

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Board of Trustees Wednesday, September 25, 2019, 6:00 pm, Room 114

Members Present:

Nina Cohen, Rick Jones, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Steve Palmer, Alfonso Perillo, Felicia Pierce, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members Absent:

William Henning

Staff:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Kathy Egmont, Diego Fellows

Guests:

Fawaz Abusharkh, Eddie Aroko

Recorder:

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 Nina Cohen at 6:10 PM on September 25, 2019, in Room 114. Nina welcomed SACS graduate Eddie Aroko, who is observing and may become a board member in January.

II. Approval of Minutes

Rick Jones presented the minutes of the Meeting of July 24, 2019. David Pabich moved to accept them as corrected for typos, seconded by Steve Palmer. The minutes were accepted unanimously.

III. Public Comment

No public comments were offered.

IV. Faculty Presentation on Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Matt Chuchul provided an update on the status of and plans for moving forward with our SEL efforts. In brief, our goal is to identify and address the needs of *all* students in the Lower School, not just those with more significant issues. Accordingly, we introduced a new curriculum (Second Step®), beginning with a student self-assessment Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

This screening tool is used worldwide, allowing us to compare the responses of our students with general trends. Overall, there were no surprises. Two-thirds of our lower school students are feeling ok about issues ranging from worrying to hyperactivity to peer problems, while the remaining third expressed slightly raised to higher levels of concern in these areas.

More important, the SDQ enables staff to compare their observations with student responses and develop a specific plan of action for each student. Our goal was to identify highest areas of concern and at least one action staff—usually the Connections teacher—could take with each student. This is now being implemented; the questionnaire will be administered again at mid-term and at the end of the year. A copy of the SDQ, a summary of results, and a document outlining the Second Step middle school program were provided.

We will continue to track students from year to year, even as they transition to the Upper School, where a different curriculum is used. It was introduced last year, so our 10th graders are taking this for the second time.

Matt also spoke to the question of teacher training. Having been doing trauma-sensitive work for five years as part of professional development, staff has become comfortable with this work and able to move forward with it. New teachers are partnered with more experienced staff, and we always identify the teacher(s) who best know a student to work with them.

V. Update on funding bills and impact on charter schools

The Strategic Plan update is postponed to next month. The school is monitoring progress on final decisions regarding charter schools and funding at the state level, as reported by Kathy Egmont. She reviewed key elements of the School Funding Bill (S.2348 Ch.70). Our hope is that the final bill will be charter neutral, i.e., that charters have access to the same resources as traditional public schools; that the autonomy of charters remains intact, and that the bill increases or does not decrease resources to charters. Nina Cohen shared information she received from a webinar with the Charter School Association for advocacy volunteers.

The bill has been reported out from the Senate committee, is being debated and gathering amendments before going to the House. At this time, we believe it is good legislation that will benefit both charter and district schools. It is charter neutral, progressive, reallocates funding to better support lower-income districts and out-of-district special needs. The importance of this legislation is underlined by the fact that the last update to school funding occurred in 1993, more than 25 years ago.

VI. SFC Report

Pam Rochna reported that the SFC met on September 9th and will meet again on Monday, October 7th. The SFC currently has \$800 in its account, with plans to move toward zero-based budgeting and close review to ensure we are directing funds as effectively as possible. She handed out the calendar of events for the school year and indicated that we are seeking more donations for our calendar raffle in December.

On a separate note, we will again be selling tickets for the Salem Education Foundation's Food for Thought raffle. SACS receives \$1 for every ticket over 100 sold; these proceeds go to funding the Rachel Hunt Scholarship. One issue to be discussed and resolved concerns how the student selling the winning ticketed is rewarded.

VII. Committee Reports

A. Finance Committee

Financially, we remain in good shape. Net operating income suggests we are ahead of budget by \$137,000. Alfonso Perillo indicated that funds from the Foundation and the Read grant were moved to the operating budget to cover renovation costs. These costs will be capitalized; we are at breakeven on the renovation project. Our conservative estimate of how much we will receive from the Commonwealth per student provides expectation of increased funding.

The audit report will be presented to the Finance Committee at its next meeting, but it appears there are no problems. We did use \$150,000 of our line of credit to finance construction. Our banker suggested a loan higher interest only than we liked, and he promoted rolling this into longer-term (five to seven years) debt, including our prior loan. The Board agreed that this is not our first choice, and Kathy and David will meet with Scott Meyers to discuss the issues we are facing since moving a significant part of our revenue into the foundation.

Scott Myers is our new banker, and he is reviewing our financial history. We look forward to a good relationship with him; he attended the Chamber of Commerce meeting held at SACS and served on the board of a charter school in western Massachusetts.

Alfonso also reported that salaries are just under budget, and the balance sheet shows our investment in the building and capital projects.

B. Governance Committee

Rick Jones reported that the committee is currently doing a 360° review of the Executive Director; the deadline for input is September 30, after which the Committee will meet to discuss and develop a formal recommendation.

Board member recruitment continues. At our request, Paul Tucker has suggested several people, and we look forward to the October 26 reception at Nina Cohen's house to introduce our new heads of school and test the waters for board candidates. It was noted that Kara McLaughlin, while unable to join the SACS board, has volunteered to serve on the Governance Committee.

C. Development Committee

Christine Wynne reported on past, present and future Development Committee activities. First, the Committee exceeded its 2018-2019 fundraising goal for the annual fund of \$30,000, raising \$57,000. Current efforts have focused on Reach the Beach, which has been folded into our overall fundraising goal for the first time. It, too is surpassing its goal, having raised nearly \$8,000. Although not strictly a fundraising event, the September 26th reception will, we hope, inspire active giving and keep former board members feeling engaged with the school.

Looking ahead, we have the very nice "problems" of matching a new anonymous gift of \$5,000 and of maintaining the momentum needed to reach this year's goal, which is

likely to be \$65,000. An official vote has been postponed until October, when more information is available.

Discussion of fundraising possibilities focused on a major spring event that could become an annual event. Suggestions ranged from a student showcase to a golf day to a gala. We will need strong board support as well as support from the business and general communities. Fortunately, there is strong public appetite for supporting schools. The Committee believes we will need another matching gift and perhaps a single big sponsor for an event to be held in the gym.

D. Facilities Committee

The big news here is the successful completion of the summer renovation project. The Board thanked Rick Jones in particular for his assistance in the design of the space, which has been very well received.

The new Shetland Park owners are looking at traffic patterns, one-way areas, loading docks and parking. There will be changes, although these remain unknown at this time. They want to upgrade the overall appeal of the park and are working with landscape architect Naomi Cottrell on both short-term and long-term improvements. On a less sanguine note, they are opposed to any proposal to paint any of their buildings, including the gym.

E. Human Resources

Rick Winter shared information about the State Family Medical Leave. While much remains uncertain, as of 2020, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will require employees to contribute to paid family medical leave (PFML) benefits. Currently, employers (including SACS) can choose to fund this completely or have employees fund it. Companies may be able to opt out of the state plan if they have a plan of their own but SACS will not be opting out at this point. As of October, we will be deducting the required amount, with plans to refund it if we receive an exemption.

VIII. Head of School Report

As noted above, Matt Chuchul reported on the social emotional learning program. Stephanie Callahan provided an overview of the most recent MCAS results; the full accountability results are not yet available. She began by noting that SACS was at par with or outperformed both state and city on all tests at all grade levels. Stephanie explained that the Next Generation HS MCAS exams are a more rigorous assessment for students. A study of college matriculation and graduation from 2010 to 2018 found that achieving proficiency on the Legacy MCAS did not correlate to strong college matriculation and graduation while achieving at the Advanced Level did. DESE believes that the new Next Generation MCAS standards of proficiency will better describe students' college readiness

This was the first time the MCAS could be taken on computer and the first time as well for the new eighth grade science test. SACS has been doing very focused work on math, including teacher training, a new planning structure and a new curriculum introduced

three years ago. This means our eight graders are now in their third year of this curriculum. This is the first year that we have shifted our focus to the learning center for general and video remediation work for math. We believe this is paying off. We recognize that new testing models and standards usually bring lower results initially and we expect to see growth next year.

Stephanie noted that although we give the the high school biology MCAs to students as ninth graders, the results are reported when they are tenth graders. The transitional scores for the new test will be pegged to prior test graduating requirements.

Stephanie noted that Alex Dean is one of 20 math teachers on the statewide committee for the 10th grade tests. He and Denise Granniss were SACS representatives doing this work.

We will have the full accountability results, i.e., how schools are progressing individually, next month. We are pleased with the performance of our students, even as we are working to improve our results each year. When 50 percent of Salem's rising sixth graders are applying here, it is clear that we are doing well by our students.

Other topics presented briefly included new history/social studies courses aligned with the 2018 MA Curriculum Frameworks, Posse scholarship nominees, preparations for an upcoming ALICE drill, and Project Amp, an intervention program to reduce/prevent substance abuse among adolescents.

IX. Executive Director Report

Kathy Egmont reported on several issues. First, we are fully staffed, and enrollment is at 495 students; we will stop accepting students as of October 1st.

Second, the Friday bus issue is under discussion. The problem is the two-hour gap between the close of school at 2 pm and bus arrival at 4 pm. The City is required to meet our schedule, but this is a significant hardship for me as it means two additional drivers and buses must be hired for the entire week. We have initiated an official request for next year, are seeking solutions for this year, and will discuss with parents in October.

The arrest of some SACS students for felonies over the summer brought our relationship with the Salem Police Department to the fore, as we received no call from them about these situations. Looking into the matter, we learned we need a memorandum of understanding on this. We are sympathetic to our Police Department, which is understaffed. As a result, one of their two school resource officers has had to be reassigned, leaving the sole remaining officer on overload trying to serve all of Salem's schools. We will be meeting with the Police Chief to open more communication.

Last, two of the three seniors who had not met graduation requirements have since done so and graduated. The third is on track to do so as well.

X. Vote to Adjourn

Steve Palmer moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 PM, seconded by David Pabich, and passed unanimously.