

Salem Academy Charter School
Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Board of Trustees
Wednesday, November 21, 2016 at 6:00 pm, Room 124

Members Present: Peter Copelas, Nina Cohen, Rick Jones, David Pabich, Steve Palmer, Leslie Tuttle, Joshua Biber, Paige Nalipinski, Thomas Monroe, Ana Nuncio

Members Absent: Karen Cady,

Guests: Stephanie Callahan, Sean Gass, Sean O'Neil, Pam Rochna, Pam Boardway, Nina Bridgeman, Allison Wyatt, Fawaz Abusharkh, Coree Dovev, Jennifer Lebzelter, Christian Foster (minute-taker)

I. Call to Order

The monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School, 45 Congress St., Salem, MA was called to order on November 21, 2016 at 6:23 PM in room 124 by Chair, Peter Copelas.

Peter introduced Coree Dovev and Jennifer Lebzelter, faculty representatives for the Board Meetings. Faculty members are encouraged to be active participants in meetings. Board members introduced themselves to Coree and Jennifer.

II. Approval of the minutes

Motion: The minutes of the September, 2016 meeting shall be approved with corrections. Motion made by David Pabich and seconded by Steve Palmer.

Resolved: The motion carried unanimously.

III. Public comment

No comments

IV. New Business

Sean O'Neil announced that all members present at the Board Meeting are invited to the We the People event, led by Kim Stanhouse. The invitation was handed out to all participants at the board meeting. There will be two showcase events. Judges are needed for the events. Participants were encouraged to find volunteers for this event.

V. SFC Report

Pam Rochna, Pam Boardway

There was not an SFC meeting in October. The SFC has met with Chyna Onembo and together, they are strategizing a committee event in February.

The Calendar Raffle is in full swing. There is a bit of a slump in sales. Pam Boardway reminded the group that 100% of the sales go to student accounts.

Yankee Candle sales will begin in February and go into March. That is usually Salem Academy's biggest fundraiser.

VI. Head of School and Principals' Report

Stephanie Callahan introduced PARCC, a two-year pilot program, and gave an overview of the assessments Salem Academy students took.

This year, the majority of schools in Massachusetts (72%) opted to take the PARCC assessments.

- 44% opted to do the computer based assessments. Salem Academy Charter School was included in this 44%. These electronic tests were new for Salem Academy students

Following the two-year pilot, Massachusetts decided not to take on PARCC and will be transitioning back to their own, home grown, assessment. These assessments will continue to be developed and distributed by Pearson. There will be more data and transparency with this transition back to "MCAS 2" as it will be called.

Results from Salem Academy's 2015 PARCC assessments can be found in Appendix B.

Stephanie explained that there were a number of reasons 2016 results decreased. Long term maternity leaves and unexpected teacher exits might have caused the dip in scores. She then presented an analysis of Salem Academy students' performance against Salem Public School students and comparative schools, Neighborhood House Charter School (takes the online, electronic PARCC assessments).

Lower scores for Salem Academy Charter School students on PARCC assessments were surprising because ANet scores were competitive against comparative scores throughout the year. The topic of Writing was emphasized and discussed. Writing was weighted more than reading on the PARCC assessments. Because of these results, added emphasis on writing is being placed on teachers this year. The 2016-2017 school year has started off well. Salem Academy is piloting a few new approaches to Writing instruction.

A brief discussion about the overall usage of computers in instructional practices both at Neighborhood House and Salem Academy Charter School was held after inquiry from Thomas Monroe. Little is known about Neighborhood House's practices, however Salem Academy Charter School students use technology regularly in their classes and studies.

PARCC Math results also showed that the switch to computer based assessments probably resulted in a dip in scores. Salem Academy students are, overall, outperforming peers across the state.

C. Growth

Growth was fairly consistent across grades. Stephanie went into detail outlining the specific grade growths for both ELA and Math. Importantly, it should be noticed that while Salem Academy Charter Students' scores appear to have dipped on various assessments on both subjects, comparatively, these scores are consistent with competitiveness in the past. All scores have decreased across the district and Salem Academy Charter School students continue to outperform the district and state scores.

D. CPI

Salem Academy students are not meeting growth goals because of the previous year's positive results. While falling a bit short, Salem Academy Charter School will however continue to pilot new Massachusetts assessments in the 2016-2017 school year rendering the school "held-harmless". Held-harmless means that Salem Academy will continue to operate as a Level 1 school. CPI is the method for comparing different assessments, PARCC and MCAS.

E. Takeaways

Salem Academy, while in the top 75% in comparative schools, did not meet its target goals (PPI goals). Stephanie went into detail on the details of how PPI is calculated.

Peter Copelas asked whether baselines are actually effective if Salem keeps jumping around from different assessments each year. How does that influence curriculum decisions? Stephanie explained that teachers create their own curriculum. They have an understanding of the tests that are going to be taken each year and use those data to drive curriculum development. State testing somewhat drives curriculum. Approach to these state tests is emphasized. Examples include: math teachers need to focus a lot of effort and time on reading skills for word problems. Similarly, ELA teachers now need to focus on comparative and increasingly complex texts.

Nina Cohen asked about how results on tests impact Salem Academy Charter School's status. Salem Academy Charter School is still level 1. Sean O'Neil responded to Nina's question noting the fact that when Salem Academy Charter School was approved for the current five-year charter it resulted in two outcomes. First, the charter was renewed which will allow the school to continue providing education to students for at least two more years when the charter must be renewed (three years have already passed since the charter was renewed). Second, Salem Academy Charter School applied for and was offered proven provider status in order to provide for increased enrollment (18%).

F. Internal Measures in Salem Academy Charter School

i. Increase in honor roll and high honor roll (grades 6 and 7) and a dip in grade 8.

ii. Significant dip in "at-risk" students for grade 6 and 7 and a slight dip in grade 8

iii. ANet results. Smaller network of math schools. Salem Academy cannot compare itself to some of the best schools in Boston besides Neighborhood House. The 6th Grade ELA teacher is feeling better about the assessments, standards and is performing at the top of the network. Similarly, these results are emulated in 7th Grade Math. Stephanie continued to share the ANet results which were all positive. Students will be taking the A2 assessments this week and next. Steve Palmer noted the percentage dip in ANet scores even though ranking in the network did not change as drastically. Stephanie agreed and both Steve and Stephanie hypothesized that changing tests and increased complexity probably resulted decreased scores. All schools are feeling that.

iv. Upper School end of quarter report. Sean Gass mentioned the changes in the high achieving upper school group. The 2017 graduating class struggled last year however gains are being made by 11th and 12th teachers. 10th graders are down (-18% honor roll) from last year. Far fewer are "at-risk" however. Overall, Salem Academy is seeing increases on most fronts.

Seniors have reached two milestones in college applications, the 1st and 15th of November. Salem Academy Charter School had Salem State come in for on the spot interviews where students were accepted on the spot. 2016 is the first year Salem State has come on to the Salem Academy Charter School campus for in-person interviews.

Two student are finalists for the Posse Scholarship. One student is a finalist for Questbridge. FAFSA day went well. The students and their parents learned about the FAFSA process and started filling out forms together. More than 60 students and families came to the event.

Hiring: 9th grade math teacher resigned unexpectedly. Casey Vanderpot was hired for this vacancy. There is a maternity leave ELA position open. There are good candidates for this opening and a hiring will take place soon.

VII. Executive Director Report

- A. Sean O’Neil emphasized the importance of using data to provide insight into student achievement.
- B. Two students have left Salem Academy since October 26th, 2016. These departures were not unexpected.
- C. Based on the data comparison between SACS and MA public schools, Salem Academy students are relatively on par in terms of discipline. It is true, however, that there are prominent charters with excessive discipline. Salem Academy Charter School represents what a charter school is supposed to be. Additionally, Salem Academy Charter School has committed to our ELL program. With an exemplary ELL program, Salem Academy Charter School has also paid attention to discipline and developed a culture that supports learning in ways that are good for kids.
- D. An analysis of SPED programs came out as well that claimed that charters do not serve special education students. Many of the critics of charter schools cite research like this to support defunding and opposing charter schools. Salem Academy Charter School, however, has extensive special education services. Looking at the highest achieving charters (19 schools in Massachusetts), many in the top do not have any special education teachers. Some of Salem Academy’s comparison, in-network schools have incredibly rigorous academic programs (IB) and they tell students that “if you can’t do it, don’t come”. This is not how things are done at Salem Academy Charter School. Salem Academy Charter School, with 14-18% special education students, employs 7 teachers, 5 paraprofessionals, 2 counselors, a reading teacher and a part time reading specialist.
- E. From the charter school meeting, the following points from the Ballot Initiative were mentioned :
 1. The defeat was not about charters, it was about funding them.
 2. Approval rates are still steady regarding charters – charter schools are still regarded quite highly.
 3. It is easy to get people to vote no (inspire fear, doubt), but much more difficult to get them to vote yes. There was a large group pushing for No.
 4. TV is no longer the king of advertising. Social media is now prominent and the message here was difficult in that medium due to the brevity of the issue.
 5. This has become a partisan issue, supported by Baker and private, corporate money, seen as republican by many citizens of Massachusetts.
 6. “Dark money” became a stain on charter school credibility. A number of corporations put money behind this, which was characterized by the “dark” label. However, Sean O’Neil believes they may have been putting money toward charter schools because they want an educated workforce.
 7. The result is now that people of color are beginning to distance themselves from charter schools.
 8. It is as important as ever for charter schools to collaborate with district schools. Charters should not have an adversarial relationship with the districts public schools.
 9. No on 2 people will now turn their efforts to restricting funding, which will put Salem Academy Charter School at risk.
 10. Plans in the state senate are to add a millionaire’s tax targeted for additional funding for district schools.
 11. President elect Donald Trump is proposing a \$20 billion block grant to support school choice.

In a recent meeting with a few funders, Sean O'Neil witnessed the beginning of challenges for Salem Academy moving forward.

Alison Bagg is the new charter school office Director. Priorities for the charter school office moving forward include:

- Continue to practice cyclical oversight
- Focus on board training
- They received a grant (\$3.5 million for dissemination, they will invite proposals
- Continuing to focus on access and equity
- Working with schools specifically on climate, culture, and discipline
- Continuing commitment to ongoing improvement

VIII. Committee Reports

A. Committee on Trustees, Nina Cohen

Offers to join the Board of Trustees were made to four individuals in the last four weeks: Alfonso Perillo and Christine Wynne have both agreed to join the board. Bill Henning will also be joining the board if nominated. The committee on trustees are still trying to find a chairperson for the education committee. Additionally, Salem Academy is also behind on minority recruitment. There is not a formal process in place for this initiative, so the committee is asking that anyone with an idea should contact Nina. Salem Academy administrators and board members have been inviting people to have a tour, ask questions. Josh Biber asked if the new board members are white people, then committed to come back to the board with some more candidates of color.

B. Development Committee, Nina Cohen

Mailing went out on 11/3/2016 to a database of donors who have donated in the past. Two gifts have been received and there are plans to follow up with phone calls. Additionally, the plan is to make another mailing effort with the focus of purchasing a theater seat. The development committee hope to sell 181 more seats. The other sources of funding are grant opportunities. Foundations include Amelia Peabody, Reed Foundation, Riley Foundation, Eastern Bank, People's United and the Lynch Foundation. School-wide open house is an opportunity to get the community together. March 29th, 2017 is the currently scheduled date. The development committee hopes to have multiple performances; Christine Wynne will be involved in organizing. The event will include commemoration of donors. We also count on fulfilling board promises for our goals.

C. HR Committee

Karen Cady reported that the Trustee members of the HR committee had met to get organized. She said that Eastern Benefits had who encouraged Salem Academy to get a consultant. We interviewed and hired Jane Callahan, whose first step is to audit all Salem Academy Charter School HR policies. Peter Copelas asked if there are upcoming labor laws, there are – December 1.

D. Finance Committee, Thomas Monroe

Thomas reported our cash position is strong right now, which is great because we are looking at some challenges in terms of our construction. We did lose one more student, so that will lower tuition by about \$10,000. We see an increase in food expenses, which is great for participation in the program.

We have adjusted the rental costs because we are still not in the building. We are adjusting based on moving dates of occupancy. All costs associated with occupancy were adjusted down. Costs for information systems continues to run high. Stephanie pointed out that we did just receive a year for free from Rediker based on our current technical issues.

E. Facilities Committee, David Pablich

David Pablich and Sean O'Neil had a meeting with Mr. Lappin. The Facilities Committee explained that Salem Academy needs a gym that will do specific things, and Mr. Lappin agreed. David and Sean are concerned about the structure itself, especially insulation, and the look of the interior spaces.

Some points Sean O'Neil and Mr. Lappin discussed included:

- Occupancy is unclear: they initially quoted a low number (149), which hinges on whether it is an educational space or an assembly space. If it is an assembly space, the number would be higher (~300). There are additional zoning laws, etc. that are affected whether or not the building is defined as an educational space. David and Sean expressed the need to see the differences before signing off on the plan. Agreement has not been met yet.
- Insulation is a challenge. Salem Academy Charter School would like it to comply with the energy standards.
- The facilities committee wants to make sure that the height was enough for volleyball.
- Interior spaces are a concern as well: David is concerned with the use of drywall in a large part of the wall.

Mr. Lappin expressed concerns with the risks that he was taking. Sean and David did see the point in his concerns.

Sean O'Neil added that with the new arts center, Salem Academy Charter School has committed to certain expenses, including the ramp, bathroom floors, and a few additional items. Some of those costs have been higher than expected, from \$20,000 to \$51,000 on the ramp. Shetland Park has offered to spread those costs out over five years. Mr. Lappin is suggesting that we rewrite the lease to add that money in. That is one option, but Sean explained that the board may want to pay that as a capital expense instead. Peter pointed out that adding it to the lease would be bad because when negotiation on the next lease begins, the terms are usually dependent on the previous lease. David Pablich pointed out that some of the costs should be adjusted, such as the stairs that would have had to be built either way. Peter Copelas pointed out that each improvement or change has been according to our specifications. Sean O'Neil explained that a decision need not be made tonight. Rick Jones asked if it was a comparable cost to the rent deferment. Thomas Monroe pointed out that we do not need a vote to just purchase it.

The Facilities Committee will try to reduce the costs by breaking out the different expenses. Peter explained that we are leaning toward paying it outright, but the finance committee needs final numbers which will be clarified in the next meeting with Mr. Lappin.

Gym update: building permit is still in the works, waiting on plans for sidewalks and curbing. Materials are here.

Facilities committee did not have the ability to ask for a completion date on the arts building.

IX. Search Committee Report

No report.

X. Vote to Adjourn Regular Meeting

Reminder of the holiday meeting on 12/14 – meeting at the school at 6pm to start immediately, then we will adjourn to dinner.

Reminder on 12/14 the election of new trustees and officers will be the main agenda item.

On motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:19 PM.