

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, May 25, 2022**

Members present:

Sasha Durand, William Henning, Shelby Morrison, Toyuwa Newton, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens, Rick Winter, Mikki Wilson, Christine Wynne

Members present by phone:

Susan Low

Members absent:

Eddie Aroko, Dan McCaughey

Staff present:

Fallon Burke, Stephanie Callahan, Will Carter, Alex Dean

Guests present:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Bessie Marashi

Recorder present:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order

Secretary Christine Wynne called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 6:08 PM on May 25, 2022. This was followed by a moment of silence and reflection in the wake of the Uvalde, TX, school shooting.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of April 27, 2022

Shelby Morrison moved to accept the minutes of the April 27th meeting as submitted. The motion was seconded by Rick Winter and passed unanimously by in-person or phone vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh commented on the Uvalde school shooting, praying that we find the courage to change our gun laws. On a happier note, as the parent of a graduating senior, he thanked the school for the care they have taken of his (and all) children. He remarked that Salem Academy makes parents feel a part of the school and its decision-making. In return, Christine Wynne thanked Mr. Abusharkh for his input, involvement, and representation of parental issues and thinking over the past years.

IV. SFC Report

The SFC's Staff Appreciation Day went well with parents contributing to a potluck luncheon, as reported by Bessie Marashi. Ana Brea received the Sean O'Neil Award. The SFC has also determined who will receive the Rachel Hunt Award, name to be

announced at graduation. Plans for the June 1st school picnic at Winter Island are being finalized and boutonnieres for graduating seniors have been ordered.

V. School Updates

A. College Counseling

In addition to a written report, Melissa Lassen, Director of College Counseling, provided an update on the year's work. She has met one of her major goals for the year: for graduating seniors to have more choices in where to continue their education, as 95 percent have been accepted by two or more schools. All will have a post-secondary plan by June 1st; most will attend four-year colleges.

Melissa remarked on what a great cohort the Class of 2022 has been, especially in hitting the ground running last fall. She credited the hard work of her team, noting how much more they have been able to accomplish with added staff. College Aid Pro and Going Merry have made it easier to scrutinize affordability and identify scholarship opportunities; both programs allow for counselors to interface and be involved in the process.

Our college counseling program also includes addressing equity issues underrepresented populations face in the college admissions process, critical review of professional articles to improve writing and analytical skills, and access to SAT tests where needed to strengthen an application.

Looking ahead, the mandatory Collegiate Skills 12 course will now be a year-long program that Melissa will teach in collaboration with North Shore Community College, where she is now an adjunct professor. This will be available to all students and will enable her to get 9th and 10th graders focused on academic and career choices earlier. All of these efforts reflect Salem Academy's college preparatory mission. As Bessie Marashi noted, Salem Academy students are engaged earlier, guided and supported by staff in a way not seen in other schools; this reduces at-home stress considerably and is of great value to parents.

Melissa ended her report by indicating that feedback from students and alumni is always welcome. Strengthening alumni connections and feedback is a current priority and will continue to be so going forward.

B. Social-Emotional Learning

Dean of Students Chyna Onembo updated the Board on how students have fared this year as well as current trends and challenges. As detailed in her written report, this has been a difficult year for students as they transitioned back from remote to in-person learning. As has been seen across the country, students are experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. At the middle school level this has manifested predominantly as outbursts and inappropriate behavior; high school students skip classes or school completely. High-risk sex, pregnancy, self-harming and eating disorders have all increased significantly.

In response, we are constantly checking with kids to see how they are doing through surveys, questionnaires, and informal conversations. We are also reaching out to families, but without the established touchpoints and relationships we had before Covid, it has taken time to build rapport, and parents don't always know what support is available. All schools are seeing increased demand for outside resources, as we know from our conversations with them, and it is taking much longer to get needed support. The one-week wait time for a referral we once experienced may now stretch to 24 weeks. Counselors are experiencing a significant increase in the number of students they are seeing and in the number of sessions involved. Tier 2 supports, including therapeutic groups, do not have enough staff to run all of the groups needed.

As Chyna transitions to her new role as Managing Director of Safe and Supportive Culture she hopes to have more capacity to understand what is happening and how to address these issues. One way will be the hoped for continuation of the \$250,000 SEL grant from DESE, which has played a huge role in our ability to add capacity and staff training this year. Among Board member suggestions were art therapy through The Artful Life on Canal Street, the availability other grants and resources for SEL work, teaching online safety, and the need to be thinking about how we deal in the long term with the pandemic-related mental and emotional health issues that are affecting and will continue to affect our children for years to come.

VI. Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan's written report included a hiring status for next year as well as the status of our Covid protocols, which remain unchanged as we have not seen an upsurge in cases. It also included a draft grant proposal for Read Trust funding for next year; this will be finalized following the visit of trust representatives on June 9th. We are excited that some of those attending will be able to visit the school for the first time, and we look forward to continued expansion of our in-depth STEM programming, thanks to the Trust.

In light of the tragic events in Uvalde, TX, our in-person discussion focused on school safety. Salem Academy actively practices an ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate) protocol, including ongoing education for students and staff, plus drills. Essentially, ALICE protocols enable every individual to evaluate a situation and respond in the way that seems to them most appropriate. The drills aim to make students aware of the building, let them practice decision-making, and include post-drill debriefings with the police that explore different scenarios and how they felt as well as what they did. Students are informed of drills in advance and resources provided for those known to have anxiety issues.

One of the most challenging aspects of maintaining school safety is limited access to Salem Police Department School Resource Officers. There are only two officers serving all Salem schools, one of whom is not scheduled to be replaced as she takes maternity leave. We have enjoyed a very close and positive relationship with both officers; they play an important role in keeping our kids safe, helping them make good decisions, and working with families. They are well trained and care about our kids, but they, too, are on overload. And, given that they are now based in Salem

High School and Collins Middle School, we see less of them. Stephanie Callahan indicated that we have not had opportunities to talk in depth with Police Chief Lucas Miller but hope to do so soon.

The discussion also included reactions to Uvalde. Teachers were concerned and anxious; moments of silence and invitations to discuss these events were extended to students but the sad fact is that school shootings are a part of our children's world. While the Parkland shootings generated a proactive response from teens, they may well find the lack of follow-up action discouraging. School shootings have not led to significant gun control legislation, but they have produced some positive actions. Much of the SEL work we do came out of Sandy Hook, and Salem Academy was a demonstration school for safety and supportive protocols that are now mandatory in other schools, again an offshoot of Sandy Hook.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Development

We reached our fundraising goal for the Reach for College Gala. Mikki Wilson reported that we raised \$30,157 with this event and now have \$56,937 toward our \$75,000 Annual Fund goal. She credited the outstanding work of the entire committee and noted that this is especially noteworthy for a small, volunteer committee in our current economic environment.

B. Education

There was no report from this committee this month.

C. Governance

Bill Henning reported on several different Governance Committee activities.

- He thanked those who attended the breakfast with faculty and staff. He also thanked Christine Wynne for organizing this event.
- Mark Stevens is organizing having board member photos taken
- Bill will be sending surveys in connection with the Executive Director's annual review and to determine dates and details for our strategic planning process, including whether the current strategic plan should be extended or an entirely new plan undertaken.

Mekka Smith announced that she will be doing her doctoral residency with the US Department of Education in Washington, DC. Accordingly, she will continue as Chair as long as public meeting law allows. Dan McCaughey will continue in his current role but assume the responsibilities of the chairmanship if necessary.

D. Facilities

The Facilities Committee is looking at both immediate and longer-term space needs. Adding capacity means we desperately need more offices. Committee members have been meeting with Stephanie Callahan and Krissy Sgambellone to explore possibilities. Given that the Learning Center is one option, the installation of new carpeting there will be postponed.

Other current projects include refinishing the gym floor this summer and installing a video camera and buzzer system in Building 3 for safety reasons. Discussions with Prime Group regarding various requests and lease responsibilities are ongoing.

E. Finance

Our financial position remains strong, as reported by Rick Winter. The focus right now is on next year's budget, which will be discussed at the June meeting.

Rick also noted the extraordinary efforts of Stephanie Callahan this past year, holding in effect two jobs as well as dealing with the pandemic. In recognition of this, and with the Finance Committee in agreement, Bill Henning moved to give her a \$15,000 bonus this year. The motion was seconded by Rick Winter and passed unanimously.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn

Alison Palmer moved to adjourn, seconded by Christine Wynne. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting ended at 8:27 PM.