1996's Reunion Event is one meriting replication. Dues payment in 2016 declined from payments in 2015. We relied exclusively on electronic notices but this year we will send hard and electronic notices soliciting dues. We do get more and more electronic responses. Kimberly Lo suggested that we include notes about upcoming events. Aquib Yacoob suggested that the notice should also mention the crisis we've been weathering as an additional incentive to support THAA in its support of THHS. The controversy prompts so many alums to reach out. Routine announcements don't get the response that this issue gets. Again the challenge of soliciting and maintaining accurate contact information in the context of dues collection surfaced. Craig Slutzkin and Shari Gruber will continue to work on this problem.
- e. **Projects.** Since our energies have been diverted, we're often marking time.

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- i. Craig Slutzkin continues to plan to issue a newsletter in an online format.
- ii. Old and new videography projects are under consideration. The “old” project, taping “Old” alumni, original 1984 faculty, and students from class of 1988, is in great part completed. Some of the videos are on Facebook/Vimeo. We may reinstitute “Video Mondays” and post these to our Social Media. Ms. Traum thought these or new videos could refresh the THHS “ethos,” like an uplifting commercial. Jesse Ash sees some challenge in terms of identifying an approach and the shortness of time until students must accept an invitation to attend THHS pretty makes the project moot. Michael Byc attended the open house and found that people didn’t seem to know about the controversy at the school perhaps obviating the need for a positive advertising strategy.

V. Discussion of Compliance Policies. Craig Slutzkin led a discussion about the role that THAA can or should play in projects or causes Board members are personally promoting.

- a. The Association sponsored in name, in response to a request from Board Member Ethan Felder, the Unity Rally which took place on February 26 at MacDonald Park in Forest Hills. The event became, in some ways, a political rally and the Association received comments from several members questioning the participation of a not-for-profit organization in a political action. The Board then discussed this issue. Ethan Felder described the event as political but not partisan because anti-bigotry speech is political but it should transcend party. One speaker was Linda Sarsour who has been identified as anti-Israel and is a political, partisan presence. Mr. Felder also reported regretfully that ADL, which is an anti-hate organization, didn’t support the event because they didn’t approve of every speaker.
- b. The general consensus of the Board was that these types of events need to be looked at and considered carefully, and the Association should have a policy to address how and when it lends its formal support.
- c. Karen Wu had created a Compliance Manual related to this kind of issue. When it was written, board members signed an acknowledgement statement. There was consensus that, going forward, we would use the manual as a guide for future actions.
- d. Ms. Traum and Mr. Felder will review the Compliance Manual to ensure it addresses these issues and will propose any necessary modifications.

At this time, Interim Acting Principal Jahoda joined the meeting by phone.

VI. School Relations Report.

- a. **School Report.** Interim Acting Principal Jahoda reported.

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- i. Current events include the Parent Teacher Conferences which will take place on Thursday and Friday, 3/23 and 3/24, and the school play, A Midsummer Night's Dream with music from the 50s is scheduled for Friday and Saturday performances. The students are very busy preparing. Dr. Lee noted that additional events are listed on page 13 of the Board Packet including a Phoenix reading and Career Day.
 - ii. Ms. Jahoda was prompted to comment on Monday's Open House. She described the schedule. When questioned, she noted that no prospective student or parent expressed concerns about the current principal controversy and that she did not know of any decline in attendance.
 - iii. Mr. Slutzkin asked about Admissions, specifically the qualifications of Special Ed certified Applicants. Ms. Jahoda refused to answer any questions about this topic. The Board expressed serious concern about her refusal to answer questions. Ms. Jahoda noted that there was a 43% in applicants based on her own efforts, but didn't know what the overall admissions results.
 - iv. Mr. Fung moved the questions to a budgetary realm where students needing additional services divert funds from other students. Ms. Jahoda noted that such funds are provided by the Department of Education. Mr. Slutzkin noted that, in the past, the guidance office was spending a disproportionate amount of time of those students, which Ms. Jahoda refuted.
 - v. Questions about diversity, number of applicants, number of acceptances, the diversity of the current school population, college acceptances were brusquely addressed. Ms. Jahoda continued to refuse to answer questions citing either confidentiality or lack of knowledge at that time.
 - vi. When asked if she would comment on the demonstration at City Hall, Ms. Jahoda declined. She did say that she never deemed Classic reporting, "fake news."
 - vii. Ms. Jahoda was then questioned on further topics relating to the principal search and school investigations, but refused to comment.
 - viii. There was a brief discussion, after Ms Jahoda left the meeting, of Special Ed concerns, with the intent of following up with some alums who may be able to help us recruit academically talented Special Ed students.
- b. **PTA Report.** Michael Rosen reported and provided the PTA's perspective on issues that we've cover, thanking the Association for its ongoing help.
- i. The last two PTA meetings informed parents about the College Application Process and Macaulay Honors Program.
 - ii. Parents have been witnesses, protesters, participants in actions related to the C30 process. Borough President Melinda Katz addressed a PTA meeting. There was

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- a Q and A. Laurence Pendergast addressed parents. Parents completed postcards as part of the student designed postcard campaign. Parents signed petitions. All of this takes place in the context of anxiety about the college application process.
- iii. Fundraising still lags behind goals. The PTA garnered \$1,000 at the open house selling THHS products. Fundraising campaigns have collected about 50% of what the PTA had hoped to raise. The PTA has raised \$27,000, far less than the goal of \$55,000. They will have to look at budget and expenditures and try to reconcile the income with the expenditures. The loss of the SAT program is a serious loss of income. The IA Principal is looking for volunteer teachers.
 - iv. Parent engagement is down. The PTA board is not fully staffed. The new Co-President Edward Tan is a good find. The Cassidy Family is tirelessly serving in various roles. The PTA elections take place on May 17th.
 - v. The PTA and SLT thanked Dr. Lee and Ms. Traum for their efforts and time.
 - vi. The school produced a Wish List; Mr. Rosen hoped the Association can help fund some of the items since the PTA is short of funds.
 - vii. The PTA thanked the Association for its role in Career Day.
 - viii. There have been two Principal's Breakfasts since our last meeting. The first was well attended; at the second meeting, attendance was down. There is little follow-up on issues that the IA Principal said she would investigate.
 - ix. Student activities continue to be successful. FON mobilizes the entire school either as performer or audience member. THHS looks forward to the school play's performances; it is A Midsummer Night's Dream.
 - x. Communication between parents and teachers is flawed. The Grade Book technology is not accessible for parents, leaving parents without important data about student performance.
 - xi. Mr. Rosen thanked guidance counselors during National School Counselor Week.
 - xii. The next SLT and PTA meetings are April 6.
 - xiii. Craig Slutzkin responded to the PTA's grateful acknowledgement of THAA's work with thanks to Michael Rosen's and his family's work for the school.

VII. Committee Reports

- a. **Events Committee Reports.** Various people reported.
 - i. Upcoming and pending events are listed on page 13. We are researching and organizing a Metropolitan Museum of Art Tour led by Debra Michlewitz who is a School Programs Docent; a Merchant House Museum Tour led by Alumna Jackie Dimas; and a tour of Flushing Meadow Park led by alumnus Michael Bycz.
 - ii. Karen Curzio, the Reunion Chair, is spearheading the planning of several Reunion Events. She is recruiting organizers. Michael Byc assumed leadership

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for the Class of 2007; Allesha Seenauth assumed leadership for the Class of 2012; Jason Nocera and Cynthia Jon assumed leadership for the Class of 1992; Ms. Curzio is seeking leaders for the Class of 1997 and recruited leaders for the first four of the “First Five” event for the first five graduating classes. Ms. Curzio is the leader for 1988, Michele Carino for 1989, Monica Bialokur for 1990 and Yanique Fletcher for 1991. Karen is also researching a Cyclones v Yankees outing for Saturday, August 26. The cost will be \$17 / ticket. There is also a July date available.

iii. Ms. Traum and Jomaire Crawford are working on Lawyers Event.

- b. **Young Alum Committee Report.** Young Alum Chair Ms. Lo suggested not marketing the baseball events as family events in order to attract a broader range of interest. She has done research about an August 17 Yankee v Met game. The idea of using Mr. Fung’s strategy of linking the payment for tickets to payment of dues will be discussed further.
- c. **Membership Committee Report** was postponed.
- d. **Mentoring Committee Report.** Gary Mellow reported that the survey to facilitate the mentoring process is ready for dissemination.

VIII. **Treasurer’s Report.** Mr. Slutzkin reviewed the Treasurer’s Report on pages 14-21.

- a. Note was made about THAA’s funding of Daphne Manhart’s role as chaperone for the We, the People competition, in the amount of \$113 for a hotel room. Note was made about the payment for the NCSSS professional development activity where one teacher who was scheduled to attend did not attend. The teacher had never informed anyone that he would be attending.
- b. Professional Development funds are primarily money donated by Charles Sigety and Leonard Polonksy and he specified that professional development approval should go through the principal.
- c. A question was asked if the NCSSS conference, which Ms. Jahoda brought faculty members to, was even worthwhile. Mr. Slutzkin responded that not everyone gives feedback on their trip and for this particular one, no one did.

The motion to adjourn was made by Dr. Lee and seconded by Dr. Largmann. Meeting adjourned at 9:46pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Michlewitz
Secretary