

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Tuesday, August 11, 2020, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Edward Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Susan Low, Dan McCaughey, David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Felicia Pierce, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

Shelby Morrison

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Kathy Egmont, Diego Fellows, Andrea Jacobs

Guests present remotely:

The meeting was presented by ZOOM, YouTube and guests names are recorded on those sites.

Recorder present remotely:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order, Welcome

A special meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees was held on August 11, 2020, to review and vote on the proposed school reopening plan, school calendar, and health protocol guidelines. The meeting was called to order by Chair David Pabich at 6:06 PM, via Zoom. Executive Director Kathy Egmont welcomed all attendees and explained that we are streaming live via FaceBook and using an expanded Zoom platform to allow more participants.

II. Proposed Plan for the Reopening of School for 2020-2021

Kathy Egmont and Stephanie Callahan provided a slide presentation overview of the comprehensive *Covid-19 Return to School Plan 2020-2021*, which is available in its entirety on the school website. The plan was developed in collaboration with a wide spectrum of faculty and staff as well as Board Finance and Facilities Committees and moderators of the SFC.

Stephanie began by reviewing the state mandate to look at three options: in-school, fully remote, and a hybrid teaching model. In the context of our goal providing a rigorous, challenging educational path that leads to college, she noted the many considerations to be balanced: facility issues, individual student needs, parental and faculty needs. The key goals for reopening are safety, high expectations for learning, relationship building, strong communication and flexibility.

Recommendation

In order to best meet these goals, the administration is recommending a “phased-in remote to hybrid” plan, which has all students beginning the school year remotely for two weeks, then bringing students back gradually, class by class, roughly every two

weeks in order to manage safety protocols. As Kathy pointed out, this allows us to test systems and communications and ensure everyone's safety. Under this plan, grades 6-9 would be back in school by mid-November, at which time we will be better able to assess future direction and our ability to bring back grades 10-12. She made several important notes:

- In-school means half-days (8:30 to 12:30), four days a week, to give teachers time to prepare for both remote and in-person learning and to allow for adequate cleaning and sanitizing.
- Everyone will be required to wear a mask in-school except for those with valid medical exemptions.
- Any family can opt out of in-person instruction and remain remote all year.
- There will be opportunities for in-person events, team meetings, participation in any sports taking place.
- Extra staff will be provided to work with seniors applying to college.
- This approach also prioritizes the needs of special populations and 6th graders, who are new to the school.

The fully in-school approach was rejected as our facilities cannot accommodate required safety protocols, such as 6-foot distancing. The fully remote model does not allow for needed social interaction, relationship building, and some types of in-person learning.

Planning Considerations and School Schedule

Stephanie reviewed the design principles involved.

- The remote program will be more structured than this past spring's program and includes time for breaks and both synchronous (working together, directly with teacher) and asynchronous (independent or teamwork) sessions to provide variety and minimize Zoom fatigue.
- While technology and tools are critical, it is our teachers and our curriculum that will provide the structure and consistency.
- Morning Connections will help to build community, as will clubs and activities, which will begin remotely but transition to in-person meetings when safe.
- There is a focus on diagnostics and intervention blocks to compensate for spring learning loss and to ensure all students have the support they need.
- "Pivot" is the word of the day; the plan is designed to be flexible and allow us to respond quickly to mandated or indicated changes.

The schedule exceeds state requirements for both instructional hours and number of days from September 15, 2020 to June 25, 2021. It allows for staff training and student/family orientations for two weeks (August 26 – September 15) prior to the start of remote classes on September 15 and for two weeks of purely remote learning before in-school classes begin on September 28. It maintains Friday as an early-release day, provides four in-person learning hours per day (dependent on bus schedules) and ensures that teachers will have only one choice block per grade through Q1.

Kathy noted that our budget includes funds for both an additional part-time counselor and part-time college counselor as well as a second nurse. We may also need additional paraprofessionals, e.g., as bus monitors. We are cognizant of the nursing needs due to Covid-19, and we are aware of the possible need to assist teachers with child care issues.

Facilities and Operations

The building has undergone a thorough HVAC assessment and steps are being taken to ensure the best ventilation possible. These include VERVE 13 filters and I-waves, HEPA filtration purifiers for interior rooms, and a request to our landlord for screens on all windows that do not already have them. Additional measures we are taking include the following:

- We have adequate PPE supplies on hand and will procure plexiglass dividers as needed.
- Interior offices have been reworked to allow proper distancing.
- Signage for distancing, sanitizing and mask wearing will be in place.
- We are looking at a way to provide a remote learning space for partners.

Metrics guiding in-person/remote decisions

Decisions will be based on data, state requirements and physical feasibility as we strive to provide the best educational experience possible for our students. We will follow community infection rates as well as our own exposure and infection rates. The building will be closed if we are unable to have both an administrator and a nurse on duty.

Financial considerations

We are dealing with the uncertainty of not knowing the State budget, now not likely to be available before October or what charter school funding will look like. We do know Chapter 70 funding has been decided and that FEMA/MEMA funding will be available. We hope such funds can be used for ventilation and facilities expenses, but, because we lease rather than own our facilities, we must show proof of expenses for which we are responsible; we are in discussion with our landlord regarding this. Federal and State funding will also be important, and we have applied for all applicable grants available to us.

III. Discussion

Board members were able to make comments, raise questions and respond to submitted questions/comments prior to opening discussion to the public.

- In response to Rick Winter's question, Kathy and Stephanie clarified that out-of-state protocols do not apply to states Massachusetts has identified as reciprocally safe.
- Christine Wynne asked how an all-remote student navigates the in-school weeks and was told they would be attached to the cohort learning remotely that week. Kathy indicated that dates have not yet been set for parents to

make the remote/in-school decision, but that flipping back and forth between options will not be possible.

- Mekka Smith asked which city protocol we will follow given that we have students (and teachers) from other municipalities with different risk levels (red, yellow, green, white). We have not yet received state guidance on this, but we are working with the Salem Board of Health, Mayor Driscoll and Superintendent Zrike.
- Transportation continues to be an unknown factor in terms of times, routes and capacity. We currently have 65 students requesting bus transportation. We are working with the City on this as well.
- A question submitted by Denise Lee asked when everyone would be back in school. This is outlined in the plan, which indicates that the date will depend on a post-Q1 assessment. A best-case scenario would have everyone back in school on the hybrid schedule just before winter break.
- In response to a question from Christine Wynne, the additional administrative work imposed by the pandemic will be monitored to assess the need for more help. Measures to minimize the administrative workload include discouraging visitors, having the second nurse will be responsible for much of the Covid-19 tracking, and we have outsourced some HR work.
- A submitted question by Niamat Khan asked what SACS will do if a student is not feeling safe in school during an in-school week. Kathy Egmont said we would first have to find out why s/he felt this way before taking further action.

Dave Pabich acknowledged the massive effort required to produce this plan and applauded what a thorough and thoughtful product resulted. On behalf of the board, he thanked Stephanie, Kathy and everyone who worked so diligently to produce this plan.

IV. Public Comment

Parents, teachers, and interested members of the public were able to submit questions and comments both before the meeting and using the Zoom Chat function during the meeting. All comments and questions were read aloud; most were addressed in the plan or in the preceding slide presentation.

Jess Modaff expressed concern about the lack of early drop-off. Bus schedules will be reviewed with the Salem Public Schools or additional staff considered; we know some parents' work schedules necessitate early drop-off. If the final transportation plan (still in development) does not work for a hybrid plan student, s/he may transfer to all remote learning.

A question from Caryn (no last name) asking what parents can do yielded a variety of answers, from making masks, to contributing to the emergency fund to volunteering to drop off food to remote learners at home. Stephanie Callahan indicated we will be exploring some kind of online forum where parents could communicate with one another.

Health protocols were understandably a concern, e.g., a question from Niamat Khan asking how we would quarantine a child exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms. This is

addressed in detail in the plan, from isolating or sending the student home to detailed contact tracing if required. In addition, the nurse will have a list of all testing sites.

Another area of concern is how to ensure a satisfying and successful year for seniors, as expressed by Denise Lee. Although no plan can create a “normal” senior year, special efforts will be made to provide opportunities for social interaction in person and remotely, not to mention hiring additional staff to assist with the college application process. It will not be possible, however, to take a gap year.

Miscellaneous questions addressed a variety of concerns, from whether an all-remote student could participate in community meetings (yes) to how food insecurity issues will be addressed. (We work with the Salem Public Schools and the Salem Food Pantry and will see that food is delivered if need be.)

Both Kathy Egmont and Stephanie Callahan reiterated that Salem Academy will work parents to see that their concerns are addressed.

Board members joined Chair David Pabich in expressing their appreciation for a plan so comprehensive and coherent that it addressed many possible questions and issues before they could be raised.

V. Vote

Bill Henning moved to accept the reopening plan as presented as well as the proposed school calendar and agreement to follow Salem Board of Health guidelines should there be a discrepancy between local and DESE guidelines. The motion was seconded by Rick Winter and passed unanimously via a roll call vote. Two board members, Alison Palmer and Felicia Pierce approved the proposal offline.

VI. Adjournment

Bill Henning moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Rick Jones. The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote and the meeting ended at 7:35 pm.