

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, September 22, 2021**

Members present:

Edward Aroko, Sasha Durand, William Henning, Rick Jones, Susan Low, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Mikki Wilson, Rick Winter

Members absent:

Dan McCaughey, David Pabich, Shelby Morrison, Paula Pitcher Christine Wynne

Staff present:

Stephanie Callahan, Will Carter, Drea Jacobs, Alex Dean

Guests present:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Mark Stevens

Recorder present:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Rick Jones called the monthly meeting of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees to order at 6:06 PM on August 19, 2021.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of August 19, 2021

Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes as submitted, seconded by Mikki Wilson. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh expressed the concern of some parents that our vaccination rate appears to have dropped since last spring. Stephanie Callahan indicated that the numbers are somewhat diluted by students too young to be vaccinated and by the fact that many who have been vaccinated have not yet submitted written proof. The actual number is thought to be at least 60 percent. We are following up individually with everyone who has not submitted proof of vaccination, and we are holding a third vaccination clinic to encourage more people to get the vaccine.

IV. SFC Report

The SFC held its first meeting last week via Zoom with remote attendance slightly lower than in the spring, perhaps due to election day. Stephanie Callahan also reported that Reach the Beach activities went well and that Back-to-School Night, Alice in Wonderland, and the Haunted Happenings Parade are among upcoming events.

V. Principals' Report

Will Carter and Drea Jacobs reported jointly on the new school year and return to all in-school learning, noting that overall, while many previous procedures are being reinstated, Covid is still very much with us and requires modifications in many areas. SATs, PSATs and AP practice tests are scheduled, along with ANets. ANet interims in 9th grade math and English will help us to ascertain what students do and do not know. College planning is also well underway, focusing on both where students stand now and the path they want to pursue.

SEL is a major focus as it is clear Covid has had a big impact on students, especially in the Lower School. Sixth graders were in 3rd grade, 8th graders in 5th grade the last time they experienced a full in-person school year. In a sense, kids must relearn what it means to be a student and a SACS student specifically. Accordingly, Connections period at the start of the day is especially important. We will be looking at a mid-year survey to monitor SEL more closely.

Hiring is a concern. Like other schools, Salem Academy is seeing teachers opt for other professions, especially in the STEM and SPED areas. We are also confronted with the perks and higher salaries offered by other schools. As a result, we still have vacancies and few applications. We are posting in more expensive places and actively working with recruiters. Although we do have subs in place, we are stretched.

Just as recruitment is an issue, so too is retention. Our salary structure leaves us little wiggle room, and teachers are well aware of this. The length of our school day is also an issue. Alex Dean pointed out that many of the benefits we do offer, including strong teacher support, are not visible outside of our community. As Drea Jacobs pointed out, our teachers are going above and beyond and, in many cases, didn't get a good chance to recharge their batteries over the summer. We are assessing what we're asking of them to try and lighten the load a bit. In addition, this year brings the challenge of properly onboarding and supporting our new hires, many of whom are first-year teachers and/or career changers.

Looking ahead, we need to think outside the box in supporting our teachers. We need to continue building a pipeline, as evidenced by having two student teachers and two counseling interns on board. We are considering an open house night to recruit for next year as well as creating a teacher recruitment video comparable to the student video we already have. Stephanie Callahan indicated we are now working with a consultant to see how other schools are dealing with this, what are effective recruiting tools and what we need to do next spring. Can we pay bonuses? Can we ramp up our remuneration? Altogether, this year is like no other. there are many variables in play that require that we think about recruiting, supporting, rewarding. and retaining teachers in new ways.

VI. Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan began with a shout out to teachers and staff who have dealt with not only typical new-school-year adjustments, but also resignations, bus cancellations, and expected post-Covid behavior issues and unexpected Covid-related adjustments to schedules and procedures.

In addition to the teacher-related issues noted above, staff are also going above and beyond. We chose not to replace our head of school, issuing instead an RFP for a consultant to assist in identifying what a school of 500 students should have in terms of staffing. This year has meant more work for many, although it should be noted that we now have three mental health and three college counselors plus two interns. We do need to fill one or two more positions. Stephanie also indicated that the Read Foundation is funding a position to monitor/ensure student success.

We would like to do bonuses if funding becomes available...and we recognize the importance of not making promises we can't keep. New year excitement and expectations of a return to normalcy have met instead with ongoing adjustments and unanticipated stresses. The impact of our longer school day and required level of commitment is evident in exit interviews, and we are looking accordingly at how to lighten the load for both teachers and staff.

Stephanie also reported on our work with Onward. Initial meetings and board interviews have concluded and will be reported on at our November meeting. Our kick-off events had to be postponed due to Hurricane Henri, but will take place the week of September 27th. Additional sessions are scheduled for January and February.

Looking at tangible facts and figures, Stephanie reported that we continue to be overenrolled with 495 students and are holding steady. As expected, MCAS results were down across the state; ours were pretty good by comparison. Finally, the audit report has been positive.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Finance Committee

Stephanie Callahan reported that the numbers look good, with slightly higher tuition that expected. Variances, particularly in custodial expenses were related to summer school costs and now to the need to serve lunch in the gym. Computer expenses, which include new equipment, repairs, and computer-related services were slightly higher as more Chromebooks were taken home. Like many things during the pandemic, Chromebooks have been in short supply and are more expensive.

B. Development Committee Report

Wellness Month kicked off on September 17, per Mikki Wilson, who credited both Stephanie Callahan and Diego Fellows for their efforts. We have already raised over \$10,000 of our \$15,000 Reach the Beach goal, and we have a full roster of activities that will allow people to participate in many ways.

C. Facilities

Rick Jones reported that the HVAC system seems to be working, and additional work will be done during vacations, when students are not in school, finishing probably

next summer. Prime Group is sharing the expense of these legacy issues, which are expected to total about \$130,000; it is difficult to obtain firm estimates far in advance of actual work as suppliers cannot commit due to pandemic-related availability and cost increases.

Among topics to discuss in upcoming meetings with Prime Group are landscaping by the gym, the deteriorating condition of the recess yard, and a possible patio by the parking garage. These are all possibilities as we can use Covid funds to improve outdoor spaces. Prime Group has been amenable to working with us and sharing costs. We have not received any updates on their master plan in process.

D. Governance

Rick Jones reported that Shelby Morrison is stepping down as Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee due to the demands of her new job. She will remain on the committee, however. Bill Henning moved to appoint Rick Winter Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee. The motion was seconded by Sasha Durand and passed unanimously.

The October 27th board meeting will serve as a strategic retreat, beginning at 5 pm.

VIII. Move to Adjourn

Mikki Wilson moved to adjourn, seconded by Bill Henning. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting ended at 7:27 pm.