APPROVED

Veritas Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

In Person

Date and Time
Thursday May 22, 2025 at 4:30 PM

Location
In Person at the High School: 225 Carando Drive Springfield, MA 01104

One tap mobile +13126266799,,87944697628#

Dial by your location
+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 879 4469 7628
Passcode: 912934

Find your local number: https://vpcs-org.zoom.us/u/k8aG053ZG

Trustees Present
A. Mendelson, D. Ford, D. Fuller, L. Doherty, M. Freeman, M. Landon, R. Sela

Trustees Absent
A. Errichetti, A. Hickson-Martin, A. Martínez, R. Martin, X. Delobato

Guests Present
N. Gauthier, R. Romano

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

M. Landon called a meeting of the board of trustees of Veritas Preparatory Charter School to order on Thursday May 22, 2025 at 4:32 PM.

B. Approve minutes

D. Ford made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 04-24-25.
A. Mendelson seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. CEO Report

A. CEO Updates

Reminders & Upcoming Events:

June Board Retreat
Please save the date for the **Board Retreat on Thursday, June 26th from 1:00–5:00 p.m.**, followed by dinner. Additional details to come.

Early College Convening – Friday, May 30th
Join us from **9:30–11:30 a.m.** for our **Early College Dissemination Event**. We've invited local charter schools, Early College programs from across the state, partners from STCC and Worcester State, donors, and supporters to learn more about our model and impact. It's a great opportunity to share our work—feel free to bring a guest!

B. 2025–2026 Academic Calendar – Vote

M. Landon made a motion to approve the 2025-2026 academic calendar.
L. Doherty seconded the motion.
2025–2026 Academic Calendar Updates/Changes

The primary change in the proposed calendar is an **extended December break**, aligning with Springfield Public Schools (SPS). This adjustment is intended to support improved student attendance and accommodate **Three Kings Day**. The extended break means the school year will now end on **June 23rd** (this date accounts for 5 snow days as well), with a **half day on December 23rd** as the final day before break.

At the high school level, **conference-related half days have been removed** from the calendar. Since students are already dismissed early on Fridays, **family conferences will be scheduled during those existing half days**.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

C. Enrollment & Attrition Update

Enrollment and Attrition Update – Presented by Jonathan Swan, Chief Operating Officer

Jonathan Swan, COO, provided an overview of current enrollment and attrition trends. He noted that the leadership team has conducted an in-depth analysis of the data and recently engaged in a follow-up discussions, during which additional data was requested. This work is part of the early stages of drafting the school's annual Recruitment and Retention Plan, which will be refined for the upcoming academic year.

As of early May, 65 students have withdrawn from Veritas Prep since August. A notable portion of attrition tends to occur at the start of the school year. In past years, the school has been able to enroll new students mid-year; however, with full grade-level buildout (grades 5–12), this will no longer be possible moving forward.

The team closely examined the reasons families chose to leave, focusing on patterns related to student experience, academic performance, and external factors. Key findings include:
62% of students who withdrew were chronically absent.
48% had a GPA below 2.0, indicating they were experiencing academic challenges.
40% were new to Veritas this year.

To strengthen student support and retention, a staff role will include explicit responsibilities around transition and retention in the coming year.

Students who transferred to other charter schools often had specific needs or preferences that aligned better with those schools. For example, families who chose Pioneer Valley Academy cited its unique model as a better fit. There are also students who move between charter schools frequently, and in some cases, behavioral challenges may be a contributing factor. This highlights the importance of retaining our current students, as mid-year transfers can present additional challenges for both the student and the school.

Students who returned to Springfield Public Schools (SPS) often did so due to changes in their home address, which affected transportation eligibility. At the high school level, students sometimes cited limited athletic offerings as a factor in their decision to leave. A small portion of students transitioned to homeschooling or virtual learning environments, while others moved out of state. In some cases, families cited concerns related to bullying as part of their decision to withdraw. Overall, most students who left were facing academic and/or behavioral challenges, which contributed to their difficulty in adjusting and succeeding at Veritas.

Notably, **51%** of students who left returned to SPS. This is an area the team is exploring further to understand the underlying causes and how to better support these students.

One area of focus has been improving transparency about academic rigor so that families are better informed from the start. The highest attrition rate was seen in 5th grade (38%), which may be attributed to students entering Veritas after facing academic difficulties in 4th grade. In some cases, students arrive unprepared for the expectations at Veritas. Early identification and immediate intervention strategies are being implemented to better support these students. While Veritas cannot deny enrollment, the team is committed to proactively communicating expectations and support plans with families. In addition, leadership has been engaging in more conversations with principals and counselors at the schools from which students are enrolling. These discussions aim to build stronger partnerships and help Veritas better understand incoming students' needs so they can be more effectively supported from day one.

Looking ahead, demand for charter seats in the region has declined slightly, and the presence of more charter schools in the area has shifted the landscape. Previously, Veritas had the option to over-enroll at the start of the year rather than backfill mid-year. That flexibility will not be available going forward, making retention efforts all the more critical.

Rachel added an observation about the challenges that can arise when students transfer mid-year from other schools. While sending schools may have students' best interests at heart, these students may not always arrive with the preparation needed to thrive in a rigorous academic setting. This underscores the importance of clear communication, early support, and thoughtful transition planning.

Summary:
While the current attrition data is consistent with historical patterns, changes in enrollment capacity and shifting regional dynamics mean that Veritas must now be more strategic and proactive than ever in both recruitment and retention. The leadership team remains committed to continuous improvement and will keep the Board updated as planning progresses.

III. Finance Committee

A. FY26 Budget DRAFT – Review & Discussion

Denise provided an overview of the FY26 budget, which has been developed as a break-even budget and is predicated on achieving full enrollment. Maintaining enrollment at 766 students will be critical to financial stability. While the budget accounts for the potential loss of up to 20 students, a repeat of this year's attrition levels would pose financial challenges.

Revenue projections are primarily based on state reimbursements, including funding under the Student Opportunity Act (SOA). Additional funding is expected from federal entitlement grants (Title I, II, III, etc.). Recently, Lynne, Director of Business Management, shared a public notice indicating over $1 million in proposed cuts to education funding; however, this pertains to ESSER funds, which Veritas has already fully expended. There are also projected cuts to local food cooperative funding, but as Veritas is not a participating school, these reductions will not affect us. At this time, federal grant funding appears stable.

Another key component of projected revenue is private philanthropy. Rachel is actively working to raise $450,000 from long-time foundation partners. To mitigate potential volatility, $325,000 in private grant funding has been built into the budget. Denise expressed high confidence in the accuracy of revenue projections.

Enrollment counts are finalized in October and used to determine monthly state reimbursement payments. These counts are revisited in October, March, and June for any necessary adjustments.

On the expense side, costs have been well-controlled over the past two fiscal years, and FY26 will continue with a tight expense budget. Staffing remains the largest expense, accounting for 71% of the total budget. Fixed costs such as the high school lease offer little flexibility. While other areas such as athletics could be reduced, doing so may negatively impact student retention and enrollment. One area that Lynne identified within expenses that could be looked at more closely is costs related to college programming and curriculum. If significant budget reductions were required, staffing cuts would need to be considered.

A contingency note attached to the FY26 budget outlines potential actions if funding were reduced by 50%, though current guidance from the governor suggests this level of reduction is unlikely. In the event of future funding shortfalls, the team would seek relief funds to avoid severe cuts.

Looking ahead, the broader philanthropic landscape may become more competitive as other organizations lose federal funding. Leadership anticipates a greater financial impact in FY27 and FY28, which could necessitate additional staffing reductions.

Lisa suggested, and Rachel agreed, that a prudent part of the FY26 financial plan should include not replacing non-essential staff who choose to leave. This approach would help mitigate budget pressures without immediate layoffs.

B. Financial Updates – Monthly Financials, Capital Budget & 5-Year Projections

This section was not discussed due to time constraints. However, all related materials have been included in the meeting packet and are available for your review.

IV. Governance Committee

A. Board Survey Update

These items were not discussed due to time constraints and will be revisited at the June Board retreat.

B. Trustee Roles & Committee Assignments for 2025–2026

These items were not discussed due to time constraints and will be revisited at the June Board retreat.

V. Academic Achievement Committee

A. Academic Achievement Committee Report (as time allows)

This section was not discussed due to time constraints and will be revisited at a future meeting.

VI. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
M. Landon

Documents used during the meeting

- VPCS Calendar 2025-2026 5.16 DRAFT.pdf
- FY26_Operating_Budget_-_draft.pdf
- FY26_Operating_Budget_Note.pdf
- Capital_Budget_-_Spring_2025.pdf
- 5yr_Projection__Summary.pdf
- 5yr_Projection_Details.pdf
- 5yr_Projection_Cash_Reservation.pdf
- Staff_Delta_FY25_to_FY26.pdf
- Financial Reports to the Board May.pdf
- Trustee Terms, Officer Roles & Committee Assignments 2025-26 - May Meeting.docx

- SAT Scores School Day testing Spring 2025.pdf