

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
Wednesday, December 16, 2020, via Zoom**

Members present remotely due to Covid-19 guidelines:

Edward Aroko, Bill Henning, Rick Jones, Susan Low, Dan McCaughey, Shelby Morrison, David Pabich, Alison Palmer, Mekka Smith, Rick Winter, Christine Wynne

Members absent:

None

Staff present remotely:

Stephanie Callahan, Matt Chuchul, Alex Dean, Diego Fellows, Andrea Jacobs

Guests present remotely:

Fawaz Abusharkh
Paula Pitcher

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 6:06 PM on December 16, 2020, via Zoom.

II. Minutes of the Meeting of September 23, 2020

Mekka Smith moved to accept the minutes of November 18, 2020. Rick Jones seconded the motion, which passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

III. Public Comment

Fawaz Abusharkh wished everyone a happy holiday season and requested that the school consider a half or full snow day for December 19th. Stephanie Callahan indicated this would be addressed later.

IV. SFC Report

There was no report as the SFC did not meet this month. Stephanie Callahan indicated that the Boon Supply fundraiser has been extended to the end of the year. Given the pandemic, revenues are understandably somewhat behind last year.

V. Principals' Reports

With the conclusion of Q1 on November 12th, the focus in both the Lower and Upper Schools has been on evaluating performance, identifying trends and determining appropriate action plans. This has been greatly facilitated by the availability of

detailed data, enabling teachers and administrators to analyze data by a variety of subgroups. Matt Chuchul reported that in the Lower School they have been able to identify specific groups that are underperforming and can now redress issues with additional support, changes in curriculum or more opportunities to speak English, for instance.

Matt also reported several other important achievements this month. Staff has met with 140 family members or care givers, Spanish for 6th graders has launched, and a students of color group has started, as has Lower School student government. We conducted a well-attended Q1 celebration via Zoom. A student survey now being conducted will provide important information on student perspectives.

In response to Mekka Smith's request for more detail on the nature of learning gaps the data has uncovered, Matt noted that we can now see lower achievement in science and history among students on IEPs, for instance. English language learners are having issues that suggest more opportunities to speak English, even informally, will be helpful. A third underperforming sub-group comprises Latinx students and may involve specific departments or courses; our new curriculum gives us some options for addressing this.

Drea Jacobs reported similar themes in the Upper School. She and Matt Chuchul modeled how data can be analyzed to uncover what's happening and suggest possible curricular or other changes. Alex Dean indicated this modeling had been very helpful. Better data and deeper analysis prime teachers and staff in a way that has not been possible before. She also noted some bright spots that the data has revealed, particularly in ELA and Spanish.

The Upper School does differ from the Lower School in that they have had only eight days of in-person learning and just for 9th and 10th graders. There is some other concern for seniors; interventions are planned in January for those who are not passing graduation requirements.

The other major concern is keeping kids feeling connected. Accordingly, we have pushed extracurricular activities and things like Spirit Week. Students are being encouraged to take the lead and, as a result, there is a new geography club and the kids have led an Among Us tournament. Clubs are active and teachers involved in a variety of ways.

On a final note, Drea indicated that evaluation is especially difficult because learning methods and grading are so different from pre-pandemic days. Q2 will provide a good check.

Bill Henning asked if there had been any consistent feedback from parent meetings. Both Matt and Drea said there is an overwhelming spirit of collaboration and mutual support. Everyone's biggest concern? When can we get back in the building?!

VI. Interim Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan reported first on enrollment, which is, not surprisingly, lagging behind last year. We do have the Salem Public School list of 5th and 8th graders and

will be mailing to their families. Info sessions are scheduled for the last week of January and again in February. These will provide Spanish translation; a third session will be conducted in Spanish.

Along with other Salem Public Schools, Salem Academy will operate remotely when it reopens in January following the holiday break. We will also be doing some proactive testing prior to in-person classes on January 11th. This plan recognizes the post-Thanksgiving Covid surge; Dave Pabich applauded Stephanie for choosing to operate remotely at that point. Going forward, we have queried families about testing. Ninety percent will participate in the planned sympathetic rapid antigen, aka saliva pool testing.

Christine Wynne asked if many of our families have childcare or food insecurity issues. Stephanie said no and that we have money in the emergency fund if needed.

Last but not least, we have found a middle school band teacher who will teach remotely from Pennsylvania!

VII. Committee Reports

A. Governance Committee Report

Rick Jones reported that the scheduled December meeting with Egility has been pushed to January 11th in order to build a deeper pool of Executive Director candidates.

Rick also proposed Paula Pitcher for board membership effective 1/1/21. She has been a guest at recent board meetings, and her résumé has been distributed to the board. His motion was seconded by Christine Wynne and passed unanimously via roll call vote. Welcome, Paula!

Bill Henning moved to accept the proposed slate of officers, which maintains all current positions and assignments, for the coming year. This was seconded by Mekka Smith and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. Education Committee Report

Dan McCaughey reported that the committee has had two additional meetings with possible DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) consultants and has found significant variations in focus, length of engagement and price. The committee recommends Onward, whose proposal uses performance gaps as its initial focus, as opposed to curriculum enhancements or leadership training. Onward works with different kinds of organizations, but they began in schools and are eager to work with us.

Onward's proposal was the most comprehensive and was the one judged to be of most value and most aligned to our goals. It is not inexpensive (\$145,000), but with savings achieved by operating remotely and by paying a portion in each

of three fiscal years, it is do-able, according to Shelby Morrison. We already have a \$10,000 grand from DESE and are already looking for funding for next year. The program will begin in January and continue for 18 months, with the option to pause if necessary.

The board believes this is important work for the future, a cultural game-changer, as Dave Pabich noted. We look forward to having Onwaard present to the Board sometime in 2021. Bill Henning moved that we engage Onward, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

C. Finance Committee Report

Shelby Morrison reported that we hope to know by the end of the month if the district submitted its report, which will in turn enable us to learn what our tuition numbers are for the current year. Otherwise, we will not have this information until March. There was little other financial news; our finances remain stable and the school remains low risk.

D. Development Committee Report

This committee also had little new to report. Christine Wynne said that Giving Tuesday generated \$1,900, compared to just \$1,000 last year. Overall, we are about \$9,000 ahead of prior year, which is excellent given the current pandemic environment. Current activities include an upcoming Winter Wellness 5K and finding sponsors for the Reach for **College Gala**.

Edward Aroko and Alison Palmer reported on their efforts to build alumni support. They have sent an involvement survey and, although only a few responses are in, athletic events and community cultural connections appear popular. Networking, branded merchandise, and a résumé workshop this spring for alums graduating from college are planned. The goal is to make the relationship mutually beneficial and keep alumni engaged with (and giving to) the school. As Christine Wynne remarked, active alumni involvement is important and says the school is here to stay.

E. Facilities Committee Report

Rick Jones reported that some vent filters have been installed and paid for by Prime Group to the tune of \$6-7000. It is less clear who will for some remedial work that should have been done during renovation of the building and during construction of the gym. We hope that Prime Group will bear the major portion of the cost, but the situation is complicated by several factors: work done prior to Prime Group's ownership, choice of contractor given public securement law issues, and the significant (\$145,000) expense involved. Additionally, the improvements would address basic comfort and air circulation issues that have existed for years, problems that existed prior to the pandemic. The proposed work could not begin until the summer and, with a vaccine on the horizon, making these improvements may lose some urgency, but they still need to be addressed. We will be prioritizing and negotiating with Prime Group in the weeks ahead.

VIII. Vote to Adjourn.

Rick Jones moved to adjourn, seconded by Rick Winter. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, and the meeting adjourned at 7:48 pm.