

Thomas Edison Charter Schools
Governing Board Meeting
Date: March 11, 2026

Meeting called to order at 5:30 pm by Lindsey Fowers

Board Members Present: Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, Ryan Reeves, and Ester Israelsen

Board Members Attending Electronically: Jeff Mason

Board Members Absent and Excused: none

Conducting: Lindsey Fowers

1. Adoption of the Agenda

2. Public Comment:

Principal Brad Larsen apologizes for missing the last meeting and thanks the group for their understanding and support, acknowledging that their time is valuable and expressing appreciation for their work.

3. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes as distributed: Lindsey Fowers

Second: Ryan Reeves

Affirmative Vote: Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, Ryan Reeves, Ester Israelsen, and Jeffrey Mason

Resolved: unanimous

4. TECS Philosophy: Jim Peterson

This month's philosophy discussion is from Schedule A in the updated charter, which includes the school's mission statement and purpose. The mission statement sets the tone for the school's philosophy. They review the school's mission statement, which emphasizes providing students with the knowledge, tools, and discipline needed to become successful, responsible citizens and high achievers in a complex and evolving society. They explain that this mission is supported by a stimulating academic curriculum, structured classrooms, and strong parental involvement. The speaker highlights that parents are welcomed and expected to participate in the school community. They also discuss the charter school's purpose of improving student learning through high expectations, challenging curriculum, a positive environment, committed families, and skilled staff, noting that these elements reflect the school's overall philosophy and goals for student success.

Board member Courtney Carpenter explained she volunteered at the regional history fair and noticed that many of the participating students were from their campuses. She was impressed by the students' ability to discuss history and its relevance today with strong critical thinking skills, noting that some of the analysis was deeper than what is often seen in certain college-level classes.

Financial Report: Jim Peterson

The financial monthly expenditure report shows monthly expenses starting from July, the beginning of the fiscal year. February has recently been added. In the graph, the dark blue line represents monthly expenses, the dark red line shows the average monthly expense, and the green and light blue horizontal lines represent projected average expenses. The green line shows projections without a cash surplus, while the light blue line includes the projected surplus. Currently, expenses at both campuses are below the light blue line, meaning the school is spending less than projected so far, though larger expenses may occur toward the end of the fiscal year.

Board member Mikelshan Bartschi asked what percentage of the budget is for employee salaries, benefits, and other things the school has little to no control over because it's ongoing or preset. Jim explained Payroll is the school's largest expense (around 40%), followed by employee benefits. The school has some control over salaries and benefits but aims to stay competitive with local school districts. Budget decisions—such as raises or benefit adjustments—must consider both what nearby districts offer and the funding provided by the legislature through the Minimum School Program. Since legislative appropriations are outside the school's control, the school must plan its budget carefully to operate within those limits. The school also maintains money in bank and savings accounts that isn't shown in the report. It aims to keep at least a 5% annual surplus, though the exact amount can vary depending on circumstances. Maintaining this cash surplus helps keep the school financially stable across its campuses.

Legislative Update: Jim Peterson

Jim reviewed a spreadsheet summarizing key public education bills from the recently ended legislative session. The list includes selected House and Senate bills relevant to Thomas Edison Charter School, with orange highlighting bills that did not pass and green showing those that did. Voting progress through committees and floor votes is shown on the right. The most important bills are the appropriation bills—House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 2. Approved funding includes about a 4.2% increase in the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) and about a 4.5% increase in the Local Replacement Fund (LRF), which provides charter schools funding in place of local property tax revenue received by district schools. Other bills related to areas like dyslexia screening and charter school funding are listed for further review on the legislative website.

5. Land Trust plan approvals: Angela Williams

Angela presented the Land Trust plans for both the Edison North and Edison South, which must be approved annually. Each plan sets academic goals and explains how allocated funds will support those goals. For Edison North, the main goal is for K–5 students to achieve at least one year of growth in phonics, spelling, and reading, measured through Acadience reading scores and spelling assessments. Funds will be used for Spalding Resource Center subscriptions (~\$3,000), classroom aides (~\$39,600), and Spalding training. A second goal is to increase proficiency for grades 3–8 on the RISE test in English, math, and science. About \$85,000 total is allocated for North, mainly for aides and MTSS support. For Edison South, the plan is very similar but the school receives more funding due to its larger size, allocating about \$130,000 toward similar goals and supports. Both

plans were approved by their respective councils (with required parent-majority membership) and must be submitted to the state along with council signature forms confirming participation and approval.

Motion to approve the Land Trust plans as presented: Lindsey Fowers

Second: Courtney Carpenter

Affirmative Vote: Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, Ryan Reeves, Ester Israelsen, and Jeffrey Mason

Resolved: unanimous

Gifted and Talented Grant: Angela Williams

Angela explains that the school's Gifted and Talented program is based on optional after-school activities such as band, orchestra, and an art club. Students can self-select to participate, and there are no restrictions based on grades or screening, allowing broad access.

Each year, the school completes a survey reviewing demographics of participants to ensure all groups have equal access. The main imbalance found is that male students are underrepresented in these programs, though participation has improved slightly (from about 31% to 33%). To address this, the school promotes the programs through back-to-school nights, assemblies, and parent communication.

The presentation fulfills a requirement for a grant that provides some funding for these programs, and the report simply needs to document that it was presented to the board.

6. Board Training: Brian Carpenter Podcast #11: All in The Family - Nepotism

The training explained nepotism, its origins, and the risks it poses for charter schools. Nepotism—favoring relatives in hiring or governance—originated in medieval Europe when popes granted privileges to relatives. The speaker shares several real examples from charter schools where family members held leadership or board roles (e.g., a school leader hiring a sister or relatives serving on the same board). In multiple cases, these situations led to serious consequences, including financial problems, negative media attention, and even a school losing its charter.

The discussion emphasizes that even if nepotism is not illegal, it can still damage governance and public trust. Boards should consider policies that require full disclosure, transparent hiring processes, proper job advertising, and safeguards to prevent relatives from benefiting each other financially or in decision-making. Boards should also use conflict-of-interest disclosures, which are required for 501(c)(3) organizations.

Board Chair Lindsey Fowers asked if the school had a Nepotism policy. Principal Kirk said she thinks the school has its own nepotism policy, even though Utah law does not prohibit nepotism. The school has occasionally hired family members, but only when they were the best or only candidates. In such cases, the relationships were fully disclosed to the board, and proper procedures were followed. Principal Brad Larsen explained, when his niece applied for a position, the relationship was openly disclosed and he removed himself from the hiring process.

Jamie Lewis explained that Utah does have laws regarding nepotism.

7. Board Training Discussion: Policies & Procedures Section 4000 (Curriculum & Instruction); Teacher Handbook

Board Chair Lindsey Fowers asked board members if anything stood out to them during their board visits, particularly related to curriculum, instruction, or teacher practices. She observed that the school environment is very positive, especially in the middle school. She is impressed by how teachers remain patient and supportive while managing typical middle school behavior, and she admires the teachers' ability to stay positive despite students' antics.

Board member Courtney Carpenter shared a positive observation from reviewing the school's homework policy. She appreciates that homework is structured and predictable, especially in middle school, so students are not overwhelmed by large assignments from a single subject. Expectations for how much time homework should take are clear, and much of the work is broken into smaller steps and supported during class, making larger projects more manageable. She also likes the policy of not assigning homework on weekends, which is beneficial for families.

Principal Kirk agreed, confirming that teachers collaborate, especially with the larger projects, so students are not overwhelmed.

Board member Ester Israelsen agreed, stating she has three middle school students and it would be extremely difficult to get all the projects done if these big projects overlapped each other.

8. Pre-ACT Results: Jamin Bingham

Jamin first presented the North campus Pre-ACT results from the past five years. The results are grouped into three categories: needs intervention, on the cusp, and on target for college readiness, based on benchmarks set by the Pre-ACT organization. The goal is to have fewer students needing intervention and more on target, which the current results show.

In math and science, the school's scores improved slightly from last year and are well above the national average (shown by a gray dot, though it reflects last year's national data). STEM scores, which combine math and science and use higher benchmarks, also show strong performance. Overall, the results indicate the school is performing well compared to national averages, with some normal year-to-year variation between student groups.

Board member Mikelshan Bartschi questioned if it was concerning that the number of students "needing interventions" was higher in science this year than in years past. Jamin explained that the science test is particularly difficult, which is reflected in the scores and the national average. Because results can vary by student cohort each year, the school tracks the data annually to look for patterns. If lower scores continue in future years, the school may review curriculum and instruction to ensure all key concepts are being covered—while emphasizing that they do not teach specifically to the test, but want to confirm students are learning the necessary material.

At North, about 91% of students were on track for college readiness in English and 79% in reading, which are strong results and above the national average. English tends to be an easier test compared to others. At South, about 90% of students were on track in math, 70% in science, 86% in English, and 80% in reading. Science scores tend to be lower because the science test is generally more difficult.

Students receive detailed score reports that break results into areas such as algebra and geometry, show their answers alongside the correct ones, and allow them to review their test booklets. This helps students identify strengths and areas for improvement. The handouts also include comparison charts between North and South, not to rank them but to provide data for teachers and department meetings to better understand performance and guide instruction. Overall, both campuses perform well above the national average.

Board member Mikelshan Bartschi asked if the schools tend to score similarly in the same categories and if the scores comparable. Jamin responded by discussing recent trends in the Pre-ACT data. Last year there was a noticeable dip across several areas, but this year results showed interesting differences between campuses: South performed particularly well in math and science, while North scored especially high in English, with South slightly lower in that area. The reports also allow staff to analyze which answers students chose on each question, helping identify patterns where many students missed the same topic or question. This helps teachers review whether certain concepts may need more emphasis. While the school does not teach directly to the test, the data serves as an additional tool to confirm that students are being effectively prepared for college and careers. While overall percentages of students “ready for college” remain high, some students who were previously “on the cusp” shifted into the “in need of intervention” category. This can fluctuate year to year due to factors like the number of students with IEPs or other cohort variations. Because the school has relatively small student numbers, even a single student can noticeably change the percentage, which is why they prefer to focus on percentages rather than raw counts for interpreting trends.

9. Principal Evaluation Policy #1402: Jamie Lewis

Policy #1402 regarding administrations of evaluations (e.g., for the business manager or principal) was outdated—it specified using paper forms and submitting feedback by January 1 through a third party. Currently, evaluations are done anonymously via Google Forms, managed by Angela Williams, and shared with the governing board as requested, usually in early January. The update removes the outdated dates and methods, giving flexibility and aligning the policy with current practice.

Motion to approve the updated Principal Evaluation Policy as presented: Lindsey Fowers

Second: Courtney Carpenter

Affirmative Vote: Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, Ryan Reeves, Ester Israelsen, and Jeffrey Mason

Resolved: unanimous

10. Principal Contract Renewals: Lindsey Fowers

Board Chair Lindsey Fowers and board member Jeff Mason interviewed the North Campus principal Brad Larsen, and the Board Chair Lindsey Fowers and board member Courtney Carpenter interviewed the South Campus principal Melani Kirk, as part of their principal self-evaluations. She and the board members are pleased with both of their performances and agree they would like Brad and Melani to return for another year.

Motion to have both principals return for the next school year: Mikelshan Bartschi

Second: Ryan Reeves

Affirmative Vote: Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, Ryan Reeves, Ester Israelsen, and Jeffrey Mason

Resolved: unanimous

11. Principal Reports: Melani Kirk

- Enrollment:
 - The school currently has 687 students, slightly down from the October 1 count of 691, with minor fluctuations throughout the year. Enrollment for the 2026–27 school year is projected at 677 students, which is lower than desired. The school hired a marketing company to boost enrollment, but results have been disappointing. Efforts like a “Bring a Friend to School Day” on February 27 had high attendance (111 visitors) but resulted in almost no new enrollments. They are following up with a parent survey and exploring more localized social media strategies to improve outreach.
 - A major concern is kindergarten enrollment, where they currently have only two filled sections but need a full section, meaning 36 more students are required for next year. Recruitment and outreach efforts are ongoing to address these shortfalls.
- Strategic outcomes:
 - Students are performing very well academically and in citizenship; this will continue to be a focus next year.
- School events & celebrations:
 - Thomas Edison’s birthday celebrated with cupcakes; students get sugar treats only a few times a year.
 - Leadership and college prep week combined with Stephen Covey leadership team from Utah State University, including interactive assemblies.
 - Family STEM night held for the first time; included robots and interactive activities; well-attended and likely to continue.
 - Geography Bowl held with strong participation; winners recognized.
- Community engagement & outreach:
 - Bring a Friend to School Day and canned food drive to involve students and families.
 - Parent-teacher conferences: K–5 expected 100% attendance, middle school required if students have D/F grades or for sixth graders completing SEP forms. Teachers follow up to ensure participation.
- Staff development:

- Aide reviews conducted with self-evaluations and meetings with directors of instruction to reflect on expectations, performance, and staffing needs for next year.
- Academic competitions:
- Regional history fair showcased students' projects; state qualifiers recognized; teachers provided strong guidance.

Principal Reports: Brad Larsen

- Enrollment & strategic outcome:
 - Current enrollment is 457 of 504 for next year (~90% capacity), below desired levels.
 - Most open spots are in elementary grades (K–2); middle school is full.
 - Some families may leave for new middle schools, but expected impact is manageable.
 - Marketing firm efforts continue, but the school is focusing on more targeted outreach.
- Recruitment initiatives:
 - Bring a Friend Day: 36 students signed up; 1 enrolled, 1 in progress; will continue the event.
 - Staff-led efforts praised for success (Christina and Angela highlighted).
- Staff & community events:
 - Winter staff party improved attendance and camaraderie.
 - President's assembly focused on leadership, values, and overcoming challenges (examples: FDR and other presidents).
 - Class parties and middle school dance: Focus on positive student interactions and teaching proper dance etiquette.
 - PO (Parent Organization) date night raised funds for the school; event praised for success.
- Safety & monitoring:
 - Triton sensors installed in bathrooms to detect smoking/vaping; cameras not allowed in bathrooms.
- Academic & extracurricular activities:
 - Science fair: Top students advancing to regional competition.
 - Regional history fair: Students advancing to compete in six areas.
 - Spelling bee: Some students advanced to regional level.
 - Carolyn Larsen said each school had one student move on from the Regional written bee – Adam Harper from North Campus and James Wood from South Campus.
 - Parent-teacher conferences executed successfully; follow-up ensures participation.

12. Vendor and Personnel Requests: Melani Kirk & Brad Larsen

None

13. Adjourned at 6:51 pm