

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, January 26, 2022
Via Zoom**

Members present remotely:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Susan Low, Dan McCaughey,
Shelby Morrison, Toyuwa Newton, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens,
Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

None

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Diego Fellows

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Bessie Marashi

Recorder present remotely:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order

Chair Mekka Smith called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 5:35 PM on January 26, 2022, via Zoom.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of December 15, 2021

Christine Wynne moved to accept the minutes with the correction that Alison Palmer be noted as present. The motion was seconded by Sasha Durand and, Bill Henning abstaining, passed unanimously via roll call vote. Our two newest trustees, Toyuwa Newton and Mark Stevens, have not yet been approved by DESE and are not yet able to vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh wished all a happy new year.

IV. SFC Report

Bessie Marashi reported that the Boone online product sale will take place March 1-21, although orders received after that date will be credited to the school. Pamphlets promoting the sale will be available soon and, along with social media promotion, will encourage parents, staff, and others to participate.

V. Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan reported on multiple topics.

- We have received 30 more applications for admission, bringing the total to 207.
- Very good news on the grant front; we have received a \$250,000 grant from DESE for SEL; it has already gone into effect and must be used by June 30, 2022. This will provide funding for our new Lower School crisis counselor, a

new behavior intervention position, and some of our work with Onward. It makes possible things we did not think we would be able to do. Receiving this grant is especially rewarding as it required significant extra work in a very short time by a team already dealing with multiple student issues.

- To have time to focus on strategic planning, Board members were asked to review the written Principals Report and have questions ready for Drea Jacobs and Will Carter in February.
- Our sports spectator policy currently allows four people per household to attend indoor games due to Covid. Many of the schools where we play have different policies; Salem Public Schools, for instance, requires proof of vaccination but has no capacity limits. We have not thought this necessary as most of our players and coaches have already had Covid, we have very few active Covid cases currently, and we are seeing a decline. We hope to return to a 100-person capacity soon.

New Covid Protocol

Stephanie Callahan reported on a proposed change to Covid protocols. We are currently following the protocol recommended by DESE last fall. In short, this involves pool testing and “test and stay” combined with contact tracing, according to which, based on state and nationwide data, few students have tested positive. Accordingly, DESE is now recommending that pool testing continue, but that unvaccinated students be given the opportunity to do weekly at-home rapid testing instead of test and stay. (Families must opt for one or the other; they cannot do both.) After studying the data and the proposal, our Covid team recommends adopting the new DESE protocol.

In the Board discussion we learned that we do not pay for testing, that DESE will review its protocol after April 22nd, and that whatever is proposed at that time will most likely remain in effect through the summer. We also know the current protocol is frustrating as vaccination does not protect against the omicron variant, those infected may be asymptomatic, and students have many contacts outside of school so contact tracing is difficult as well as time consuming for staff. Although there is some concern re the accuracy of at-home tests immediately after infection, they are seen as a good option. Rick Winter moved that we adopt the recommended DESE protocol, seconded by Sasha Durand. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote. We anticipate the at-home kits will be received in the next week or two.

DESE Site Visit

Detailed information from DESE regarding our upcoming site visit was provided to Board members. Stephanie Callahan will send an additional document with questions DESE is likely to ask. This will be helpful for Board members participating in the focus group; also, Stephanie and/or Mekka will discuss this further with anyone who wishes. Board members who can participate should let Stephanie know.

DESE will bring a team of four and will observe classes as well as meet with students, faculty/staff, board members and the Executive Director. They will submit a report, to which we can respond for a week before it becomes permanent. Ratings

are exceeds, meets, partially meets, or falls below expectations. This report will inform the next charter renewal decision.

Stephanie indicated that this is a routine, one-day visit, typical midway through a five-year strategic plan. DESE will be looking for faithfulness to our charter, the organization's viability, and academic success. Because we are college-focused, there is a lot of overlap between our mission and academic success. They will also be looking at school culture, SEL, REACH, etc.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Development

Mikki Wilson reported that the sponsorship package for the REACH for College Gala will be available next week, and other details are being finalized. The Gala is planned for May 6th. If anyone is planning to make a matching gift, please let Mikki know.

B. Education

This committee has not met since the last Board meeting but will be taking a deep dive look at data for its next report.

C. Governance

The Governance Committee report began with a vote to confirm Bill Henning as chair. Mekka Smith so moved, seconded by Shelby Morrison. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, Mekka then appointed Christine Wynne and Mark Stevens to this committee.

Bill officially welcomed Toyuwa Newton and Mark Stevens as new trustees. Both are parents of 7th graders, and both have strong financial backgrounds. Toyuwa will be serving on the Finance Committee, and Mark on the Governance Committee, as noted above.

Bill asked that anyone who wishes to change his or her committee assignment get in touch with him. He also asked that everyone be thinking of candidates for Board membership as both his and Christine Wynne's second terms expire at the end of 2022. Strategic planning and development experience are particularly desirable skill sets. Upcoming activity includes training for new Board members with Kathy Egmont and the Executive Director's evaluation.

D. Facilities

We have signed an 18-month lease with Prime for temporary expansion space at \$26/SF with improvements (walls, lights, ceiling tiles, HVAC, etc.) rolled into that price, according to Sasha Durand. At the conclusion of the term, we can renegotiate this in conjunction with our other leases; at that point improvements will have been paid off and a lower price can be considered. Prime showed good faith in beginning the build-out while negotiations continued in order to have the

space ready as close to February 1st as possible. This new space will make a huge difference, allowing the gym to function solely as such and providing much needed office space. Despite some delays, primarily due to sourcing, the space is looking great and will boost spirits during a difficult time.

E. Finance

Rick Winter reported that our financial position remains strong, with good cash on hand and preliminary reports showing Q2 tuition higher than projected, even though we have not yet received approval for additional students. He indicated we will continue to take a fiscally conservative position and gave a shout-out to Stephanie Callahan for identifying ways to fund our work with Onward.

VII. Board Strategy and Structure

After a five-minute break, the meeting reconvened with a discussion of Onward's decision to continue their school-based work with us but not to work directly with the Board, as they believe more foundational work is in order. They have recommended a different partner. This is disappointing, but we need to own where we are and keep moving forward. Concerns expressed included the need for alignment between the Board's work and the school-based work. Are they a good fit with our staff? How tightly aligned are Onward and the consultant with whom they recommend we work? Will their fee be reduced and reallocated to a new consultant?

When asked what kind of work is taking place among staff and students, Stephanie mentioned identity and bias intersections, confronting bias, knowledge building, and providing tools, all of which are being translated into applications. Mekka will ask more details on areas for improvement, and we will be exploring the recommended partner.

Mekka and Christine Wynne presented a brief PowerPoint to guide our discussion with the goal of aligning our views on working together, identifying, and implementing best practices. It included reviewing the role of the trustee to lead and advise. Stated expectations are to participate in board meetings and committee work, provide financial support, and actively engage with the school in order to make informed decisions and see opportunities for growth. There are challenges, of course, from geography, changes in personal circumstances, and the impact of Covid. What sets Salem Academy Board members apart is that we know the school, its students, families, and culture.

In reviewing our previous discussion of how we came to Salem Academy and the Board, we noted the power of connectivity and communication. Mekka Smith asked how writing and sharing our racial biographies benefit us as a working group. Exposing our vulnerabilities is not easy. It is a matter of trust, of learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Learning about each other on this deeper level, however, helps us to understand different perspectives and appreciate what has made each of us who we are.

Discussion shifted to core values we share. Honesty, communication, and openness were mentioned, along with ensuring that Board values are aligned with school

goals. Collaboration was also mentioned; we step in to help each other when needed. It was noted that no one has actually seen a written list of core values, and that this would be very helpful as we continue work in this area.

Do we have a similar level of commitment? We recognized that this can vary, e.g., committee chairs may make a bigger time commitment, for instance, and our availability can change from week to week as we all have busy lives and other commitments. This is also a matter of expectations; we need to raise the level of expectations.

Specific suggestions for making our meetings more productive included the following:

- Have a different person read our mission at every meeting.
- Flip the agenda to put serious discussions up front and more routine reports at the end.
- Review our standard agenda; are all items obligatory? Stephanie indicated some are dictated by our bylaws, some by the time of year and need for a decision, and some, such as academic data, by DESE's requirement at it be shared with the Board.
- Begin meetings with some form of open sharing.
- If we disagree with something, share our reasoning.

Sasha noted that the level of commitment required today is much higher than when she served on the Board years ago. She also noted the significant time and work that goes into preparing materials for Board meetings.

Time constraints shortened the discussion. As Mekka Smith pointed out, this is not a red-flag conversation, but a good-to-great conversation as we strive to be as creative and effective as possible.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn

Christine Wynne moved to adjourn, seconded by Mikki Wilson. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 8:12 PM.