

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Board of Trustees Wednesday, October 23, 2019, 6:00 pm, Room 114

Members Present:

Nina Cohen, William Henning, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, David Pabich,
Alison Palmer, Steve Palmer, Alfonso Perillo, Felicia Pierce, Mekka Smith, Rick
Winter, Christine Wynne

Members Absent:

Shelby Morrison

Staff:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Kathy Egmont, Diego Fellows

Guests:

Fawaz Abusharkh

Recorder:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order, Welcome

The monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees was called to order by Chair Nina Cohen at 6:12 PM on October 23, 2019, in Room 114.

II. Approval of Minutes

Rick Jones presented the minutes of the September 23, 2019, meeting. They were amended as follows:

The second paragraph of the Head of School report was clarified to read:

“Stephanie explained that the Next Generation HS MCAS exams are a more rigorous assessment for students. A study of college matriculation and graduation from 2010 to 2018 found that achieving proficiency on the Legacy MCAS did not correlate to strong college matriculation and graduation while achieving at the Advanced Level did. DESE believes that the new Next Generation MCAS standards of proficiency will better describe students' college readiness.”

The fourth paragraph was clarified to read:

“Stephanie noted that although we give the high school biology MCAs to students as ninth graders, the results are reported when they are tenth graders. The transitional scores for the new test will be pegged to prior test graduating requirements.”

Steve Palmer moved to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by David Pabich. The minutes were accepted unanimously.

III. Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

IV. Finance Committee Report

A. Audit Review

Alfonso Perillo reported that the audit process went well and resulted in an unqualified opinion with no findings. He has met with the auditor and reviewed our ratios. He explained that 2018 monies received from the Read Foundation appeared in our 2019 report, but the timing will now reflect 2020 monies during the current fiscal year. Approval of the draft Combined Financial Statements and Independent Auditors' Report was moved by Alfonso, seconded by Steve Palmer and passed unanimously. SACS Foundation management will now sign the MD&A letter and the report will be officially submitted to the Attorney General's office and DESE.

B. Monthly Financials

The financial dashboard shows that we are on target and ahead of budget. It was noted that cash on hand is slightly low at this time, but not cause for concern. Operating expenses appear to be over budget in some line items. Alfonso noted that construction costs were capitalized and are not reflected in the P and L. He noted that salaries are coming in under budget. There were some maintenance costs over the summer that had not been anticipated to support the construction work. We expect the costs to level out in the coming year.

C. Update on Beverly Bank Loan

Negotiations for a \$150,000 loan are continuing, according to Kathy Egmont. She and David Pabich met with our banker and have come up with a solution to the dilemma we faced, namely, that the unpredictability of our revenue stream means we are not in accordance with bank policy, yet we do not want a higher interest loan and do not want to roll this indebtedness into a single large solution. The answer lies in having the SACS Foundation guarantee the loan; on November 4th we expect they will vote to guarantee such this loan.

The Board commended Kathy, the Finance Committee and our accountant, Deborah Campbell, for the tremendous amount of work they have handled with efficiency and such excellent results.

V. Other Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee

The Governance Committee completed its 360° evaluation of the Executive Director, as reported by Rick Jones. Thirteen Board members responded and expressed overall satisfaction with the ED's performance, especially in the context of personal, construction and Shetland Park management change challenges. They noted that the section of the evaluation dealing with improving the school's visibility extends beyond the ED's personal efforts to her ability to empower others in their efforts. In response to Alex Dean's query concerning 2020 goals, it was pointed out that remaining question marks concerning future goals refer not to the goals themselves,

but to the fact that strategies for reaching them are still being determined. It was also noted that the involvement of the executive director of another organization (Kara McLaughlin, The House of the Seven Gables) brought a valuable perspective to the process.

Felicia Peirce moved to accept the report and renew the Executive Director's contract for an additional two-year period including the current school year, with the same raise as the rest of the staff received. The move was seconded by Steve Palmer and passed unanimously. Nina Cohen thanked the Board and the Governance Committee for a thorough and thoughtful process.

Additionally, Rick reported that our HR consultant, Jane Callahan, completed exit interviews with all departing faculty members. The primary reason for their move was personal circumstances, such as the birth of a child. It came as no surprise that the heavy workload, longer school day and year were also cited. Given that many new students will continue to be unprepared for Salem Academy's academic rigor, the need for extra efforts required for faculty attention will also continue.

B. Development Committee

Christine Wynne reported that the Development Committee has reviewed upcoming events and sources of income and established a fundraising goal for the current fiscal year of \$60,000, subject to review next spring.

We have received a \$5,000 anonymous dollar-for-dollar matching gift and will seek an additional \$5,000 matching gift. Stephanie Callahan pointed out that, unlike past years, when gifts could be matched to the need for new enrichment activities from field trips to AP tests, we are now fundraising for continuation or enhancement of existing programs. The Committee will provide more detailed projections of how funds will be used at our next meeting.

Diego Fellows presented a video developed over the past year that can be used for recruitment as well as development purposes. This will be on our website, and clips can also be used in social media. It features only juniors and seniors due to scheduling availability and the fact that they are more familiar with and better able to articulate the SACS story and their own personal experience. Diego does use kids from all grades in social media posts.

In conjunction with the discussion of recruitment, it was noted that the first open house will be held on November 13, 2019. This open house usually has somewhat lower attendance than later open houses as families don't become focused on school choice until after the first of the year. Leni De los Santos and Arlene Garcia will do one in Spanish in December. Diego also indicated that he hopes to be able to produce an annual report this year; this would be helpful for both development and recruitment.

C. Facilities Committee

The modified traffic pattern being tested by Shetland Prime Group was the first topic of discussion. The current configuration is seen as a quick fix while a more robust plan to address congestion and parking issues is developed. We believe the truck drop-off is better and safer, but we have sent a letter to Prime Group indicating that two-way traffic at the Lynch street entrance needs to be suspended during school drop-off and pick-up times. We are waiting for a clearer plan before making any formal announcements.

Salem State's future disposition of its South Campus was also discussed. While this might be considered pie-in-the-sky talk at this time, we believe we would be remiss in not at least exploring this opportunity. It is a complicated issue involving the University, the City and the Commonwealth. A working group will be established to learn more about this.

VI. SFC Report

Pam Rochna announced that the next SFC meeting is November 4th. Prior to that, however, she is seeking people to sell tickets and help staff the Food for Thought booth during Haunted Happenings.

VII. Head of School Report

A. Workers' Turn

Matt Chuchul encouraged everyone to attend *Workers' Turn*, a new play researched, written and soon to be performed by Lower School students on November 8 and 9 at 7 pm at SACS. The play is based on events that took place at the Pequot Mill, Shetland Park's original predecessor. Research uncovered an employee instruction booklet from the 1940's. The play represents both a superb learning experience for the students and a newsworthy event for the Salem community. The Board encouraged Matt to reach out to local historical organizations to promote the play.

B. MCAS Results

Stephanie Callahan's remarks focused on interpreting MCAS results. Because MCAS are designed in large part to provide evidence for government funding that schools are improving and closing the achievement gap, they are oriented to low-performance schools. Key performance indicators of interest to an individual school like SACS, are not quickly apparent. As an example, the achievements of students doing advanced course work can be overpowered by students dropping out of school. Similarly, a school may receive 0s or 1s (indicating minimal improvement) when the reality may be that the school sustains consistently high performance.

This is true of SACS, where we are in the 90s for high school ELA, math and science, yet receive 0's and 1s in regard to our targets.

The somewhat complicated weighting system generates a criterion-referenced target percentage; for SACS, this is 46 percent, indicating "moderate progress toward targets." Some of the other factors to be considered in analyzing MCAS results include the introduction of new curricula, new MCAS tests and the impact of the emotional and mental health on absenteeism and coursework completion.

Highlights included lower school improvement in meeting targets for math and particularly ELA improvement. The upper school extended engagement and annual dropout improvements. Challenges noted include the impact of chronic absenteeism on lower school ELA performance, although, at 10 percent, it is much lower than the state average or the City of Salem's even higher rate of absenteeism.

We are pleased with our results as they indicate that we are providing a quality educational product and sustaining high achievement across different cohorts of students.

The Board thanked Stephanie for a cogent presentation of a convoluted subject.

VIII. Executive Director Report

The status of current enrollment and wait list was provided by Kathy Egmont for informative purposes; no discussion ensued. Current enrollment is 495 students. Nearly half of the 241 students on the wait list are for Grade 6.

We are in negotiation with Shetland Prime Group to arrange for student parking spaces behind the garage. We hope to have approximately 35 spaces billed at the employee parking rate of \$200 per year; student would pay \$20 a month August through May.

Kathy updated the board on the request by parents for the 4 pm Friday afternoon bus to come at 2 pm instead, avoiding the two-hour wait between the end of school day and bus pick up. The issue is more complicated than might be expected, as it appears that the City's contract with the bus company could require hiring full-time people and obtaining extra buses for the entire week as all currently available buses are already deployed. The projected cost according to the Superintendent is \$80,000.

Neither a 1 pm dismissal, which would cut into instructional time, nor hiring staff for an after-school program, which would be an extra expense for SACS, meets our needs. Nina Cohen and Kathy Egmont will be meeting with Mayor Driscoll, and we will be submitting this expense, as required, prior to development of the School Committee budget for 2020-2021.

IX. Vote to Adjourn

Rick Jones moved to adjourn, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.