

Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved November 16, 2020)

September 30, 2020

Location: Teleconference

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

The following guests, consisting of teachers and APS, were in attendance: Chris Amanna (SLT), Georgia Brandeis (AP), Kevin McDonough (UFT Chapter Leader), Veronica York (AP).

The following guest alumni were present: Mehrose Ahmad, Jillissa Drayton, Yanique Fletcher, Michelle Gan, Sumaita Hasan, Victoria Tu.

- I. Co-President Craig Slutzkin called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and thanked the directors and guests for attending this virtual meeting.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes.** The Board reviewed the minutes of the June 17, 2020 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Kimberly Lo and was seconded by David Zarowin. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. **Executive Committee Report.** Mr. Slutzkin and Dr. Selina Lee presented the report:
 - A. Craig Slutzkin paid tribute to Rhoda Weinstein, one of the founding teachers of the re-opened Townsend Harris High School, who passed away at the age of 89.
 - B. Dr. Selina Lee reviewed plans for a virtual annual meeting.
 - C. Dr. Selina Lee reported that the SLT met a few times during the summer to discuss and strategize the reopening of school, a response to the defunding of the Bridge Year by the DOE, and proposed screened admissions procedures in the time of the pandemic. The high school application deadline currently is December 4th.
 - D. Mr. Slutzkin with Michael Byc and Karen Curzio started to revamp the THAA website.
 - E. Mr. Slutzkin thanked the executive committee, as well as school administration and PTA, for all the work done during Summer 2020.
- IV. **Events Committee Report.** Dr. Selina Lee and Karen Curzio reported.
 - A. Most polled alumni expressed concern about in-person reunions. Most classes will stage virtual events and some classes will move their benchmark reunions to next year.
 1. The class of 1990 will hold a virtual event this year and an in-person gathering next year. Some virtual ideas that have been floated include wine tastings and games.
 2. The volunteers organizing the 1990 event are Ruth Lerman Hart, Danielle Steinmann, and David Rozsa.
 3. Selina Lee noted that two benchmark years do not have volunteer organizers in place. She further suggested that we send out another recruitment email to fill these gaps.
 - B. Michael Byc suggested that all the money be banked in order to combine all resources for a “big, crazy party” to celebrate a return to in-person gatherings.

- C. The Board explored other ideas about the nature of a virtual event, including a Spotify List, prearranged speakers, and the allocation of funds to hire someone to moderate and create break-out rooms for two to three hours.
- D. Selina Lee, Lara Traum, Yanique Fletcher, and Karen Curzio will meet to try to create a protocol that will be helpful for all events.
- E. Selina Lee reviewed the “Events Completed” section with special emphasis on the NY Comptroller Meeting on September 10 attended by several Alumni officers, and Assembly Member Nily Rozic, as well as school administrators and PTA representatives, attended to discuss the Bridge Year was a prominent topic.

V. **School Relations Reports.**

A. **School Report.** Veronica York reported.

- 1. AP York introduced Kevin McDonough who is the new UFT Chapter Leader. Mr. McDonough has been a member of the staff for two years. He is a teacher in the Humanities Department.
- 2. The admissions process is unresolved. One idea is to use 6th grade scores where no one was professionally prepped.
- 3. Ms York further reported on the NYC Comptroller Meeting and thanked Nily Rozic for arranging it. Comptroller Stringer said he would try to find out more about the process and thinking behind the DOE’s decision.
- 4. AP Ellen Fee and Principal Brian Condon juggled the budget to find the \$350,000 to fund the fall semester’s Bridge Year program. The \$350,000 to fund the spring semester is unsecured. Queens College has some ideas about possible sources, perhaps sustainable sources, to pay for the program in the future. AP York said that January is the absolute deadline to secure spring funding. The entire year long program requires \$800,000. This pays for the college classes, four music classes, support for the school newspaper, a writing fellow, and some other initiatives. The classes require \$600,000 in funding.
- 5. This semester required the coordination of the remote class schedule and the Queens College class schedule. Every senior has a college elective in addition to the college colloquium.
- 6. Ms. York discussed the College Now program, a DOE funded program, as compared with the Bridge Program. Ms York unequivocally stated that College Now did not meet the rigorous standard of the Bridge Program.
- 7. Ms. York reviewed the process behind the design of the THHS Remote Learning, the support that school has provided, and the different students’ emotional coping with remote learning. This included discussion of communication with teachers and students.

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

- 1. The PTA election will take place virtually this year.
- 2. The PTA continues to fight for the Bridge Year.
- 3. Ms. Kimyager thanked the administration and THAA for all their work,

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

- A. The value of the THAA portfolio has rebounded, after the losses reported last May, appreciating 8%, which exceeds the customary 5% goal.

- B. Mr. Slutzkin reviewed the proposed 2020-2021 budget. As always THAA strives to only spend the interest earned not the principle of the endowment to ensure available monies for future classes.
 - a. The budget reflected the reality of remote learning and also included an allocation to the equity and inclusion efforts.
 - b. \$5000 was allocated to funding the expansion of the Wall of Fame to include younger, more diverse alumni. Planning is hindered currently by the difficulty of gaining access to the building.
 - c. As always, the budget is mindful of “anticipating unanticipated costs.” Mr. Slutzkin budgeted these amounts with input from AP Ellen Fee.
- C. A motion to accept the budget was made by Gary Mellow and was seconded by Peter Lee. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. **Diversity Initiative.** Aquib Yacoob reported and introduced presentations.

- A. Mr. Slutzkin provided context for the Diversity Initiative and the committee work. The initial incident was a poorly received statement that THAA posted in response to Black Lives Matter activism. Our second communication asked alumni to participate in planning to move forward. Twenty-five alums formed the initial group that wanted to be involved.
- B. Aquib Yacoob spoke about the current state of the work; members of the committees seek to solidify their proposed plans and broadcast the suggested plans of our community, especially to lots of black alumni and alumni of color hurt by statements. A key point is that the school should be more inclusive [and] have more black students. This large national moment of activism intersected with #NotMyTownsend postings.
- C. Committee participants reviewed the plans developing in each of four committees.
 1. Yanique Fletcher, Class of 1991 described aspects of Plan #1: **Outreach and Recruitment** in diverse communities of prospective students. The actions consider engagement and cooperation of alumni, parent coordinators, and community groups. In the first classes in the late 1980s, 29% of the students enrolled identified as Black and/or People of Color. That percentage has dropped to 10%. Ideas include alumni outreach, transportation assistance scholarships, student surveys, and mentorship, specifying five person cohorts. Craig Slutzkin commented that we wanted to support existing programs wherever possible and not reinvent initiatives where it is repetitive. Principal Condon commented that, in terms of transportation, we might profit by working with other high schools in our neighborhood like Francs Lewis HS and Bowne HS who have similar motives in obtaining some relief from NYC and the MTA.
 2. Aquib Yacoob spoke about Plan #2: **Anti-Racist Education.** He reviewed a list of ideas including a Book Club, a bibliography of recommended books, scheduled group conversations, panel discussions, keynote addresses on important days like Juneteenth, new THAA events where THHS constituents are invited to participate, and expanded faculty development for faculty. These are activities which THAA can organize or support. Again, we would provide support where the program already exists and innovate and lead where our leadership is necessary.
 3. Jillissa Drayton, Class of 2016, reviewed Plan #3: **Communication, Information, and Transparency.** Plans revisit past attempts and seek to strengthen the actions. Several activities, including a recruitment THAA event in the style of a club fair and

expanding and upgrading the online newsletter, are explored. The key goal is to foster and improve communication, engagement, and transparency.

4. Mehrose Ahmad and Suhmaita Hasan presented Plan #4: **Proposal Re: Sexual Assault and Misconduct Practices at THHS**. The report cites the possible involvement of an administrator, an alumni volunteer or an intern to improve reporting and response protocols. It envisions using Senior Meeting, PTA Meetings, and Orientation as venues to disseminate information and empower students. David Zarowin commented that his experience with Title IX Training might be a resource that THHS could use.
- D. AP Veronica York provided information in her report on the THHS Equity and Access Team which dovetails with the ideas that the THAA Diversity Initiatives explore. Because it makes the best use of available resources, the Association wants to layer its ideas where possible into the programs that the high school has in place. This is a list of the Equity and Access Team's activities at the high school. Some are ongoing; some can be re-activated. They offer many footholds for THAA engagement.
1. Student Equity and Access Group meets.
 2. Small Staff Equity and Access Group meets.
 3. Larger Staff Equity and Access Group meets.
 4. Summer meetings of these group members took place.
 5. Administration meetings with #NotMyTownsend constituents.
 6. Guidance coordinates an Alumni Buddy Program,
 7. Guidance oversees a Big Sib Program.
 8. There are ongoing varied groups working on various issues, including Courageous Conversations which student and staff have joined.
 9. In Social Studies classes there are lessons about Race.
 10. Staff is designing a scorecard, a concept pioneered at NYU, which is a self-evaluation tool. It challenges teachers to assess their embrace of different perspectives and students' identities.
 11. These programs seek to allow "All students [to] feel known and valued."
 12. Middle School recruitment strategies are designed and considered.
 13. There is a Monthly Vent Meeting.
 14. New FON ideas are explored.
 15. New Electives are born like Queer Lit.
 16. The demerit system has been revamped.
 17. Staff training addresses implicit bias, the careful assignment of pronouns to respect LGBTQ+ identities, and spotting crisis.
 18. Hiring practices are evaluated.
 19. Projects to connect students and teachers are considered.
 20. There is an ongoing search for strong speakers.
- E. Principal Condon commented that the school is in a "staging and phasing" place and is raising awareness. He discussed the annual training of staff which addresses recognizing verbal abuse, recognizing sexual misconduct, establishing a safe place, supporting student voices, and being transparent.
- F. Chris Amana, the chairperson of the SLT, commented that Building Trust and Relationships is a key piece of the CEP. Other foci of the SLT echo the concerns of the Diversity Initiative and the Equity and Access Teams. Mr. Amana cited other goals of

getting to know every student, of culturally responsiveness and education, all concerned with making students feel supported.

- G. Aquib Yacoob resumed leadership of the discussion. He posed the question, “How do we co-build?” Also integral to this closing discussion was communication of progress to the alumni community.
1. Craig Slutzkin cautioned that THHA should not overpromise and underdeliver. He rhetorically posed questions: What is possible in the short run? Long run? What is sustainable?
 2. The Board discussed various strategies and several members noted that communication needs to improve, prioritization, and coordination with the school.
 - a. Board members stressed that this is a process that will take time, and that whatever is proposed, the school administration will need to have input and buy-in.
 - b. Several guests noted that these projects will require a lot of manhours.
 - c. That being said, several guests recommended that there be a timeline so that the project does not linger.
 3. As a next step, Mr. Yacoob and Ms. York will meet next week in order to connect some projects on extant committees and discuss next steps. At the same time, each THAA Diversity Initiative committee will prioritize and solidify ideas and develop timelines. People should use email to keep the conversation going.
 4. Selina Lee restated that the budget indicates \$6500 for efforts to advance Diversity and Inclusion. The new and updated Wall of Fame project has a separate \$5000 allocation going forward.
 5. Mr. Yacoob indicated that we could close out this session and Mr. Slutzkin noted that the Board reached consensus on actions that the Diversity Initiative wishes to pursue.

VIII. **Old Business.**

- A. The report on the revision of the bylaws was deferred.
- B. Still under consideration is the timing and content of notice for payment of dues. Shari Gruber noted that our current discussions and plans make for good material for a dues statement.

A motion to adjourn was made by Dr. Selina Lee and was seconded by Peter Lee. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Michlewitz
Secretary