

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, May 26, 2021, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Sasha Durand, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Paula Pitcher, Mekka Smith, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

Edward Aroko, Susan Low, Shelby Morrison

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Diego Fellows, Andrea Jacobs

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Alex Dean, Steve Palmer

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 May 26, 2021, via Zoom.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of April 28, 2021

Mekka Smith noted that two guests were present remotely: Fawaz Abusharkh and Alex Dean. Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes of the April 26, 2021, meeting as amended. Christine Wynne seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously via roll call vote.

III. Public Comment

Two guests provided public comment. Fawaz Abusharkh asked that thoughts and prayers for peace be offered following the recent wave of violence in both America and in the Middle East.

Former trustee Steve Palmer spoke about the George Brandenburg Science Prize, which honors an early supporter of Salem Academy and its science program. George, an internationally renowned physicist died in 2013. His wife Ellen, a leader in the Unitarian Universalist Church, was also a strong supporter of the school. Ellen's death last September prompted Steve to suggest renaming this award, which carries a \$500 scholarship, the George and Ellen Brandenburg Science Prize. Bill Henning moved to do so, seconded by Sasha Durand. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

The discussion brought to light the fact that today's students (and others) do not know about the Brandenburs. Steve will help Stephanie Callahan in drafting some information about them to give to recipients.

In response to Bill Henning's question whether our various prizes are endowed or if funds must be raised annually, Stephanie Callahan indicated that such donations are one-time gifts accounted for in general Foundation funds. With the exception of an occasional carry over to the following year if the gift was restricted. funds are raised

annually. Bill suggested, and the Board agreed, that we should begin thinking about setting aside funds when it is financially feasible to do so in order to endow such prizes in the future. He cited, as an example, that Salem Rotary scholarship endowment that has grown significantly over the past 25 years.

IV. SFC Report

In Amy Stewart's absence, Stephanie Callahan addressed all of the end-of-year activities in which the SFC is involved. These include the Rachel Hunt Scholarship, providing T-shirts for graduating 8th graders and flowers or boutonnieres for graduating seniors. The SFC also sponsoring a meeting for the parents of rising 9th graders. Last, Massiel Garcia is on board to take over as the SFC treasurer next fall.

V. Principals' Report

Matt Chuchul reported that the Q3 celebration in the gym marked the first time all Lower School grades have been together since reopening, whether in person or via livestreaming. The key words: excitement and joy. Similarly, he was pleased to report on other aspects of student life. The Pauper Princess is still aiming for a screening before the year's end. AAPI heritage month and Juneteenth will be recognized at lunch time, when the most students are together. Upper School students are presenting to Lower School students, and we will indeed celebrate Field Day this year.

Celebrations aside, we are focused on a strong closing to the school year, including gearing up for MCAS. Matt reported that we are also pretty well set for summer school, which will take a more holistic rather than specific subject approach and run throughout July. In the past, summer school was remedial, with students studying a specific subject for two hours a day for a week.

Mikki Wilson asked for more information on this outside curriculum. Called BellXcel, it has been made possible by a grant from DESE and, in addition to the enrichment aspect of covering different subjects, it includes a management system to track attendance, run surveys, and conduct outreach to parents. Its more holistic nature also allows more flexibility in hiring, which is good, as fewer teachers may be available after such a difficult school year.

We are anticipating about 50 students for summer school, more than we have had in the past in the Lower School. This will include some students who may not have qualified in the past but, because of the shorter school year and remote learning, can benefit from more learning time to be ready for September. Additional students may be invited if there are open seats.

Drea Jacobs noted that the same sense of excitement for end-of-year activities has permeated the Upper School. She is particularly proud of how both students and staff have adapted to the full-day schedule and live streaming. This was a huge shift, and everyone is showing up for a strong finish to the school year.

Specifically, on the service-learning front, 9th and 10th graders have been out in the community and there is a 9th grade pride parade planned for June 17th. Seniors, many of whose projects were sabotaged by the pandemic, responded by pairing up, supporting others projects and, in all cases, are reflecting and reporting on their projects, from planning through obstacles, lessons learned and how it could be done differently.

Other activities have included surveying remote learners who reported a positive experience overall and provided valuable feedback, as the amount of time they have had to be online has been a concern. We are in the midst of a testing marathon, including both AP tests and MCAS. Becca Alfredson has done an excellent job of coordinating these.

The college counseling team is posting commitments on both Instagram and FaceBook. Although 100 percent of the class has been accepted at a four-year college, not all have made commitments, as some students still have work to do in order to graduate. While some students have been accepted at highly competitive schools, more are opting to stay local for financial or other pandemic-related reasons. It was also noted that some schools, e.g, Salem State, have specific programs like nursing that are very competitive. It has been an atypical year all around, including the fact that admissions testing criteria varied from school to school and we have an unusually high percentage of students on IEPs.

Mikki Wilson wondered about first-generation college students. Drea indicated that, while we do have available data, we have not had time to examine it. We do try to support these students by connecting them with someone who went to the college, and we are looking at the possibility of on-campus weekends for first-generation college applicants. We have room to grow in matching our graduates to the right college in terms of financial support, graduation rates, alumni connections, etc.

VI. Executive Director's Report

Like everyone else, Stephanie Callahan's report focused initially on the high spirits occasioned by the reopening of in-school learning and preparation for the end of the school year. She thanked Drea and Matt for a comprehensive look at the past four weeks. To their report, she added that the Read Foundation visit will be done via Zoom on June 7th and we are planning for an in-person gathering on the last day of school. Graduation will also be in person, but limited in capacity, so it will be live streamed for Board members and others.

Looking ahead, we are over enrolled by 33 students with 513 accepted for next year; we do expect that number to change over the summer. Additionally, we are exploring a charter amendment that would raise the cap on the number of students we can have. Stephanie has talked to DESE; they are waiting on data in August and have pushed the deadline to November, so we will not have to submit our request until fall. If our request is rejected, we be forced to limit the number of incoming 9th graders.

Over enrollment has become a growing concern. The addition of the arts center, gym, more courses and extracurricular activities, including an expanded athletic

program, has meant that fewer students are leaving. We have been serving around 495 students and will continue to serve all accepted students, but we are close to our cap...and we would like to be compensated for the actual number of students in the school.

Bill Henning asked if we have considered becoming a regional vs. a Salem school. This was last discussed during Kathy Egmont's first year as we would have to become regional to grow significantly. The Board had begun considering an ad hoc strategic planning committee when the pandemic struck. These are topics for further discussion as we undertake longer-term planning re facilities and staff needs.

More immediately, the June Board meeting may be in person; we will use a Doodle poll to determine whether to meet in person or via Zoom.

At this time, fall re-opening is mandated to be in person, which would be extremely difficult for SACS if 3-foot distancing is still required. Many unknowns and issues surrounding next fall remain to be resolved. We do have an approved calendar of 187 learning days with August 30 the first day of school for returning students

VII. Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee Report

Rick Jones reported that Stephanie Callahan presented an emergency planning draft to the committee; they in turn provided feedback to inform the next draft. The committee is looking at leadership planning for the Board as well as candidates to fill the vacancies that will occur in January when Rick Jones's, Dave Pabich's and Christine Wynne's terms expire. The Committee welcomes suggestions, which should be sent directly to Rick. We need people with finance, facilities and development expertise as well as a parent.

Mekka Smith and Dave Pabich have had an initial conversation about coordinating an in-person Board retreat. This will be discussed in June. In the meantime, Mekka will email the Board to identify the best time for such an event. Possible topics include building community, deepening our equity work, reflecting on the past year and initiating the strategic planning discussion.

B. Education Committee Report

Stephanie Callahan indicated that the committee did meet this month. The focus was on Onward's halfway report and on reopening, which has been discussed above.

C. Development Committee Report

Christine Wynne was pleased to announce the Reach for College Gala was highly successful, thanks especially to those who gave so generously of their

time and financial support. Our goal in March was \$25,000; we have raised \$27,00, with \$2,000 in additional pledges till outstanding. This means that, with other pledges to the Annual Fund, we are within \$2,500 of reaching our \$70,000 goal. Christine expressed the hope that contributions will be made prior to June 30th if possible.

On a different topic, she indicated that she, Alison Palmer, Mikki Wilson and Eddie Aroko are gathering data and working through the Alumni Association to engage, sustain, and ensure that our graduates get through college.

D. Facilities Committee Report

Dave Pabich reported that this committee is continuing to monitor reopening and still in discussion with Prime regarding needed HVAC improvements. The focus is on safety in the classroom first, then on issues of comfort.

We are also exploring obtaining more outdoor space, possibly by the side of the gym. We met with the Salem's arborist and will reach out to Prime re obtaining free trees from the city. There are more than 2,000 available and as many as 75 different species on offer.

We have been approached by Avison Young, a commercial real estate advisor working with Prime Group on the future of Shetland Park. They are currently talking to various stakeholders. Rick Jones will attend some of the ongoing meetings.

E. Finance Committee Report

Bill Henning presented a very positive report. Tuition numbers have held and we are in excellent shape due to higher than anticipated revenues and lower than anticipated expenses. Multiple budget scenarios have been sent to the Board, and a proposed final budget will be presented at the June meeting. We are seeking some new grants and will budget tuition numbers very conservatively.

Move to Adjourn

Bill Henning moved to adjourn, seconded by Christine Wynne. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:38 pm.