

# TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED BOARD MEETING MINUTES MAY 24, 2024

## **Call to Order**

Lee Sonnenberg, Board Member called the May 24, 2024 Board of Trustees meeting for the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to order at 10:15 a.m.

Mr. Sonnenberg gave the Oath of Office for the reappointment of board member Dan Brown to the School's Board of Trustees.

Julie Prause was also reappointed to the School's board but could not attend the meeting and would take the Oath of Office at a later date. A new board member, Hillary Rodriguez, was also appointed and would attend a later meeting.

## **Introduction of Board Members and Audience**

Board members present were: Lee Sonnenberg, Brenda Lee, and Dan Brown. Board members present via Zoom were: Maghan Gautney and Beth Jones. Julie Prause, Elaine Robertson and Ernest Worthington were unable to attend.

Audience members present via Zoom were: Cecilia Robinson, Christina Hoke, Hillary Keys, Susan Osterhaus, Valerie Perwein and David Hook.

Audience members present were: Emily Coleman, Superintendent; Veronica Keating, Executive Assistant; Sara Merritt, Short-Term Programs Principal; Alex Arguello, Head of Community Engagement; Susan Houghtling, Planning and Evaluation Coordinator; Jenny Wells, General Counsel; Eric Grimmatt, CSR Director; Cheryl Williams, HR Director; Ann Du, CFO; Cyrenna Villegas, Procurement Director; Angela Wolf, Curriculum Director; Scott Brackett, IR Director; Daniel Wheeler, Instructional Technology Coordinator; Eden Hagelman, Asst. Principal; Phoebe Williams, STP; Sonia Fair, Teacher; Colin Higginbotham, Media Tech; Joan Rodgers, Teacher; Toni Ericson, Outreach; Julie Nielson, Teacher; Stephanie Brown, Teacher; Haley Moberg, Coordinator of Dual Enrollment; Cindy Kubacak, Teacher; Toni Provost, O&M; Rusti Wade, Outreach; Nina Wibbenmeyer, Teacher; Yolanda Shaw, Outreach; Belinda Fayard, Outreach; Katie Barnes, O&M; Neely Kulhanek, STP; Suzanne Becker, Archivist; Wendy Weeks, Residential; Nichelle White, STP; and family and friends of retirees.

## **Recognition of Retiring TSBVI Staff Members**

Retiring staff members being recognized were: Toni Ericson, Toni Provost, Stephanie Brown, Sara Merritt, Julie Nielson, Haley Moberg, Sonia Fair and Cindy Kubacak.

Retirees that were recognized but not present were: Jim Clark and Kate Hurst.

The Board thanked the staff for their service and congratulated them on their retirement.

## **Public Comments/Open Forum**

There was no one signed up for comments.

## **Consideration of Approval of Minutes of April 3, 2024 Board Meeting**

Mr. Brown motioned to approve the minutes of the April 3, 2024 board meeting. Ms. Lee seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

## **Report from the Finance Committee**

### **a. Consideration of approval of board policies: DG – Employee Rights and Privileges**

Dan Brown reported that the Finance Committee recommended the amendment of policy DG – Employee Rights and Privileges; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

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

The total investments to the Legacy account for the eight-month period ending on April 30, 2024 was \$1,491,812 and the earnings for the period were \$34,269.

The Finance Committee recommended the approval of the Investment Report; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

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

The Finance Committee recommended the approval of receipt of gifts and donations of over \$500; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

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

There was a request to expend a \$24,802.95 donation on items requested by teachers related to STEM and music. The Finance Committee recommended the approval of request for expenditure of gifts and donations as stated; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

### **e. Review of budget reports**

#### **Operating Budget Expenditure Report**

Mr. Brown stated that the target Operating Budget Expenditure as of April 3, 2024 was 66%. The percentages of the budgets used as of April 3, 2024 were: classroom instruction – 67%, residential program – 67%, summer and short-term programs – 43%, related and support services – 67%, technical assistance – 59%, teacher preparation – 33%, educational professional salary increases – 0%, central administration – 63%, and other support services – 64%. The total expended across all budgets was – 63%.

#### **Legacy Revenue Budget Report**

Mr. Brown stated that the benchmark for the Legacy revenue budget report for the eight-month period ending April 30, 2024 was 66%. The total percent of the budget received was 84%.

#### **Legacy Operating Expenditure Budget Report**

The benchmark for the Legacy Operating Budget used as of April 30, 2024 was 66% and the total percent of the budget used was 53%.

## **Report from the Program Committee**

### **a. Report on TSBVI's School Health Advisory Council's activities and recommendations**

Brenda Lee reported that for the 2023-2024 school year, the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) was led by Ria Ferich, school counselor, and included TSBVI's school nurse, Sally Freeman, RN; health teacher, Cristi Fleming; physical education teacher Kristine Seljenes; curriculum director Angela Wolf and Safety and Security Program Supervisor Stacy Correa. The Committee had representatives from two families with students attending Comprehensive Programs: Milka Hatch and Cassandra Hernandez

The year's health and physical fitness highlights included Family Day and Wellness Fair, Turkey Trot, Jingle Bell Run, Jump Rope for Heart, and the Special Olympics. They thanked the volunteers from Delta Gamma, The Girls School of Austin and our OT/PT staff for supporting these events.

The Committee continued to use evidence-based SEL materials from Empowering Education and Random Acts of Kindness campus-wide. In one classroom they piloted *My Rights, My Life curriculum*, an inclusive and accessible healthy relationship curriculum for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities to better serve student's mental health needs. The SHAC recommended a continued focus on the cross-curricular implementation of SEL lessons and infusing lessons with the ECC model. This year they infused the arts into SEL programming and invited Creative Action to perform "Welcome Armadillo" for TSBVI's elementary students and look forward to inviting them on campus again next school year.

They met the needs of families and staff by sharing, Alliance Work Partners (AWP) on a monthly basis. Parents also received updated emails with free or low-cost mental health resources in their communities and additional resources in the SHAC newsletter.

### **Campus Safety and Security**

Communication was increased between school and families, Stacy Correa routinely provided information on the required drills to keep students and staff safe through email and attending meetings where she could answer questions from families. Stacy addressed questions regarding severe weather, evacuation routes, and the differences between drills (Lockdown, Fire, Shelter, Secure, Evacuate HAZMAT) and also shared information about campus-wide safety upgrades including our Emergency Alert system, outdoor PA system, and construction on our perimeter fence.

Ria Ferich was stepping down from TSBVI's School Health Advisory Council (SHAC). Sally Freeman will remain on the Council.

### **b. Report from Short-Term Programs**

#### **□ Short-Term Program update**

Ms. Lee said the program served 259 students who had duplicate services. There were 132 students with unduplicated services.

#### **□ Update on Summer 2024 programs**

Ms. Lee stated that there were 237 students accepted to summer programs. The programs start June 9, 2024 and it will be four weeks long.

**c. Report from Outreach Director**

**□ Outreach Program update**

Ms. Lee stated that Outreach had 1,600 participants at Coffee Hours and 800 at Tech Tea Time meetings. She added the program has already done future planning of workshops and services through the fall. The newly revised curriculum, *Essential Tools of the Trade* will be at the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) conference.

**d. Consideration of approval of board policies:**

**CKC Safety Program/Risk Management: Emergency Plans**

**FFAF Wellness and Health Services: Care Plans**

The Program Committee recommended the amendment of policies CKC – Safety Program/Risk Management: Emergency Plans and FFAF – Wellness and Health Services: Care Plans; therefore, a second was not required. The Board voted unanimously and the motion passed.

**Consideration of Approval of New Contract Staff**

Emily Coleman stated the following individuals in addition those listed were or will be contracted to fill teacher or other contract vacancies for the 2024-2025 school year:

Nancy Fitch – Counselor Probationary;  
Brian Miller – Teacher Probationary;  
Katlin Jazmine – Teacher Probationary;  
Crystal Meza – Teacher Probationary;  
Milia Stuart – Teacher Probationary; and  
Erica Cairns – Outreach Director Probationary.

The following position was previously approved but changing title: Mary Shore, Orientation and Mobility Instructor in Comprehensive Programs.

Dan Brown made a motion to approve the contract staff as amended. Brenda Lee seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to pass the motion.

**Consideration of Approval of Hiring an Employed Internal Auditor Versus Engaging an External Audit Firm**

Mr. Sonnenberg stated that the School has a six-month contract extension with Garza & Gonzalez and Associates through February of 2025.

Cheryl Williams reported on the hiring process. She added that there were several state agencies with internal auditor job listings posted for weeks and even months. Agencies also refresh listings like the School does; therefore, job postings may be even older than posted. The Board stated they preferred an internally employed auditor and that they spend more time on campus, which gives them the benefit of getting to know the culture and staff.

Mr. Sonnenberg asked Ms. Williams her opinion. She stated that realistically the position had not garnered suitable applicants. She added that the auditing firm has a different experience level because they continue to work with other clients. The firm had been working with TSBVI for an extended period of time; therefore, they are more familiar with the School. She stated that Chika Cherry has primarily worked on the School's audits. The cost of retaining the firm would essentially be less considering an internal employee would be paid a 12-month salary including benefits. Mr. Sonnenberg stated the firm had been doing well with the School's audits. The Board agreed to continue the contract with the external auditing firm.

Ms. Lee made a motion to retain Garza & Gonzalez and Associates auditing firm. Mr. Brown seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to pass the motion.

### **Consideration of Approval of Agency Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2025-2029**

Ms. Coleman stated that there was not anything new to the Board in the Agency Strategic Plan. She added that the redundancies and impediments section was mostly related to recruitment and retention. The School would like to ask for contract staff to receive five leave days including for that time to roll over to future school years. She said getting the State to change some of the rules related to teachers and their leave to be comparable to Austin Independent School District would aid in retention and recruitment.

Mr. Brown motioned to approve the Agency Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2025-2029. Ms. Lee seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

### **Review of the 2024-2025 Annual Improvement Plan**

There was no action taken. The Board was provided with the complete Annual Improvement Plan for 2024-2025

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

House Bill 3033 passed in the 88<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session, requires the Board to designate non-business days each calendar year that are not included in the required ten business days for the purpose of responding to Public Information Act requests.

The Board approved four non-business days for the first three months of 2024 at their November 2023 meeting. The School asked for approval for the following dates for the remainder of the 2024 calendar year:

November 25, 2024;  
November 26, 2024;  
November 27, 2024;  
December 27, 2024;  
December 30, 2024; and  
December 31, 2024.

Ms. Lee motioned to approve the designation of business closure days related to public information requests. Mr. Brown seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to approve and the motion passed.

### **Report from the Superintendent**

#### **a. Campus activities and visitors**

Ms. Coleman stated that the School's solar eclipse day was successful. The students were impressed and had fun. The *Annie Jr.* spring play was a hit. The School's Graduation ceremony and reception was well-attended. Short-Term Programs were busy and summer programs will soon start. Ms. Coleman added that Outreach held many successful programs.

**b. Superintendent's activities**

Ms. Coleman stated that she attended the SCASB track and field and performing arts tournament at the Louisiana School for the Visually Impaired in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She added that she attended Texas Association Education Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) conference in San Marcus, TX. She is still working on her doctorate at Texas Tech University. She participated in jury duty recently. She stated she is still on the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind (COSB) and Braille Authority of North America (BANA) Board. She also shared that her son graduated from TSBVI.

**Consideration of Nomination of TSBVI Board Member to the Texas Association of School Boards**

The Board reviewed the requirements for nominating a board member to the TASB Board and the Board decided to take no action.

**Discussion of Future Board Meeting Topics**

Mr. Sonnenberg requested information regarding teacher contracts and probationary versus emergency requirements. Ms. Coleman stated she would ask the principal, Miles Fain for information to present at the next board meeting.

**Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**Adjournment**

Dan Brown motioned to adjourn the May 24, 2024 Texas School for the Blind and Visually Board of Trustees meeting. Brenda Lee seconded the motion and the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 11:55 a.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 \_\_\_\_\_