

**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School  
Wednesday, February 16, 2022  
Via Zoom**

Members present remotely:

Edward Aroko, William Henning, Dan McCaughey, Toyuwa Newton, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

Sasha Durand, Susan Low, Shelby Morrison

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Will Carter, Drea Jacobs, 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 5:36 PM on February 16, 2022, via Zoom. Following the roll call, board members spoke briefly to what they do professionally and, in addition some aspect of their personal life of which they are, in effect, the CEO. These ranged from making connections to managing teenagers.

**II. Minutes of the Meeting of January 26, 2021**

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes of this meeting with two additions: 1) the official vote confirming Bill as chair of the Governance Committee (moved by Mekka Smith, seconded by Shelby Morrison, and passed unanimously via roll call vote) and 2) Mekka's appointment of Mark Stevens and Christine Wynne to that committee. The motion to accept the amended minutes passed unanimously via roll call vote. Both Toyuwa Newton and Mark Stevens have been approved by DESE and are now eligible to vote.

**III. Public Comment**

Fawaz Abusharkh reported that the consensus of conversations with other families is that they hope the Board will not lift the current mask mandate until two weeks after February break, i.e., mid-March.

**IV. SFC Report**

Bessie Marashi plans to distribute the Boone fundraiser books at the end of this month. The SFC has given Diego Fellows a letter to be published in *The Navigator*, and they are working on a FaceBook page. Online, the fundraiser will appear as Salem Academy; if viewers purchase using a student's name, the profit will be allocated equally to the student and the SFC; otherwise, all profits go to the SFC.

Melissa Lassen has sent the essays of applicants for the Rachel Hunt Award to the SFC. Bessie explained that three or four parents will read them—they are presented anonymously—and determine the three finalists and winner by consensus.

## V. Board Updates

Mekka Smith updated the Board on three different initiatives: advocacy, equity work, and the Board committee survey.

### Advocacy

The annual Massachusetts Charter School Advocacy Week will be March 7-14, at which time we can meet with our elected representatives and check in with what is happening statewide with charter schools. Mekka asked for volunteers to participate in these events, all virtual again this year. Mikki Wilson, Toyuwa Newton and Christine Wynn will do so, along with Nina Cohen. We have strong relationships with both Senator Joan Lovely and Representative Paul Tucker and will look forward to reconnecting with them.

### Equity Work

Onward has provided guidance on areas for us to work on, which range from personal racial equity development to practices/procedures to implement school wide. The Education Committee will continue to spearhead this work; other interested Board members are welcome.

Mekka indicated that we are in conversation with the consultant Onward recommended, Common Good, and will reach out as well to Human in Common, an organization suggested by Bill Henning. Mekka also indicated that we will need to find funding for this work, as monies allocated to Onward, while they can be repurposed, cannot be diverted to a different consultant.

### Board Committee Survey

Details of the report will be shared with the Governance Committee, but the high-level themes are enthusiasm for a retreat (although not in Salem in October), the need for more non-Trustee volunteers, and a desire to strengthen our personal relationships and collective goals.

## VI. Principals' Report

Will Carter reported that at both the Lower School and Upper School levels we have been analyzing data from the first half of the year to ascertain if we are on track to achieve our goals for year and where there are gaps that must be addressed. We have identified disparities in special ed, ELL, and race/ethnicity subgroups and are addressing them. While we are not at our goal of having 95 percent of students meet or exceed proficiency, we are on track to have 90 percent of all students passing all classes by year end. Drea Jacobs pointed out the difference between now and last year at this time, when percentages were substantially lower.

Will also indicated that slightly lower Q2 vs. Q1 results are not concerning as they can be attributed to shifting benchmarks, the return of mid-terms after two years, the shift back to in-person learning, and the resurgence of Covid.

At a staff level, mid-year meetings with all teachers have been completed, providing important feedback and support by recapping strengths, areas of growth, personal and professional goals. PLCs have been meeting and continuing their work with Onward, identifying and implementing projects that range from making family communication channels more accessible to book clubs oriented to diversity and equity.

Similarly, parent/teacher conferences are providing important feedback and support. We are making an all-out effort to connect with families by making both in-person and virtual options available where possible along with more meeting times throughout the day.

Both Will and Drea noted that student survey results have been very positive with good feedback and suggestions. We are celebrating Black History Month in multiple ways, have held end-of-quarter events, pursued athletics and extracurricular activities enthusiastically, and really enjoyed the return of field trips. That said, everyone, students, and teachers alike, is tired and ready for February break.

## **VII. Executive Director's Report**

In response to the expiration of the DESE mask mandate on February 27<sup>th</sup>, the Covid Safety Task Force would like to extend the mandate to March 13<sup>th</sup>, two weeks post February break. Stephanie Callahan also proposed that the task force be given the autonomy to change our Covid protocols as required in response to the often rapidly evolving Covid environment, DESE, city and state mandates.

Discussion covered how such decisions are handled in other counties and schools, our current 82 percent vaccination rate, and the parent survey, which is about 50/50 in favor of required vs. optional masking. Mark Stevens pointed out that more detailed information would likely shift some votes from required to optional. Bill Henning moved to accept the proposal, both regarding extension of the mask mandate and granting the Covid Safety Task Force to make protocol decisions. The motion was seconded by Mekka Smith and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Stephanie also reported the following:

- The Core Criteria Year 3 DESE site visit went well; we will receive their official report in six to eight weeks. They were particularly interested in a math class project using a culturally proficient lens to investigate the Harvard admission scandal; they expressed interest in following up to learn more and possibly develop a template for dissemination to other schools.
- The human resources situation continues to be challenging; some positions are being filled but openings remain, especially in special ed. With the ideal job survey going out this week, we are beginning to look at hiring for next year.
- Our recently completed compensation study shows that we are below the average salaries for both Salem and surrounding public schools and that the gap has been widening. This dictates a significant budget revision, which will be proposed next month. It will address both salaries and the need for additional employees to allow sustainable workloads and provide options for

personal growth and development. Our work with organizational consultant Talented has identified several new positions that will ameliorate this issue.

- Our request for a charter amendment to increase our capacity by 30 students was denied by DESE due to the 9 percent charter cap and current SPS enrollment. This means any expansion would have to be by becoming a regional charter school, a major strategic decision that would have to be investigated thoroughly. Without the approval to increase capacity, there are also financial implications to be considered.

## **VIII. Committee Reports**

### **A. Development**

We have raised \$14,500 towards our Annual Fund goal of \$75,000, as reported by Mikki Wilson, and are now focused on fundraising for the REACH for College Gala on May 6<sup>th</sup>. This will be virtual again this year and the Development Committee has set a goal of \$40,000. Along with a \$15,000 goal for next fall's Wellness Week and Reach the Beach fundraiser, comparable to what we raised this past year, we are looking to raise \$130,000 altogether.

Mikki emphasized the need for all hands on deck to reach our goal. Board members can support the Gala through personal donations, corporate sponsorships, being an ambassador to the community, hosting a "friendraiser," or engaging in friendly challenges. She indicated the need not only to reach out to the Salem community, but also to an audience beyond that of people interested in supporting students and education in general. We have a unique positioning as a school with a college preparatory focus combined with community involvement.

### **B. Education**

Mekka Smith indicated that the Committee's focus has been on the DESE site visit and charter expansion request, both of which were addressed in the Executive Director's report. She added that all focus groups—student, staff and Board--were aligned and contributed to an excellent visit.

### **C. Governance**

New trustee training with Kathy Egmont went well, as reported by Bill Henning. The Committee is now mapping out a Spring breakfast event to make our faculty, staff, and Board better known to Salem community leaders. Bill also reported that Susan Low has transferred from the Education Committee to the Facilities Committee. He repeated our ongoing need for good Board candidates, particularly with a strategic planning, facilities, or development background.

### **D. Facilities**

We are in the new cafeteria! Stephanie Callahan said the move has gone well and has been a boost to morale. Minor construction issues are being resolved, kids know how to get there, and disturbance to neighbors has been minimal. The

accompanying offices are being used and are helpful as we bring on new staff members and mental health resources. We continue to work with Prime on HVAC upgrade in the main building

**E. Finance**

Rick Winter reported that our financial position remains strong. Tuition will be confirmed in March, which provides a stable base for the rest of the fiscal year. Anticipated higher salary expenditures, no additional funding from expansion, and inflation are all issues we must address. While preliminary reimbursement for next year is projected by DESE at \$19,000 per student, which would be a significant increase over the current \$17,567, we will continue to be far more conservative in our budgeting.

**IX. Vote to Adjourn**

Toyuwa Newton moved to adjourn, seconded by Christine Wynne. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:24 PM.