

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, January 27, 2021, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Edward Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison,
David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Paula Pitcher, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine
Wynne

Members absent:

Susan Low

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Diego Fellows, Andrea Jacobs

Guests present remotely:

Amy Stewart (SFC), Fawaz Abusharkh

Recorder present remotely:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order, Welcome

Chair David Pabich called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 6:03 PM on January 27, 2021, via Zoom, and welcomed new board member, Paula Pilcher

II. Minutes of the Meeting of December 16, 2020

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes of the December 2020 meeting with the correction that our new board member is Paula, not Paul Pitcher. The motion was seconded by Mekka Smith and passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh wished everyone a happy new year.

IV. Advocacy Report

Nina Cohen began her report by indicating the importance of trustees and parents participating in Advocacy Week, organized by the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, and beginning March 2nd with a virtual kick-off. Several Board members indicated they will attend; Nina will send information to Amy Stewart to help enlist parents. Training will begin February 25.

The goals are threefold: fully fund the Student Opportunity Act, ensure equitable access for all students and support specific bills. Ancillary to this is the goal of increasing support for charter schools on Beacon Hill, currently estimated at about 31 percent in the House. Some uncertainty surrounds the change in House leadership; Robert De Leo was a charter school supporter; Ron Mariano's position is not yet clear.

Nina noted the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with local legislators. We are fortunate that both Senator Joan Lovely and Representative Paul Tucker are supporters of Salem Academy; we need to support them as well. We also need to cultivate legislators in surrounding districts.

Lastly, she commented on the fact the New Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, has a public-school background and is known to be favorable to education reform and charter schools. This, plus President Biden's pledge to triple Title 1 funding are hopeful signs.

V. SFC Report

The Boone fundraiser ended on December 31st, just exceeding its \$5000 goal. We will receive \$2,010, of which \$863 goes to the SFC and the remainder to students. In lieu of the usual bagel breakfast, all student salespersons were given a \$5 gift certificate to Bagel World. Boone also provided gifts for top sellers and for staff; we will draw names for the two \$20 gift certificates.

The SFC will meet via Zoom on February 3rd. Recent great attendance—30 to 50 people—suggests continuing to offer a Zoom option even after we are able to resume in-person meetings.

VI. Principals' Report

Matt Chuchul's report began with the official announcement of his departure at the end of this school year. He read his letter of resignation, which cited the desire to be closer to family and his decision, prompted by the pandemic, to make the move back to Long Island sooner rather than later. The Board expressed its disappointment, support, understanding and tremendous appreciation for all Matt has accomplished at Salem Academy. He has been a talented teacher and an inspirational and visionary leader.

Matt presented the results of a recent survey of Lower School students. An important findings was that 82 percent agree or strongly agree that they feel connected to their classmates. This has been a concern at a time of remote and hybrid learning. The LS student government has been active, running a popular Among Us event. Virtual lunches are also helping to connect kids, especially sixth graders.

As Q2 comes to an end, our assessments within our network remain strong. Students understand what is expected of them academically. The Wit and Wisdom curriculum has been instrumental in getting kids to speak up and engage, even on Zoom. We are also able to identify and target sub-groups for special attention, e.g., sixth graders who need to improve their reading fluency will now get help with this during Friday tutoring sessions.

Mekka Smith asked if the Board could have access to some of the deeper analyses. Matt said they have been and will continue working to make the data accessible in more meaningful ways. He frequently requests deeper dives from ANet. With the addition of Q2 data from different sources, we will get a more holistic view.

Drea Jacobs reported that they are seeing similar trends in the Upper School. The most noticeable difference is that students feel more connected to their teachers than to their peers, not surprising given that they returned to the building only this month. We will be working to bolster connections, honoring requests to go hybrid where possible, as productivity is higher with in-person learning. We are seeing students leading more actively, both remotely and in person. The Student Government is conducting its own weekly surveys, for instance.

Overall, this has been a particularly tumultuous month nationally and for SACS as both Upper School students and all staff are just now back in the building. Everyone is settling in; there are exciting opportunities despite anxieties. Both students and teachers are feeling safe in the building, although scheduling is especially challenging. More frequent and consistent grade checkpoints provide both clarity and the chance to celebrate kids' personal growth and progress. Comments from Board members who are also parents suggest that this is very motivating.

VII. Interim Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan began by officially recognizing Matt Chuchul and all that he has done for Salem Academy as a teacher, coach and principal. He has been integral to growing our school and culture.

Stephanie explained how the Student Opportunity Act has proceeded without being funded, resulting in the need to submit the school's plan for administering monies that we have not (and will not) receive. The SOA will be funded at some point, and we will simply submit a new plan next August. Mekka Smith cautioned against allocating these funds for talent retention as this may not be a sustainable source for that. Bill Henning moved to accept the plan for submission. This was seconded by Christine Wynne and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Salem Academy has received a \$10,000 grant from DESE related to integrating social/emotional learning (SEL) and service-learning (SL). It can be used in our work with Onward to provide DEI training. DESE is looking forward to working with us on this because of our Service-Learning track record. This will be a two-year continuation grant, so we hope to apply for and receive additional funding next year. In response to Dave Pabich's question about further help from DESE in developing such programs, Stephanie said we are in a good position to share what we do going forward.

Through the grant, we will be participating in several workshops throughout the spring related to SEL, anti-racism, and SL unit design. Bill Henning wondered if Salem's Race Equity Task Force might offer service learning opportunities

The enrollment update highlighted lower attendance at virtual information sessions, probably because prospects want to see the school or are only now beginning to focus on the future. We will have a banner on Washington Street, and we are ready to reach out to Salem's many subgroups if the applicant pool is not where we want it to be. We may also be able to offer both in-person and virtual tours. Currently, we have 82 applications compared to 100 at this time last year. Sixth-grade applications

in particular are lagging, perhaps because the mailing has not yet gone out or because parents are hesitant to change schools during the pandemic.

Now that we are operating fully in hybrid mode, it is both exciting and anxiety provoking. We are doing pool testing and seeing our first positives but have been able to isolate individuals. We are testing students separately from staff and working with the City, which is paying for all staff and high school students. Kudos to school nurse Katie Harvey and to Kristine Sgambellone and Leni De los Santos for managing the challenges of operating under Covid-19 circumstances. About 40% of our families remain remote, and this is likely to still be an option next September.

The staff report included the departure of one teacher due to a career change/salary, and excellent teacher survey results that indicate they are feeling recognized and supported. Our ideal job survey is coming up and will provide insights for staffing next year.

VIII. Committee Reports

A. Finance Committee Report

Our financial position remains strong, as reported by Shelby Morrison; we are now in a position to reconsider raises for teachers, which were temporarily frozen at the end of FY20. Accordingly, she presented two scenarios—with and without a 3% raise—of our projected finances for the remainder of this year. Even with raises we anticipate a healthy surplus. Bill Henning moved to implement the raise retroactively, seconded by Shelby Morrison. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote and will be distributed in the remaining payroll.

B. Governance Committee Report

Dave Pabich reported a correction to our published Board terms; Christine Wynne's term expires at the end of this year. He went on to discuss training for new Board members and said that Kathy Egmont would return to assist with this. We have several potential candidates and will bring them onto the Board this spring if possible.

The Executive Director search is proceeding, as reported by Rick Jones. Five candidates have been narrowed to three semi-finalists, who will be interviewed by the Committee the week of February 1. Meetings with students, faculty, parents and the Board will follow.

C. Education Committee Report

The Committee has not met in January, although Dan McCaughey said they signed the contract with Onward.

D. Development Committee Report

This year's Reach for College Gala will take place virtually on April 30th. Christine Wynne reported that we hope to have the sponsorship package finalized and

distributed by mid-February. Thanks to an end-of-year spike in giving, we have raised about \$35,000, the half-way point to reaching our \$70,000 goal. We met our first \$5,000 matching gift and are looking for more matching donors.

E. Facilities Committee Report

We continue to deal with HVAC issues, both in terms of functionality and comparative landlord/tenant financial obligations.

IX. Executive Session

Bill Henning moved to go into executive session and not return to open session. , The motion was seconded by Christine Wynne and passed unanimously by roll call vote. Discussion focused on Executive Director's salary range. Members from the Finance Committee presented the options and shared comments on background research.

X. Vote to Adjourn.

Christine Wynne moved to adjourn, seconded by Alison Palmer. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 8:02 pm.