

**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School  
Wednesday, May 27, 2020, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Edward Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison,  
David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Felicia Pierce, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter

Members absent: Christine Wynne, Susan Lo

Staff present remotely:

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

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Nina Cohen, 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 6:04 PM on May 27, 2020.

**II. Minutes of the Meeting of April 29, 2020**

Mekka Smith presented the minutes of the April 29, 2020, meeting. It was noted that Rick Jones was erroneously listed as being present and that Nina Cohen was in attendance as a guest. The motion was made and seconded to accept the minutes with revisions and was approved unanimously with a roll call vote.

**III. Public Comment**

Fawaz Abusharkh commented that Ramadan has ended; he hopes there will be better days ahead.

**IV. Graduation Report**

Stephanie Callahan provided details on graduation, which will be celebrated in a variety of ways, keeping with Salem Academy traditions where possible. We will hold our graduation as scheduled, at 6 pm on June 12, while everyone is still here. The ceremony itself will be a video created by Jostens and presented on a Zoom platform webinar style. Kathy Egmont will send the link to enable home viewing; the ceremony will also be on SATV.

It will include the full roster of class marshals, graduation speakers and seniors presenting their legacies, all taped in advance in Albright. Caps and gowns were delivered in person, along with senior signs, graciously donated by the Rochna family. Diplomas are being physically presented to students by their families, followed by photos opps and staff waiting outside to cheer and applaud. Everything has gone smoothly and on time,

Diego Fellows has created a special website for the seniors and “senior spotlights” have been posted on social media highlighting each senior individually. The whole experience has proved very moving and validates the decision to celebrate now, rather than postpone events. Signing day will be June 1<sup>st</sup>, also the likely date of the senior parade.

## V. SFC Report

Pam Rochna reported that the SFC met via Zoom on May 4<sup>th</sup> and will meet again (remotely) on June 1<sup>st</sup>. The virtual platform has attracted more attendees and may be a good option periodically in the future. They helped to facilitate the Sean O’Neil award, given each year to a staff member nominated by their peers. This year’s recipient is Leni De los Santos. The Rachel Hunt scholarship will be given to Dylan Higgins at graduation.

Because it was not possible to hold a staff appreciation lunch this year, the SFC will give all staff a SACS metal water bottle and note. The last activity of the year is the Honors Breakfast; ideas are still being entertained, and Board members suggested everything from “breakfast chubbies” to bagel certificates. It is likely to be a “grab and go” event as delivering to 130+ students is not feasible. Volunteers may be needed as well as food donations as this is not a funded event.

## VI. Committee Reports

### A. Development Committee Report

Kathy Egmont read a report from Christine Wynne, who was unable to attend tonight’s meeting. She looks forward to the virtual toast to celebrate Salem Academy’s gala sponsors and service learning partners. This will be a Zoom event. In the meantime, the Committee will use the month of June to raise the additional funds, about \$6,000 required to reach our \$60,000 Annual Fund goal. With anticipated pledges, this is feasible.

Special opportunities include funding the Rachel Hunt Scholarship or the new Service Learning Award (each \$500), one of several trustee prizes, or donating to cover the \$8,000 in additional expenses incurred with virtual graduation.

What is particularly important to notice is the active spirit of giving that we see all around us, from the Rochna family’s donation of the senior signs to \$24,000 in the Covid-19 Emergency Relief Fund. If we are able to reach our Annual Fund goal, the SACS community will have raised in total \$84,000 this year, compared to less than \$25,000 just three years ago.

Kathy Egmont has shared this accomplishment with Bill Garr of the Read Foundation who in turn indicated that the Foundation expects to be able to support her funding proposal. Kathy reported that she had mentioned to Bill Garr, the consultant supporting the Read Foundation, the thought of establishing an endowment as well.

## **B. Finance Committee Report**

Financially, we are tracking on budget and anticipate breaking even at the end of the fiscal year in June. As Shelby Morrison reported, there have been no unexpected revenues or major expenses at this time. The Committee is taking a very conservative approach, focusing on three scenarios for the FY2021 budget—flat revenues (most likely), a small increase or potentially a decrease.

The crux of the issue is that we are required to submit a budget by June 30 but cannot budget with any certainty in the absence of a State budget, which will not be available until July and, in these uncertain times, remains an unknown factor. There are many rumors circulating re funding cuts, none of which can be verified. We do hope to receive some stimulus monies, amount unknown. We will review our budget when information becomes available and, accordingly, we are deferring all but critical capital expenses and holding off on hiring for new positions.

Bill Henning commented that, on the May 26 Rotary lunch call, he asked Mayor Driscoll how decreases in the City's budget would affect the school budget. She indicated that they were hoping to avoid layoffs. Nina Cohen asked if anyone knew Stephen Zrike, Salem's new Superintendent of Schools. Kathy Egmont does, says he is well-regarded and she has established email contact with him over the importance of communication as decisions about schools reopening and choices made will affect all of us in the fall.

## **C. Facilities**

The committee is focusing on what is required to reopen the school, and if it can reopen under Covid-19 guidelines. No one is in the building at present except for specific employees on certain days. Ms. Sgambellone is there every day and she is managing the cleaning, the guidelines for people coming into the building and planning for re-opening the buildings. She is exploring methods for flushing the water system to avoid the possibility of Legionnaire's Disease contamination. At this point, the focus is on being flexible and pro-active.

## **D. Education**

Dan McCaughey reported that Kathy Egmont had shared with the committee the plan for addressing grading issues resulting from pandemic-related interruptions to normal school operation. The goal is to balance fairness to students unable to participate fully in remote learning for reasons that cannot be helped, such as lack of technology or the need to work to support the family, with fairness to others who have been working hard on their academics.

Grades will be based on a student's status in March or progress made since then. The higher of students' 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> quarter grade will be factored into their GPA. Matt Chuchul indicated that all students will be promoted to the next grade and that plans will be in place for 7<sup>th</sup> graders needing help. Kathy Egmont commented that this is a reflection of a strong academic team that knows its students and will be ready with remediation plans on day one of the school year.

## VII. Head of School Report

Stephanie Callahan reported that student engagement is being tracked daily. It is fairly stable, supported by a variety of practices, e.g. study buddies, mentors, and daily phone calls. Grades reflect normal fluctuations with more than 80 percent remaining the same, about 10 percent going up, and only 6 percent showing slight decreases.

Both the Upper and Lower Schools have been doing parent conferences; staff have met with more than 80 of families and are on track to reach their goal of meeting with all families by the end of the school year. A number of family activities are on the schedule, from workshops to trivia nights to games. All of these are effective in keeping students and their families engaged.

Specific events include the end-of-year celebration for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades on Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup>. Eighth graders will pick up their t-shirts and graduation certificate at their drive-by celebration on Thursday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, to be followed by graduation the next day in a Zoom-style ceremony.

Matt Chuchul responded to Nina Cohen's question about the number of 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders leaving SACS for other schools, indicating that it appears to be a typical year, although some students are still undecided.

Stephanie Callahan reported that the impact of Covid-19 on students' ability to complete their service learning projects has required a reassessment of grading for seniors. They have been given three options: opting out completely, taking it as a pass for credit without a grade, or completing their project. All options required some form of reflection and the 10 percent who completed the program have presented to the committee and described the impact service learning has had on them.

Stephanie also reported on hiring. Retention overall has been good. We are pleased to welcome back Dave Shiels and are hiring our first SACS graduate, Hannah Fortin. Hiring for other positions is in process.

## VIII. Executive Director's Report

Kathy Egmont began with the good news that our health insurance premium will go up only six percent. We will have a higher deductible but will be able to avoid raising the amount employees must pay and keeping it a flat fee, important in a year when raises are not possible. Open enrollment will take place online June 1-8.

Discussion then shifted to the pressing issue of reopening the school, a particular problem for Salem Academy given the layout of the building, limited number of classrooms, narrow hallways, and offices that will not accommodate social distancing. Other significant issues include the possible need for additional nurses and the expense of additional buses.

Building and sustaining our community and culture are also critical, and there are no immediate solutions to physical distancing problems, whether considering a mix of remote and in-school learning, smaller classes or alternating Upper and Lower School physical attendance.

Problems are compounded by the lack of direction from the State. CDC guidelines often say, "if feasible," but the real issue remains, is it safe? We do not know if the State will issue guidelines or mandates, nor do we know at this point what Salem Public Schools, particularly Salem High School, will do.

Rick Jones asked if we are prepared to teach remotely in the fall. Kathy Egmont indicated we would be, although not happily. Alex Dean also pointed out that continued remote learning will be particularly difficult with an incoming class of sixth grade students whom we do not know as well as each grade moving to new teachers where no relationship has been built.

Because of the in-flux nature of the situation, an emergency meeting of the Board may be required in August.

**IX. Vote to Adjourn**

Bill Henning moved to adjourn, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion was unanimously passed by a roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:24 pm.