

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School August 21, 2024

Members present in remotely:

Eddie Aroko, Rich Cowdell, Domina DiBiase, Sal Martinez, Toyuwa Newton,
Robert Rogers, Julie Rose, Mark Stevens, Jeff Whitmore

Members present remotely:

Rich Cowdell

Members absent:

Kara McLaughlin

Staff present remotely:

Fallon Burke, Stephanie Callahan, Sabrina Williams

Recorder present remotely:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Toyuwa Newton officially called the meeting to order at 6:13 PM.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of July 17, 2024

Julie Rose moved to accept the minutes of the July 17, 2024, seconded by Robert Rogers. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

III. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

IV. Development Update

Reach the Beach is the first major fundraising event of the new school year, as reported by Fallon Burke. This year the focus will be strictly on the race and the all-school field trip, a new feature this year. There will not be a Wellness Week campaign due to lack of resources and past interest.

Salem Academy has been participating in Reach the Beach for 15 years, both with a team of runners and with support drivers. It is a great way to start the year, fostering connection and team building, bringing teachers and students together outside of the classroom. It also reinforces our safe and supportive environment strategy, not to mention getting our fundraising year off to good start. To date, we have \$1500 in pledged sponsorships and about \$1200 in donations. All 12 runners also fundraise individually.

Fallon also reviewed our "Giving at a Glance" document, which lays out our fundraising activities for the year month by month. Everything gets posted on social media and, as Julie Rose mentioned, it's important for everyone to share these posts with their own networks.

V. Strategic Planning Discussion

The upcoming deadline (September 25th) to submit a request to increase the number of students we can serve prompted the need for the Board to review possible courses of action and to understand the guidelines for presenting the proposed amendment to our charter that such a request would necessitate. We are in a position to submit such a request because the SPS district has fallen into the bottom 10% of statewide MCAS performance.

Stephanie Callahan reviewed the new guidelines released by DESE this past May. They require very detailed information on many aspects of school operation. Any proposal submitted must first be approved by the Board. What follows is a brief summary of only the most salient sections and requirements of the guidelines; the complete document was made available to the Trustees prior to the meeting.

Section II C concerns school performance/ Given that SACS had a performance review just last spring as part of our normal charter renewal application, this information is already in DESE's hands. It more or less identifies what they will be looking at in terms of any new request.

Section II D directly relates to any expansion request and seeks to determine if the requester is a proven provider. The information required is contained in the Annual Report and Student Activity Report we just submitted.

Section II E refers to federal funds available to charter schools and states that expanding schools could receive \$2,000 per additional student served if certain criteria are met.

Section III deals with logistics of how the request must be submitted, who must be notified etc. This includes Mayor Pangallo, Superintendent Zrike, families and community members.

Section IV covers the application itself and asks us to explain the rationale for our request, what it will mean to families and to our community. It also provides a place to discuss any trends or anomalies in the data. Item #15 in this section asks us to describe the anticipated financial impact if the request is granted; this includes impact on regular expenses, such as transportation, other challenges, and possible new programs.

Section V does not concern us as it refers to amendments to the grades we serve.

Section VI regarding a request to increase in maximum enrollment gets to the heart of any proposal we would submit. It requires us to identify the number of seats by grade we wish to add, whether we would be drawing only from our own district or from others as well, changes to our educational programming, how we would implement any changes, the impact on school governance, etc.

Stephanie reviewed how Salem Academy has grown and the rationale for growing when and how we did, e.g., the desire to add an athletics program and AP classes, the desire to improve our facilities with an arts center and gym. Our largest expansion was to 495 students, but when the SPS moved out of the bottom 10 percent in 2021, the 9% cap was reinstated and funding reduced to 480 students, even though we now had 495 students enrolled. Through attrition, we have gradually brought enrollment back to 480. She also noted that we decided not to move forward with regionalization in 2022 as we were still overenrolled at that time. She also reviewed how our facilities have expanded, contracted, and been modified to accommodate growth in both student numbers and programming.

The subsequent discussion delineated a number of issues and questions to be considered if we are to submit an expansion request.

- We remain in the difficult position of being able to grow in Salem only if SPS is having problems, creating an adversarial relationship we don't want. Going beyond the district, i.e., regionalizing, is complicated by such factors as being unable to draw from districts with other charters in place or districts that don't meet our mission. This raises the question of what happens if, once again, we expand, Salem improves. and our per student tuition reverts to the 9% level. What has changed since that happened in 2021 is that other, large districts, such as Boston, are now in that position. We are waiting to see how the situation will be resolved.
- Do we meet the criteria of a proven provider? This is difficult to say. While our MCAS scores are not where we would like, we do have other strengths and a good track record. On the other hand, there are new people at DESE, including the commissioner, who don't know us/
- How many students will our existing facilities accommodate? We are currently without an art room, a cook-in cafeteria, learning common, or adequate space for therapeutic support. How do Prime's plans fit with ours, now and 10 years down the road?
- Where would we add students? Ninth-grade admissions must account for attrition over subsequent years. What would the impact on class size be?
- How do different stakeholders—students, teachers, families, etc.—feel about growth?
- Do we want to remain a “small” school, and what does that mean in terms of class sizes in both the LS and US as well as overall enrollment? “Small” is important to us in the sense of being able to know our students well.
- Would a modest request now preserve much of the status quo but provide much needed extra funding as Covid funds disappear?

Overall, growth can open up many opportunities and possibilities for us, but it comes down to our long-term strategic plan, currently in process, and determining the right size for us. There are a number of options for next steps.

- Basically, resubmit our request from three years ago.

- Make no request now but consider doing so next year after we have had more time to develop a long-term plan. The risk is that the opportunity disappears if SPS pulls out of the bottom 10 percent.
- Make a request for new seats, but do not fill all of them immediately.

Stephanie will be taking all of the above into consideration and developing a recommendation for the Board to consider at its September strategic retreat.

VI. Vote to Adjourn

Robert Rogers moved to adjourn, seconded by Julie Rose. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 8:27 PM.