

Thomas Edison Charter Schools  
Governing Board Meeting  
Date: May 6, 2026

**Meeting called to order at 5:31 pm by Mikelshan Bartschi**

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

**Board Members Attending Electronically:** none

**Board Members Absent and Excused:** Jeff Mason

**Conducting:** Lindsey Fowers

**1. Adoption of the Agenda**

**2. Public Comment:**

None. There was a member of the public, Joseph Dunlap with ESS, that joined the meeting electronically.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**Motion to approve the minutes as distributed:** Mikelshan Bartschi

**Second:** Ester Israelsen

**Affirmative Vote:** Mikelshan Bartschi Courtney Carpenter, Ester Israelsen, and Ryan Reeves

**Resolved:** unanimous

**4. Board Appointments: Jeff Mason and Ester Israelsen; all board members sign papers with Nichole**

Jeff Mason and Esther Israelsen agreed to renew their board terms for another three years beginning May 30. All board members must sign updated conflict of interest forms.

**5. Ernie Sweat – Insurance Renewal Presentation**

The health insurance plan renews in September, and renewal numbers were received earlier than usual because the organization joined a pooled program through PHP last year. As part of the switch from Cigna to PHP, a three-year commitment was made, along with a guarantee that annual increases would stay below market trend. While healthcare market trends are currently averaging 11–13% due to rising medical and pharmacy costs, PHP capped this year’s increase at 7.2%, which is exactly what the organization received.

Future renewal costs will depend on how the plan performs within the pool. In approximately six to eight months, there should be more data available to evaluate performance. If the pool performs well, the organization may eventually qualify for refunds, including longevity refunds after remaining in the program for at least three years. An example was shared of a local water district receiving a \$48,000 refund after participating long enough.

The move to PHP was originally made because Cigna's renewal costs were unsustainable, and PHP provided a more manageable option. Currently, there are no planned benefit changes for September unless specifically requested. Dental rates are increasing slightly, while vision rates are decreasing slightly.

*\*\*Lindsey Fowers joined the meeting at 5:42 pm\*\**

Principal Kirk asked if after the 3-year agreement if PEHP will raise their rates beyond market trends. Ernie said no, they will probably stay within market trends.

Principal Kirk asked if employees are liking PEHP. Ernie said they have had minimal complaints and concerns expressed, so that is a good sign that things are going well with employees.

The discussion moved to focused on future health insurance sustainability and potential plan options as costs continue to rise. While the current 7.2% increase is below the healthcare market trend of 11–13%, leadership expressed concern that insurance costs have increased nearly 40% over two years and now make up about 13% of total organizational expenses, which may become unsustainable long term.

Ernie explained that although the school is committed to PEHP for three years, there is flexibility to modify the plan design before the September renewal. Current benefits remain unchanged, but alternative options could include higher deductibles, different plan tiers, high-deductible health plans (HDHPs), or offering a Health Savings Account (HSA) option. However, HSAs are only available with high-deductible plans.

Leadership emphasized the importance of planning ahead for 2027 and beyond, discussing ways to maintain financial stability while continuing to provide strong employee benefits. Possible future strategies include:

- Offering multiple plan options for employees
- Maintaining no employee premium costs while adjusting deductibles or out-of-pocket maximums
- Providing an HSA option and contributing savings into employee accounts
- Exploring lower-cost plans while preserving overall employee support

Ernie noted that because employees currently pay nothing for benefits, there is little incentive to choose lower-cost plans unless additional value—such as employer HSA contributions—is offered. He also emphasized that the current rich benefit package has been highly valued by employees and has remained largely unchanged for years.

No immediate changes are planned, and leadership indicated they may simply continue the current plan for this year. However, additional meetings and scenario planning are expected before the September renewal, with openness to reviewing alternative options to prepare for rising healthcare costs in future years.

**6. Board Training – Brian Carpenter Podcast #2 – Dirty Walls: how will or how well questions, management vs. oversight**

Due to time, this training will be shared electronically for board members to review.

**7. Board Training Discussion: Policies and Procedures Section 7000 (Safety)**

Due to time constraint, this item was skipped.

**8. TECS Philosophy: Jim Peterson**

The school reviewed its educational philosophy, centered on the Spalding Method, a multisensory reading approach adapted from the Orton-Gillingham method for dyslexia. TECS was founded largely because of Spalding, which is applied across core subjects, especially in elementary grades, due to its success teaching all students to read effectively.

Principal Kirk said Spalding has been in the school for over 20 years because it works and they love it.

Board member Courtney Carpenter said her sister has heard of Spalding and they use parts of it, but it really only works if you use the whole program and keep the integrity of it. Principal Kirk agreed.

Angela Barton said she loves teaching the Spalding method and when she travels to other schools/states for conferences, she loves spreading word about how well the Spalding method works.

Board Chair Lindsey Fowers said she likes the multi-sensory way of teaching that is incorporated into the Spalding Method.

Board member Courtney Carpenter said the Spalding Method and Glen Latham Methods work very well hand in hand.

**9. Financial Report: Jim Peterson**

As of April 30, finances remain strong. South Campus had a temporary expense spike from ~\$77,000 in Chromebook and textbook purchases but is still spending ~\$31,000/month below average. North Campus is also under budget, spending ~\$14,000/month below average.

A salary target number was initially overestimated due to administrator salary estimates. The corrected number was sent to leadership and used for teacher salary planning, with board ratification requested for the updated figures.

**Motion to approve the updated numbers that we ratify as listed as presented tonight:** Lindsey Fowers  
**Second:** Ryan Reeves

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

**Resolved:** unanimous

The board will review and approve the final current-year budget and preliminary next-year budget next month. Current drafts are for review only, with minor adjustments expected before approval.

IDEA (special education) funds have been delayed by the state and were only finalized recently; reimbursement has been requested and may arrive soon. Discretionary supplies are over budget due to estimated spending and increased costs, including items like staff Christmas parties.

#### **10. Fraud risk assessment review: Steve Finley**

The board reviewed the annual state-required internal controls checklist, noting strong financial segregation of duties, required policies in place, ethics training, and a fraud hotline. No vote was needed, and a formal internal audit is not required due to school size.

#### **11. Survey Review: Angela Williams**

Thomas Edison conducts annual surveys of both parents and employees using the Net Promoter Score (NPS) system to measure satisfaction. NPS is based on asking respondents how likely they are to recommend the school to others on a scale of 0–10. Scores of 9–10 are “promoters,” 7–8 are “passives,” and 0–6 are “detractors.” The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. A score above 0 is considered good, above 50 exceptional, and above 70 world-class.

For employee surveys North campus scored 50 and South campus scored 91, with an overall district score of 71.

Employee feedback - North staff praised the positive atmosphere, kindness, and camaraderie, but noted challenges with intense student behaviors. South staff highlighted academic rigor, strong education, and a positive environment, while concerns focused on heavy workloads and high expectations.

For parent surveys North scored 64 and South scored 63, with an overall district score of 63.

Parent feedback - North parents appreciated academic rigor, attention to students, and patriotism. Concerns included lunch options, homework, and student behavior. South parents praised kindness, teachers, school values, and culture. Concerns included homework, strict dress code rules, and a few negative teacher interactions.

Overall, the surveys were overwhelmingly positive, with many parents and employees giving scores of 9 or 10 and sharing strong praise for the schools. The South parent survey had nearly full participation, making the results especially representative.

## 12. Student mental health screener determination for 26-27 school year: Jamie Lewis

The discussion focused on whether the school should participate in the state-sponsored mental health screening program for students. The state created the program in response to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation among students and offers funding to schools that use the state-approved screener. Schools can either use the state screener with funding, pay for their own screener, or opt out entirely.

The school has consistently chosen not to participate. In the past, the program comes with “strings attached,” requires screening all students, and creates concerns about liability and follow-through. Board members noted that identifying students with mental health needs without having sufficient services available could create ethical and legal challenges. Instead, the school relies on existing supports, including school counselors, teacher observations, and grant-funded therapists who work directly with students needing additional help.

Jamie explained that staff and teachers already identify and report concerning behaviors, maintain communication with parents, and guide families toward outside services when needed and stated they had not seen evidence of students “falling through the cracks” unnoticed within the schools.

The conversation also explored broader concerns about youth mental health and suicide prevention. Board member Mikelshan Bartschi asked whether the school tracks long-term outcomes or suicide rates among former students, though administrators said they do not have that data and questioned how directly it could be tied to school interventions. Mikelshan stressed that mental health issues are complex and often involve factors beyond what schools can identify through questionnaires alone.

Assistant Principal Christina Smith explained that staff receive regular training on recognizing suicidal ideation and warning signs, including clear procedures for responding to a crisis and involving counselors and parents. Administrators acknowledged that anxiety and suicidal ideation among students have increased significantly over the past decade and said the issue is taken seriously and addressed frequently within the schools.

**Motion to not participate in the health screener offered by the state:** Lindsey Fowers

**Second:** Ester Israelsen

**Affirmative Vote:** Lindsey Fowers, Courtney Carpenter, Ester Israelsen, and Ryan Reeves

**Abstained:** Mikelshan Bartschi

**Resolved:** passes

The discussion continued around uncertainty about the state mental health screener. Board member Mikelshan Bartschi said he did not know enough about the screener or its questions to determine whether it would provide value, so they chose to abstain from voting rather than oppose it outright.

Board chair Lindsey Fowers would like to follow up with the school counselors regarding “friendship groups” and peer discussions among third graders at the North campus, particularly

related to mental health ideation. They suggested counselors further explore those social dynamics as a possible area for support.

Board member Mikelshan Bartschi expressed interest in reviewing the actual screening tool and its questions before making decisions. Comparisons were made to the SHARP survey, another state survey that some parents opt out of because of sensitive or controversial content in the questions. Administrators noted that while they decline participation in such surveys, they still stay informed about student issues through direct communication and observation.

Board member Mikelshan Bartschi explained that SHARP survey data is valuable at the county and public health level because it helps identify trends and evaluate whether prevention programs are working across the broader community. However, he emphasized that mental health is highly complex and influenced by many social and family factors beyond school settings.

The discussion included the school's relatively small population—about 600 students out of a community of 28,000—likely would not significantly affect countywide data trends, especially since students later complete surveys in high school anyway. Overall, the discussion reflected caution about mandatory screening programs, concern about exposing students to sensitive survey content, and a preference for relying on existing relationships, observation, and targeted support systems.

**Motion to extend the meeting by 15 minutes:** Lindsey Fowers

**Second:** Ester Israelsen

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

**Resolved:** unanimous

### 13. Closed Session pursuant to Utah Code 52-4-205(1)(a): Principal Salary Adjustments

**Motion to move to a closed session:** Lindsey Fowers

**Reconvening open session of the Thomas Edison Charter School Governing Board meeting on May 6<sup>th</sup> at 7:02 pm**

**Present:** Lindsey Fowers, Ester Israelsen, Courtney Carpenter, Mikelshan Bartschi, and Ryan Reeves.

**Excused:** Jeff Mason

### 14. Principal Salary Adjustments

The board discussed approving compensation packages for school administrators for the upcoming year based on recommendations made by Jim. Members acknowledged that they did not have direct year-to-year comparison figures available during the meeting, but they trusted Jim's evaluation process and his discussions with Ryan regarding the proposed salaries and bonuses.

Board members expressed confidence in the administrators' performance, stating they were pleased with their work and wanted to retain them. The proposal included the wages and bonuses Jim recommended, even though the exact bonus amounts were not listed on the documents available during the meeting.

**Motion to approve Jim's numbers as presented:** Lindsey Fowers

**Second:** Ryan Reeves

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

**Resolved:** unanimous

## 15. Principal Reports

### North –

Principal Brad Larsen highlighted several end-of-year school events and achievements. Students successfully performed a school play with separate performances for elementary students, middle school students, and an evening audience.

The school also hosted combined elementary band and orchestra concerts, along with other music performances. At the state history fair, several students earned awards in categories such as military history and arts and culture. One student, Fidel Effendi, will represent the school at the National History Day competition in June.

Principal Brad Larsen praised a successful spring Daddy Daughter Dance "Neverland" or "Never Grow Up," featuring elaborate decorations, and provided a really fun night for all who attended. Additional school activities included a literature gallery in the library, volunteer appreciation events, and Teacher Appreciation Week celebrations. Overall, the report emphasized a busy and positive end of year, filled with student accomplishments and community engagement.

### South –

Principal Kirk reported that kindergarten enrollment is currently low, with only about 60 students enrolled for next year. Because of this, the school plans to reduce from three kindergarten sections to two full-time classrooms, with the possibility of adding a half-day teacher if enrollment increases by 8–10 more students.

To help attract students, the school is increasing marketing efforts, including new photography and video content for social media and the school website.

She also highlighted the "Just Jumpin" assembly, student council elections, and the upcoming eighth-grade graduation.

The conversation then shifted to teacher compensation. School leaders explained the structure of salary increases:

- Teachers move through levels based on years and qualifications, with level increases typically adding \$2,500.
- Teachers also receive “tier” increases based on performance and available funding.
- This year’s tier increases ranged from about \$500 to around \$1,800.
- In addition, all teachers receive a state-funded base salary adjustment.

Principal Kirk explained that teacher raises depend heavily on state funding and available budgets, and they warned staff that future budgets may be tighter than in recent years. One positive, is strong teacher retention. The school hired only one teacher across both campuses this year, compared to years in the past when many more hires were needed. Leaders emphasized that experienced teachers provide stability and quality instruction, though they acknowledged the importance of balancing veteran experience with fresh ideas. They also noted that salaries are generally competitive with or above nearby districts like Cache County, helping retain staff.

The school also conducted annual performance and evaluation meetings with every teacher and aide, discussing self-assessments, performance, and contract offers.

Finally, Principal Kirk announced that Amber Olson, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student, qualified for the National History Day competition in Washington, D.C., and the school will help cover travel costs for the participating students and teachers, estimated at about \$4,500.

## 16. Vendor Requests

North –

Principal Larsen is recommending Raymond Construction for a school entryway project with an estimated cost of about \$200,000. Although the company was also the lowest bidder, the decision was based not only on cost but also on the quality of the design proposal. The project will include a peaked entryway designed to stand out while still blending with the existing school structure. Roofers are also working on ways to integrate the addition seamlessly with the current building.

Board members reviewed preliminary drawings and discussed budget expectations, with the contractor expressing confidence the project could remain within the proposed cost range. Board members also noted the importance of choosing a contractor who would “get it right,” especially given the school’s prior experiences dealing with building repairs and construction issues. Overall, the discussion reflected support for moving forward with the recommended contractor and project design.

**Motion to approve the Raymond Construction as proposed for the office remodel project:** Lindsey Fowers

**Second:** Ryan Reeves

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

**Resolved:** unanimous

## South -

The board discussed plans to repair and maintain the school parking lot. After reviewing the condition of the lot, it was determined that while there are significant cracks, the pavement does not yet require full reconstruction. Instead, they believe resurfacing and restriping can extend the parking lot's life by another two to three years.

Three companies submitted bids for the project, with estimates ranging from about \$6,000 to \$23,000. The recommendation was to hire Morgan Pavement for approximately \$6,995 to complete crack repairs, restriping, and leveling around drain areas to improve drainage.

### **Motion to approve Morgan Pavement in the estimates as proposed to resurface the parking lot:**

Lindsey Fowers

**Second:** Ester Israelsen

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

**Resolved:** unanimous

The school is exploring options for replacing its sound system, which is about 20 years old and failing. The school is currently gathering bids ranging from approximately \$17,000 to \$42,000 and will evaluate costs, funding availability, and system options before deciding. In the meantime, the school has relied heavily on its custodian, who is also a DJ, to provide personal sound equipment for events, but leaders want to move toward a permanent upgrade using school-owned equipment.

In addition, there will be safety improvements funded through a state safety grant. These projects include modifying gym doors to meet state safety requirements, installing additional security cameras, and eventually adding safety film to certain areas of the building. Administrators noted that these safety-related projects are already funded through the grant and do not require additional board approval.

17. Adjourned at 7:28 pm