Skipper Certification & Review Board – Safety & Incident Report

Incident Date: June 28, 2026
Vessel: Sailing school keelboat (YA)
Location: .04 NM SSW of Liberty Island, west side of the Upper Bay
Environmental Conditions: Wind S, building from 6–7 knots to 13–16 knots around noon; ebb tidal current of 1–2 knots; heavy commercial and recreational traffic
Skipper Review Board: September 21, 2026. All 6 board members in attendance

1. Incident Overview
During an ASA 101 Basic Keelboat class, an instructor and four students were beating upwind against a building southerly breeze between Governors Island and Liberty Island. On approach to Liberty Island, the boat made several tacks to avoid tour boats and jet skis near the channel south of the island. An override on a winch may have delayed an initial tack away from the island. With the wind rising and the tide ebbing, the boat grounded approximately .04 NM SSW of Liberty Island. The boat remained aground for about an hour. The sails stayed up during that time, and attempts to free the boat by rocking it and starting the engine were unsuccessful. The club's Press Boat was reassigned from photographing a signature club event to tow the boat off.

2. Damage & Board Action
- **Damage Assessment:** No damage to the boat was reported, and no one was injured.
- **Third-Party Impact:** The Press Boat was taken away from its assignment at a major club event.
- **Board Decision:** The Board found the grounding avoidable. It issued a warning to the instructor.

3. Critical Seamanship Takeaways
- **Stay Clear of the Reef:** The reef on the west side of the Upper Bay, SSW of Liberty Island, is one of the most dangerous hazards in the harbor. Heavy ferry, tour boat and jet ski traffic around the island on summer weekends is to be expected and makes approaching the reef even more hazardous.
- **File an Official Incident Report the Same Day:** Any incident involving a club or school boat must be reported through the club's official incident report form on the day it occurs. A prompt report gives the club an accurate record while details are fresh and allows the boat to be checked before it goes out again. Instructors will be reminded next season to file both float plans and, when needed, incident reports.
- **Take Responsibility:** Under Rule 1 of the Skipper Agreement, a skipper accepts total responsibility for any club boat, regardless of who is aboard, who is steering, what maintenance has occurred or what outside conditions exist. This applies fully to instructors who hand the helm to students. A skipper's default should always be to promptly accept full responsibility, without focusing on possible causes such as equipment problems or traffic.