

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, April 29, 2020, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Eddie Aroko, Bill Henning, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, David Pabich,
Alison Palmer, Felicia Pierce, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent: Rick Jones

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Kathy Egmont, Diego Fellows

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Susan Low, Pam Rochna (SFC)

Recorder present remotely:

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 David Pabich at 6:02 PM on April 29, 2020. Because the meeting was held remotely via Zoom software, the roll was called to ascertain attendance.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of March 25, 2020

Mekka Smith presented the minutes of the March 25, 2020, meeting. Bill Henning moved to accept them without modification, seconded by Felicia Pierce. The minutes were accepted unanimously via a roll call vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh sent good wishes to all families observing Ramadan under Covid-19 guidelines. He also reported his interfaith collaborative has been distributing food to those in need.

IV. Governance Committee

In Rick Jones's absence, Bill Henning nominated Susan Low for board membership, commenting on her impressive résumé, her work as a board member of the Bentley Academy Charter School and the positive reaction of those who have met her. His motion was seconded by Christine Wynne and passed unanimously via a roll call vote. Susan will serve a three-year term ending in December 2022. An orientation for new trustees will be scheduled via Zoom.

V. SFC Report

Pam Rochna reported that Amy Stewart will be the moderator for the SFC next year, and Bessie Mariachi will be the secretary. The SFC will meet via Zoom to develop

alternative plans for events normally held in person between now and the end of the school year. These include staff appreciation and graduation activities. David Pabich thanked Pam for all of her efforts on behalf of the SACS community.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Development Committee Report

Christine Wynne presented a PowerPoint comparison of fundraising events over the past three years that highlighted the most effective events. The Annual Fund Campaign and Emergency Relief Fund each accounted for approximately one-third of monies raised. The annual Gala and Reach the Beach events accounted for the remaining.

Our current fundraising efforts reflect the Covid-19 crisis. While overall Annual Appeal efforts are lagging somewhat, we have raised \$22,000 in the past month for the Emergency Relief, \$7,000 through individual contributions and the balance from the Read Foundation. This is impressive.

Looking ahead, we will identify a new way to celebrate our service learning partners as well as the sponsors of the cancelled March gala, and we are exploring the best messaging and means of reaching our \$ 60,000 goal by the end of the fiscal year. It is important that we generate additional funds to cover losses anticipated due to Covid-19.

Diego Fellows noted that May 5th is Giving Tuesday, which will have a Covid-19 focus this year. Because we are participating for the first time and during a pandemic that leaves many participating non-profits in need of support, our efforts will be a soft ask.

B. Finance Committee Report

Shelby Morrison presented the monthly financial report and indicated that we expect to end the fiscal year close to break even, despite previously announced lower revenues than anticipated. The salary raises we had planned for next year will probably not be possible. Our goal is to avoid any lay-offs, both to protect our teachers and because we need all budgeted positions. This has been communicated to faculty and staff, who appreciate the situation.

Christine Wynne asked about staff morale. SACS teachers recognize how hard distance teaching is, especially for those with children at home. Our teachers exchange shout outs, support one another, and are proud of the work they are doing, as crazy as their days may be. The Lower School does a teacher survey daily, incorporating their comments and voices in planning. We are providing clear expectations, adequate resources, and support.

Kathy Egmont indicated that due to the Covid-19 situation, the FY 2021 budget will include several scenarios—lower, flat and slightly higher. She has asked

DESE if the requirement to pass the budget by the end of June will be waived if the Commonwealth itself does not have a budget, which is likely to be the case. In short, we do not know what to expect. Similarly, the City of Salem is just beginning its budget process, so we do not have the required revenue data to inform our own budgeting. Nor do we know if there will be any Federal stimulus funds for education.

Kathy reported on other budget-related matters. She will attend a meeting regarding reimbursement from FEMA for Covid-19 related expenses, which we have documented carefully. We may also receive some funds from the Commonwealth through a Federal grant which will be distributed similarly to Title 1.

C. Advocacy Report

Former Board chair Nina Cohen, who continues to be actively involved in our advocacy efforts, received a letter from the Massachusetts Charter School Association announcing a new initiative to ensure adequate funding for public and charter schools. The letter projects a huge drop in revenues and accordingly urges that we alert our Federal representatives to the need for Federal assistance to help states and cities fully fund local school districts. The need is especially important as it is unlikely the Student Opportunity Act can be implemented and educational equity is threatened. This affects all public schools, not just charters, and suggests the need for an active teacher appreciation campaign. Nina will be in touch as plans are developed.

VII. Head of School Report

Distance Learning

Distance learning and associated issues continue to be the focus in both Upper and Lower Schools, as reported by Stephanie Callahan and Matt Chuchul. Prior to the April break, the primary concern was ensuring everyone was safe and had the technology needed for distance learning. The Q3 capstone event was held virtually, and Q4 began with a switch to choice blocks, including several new ones, enabling students to focus more intently on a limited number of subjects. This format is also better for ELS and special needs teaching. Overall, we are communicating well and posting consistently.

Matt Chuchul indicated that we can now see trends emerging, such as the effectiveness of small groups. Teachers are evaluating students' involvement on a "did nothing" to "exceeded expectations" basis and finding that, for the most part, students are on track, although there is room for growth. As we settle into distance learning for the remainder of the school year, we are beginning to push harder to ensure students are doing the required work. With the cancellation of MCAS testing, we will lack data to assess incoming sixth graders and will need to focus on building

relationships and reacquainting students with going to school (we hope) as we learn about them.

In response to Kathy Egmont's question regarding how often students actually see a teacher's face, Matt indicated we have initiated "office hours" (two 30-minute windows weekly) to provide additional support. Students can check in with two to five teachers every day.

The school is committed to being responsive to students and their families, understanding who is struggling and why, addressing problems and providing needed support. This includes posting schoolwork plans on the Lower School site so that parents can see what the schoolwork is. We will also provide information and assistance to parents on how they can support their children and alert them if their children are not doing work. Alison Palmer indicated that Google has classroom guides with information for parents. Pam Rochna suggested this be posted on the website.

At the Upper School level, the same patterns we see with in-school learning are apparent. Grades 9 and 10 are very engaged, seniors are involved as they see the finish line in sight, and current juniors continue to be a mixed bag of high performers and strugglers. We are addressing skills, motivation, anxiety, lack of normal structure, work and home issues in efforts to keep students engaged.

Distance Recognitions

Report cards and certificates will be mailed to students. Conferences are being held with the families of at-risk students as well as anyone else requesting a meeting. Graduation will not be postponed but will be held virtually on June 12th with an in-person event at a later date.

Hiring

Letters were sent prior to spring break and responses are due this week. The board was pleased to learn that David Shiels will return to SACS to teach 6th grade math. We will also be hiring for Upper School special ed and math positions.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

Our Enrollment for next year is strong, and we receive applications regularly. There are only 10 families who were admitted that we have been unable to contact but are continuing efforts to do so. Good communication has been a primary directive in our new environment, according to Kathy Egmont, as has been a focus on the silver linings and the positive side of dealing with this pandemic. She expressed her gratitude for the support the team has shown one another and asked what others are grateful for. Responses ranged from virtual get-togethers to opportunities for creative leadership.

IX. Vote to Adjourn

Dan McCaughey moved to adjourn, seconded by Mekka Smith. The motion was unanimously passed via a roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:45 pm.