

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, September 23, 2020, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

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

Members absent:

Edward Aroko, Rick Jones, Shelby Morrison

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Kathy Egmont, Diego Fellows

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Cynthia Marie, Mark Meche, Amy Stewart (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 6:05 PM on September 23, 2020, via Zoom.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of June 24, 2020

Mekka Smith presented the minutes of the July 22, 2020, meeting. There were no corrections; Bill Henning moved to accept the minutes as submitted, seconded by Christine Wynne. The motion passed unanimously with a roll call vote.

She then presented the minutes of the special August 11, 2020, meeting. Shelby Hypes noted that the proposed hours for in-school learning should be corrected to read from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm. Mekka moved to accept the minutes as corrected. The motion was seconded by Bill Henning and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh commented on the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsberg and the enormous impact she has had as an advocate for human and women's rights. He also noted that the United States has passed the milestone of 200,000 deaths due to Covid-19. He expressed the hope that we can take many lessons from these events, and that we can move forward positively. He recognized the tremendous job Salem Academy has done over the summer and now in coping in our online environment, keeping everyone safe and learning continuing. He concluded his remarks by acknowledging and thanking Kathy Egmont for her many contributions to the school.

Kathy Egmont took the opportunity to note the death of Ellen Brandenburg and express the school's condolences to her family. Ellen was a strong supporter of the school for more than 17 years. Mark Meche added that Ellen's husband George had chaired our Science Advisory Council as well.

IV. SFC Report

Amy Stewart, the new chair of the SFC, reported that the group met informally over the summer and decided to postpone the calendar raffle at least until the spring as restaurants and other donors are not in a position to support us at this time.

Yankee Candle is no longer doing fundraisers. It will be replaced by a Boon Supply Company sale, which will take place from November 9 to December 4. Paper catalogs and flyers will be distributed on Picture Day (November 6), but all items are online. In fact, one advantage of working with Boon Supply is that everything is done online...no paper forms. Goods will be delivered directly to students' homes. The school will receive 40 percent.

The SFC is working on a schedule for upcoming Zoom meetings and will notify parents. The first one will probably be about what parents know, don't know, and would like to know. Amy indicated some parents have expressed concerns about student pick-up and food service; she will discuss these with Stephanie Callahan.

V. Principals' Reports

Before delving into the reports, Stephanie Callahan gave shout out to the principals, faculty and staff—the entire team—for the phenomenal job they have done in preparing for the new school year.

Matt Chuchul indicated that the summer professional development days SACS had were invaluable in planning curriculum, setting priorities and coming together as a team. As a result, the year is off to an excellent start and morale is good.

Orientation was held for all students and was very upbeat. Systems were fully operable on day one, students knew where they needed to be, and help with technology was on hand. This was especially important for sixth graders as they are new to the school. Teachers are working hard to maximize student engagement online, using different technology platforms, posting materials in engaging ways on the Lower School website where parents as well as students can access them.

In the absence of MCAS and the usual diagnostics to understand where students are academically, we are using other tools. This is important in order to be able to fine tune curricula to meet student needs. Matt called out the Wit and Wisdom ELA curriculum as both high quality and in line with many of SACS' goals. He thanked the Board for its support in investing in this program. He did note that ELA and math testing at the end of October and early November, respectively, poses a challenge due to the lack of clarity on where students stand at present.

Last, Matt commented on the variety of programs in line for Hispanic Heritage Month, noting that these run through all grades and spotlight Latinx leaders with a connection to our curriculum. We will do this for any month with a special focus.

Stephanie Callahan discussed upcoming SATs/PSATs and staffing issues. We will do testing on campus on October 14th; whether January testing is in-school or remote remains to be decided.

Mekka Smith inquired about the percentage of students likely to stay remote even if Salem becomes a green zone. Stephanie responded that our plan to reopen slowly allows us to monitor the number of students choosing remote vs. in-school learning. Currently, just high-priority students in both grade 7 and grade 8 are in school. We anticipate a roughly even split in the Lower School and, at this time, are able to accommodate anyone who needs to be learning on site.

About half of the Upper School is choosing remote learning. Balancing these cohorts is more difficult as they do not move as a group when on site, may have siblings in the Lower School, etc.—all factors that complicate scheduling. Overall, however, the balance is likely to fluctuate by no more than one or two students. Kathy Egmont took the opportunity to applaud Stephanie’s skill in addressing this issue.

Stephanie was pleased to report that additional staff are on board—a part-time college counselor and a full-time school adjustment counselor straddling grades 8 and 9. Additional staff has also resulted in some restructuring; we are not only building capacity but also providing additional leadership opportunities for faculty to remain and grow at Salem Academy.

In connection with the start-up of extra-curricular activities, Susan Low pointed out that October is LGBT History Month; the 10th is National Coming Out Day and the 13th is spirit day. She wondered if appropriate Zoom backgrounds would be of interest. Stephanie indicated that we will make sure that we will honor this month and work with our Sexuality and Gender Acceptance (SAGA) student group as well.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Development Committee Report

Christine Wynne reported that the Development Committee has many ideas but that due to uncertainties raised by the pandemic, will delay presenting an Annual Fund goal until the October Board of Trustees meeting.

Our first fundraising push, however, will be Wellness Weekend that replaces Reach the Beach this year. Diego Fellows explained this virtual initiative, which allows people to choose challenges and donate remotely. It will run October 16-18. Details are already available on the Salem Academy website, where people can register for \$10 and set personal and donation goals. We are aiming for 500 participants and hope to raise \$10,000.

Last, Dave Pabich announced that a special micro drive has raised \$6,000 in honor of Kathy Egmont, who retires at the end of the month. Nina Cohen and Craig Barrows have already made a significant donation, and as Dave pointed out, Kathy has been a rock star and has contributed in many major ways to the school. Her work is greatly appreciated, and she will indeed be missed.

B. Governance Committee Report

In Rick Jones's absence, Kathy Egmont reported that Felicia Pierce is resigning from the Board due to increased responsibilities as the chief program officer of a non-profit during Covid-19. Her contributions are appreciated, as is her willingness to remain on the Development Committee. Kathy indicated that two potential candidates for board membership are being considered at this time.

The search process for a new Executive Director is under way. Edgility, which has been engaged to manage the search, is in the process of interviewing staff and board members. They will report to the Board in October, after which the active search will begin.

C. Education Committee Report

Dan McCaughey reported that questions raised nationally in recent months regarding diversity, equity and inclusion have made this committee recognize that we have an unusual opportunity to leverage current energy to improve how we address these issues.

Per Stephanie Callahan, staff have identified four areas of focus: continuing to examine and ensure that our systems and structures do not perpetuate inequities, actively dismantling those that do, elevating student voices and leadership opportunities, and improving staff diversity and opportunities for professional development. While the first three can be addressed immediately, the Committee believes we need outside assistance in regard to staffing, to developing more strategic, ongoing programming, and to ensuring that these efforts carry through all aspects of the school. The Board is in full agreement, although its role is not yet defined, as we are in the early stages of this initiative.

D. Facilities Committee Report

This report focused primarily on HVAC remediation efforts, according to Dave Pabich and Kathy Egmont. We have invested in \$10,000 worth of purifiers and now have fans working overnight. I-waves ionize particles to make them heavier and drop into filters and to the floor more quickly. The rooftop economizers, which blend fresh and inside air, have been repaired so the air is always mixed. They are being studied to ascertain if an additional economizer is required. We are in discussion to have these paid for by our landlord.

In addition, we are mapping every vent and duct, have adequate PPE on hand, and are sanitizing electrostatically every night, which eliminates the cost of having people wipe down surfaces. The building is as safe as we can make it; neither the gym nor Albright is being used for classes at this time.

VII. Finance and Budget Updates

A. Monthly Financials

Bill Henning presented the monthly financials in Shelby Morrison's absence. Given that we are only two months into the new fiscal year, there are few deviations from budget. Most notable is the lower tuition number, reflecting a

more conservative estimate of likely state revenues. Despite this, the savings achieved by operating remotely brought us to a break-even point. In regard to the balance sheet, it appears we had more cash on hand at this time last year, but that was because of late payment from the state. We are in good shape, with cash on hand just one day short of being considered low risk.

He complimented the staff on close monitoring of Covid-related expenses, which we hope will be reimbursed by FEMA or the state. Christine Wynne asked if this monitoring poses difficulties. Although not for state grants, FEMA requires a great deal of detail. Currently Cynthia Marie is helping with this, and we are looking for a consultant to do this, as FEMA will reimburse 70 percent of the expense.

B. Final Budget

Kathy Egmont reviewed the final budget being presented for adoption. In short, it is very conservative. It includes a few additional expenses, most notably the new nutrition program, the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). Normally, we do not have a high enough percentage of students to qualify for participation in this program, which serves children 3 to 18, reimbursing schools at the rate of the highest-level student, and allowing families to take home food for all children in the family. We were just approved for participation and are excited to be able to serve the whole community.

Bill Henning asked if costs for non-students fall under School Expenses or Other Expenses, as the determination could complicate year-to-year comparisons. Cynthia Marie will see how this is handled by other schools.

Other expenses added to the budget include funding for IEP services; paraprofessionals; an additional part-time nurse; family/medical leave and anticipated accounting, HR, and executive search consulting fees. Capital expenses have been kept to the absolute minimum; the major item here is for HVAC improvements.

Overall, this is a very conservative budget based on the latest DESE information and Chapter 70 funding. It does not include any possible stimulus monies or potentially higher foundation funding. Although, as Dave Pabich pointed out, DESE's unreliability and lack of a state budget remain factors, it is important for us to have a final working budget.

Bill Henning moved to accept the budget as presented; his motion was seconded by Rick Winter and passed unanimously via roll call vote. Rick emphasized that this is a truly abnormal year. Both he and Bill commented that this vote indicates the Board's support for Stephanie Callahan and its recognition that the budget may need to change as we move forward.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

In addition to topics covered in the above minutes, the audit is proceeding with no problems or findings. Stephanie Callahan and Kathy Egmont have rewritten the

school description and narrative, which will be reviewed by the Finance Committee, presented to the Board next month, and finalized by November.

We are fully enrolled with a long wait list—91 on the 9th grade list alone--a reflection of Salem Academy's rising reputation as a first-choice school.

The transition in executive directors is well under way. Stephanie has increasingly taken on many related responsibilities; Kathy will remain available as a consultant. Stephanie reported that one of her biggest challenges is how to create a virtual open door and get information to people quickly. She will send out a meeting schedule to Board committee chairs shortly.

One of the major decisions she faces is how and when to decide whether the school operates in hybrid or fully remote mode. Adhering to DESE's red-yellow-green guidelines provides a baseline, but it must be tempered by where the community and the school are within those guidelines. Accordingly, we are generally opting for the hybrid model if the number of positive cases is at 4 or lower per 100,000. Should someone test positive, the shut-down decision will involve many factors. Decisions will be on a short-term, i.e. two or three-week basis. They are, in the end, judgment calls, and Stephanie will keep the Board informed. David Pabich reiterated the Board's support and belief that Salem Academy's strong leadership is an important reason why it is such a good school.

IX. Vote to Adjourn

In closing the meeting, Dave Pabich paid tribute to retiring Executive Director Kathy Egmont. Her accessibility and engagement with the Board, donors and community have been phenomenal. Kathy, in turn, praised the strong board and the honest and authentic people with whom she has worked, calling her years at Salem Academy a wonderful way to end her career. Diego Fellows showed a plaque that will be presented to her. Both Kathy and Stephanie Callahan commented on the close and positive working relationship they have shared.

Bill Henning moved to adjourn, seconded by Alison Palmer. As the roll was called, each board member paid tribute to Kathy, thanking her for her leadership and friendship, and wishing her a happy and rewarding retirement. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 7:57 pm.