

**The SABIS International Charter School  
160 Joan Street  
Springfield, MA 01129  
Board of Trustees**

**Minutes of SABIS Board of Trustees Meeting – March 18, 2020**

In Attendance: Sonja Shaw, Ellen McDonald, Freddy Lopez, Luis Aponte, Atu White, John Delaney, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Paula Meara, Joyce Gondek, Patrick White

Guests: Maretta Thomsen, Laura Domash, Jillian Desso, Vanessa Pileggi

Not Present: Dena Facchini, James Hollins, Derryl Gibbs, Daryl Johnson

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Meeting held via conference call.

I. **Meeting called to order at 6:07 p.m.**

II. **Public Forum**

Sonja Shaw noted that four people had reached out to speak. Two of the four couldn't attend. One did not respond. One is in attendance to speak, Ms. Desso, who addressed the Board. Numerous parents asked her to speak on their behalf. She said her oldest child attended the school and had a phenomenal experience; rest of her children out of SABIS now; although there were no issues with the first two, the third child IEPs were not followed properly; she did not know til March they didn't have current copy of IEP. This was about three years ago and she is currently a 6<sup>th</sup> grader in another school. She had issues with her daughter being on the other side of building and never returning back to class and not hearing about it until next day. The following year, teachers left, some were not trained properly, some staff were speaking to children in a way that was not proper/unprofessional including disciplinarians. Feels they were covering up info, why are teachers leaving? She did a Google search and learned that the school psychologist was on leave for issues. More recently she ended up pulling her children out of the school. There are too many kids in a classroom. Her child that was struggling has not had any issues at all in the new school district. Her IEP classroom is 4-5 students, not 13-15 like at SABIS in a smaller classroom. What used to be fabulous has really gone downhill. Can't say what exactly problem is, something needs to change. Some serious talks around about unlicensed teachers and teachers that have left but she doesn't know facts. Recently a teacher was let go and there are plenty of children in that classroom that would have seen what happened. Feels the way it was handled was awful.

III. **Approval of minutes**

**Luis Aponte moved to approve minutes listed below. Seconded by John Delaney and approved by voice vote, YES:** Sonja Shaw, Ellen McDonald, Freddy Lopez, Luis Aponte, Atu White, John Delaney, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Paula Meara, Joyce Gondek.

- Regular meeting of 1/15/2020
- Finance/facilities of 2/5/2020 & 3/11/2020
- Education committee of 2/24 & 3/5/2020
- Contract committee of 2/4 & 2/25/2020
- Executive Committee of 2/12/2020

IV. **Student Life**

Laura Domash reported for Student Life. The Academic Dept is working weekly with teachers and peer tutors, hoping to transition once back in session. Student body feedback they are enjoying peer tutoring and closing. Weekly AMS scores used and tutoring sessions entered with specific questions. Continuing to promote the “plus 6” initiative. Students have opportunity to earn free polo tee. Recruiting more students for academics to create easy transition back to school. Academic Decathlon placed 2<sup>nd</sup> place for small schools, received 11 individual medals, gold for science and literature and a top scorer. Online competing in May for nationals.

Hosting NHS induction, 24 additional students for 59 total. Lower school hosted reading stories + activities, introducing new vocab words. Every student interacted and concluded with an art activity. Hope to expand in other classes.

New head prefect appointment and looking forward to building even stronger team. Continue to listen to students and better ways to communicate and end school year strong.

V. **Contract Committee**

Atu White provided update. Received first proposal from SEM and meeting on March 24 with Education committee to review educational and reporting standards, and remedies, and awards if achieved. Will meet to come up with benchmarks and then respond to SEM. Want to have near final draft ready for Board by April meeting. Questions/Ellen McDonald asked about the deadline of May 1 draft to DESE – should we be requesting extension?

VI. **Director’s Report**

Maretta Thomsen reported. Have been communicating with Parent Connection and on Facebook and SABIS web and through robo-calls and emails to families and staff. Immediately contacted authorities for what things would need to be done. Administration is working remotely except when needed. Had everything at the front door on the 17<sup>th</sup> for parents who needed to pick up medication. Deep cleaning just finished on Monday. Holding school leaders conference calls every morning and again as needed. Admins are present at least 9-11 each day. Meetings such as 504 reviews have been cancelled since school is not in session. Participating in every webinar offered whether for education, health, etc. Enrichment materials have started to go home, provided by SABIS. Some difficulty with overload using internet as is happening all over State. Some material will go out over SABIS platform. Realize that 100% of students do not have access to internet, but a very high percentage do have access to phones. If there is situation where parents cannot get packets, they will make accommodations to come to school and pick up or mail them out. John Delaney asked, what is contained in

packets? They are receiving materials on what they have learned. Per DESE, can't provide new information—materials review what they've learned to this point in the year. Also provided with answer keys so they can check their work. Seniors have been in contact and are rather upset. Trying to keep spirits high. Joyce Gondek asked whether packets are continually updated as goes on, or is packet enough for a few weeks? -- Depends on the subject and have also told students that reading is to continue while they are at home. Math comes out on a weekly basis; some subjects are for a longer period of time. School is looking into developing technology/way to get in contact and reach peer tutor or teacher. Luis Aponte asked about students with only a phone or data limits. ---Maretta Thomsen noted there is much more to be worked out. Sonja Shaw suggested a letter to parents if not all are on-line.

*Atu White left the meeting.*

## VII. Finance/Facilities Committee

### SEM Request Letter

Freddy Lopez reviewed the separation agreement discussion at finance committee meetings on 3/11/2020 and 3/18/2020. DESE stated that the document can be public; SEM perhaps has other position. Paula Meara confirmed, the former Director was notified. Amy Wesley noted her objection to this topic. Freddy Lopez said committee has discussed and requested monies be paid back to the budget, and SEM position is that they will not pay the money back. Need to officially make this request in writing/ read aloud to Board. Joyce Gondek asked, what is the reason why they don't want to pay? Noted, there was not a specific reason given. They said the former Director was paid in accordance with how they are supposed to pay. Nothing received in writing. Paula Meara asked if Board is not a party in this, why would we not leave it? Freddy Lopez noted that this was not part of approved budget; paid without approval of the Board. Also noted that DESE has charged the board to come up with solution. Need to make formal request to SEM with position. **Anne-Marie Nicolai moved to accept the letter as read out loud by Freddy Lopez. Seconded by Luis Aponte and approved by voice vote, YES: Freddy Lopez, Luis Aponte, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Ellen McDonald, Joyce Gondek, John Delaney, Sonja Shaw. ABSTAINED: Paula Meara. Letter will be sent with a copy saved for file.**

### Budget Review

Steve Bissonnette reviewed for FY '20. Projecting about \$950K net surplus, all as per reviewed in the finance committee meeting on 3/11/2020.

Noted the school is able to work on payroll remotely. Should have in place before end of month. For the Board account, Steve will follow up to make sure invoices are up to date and Board checks are done manually. Ellen McDonald asked how the hourly employees being paid? Steve Bissonnette said they are in discussion to figure it out. Amy Wesley noted it is a State decision and they are waiting for guidance from DESE, Governor, and Commissioner Reilly like the rest of the districts. Once that is determined, will follow guidelines. At moment, DESE said schools continue to pay non-exempt employees.

## Facilities

Freddy Lopez updated for Facilities. A third party will create fields RFP. Working with Weston & Sampson as OPM. Tim Tynan will provide some updates. On solar, should have final RFP to review before it goes out. SMART program/ some questions, Tim Tynan looking into further with impact of marketability of getting a contract for solar. If anyone wants any more details please ask committee and can share with Board. All feedback welcome.

## VIII. Education Committee

Ellen McDonald provided brief update. The committee met on 2/24 and 3/5/2020. Has received commissioner's determination with two conditions. Discuss whether governance committee in agreement that we need extension to May 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Waiting for update from SEM on changes to the review document, delayed with everything going on now with schools.

## IX. Governance Committee

Joyce Gondek reported, working currently with Atu White on contract and on bylaws. Expecting draft ready for Board at the next meeting.

Sonja Shaw noted currently bylaws have to be updated by 5/1 but may be reaching out to DESE for extension to end of month. Will check with Atu White – maybe DESE can address both issues at one time to be sure Board adheres to deadlines or receives extension. Ellen McDonald is already reaching out to DESE and will report back.

*Patrick White joined the meeting.*

## XI. Chair Report

- Joyce Gondek reported on the retreat. With current situation needs to be cancelled and then revisit. Perhaps hold in fall.
- Executive committee meeting was held to approve the academic decathlon overnight trip at MIT in Boston. Because of timing and early start to the day it was required to be overnight. Reminded school can request in advance even if they don't know they're advancing, to get approval completed.
- Board signing authority – voted in November for officers and with Atu White as Vice Chair, need to vote on his signing authority for checking account. For transfers from BOT account to operating, two trustees required. Typically it is Chair, Vice Chair, and Treasurer. **Ellen McDonald moved to give Atu White signing authority. Seconded by Patrick White and approved by voice vote, YES: Luis Aponte, Paula Meara, Freddy Lopez, John Delaney, Ellen McDonald, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Joyce Gondek, Patrick White, Sonja Shaw.** Bank needs copy of these minutes.
- **Anne-Marie Nicolai moved to formally create the Safety committee and recognize its work done to date. Seconded by Luis Aponte and approved by voice vote, YES: Luis Aponte, Paula Meara, Freddy Lopez, John Delaney, Ellen McDonald, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Joyce Gondek, Patrick White, Sonja Shaw.**
- Charter renewal was granted with two conditions.

- Received a letter and an email addressed to BOT which was distributed to BOT and saved in file. The letter is from a former teacher and from her perspective, the issues going on in the school and indicating that she would also send the letter directly to trustees. Not all trustees received it. It also mentions she is sending it to the State of MA, Governor and Commissioner, superintendent of Springfield schools, the Mayor of Springfield, etc. Sonja is working on a high level response to the letter. For the education committee—if there is anything in the letter that should be addressed from a trustee standpoint, as a governance board that does not get involved in the day to day operations of school, but address any items that would require follow up. **Ellen McDonald moved to authorize the Chair to draft a general response to the teacher who submitted the letter Seconded by Anne-Marie Nicolai and approved by voice vote, YES: Freddy Lopez, Luis Aponte, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Joyce Gondek, Paula Meara, John Delaney, Ellen McDonald, Patrick White, Sonja Shaw.** Also received an email from a parent to Board about a situation that happened in the school. Sonja Shaw read the email aloud about a parent arguing about a student being suspended, sharing to bring to board’s attention. Discipline is not part of the Board. Maretta Thomsen noted that the suspension was not held and all students involved were sent to the nurse, and she followed up with all four parents.

*Atu White returned to meeting.*

- Will work on getting a conference call number for Board meetings/subcommittee chairs reach out as needed.
- Since Joan Long will be resigning after June, **Anne-Marie Nicolai moved to create an ad hoc committee to create job description, do interviews, and make a recommendation to the Board. Seconded by Paula Meara and approved by voice vote, YES: Patrick White, Ellen McDonald, John Delaney, Paula Meara, Joyce Gondek, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Luis Aponte, Freddy Lopez, Sonja Shaw, Atu White.** Sonja Shaw, Anne-Marie Nicolai, and Ellen McDonald will be on the committee.

Next meeting: April 15 abbreviated meeting is on the schedule and could be rescheduled.

Ellen McDonald moved to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Freddy Lopez. The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne-Marie Nicolai, Secretary  
SICS Board of Trustees

Attachments

Minutes for approval  
Request letter to SEM/finance  
Letter from teacher  
Email from parent