APPROVED

Veritas Preparatory Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting Annual Retreat

In Person

Date and Time
Thursday June 26, 2025 at 1:00 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. Errichetti, A. Hickson-Martin, A. Martínez, A. Mendelson, D. Ford, D. Fuller, L. Doherty, M. Freeman, M. Landon, R. Martin, R. Sela, X. Delobato

Trustees Absent
None

Guests Present

A. Clark, N. Gauthier, R. Romano

I. Opening Items

A. Call the Meeting to Order

A. Errichetti called a meeting of the board of trustees of Veritas Preparatory Charter School to order on Thursday Jun 26, 2025 at 1:20 PM.

B. Approve minutes

A. Hickson-Martin made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 05-22-25.
M. Freeman seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Welcome

A. Welcome and Review the Agenda

The meeting began with a review of the agenda, and all attendees introduced themselves.

III. Annual Meeting Governance

A. Approval of Trustee Officer and Committee Roles for FY2026

L. Doherty made a motion to approve trustee officer and committee roles for FY2026.
A. Errichetti seconded the motion.
Rachel presents the final Trustee Officer and Committee Roles for FY2026, noting a few important changes. Matt will be moving into the Chair role, as anticipated, and Ann will transition into the Vice Chair role to support Matt in the year ahead. Rachel emphasizes the need to plan for future Board officer succession, particularly thinking ahead to who will succeed Matt in three years, as Ann will not return to the Chair role at that time.

Rachel also mentions that everyone will remain on their current committee, with Ann joining the Governance Committee while continuing her work on the Academic Achievement Committee.
Lisa inquires about the current numbers, and Rachel responds that 12-13 members is good, though Denise suggests that 15 would be better to allow for smoother transitions and succession planning. Rachel agrees, stressing the importance of deepening the bench for future leaders. The Board will also need to think about areas of expertise and the roles that need to be filled to best support the organization's work.

Additionally, Rachel shares that the committee and Board meeting times will be revisited to ensure they work for everyone. There is consideration of a hybrid model, where meetings are held in person quarterly for longer sessions and monthly meetings are conducted via Zoom to handle Board business, with a particular focus on ensuring consistent meeting attendance.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. CEO Succession Plan – Annual Review

Each year, the Board reviews the CEO succession plan, which outlines various scenarios for leadership transitions. Jonathan Swan, Chief Operating Officer, continues to be identified as the successor should the CEO position need to be filled.

Aaron raises the question of whether the organization's growth warrants a succession plan for other key positions as well. Rachel responds that this is a great point and agrees that certain roles could benefit from succession planning, particularly those with three-year contracts, as she has.

Aaron also asks whether the succession planning is focused on the role or the person. Rachel explains that it used to be focused on the person, but now the focus is shifting to the role itself.

Ann notes that last year, the Board discussed succession planning for key leadership positions both on the Board and within the school. Denise suggests that this conversation can be initiated within the Governance Committee. Lisa proposes starting by identifying the roles that should have succession plans and building from there.

Andrea adds that contracts can sometimes mean little, as all employees are still considered "at-will" employees. Ann agrees, acknowledging that while contracts may not guarantee long-term security, they do serve to protect both employees and the organization—ensuring that individuals leaving without proper notice or being let go without proper notice are given due consideration. She also highlights that contracts help normalize the conversation around succession planning.

Denise recommends that the Board review the CEO succession plan itself, as it is four years old. Rachel suggests that the Governance Committee could take ownership of this task and review the plan annually to ensure it remains current and relevant.

The Board then discusses an example of Lynne, Director of Business Management, who recently took a "leave" of absence. During her time away, a temporary replacement was brought in, but it became evident that Lynne’s institutional knowledge is irreplaceable. While this situation highlighted the need for planning, the organization has developed tools and strategies to manage the transition if needed.

IV. FY2026 Budget

A. FY2026 Budget Approval

A. Mendelson made a motion to approve the budget for FY2026.
R. Martin seconded the motion.
Denise presents the final budget to the Board, emphasizing that it is a realistic and well-thought-out plan. She notes that the team has worked hard to finalize the revenue estimates and has been diligent in controlling expenses. Denise assures the Board that this budget reflects a fair approach, and includes a contingency fund for added security.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

B. Attuned SPARK Survey Contract – Vote

L. Doherty made a motion to approve a three-year contract with Attuned for the administration of the SPARK survey subject to Attuned's financial conditions and our confidence with the use of the data.
D. Ford seconded the motion.
The Board discussed the twice-annual staff survey, which has traditionally been conducted internally. This year, the decision was made to bring on Attuned, a third-party provider that will run and analyze the survey. The total cost of the contract is $40,000.

Benefits of working with Attuned include that the survey will be administered anonymously, and Attuned has a network of comparable schools. Most of the schools and networks using the SPARK survey are charter schools, and it was developed through the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF). The CSGF aimed to create a tool that schools could use amid the push to unionize charter schools, a movement that the organization is actively working to address.

Previously, the Director of Talent was responsible for synthesizing the survey data, but with this position no longer in place, Attuned will take over this responsibility. Attuned will provide a less subjective analysis of the data, which will be administered both in the Fall and Spring.

Lisa asked about data ownership, and Rachel explained that the team is currently reviewing the data ownership details with our auditors to understand how the data can be used. Denise emphasized the importance of assessing the financial stability of Attuned to ensure they can fulfill the three-year contract, as it represents a significant investment. The data will be accessed using Attuned’s Tableau platform, stored on their servers.

Lisa pointed out that the contract specifies that Attuned cannot sell the data. Rachel and Lynne will be working with the auditors to further investigate these details and provide answers to any remaining questions.
The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

V. State of the School Presentations

A. Middle School & High School: State of the School Presentation

Introduction:
Amy Clark, Chief Academic Officer and TJ Hebert, Middle School Principal, presented the third annual "State of the School" report, aimed at providing an update on the school's progress over the past year. This presentation, primarily for staff, is being shared for the second time with the Board. The goal was to provide an overview of how the school met its previously set goals and discuss goals for the next school year.

Organizational Viability:
The presentation began with a review of the school's mission, vision, and values, which were solidified three years ago and continue to be integral to the school's identity. Staff engagement with these values has been strong, and they remain aligned with the original charter.

Four key organizational goals were set at the beginning of the year:

Balance the Budget: Despite enrollment challenges, the school successfully met the goal of balancing the budget.

Student Retention: The goal was for 90% of students to stay at Veritas, but retention was at 88%, falling short of the target.

Enrollment: The goal was to enroll no fewer than 695 students, but the school was under-enrolled by 32 students.

Dissemination Activities: Two dissemination activities were completed, including a well-attended Early College Committee meeting and monthly tours.

Challenges:

Enrollment and Retention: The school faced challenges with student retention and enrollment but worked closely with Lynne and school leaders to monitor budget progress. There was a shift in focus from overspending to tightening budgets, especially post-pandemic.

Retention of High-Performing Students: Despite a focus on creating interventions and tracking progress, some students who were chronically absent disengaged and eventually disenrolled.

Academic Success (3 main goals were set for academic success):

MCAS Performance: The goal was for 60% of students to meet or exceed expectations in math and science. While the scaled scores have not yet been received, the school did not meet the target for growth.

Improvement in Math and ELA: While growth in math was noted, especially at the middle school level, the overall academic achievement was lower than expected.

English Language Learners: The goal to increase growth among English language learners was met, with 13% testing out of services.

Challenges:

Downward Trend from Middle School to High School: There was a noticeable decline in achievement as students moved from middle to high school, partly due to culture shifts and curriculum issues.

Curriculum Gaps: The high school faced challenges with the previous curriculum, particularly in math, which did not provide students with the foundational skills needed for success.

Intervention Programs:

Math Growth: Strong growth was observed in seventh-grade math, where students reached the 84th percentile for growth, exceeding a year's worth of progress.

Reading Intervention: Lexia, a reading comprehension intervention, showed promising results, improving the percentile of sixth graders who were struggling with comprehension.

High School Interventions: A similar math intervention was launched in the high school, showing success, with 35% of ninth graders and 24% of tenth graders improving sufficiently to be removed from the intervention.

College and Career Readiness - the focus for next year includes:

- Expanding opportunities for students to take college courses starting in ninth grade.
- Ensuring that all students who enroll in college classes are prepared and able to pass them, aiming for 100% success in these courses.

Chronic Absenteeism and School Culture:

Chronic Absenteeism: The goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by 3% was met, with notable improvements at the middle school, though absenteeism remained a challenge in the high school.

Staff Culture: There were improvements in staff satisfaction, but high school staff culture was noted as a challenge. Efforts are being made to improve communication and support, especially in the high school, where some staff members reported lower enthusiasm.

Next Steps:

Goals for Next Year: Specific, measurable goals will be set for both academic success and school culture, with a focus on improving student attendance, implementing more effective interventions, and enhancing staff culture.

Staff Development: Ongoing professional development and better alignment of interventions to student needs will be key focuses for the coming year.

Conclusion:
The presentation concluded by emphasizing the importance of both academic and cultural growth within the school. Despite challenges, significant progress has been made, and with continued focus and support, the school is on track to meet its goals for the upcoming year.

VI. Governance Priorities & Trustee Engagement

A. Board Diagnostic Survey Review

Survey and Consultation Summary:
The Board reviewed a comprehensive survey included in the meeting packet, which was conducted with staff participation. This survey led to a private consultation with Robert Carpenter from the MCPSA, which Rachel, the Governance Committee, and other key staff participated in earlier in May. Robert provided feedback based on the survey data, highlighting several strengths:

Strengths Identified:

- Strong commitment to the school’s mission and student success.
- Diversity of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds.
- Dedication of board members to good governance and school involvement.
- Collaboration between board members and school leadership.
- Effective oversight and accountability on academics, operations, and finances.
- Positive school culture.

- The consultation also led to some recommendations for improvement, such as publishing an annual timeline for progress reports on board goals and regular reviews.

Governance and Strategy:
A discussion followed about the effectiveness of the current strategic planning and goal-setting process. While the Board is doing well with strategic planning, some mixed responses were noted regarding the clarity and regular review of CEO goals. It was recommended that an annual timeline for publishing goals and progress be established to ensure better tracking and communication across the Board.

Focus Monitoring: Rachel discussed the ongoing process of tier-focused monitoring (including special education, civil rights, and other federally funded programs), which is now on a bi-annual cycle. This process, overseen by Jonathan, ensures compliance with federal regulations. The most recent review was on special education, with the next focused monitoring scheduled for civil rights.

Policies and Compliance:
The Board recognized that while policies are reviewed when needed (such as when starting a new program or making significant changes), a more consistent, systematic review process for all policies could be beneficial. It was suggested that the Board set a routine for reviewing policies annually or every other year to ensure they remain relevant and aligned with the school's needs.

Disproportionate Impact on Students: A survey question highlighted concerns about policies potentially impacting some students negatively. The Board agreed that while they often review policies related to student impact, they should explore ways to address such issues more strategically. One example discussed was the attendance policy, which was recently revised to better address chronic absenteeism and clarify attendance and tardiness distinctions.

Challenges and New Opportunities:
Several key challenges and opportunities were identified from the survey and consultation:

Recruitment and Onboarding: The need to recruit and onboard more Board members, with a focus on increasing diversity, was emphasized.

Financial Sustainability: Ensuring the financial viability of the school remains a top priority.

Strategic Planning: The importance of developing a clear strategic plan for the next five years was highlighted, with continued emphasis on fundraising and community engagement.

Board Succession and Community Advocacy: The need for improved succession planning and for Board members to feel better equipped to advocate for charter schools was also discussed. Nearly 40% of Board members reported feeling unprepared to speak confidently about charter schools, which is an area the Board should address moving forward.

Next Steps:
The Board will focus on refining its governance processes, particularly in terms of regular policy review and strategic planning.

A stronger emphasis will be placed on ensuring Board members are equipped to speak about the school's work and the charter school movement, with additional resources and information provided as needed.

Further work will be done to ensure that attendance policies and student engagement strategies are aligned with the goal of improving student retention and performance.

This section of the meeting wrapped up with a commitment to refine the Board's practices and ensure that they are proactive in both governance and student success. The Board will continue to review and improve strategies for addressing key challenges, ensuring that they are well-equipped for the future.

B. Trustee Engagement Policy & Participation Overview

Nikki reviews the trustee obligations spreadsheet and attendance spreadsheet with the Board. She highlights that trustee engagement was discussed during last year's annual meeting, emphasizing the importance of attendance and active participation. Many of the events and activities that trustees typically attended prior to the pandemic were put on hold, but this year, much of that programming has resumed. Nikki expresses gratitude to the trustees for their continued engagement and attendance.

Nikki also provides an overview of trustee obligations, explaining the key tasks and when they are due. She outlines the following:
Financial Disclosures: The annual financial disclosure form will be sent via email from the ESE Board Management System.
COI Acknowledgement Form: This is an annual requirement that simply requires a signature, and it will be sent to trustees via email from Skillsburst.
COI Training: Trustees are required to complete a Conflict of Interest (COI) training every two years. This is an hour-long training session, and the link to the training will be sent to trustees via email from Skillsburst.

Nikki reminds trustees where they can find these documents and emphasizes the importance of staying current with these obligations.

VII. Trustee Strategic Priorities

A. Trustee Strategic Priorities: Reflection & Planning

The trustees reviewed their strategic priorities and reflected on their progress. The first priority was considered a success, with the group agreeing that they "nailed" it. The second priority was also accomplished well, though the language used in the goal, "we will define the board's role," led to some discussion. While the goal was technically met, there was a question about whether the board's role was truly defined. The third priority, which had been discussed earlier, was considered worthwhile to keep but in need of improvement.

Lisa expressed concern that the goals weren't very aspirational, noting that trustee goals should align with the institutional pillars in the Strategic Alignment Overview, particularly focusing on organizational viability and academic success. Rachel responded that, in the past three years, being overly aspirational wouldn't have been helpful, as the Board had to focus on recovering from the pandemic. However, now that the Board has regained focus, it is time to return to being more aspirational. Lisa emphasized that while progress is being made, the Board might not yet be fully ready to focus solely on aspirational goals, as more work is needed.

Rebecca shared that significant progress had been made in the academic realm, with many "inputs" now in place that would lead to improvements in curriculum over the next few years, particularly in leadership and curriculum development. Matt added that it felt like the organization had reassessed the essential fundamentals, identifying what building blocks were still missing. Ann reflected on how the quality of work presented now, six years into the school's development, is much stronger than before.

Xiomara suggested that a financial operational goal, such as improving teacher compensation, should be added to the priorities. Andrea discussed the Empowerment Zone and how teachers in that area are receiving part of their degree costs covered, which serves as a huge benefit. She posed the question of how Veritas Prep could be creative in offering similar benefits to its educators.

Rachel noted that the influx of ESSER funds post-pandemic allowed the school to hire many additional staff members, but some roles have since been identified as unnecessary. Moving forward, Veritas Prep plans to focus on hiring fewer, but better, people. Andrea also raised the point that Veritas Prep should focus on training teachers in their fields and helping them get the necessary degrees, rather than simply increasing compensation. Rachel agreed, stating that both compensation increases and teacher development are important parts of the long-term strategy.
Lisa asked whether the school has teacher retention goals, and Rachel replied that they don't yet, but the first priority is to retain the teachers the school currently has. Matt suggested that there could be a research study or grant opportunity to analyze the impact

of teacher compensation. Rachel explained that several studies have already been conducted, including one in New York City that did not show a significant impact on academic achievement, and one from SGP that analyzed compensation data for Veritas Prep.

Michael emphasized that the right organizational culture must be in place for compensation to be effective. Ann summarized the discussion, noting the importance of having both operational and aspirational goals that center around academic success and organizational viability. These goals should focus on financial sustainability, the purchase of the middle school, philanthropy, teacher compensation, and board succession planning.

Matt suggested that organizational viability should also include a board-sponsored recognition event, college and career readiness, and increasing opportunities for student internships. Lisa proposed a financial goal to create a surplus of $300,000 to $500,000, which could be used for purchasing the building, increasing teacher compensation, or other initiatives. She acknowledged that there is a possibility of a $300,000 surplus, which includes the contingency, but emphasized that enrollment next year could impact this goal. She suggested that development efforts may need to be ramped up to meet this target.

The discussion also turned to the potential purchase of the middle school building. Rachel indicated that the school is currently fully utilizing all its space, but leasing to organizations during the summer could be a potential strategy. Denise raised the question of how much space the school actually needs and how the purchase of the middle school could align with operational needs. Rachel noted that a high school facility purchase agreement would be a great outcome for the year, and the secondary key outcome should be to develop a capital campaign and begin the quiet phase.

Several key outcomes were identified:
Operational Goals: Focus on financial sustainability, including teacher compensation, board succession, and planning.
Aspirational Goals: The purchase of the building and returning to the 2019 academic success baseline.
Teacher Compensation: Implement a revised compensation program for teachers by the end of the fiscal year, with capacity-building programs to support teacher development.
Board Succession and Leadership: Recruit two new trustees in FY26 to ensure strong governance and leadership diversity.

Ann emphasized two areas: organizational viability, which includes operational and financial sustainability, and aspirational goals, which include the purchase of the building and academic success. Lisa added that a surplus of $300,000 to $500,000 should be the financial goal, and that further development work may be needed to meet the target.

Lisa’s second priority focused on an SGP growth number, which she believes is critical to improving academic performance.

Rachel would like to see the strategic priorities organized in the following way: name one goal and key outcome and align to pillars. Lisa says operational goals are to do what we need to do as a Board and maybe one or two of the goals have an aspirational goal attached to it.

Aaron's aspirational ideas: foreign exchange program for our HS students, send students to colleges for summer programs across the country, ramp up community visibility and engagement, and increase development.

VIII. Other Business

A. Parking Lot Items

Items discussed but no conclusions made, to be revisited at a future meeting:

1. **Contracts** - Succession planning for which staff members should be prioritized.
2. **Berkshire Innovation Center** - Explore opportunities related to the engineering (advanced manufacturing) pathway at the high school.
3. **Attrition Target** - Establish an actual percentage target for student attrition.
4. **Understanding Financial Aid** - Clarify how financial aid is impacted for students with existing college credits or associate degrees.

IX. Closing Items

A. Closing: CEO Evaluation Reminder

Robbie announces that the CEO evaluation reports have been sent out, using the standard report format from Board on Track. He asks that anyone who did not receive the report let him know. Rachel adds that if anyone requires more information about any of her goals, they should feel free to reach out. Robbie aims to have the evaluations completed by mid-August so they can be submitted in September.

B. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 5:19 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
A. Errichetti

Documents used during the meeting

- Board Retreat Annual Meeting Agenda 2025.docx
- Veritas Prep_ Strategic Alignment Overview June 2025.docx
- Trustee Terms, Officer Roles & Committee Assignments 2025-26 - May Meeting.docx
- VPCS_Succession_Plan_DRAFT_v3_.pdf
- FY26 Operating Budget - draft June Meeting.pdf
- MA.Veritas-Attuned.Spark_3Yr_SAAS_Agreement.2025.03_1.pdf
- State of the School_ Board Copy 2025.pptx
- Veritas Prep Board Data Deep Dive.docx
- VPCS_Board_of_Trustees_Attendance_Policy.docx
- Veritas Board and Committee Meeting Attendance June Retreat 2025.xlsx
- Trustee Obligations Spreadsheet June Retreat 2025.xlsx
- Strategic Priorities June 2024 DRAFT.docx
- FY25 CEO GOALS_April update for Board.pptx