

**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School  
Wednesday, February 26, 2020, 6:00 pm, Room 114**

Members Present:

Eddie Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, David Pabich, Alison Palmer,  
Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members Absent:

Shelby Morrison, Felicia Pierce,

Staff:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Kathy Egmont, Drea Jacobs

Guests:

Fawaz Abusharkh  
Pam Rochna (SFC)

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 Dave Pabich at 6:07 PM on February 26, 2020, in Room 114.

**II. Minutes of the Meeting of January 22, 2020**

Mekka Smith presented the minutes of the January 22, 2020 meeting. Rick Jones moved to accept them without modification, seconded by Christine Wynne. The minutes were accepted unanimously.

**III. Public Comment**

Fawaz Abusharkh invited everyone, on behalf of the Committee of the Dominican Flag to participate in the 176<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Dominican independence. This is scheduled for 5 pm, Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup> at Lafayette Plaza and SACS's Albright Theatre.

He also reminded everyone that Sunday, March 1, is World Day of Prayer, which will be celebrated with a multi-faith festival at the Tabernacle Church in Salem between 4 and 6 pm.

**IV. SFC Report**

Pam Rochna announced that the next SFC meeting will be on Monday, April 6, at which time planning will go into high gear for spring activities, including Staff Appreciation Day.

She also reported that the Yankee Candle Fundraiser began February 9th and will finish on Friday, March 6<sup>th</sup>. Just under \$1,000 has been raised to date. Typically, momentum builds towards the end. An email will be going out soon, offering online ordering. Our goal is to raise \$10,000.

## **V. Committee Reports**

### **A. Finance**

Kathy Egmont presented the report on behalf of Shelby Morrison. The most salient point is that the actual to budget revenue comparison, while close, can be expected to worsen due to far fewer tuition dollars we will receive from the City. Given that we do not want to lay off staff or make cuts in programming, serious belt tightening lies ahead. There are some overages that cannot or will not change; we will not cut planned professional development expenditures, special ed funding or construction related expenses incurred in 2019 but not billed until 2020.

The Finance Committee is taking several steps in response to these lower revenue projections. Shelby Morrison, Kathy Egmont and David Pabich will meet with Representative Paul Tucker and Senator Joan Lovely on March 10th to get a better understanding of why forecasted revenues are so low and why the negative impact on Salem Academy appears to be far more severe than on other charter schools.

The Committee is also seeking to identify new revenue generating ideas (vs. expense reductions) and will present a preliminary FY2021 budget in March with more conservative revenue projections. We will maintain our commitment to professional development.

Ms. Egmont also addressed the school funding bill now pending with the State legislature. It is how Salem allocates funding and its above foundation rate spending that affect. While the bill promises significant funding increases to some communities, Salem is not one of them. Increases in per student funding, especially at the high school level, will be to our advantage.

Last, in reference to cash on hand, our bookkeeper has made some required account adjustments. Ms. Egmont noted that January Accounts Receivable reflect a payment actually made on February 2.

### **B. Governance**

Rick Jones shared Susan Lowe's résumé as a prospective board member. She has served on the board of the Bentley Academy Charter School and will continue there as an advisor as the school transitions to an innovation school model. Rick and Bill Henning will have coffee with her and report to the board in March.

Mekka Smith attended an executive director succession and emergency planning session, details of which she shared with the Governance Committee. She and Kathy Egmont are in the process drafting an emergency scenario plan.

Kathy reported that, while we have a written complaint policy and process for staff and parents, we do not have one for the board. This relates to serious allegations, e.g., that we are not complying with legal requirements as opposed to minor complaints about such things as school lunches. The committee is working on this as well.

### **C. Development**

Plans for the upcoming Reach for College Gala are well underway, as reported by Christine Wynne. We are ahead of last year in obtaining sponsorships, having received \$13,250 to date. In response to Dan McCaughey's question, Christine indicated that we do have a sponsorship package that can be sent out. Sponsors are being notified of the number of tickets their sponsorship includes.

The program will be about 30 minutes long and, in lieu of an auction, there will be a "giving wall." The three organizations being recognized for their commitment to our service learning program—Salem Sound Coastwatch, Life Bridge, and the Salem Youth Commission—are excited. We have worked hard to build our list of active or prospective service learning partners. We welcome the names of potential service learning partners

Ticket sales are slightly behind last year but are expected to pick up as the March 20 date approaches. Tickets can be purchased online: Adults \$75, Parents \$50, Alumni \$25. Staff may attend for free, paying \$25 for a guest.

The Annual Fund is doing well; the Committee's attention will shift to this and to other development programs after the gala.

### **D. Education**

Dan McCaughey reported that the committee met at the end of January to discuss the accountability plan for DESE. Although comments seemed confusing, Stephanie Callahan indicated that a subsequent phone call clarified DESE's comments and that all was fine. Some of the confusion arises from comments intended to address larger school issues that are not relevant to a school our size. The committee will add requested footnotes, respond to questions and resubmit the plan for additional feedback at the end of the month.

This committee now includes Allison Palmer; upcoming tasks include a more granular look at next year's school calendar.

### **E. Advocacy**

Mekka Smith reported that Advocacy Day was February 13, for which about 100 people from different charter schools descending on the State House for meetings with representatives and senators. Nina Cohen, Fawaz Abusharkh and Mekka Smith attended. We were able to share our facilities situation.

On Tuesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, from 7:45 to 8:45 AM, SACS will host state and city legislators

for a breakfast meeting. Senator Lovely has sent out 50 invitations and we look forward people.

## **VI. Head of School Report**

Stephanie Callahan commented further on the Accountability Plan cited above. In short, the plan is DESE's way of holding schools accountable for their longer-term, i.e., five-year goals. In our case, we are reporting out on these goals regularly—college-related actions for older students, percentage of middle schoolers passing all of their classes, service learning achievements and social emotional learning progress, for example.

Matt Chuchul presented the Q2 achievement results. Not surprisingly, as newcomers to SACS, 6<sup>th</sup> graders continue to struggle somewhat with math, although nearly half are at our internal goal. More students reached our internal goal for ELA than last year. Moving to the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the impact of new curricula efforts and support effort has also meant more students are attaining internal math goals than last year, and more than half are at or above ELA internal goals. The impact of new curricula and curricular resources is most evident in 8<sup>th</sup> grade results, where over 80% of students attained honor roll or high honor roll status.

Matt also noted that Choice Block has highlighted student interest in making videos on topics about which they are passionate. This has proved an excellent vehicle for quieter students to present effectively. Service Learning projects are moving from planning into action phases.

Moving to the recreational arena, the staff won the first student-faculty basketball game; worth noting: Upper School students coached Lower School kids. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade ski trip was huge success, not only because everyone had fun, but also because many students—80% or more were first-timers—realized they could be successful at something they thought they couldn't do. Support Services gathers equipment and SFC funds were available for students who could not afford the trip.

Stephanie Callahan and Drea Jacobs presented Upper School results. Most notable is the significantly lower number of students in grades 9-11 at risk and the higher number of students reaching honor roll or high honor roll status. Stephanie credited this to effective use of the support block by teachers and by early identification of needs so that plans could be put into effect quickly.

Service Learning projects for 11<sup>th</sup> graders are a concern and a Service Learning support block is going into effect to ensure they are on track and that they won't flounder as seniors. Similarly, some seniors are at risk for failing Service Learning. The support block will be helpful, as will close monitoring of all students to ensure project completion.

All but 11<sup>th</sup> graders are doing well on P/SATs compared to national averages. We are working to refine our SAT preparedness. We are also exploring whether it would be better to test in the spring. We are also beginning internal exams as preparation for MCAS and AP tests.

Our current faculty vacancies in an AP Bio and Environmental Science teacher, for which we have two candidates in the interview process, and an Upper School math teacher for next year.

## **VII. Executive Director Report**

The primary topic of Kathy Egmont's report was an update on revising the school calendar to provide a longer summer vacation. Surveys with staff and parents support this change, with basically no negative feedback, although whether to begin or end the school year earlier remains to be decided. There will be no change to vacations during the school year. This move is seen as important to teacher retention.

Accordingly, Rick Jones moved to empower the executive director to pursue this revision. The motion was seconded by Dan McCaughey and passed unanimously. Kathy will now discuss with the City, draft an amendment and bring to the board in March.

In other business, our bus request has been submitted to the Salem School Committee. Closer to home, we are already preparing for the coronavirus; any student with a fever are being questioned and monitored. We have our Lysol wipes ready and will follow appropriate protocols if a crisis develops.

Our admissions lottery will take place on March 11<sup>th</sup> and will be videoed. We will be accepting 72 6<sup>th</sup> graders (including 20 siblings), and 20 9<sup>th</sup> graders. More than 49 percent of 5th graders in Salem Public Schools have applied to SACS for 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Last, our state "report card," available online at <http://reportcards.doe.mass.edu/2019/DistrictReportcard/04850000>, highlighted the following accomplishments:

- 75% of SACS 11th and 12th graders have completed at least one advanced course vs . MA state average 65.1%
- 95% of SACS students have access to an arts program or course vs MA state 80.4%
- 88.6% of SACS 9th graders pass all courses, compared to MA state 79.8%

## **VIII. Vote to Adjourn**

Rick Winter moved to adjourn, seconded by Rick Jones. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm.