

MINUTES
of the meeting of the
BOARD OF DIRECTORS of SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS
April 29, 2019

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Nevada held a public meeting on April 29, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. at 8151 N. Shaumber Road, Las Vegas, NV 89166.

1. Call to order and Roll Call

Board Chair John Bentham called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. with a quorum present. In attendance were Board members Will Harty, Gary McClain, Carrie Boehlecke, John Bentham, Sarah McClellan, Travis Mizer, and Cody Noble (arrived at 6:30 p.m.).

Also present were Executive Director John Barlow, Principal Christina Threeton, Principal Sherry Pendleton, Principal Ruby Norland, Principal Elaine Kelley, Principal Lee Esplin, Principal Kate Lackey, and Interim Principal Michele Lorig. Academica representatives Ryan Reeves and Crystal Thiriot were also in attendance.

2. Public Comment and Discussion

Principal Sherry Pendleton addressed the Board and introduced Jackson Bentham, a student at the Lone Mountain campus, and stated that he had received the Prudential Spirit of Community Award. The award honored middle and high school students for outstanding volunteer service, with one middle level and one high school student selected per state. Mr. Angelo Casino, a teacher at the Lone Mountain campus, presented Jackson Bentham with an engraved Prudential Spirit of Community silver medallion in recognition of his outstanding community service and congratulated him on a job well done.

3. Consent Agenda

- a. Minutes from the March 18, 2019 Board Meeting**
- b. Approval of Recommendation from the Finance Committee:**
 - 1. School Financial Performance (Not for Action)**
 - 2. Approval of Janitorial Services for the Sky Pointe Campus**
 - 3. Approval of MOU with CSN for Dual Enrollment**

Member McClellan moved to approve the consent agenda, as presented. Member McClain seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

4. Academic Update and Executive Director Report

Executive Director John Barlow addressed the Board and congratulated the Lone Mountain elementary and middle school Battle of the Books teams on their first place wins in Florida.

Executive Director Barlow reviewed the data bullet points for each campus:

- Aliante – showed improved or consistent growth in comparison to the winter benchmark with the highest ELA and math growth in kindergarten
- Losee – growth was consistent with winter growth (with one grade level with a slight decline) with the highest ELA growth in 10th grade and the highest math growth in 1st grade
- Lone Mountain – grade levels showed improved or consistent growth with the highest math growth in 1st grade
- Stephanie – grade levels showed improved or consistent growth with the highest math growth in 1st grade
- North Las Vegas – growth differed by grade level with some consistent, some improved, and some declined
- Sky Pointe – showed improved or consistent growth with the highest math growth in 7th grade
- Skye Canyon – growth differed by grade level with some consistent, some improved, and some declined

Executive Director Barlow stated that the principals were following the data very closely and were working with the teachers to embed practices and supports to help the students improve. Member Harty thanked Executive Director Barlow for providing the data. Member Bentham stated he would like to start future meetings with student achievement recognition.

5. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding a Principal Search for the Somerset Academy Losee Campus

Executive Director Barlow stated that Principal Farmer had submitted his resignation and recognized his valuable service since 2011 when he opened the Emerson campus. Executive Director Barlow stated that he was seeking direction from the Board in the search for a principal for the Losee campus.

Member McClellan stated that she preferred a full principal search, using every avenue that had previously been utilized, to find the most qualified candidates. Member Harty asked if the delay caused by opening a full search would be detrimental to the school. Executive Director Barlow stated that if the position were posted on April 30, 2019 it could close on May 8, 2019. That would allow him to work with a group of five Somerset principals to conduct interviews and make a recommendation to the Board at the June 4, 2019 Board meeting. Member Mizer stated that he would like the recommendation to be for the top three candidates. Executive Director Barlow stated that, because of the impact it could have on their current employment, it might deter potential candidates if their application would be publicly announced without the assurance of the position. Discussion ensued regarding the parameters of the search and ensuring that candidates were fully aware of the needs of the Losee campus.

Member McClain moved to do a principal search for the Losee campus and bring forth three candidates to the Board.

Further discussion ensued regarding the number of candidates that the interview group would bring to the Board. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and stated that the Board could rely on the interview

group to determine if one candidate stood out enough to be a single recommendation or, if the candidates were closely matched, the interview group could bring forth multiple candidates for the Board to interview.

Member Travis Mizer moved to do a full principal search for the Losee campus, with the option for the committee to bring forth as many candidates as they feel they need to. Member McClain seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

7. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Principal Adherence to Board Approved Expense Budgets

Executive Director Barlow stated that this item was requested during a finance committee meeting during a discussion regarding budgets relating to operations and payroll expenses. Member Mizer stated that Academica needed to continually update the principals regarding their budgets to ensure that the principals stayed within their allotted budgets.

8. Academica Announcements and Notifications

Mr. Reeves reminded the teachers and Board members of the upcoming Year End Celebration and provided a legislative and a SPCSA update.

6. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Somerset Academy of Las Vegas' System-Wide Administrative Structure and Designation of Administrative Positions and Assignments

Mr. Reeves stated that, with the upcoming departure of Executive Director Barlow, the Board would need to determine the administrative structure moving forward. Mr. Reeves stated that the current structure had served Somerset Academy well during the growth from 1000 students in 2011 to the more 8000 current students; adding that with the maturity of the system and growth of highly qualified leaders more governance options were available. He explained that the support document outlining a possible lead principal structure had been developed with principal involvement.

Members Noble and Harty questioned why, since it had previously been recommended to use the executive director structure, the recommendation was now to use a lead principal structure. Mr. Reeves acknowledged that the previous recommendation, based upon a request from the SPCSA, had been to utilize the executive director structure and explained that the executive director position had evolved over time from a facilitator and support to become a supervisory role. Mr. Reeves stated that, with the retirement of Executive Director Barlow, the Board had the opportunity to evaluate the structure and look at other options, including a collaborative facilitator who would maintain their role as principal of a campus.

Member Noble questioned if it was the role of Academica to make a recommendation on the administrative structure. Mr. Reeves replied that it was Academica's role to present options and make a recommendation; however, it was the Board's role to evaluate the options and make the best decision for

Somerset Academy. Member McClain referred to the list of Academica support obligations as listed in the support materials and asked if Academica was prepared to fulfill the obligations that had previously been handled by the executive director's office, to which Mr. Reeves replied in the affirmative.

Members Harty and Mizer expressed concern with accountability and collaboration without an executive director. Mr. Reeves stated that the Board needed to determine if Somerset Academy was better suited to a structure with a strong executive director in a supervisory role or a structure with each individual site principal in charge of their site while working collaboratively together to improve all sites. Member Noble voiced concern with a lead principal being taken away from their site to help another principal; adding that he did not feel confident that the Board was ready to make an informed, well thought out decision. Members Boehlecke and McClellan agreed that the Board was not yet ready to make a decision.

Member Bentham stated that there were benefits to both structures and suggested that, in order to make an informed decision, the Board members research the options, reach out to the principals, and visit campuses.

Principal Christina Threton addressed the Board and stated that, during a recent visit to Florida, she and other principals had the opportunity to observe the lead principal structure in action; adding that it was a very open structure. She stated that, although it may be different than the traditional business world, educators were used to working in a system with teams; adding that she and the other six administrators were working together as a collaborative team. Member McClain stated that he liked the idea of empowering the administrators to maintain a unique identity at each campus while working together collaboratively. Members Harty and Noble stated that, with or without an executive director, the principals have been empowered to work together to improve the system.

Principal Sherry Pendleton addressed the Board and stated that, with the knowledge that Executive Director Barlow was retiring, Board members were individually approaching principals to discuss what type of structure could be used. Principal Pendleton stated that she had initiated a group discussion with the principals to provide the Board with a unified answer to the questions they were receiving on an individual basis; adding that the principals appreciated the Board including them in the discussion.

Principal Ruby Norland addressed the Board and stated that she had also had the opportunity to visit the Florida schools and observe their structure. She stated that, as a first year principal, she had received a lot of support from Executive Director Barlow and the other principals. She further stated that that moving to a structure without an executive director would help to strengthen all the principals as leaders and allow them to build on the trust they already have amongst themselves.

Member Harty asked if, in a structure without an executive director, it was necessary to have a lead principal. Principal Norland stated that it could be structured with a lead principal or as a collaborative leadership approach with the roles and responsibilities divided amongst the principals. Member Harty stated that the intent of the executive director structure was to give the system a facilitator to facilitate collaboration, which would help to build the trust; adding that by taking away the executive director the principals would have less resources from which to draw. Principal Norland stated that funding was also a factor in the discussions; adding that, if the principals could collaborate without an executive director, the funding could be utilized in the classrooms.

Member Boehlecke stated the executive director's office fulfilled more roles other than facilitator and collaborator and asked if the principals were prepared to take on the extra duties. Principal Norland stated that, with ongoing fluid communication between the principals and Academica, they would be prepared.

Member Harty expressed concern regarding communication between the lead principal and the Board if a principal wasn't fulfilling his or her duties. Principal Pendleton stated that the principals had discussed that possibility and included in the outline an opportunity for the Board Chair to meet monthly with the lead principal to address any concerns; adding that, with frequent check points, smaller problems would manifest early and be resolved before they became bigger problems. Member Noble stated that he was concerned that the Board would not be given the pertinent information regarding principal performance if the information was not related directly to star ratings.

Member McClellan stated that the principals should have the autonomy to make their own decisions on their individual campuses; adding that, if they made decisions that were detrimental, they would manifest in the academics, the parent surveys, and the retention rates of the teachers and the students. She further stated that, if Somerset switched to a lead principal structure, her main concern was how often the lead principal would be pulled away from their own campus; adding that she would be more comfortable with that structure if they had a lead principal with a longer tenure at their current campus, as well as long term administrative support with that principal. She further stated that she had no concerns that the principals would not work well together and be collaborative. Following discussion regarding the timing of making a decision on the structure it was determined to table the item to allow Board members to further explore the options.

Principal Elaine Kelley addressed the Board and acknowledged that there were some responsibilities that the lead principal would have that would require a learning curve; however, most of the responsibilities would not be an excessive draw on the lead principal's time and resources. She further stated that, although she would only be in her second year at Aliante, she was a long tenured principal for Somerset Academy and her administrative team and support staff had been with her for a long time; adding that, after discussing how the campus would run if she were to be appointed as lead principal, she had trust in their ability to support her in that role.

This item was tabled.

9. Member Comment

Member Harty stated that, based on the previous discussion, the Board needed to do a better job of letting the principals know that they had the trust of the Board. He stated that he appreciated all that the principals and assistant principals do for his children.

Member Bentham explained Somerset's Big Give, an upcoming initiative that would take place the following week to solicit donations for the system.

10. Public Comment and Discussion

Ms. Cathleen Reese, the Sky Pointe Read by 3 coach, thanked Mr. Barlow for his outstanding efforts in professional development in support of the teachers and students regarding the Read By 3 program; and encouraged the Board to remember the system-wide programs that will continue to need support as they decide on a new structure.

Rhonda Crostic-Maglietti, a parent, asked the Board to interview more than one candidate in the principal search for Losee. She also stated that it was not appropriate to hold dances for K-12 students.

Daniel Rangel, the Losee registrar, wrote a letter, which was read to the Board, in of support of Interim Principal Lorig for the Losee principal position. Patricia Trujillo, the Losee PTO president elect, spoke in support of Interim Principal Lorig, to bring consistency to the campus. Brenda Escobar, the Losee office manager, asked the Board to give Interim Principal Lorig a chance to make changes in the campus.


Sarah Passer, a Losee teacher, encouraged the Board to trust in the principals as they determine the structure for Somerset Academy. She asked that the Losee community be involved in selection of new principal for the campus. She also stated that the Losee and Sky Pointe student councils attended NASC (Nevada Association of Student Councils) where they both received the silver star award which is the highest honors.

Member Bentham invited principals to announce any recognitions at their campuses. Principal Lee Esplin stated that two Sky Pointe students attended Nationals for Archery. Principal Kelley stated that an Aliante student had won 1st place for 3rd grade at the UNLV science competition. Principal Threeton stated that the North Las Vegas premier band earned a superior rating at the UNLV competition.

11. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Approved on: 6-4-19


Secretary of the Board of Directors
Somerset Academy of Las Vegas