

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, November 17, 2021
Inc.Ubate Coworking, Lynn, MA**

Members present:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Rick Jones, Susan Low, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, David Pabich, Mekka Smith, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne,

Members absent:

Alison Palmer, Paula Pitcher

Staff present:

Stephanie Callahan, Melissa Lassen, Drea Jacobs

Guests present:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Toyuwa Newton

Recorder present: Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order

Chair David Pabich called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 5:52 PM on November 17, 2021. The meeting was held at Inc.Ubate Coworking in Lynn, MA.

Bill Henning introduced Toyuwa Newton as a prospective board member. Toyuwa has a financial background and is the parent of a Salem Academy 7th grader.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of October 27, 2021

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes with a correction to the spelling of his name and amending wording regarding the charter amendment proposal to say, "Without the additional tuition, we may need to cut back on programming and the number of students." The motion was seconded by Sasha Durand and passed, as amended, unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving.

IV. Executive Director's and Principals' Reports

To allow adequate time for the strategic planning process Stephanie Callahan referred everyone to her written report and the reports submitted prior to the meeting by school principals Will Carter and Andrea Jacobs. She then introduced Salem Academy's college counselor, Melissa Lassen.

V. College Counseling Report

Melissa began by noting the significant growth of this department over the 10 years she has been with Salem Academy. In addition to Melissa, the team has two staff members; Ashley Worthington has streamlined the recommendation process and works with Seniors, while Brendan Douglass is focusing on alumni on post-secondary tracking. We want to know where our graduates are going, what they are doing, and how well they are doing. We have not the bandwidth for this research until now, and we look forward to what we can learn about how to improve the Salem Academy experience for our graduates.

She then reviewed the college application process, which begins with a mandatory collegiate skills class. The inability to meet in person last spring slowed the process a bit, but it is now back on track with all recommendations complete and all seniors having applied to at least one school; the average is 10 applications with a good balance of “reach” and both academically and financially realistic schools. About 80 percent of all applications have been completed

The focus right now is on ensuring completion prior to the December holiday break of all FAFSA® and CSS forms, the most prevalent financial aid forms. The end goal is to have all students be accepted by at least two schools that are viable options for them.

In response to Christine Wynne’s question about whether more schools have expressed interest in Salem Academy over the years, Melissa indicated that, while this is a natural accompaniment to our growth, the more proactive we can be about establishing and strengthening our college relationships the better. Having a bigger team will enable us to do this. As Dave Pabich pointed out, having schools understand who we are and why we are special is critical.

Melissa indicated that non-traditional high schools do have a greater presence than in the past, and she has had a very positive response to the school profile she has created. She targets our most popular schools, many of which reflect the financial status of our families. Financial aid seems to be a moving target, with colleges changing course; it’s hard to predict who will receive aid or how much. Students are increasingly sensitive to the financial burden college places on their families and on their own futures; many students today are wary of incurring too much debt.

Overall, Melissa thinks we are on track, that senior essays are thoughtful, and that when they leave Salem Academy next spring, our seniors will know the score and have clear expectations about the college years ahead.

VI. Committee Reports

In the interest of time, these reports were very brief.

Governance

Rick Jones reported the Committee is focused on the strategic retreat and recruitment of new board members. Both Mark Stevens, who has agreed to join us, and Toyuwa Newton, who is visiting tonight, may be considered at our December

meeting, leaving one open spot on the board. The proposed slate of officers for the coming year will also be presented in December.

Finance

There are no significant changes here, according to Rick Winter. We do have a little more cash on hand, and we are expecting to see placement fees in conjunction with the difficulty of filling open teaching positions.

Facilities

Dave Pabich reported that we are looking for substitute space for lunch for the next few months. There are several options within the Prime buildings, although some may need a little fine tuning. The HVAC situation is ongoing, slowed slightly by a change in our primary contact at the Prime Group. It is anticipated that we will share the estimated \$130,000 expense, which will be incurred over the months ahead.

Development

Christine Wynn announced that our fundraising goal for the current year will be \$75,000. Last year we raised \$71,000, exceeding our \$70,000 goal. Over time we have tended to see 15 percent increases annually, but the continued impact of Covid-19 and related uncertainty dictate a conservative goal this year. To date, we have raised \$22,000, about \$1,100 more than we had at this time last year, and we are looking forward to an in-person gala, despite likely higher expenses.

Bill Henning reported that the Foundation is meeting November 18th to discuss a scholarship endowment of some kind. He then moved to accept the \$75,000 annual fund goal, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion passed unanimously.

Education

Dan McCaughey reported that getting everything back on track, for both students and faculty, has been the primary challenge this fall. We have lost more than the usual number of teachers during the course of the semester, reflective of a nationwide trend since Covid-19 for people to leave jobs, explore entrepreneurship, and make big decisions on a life-is-short basis, rather than consider them over a longer period of time.

At Salem Academy the amount of support we provide our students means a longer day, longer year, and an unusually high level of commitment from our teachers. While the departures we have experienced all stemmed from individual circumstances, they raise the question of how we can tell our story more effectively to prospective teachers and get the word out about what makes working at Salem Academy special. Rick Winter will share an employee testimonial video with Stephanie. Although there are not really any comparable charter schools nearby with whom we could brainstorm, Stephanie does know of a team that comes to do testimonials at different schools.

VII. Build the Team: Who We are

Mekka Smith began our strategic planning process by clarifying the two initial activities: building the team and looking at how we work together. The basic norms

are simple: be present, speak your truth, and follow the adage, “What is said here, stays here; what is learned here, leaves here.”

“Building the team” recognizes the many changes in the school and the Board in the past few years. With so many important decisions in our hands, it is important that we trust each other. Accordingly, we began by briefly sharing how and why each of us became a trustee, after which we broke into small groups to share the racial autobiographies that everyone was asked to complete prior to the meeting.

When the Board reconvened as a whole, comments on the experience ranged from the importance—and often the difficulty—of achieving gender, ethnic and racial diversity in a group to how hearing the experiences of others encouraged more personal reflection on who we are as individuals and why. It was also noted that feeling uncomfortable is necessary to achieve real progress; sharing discomfort builds trust and empowers us to move forward. We need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Because of time constraints the discussion of how we can work together more effectively was postponed to a later date. It was emphasized that the evening’s discussion is just the beginning of our planning process.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn

Mekka moved to adjourn, seconded by Shelby. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting ended at 7:50 pm.