

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, March 24, 2021 via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Edward Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Susan Low, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Paula Pitcher, Mekka Smith, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

None

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Diego Fellows, Andrea Jacobs

Guests present remotely:

Amy Stewart (SFC)
Sasha Durand, Fawaz Abusharkh

Recorder present remotely:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order, Welcome

Chair David Pabich called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 6:04 PM on March 24, 2021, via Zoom.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of February 24, 2021

Mekka Smith moved to accept the minutes of the February 24, 2021, meeting. The motion was seconded by Rick Jones and passed by a roll call vote of all eligible members. Shelby Morrison and Bill Henning abstained, having been unable to attend that meeting. Per Stephanie Callahan, we are still awaiting DESE approval of new Board members Mikki Wilson and Paula Pitcher; they are not eligible to vote until then.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh thanked everyone for their hard work in transitioning to in-school learning. He requested a moment of silence, honored by Chair David Pabich, in memory of those who died due to gun violence in Georgia and Colorado.

IV. SFC Report

Attendance at SFC meetings via Zoom continues to be excellent with 25 to 30 people participating. As a result, the SFC will probably adopt a hybrid model even after in-person meetings resume. Christine Wynne noted that such a model would enable many parents to participate who could not otherwise attend. There is a good candidate to take over the Treasurer's position next fall and activity now is focused on reading and evaluating all of the Rachel Hunt Scholarship applications. She will alert Stephanie Callahan if the SFC needs help doing this.

V. Principals' Report

On March 1st we began our new live stream learning model: half “roomers” and half “zoomers.” Matt Chuchul reported that already the benefit of smaller classes is apparent, especially for zoomers. We have settled into this model, well ahead of the state’s mandatory late April in-school requirement, and we will be teaching/learning this way for the rest of the year.

Regarding MCAS, DESE has yet to set a date for middle school assessments, so we remain flexible. We will participate in a pilot 8th grade Civics MCAS.

A DESE grant has made possible professional development workshops on the intersection of service learning, SEL and anti-racism. This has been particularly timely, given our work with Onward and current planning for next fall’s service learning. Stephanie Callahan added that part of the grant has been used to fund our work with Onward and, because we are able to participate in the service-learning PD as our own cohort, we have been able to customize and align the work with our goals and strategic plan.

At the Upper School level, live streaming is just beginning. Drea Jacobs said the focus has been on analyzing Q2 data, with particular attention being given to students who are struggling. The biggest problem is lack of work submission, and we have been identifying tools/techniques successful students have found helpful. Student spotlight videos will highlight these. Other interventions include timely assessment of grade and attendance data and encouraging struggling students to become part of bi-weekly or every week cohorts. Where indicated, we will also begin credit recovery plans now, rather than wait until the summer.

Instructional focus is also changing, moving from the teacher/student exchange typical on Zoom, dubbed “tennis,” to a more collaborative, group discussion approach, we are calling “soccer.”

In response to Mekka Smith’s question about credit recovery vs. accelerated learning programs for the summer, Stephanie Callahan said this is still being formulated. It’s been a hard year, and some families have expressed needing a break, so we are looking into a variety of options from time intensive to less time demanding programs for students. Funding will come from a variety of sources as entitlement grants can no longer extend over the summer months. We are looking for flexibility.

VI. Executive Director’s Report

Stephanie Callahan reported that the administrative team will be meeting bi-weekly with Onward. There is a detailed schedule of interviews, meetings, and data-dives as part of this “data and discovery” phase, with the final report due in May. Stephanie will provide interim updates to the Board. A variety of grants will fund this program through FY 2023.

The admissions lottery took place March 10th and went smoothly, completely electronically for the first time. Eighth grade applications were up 130 percent, other grades were lower, perhaps due to pandemic stress and reluctance to change schools unnecessarily. There were a significant number of sibling acceptances.

We are on pace for reopening the Lower School completely by the April 28th mandate. Surveillance testing continues, more than 80 percent of faculty and staff have been able to schedule their first vaccination, and, as far as we know, everyone is eager to get vaccinated. No date has been set for the Upper School reopening yet, which gives us more time to figure out scheduling, ensure testing, install new desks, and give teachers time to set up after vacation.

Almost all Lower School families have responded with about 70 percent opting for in-person learning. Upper School numbers remain in flux, as there is concern about the new 3-foot distancing.

Dave Pabich asked about overall morale. Stephanie Callahan said that being on campus feels safe and good; vaccination efforts are in full force, but the idea of 500 students in the building remains daunting. This will be a huge transition for everyone. So, there is naturally some stress...and a "get on with it" attitude.

Mekka Smith wondered if there will be room for students to receive special services. Stephanie indicated that all scheduled activities have been accommodated, but more impromptu ones, such as the need for a break out rooms, are more difficult as these spaces and the Learning Commons are being used for offices. We don't yet know about after school activities. Sports and drama are the only regularly scheduled events happening live. We will be as ready as we can be, although we expect the usual "How do I get to lunch?" bumps in the road.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee Report

Rick Jones presented Sasha Durand for Board membership, noting her past service on this Board and her facilities/construction expertise, which will be particularly welcome when Rick Jones's and Dave Pabich's terms expire in December. Bill Henning moved to elect Sasha to a full term, backdated to 1/1/21. His motion was seconded by Mekka Smith and pass unanimously by roll call vote. She now joins Paula Pitcher and Mikki Wilson in waiting for official DESE approval. Stephanie Callahan will set up a training date.

Rick reported that the Committee is working on emergency planning so that we have a clear course of action outline if, for instance, someone got sick.

B. Education Committee Report

The Committed held a very involved and helpful meeting on March 9th, as reported by Dan McCaughey. Discussion covered a variety of topics: Onward,

Lower School live streaming, student-led interventions, MCAS status, Black History Month activities and an update on the Lower School principal search.

C. Development Committee Report

Christine Wynne began by announcing that the Reach for College Gala has been moved to May 7 at 6 pm via Zoom in response to the generally busy and stressful period we are in. The Gala will focus on resilience and inspirational teacher and staff stories. Sponsorships are coming in...and we need more. Our goal is to raise \$25,000, \$10,000 more than last year. This will be important as the Annual Giving fund started plateauing in February. We need everyone to be creative in reaching out to businesses, friends, etc. Diego will resend the sponsorship package to everyone. Dave Pabich raised the possibility of restaurant packages, to be discussed offline with Christine.

D. Advocacy Report

Mekka Smith reported that she, Nina Cohen, parent Karen Russell, and approximately 200 other people participated in the virtual March 2nd charter school advocacy meeting. They had positive conversations with our local legislators, urging them to support the Student Opportunity Act, which previously excluded charter schools. We expect to know how this turns out by early May.

E. Facilities Committee Report

Dave Pabich reported that we are continuing to figure out the full scope of mitigating HVAC issues. Covid notwithstanding, this will cost about \$137,000. We have provided Prime Group with the information and will be discussing sharing this expense with them.

The Committee is considering other issues as well, from the bell commander to the need for additional space to reopen. Rick Winter asked about long-term plans for expanded space, specifically exploring SSU's South Campus. Although right now we are consumed with immediate needs, i.e., teacher planning space and break-out rooms, this has not been forgotten. Rick Jones pointed out that our current strategic plan expires in 2023, so this the time to begin considering convening an ad hoc strategic planning committee and addressing longer-term space issues.

F. Finance Committee Report

Shelby Morrison reported that we expect to remain within budget for the rest of this fiscal year as tuition has been significantly higher than projected while expenses have trended lower without classes in the building.

The focus of her remarks was the FY2022 budget, for which she presented three scenarios. All are very preliminary and basically conservative, as the tuition

number used is lower than what we are now receiving, and none of the scenarios includes possible Federal funding.

1. This is a break-even budget that includes step raises for those in a step plan and three percent raises for others. It also includes some net increases in positions, mostly part-time to full-time.
2. This is the same a #1 minus the increase in net positions.
3. This scenario has a two percent raise, and no increase in positions.

Discussion included recognition of the need to be especially conservative this past year balanced with the need for faculty and staff to be able to plan ahead. Stephanie Callahan pointed out that that the focus should be on the bottom line, with flexibility to move funds around in response to changing needs. At this point, there are too many unknowns, from what our needs will be when students are back in the building to the final tuition reimbursement number. We believe we have a good relationship with granting foundations but are in the dark regarding Federal funds.

Accordingly, Bill Henning moved to approve scenario #2 with an additional upside provision of \$50,000 in salaries should the Executive Director need it to secure important positions. This will allow return letters to go out, give Stephanie flexibility, and provide time for additional information to come in before refining the budget further. The motion was seconded by Shelby Morrison and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

VIII. Move to Adjourn

Mekka Smith move to adjourn, seconded by Rick Jones. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:57 pm.