

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, April 27, 2022**

Members present:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Susan Low, Toyuwa Newton,
Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

Susan Low, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, Alison Palmer

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 6:06 PM on April 27, 2022. The meeting began by sharing recent high points in our personal and professional lives.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of March 23, 2022

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes of the March 23rd meeting as submitted. The motion was seconded by Mekka Smith and passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh congratulated the school on its *US News and World Report* top-75 ranking among Massachusetts high schools and Drea Jacobs on her appointment as Senior Director of Academics.

IV. SFC Report

Bessie Marashi reported that Staff Appreciation Day will be celebrated with a potluck luncheon and that plans are also under way for the June 1st school picnic at Winter Island. Details for both will be finalized at next week's SFC meeting, as will determining finalists for the Sean O'Neil Award. The SFC is looking for a new treasurer for the 2022-23 school year.

She also noted the importance of now being able to meet in person. Several attendees are mothers of 6th or 7th graders, i.e., parents new to the school. Bessie was able to explain a bit about school culture—another area where Covid has precluded normal acclimatization. Some of the feedback they provided was the fact that not everyone is aware of and/or following the FaceBook page.

V. Principals' Report

We are well into Q4 and testing season, as reported by Will Carter and as detailed in the written Principals Report submitted by Drea Jacobs and Will. The first round of testing is in process; ELAs are done with math and STE in the weeks ahead. We are actively working to lighten the stress of exams with field trips and social events.

The most significant achievement he reported is having lowered the number of students in danger of retention by 40 percent. Only a few students are still in serious difficulties; most are having trouble with only one or two classes and are very close to passing. Covid has undermined students' ownership of their learning but the lifting of mask mandates, more normal classroom arrangements, and being together are signs of a slow return to normalcy. The focus now is on asking kids what finishing well looks like for them and assuring them they can do it. They are getting the message and responding positively. We are hoping summer school will not be necessary.

Will responded to a question about the impact of the state's plan to raise the MCAS passing level by saying that our goal has been and remains to ensure students do their absolute best. A higher MCAS bar should not affect us, and we will just keep moving forward.

Drea Jacobs emphasized the forward movement in student growth we are seeing compared to this time last year. As in the Lower School, Upper School students in danger of failing are relatively few and are just shy of a passing grade for the most part. We will have summer school but, like last year, the online curriculum allows kids to stop once they have completed a course. Fully 86 percent of students who took a summer school course in 2021 are passing the next course now and are on track for graduation.

Drea also reported on the following:

- We are completing the first round of in-person parent/teacher conferences in two years. Although it has meant staying until 8 pm, the joy of being able to meet in person is worth it. Virtual meetings are also available.
- Decision Day is being celebrated April 29th with cupcakes, school, pennants, apparel etc. Faculty will be using the first few minutes of the day to share something about their own introduction to college life.
- AP tests will be confined to just two weeks beginning May3rd and, while stressful, are balanced by the return of in-person end-of year senior events and the ability to be outside.

Picking up on Bessie Marashi's earlier remarks about some parents not reading the Navigator or FB page, Drea noted that she is not surprised as we send many emails and there are multiple ways of getting SACS information. Will Carter noted that redundancy is not necessarily bad. This led to a discussion about how information is communicated (emails, The Navigator, etc.) Diego Fellows indicated our communications strategies are all under review. We do welcome the return of more in-person opportunities to rebuild connections.

A recap of recent and upcoming events began with the report that the Dominican Republic trip was a big success, and despite Covid, everything went smoothly. This trip takes place only every other year to allow students and their families ample time for fundraising. There are many upcoming events, and Board members are urged to attend the ones that interest them most. Of special interest, the annual Read Trust visit will be in person this year on June 9th. It was also noted that graduation will be live again this year.

Drea is preparing to hit the ground running as Senior Director of Academics on July 1st, although right now the focus is on testing and hiring. The market is moving more slowly than usual this year, but we have several strong candidates for open positions.

VI. Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan continued the employment discussion, reviewing the hiring status presented in her written Executive Director's Report. Hiring letters for faculty are due back April 29th, and we are pleased with the low attrition among first-year teachers despite the difficulties of this past year. She was happy to report that the front desk position has been filled with a former SACs student. We continue to work with a consultant on filling teaching positions and are managing hiring for non-classroom positions internally.

Our capacity building also continues, recognizing that an organization can absorb only so much change at a time. Working with our consultant, position titles and reporting hierarchies have been reviewed and changed to be more efficient, distribute reporting relationships more evenly, and provide liaisons to the Board. We are also focusing on establishing and filling lower level positions that can then expand to provide a career growth path.

Mekka Smith reported on Massachusetts Charter School Advocacy Week events held in early March. We had a great turn-out of staff and Board members and an excellent discussion with Senator Joan Lovely. Stories of how Salem Academy has impacted students' lives resonated particularly with her. We requested that she and Representative Paul Tucker support additional funding (\$150/student) for charter school facilities to equal facilities funding provided to district schools. This was added to the House budget and now goes to the Senate. If passed, it will be adjusted annually. We enjoy excellent relationships with both Senator Lovely and Representative Tucker, and we hope to build a similar rapport with candidates in upcoming elections.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Development

Mikki Wilson reminded everyone to register for the May 6th gala if they have not already done so. She reported that we have raised \$8,158 to date with pledges for an additional \$4,000; she thanked those who have donated or made pledges.

While it does not matter materially whether one donates prior to or during the gala, it was suggested that it's always nice to say we have 100 percent board participation.

Mikki has reached out to Kathy Egmont and the Foundation and is very focused on making new connections that will pay dividends in the future, especially as right now many people and organizations are struggling financially right now. We particularly want to engage people who are passionate about education and/or offer bridges to the community.

Other upcoming events include the Staff Appreciation breakfast on April 29th, which gives faculty and staff an opportunity to meet and talk with Board members. Also, the Essex County Community Foundation Institute for Trustees will continue with virtual sessions throughout this month and next. Board members are encouraged to participate as these sessions have an excellent reputation, and all materials are available online.

B. Education

Mekka Smith provided a DEI (diversity/equity/inclusion) update. She had a very positive meeting with potential consultant, Human in Common. They have asked us to provide a sense of what we think we need and are looking for. This led to small group break-outs followed by a group discussion on DEI. Because DEI is a relatively new concept, or new language if you will, we agreed we need more clarity on defining exactly what it means. Like any new language, we need to practice and use it. We need to know more of each other's history and perspective in order to understand what DEI means to us as a board and as a school. We do not want to simply pay lip service to a trend; our goal is to establish a culture that attracts the kind of faculty and staff we want and that will be self-perpetuating.

C. Governance

Bill Henning said planning for a September strategic retreat is in process and Board members will be surveyed to establish a specific date and time.

D. Facilities

The Facilities Committee is involved in several smaller projects, from redoing the gym floor this summer while Covid funds are available to replacing carpeting. Sasha Durand requested that future budgets include a line item for such ad hoc repairs so that the Committee doesn't have to apply to the Finance Committee whenever funds are needed. She indicated that we are asking Prime to assume responsibility for needed HVAC remediation as the problems date to the original installation by the previous owner, not Salem Academy. Prime is a good landlord and have been very responsive in general.

On a separate note, Stephanie Callahan and Managing Director of Operations and HR Kristine Sgambellone are reviewing upcoming space needs. This includes immediate needs, such as break-out rooms and offices for new hires as

well as long-term needs as we grow. Sasha pointed out that letting Prime know our plans and future requirements is important as it affects their long-term planning, especially if they are considering constructing a new building for SACS at some point.

E. Finance

Payment from the state was slightly above expectations and we remain in a financially sound and stable position, as reported by Rick Winter. We are now looking at the best ways to use available funds.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn

Mikki Wilson moved to adjourn, seconded by Christine Wynne. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting ended at 8:16 PM.