

# Truxton Academy Charter School

## Regular Board Meeting

**January 10, 2021**

Notice was provided on our website, [www.truxtonacademy.org](http://www.truxtonacademy.org) on Monday, December 6, 2021.

A quorum of 8 trustees out of 8 total number of trustees was present as follows:

**Members Present:** Stuart Young and Tom Brown attended in person. Krysta Austen, Sarah Stevens, Dave Amberg, Korinne L'Hommedieu, and Beth Klein joined remotely. Cindy Denkenberger joined remotely at 7:05pm.

**Others present:** Lydia Aris-Brown attended in person. Leaf Carmer, Jenny Hull, Madysen Eckhardt, Kay Reakes, Victor Siegle, Liz Blackburn, Courtney Harrington, Betsy and Bud Soshinsky attended remotely. Sara Petit-McClure joined remotely at 7:11pm.

President Stuart Young called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

### **Approval of Minutes**

Minutes for the Regular Meeting December 13, 2021 were presented. Having no objections, minutes were accepted as presented. Approved.

### **Community Comments**

Betsy Soshinsky asked if her letter of concern had been addressed. Stuart would like to wait for Sara to join to address these comments.

### **School Report**

Jenny Hull shared additional results from the parent survey. Responses show that overall, families are satisfied with their child's experience at Truxton Academy. Feedback showed a desire for students to get outside more often. At the last staff meeting, teachers discussed ideas and will be implementing more outside time and outside lessons.

Madysen Eckhardt reported that her third-grade class is getting outside as much as possible. She shared photos of her class. Students are learning about non-fiction text for Reading, Writing and Spelling. They are reading a book about the Iditarod and a dog named Togo as well as "Balto and the Great Race." The kiddos are loving it! They are comparing the two dogs and discussing different traits. They are starting a 2022 Project. The first activity is to choose a main topic by paring down a few choices to one word. They will take this word and discuss how it would "better" them. They will find a quote using this word and eventually will be adding pictures. They will learn how to find images from the computer and cut and paste. They are also working on pre-fixes and suffixes. In Math, they are working on addition and subtraction with 2 and 3 digit numbers. The students are showing success and strength. In Science, they are starting a new unit on "Matter and Machine" and will be looking at the benefits of modern-day farm equipment.

Jenny Hull added that the Rural Life Lab Committee has added a more sustainable composting plan and that they are planning field lessons in the kitchen with Ms. Taylor. Grow Towers are operating in two classrooms and the third will be implemented in an after-school program.

Sara reported that state tests will be using computers this year. The school did a simulation today to make sure technology works and students know what the test will look like. She feels like everyone came back from the New Year looking forward to the future. The school celebrated National Law Enforcement

Day with Cortland County Sheriffs. They had lunch with students. The officers spent considerable time and had a great presence with the students.

Stuart invited Betsy to share her comments now. She stated that she was happy to hear students were getting outside more but does not understand why they were not going out sooner. Sara responded that it is not a complaint from many parents. Betsy's concerns are still valid and the awareness brought has led to some changes, more are in the works. Winter does make it challenging, but they are working to add time by having part of a lesson inside, and the next part of the lesson outside. She appreciates the comment and knows focus on outside learning is important. The team will continue working to improve this aspect. Betsy replied that outside time with hands on learning is what is supposed to set Truxton Academy apart. Tom and Stuart both responded that the board is aware of the issues and is working with the Administration to help. Staffing shortages are an issue, we are still working on staffing. Hiring is difficult at this time. Sara agreed that it is a nationwide issue and is hard to hire for any position at this time, anywhere. Betsy responded that her concerns were specific to her two boy's class. Sara suggested that the conversation continue with herself, the parents, and the teachers. Bud stated that they were looking for examples of changes and progress. Sara replied that the "picture" they see with their children currently is not what she sees in whole grade. Their concerns are valid towards their children and Truxton Academy is working toward the "vision" they see on the website. The whole Truxton Academy team is doing their best to improve Betsy and Bud's family's experience and to meet the goals we set to reach our vision.

Betsy still feels like her whole letter has not been addressed. Stuart responded that an individual meeting to follow up should be set. Bud stated that they will continue to attend meetings and bring more people to make a difference if issues raised are not being answered to. Krysta mentioned that some of the specific issues may not have been answered to, as some committees have not yet met. Tom apologized that we are not progressing fast enough for them and that we are striving to meet the vision. It takes a lot of effort to make it happen. Stuart mentioned that we are always looking for parents to join committees to help with our progress. Betsy responded that with her kids currently not in school, it is hard to know how to participate. Dave Amberg commented that we did receive the letter, we are taking it seriously, he is hearing from Sara and the other teachers that they are doing best they can. He remarked that this is unprecedented and trying times and asked them to be patient. Bud and Betsy both asked again why things are so different from last year. Tom replied that we hear you, the Board agrees there are issues to be worked out. It has been discussed in Leadership council and the faculty is brainstorming best ways to make improvements. Betsy asked why she has not received a response to her letter. Stuart stated that he will provide a written response.

Kay Reakes added that in response to comments made about the vision and the website, that she asks them to be patient and understand that the process has been long and time consuming. Simple things like an architect stamp holding us up, may sound crazy, but is reality none the less. State regulations, COVID holding up committee meetings, contractors, etc. As a team, we worked for 5 years just to start the school before it opened. We are still working as hard as possible to adjust each year to school growth. Please be patient, don't give up on us and please do not stop providing feedback.

Leadership Council – Beth reported that they discussed concerns about substitute teachers. They are making a recommendation to the Finance committee to raise sub pay and will need help from Marketing with advertising opportunities. Also, when Teaching Assistants are covering a classroom as a substitute teacher, it should be acknowledged that they are running the room, not just supporting. The council has been kept apprised through Jess with staffing issues. Issues will be discussed with Finance, working on different scenarios as well. Sara reported that they also discussed the accountability plan for renewal. Teachers are staying involved in that process.

## **Board Committee Reports**

### *Finance Committee*

Treasurer's Report attached. Korinne reported that cash position remains strong. Profit & Loss statement shows 6 months of actual revenues and expenses with a favorable projection of balance for remainder of the year. We must acknowledge that some of this is due to open positions. As previously mentioned, we

are working in unfavorable conditions to fill those positions. Some decline in enrollment will affect the balance through the end of the year, but we should be okay.

Finance Committee Report attached. Tom reported that he heard from our eRate consultant. We do not have her under contract anymore since we did not need services. He does not think we need to retain services at this time as services cost more than benefits received, based on our current needs. He suggests we re-visit if a large project for network or technology changes is planned for.

Sara reminded the board that the original budget was planned for 96 students, which is where we currently are in enrollment.

#### *Personnel Committee*

No report submitted. Cindy stated that the next meeting will be held on January 13 at 7pm with a full agenda. The committee is looking for approval on creating a new position for a Social Worker/Social Emotional and Academic Intervention teacher.

Motion by Tom Brown, seconded by Krysta Austen, to approve creation of Social Worker/Social Emotional and Academic Intervention teacher position. None opposed. Motion carried.

#### *Facilities Committee*

No Report submitted. Tom reported that Heating system issues were being addressed internally as much as possible. May need outside vendor. Tom asked if Rural Life Lab committee had any update on the small animal barn. Courtney asked if they wanted the full report now?

Rural Life Lab Committee report - Lizzy reported there are no barn updates they are aware of. They have been focusing on curriculum and getting garden plans ready for next year's implementation. Each grade will have an outdoor assignment attached to the garden. They are working on having a field trip for each grade, each week, even if it is on site, i.e., to the kitchen working with vegetables. Courtney added that the committee's goal is to implement Rural Life Lab curriculum and programming for the remainder of the school year working with staff to provide resources and outside opportunities for classrooms. They have emailed each teacher asking them to provide interests to focus on. Areas of interest suggested: animal sciences, natural resources, embryology, and horticulture. They will plan for every class to participate in offsite field lessons. Ms. Jess and Mrs. Francis are using grow towers now. The third grow tower will be used for after school enrichment. An account was set up for funds received through recent donations for the committee. They need more information on restrictions for fundraising for things like funding for a dedicated Ag staff member and Rural Life Lab projects and initiatives. It was suggested the board share the current committee list. They should plan to join the next fundraising committee meeting. Lizzy asked if they should continue to pursue a high tunnel grant or wait on the RCS grant. Dave said they will be discussing at the next meeting. In the interest of time, it needs to be decided now if they should continue. If this grant is awarded, we could still go for a second high tunnel and she has ideas for how to work with both. Tom recommended going for the one now since everything takes so long and this would help meet parents' expectations. Korinne agreed and a decision needs to be made now to make the deadline.

Tom Brown moved, Beth Klein seconded, to allow the Rural Life Lab Committee to go forward with this grant application. All in favor. None opposed. Motions carried.

#### *Curriculum Committee*

No Report submitted. Cindy reported that the next meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2022. Sara reported that a conversation with SUNY CSI regarding the accountability plan and minor changes and clarification will need to be approved at the next meeting. Tom asked if the Board of Regents' decision regarding testing affected our school. Sara said it does not pertain to our school. Still preparing for end of year assessments, with or without the State.

#### *Marketing Committee*

No Report submitted.

### **Special Committee Reports**

*Nutrition Committee*  
No Report submitted.

*Professional Advisory Committee*  
No report submitted. Lydia commented that she is thrilled the Rural Life Lab Committee is going for the Ag in the Classroom Grant. She encouraged that they keep trying until they are successful.

*Transportation Committee*  
No Report submitted.

*Educational Excellence Committee (Fundraising Committee)*  
No Report attached. Dave reported they will be meeting later this month and will maintain a master spreadsheet. They did reach out to PTO for new members. Erin Kelly will be joining. They also circulated documents to the Board Members. They are asking for members to review the local business list and if they have any personal connections, Dave will help reach out. They are looking to build a list for an annual Donor request. Please remember a follow-up phone call is important. Kay asked about the list from early previous supporters and if the lists can be merged. Victor said he had the list from previous donors. He and Dave will review it together.

*Rural Life Lab Committee (formerly Agriculture Committee)*  
See above.

With no objection to reports as submitted, reports are all approved.

### **New Business**

Tom reported that the Leadership council discussed difficulty in finding substitute teachers. The teachers asked us to consider increasing pay to attract applicants. Tom checked rates at different districts. The highest he found locally was \$125 per diem. He recommended the per diem rate be increased. Sara stated the rate was currently set at a range, based on teacher's qualifications, and it should still be a range. She requested keeping the new rate through the end of the current school year. Cindy remarked that it may be difficult to drop the rate in the new year, we may want to consider the increase permanently. Tom stated it should be reviewed at the end of the school year.

Motion by Tom Brown, seconded by Dave Amberg, to increase daily rate for substitute teachers to \$110-\$130 per day through the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year. The rate will be reviewed for the new school year. All in favor, none opposed. Motion carried.

Sara reported that Cortland County changed COVID guidelines. She shared this information with Stuart and parents. Truxton Academy will be following these new guidelines. Faculty and students that reside in other counties will still need to abide by their county guidelines. Truxton Academy encouraged disposable masks for the month of January. We received KN95 masks from Cortland County, but they were too large for most students. We also received test kits, but they were based on last year's enrollment numbers. Sara and Leaf have both reached out to different entities to request more tests. They will offer one box per family on a first come, first serve basis.

Cindy asked about the county run Vaccine clinic. Sara reported that the first clinic took place, the next one will be in two weeks. Cindy asked how did it go, traffic wise, etc. Sara said it went very well. Everyone was respectful of the school's space. It was well organized and well run. They did not schedule appointments during student dismissal. There was no negative impact on Truxton Academy.

### **School Events**

JAN 17	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - No School
FEB 1	Application Enrollment Opens (intent to return forms for current students sent out)
APR 1	Transportation Requests Due to Resident Districts

APR 4

Application Lottery

Cindy asked about Contest winners. Sara reported that the 4th Grade Team won 1st Place in the Elementary Division of the Top Beef Contest and one of our 3rd Grade Classes won 2nd Place. They should be making one of the dishes in the cafeteria soon. They sent a thank you to Jeff Perry and the Cornell Ag School partnership. His student teachers came once a week to work with our students.

**Adjournment**

Motion by Tom Brown, seconded by Dave Amberg, to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 pm. None opposed. Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Dawson", written over a horizontal line.

Patty Dawson, Recording Secretary