

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS
OCTOBER 30, 2023

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas held a public meeting on October 30, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. at 6475 Valley Dr., North Las Vegas, NV 89084.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m. by Board Chair Travis Mizer. The following Board members were in attendance: Travis Mizer, LeNora Bredsguard, John Bentham, Will Harty, and Cody Noble (left at 7:33 p.m.).

Board Members Sarah McClellan and Renee Fairless were not in attendance.

Also present were the following principals: Lee Esplin, Jessica Scobell, Shannon Manning, Mindi Palomeque, Cesar Tiu, David Fossett, and Kate Lackey. Somerset Inc. representative Suzette Ruiz; and Academica representatives Gary McClain, Ryan Reeves, and Marla Devitt attended the meeting.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jessica Whitney provided public comment regarding the treatment of her son at the Stephanie campus.

3. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE AUGUST 21, 2023 BOARD MEETING**
- b. GENDER DIVERSE STUDENT POLICY**
- c. APPROVAL OF WORK BASED LEARNING APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION TO THE NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
- d. APPROVAL OF UPDATED SPECIAL EDUCATION MANUAL**
- e. ACCEPTANCE OF PRINCIPAL EVALUATIONS AND SALARY INCREASES**
- f. APPROVAL OF THE SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS ACADEMIC CALENDAR FOR THE 2024/2024 SCHOOL YEAR**
- g. APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**
 - 1. SCHOOL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE**

MEMBER BENTHAM MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA, AS PRESENTED. MEMBER HARTY SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.

4. ACTION & DISCUSSION ITEMS

- a. DATA PRESENTATION**

This item was tabled.

b. CAMPUS UPDATES BY SOMERSET PRINCIPALS

The principals of the Somerset Academy of Las Vegas addressed the Board, providing updates and highlights from their respective campuses. Principal Cesar Tiu presented an overview of activities at the Lone Mountain campus, emphasizing the successful implementation of four new curriculums despite the challenge of undertaking them simultaneously. He highlighted the consistency across grade levels and improved teacher collaboration, along with the restructuring of the intervention and enrichment block to offer more targeted support and differentiated learning. Tutoring initiatives were introduced for "bubble kids," focusing on specific support needs identified through baseline data analysis. Principal Tiu also discussed the school's involvement in academic competitions, community engagement efforts, sporting events, and fundraising. When Member Mizer inquired about the learning curve for the new curriculum, Principal Tiu acknowledged the challenge and acknowledged relying on assistance from other campuses for training.

Principal Mindi Palomeque presented an overview of the North Las Vegas campus, introducing Assistant Principal Yvette Simmons and highlighting her extensive background in various education levels. The school recently underwent a comprehensive support team visit from Florida principals, leading to the adoption of the Magnetic Phonetic program to address challenges in phonics. Principal Palomeque discussed the school's engagement in fundraising, campus activities, sporting events, and initiatives like Mental Health Mondays. Additionally, the school organized "cup of coffee" events focusing on ELA and math to provide parents with insights into classroom activities and valuable resources. In response to Member Mizer's inquiry about absenteeism, Principal Palomeque emphasized the school's dedicated efforts to address the issue, including the staff's committed time spent on communication with parents.

Principal David Fossett reported positive developments at the Stephanie campus, including the success of the fall festival with nearly 2,000 attendees. The school was preparing for grade-level and classroom spelling bees. He noted that midyear testing would start earlier this year due to adjustments in the academic calendar. Notably, the school introduced a unique incentive program where students, based on effort rather than scores, could play with the administration as a reward. The goal was to reduce stress and emphasize genuine learning efforts.

Principal Lee Esplin introduced Fidelyn Gwen Aballe, the student body president at Somerset Sky Pointe, and explained that she had presented at the Leader in Me conference, demonstrating strong leadership skills. Ms. Aballe addressed the Board and outlined three goals for the school year: boosting school spirit through events, enhancing student connection and appreciation, and earning the Silver Star and Southern Star Awards at NASC (Nevada Association of Student Council). Notable events included a successful welcome-back dance, a well-attended homecoming with over 500 students, and a first-time whole-school assembly held on the field. Initiatives for student connection and appreciation involved senior shout-outs, student shout-outs on social media, and a bulletin board recognizing students in various subjects. Ms. Aballe also discussed efforts toward achieving the Silver Star Award, including attending conferences and monthly goal packets. The school successfully raised \$2,000 for the Maui fire through a charitable financial contribution (CFC). Ms. Aballe highlighted the Chick-fil-A Leader Academy, a leadership development program, and upcoming events like the lock-in with various activities. She concluded by mentioning plans for an Instagram takeover of the NASC account to promote Somerset Sky Pointe.

Member Bentham asked if the lock-in was all night, to which Ms. Aballe replied in the negative, noting that it was from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Member Mizer asked if the student council could work with the Skye Canyon and Lone Mountain 8th grade students to encourage continuing their Somerset education at Sky Pointe. Ms. Aballe explained her intention to enhance the school's social media presence, specifically using platforms like TikTok to showcase the fun and spirited aspects of Somerset Sky Pointe. The goal was to counteract the perception that the school was boring, especially in response to concerns from middle school students considering moving to another high school.

Principal Esplin highlighted several initiatives and achievements at the school. They were visiting the Skye Canyon and Lone Mountain campuses and exploring the creation of a conservatory, beginning with a dance theater, premiere band or orchestra, and choir. The conservatory aimed to offer advanced opportunities for students in the arts, potentially retaining them within the school. He noted that they continued to organize events like freshman nights, providing information to parents and students about high school. Principal Esplin reviewed the school's fundraising and sporting achievements.

Principal Lackey provided updates on upcoming events at the school. She mentioned the Halloween Parade scheduled for the following day at 1:30 PM, followed by Halloween parties in most classes. Six teachers and administrators would be attending the Annual Middle Level Education Conference (AMLE Conference), emphasizing the importance of professional development. Principal Lackey outlined the school's upcoming activities and sports events. The school was also conducting mid-year benchmark testing for I-Ready to assess growth and planned for further improvement before the semester ended.

Principal Jessica Scobell provided an update on activities and changes at the Losee campus. In the elementary school, innovative sections were created in third and fifth grades to address specific student needs and improve academic performance. She reviewed the school's activities and sporting achievements. Principal Scobell stated that efforts to improve academic growth in middle school included a smart pass plan and increased security monitors which had a positive impact on student behavior. Changes in ELA and math programs were made in middle school based on successful elementary strategies. High school achievements include dual enrollment, ACT boot camps, and the establishment of a marching band, contributing to student engagement and success.

Principal Manning provided updates on the Aliante campus, highlighting positive trends in math proficiency, which increased by 10% last year, reaching 52%. There was a slower growth rate in ELA proficiency, prompting a curriculum change to CKLA. Teachers observed and collaborated across campuses. Professional development, including weekly PLC meetings and additional training days, with Amplify being used for intervention groups. Principal Manning also reviewed campus activities and sporting achievements.

f. DISCUSSION REGARDING ANTICIPATED PROJECTS

Mr. Gary McClain addressed the Board, providing an update on projects discussed during the last board meeting. A list of anticipated projects, including two-classroom additions at Skye Canyon and Aliante, which were postponed in 2021 due to cost considerations. These projects, sharing a similar scope, were intended to be funded by bond funds, with each campus having around \$600,000 allocated for the project fund. Mr. McClain explained that a two-classroom addition bid for Doral

Pebble in 2021 returned bids at \$850,000, significantly surpassing expectations, leading to the tabling of the project by Doral Academy. Some Somerset Board members were informed of the high-cost findings. Despite funds being invested in design, land use, and permitting phases, the projects were ultimately placed on hold without further public action.

Member Noble confirmed that the project aimed to add two classrooms to each campus and inquired if the projects were anticipated to exceed \$1 million. Mr. McClain stated that based on a similar project bid in early 2023, the expected cost would be \$1.2 million, explaining the cost increase to approximately \$750 per square foot compared to \$250-\$300 per square foot pre-COVID. Member Noble questioned if the additions were requested to increase student enrollment. Principal Lackey clarified that the Skye Canyon project aimed to add two classrooms which a retractable wall that would primarily function as a second, smaller-scale multipurpose (MP) room for PE and other activities due to space constraints. Principal Manning stated that the Aliante project had a similar purpose, planning to open a performing arts program and utilizing the additional space as a performing area, with two classrooms featuring a retractable wall.

Member Noble inquired about the possibility of bidding the projects together for economy of scale, to which Mr. McClain responded that it posed challenges with separate sites requiring separate supervision. He further explained that while the hope had been that costs would peak and then decrease, they had plateaued instead. Member Bentham raised concerns about the accuracy of the \$750 per square foot cost, noting that bids had not been requested. Mr. McClain clarified that a recent bid at the Doral campus for a comparable project was \$750 per square foot, totaling \$1.2 million.

Member Harty questioned the timeline for bond funds, with Mr. McClain stating that they could be extended. Member Harty noted that the bond funds had been borrowed at a lower rate. Discussion ensued about extending the bond funds. Mr. McClain conveyed that the purpose of the update was to provide information for when the surplus spending plan was complete. Member Harty inquired about the timeline if the Board approved the projects, and Mr. McClain responded that working with the architect would be required to restart the process. He noted that some construction would take place during the school year regardless of the start date.

Member Bredsguard asked who was creating the surplus spending plan. Mr. McClain stated that a couple of Board members and Academica had worked on the plan and noted that a third party was engaged to do a reserve study of Somerset's assets which would outline the timeline for expected maintenance items, noting that it was not yet complete. Mr. McClain stated that the Board would need to hold a meeting before the end of November and the spending surplus plan could be included on that agenda.

Mr. McClain provided an update on several other anticipated projects. The Sky Pointe Improvements, consisting of an elementary school classroom addition and roadway improvements, were already underway, with design and engagement with NDOT in progress. These enhancements aligned with the property's master plan and were slated for submission for land use approval. The Lone Mountain expansion, which involved the acquired adjacent parcel of land, was progressing, marked by committee meetings to discuss ideas and the creation of renderings by an architect. Additionally, there were plans to replace the turf at Losee. Principal Scobell mentioned the budget adjustments due to changes in at-risk funding and the insufficient maintenance of the turf. Mr. McClain anticipated a public bid for the turf in January, seeking Board approval in February. The

discussion touched on turf use and maintenance. Member Bentham acknowledged the study as a budgeting tool, and Member Mizer inquired about determining project priorities for the upcoming initiatives. Discussion ensued regarding how and when to determine the priority of the anticipated projects.

e. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE ANNUAL SURPLUS SPENDING POLICY

This item was tabled.

g. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL TO ENGAGE BOB GRONAUER'S OFFICE FOR LAND USE SERVICES FOR LONE MOUNTAIN AND SKY POINTE EXPANSION

Mr. McClain reviewed the advantages of engaging Bob Gronauer's office for the Lone Mountain and Sky Pointe expansions.

MEMBER BENTHAM MOVED TO APPROVE TO ENGAGE BOB GRONAUER'S OFFICE, AS PRESENTED. MEMBER BREDSGUARD SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.

c REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE EMO EVALUATION FOR ACADEMICA NEVADA

Principal Esplin presented the findings of the Academica EMO evaluation from the survey covering seventeen categories. The overall performance rating for Academica by the governing board was 3.3 out of 4, a slight increase from the previous fiscal year's rating of 3.225. Top-performing categories included board management, legal services, and grant management for Grant development. The lowest-rated areas were finance and payroll, with plans for a new payroll program in January, and travel and recruiting, along with licensure. Principal Esplin expressed intent to collaborate with Academica to enhance performance in these areas moving forward.

MEMBER HARTY MOVED TO APPROVE THE EMO SURVEY, AS PRESENTED. MEMBER BENTHAM SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.

d. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION REGARDING INSURANCE COVERAGE

Mr. McClain presented a one-sheet document from the insurance provider, providing an overview of various insurance coverages held by Somerset Academy. Acknowledging the complexity of insurance arrangements, Academica aimed to simplify the information for the board's understanding. The document detailed multiple insurance policies, including umbrella coverage. While not requiring any immediate action, the purpose was to inform the board about the extent of coverage, especially in scenarios like cyber-attacks. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and emphasized the importance of understanding the levels of coverage, particularly with a large organization engaged in various activities. The policies were renewed annually, with adjustments made based on market trends and specific needs. Discussion ensued regarding the annual renewal process and the bidding of insurance individually for each school while maintaining a competitive edge.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NOTIFICATIONS

There were no announcements

6. MEMBER COMMENT

Member Harty thanked the principals for their hard work for the students and staff. Member Bentham commended Principal Scobell and her team for fostering a strong sense of community at the Losee campus. Member Bredsguard acknowledged her participation in the principal evaluations and extended congratulations to the campus principals for their commitment to enhancing their respective campuses. Member Mizer stated that Somerset had a strong administrative team. He acknowledged the unfortunate incident recently at the Losee campus, thanked the principals for their support of the Losee campus, and expressed the grief associated with the event. Principal Scobell expressed appreciation for the support the campus received.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

8. ADJOURN MEETING

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 6:51 P.M.

Approved on: November 30, 2023



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