

**TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
November 22, 2024**

**Call to Order**

Lee Sonnenberg, Board President called the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Board of Trustees meeting to order at 10:15 a.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance and Texas Pledge**

A TSBVI student led the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance and the Texas Pledge for audience members.

**Introduction of Board Members and Audience**

Board members present were Lee Sonnenberg, Hillary Rodriguez, Beth Jones, Brenda Lee, Dan Brown, Elaine Robertson, Ernest Worthington, and Maghan Gautney.

Present via Zoom was Julie Prause, Board Member.

Audience members included Emily Coleman, Superintendent; Veronica Keating, Executive Assistant; Ann Du, CFO; Miles Fain, Comprehensive Program Principal; Mike Hanley, Former Board Member; Angela Wolf, Curriculum Director; Scott Brackett, IR Director; Cheryl Williams, HR Director; Alex Arguello, Head of Community Engagement; Eric Grimmett, CSR Director; Eden Hagelman, STP Principal; Jenny Wells, General Counsel; Erica Cairns, Outreach Director; Susan Houghtling, Planning and Evaluation Coordinator; and Colin Higginbotham, Outreach Media Tech.

**Public Comments/Open Forum**

Michael Hanley was signed up for public comments. He shared information about NewView Oklahoma, a program that empowers low vision and blind individuals by offering training to become independent. They also teach the community how to use adaptive technology and offer job placements. He stated that their agency makes the firehoses used by the U.S. Forestry Service to put out forest fires across the country.

He shared that the unemployment rate for visually impaired individuals is extremely high. Mr. Hanley said his agency would like to work with the School to employ graduates.

**Consideration of Approval of Minutes of the October 7, 2024 Board Meeting**

Mr. Sonnenberg recommended corrections to the minutes including changing the name from Ernest Worthington to Julie Prause as the board member reporting on the Finance Committee meeting. The Audit, Compliance and Management Review Committee was referenced and it should have been the Finance Committee. Dan Brown made a motion to approve the minutes with the corrections recommended by Mr. Sonnenberg. Brenda Lee seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to pass the motion.

**Report from the Finance Committee**

- a. **Consideration of approval of new Nolan County farm contract**

Ms. Coleman shared information regarding her and Lee Sonnenberg's visit to the School's Nolan County farm properties in Roscoe, Texas. They also visited a gravesite for which TSBVI is responsible for upkeep. Richard Osbourne and Scott Fullwood, who contract with the School to farm two plots of acreage, showed Ms. Coleman and Mr. Sonnenberg the process by which cotton is processed from the farmlands. Mr. Osbourne will be retiring at the end of his lease in December and James Parrott would like to take over farming the land. Mr. Parrott has requested to change the lease so that he may alternate crops to ensure the soil is not depleted of its nutrients.

Dan Brown stated the Finance Committee recommended approval of the new Nolan Country farm contract with Mr. Parrott for calendar year 2025; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve the contract and the motion passed.

**b. Consideration of approval of Investment Report**

Mr. Brown stated that the total investments for the two months ending October 31, 2024 were \$1,411,315 and the interest earned was \$7,125. The Finance Committee recommended the approval of the Investment Report; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

**c. Consideration of approval of receipt of gifts and donations of over \$500**

The School received an anonymous donation in the amount of \$50,000. The Finance Committee recommended approval of the donation of over \$500; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

**d. Consideration of approval of request for expenditure of gifts and donations**

The Finance Committee recommended the approval of the expenditure to purchase musical instruments to create a drumline; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

**e. Review of budget reports**

➤ **Operating Budget Expenditure Report**

The benchmark for the percentage of the budget expended as of October 31, 2024 was set at 16%. The percentages of each budget strategy expended as of October 31, 2024 were: classroom instruction – 18%, residential program – 17%, Summer and Short-Term Programs – 13%, related and support services - 16%, technical assistance (Outreach) - 14%, teacher preparation - 2%, central administrative - 16%, other support services - 16% with the total for all budget expenditures at 16%.

➤ **Legacy Revenue Budget Report**

The benchmark for total Legacy Budget revenues received as of October 31, 2024 was set at 16%. The total percent of the budget received was 21%.

➤ **Legacy Operating Expenditure Budget Report**

The benchmark for the percent of the budget expended as of October 31, 2024 was set at 16%. The total percent of the budget used was 7%.

**Report from the Program Committee**

**a. Consideration of approval of board policies:  
DP (TSBVI) Personnel Positions**

Brenda Lee reported that the Program Committee recommended approval of amended Policy DP (TSBVI) - Personnel Positions; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve the policy and the motion passed.

**b. Report from Comprehensive Program Principal**

➤ **Career Education Program Update**

Brenda Lee reported that students from the career education program talked with the Program Committee about the programs they participate in including their community career partnerships. Program Committee members stated that the students and their skills were impressive.

**c. Report from Curriculum Department Director**

➤ **Report on Curriculum sales**

Ms. Lee reported that the total curriculum sales for FY 2024 was \$220,987.03.

**d. Report from Short-Term Programs Principal**

➤ **Short-Term Programs update**

Ms. Lee stated that there were 259 students in the 2023-2024 school-year Short-Term Programs. The percent of students making progress in assessed programs was 97%. There were two new courses added to the summer program: Art and High School Independent Weekend. This program served 18 out of 20 Education Service Centers (ESC) with 205 students and 98% of the districts and parents rating the program as very satisfactory or outstanding.

**e. Report from Outreach Director**

Ms. Lee reported that the Outreach Program was very busy with an increase in service requests. There have been inquiries from as far away as Brazil and Australia.

**Report on Achievement of 2023-2024 Objectives from the Agency Strategic Plan and the Annual Improvement Plan**

Susan Houghtling presented on how well the School achieved its 2023-2024 performance objectives that are found in the Agency Strategic Plan, the Annual Improvement Plan and in TEA's accreditation standards for the School.

**Report on Maintenance, Annual Inspection, and Recommendations for Maintenance and Repair of the Campus Residence**

Ms. Coleman reported on the annual maintenance performed on the campus Superintendent's residence including budgeted and actual expenditures. The Texas Facilities Commission (TFC) paid for the repairs to the residence. Recommendations for future maintenance and repair of the residence were listed with the highest priority recommendation being replacement of three AC units and any associated ductwork and the assessment and repair of any additional components. The Board also received an inventory and condition of furniture, appliances and other fixtures in the home.

**Designation of Business Closure Days Related to Public Information Requests**

Ms. Coleman stated that TSBVI administrative staff request the approval of the following non-business days for responding to Public Information Act requests for the remainder of the 2024 calendar year for the Board's consideration:

- November 26, 2024
- November 27, 2024
- December 23, 2024

- December 27, 2024
- December 30, 2024
- December 31, 2024

For the first six months of 2025 the following days were requested to be designated as non-business days for responding to Public Information Act requests:

- January 2, 2025
- January 3, 2025
- March 20, 2025
- March 21, 2025

Elaine Robertson motioned to approve the aforementioned dates as non-business days for responding to Public Information Act requests. Dan Brown seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to pass the motion.

### **Annual Report on Employee Complaints about Discrimination or Harassment**

Ms. Williams stated that there was one report in the past year related to employee discrimination or harassment.

### **Report from the Superintendent**

#### **a. Legislative update**

Ms. Coleman reported that the School has not had a legislative hearing to date. Before that time, it is anticipated that the Legislative Budget Board will give the School questions to answer.

#### **b. Campus activities**

Ms. Coleman shared recent and upcoming campus activities. For Comprehensive Programs this included White Cane Day, Family Day, USABA Goalball Nationals at Florida School for the Deaf and Blind, the Holiday Big Show and, in January, the SCASB Wrestling, Cheerleading and Performing Arts at Oklahoma School for the Blind. Events for Short-Term Programs include the following classes: JAWS for Students and Teachers, Wellness Weekend, Magic World of STEAM, and individualized instruction, among others. Outreach Programs events include the Mentor Center, Southwest Orientation and Mobility Conference in Round Rock, Coffee Hours, Family Recharge Zone, and Tech Tea Time.

#### **c. Superintendent's activities**

Ms. Coleman stated that she continues her course work for her doctorate. She remains on the COSB Board, visited the Nolan Farms, and was the keynote speaker at a TVI conference in Oregon.

#### **d. Activities of the TSBVI Safety and Security Committee**

Ms. Coleman stated that, at the Fall TSBVI Safety and Security Committee meeting, the Committee discussed how school day drills are performed and received information about the Weekends Home process.

### **Discussion of the Superintendent's Annual Performance Appraisal Process in January**

Ms. Williams stated she will send an email to Board members with information about the Superintendent's annual appraisal process as well as the appraisal form in preparation for the January evaluation.

## **Personnel Update**

Mr. Sonnenberg announced that the Board would recess the open session and convene in a closed meeting to discuss the following item listed under agenda item #14 – ‘Personnel Update’ in conformance with Texas Government Code Section 551.071 – Consultation with School Attorney and Texas Government Code Section 551.074 – Personnel Matters.”

No voting would take place in the closed meeting. Any action the Board wished to take as a result of discussions in closed meeting would take place after the Board reconvened in the open meeting. It was 12:17 p.m.

At 1:11 p.m. Lee Sonnenberg announced that the Board would convene in open session. No action was taken on the agenda item.

## **Report of Completion of Board Member Training Requirements for the Past Year**

Lee Sonnenberg announced the names of board members who met, exceeded, or were deficient in meeting the training requirements for the past year. He added that completing the annual required continuing education is a basic obligation and expectation of any sitting board member under State Board of Education rule.

Met training requirements:

Dan Brown;  
Maghan Gautney; and  
Elaine Robertson.

Exceeded training requirements:

Beth Jones;  
Brenda Lee;  
Julie Prause;  
Lee Sonnenberg; and  
Ernest Worthington.

Deficient in training requirements:

No one.

Hillary Rodriguez just began her term on the Board in August and has more time to complete her training requirements.

## **Discussion of Scheduling Board Training for the Next Year Based on the Framework for School Board Development**

The Board discussed options for training next year. They stated they liked the idea of seeing students in their academic or career elements.

## **Discussion of Future Board Meeting Topics**

No recommendations for future topics were identified. The Board stated they would share out should they think of topics.

## **Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**Adjournment**

Elaine Robertson motioned to adjourn the November 22, 2024 Texas School for the Blind Visually Impaired Board of Trustees meeting. Brenda Lee seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

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Lee Sonnenberg, Board President

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Date

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Dan Brown, Board Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Veronica Keating, Recording Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date