

**MINUTES  
of the meeting of the  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS of SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS  
July 20, 2020**

Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas held a public meeting on July 20, 2020 at 6:32 p.m. at 4491 N. Rainbow Blvd, Las Vegas NV 89108 and via Zoom meeting.

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Board Chair John Bentham called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. In attendance were Board members John Bentham, Cody Noble, Will Harty, and LeNora Bredsguard (via Zoom).

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, and Ryan Reeves.

**2. Public Comment**

Written public comment was received from Tara Crammer, Amy Peterson, and Skyler Stephens; 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 concerns with possible reopening plans: Apryl Schulman, Elizabeth Lytle-Martinez, Pamela Smith, Jennifer Schmidt, Kathryn Herbert, Dineen Harmych, and Skylar Stephens.

**3. Consent Agenda**

- a. **Minutes from the June 20, 2020 Strategic Planning Meeting**
- b. **Approval of Revised Somerset Wellness Policy**
- c. **Approval of Revised Meal Charge Policy**

**Member Harty moved to approve the consent agenda, as presented. Member Bredsguard seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**4. Acknowledgement of Gary McClain's Resignation from the Board of Directors and Possible Action Regarding New Board Member Search**

Member Bentham thanked Member McClain for his service to Somerset which included his dedication to Somerset before and during his time serving on the Board. Member Bentham stated that a search for a new Board member was needed and asked Ms. Thiriot to proceed with a search similar to the previous two Board member searches.

## **5. Discussion and Possible Action to Approve the 2020-2021 School Year Reopening Plan**

Member Bentham stated that the principal cohort had worked diligently on creating the reopening plan and acknowledged that it would not be possible to please all of the stakeholders with any decision on reopening. Member Bentham asked Mr. Reeves to address the legal question that had been raised during public comment. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and reviewed Governor Sisolak's Emergency Directive which was issued on June 9, 2020. In the directive school buildings were allowed to reopen under Phase 2 restriction with classrooms capped at no more than 50% of capacity and no more than 50 people per room. Mr. Reeves stated that each district and charter school was required to submit a Board approved reopening plan; adding that the plan should contemplate school year instruction offered through: 1. distance education under an approved Path Forward Program of Distance Education; 2. in-person instruction following strict social distancing protocols; or 3. a combination of distance education and in-person instruction. Mr. Reeves noted that the directive allowed for any of the three options listed.

Principal Lee Esplin addressed the Board and reviewed the process for developing the reopening plan. He stated that the principals had started the process in June with surveys sent to the staff and community. At the time of the surveys 91.75% of people wanted the students back in school. He stated that the leadership teams felt that it was important for the students to meet with teachers in order to build the foundational skills. Principal Esplin outlined the plan as developed which included half day in person learning, with half of the students attending in the morning and half attending in the afternoon. He stated that the Sky Pointe campus had opted for two full days per week of in person learning for 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Principal Esplin further explained that, although masks would not be required for K-4<sup>th</sup> grades, they would be encouraged. Finally, Principal Esplin noted that the plan had been developed before the State COVID-19 numbers had increased.

Member Harty stated that, with the diverse group of parents and families, it would not be possible to please everyone; adding that he supported the plan presented by the administrators. Member Noble stated that there were a number of concerns expressed through public comment regarding the plan. He stated that he would like to hear discussion from the principals on the following points: the three-hour block versus every other day; whether everyone should attend school online; why online learning was not an option for all students; concerns about masks for younger children; what would happen if someone tested positive; and what would happen if a teacher became sick.

Principal Ruby Norland addressed the Board and stated that the thought process of the principals when creating the plan had been to focus on what was best for the learning of the children. They had determined that with the am/pm plan the teachers would be able to see the students every day, which was the preference indicated in the survey results; adding that the principals were confident that a lot of learning could take time during the three-hour time frame with a maximum of 13 students per classroom. Principal Norland acknowledged that, with Nevada now considered a red-zone state, the circumstances may need to be reassessed; however, the main concern of the administrators was providing a stable learning environment for the 2020-2021

school year. Member Noble asked if the principals were considering other options than those presented in the plan. Principal Norland stated that she was sharing her concerns and thoughts about providing the best learning environment for the students with the changes occurring in the State.

Principal Elaine Kelley addressed the Board and stated that the original thought plan of the principals had been to develop a plan that would work best for the majority of the students and staff; adding that, with increased positive cases, all virtual was the only way to guarantee the health and safety of all of the students and staff. Principal Esplin stated that, although online school was not the best option for the education of the students, based on current conditions it should be considered. Member Bentham asked for clarification on the differences between online and the proposed plan. Principal Esplin stated that, although it would be different, the teachers would still be live with the students every day during the assigned time and the students would be required to be in uniforms. Member Bentham asked about a timeline for online learning, to which Principal Esplin replied that the goal should be for at least a complete quarter.

Member Bredsguard thanked the principals for the time and effort required to create the reopening plan. She noted that the plan only provided an online option for students who could provide medical documentation and asked if it could be expanded to include families regardless of documentation, to which Principal Esplin replied in the affirmative. Member Bredsguard stated that she was concerned with the ability to clean sufficiently with the proposed plan. Principal Esplin stated that each classroom would have the previous number of desks, each student would be assigned to a desk to eliminate overlapped use. He further explained that, in addition to regular cleaning, there was a product that could be sprayed on surfaces that would create a barrier that would kill viruses with a lifespan of up to three months.

Member Bredsguard asked how the plan would limit the exposure for specialists who would be seeing more students than regular teachers. Principal Kelley stated that options had been discussed at the Aliante campus and a plan was developed that would minimize risk and exposure by limiting the number of students a specialist was in contact with in a short amount of time, ensuring cleaning was taking place and materials were not shared from student to student; adding that the students would not be traveling in the hallway. Member Bentham asked how a student with a IEP would have their needs addressed. Principal Kelley stated that the special education teachers were working with the Academics special education director and assistant director to develop a model to ensure that the students' needs were met.

Member Harty asked if a hybrid plan would meet the State requirements. Mr. Reeves stated that if the plan presented was approved it would allow for distance education, in person learning, or a combination of the two. He stated that if approved by the Board and the State any combination of the plan, including going to an all online option, could be used as needed. Mr. Reeves noted that the Governor's directive stated that schools must comply with any quarantine and social distancing requirements of the CDC; adding that, with 9500 students, it was likely that there would be positive cases among the students.

Principal Christina Threeton addressed the Board and noted that the plan had been developed to comply with the 50% capacity requirement and that the principals felt it was important to have the students on campus every day; adding that they would also be ready to go virtual if needed. Principal Threeton noted that the uniform requirement had received a lot of attention and stated that uniforms were a Somerset standard. When the students were wearing uniforms they were mentally ready to learn and were part of the community.

Principal Lackey addressed the Board and stated that she felt strongly that the students would learn best in the school setting; however, the plan would allow for families to choose online learning. She expressed concern for the students' social and emotional health in an all online environment. Member Noble noted that the plan required medical documentation to request all online learning and asked for confirmation that any family could choose that option. Principal Lackey confirmed that all of the principals would allow any student to opt for all online learning; adding that the wording in the plan could be adjusted for clarity. Member Noble asked if the campuses had the equipment necessary to provide all online learning. Principal Lackey stated that part of the funding from the CARES/ESSER grant had been earmarked for equipment for online learning.

Principal Jessica Scobell addressed the Board and stated that, during the spring shut down, the Losee campus had struggled to provide technology to the students in need. With the half day model those students would receive daily in person instruction. She was also concerned that many students relied on school for their meals which might be difficult to distribute without in person learning. Principal Scobell noted that she was surprised that 20% of the Losee families had opted for the online only plan. She asked that, if the Board decided on an online only plan, it be for a complete grading cycle. Member Bentham noted that another concern to consider was that, without in person school, cases of abuse and mental health issues would not be addressed. Principal Scobell agreed and noted that all of the principals had ensured that the school social workers continued to be involved with the students; however, not all students were familiar with the services provided.

Principal Cesar Tiu addressed the Board and stated that he also had mixed emotions about online learning versus in person learning due to the change in circumstances. He stated that consistency provided the best atmosphere for learning. Principal Tiu further stated that, whatever platform was approved, the Somerset system would embrace it and provide a quality education for the students.

Public comment was made by the following individuals regarding concerns with possible reopening plans: Mykle Lee, Jayd Rowles, Julie Ann Usiak, Maggie Pezzullo, Michelle Moskos, Carlos Saucedo, Amber Lewis, Stacy Holland, and a parent in attendance. Comments from Delfina Simpson and Angelina Pineda were read.

In response to a concern during public comment, Principal Lackey stated that if a child became sick the school was directed to call the SNHD and get their immediate recommendation based on the case; adding that, when previous cases of norovirus had affected the schools, SNHD had been contacted for recommendations. Principal Esplin responded to some of the issues raised during the public comments. In response to the possibility of having one campus as an online only

campus, he stated that it would be difficult on the families from that campus who opted for in person learning. In response to delaying the start date he replied that, without know when things might improve, it was not possible to determine a better start date; adding that any changes to the calendar needed State approval. Member Bredsguard noted that a one week delay would be in line with other system and the school district while allowing for additional teacher training. Principal Esplin stated that they had determined to use part of the professional development days before school started and the remainder during the school year.

In response to weekly virus testing of all students Principal Esplin replied that it would be very time consuming and leave little time for actual instruction. He stated that, at the Sky Pointe campus, the cleaning company would be providing documentation regarding the cleaning products and schedule. Member Bentham noted that one concern was regarding special education, which had been addressed during the previous discussions. Member Noble noted that one of the questions asked during public comment was if the school be able to convert to in person if they started with all virtual learning. Principal Esplin replied that the reopening plan included the option to return to in person learning; adding that he would suggest that any change from virtual to in person be made at the end of a quarter or semester. Member Noble noted that another concern raised during the public comments was if a student would fall behind if they became ill. Principal Esplin replied that with remote live instruction a student could continue receiving instruction while in quarantine.

Mr. Reeves stated that the reopening plan presented by the principals contained a blended learning program with the option for parents to select all virtual learning; adding that the Board could include instruction in the motion to make it an all virtual start for the school. Member Bredsguard stated that the motion would also need to include language allowing for anyone to select the all virtual model regardless of medical documentation. Principal Scobell stated that the plan stated that students who opted for cohort C would need to commit for a quarter; however, if a student became sick with COVID and were precluded from coming to school they would have the opportunity to go virtual until they were able to return in person. She stated that while the principals wanted to be flexible they had to think about staffing requirements for in person and virtual instruction.

**Member Bredsguard moved to approve the original presented reopening plan with an amendment to include a cohort C for online learning for any families that feel it is the best option for their child, without documentation for vulnerabilities being required.**

Member Noble asked to have include a secondary motion with the option for principals to switch to all online learning for a quarter or semester, based on the current conditions. Principal Esplin stated that he would prefer that the Board determine if the system were to go all online. Discussion ensued regarding all online learning. Member Noble requested that the motion include an initial phase of all online learning for the first quarter with a reassessment at the end of the quarter to determine the school would continue with all online or move to a blended plan.

**Member Bredsguard moved as previously stated with the addition of the initial phase as online learning for the first quarter, to be reassessed at the end of the quarter. Member Noble seconded the motion.**

Mr. Reeves asked for clarification from the Board as to whether the building would remain open for teachers and include an option for individual students to be able to attend for one on one assessments or meetings as needed. Member Noble stated that the Board's action tonight should not prohibit that. Member Bredsguard agreed, as long as CDC guidelines were followed. Member Harty stated that he would be opposed to the motion as stated; adding that he preferred an in classroom instruction option.

**Member Bentham opened the floor to a vote and the Board voted 3 to 1 to approve, with Member Harty voting in opposition.**

**6. Discussion and Possible Action to Revise the 2020-2021 School Year Calendar**

Member Bentham stated that the calendar had been adjusted to return to school on August 17, 2020 with one data day removed later in the school year.

**Member Noble moved to approve the revised 2020-2021 school year calendar. Member Harty seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**7. Review and Acceptance of CARES/ESSER Funding**

Ms. Thiriot stated that CARES/ESSER grant provided funds for PPE and technology for schools. Member Noble asked what restrictions would be placed on the funds. Ms. Thiriot stated that the award contained some restrictions; however, the money would be spent within those restrictions and the funds would not need to be repaid.

**Member Noble moved acceptance of CARES/ESSER funding. Member Bredsguard seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**8. Academica Announcements and Notifications**

There were no additional announcements.

**9. Member Comment**

Member Bredsguard and Member Bentham thanked all those who had worked on the presentation and their willingness to continue to work together.

**10. Public Comment and Discussion**

There was no public comment.

**11. Adjournment**

**The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 p.m.**

**Approved on: September 17, 2020**

*LeNora N Bredsguard*

LeNora N Bredsguard (Sep 18, 2020 13:02 PDT)

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

From: Tara Crammer [REDACTED]

Dear Somerset Academy Board of Directors,

I am writing to request your help regarding the proposed return to school guidelines. I understand that the Board will vote on July 20th, and I would like to send a brief message for your consideration before the vote.

I can only imagine the difficulty that schools are facing when attempting to devise a plan for this semester, which keeps our students and staff as safe as possible, while meeting the Governor's guidelines. I have been working in administrative positions for the past 15 years and understand that there's no way to make everyone happy.

So, my request is that Somerset schools consider replicating the schedule adopted by CCSD. Specifically, I am requesting that our children attend 2 days per week, and have the other 3 off for distance learning rather than having children attend Monday-Friday for 3 hours per day.

Speaking as a parent, who works full-time at a considerable distance away, my ability to secure childcare both before and after school each day is compromised. Allowing parents to take their children to one location each day (either school or childcare) is much easier than the logistics involved in a 3 hour school day. Additionally, while I have utilized Champions for childcare last year, Champions forces parents to pay for days that they may not use. For example, parents must select paying for 2 mornings or 5 mornings. So, if I only need help 1 day, I am paying for 2. This may seem petty, but the cost amplifies when considering morning and afternoon care, now with extended hours, and many parents may struggle with being able to afford this option.

In close, I certainly don't presume to have all of the answers, and understand the complex puzzle that must be assembled to meet everyone's needs. I simply ask to have a schedule that's in full days rather than 3 hour blocks.

Thank you for your time in reading this message and for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Tara Crammer



Hi Somerset Board-

Thank you so much for the time each of you spend volunteering to make our schools the best they can be. I just wanted to take a minute and express my gratitude for Somerset, our board and the administrations from all of our campuses. 2020 has for sure been a crazy year!

I am grateful for the time that has gone into listening to the parent surveys. The plan presented for our schools reopening is by far one of the best school plans I have seen. Phase 2 is for sure a difficult place to be as we are looking at returning to school. As we navigated 4<sup>th</sup> quarter I watched my children struggle with the lack of in person instruction and the social aspect school bring to them.

The 5 day a week ½ day schedule allows so much for our students. It allows the in person instruction so needed, and the connection with their peers. It also allows the most flexibility to progress through the different phases our state will see in the coming months.

As you review the final opening plan and vote, please remember that our kids need this plan. Thank you for your time.

Amy Peterson  
Somerset Lone Mountain Parent

Members of the Board,

I am Skylar Stephens, photography teacher at Sky Pointe. I would first like to say that I appreciate all the work and thought that has gone into the return plan. I know that these decisions have not been easy and that this is an unprecedented situation. I also appreciate how the final quarter was handled. We implemented changes quickly and I think the system was fair for teachers and students.

As my time is limited, I will hold my concerns about risks to students, as I am sure others will and have brought these concerns to your attention and focus solely on my concerns as a teacher. While I appreciate the return plan, I have some serious concerns about the risks it poses to the health and safety of the students and staff, especially those like myself, that have preexisting conditions and also might have family members at risk. In my situation I have asthma. When I get a common cold, it can last for months. I also have a daughter at home that has a rare immune disorder that causes physical and vocal tics, as well as cognitive impairment. This disorder is caused by repeated infections causing the body's immune system to attack itself. Her life has been turned upside down by this condition, including not being able to participate in school or spend time with friends. After 2 years of doctor after doctor not being able to diagnose her, we finally have a diagnosis. We are awaiting her treatment, which will be IVIG, a treatment for her immune system. She will be prone to infection and an illness like COVID-19 could be devastating. Even a minor infection could exacerbate her condition.

I am very concerned that the return plan that has been presented will put me and my family and my fellow teachers at undue risk. While there are safety precautions taken, I am concerned with a plan that brings students into close and frequent contact with at risk teachers. I understand our need to make the best possible and normal school day for the student, but I feel that this plan leans more towards being least restrictive rather than being the safest. While risk of infection for students is statistically low, risk for adults is unchanged. Recent studies suggest that while younger people are less likely to become seriously ill, children 12-19 are just as likely to spread the virus as adults. There are still many unknowns about transmission, that I feel my safety and that of my fellow staff members will be compromised.

As I am sure you are aware, the issue of returning to school has become a national political talking point. I have received hate and venom online for expressing my concerns. During this time I have spoken with many fellow educators across the country and I can honestly say that most if not all have serious reservations about returning to the classroom. As teachers we know what the classroom and school environment is like day to day. Teachers know mask wearing will be a constant discipline issue. If yonder pouch use is any indication, it will be a constant battle, especially given that the presented plan does not allow for outdoor breaks between classes. Students will remove masks in restrooms, in the hall when they think no one is looking, and when they are hanging out when they leave the building.

This job, while very rewarding, is also difficult. With so many things to consider such as state standards, behavior management, special needs, lesson planning, instruction, to name a few; adding the further concerns of mask wearing, sanitation, simultaneous online and in person instruction, may well be a bridge too far.

When speaking to my fellow educators there are many questions that have no easy answers, such as what happens if someone tests positive for COVID-19? If it is a student and they have attended 6 different classes, in 6 different classrooms, with 6 different teachers, then all 6 teachers, along with all students that attended those classes, would be obligated to self-quarantine under CDC guidelines. That would mean that we would need 6 substitute teachers or have all students transition to home learning for 14 days. This could potentially create an environment of constant opening and closing. This could create an unstable learning environment for all involved.

I understand our need to get back to normal, but a school environment with teachers wearing masks attempting to teach students both present and online, while being unable to sit next to each other or interact, is far from normal. In summary, there are too many variables and unknowns for an in-person model such as this to provide for safety. I suggest we begin school online full time to prepare and create clear expectations for our families. Our staff managed to put together a solid online program in a week this Spring. Imagine what we could do with more time. While it may not have been ideal, it was workable. If we used our resources to ensure all students were able to log in and participate, I am confident we can create a great educational experience.

As my time is limited, I have listed below questions and concerns that I and my fellow educators have. It is my feeling that with so many uncertainties, the current plan is unworkable and unsafe for at risk teachers..

Concerns and questions:

Many of our teachers and admin are above the age of 40 or at risk due to preexisting conditions.

Classrooms and Hallways are not large enough to space students far enough apart.

Students are allowed to opt out of mask wearing policy without a doctor's note.

Students will be eating lunch without a mask while in the presence of adults and students.

According to a [new South Korean Study](#), children 12-19 are just as likely as adults to spread COVID-19.

Regular Bell schedule means that students will be passing from room to room too often.

5-minute passing periods are inadequate for disinfecting. Also it does not give adequate time for bathroom breaks with the proper amount of handwashing.

The schedule does not allow time for teachers to take breaks from prolonged mask use.

Teachers with elementary age children will be unable to transition children to daycare.

With half the students at home, hands on, demonstration-based teaching will be difficult as half the class will be present, and the schedules are not A and B days.

School network could not handle normal school traffic in the past, how will it handle all teachers streaming live video at once? Will the network be upgraded?

Air condition system is enclosed.

Summer heat will force PE class indoors.

Students are under no obligation to social distance outside of school, nor are the families.

What is our liability if a student gets COVID-19 and what is the school liability to a teacher that becomes ill? Will the teachers have to use their own days if asked to quarantine (even if they have no symptoms)?

Nevada is considered a "[red zone](#)" State by the White house COVID-19 task force.

Parent survey was taken when Nevada cases were low and the expectation was that the heat would slow down the virus. Has a new survey been conducted?

Extended school day and duties without extra compensation.

Substitute availability has been difficult under normal circumstances.

If a case is detected in a class, CDC guidelines suggest a 14 day quarantine. The quarantine alone would use almost all PTO days. Will all students be transitioned to home learning?

Will testing be available for teachers?

If there is a positive test, will teachers be required to be tested at their own expense?

With a vaccine likely by the end of the year, can we wait for live instruction until then to resume live instruction?