

MINUTES
of the meeting of the
BOARD OF DIRECTORS of SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS
September 17, 2020

Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas held a public meeting on September 17, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. at 385 W. Centennial Parkway, North Las Vegas, NV 89084 and via Zoom webinar.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Board Chair John Bentham called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. In attendance were Board members LeNora Bredsguard, Sarah McClellan, John Bentham, Travis Mizer, Will Harty, Cody Noble, and Renee Fairless (joined at 10:38 p.m.).

Also present were Principal Lee Esplin, Principal Cesar Tiu, Principal Christina Threeton, Principal Jessica Scobell, Principal Elaine Kelley, Principal Kate Lackey, and Principal Ruby Norland; as well as Academica representatives Crystal Thiriot, Ryan Reeves, and Gary McClain.

2. Public Comment

Written public comment was received from Amber LaMontagne, Gretchen Merrell, Jennifer Shields, Sarah Brown, Vanessa Starr-Comikey, Crystal Davenport, Ashlee Jensen, Margalina Maggie Pezzullo, Brittany Benson, Lili Ruiz, Amanda Stewart, Danyiell Lockwood, Lindsay Bailey (2 submissions), Sera Riley, Nicole Garcia, Desiree Olson, Amber, Priscilla Davis, Tara Waite, Lizz A. Esparza-Dorantes, Diana Waite, Salym Liufau, Juan and Pamela Contreras, Lindsey Reynolds, Jean Cox; the written public comments were distributed to the Board members and are attached to the minutes. Public comment was made by the following individuals regarding possible reopening plans: Susana Harty, Gwendolyn Neff, Joshua Miller, Brooklyn Young, Jim and Ann Henry, Gina Rossa, Andrea Chambers, Carissa Chenin, Precious Bucher, and Jenerfer Anderson.

Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and explained the documents that were currently governing Somerset Academy's action. Governor's Directive 022 set a capacity limit of no more than 50% room capacity. Governor's Directive 028 set forth spacing of at least three feet for students in elementary and middle school, and six feet for high school students and adults. The State Public Charter School Authority's (SPCSA) action of August 14th set forth that, so long as the county in which a charter school was located was in mitigation level one or two, as Clark County currently was, the school could not bring into the building more than 25% of the total enrollment at any one time, with the 25% prioritized according to special needs. He explained that the priority needed to include special education students, English language learners, and 504 plan

eligible students; adding that it could also include students of a certain grade level or age where the Board determined that they had a special need for instruction.

3. Student/School Achievement Recognition

The principals recognized the students, staffs, and events at their campuses.

4. Consent Agenda

- a. **Minutes from the July 20th Board Meeting**
- b. **Approval of Recommendations from the Finance Committee:**
 - 1. **School Financial Performance**
 - 2. **Approval of Budget for the 2020/2021 School Year**
 - 3. **Acceptance of Grant Funds**
 - 4. **Approval of Revised Maximum Enrollment for the 2020/2021 School Year**
 - 5. **Approval of Retention Bonuses**
 - 6. **Approval Robert Roof and Floor as Vendor for Carpeting at the Lone Mountain Campus**
 - 7. **Approval of Green Living Services as Vendor for Playground Resurfacing at North Las Vegas Campus**
 - 8. **Approval of Magic Brite as Janitorial Vendor**
- c. **Approval of Recommendation from the Evaluation Committee**
 - 1. **Approval of Principal Evaluations and Contract Renewals for all Principals of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas**

Member Mizer moved to approve the items for action on the consent agenda. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

10. Review and Approval of Virtual Education Plan for 2020/2021 Second Quarter

Member Bentham explained that the Board had made the difficult decision to start the school year with all virtual instruction and noted that the Governor and SPCSA direction had subsequently required the virtual model. Each of the Board members commented on the importance of developing a plan to provide in class instruction to as many students as possible, within the constraints of the SPCSA and Governor's Directives. The comments included praise for the teachers and administrators during difficult times, considering allowing an all virtual model for some families, prioritizing special needs and younger students, ensuring safety for students and staff, and concern that students were falling behind.

Ms. Crystal Thiriot addressed the Board and stated that the survey results were available on each campus website in the support materials section for the Board meeting. She then reviewed

the parents, family, and Somerset stakeholder survey results. The data was segregated by campus and system and showed the number of respondents who preferred a hybrid learning model and the number who preferred to remain virtual. Mr. Reeves stated that 32% of parents surveyed preferred to remain virtual and 52% of the teachers surveyed preferred to remain virtual. There were significant gaps between campuses with the Losee and North Las Vegas campuses showing a preference for remaining in virtual learning.

Member Bredsguard asked if there had been a difference between elementary and upper grade student in the responses, to which Mr. Reeves replied in the affirmative. Mr. Reeves explained that there was a 10% difference, with the upper level students more comfortable remaining in a virtual setting. Member Mizer asked if the response rate differentiated between families or individuals. Mr. Reeves stated that it was difficult to determine if the parents responded once for the family or multiple times for each child. Member McClellan asked if the teacher survey differentiated between grade levels, to which Mr. Reeves replied in the negative. Member Bentham reminded the parents that the survey results were available on the websites.

Principal Lee Esplin and Principal Kate Lackey addressed the Board to outline some of the concerns that the principals had with returning some students to school:

- Safety of students and staff
- Infinite Campus – balancing classes
- Difficulty of teaching virtually and in person at the same time
- Not having the proper equipment (not available for all campuses)
- Finding substitutes if teachers use PTO or were exposed
- Following health and safety regulations – exposure tracking
- Health issues of teachers and teacher’s companions
- Bringing back grade levels at the expense of other critical students
- Logistics and travel issues for families with students in multiple grades
- Teacher’s mental health

Member Bentham asked why teachers had been more in favor of a return to the classroom in June than they were now. Principal Esplin stated that they had worked hard to make virtual school successful and were concerned about transitioning back or doing both virtual and in person. Member Harty noted that, even with declining numbers, COVID would not be going completely away soon; therefore, a game plan was needed to get the students back in the classroom.

Member Mizer stated that one Clark County charter had recently brought back some students, and asked if Somerset could work with them to develop a plan. Principal Esplin stated that they were waiting for a call back from Principal O’Dowd on the success of the return of some students. Mr. Reeves explained that Pinecrest Academy had in person learning for kindergarten and 1st grade at one campus. Their board would meet after two weeks to review how successful it was and determine a path forward. He also explained that the Academics managed charter schools in Washoe County were using a hybrid learning model after receiving a waiver from the SPCSA. Member Bentham asked for an explanation between lesson plans for virtual and in person learning. Principal Lackey replied that in the current virtual model they were able to maximize the amount

of curriculum the students received; adding that the teachers also offered extended learning and SPED services were offered in the afternoon.

Member Noble stated that teacher and student mental health seemed to be competing concerns. Principal Jessica Scobell stated that it was possible to balance the concerns; however, only returning some grade levels would infer that some teacher's mental health was more important than other teacher's mental health. She stated that bringing back only some grade levels would not be equitable; adding that the teachers would step up if they felt that the return to school was fair. Principal Threton addressed the Board and reminded them that flu season would be coming soon and stated that it was a concern for the teachers. Discussion ensued regarding possible return scenarios which included petitioning the SPCSA to increase to a 50% return rate and allowing the principal at each campus to determine the needs at their respective campus.

Member Mizer moved to start the 2nd quarter with the hybrid model that was previously approved by this Board at a 50% capacity, if that is turned down by the State Charter Authority or any other governmental agency, we will move forward with bringing back students to class at a 25% capacity, giving priority to special needs/ELL students, followed by kindergarten, then moving up to additional grades as determined by principals, giving principals the autonomy to manage that how they see fit. Member Bredsguard seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

6. Interview of Board Member Candidates

- a. Renee Fairless**
- b. Spencer Gunnerson**
- c. Micol Levi-Minzi**

Member Bentham stated that, with the resignation of Gary McClain, the board had an opening for a new Board member. Following an intensive search, the candidates were narrowed down to three individuals.

Renee Fairless: Ms. Renee Fairless addressed the Board and reviewed her personal, and educational experience. During the introduction and interview sessions she relayed the following:

- She had been an educator for 36 years. She was forever changed when she worked at Sunrise Mountain with a primarily Hispanic demographic and realized that changes needed to take place before high school for disadvantaged students.
- She became the principal at Mater Academy, which had over 70% EL students and over 10% special education students. Most students came to Mater two to three years behind. She had been able to help grow the students at Mater and improve Star ratings.
- She was passionate about education in Nevada and was willing to provide expertise and help from her experience.
- With Somerset becoming a more diverse population, she could lend expertise in how to best serve the students.

- She was a lifelong educator who would be committed to Somerset for as long as she was valuable to the system.
- As an administrator at Mater she was an instructional leader, putting children first. Board members made decisions that affected a wider community, keeping all students and families in mind when making decisions for the whole system.
- As a Board member she would be concerned with what was best for the children. Although she had relationships with the Somerset principals she would still hold them to high standards while she worked closely with them.
- She understood the difficulty of trying to please too many people and felt like the Board should have been more decisive in the decision making process earlier in the meeting. The Board needed to be able to make decisions with the children as the first priority.

Spencer Gunnerson: Mr. Spencer Gunnerson addressed the Board and reviewed his personal and professional experience. During the introduction and interview sessions he relayed the following:

- He was the father of five children, four who attended Somerset Lone Mountain. He was an attorney by trade.
- He would be able to add his voice and experiences to the Board when making decisions. It would be exciting to be a part of a group working for the betterment of the children.
- He had strong communication and listening skills, which would benefit him and the Board during discussions.
- He understood that he would have to make decisions based on what was best for all of the Somerset children, even if the decisions did not benefit his family.
- He knew that the Board was responsible for setting the foundation for the system, then needed to allow the administrators and leaders to accomplish the work.
- He believed it was important to get the foundational learners back in school as quickly as possible. He agreed with the decision the Board made to get the students back to school as quickly and safely as possible.

Micol Levi-Minzi: Ms. Micol Levi-Minzi addressed the Board and reviewed her personal and professional experience. During the introduction and interview sessions she relayed the following:

- She was from Italy but had been in America since she was a small child. She was a psychologist who worked at the VA as a training director. She was the mother of three daughters, two who currently attended Somerset Aliante.
- She grew up valuing service to others, helping those in need, and education. She was grateful for opportunities to give back while ensuring her children received a quality education.
- She liked the diverse backgrounds of the Somerset Board members. She could add a mental health background and voice to the Board.

- She constantly had to monitor dual relationships and would be able to make decisions for the good of the whole Somerset system even if it was not the best decision for her children. Ethics played a huge role in her training and profession.
- She understood that the Board would make the decisions that would then need to be carried out by the principals. It was important to ensure that academics stayed at the forefront of the decisions.
- Suicide rates among children was mentioned during the public comment section of the meeting. She would be able to add perspective on that aspect of mental health for the system.
- In order to follow all of the directives and guidelines, the decision made tonight was the correct decision.

7. Nomination and Election of one New Board Member

Each Board member spoke to the qualities that each candidate would bring to the Board and weighed in on his or her choice of candidates.

Member Mizer nominated Ms. Renee Fairless as the new Board member for Somerset Academy, and the Board voted unanimously to elect Ms. Fairless as the newest member of the Board.

8. Nomination and Election of Board Secretary

Member Mizer nominated LeNora Bredsguard as Board Secretary, and the Board voted unanimously to elect LeNora Bredsguard as Board Secretary.

9. Approval of Lead Principal Compensation Structure and Appointment of Lead Principal for Somerset Academy of Las Vegas

Member Bentham noted that the lead principal position had been discussed during the Strategic Planning meeting. With Principal Esplin leading a K-12 community he would be a good candidate.

Member Bentham moved to appoint Principal Lee Esplin as the lead principal, effective immediately, with a stipend of \$5000 per year. Member Harty seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

11. Approval to Amend Service Logs Section of Somerset SPED Policy and Procedures to Allow the School to Document all Services for Students in Google Drive

This item was tabled.

12. Review and Approval of a Revision to the Somerset Academy of Las Vegas Board of Directors Bylaws

This item was tabled.

13. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Membership of Somerset Foundation Board

Ms. Thiriot stated that the Somerset Foundation Board called for two members of the Somerset Board of Directors to be members of the Foundation Board. Member Harty expressed concerns about the revenue and expenses related to the Foundation Board; adding that he was not sure of the value of the board continuing to exist. Member Bentham noted that there was potential for increased value. Member Noble noted that expenses had been incurred in the establishment of the Foundation which would need to be incurred again if it was reestablished at a later date; therefore, he would be in favor of continuing the Foundation Board.

Member Harty moved to approve Cody Noble as a member of the Somerset Foundation Board. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.

5. Academic Progress Reports and Updates on School Initiatives

The Somerset Principals provided brief updates on academic progress, distance learning, and school events. Some of the things reported were updates on MAP and iReady testing along with:

Principal Tiu stated that some of the Lone Mountain teachers held a social/emotional learning event with parents and students at a park. The kindergarten and 1st grade teachers met with students at a public library. They recently had the iReady diagnostic and in preparation held an iReady parent university with Q&A online. Member Bentham mentioned that one teacher had visited her students with a mobile library.

Principal Scobell stated that they were preparing the students for the ACT. She now had a complete leadership team, including an EL Strategist, K-5 Strategist, Read by Grade 3 Strategist, a full time Math Strategist, a part-time ELA Strategist, an AP Strategist.

Principal Kelley stated that the Aliante campus had great attendance. She was able to attend a minimum of ten classes each day.

Principal Esplin stated that the Sky Pointe dual credit program was up and running, with two teachers on campus and 17 students who were taking classes at the Sky Pointe campus and at CSN. The CTE program had been expanded. A Virtual Monday program had been implemented for the elementary campus with small group instruction for the Read by 3 students and other groups.

Principal Lackey stated that the Skye Canyon teachers were analyzing data to meet the needs of the students. They were working to establish proficiency skill workshops and professional development.

Principal Threton stated that North Las Vegas would be holding a SMART week focusing on finance, math, and art with many activities for the students. The leadership team would be meeting with Jessica Barr to dig into the data. They recently held their Leader in Me kickoff.

Principal Norland stated that They were meeting as grade levels to have data chats and create small group structures for the students. They were waiting for Chromebooks that were back ordered. NJHS virtual induction ceremony would be next month. They were organizing Zoom teacher walks, allowing teachers to visit each other's classes. They now had a certified therapy dog on campus who was listed on the school website.

14. Academics Announcements and Notifications

There were no announcements.

15. Member Comment

The members thanked the principals, fellow Board members, and the online participants for their commitment to the Somerset system.

16. Public Comment and Discussion

There was no public comment.

17. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 p.m.

Approved on: 10/6/2020



**Secretary of the Board of Directors
Somerset Academy of Las Vegas**