

**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School  
Wednesday, June 22, 2022**

Members present via Zoom:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Dan McCaughey, Toyuwa Newton, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mark Stevens, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

Susan Low, Shelby Morrison, Mikki Wilson

Staff present via Zoom:

Stephanie Callahan, Diego Fellows

Guests present via Zoom:

Bessie Marashi

Recorder present via Zoom:

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 6:02 PM on June 22, 2022, via Zoom. She acknowledged the commemoration of Juneteenth, remarking on growing student involvement in this annual event.

**II. Minutes of the Meeting of June 22, 2022**

Mekka Smith moved to accept the minutes of the June 22nd meeting, amended to state that she will continue in her role as chair as long as public meeting laws allow, with Dan McCaughey assuming the responsibilities of the chair when and if required. The motion was seconded by Sasha Durand and passed by roll call vote with abstentions by Eddie Aroko and Dan McCaughey, who were not present.

**III. Public Comment**

Alex Dean, who has taught at Salem Academy for five years, thanked the Board for its support as he prepares to leave for a teaching assignment in India. He mentioned that the question of expanding as a regional charter school had been under discussion when he joined Salem Academy, and he encouraged the Board to embrace this question as it embarks on a new strategic planning process.

**IV. SFC Report**

Bessie Marashi began her report remarking on the beautiful graduation ceremony held June 10<sup>th</sup> and noting that Adelaide Cutler received the Rachel Hunt scholarship. Although bad weather forced cancellation of the school picnic, the SFC hopes to reschedule this in August.

She also reported that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher appreciation event went well and that the 3.8 Brunch scheduled for June 23<sup>rd</sup> will take place in the gym and will be followed by lunch. Moving Up ceremonies and 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation take place in the

afternoon, at which time rising 9<sup>th</sup> graders will receive their class shirt, designed, and voted on by students. New 9<sup>th</sup> graders will receive theirs in the fall.

Last, Bessie will continue as moderator, but the SFC is looking for a new treasurer.

## V. School Updates

### A. Principal and Executive Director Reports

Both Will Carter and Drea Jacobs, principals of the lower and upper schools respectively, were unable to attend but submitted written reports covering end-of-year academic and student life events and plans for summer school. Stephanie Callahan indicated that 4<sup>th</sup> quarter performance data will not be available until next month.

Bill Henning noted that it seemed the Board had received less information on grades and academic reporting this year, including comparisons to prior years. Stephanie indicated that remote learning and other pandemic-related issues have made comparisons impossible. In addition, DESE has required changes in focus and priorities. As a greater degree of normalcy returns, she expects to be able to provide more comparative data in the year ahead.

Complementing her written Executive Director report, Stephanie said that the Read Foundation visit went very well. She especially noted the contributions of Will and Drea, both of whom are juggling many responsibilities at this time. All teachers and staff in positions funded by the Trust were present and actively participated. We anticipate hearing from the Trust re future funding by the end of the month.

Our formal work with Onward has concluded with a transition meeting scheduled for the week of June 27<sup>th</sup>. On a positive note, we have developed common language and set expectations for becoming even more actively anti-racist. This has been a challenging year to undertake this work, however, with many transitions, high teacher turnover, stress and fatigue undermining what was a far more time-consuming commitment than we had realized. In recognition of this, Onward shifted to an online platform new people could (and will continue to be able to) access.

Looking ahead, we need time for small group discussions, time as well to facilitate the individual work that is required, and to build muscle for tough conversations. Dan McCaughey noted this needs to be incorporated into our strategic planning, and Christine Wynne suggested we think about a committee to monitor and promote this work.

On the hiring front, we are close to having finalists for the Upper School Principal position. This process will move more quickly when the school year ends. Stephanie noted that higher level positions need to be evaluated carefully; a candidate who appears to hold a lower-level position may be working in a much larger school and is actually well qualified for a more senior position.

We have many open teaching positions, especially for 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and we do have candidates in the pipeline. Our new salary structure does make us more competitive, and salary does not seem to be the issue it was last year. We may opt to continue working with our outside consultant for one more month.

This discussion provided a natural segue into proposed teacher bonuses based on longevity. Such bonuses promote retention, which is important, but we believe it is equally important to recognize the loyalty and experience these teachers bring to Salem Academy. While individual recognitions have taken place in the past, this is the first time we have addressed bonuses for the faculty as a whole.

A written proposal, reviewed by the Finance Committee, outlined bonuses for teachers who have been at Salem Academy at least five years and who will be returning the following fall. Because this would be the first year such bonuses are paid, the proposal provides retroactive awards for current teachers who have been here from five to 19 years. Bill Henning moved to accept the proposal, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

## **B. Strategic Plan Update**

Stephanie Callahan submitted a spreadsheet briefly outlining the status of the goals and objectives of the five-year plan developed in 2018. In her oral presentation, she noted first that the Board and its committees will need to take a much deeper dive to assess where we are and where we need/want to go. For this meeting she highlighted the following:

### Goals 1, 2, and 3

Goal #1 concerns educational programming; #2 focuses on creating and maintaining a positive school culture, and #3 is about promoting best teaching practices. In all cases, these are ongoing goals. Academically, we have made continuous improvements since 2018, despite Covid, including stronger STEM and special ed programs. From curriculum to training and professional development, we have made significant improvements in what we offer and how it is presented. Covid forced a redirection of much of our energy and processes, but we have not lost sight of our stated academic, cultural, or professional teaching goals.

It is important to note that Covid has radically changed the social landscape; kids have different needs today, and pandemic upheaval means we now have much self-assessment and resource building ahead of us.

Overall, the first three goals are ones we address on a daily basis; they will not change, but how we plan to meet them will.

### Goals 4 and 5

These address the school's fiscal stability and our ability to sustain our mission. Again, Covid has radically changed the context in which we now operate, and it puts us on the alert for the need to be able to accommodate unknown future

changes. These goals encompass questions of how large we want to be, our geographical reach, where we are physically located, the kind of facilities we will need, and the commensurate resources and infrastructure required. These are critical questions without easy answers; much of our strategic planning focus will need to be here.

## **VI. Committee Reports**

### **A. Development**

Diego Fellows thanked the Board and the Foundation for their support, financial and otherwise, throughout this past year. We are close to reaching our \$75,000 Annual Fund goal by the June 30<sup>th</sup> end of our fiscal year. Christine Wynne congratulated Diego, Mikki Wilson, Alison Palmer, and Eddie Aroko on their accomplishments during a difficult year. She also thanked Dan McCaughey for his generous matching gifts over the past four years.

### **B. Education**

The Committee met and reviewed the Principals Reports and our work with Onward, both covered elsewhere in these minutes.

### **C. Governance**

Bill Henning reported that faculty, staff, and family surveys for the Executive Director's evaluation next fall have been completed. The Board will be surveyed in July. Bill noted that Leni De los Santos has been very helpful. The Governance Committee will be meeting June 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss the fall strategic retreat. Mekka Smith requested that Board members who have not yet provided input are encouraged to do so before that meeting if possible.

Christine Wynne reminded the Board of a meeting last fall at which time the idea of an endowment was briefly discussed. The Pabich family took it from there. Working with the Foundation, Dick and Diane Pabich have made a significant gift to help establish an endowment, with funds to be used for graduation awards that provide seniors with more options in choosing a college. A party or celebration involving this Board, the Foundation Board and the Pabichs is being planned.

Bill reported that because of this gift the Foundation has developed and approved an investment policy, established an investment committee, and selected a financial advisor. After interviewing three potential advisors (the Essex County Community Foundation, TimeScale, and Cabot Wealth Management), the Foundation voted to work with Cabot Wealth Management.

The Foundation's investment committee will include two members of our board, the Treasurer (Rick Winter) and a member to be appointed every year at our annual meeting in December. Christine Wynne moved to appoint Bill Henning to this committee for the remainder of this year. The motion was seconded by Sasha Durand and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

#### **D. Facilities**

Sasha Durand covered multiple minor issues with which the committee has been dealing, from plumbing work being done in Building 3 to lighting in the basement to HVAC in the gym. We are in discussion with Prime regarding who is financially responsible for these different projects. She was pleased to report that Prime supported our request for a recess yard; a formal agreement will be drafted, and we will be responsible for maintaining the yard. Last, architect John Seger has developed plans for new offices to be carved out of the current Learning Common. These are badly needed as we continue to bring new staff on board.

#### **E. Finance**

Our financial position remains strong, thanks to good financial management and revenues remaining above projections for the current fiscal year. Rick Winter's report focused on the proposed budget for the coming fiscal year and included spreadsheets with various revenue projections as well as the proposed budget itself.

Once again, we have budgeted very conservatively. We are likely to receive more in tuition from the State than the proposal reflects and additional funding from other grants is likely. At the same time, we have accommodated an \$85,000 increase in staffing expense and added more funding for such things as anticipated higher transportation costs. Given our pandemic experience, the committee looked carefully at different "what if" scenarios; we know where we can freeze or find funds should the need arise. Rick Winter moved to accept the FY2023 budget as presented; the motion was seconded by Mekka Smith and passed unanimously by roll call vote.

#### **VII. Vote to Adjourn**

Bill Henning moved to adjourn, seconded by Mekka Smith. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 8:52 PM.