

**MINUTES**  
**of the strategic planning meeting of the**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS of SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS**  
**February 8, 2020**

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Nevada held a public strategic planning meeting on February 8, 2020, at 8:00 a.m. at 6630 Surrey St., Las Vegas, NV 89119.

**1. Call to order and Roll Call**

Board Chair John Bentham called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. In attendance were Board members LeNora Bredsguard, Sarah McClellan, Travis Mizer, Cody Noble (left at 11:30 a.m.), Will Harty (arrived at 8:09 a.m., left at 1:45 p.m.), and Gary McClain (arrived at 8:14 a.m.).

Also present were Principals Lee Esplin, Cesar Tiu, Ruby Norland, Christina Threeton, Jessica Scobell, Elaine Kelley, and Kate Lackey; as well as Somerset Academy Inc. representatives Bernie Montero, Sarah Fye, Suzette Ruiz, and Marla Devitt. Academica Representatives Crystal Thiriot and Ryan Reeves were also in attendance.

**2. Public Comment and Discussion**

Principal Cesar Tiu addressed the Board and invited them to the Lone Mountain leadership day on Wednesday, February 12, 2020 from 8:00 a.m. until 10:30 a.m.

**3. Approval of Minutes from the December 17, 2019 Board Meeting and January 18, 2020 Training Meeting**

**Member Mizer moved to approve minutes of the December 17, 2019 board meeting and the January 18, 2020 training meeting. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**4. Campus Progress Reports from Aliante, Losee, and North Las Vegas**

Principal Elaine Kelley addressed the Board and stated that 4<sup>th</sup> grade had been departmentalized, which allowed teachers to focus in on content area; adding that each 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was partnered with the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who was teaching the same content area. She stated that the middle school math teachers were working with the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to provide professional development and collaboration. Principal Kelley stated that an instructional aide in 5<sup>th</sup> grade was supporting the science rotation, the reading teachers were integrating some of the science standards to enhance the academic exposure, and the STEAM specialist was working with small groups of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders on their science projects. The reading teacher, who was certified in reading instruction, was working with students on reading instruction, the Spanish teacher was working with ELL students, and the literacy specialists had been working with small groups to work on ELA standards.

Member Bentham asked if they had seen any growth with the changes implemented. Principal Kelley replied that they did not have new data; however, they had seen a positivity among the teacher which would carry over to the students. Member Noble stated that he had expected a more detail action plan to improve the Star ratings. Principal Kelley replied that she had condensed the information; adding that they were working hard to improve the Star rating by teaching from the curriculum, using small group support instruction, providing an IA for each teacher or grade level, and targeting more focused instruction.

Member Noble asked what was being done in the middle school. Principal Kelley stated that the student population had doubled in the middle school and four new teachers were added. She stated that, because the added teachers were new to the curriculum, they were being supported by the curriculum coach. She added that, with only one curriculum coach supporting all of the subjects for all grades, it was difficult to provide enough support; adding that they had fourteen long-term subs and would have 1110 students next year.

Member Noble asked what support the Board could provide. Principal Kelley stated that, during a budget planning discussion with Matt Padron, she had discussed the need for additional money to support the administration team and an additional curriculum coach to help support the teachers. Member Mizer stated that, during the Finance Committee meeting, they had discussed long-term subs and that Mr. Reeves had stated that, with a teacher shortage, more long-term subs were being used across the state. Principal Kelley stated that many long-term subs were good educators who didn't have the credentials to teach. Principal Esplin addressed the Board and stated that some instructional aides were also great teachers who lacked the credit hours to even be long-term subs. Discussion ensued regarding making changes to the tuition reimbursement program to facilitate long-term subs and instructional aides gaining teaching credentials, with the determination to add a tuition reimbursement discussion to an upcoming agenda.

Principal Jessica Scobell addressed the board and stated that the graduation rate had been fixed and that they were working on the five-year graduation cohort for the performance framework grading. She reviewed the CTE plans, which included a teaching and training strand and a sports medicine strand for the 2020/2021 school year and, hopefully, an additional strand the following year that would be less academically rigorous. She stated that two veteran teachers would be coming on board to take over several AP courses and four fully credentialed high school math teachers would be joining the staff.

Principal Scobell stated that, although the data may not have reflected the improvement, she was pleased with the direction the middle school was moving. Chronic absenteeism had been reduced in all grade levels K-12 from 13-16% to 4-6%. She stated that the improvement in chronic absenteeism would help in the Star ratings, as well as facilitating improved learning by students who were in class more. Principal Scobell outlined the staffing changes that had taken place with long-term subs being replaced with qualified teachers. Principal Scobell stated that the cultural of the middle school had improved with fewer expulsions; adding that two student support advocates were currently in Texas for restorative justice training.

Principal Scobell stated that, although elementary was the biggest concern, 5<sup>th</sup> grade had showed improvement in the i-Ready assessment. She distributed handouts with the i-Ready results and reviewed the results with the Board. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade they were able to move 10% of the students from yellow (one grade-level behind) to green (on or above grade-level) in reading and 24% more students fell in the green area in math. She stated that teaming of courses had been beneficial, allowing teachers to plan less, plan with purpose, and reflect on what they taught. Principal Scobell further stated that they would be emulating the improvements in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and would be targeting the students with intervention. An ELL strategist had been added at the semester.

Member Mizer expressed concern with keeping the changes in place if there was a large turnover in teachers and asked about teacher retention at the Losee campus. Principal Scobell stated that one of the first things she did when she was hired was to meet with every teacher. Principal Scobell added that at this point, one high school teacher would be leaving, although she may need to have hard conversations with other teachers. She stated that, even though a few teachers were looking to transfer within the Somerset system, she not aware of any middle school teachers who would be leaving. The biggest transition would be in elementary where she would be replacing long-term subs with fully licensed teachers. Member Bentham noted that Principal Esplin had visited the Losee to campus to assist in evaluating the elementary school and thanked the principals for their collaboration.

Principal Christina Threton addressed the Board and stated that they would be moving to departmentalization of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades and had teamed the teachers together. All of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers were able to spend two hours with coaches and administrators from Florida and Las Vegas reviewing the i-Ready data, which was valuable and powerful for the teachers. Instructional Aides had been reassigned to the power hours for the individual students who needed the extra push. She stated that they had purchased GradeCam which would be used weekly to assess the students in specific targeted standards for the SBAC assessment.

Principal Threton stated that administrative team had devised an SBAC crunch time plan, helping to plan lessons for the next ten to twelve weeks. They would be offering seven Saturday sessions to targeted students in 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She stated that they had about sixty students attend tutoring session three times per week. Principal Threton further stated that Assistant Principal DeAnda had been working with the chronic absenteeism parents to improve attendance. There were currently ten homebound students.

Principal Threton stated that Ms. Crystal Thiriot had been helping at the campus with student discipline and Ms. Sherry Pendleton had helped in the office through the month of January to free the administrative team up to spend time in the classrooms. She stated that they had been working on tier instruction during their professional development days. They had hired an additional instructional coach to work with the EL students. With help from Florida they had implemented i-Ready growth and would hold challenges between teachers, students, classes, grade levels, and with the Aliante and Losee campuses. The students at or above grade level had increased from 26% to 45% in reading, with a decrease from 33% to 21% in students two or more grade levels behind. There was an increase from 19% to 36% in students at or above grade level in math. Principal Threton further stated that student behavior was a challenge. They had created a refocus room and were working on teaching students instead of suspending them.

Member Bentham asked for clarification on homebound students. Principal Threton explained that, if a student had medical reasons that prevented them from attending, the school was able to provide compensatory time to make up the missed days. Principal Scobell stated that the nominal amount of money needed to pay the teacher to go to the home would exponentially help the school by preventing the students from getting too far behind. Principal Kate Lackey addressed the Board and stated that she was using Somerset Virtual for one of her homebound students.

Member Noble stated that the Board had received mid-year projections and asked if they would be able to see projections after the third quarter; adding that the Board would like to know if the plans implemented were working. Principal Scobell stated that they were pulling their i-Ready data weekly, which was helpful in monitoring whether or not the interventions were working. Discussion ensued on SBAC testing and the elements included in the Star rating system. Principal Ruby Norland stated that it would be useful to have all campuses using the i-Ready system. Discussion ensued regarding purchasing

i-Ready for the system. Mr. Bernie Montero stated that Somerset Inc. would be working to negotiate purchasing i-Ready for the entire Somerset system.

Member Harty stated that the issue was a larger issue and should include a discussion regarding the budget and surplus. He stated that, with budget planning for the 2020/2021 school year taking place, the Board should discuss if and how to utilize some of the surplus. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and stated that now was the correct time to be having budget discussions; adding that Mr. Matt Padron was meeting with the principals to discuss the needs of each campus. Member Bentham stated it was a discussion that should be included in the strategic planning section of the meeting.

## **5. Strategic Planning Discussion**

### **a. Review of Mission and Vision of Somerset Academy, Inc.**

This item was discussed in conjunction with item 5.b.

### **b. Review of Progress and Setting Short and Long Term Goals**

Ms. Sarah Fye addressed the Board and stated that she worked for Somerset Inc. as the director of strategic planning. She asked the principals and Board members to partner up with the liaison assigned to their campus. to have honest discussions regarding the strengths, weaknesses, internal opportunities, and outside threats of their respective campuses. She asked each partnership to highlight the discussion using post it notes on a poster, then the partnerships would review and comment on other campus highlights. While reviewing the other campus highlights they would have the opportunities to see parallel highlights and offer or request help.

Following the partnership exercise Ms. Fye noted that there were many commonalities among the campuses as well as some outliers. She reviewed the following:

- Family Support was a common strength
- Faculty retention and growth mindset were strengths for some campuses and weaknesses for some campuses
- ARL partnerships, community partnerships and growing from within were opportunities for all campuses
- State funded changes, NSLP, and social media were identified as opportunities for some campuses and threats for some campuses
- Teacher salaries and State discipline reporting policies were identified in both the threat and weakness categories

Ms. Fye stated that the exercise would allow the Board to identify resources and potential strategies as they reviewed and revised the Somerset goals. The Board could use the information to refine the goals with the end in mind and determine the incremental steps needed to attain the goals. Discussion ensued regarding resources, strategies and roles:

<b>Resources</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Roles</b>
Purchasing power	Flexible pricing models based on school need and size	Academica liaising between CA and principals w/relationships from Somerset Inc.
Coaches and Strategists	Develop network capacity through content area specialists and develop network walkthroughs	
Build relationships w/local universities	Develop teacher capacity and increase teacher retention	Crystal to follow up
Toro Restorative Justice training	Culturally relevant practices	UNLV rep – Academica follow up

Through discussion the Board made the following revisions to the Somerset goals:

**Goal #1** – (original goal) Maintain/increase all schools to 5 star schools by 2021/2022

Possible changes: By September 2022 Star rating will be 4 or 5 stars with reasonable growth or table the goal pending further discussions with Jessica Barr (Need to clarify that system goals are made with the intent to improve the network, which is separate from components of principal evaluations)

**Goal # 2** – (original goal) Implement with fidelity the Leader in Me program (in all schools) by 2019/2020

Proposed revision: Utilize character and leadership programs in the schools by 21-22 school year or toss the goal

**Goal #3** – (original goal) All schools will have common grading practice in K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 which will be Board approved by June 30, 2019

Toss the goal

**Goal #4** – (original goal) Common Somerset of Las Vegas Operational Manual

Toss the goal

**Goal#5** – (original goal) Become more financially sound with the primary goal of increasing teacher pay, to include studies on facilities maintenance

Keep working with Academica to realize this goal



Ms. Fye stated that the some of the concerns noted from the principal comments would need further discussion and could possibly lead to more system goals. The concerns included teacher capacity and retention; facilities and programs; mentorship for principals; and collaboration and commitment. Discussion would continue during a future Board meeting.

**c. Action Plan Reporting Process**

This item was not discussed.

**d. Formation of an Evaluation Committee**

This item was not discussed.

**6. Member Comment**

Member Bentham expressed appreciation for the discussions that had taken place during the meeting and thanked the principals all of their hard work and for their participation in the meeting. He asked that, when competitions and events were hosted at Somerset schools, the schools were welcoming and Somerset was represented in a A+ manner.

Member Bredsguard stated that it had been a great opportunity to be involved in the collaboration that had taken place during the meeting.

Member McClain thanked the principals for being willing to be vulnerable to improve the system.

**7. Public Comment and Discussion**

The Somerset Academy Inc. and Academica representatives expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in the collaboration that would help build a great program.

**8. Adjournment**

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:02 p.m.**

Approved on: 2-18-2020



CHAIRPERSON of the Board of Directors  
Somerset Academy of Las Vegas