

**Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA)**  
**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes**  
**December 9, 2021**  
**By Video Conference**

**Meeting Recording:**

<https://tmapchs-org.zoom.us/rec/share/2WYfRanEBNFd2fVv6p8Sr1MtI3-LvhonmFttAQBkxuLRUqjwLYytYbPCnK3CO9Fg.D8bWI6V1OIrXXpm>

**Passcode:** E^AN5=i%

**Board Members in Attendance:** Danielle Bierzynski, Jinah Bryant, Jerry Epstein, Dan Gordon, Mark Harrison, Aleisha James, Ken Jones, Richard Roe, Andy Rosenberg, Jonathan Stoel, Laurence Telson.

**Staff in Attendance:** Raymond Weeden, Executive Director; David Schlossman, Chief Operating Officer; Sam Chiron, Social Studies Teacher

Mr. Stoel called the meeting to order at 8am. A quorum was present.

Mr. Stoel asked for a motion to approve minutes from the September 30, 2021 meeting. The motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.

Mr. Jones introduced the **Finance Committee** Report, beginning with proposals concerning the 403(b) retirement plan. Mr. Jones asked Mr. Schlossman to report on employee concerns and proposed changes. Mr. Schlossman reported the following:

- Recommendations by TMA staff regarding the 403(b) retirement plan and a request to the board to approve the adoption of a new plan
- Previous plan was established in 2004, and fee levels have emerged (nationally) as a concern in recent years
- Employees seek a provider offering lower fees and improved transparency
- Employees and trustees interviewed several providers and advisors this fall and solicited feedback from employees
- Recommendation is for Vanguard as provider and Newport Group as Third-Party Administrator (TPA), based on lowest fees, flat-fee structure, large number and variety of funds, and experience of TPA
- Recommendation is for SharePower (a.k.a. Cambridge) as financial advisor for employees and the 403(b) plan, based on socially responsible investing philosophy (which employee group sees as aligned with the school mission), shareholder advocacy, and low fees
- If board votes in favor of change, TMA employees will work with advisor and provider to create TMA plan that the board will formally approve, ideally at its February, 2022, meeting
- If board approves plan, employee funds will be transferred between plans in roughly March (the exact timing depends upon board review, provider structuring of the plan, and general normal-course-of-business needs)

Mr. Jones said the Finance Committee reviewed the proposal and other information in preparation for the board meeting and recommends approval. Mr. Epstein said the board has a particular responsibility to ensure this plan is in the best interest of the participants and noted the analyses the board had conducted, including obtaining legal advice. Mr. Chiron encouraged the board to approve the proposed plan. Mr. Jones asked for a motion to approve (1) the change in 403(b) retirement plan provider to Vanguard (with Newport as its partner TPA) and (2) Sharepower (a.k.a. Cambridge) as the employee-and-403(b)-plan financial advisor. Mr. Harrison made the motion. Ms. Bierzynski seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Schlossman presented the Financial Report, which included the following:

- Audit of the year ending June 30, 2021, was completed and is “clean”
- FY21 featured a \$1.3 million positive change in net assets, largely because of PPP loan (received in FY20 but recognized upon loan forgiveness received in FY21)
- FY22 forecast includes \$151K less favorable than budgeted, but the PPP loan cash and other COVID-19 support provide funds to avoid any recommendations of cuts
- Expenses forecast to be within budget

Ms. Telson asked about the implications of COVID-19 on the budget. Mr. Schlossman said TMA has slightly lower than expected enrollment due to COVID-19, which is consistent with local and national trends.

Mr. Weeden presented the **Executive Director’s** report. Highlights included the following:

- Focus at TMA has returned to teaching and learning successes and challenges rather than (solely) COVID-19 mitigation
- 17 students participated in instant decision day and were accepted to one or more schools, including Trinity Washington University and Virginia Union University
- Attendance has improved and is 89% on average per day
- Local hotel chain is paying for tutors to come into TMA two days per week to focus on math
- TMA is working with EmpowerK12 to collect data and see how to improve
- TMA anticipates DC Council legislation to require vaccination for next school year
- In response to increased violence and public safety incidents in DC, TMA will undertake mitigation measure used in the past, such as periodic bag checks
- One employee was terminated because of lack of compliance with vaccine mandate

Ms. Bierzynski asked about staff morale and the national trend of teachers leaving the profession. Mr. Weeden said he does not expect a mass exodus but he does expect some team members will seek different roles or leave the school. Five Urban Teachers Fellows are currently in their first year as Fellows and will hopefully buffer any staff departures. Other prospective teachers are in the pipeline. A virtual “chief of staff” is helping with recruitment.

Mr. Weeden reported that the school discovered limited but urgent masonry repairs needed inside the building, which led to a brief building closure. The Operations team brought in

engineers to ensure safety and plan needed repairs. The building was determined safe for occupancy, and remaining repairs will be completed over Winter Break.

Ms. Bryant asked if teachers' mental health is being supported. Mr. Weeden said services are being offered, but he doesn't know who is taking advantage of what. He is trying to be generous with time off as needed. A second cohort of Wellness Fellows working with Wise Center will begin in January. Students are taking advantage of mental health services.

Mr. Gordon asked about student vaccination rates. Mr. Weeden said 80 students, or 20% of the population, are vaccinated so far. Team is continuing to develop incentives. They hope to reach 50% by spring break. Mr. Weeden said all student-athletes are vaccinated.

Mr. Jones asked if TMA has a lockdown procedure, and Mr. Schlossman confirmed that it does.

Mr. Rosenberg presented the **Development Committee** report, which included the following:

- Thanks to donors for major gifts
- Development Committee is on-boarding Gelatya "GIGI" Aklilu who will be serving as TMA's Development Manager for Administration
- Annual appeals have been mailed
- The Development Committee is considering whether the spring Showcase gala—scheduled for May, 2022—should be in-person or virtual.

Ms. James asked about parking if the event was in person. Mr. Weeden said there are options, including hiring a valet service, paying neighbors for their spots, or holding the event at another location. The issue is the building under construction across the street has replaced an empty lot the school used to rent for parking.

Ms. Bierzynski said she is open to an in-person event with a vaccine or COVID-19 test requirement. Mr. Rosenberg said he thinks requiring a test will be a barrier to participation. Mr. Stoel said he prefers in-person events with proof of vaccination. Mr. Weeden said the team can figure out how to safely hold an in-person event if that's the board's decision. Mr. Rosenberg invited board members to share their thoughts individually with him or Mr. Weeden or Ms. Oviedo.

Mr. Stoel invited public comments, in compliance with the Open Meetings Act. There were no public comments.

Mr. Schlossman noted that TMA is fully in compliance with the District vaccination mandate that requires school employees to either be vaccinated or secure a formal exemption.

Ms. Telson asked what TMA is doing to encourage student and family vaccination. Mr. Weeden said the school held on-site clinics, sponsored events, and provided incentives for several months. Now TMA is working with Link Communications and Pathways 2 Power to directly communicate with families, through a partnership with Ed Forward. Mr. Weeden expressed appreciation to Ms. Bryant and Ms. James for holding an event for parents to talk about the vaccine.

Mr. Gordon asked how the national trend of decreasing numbers of students planning to attend or entering college is reflected at TMA. Mr. Weeden said the team at TMA works hard to convince every senior to apply, but they expect that a higher number of students than usual may not enter college this fall. He believes that the ongoing pandemic is an exacerbating factor in families' reluctance to encourage leaving for college. Ms. Bryant pointed out that some students are interested in trades, the military, or jobs that don't require college. Mr. Weeden said he wanted to make sure students realize they can go to college in order to benefit their career even if they want to enter a trade.

Mr. Stoel adjourned the public portion of the meeting at 9:33am.

Mr. Stoel made a motion to move into executive session to discuss personnel matters and board development. Mr. Harrison seconded the motion. The motion carried.