

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, March 23, 2022**

Members present in person:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Susan Low, Shelby Morrison,
Toyuwa Newton, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens, Mikki Wilson,
Christine Wynne

Members present remotely:

Dan McCaughey

Members absent:

Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter

Staff present:

Stephanie Callahan, Will Carter, Alex Dean, Drea Jacobs, Diego Fellows

Guests present:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Bessie Marashi

Recorder present:

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 6:15 PM on March 23, 2022. Continuing our desire to become better acquainted personally, we spent ten minutes in small groups sharing information about what's going on in our lives.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of February 16, 2022

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes of the February 16th meeting as submitted. The motion was seconded by Alison Palmer and passed unanimously by a show of hands of those present, and by voice for Dan McCaughey, who attended by phone. Sasha Durand and Shelby Morrison abstained as they were not present for that meeting.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh wished everyone well.

IV. SFC Report

The Boon fundraiser has just concluded, as reported by Bessie Marashi. It generated a little over \$1600, of which the SFC received \$416, and students received \$299. This was not as successful as we had hoped, despite active online and in-person promotion. Accordingly, the SFC is planning to conduct next year's fundraiser in conjunction with the Student Council, raising funds for student-identified purposes.

The SFC is now focused on Staff Appreciation Day, to be held on Friday, May 20th, which is a half-day. A volunteer committee is being formed to determine the theme and plan logistics for this event. Diego Fellows is helping with a survey to determine

the staff member of the year, who will receive a plaque during the event. All staff and faculty participate in the voting.

V. Principals' Report

In line with the written Principals Report, Will Carter reiterated that supporting student wellbeing and SEL has been the dominant theme of the entire school year, compared to last year, when much of the focus had to be on the logistics of operating during Covid. Students have been struggling in many ways—anxiety, depression, unexcused absences at the Upper School level, behavior issues in the Lower School. The return to a structured school environment after two years of pseudo-autonomy has also fostered rebelliousness. Additionally, it has proved very difficult to obtain outside services. All of this has reinforced our goal of making kids feel that they can be and are successful and that they are truly supported here.

Faculty and staff have stepped up to the plate, especially with several crucial positions unfilled earlier in the year. Staffing has now stabilized somewhat, hiring is proceeding, and the addition of new staff members are all helping greatly. Both Will and Drea Jacobs pointed out the importance of having had an infrastructure of support in place pre-pandemic. While everyone is exhausted by this time of the year in general and this year in particular, we're doing ok. Team meetings, the new teacher workshop and active coaching are all contributing to a sense that we have our finger on the pulse of how people are coping, there's a safety net in place, and we can react quickly when and if needed.

In response to a question from Christine Wynne, there is no one subset of more vulnerable students. A mid-year check on how students are feeling suggests we're holding steady. Seniors are naturally experiencing "senioritis." Sixth graders coming into SACS after abnormal 4th-5th grade experiences, are now adjusting more easily. Family partnership and responsiveness have been excellent, and we look forward now to being able to offer either in-person or Zoom conferences.

Admiration and appreciation go to Melissa Lassen and the college counseling team. Their work is going very well, a testament to the importance of having the capacity to translate wishes and goals into reality. SATs and their first college info session are coming up for Juniors. Seniors are posting pennants and ringing the bell on the college acceptance board, marking the return of another tradition.

Drea ended her remarks by telling us of a new partnership with North Shore Community College. We will be offering a course on understanding higher education and career paths. The professor will be here three days a week, and students will receive three college credits if they pass. We are not sure yet whether the course will be offered to 10th or 11th graders as there is some overlap with our existing 11th curriculum.

VI. Executive Director's Report

After two years of lengthy reports on Covid-related issues, Stephanie Callahan was pleased to say simply that things are going well. We have a good supply of rapid

tests, about half of students are opting to continue wearing masks, and we are now looking at the possibility of students being able to face each other for group work.

Staffing is also going well, as indicated in her written report. Several employees who left earlier in the year have now chosen to return to SACS. We do have some openings for immediate hire and are gearing up hiring for next year. The focus in tonight's meeting, however, is on staff retention and our ability to attract people going forward. We are aware of resources available to us, but we have not had the capacity to take advantage of them. We need to build this capacity, however, if we are to move forward. Accordingly, we will be hiring for several new positions.

Stephanie also covered the following, all alluded to in her written report:

- The admissions lottery was held, a few technical issues notwithstanding, on March 9th. The dip we and other charters experienced last year, probably related to preoccupation with pandemic issues, has disappeared; 6th grade applications were up 28 percent over 2021. We accepted 72 students for Grade 6 and 20 students for Grade 9,
- With our request to add additional seats denied by DESE, any future growth would have to come from becoming a regional charter school. This will be a key subject for discussion in our strategic planning. In this context, we are also following Salem Public Schools' facilities master plan development and its potential impact on us.
- Because of where holidays fall and to allow a professional day as the first day after the December break, Stephanie proposed starting the school year one day early, on Thursday August 25th. Toyuwa Newton moved to accept this proposal, seconded by Shelby Morrison. The motion passed unanimously via show of hands or voice.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Development

Even without a big matching gift yet, we have raised \$35,000 towards our Annual Fund goal of \$75,000, as reported by Diego Fellows. Fundraising for the REACH for College Gala on May 6th has realized \$5,000 of its \$40,000 goal. Mikki Wilson will be talking individually with Board members about sponsorships, which include a lower (\$250) starting level this year. Other ways the Board can support the Gala include donating when registering, participating in the giving wall, and hosting a virtual or in-person viewing party.

B. Education

Although the Committee has not met this month, Dan McCaughey reported that they are still in the process of identifying a consultant to work with us on equity issues.

C. Governance

Bill Henning covered the following topics in his report:

- He reminded everyone of the ongoing need to identify potential Board members as we currently have two open slots and will lose two more Board members at the end of the year. To help with this process, the Committee is working on a job description.
- Bill also queried the Board regarding a good time for a strategic planning retreat. People are generally open to doing this on a weekday as opposed to a weekend, perhaps in a less busy month, but there is some resistance to holding a retreat in the summer, when many people are mentally as well as physically on vacation.
- A breakfast to bring community and school leaders, including Board members, together is scheduled for Friday, April 29th. Details TBD.
- Christine Wynne moved to change the July Board meeting to Wednesday, July 20th to facilitate staff vacation plans. The motion was seconded by Shelby Morrison and passed unanimously by show of hands or voice.

D. Facilities

Sasha Durand reported that the new cafeteria is in full operation with Prime taking care of the few tweaks remaining. HVAC upgrades for Building 3 will take place during April vacation. A recent fire inspection revealed that there are a few doors whose locking mechanisms need to be replaced. We will discuss responsibility for this with Prime. Last among current issues is the need to explore why the gym seems to be overheating.

Looking longer range, we have 12 months to let Prime know if we want to remain in this location. This has major strategic and financial implications. Prime also is in the midst of long-term planning, and one question is how much space they want to devote to a school; they are not aware of any potential Salem Academy expansion. Possible expansion and location will be subjects for discussion in the months ahead.

E. Finance

Stephanie Callahan began with a discussion of proposed salaries and wages prior to presenting a first draft of a proposed FY2023 budget. Hiring and retention issues over the past year have underscored the need for understanding how we compare to other schools. She presented a written teacher compensation analysis of seven North Shore schools, which shows we are below the average of these schools.

To bring us to a more competitive position, the Committee is recommending revised salary scales for faculty and paraprofessionals along with a 4% percent for positions not on the scale. Two other scenarios with lower proposed increases were presented, but the Board agreed with the higher recommendation. This is a significant but needed increase, and it points out the need to review salaries at least bi-annually. With a template now in place, this should be easier.

In addition to raising starting salaries, the proposed increase will allow for ongoing salary increases, which is not necessarily the case in some schools. It recognizes the time commitment—longer days, longer school year—Salem Academy requires, and it recognizes that it costs less in the long run to retain than to hire teachers. Bill Henning moved to accept the proposed salary increase, seconded by Shelby Morrison. The motion passed unanimously by show of hands or voice.

Overall, the proposed FY 2023 budget, presented in writing with several scenarios, is a conservative one, even with the proposed salary increases and the addition of five new positions. Although it assumes continuation of promised Covid funds, it does not include likely additional sources of funding, e.g., foundations, a proposed higher level of state tuition reimbursement, or the fact that we will have a full-time development person on staff. We also know where we would tighten our financial belt if there were a serious tuition problem. The budget will be discussed further in future meetings.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn

Sasha Durand moved to adjourn, seconded by Alison Palmer. The motion passed unanimously by show of hands or voice, and the meeting ended at 8:20 PM.