

**Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved on September 30, 2020)**

**June 17, 2020**

**Location: Zoom Videoconference**

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

- I. Co-President Lara Traum called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and thanked the directors for attending our second virtual early evening board meeting.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes**. The Board reviewed the minutes of the January 7, 2020 and April 28, 2020 meetings. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Ben Fung and seconded by Shari Gruber. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Events Committee Report**. Dr. Selina Lee reported:
  - A. THAA organized several webinars as an effort to support our community during the pandemic shutdown. Andrew Goodman's presentations on 5/21 and 5/22 dealt with financial planning during the COVID pandemic, Debra Michlewitz provided a virtual tour on 5/26 of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Modern and Contemporary collection.
  - B. Our Virtual Career Day featured 70 volunteers, double the number at last year's event.
  - C. THHS's Virtual Graduation will take place on Monday, June 22. Board of Directors speakers, Craig Slutzkin, Lara Traum, and Dr. Selina Lee have prerecorded their remarks. Debra Michlewitz will receive this year's Founders Award.
  - D. Planning of reunions has been on hold but Dr. Lee and Karen Curzio will consider offering Virtual Reunions or perhaps postponing reunions until next year. The committee intends to do outreach to recruit organizers.
- IV. **Mentoring Committee Report**. Gary Mellow reported:
  - A. Gary Mellow stated that we need to tackle the intrinsic racism issue and then we will be in a better place to proceed. He also suggested that we can still use the survey as a tool going forward.
  - B. Lara Traum heard from teacher Sara Oberlander Lowe, the SU advisor, who had ideas about making the structure of mentorships more available to appropriate supervision. The need for supervision is significant. The discussion cited disclosure statements, norms, appropriate and inappropriate behavior, security, emails funneled through the guidance office, chaperones, liability waivers, legal liability, the school's reputation and opt-in participation. A discussion ensued on potential structures. Mr. Mellow will connect with Principal Condon or Veronica York to discuss further.
- V. **School Relations Reports**.
  - A. **School Report**. Principal Condon reported:
    1. The principal said that he would forward data about College Acceptances.
    2. Remote Learning went as well as it could go. The sudden change required both teachers and students instantaneously transform themselves from

novices to experts. The constituents had some familiarity with Google Classroom and online platforms. Areas for improvements were discussed and the Board made several suggestions to Principal Condon that may result in a more meaningful experience for the student body, noting that everyone shares that goal.

3. The Virtual Graduation Ceremony will take place on Monday June 22. It will be a production that was produced by the professional group that staged the virtual NFL draft. This is an attempt to compensate for all the cancelled events like Prom, Sports Awards Dinner and Baccalaureate Ceremony. Baccalaureate Awards will be part of the graduation extravaganza.
4. We delayed the principal's comments about #notmytownsend until later in our meeting where it dovetailed with our longer discussion.
5. Mention was made of other issues that interest the board: Cuts to CUNY's budget; Preservation of the Humanities Seminar and Bridge Program; the Future of Screened Admissions Process.

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

1. Irina Kimyager noted that Principal Condon covered much of the current news about the school.
2. Currently, the PTA meets with Ms. Fee and Ms. York and holds virtual meetings. There is good support from the parents, and a PTA newsletter provides comprehensive information to parents which parents applaud.
3. Guidance counselors are available and connecting students to information, including information about college selection and internships.

C. **School Report (Continued).** Principal Condon resumed his report.

1. A discussion about the school's admissions policy ensued. There is overwhelming support for keeping screened programs though screens may change. Any school principal could propose a new factor for consideration. Principal Condon feels the screening process is not endangered. The Board discussed using screens as a tool for increased diversity.

VI. **THAA Response to the #NotMyTownsend and related issues.** The discussion was led by Lara Traum.

A. A discussion ensued about the current issues. The main issues for discussion were (1) the #NotMyTownsend Instagram page, and the issues raised by students and alumni who have shared their stories and (2) the recent Alumni Association communications regarding the recent racial issues and protests and the negative reaction from alumni, as well as follow ups.

B. #NotMyTownsend:

1. The Board reviewed the issues raised and expressed extreme concern. The Board discussed a possible role that it could play in helping the school address those concerns and move forward.
2. As part of the discussion, the Board discussed its role within the school, which is one of advisor but not one of any codified authority.
3. Principal Condon said that these postings were painful for the administration to hear about, whether they described events that happened during their tenure at the school or prior to their tenure. The administration has reviewed

every allocation and referred items to the Department of Education (applicable agencies) as required by policy and law.

- a. Derisive language is not tolerated and that will be made clear to the student body and faculty.
- b. Teachers have expanded the curriculum to be inclusive and celebrate diversity; it can be a challenge for teachers compounded by students' varying enthusiasm and engagement, but the school has made this its utmost priority.

C. THAA Communications:

1. The Board reviewed the recent communications and the general comments from the alumni body.
  - a. Both emails and social media responses included passionate responses – most of which were negative about the Association's first email. Some responses were defamatory.
  - b. The Board discussed its own communication directly after the first email was sent.
2. Again, the Board discussed its role within the high school, as several alumni demanded in their letters that the Alumni Association change policy at the school, which the Alumni Association has no jurisdiction over, and take specific political positions about non-education matters.
3. In the second email communication, alumni were asked if they wished to participate in efforts to address these issues both at the school and alumni level. Roughly 25 people responded.
4. The Board agreed to a Diversity and Inclusion Initiative to be coordinated by Aquib Yacoob. Gary Mellow, Shari Gruber and Ben Fung volunteered to participate (with all officers acting as ex-officio members of the initiative). All alumni who responded We did reach out to the senders of messages, inviting them to participate in this initiative. It is scheduled for Saturday July 20<sup>th</sup>.
5. Kimberly Lo did research about other NYC alumni associations' actions in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and demonstrations and the violence and history which prompted these responses. Stuyvesant reposted the principal's letter. Bronx HS of Science did not post anything. Brooklyn Tech posted a response from a Black alumnus. Our statement seems as though the only direct statement issued from local public high school alumni associations.
6. The board brainstormed possible responses after the diversity call.
7. Mr. Slutzkin advised that links for the diversity call would be forwarded to anyone who wished to be present. We can have another board meeting this summer. He expressed the belief that "we'll come out of it stronger."

VII. **Treasurer's Report.** Craig Slutzkin reported:

- A. He compared the current valuation of our assets to that of November 2019. The Association's portfolio value has rebounded after the steep losses sustained over the past quarter. The Association's portfolio is now valued only .8% below the November figure.
- B. He asked that any questions be emailed to him due to the late hour.

There will be an announcement of our next meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Michlewitz  
Secretary