

MINUTES
OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS
JANUARY 11, 2025

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas held a public strategic planning meeting on January 11, 2025 at 8:00 a.m. at 6630 Surrey St., Las Vegas, NV 89119

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 8:16 a.m. by Board Chair Travis Mizer. The following Board members were in attendance: Travis Mizer, LeNora Bredsguard, John Bentham, Matt Hurley, Sarah McClellan, and Matt Morris.

Board Member Renee Fairless was not in attendance.

Also present were the following principals: Lee Esplin, Jessica Scobell, Shannon Manning, Cesar Tiu, Kate Lackey, Mindi Palomeque, and David Fossett. Other attendees included Bernie Montero from the Somerset Inc. and Academica representatives Gary McClain, Trevor Goodsell, Kristy VanderMolen, Ryan Reeves, Travis Keys, and Marla Devitt.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

3. CONSENT AGENDA

a. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE NOVEMBER 13, 2024 BOARD MEETING

b. APPROVAL OF UPDATES TO THE SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS SPED MANUAL AND SPED POLICY & PROCEDURES

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

4. ACTION & DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE FY24 SINGLE AUDIT

Ms. Kristy VanderMolen, Director of Accounting for Academica, provided an overview of the single audit, which was required when federal funding exceeded \$750,000, with Somerset receiving over \$11. The single audit focused on three major programs: the school lunch program, special education, and ESSER funds. One significant deficiency was identified: a lack of documented payroll approvals. This issue had been addressed by implementing an electronic payroll approval system starting in January 2024, ensuring no further findings of this type. Member Mizer asked about the consequences of the finding. In response, Ms. VanderMolen explained that significant deficiencies required corrective action and verification of resolution, which had already occurred. Mr. Trevor Goodsell addressed the Board and stated that the deficiency related to payroll approvals

had already been resolved, as the issue was limited to a period before January 2024. The transition to the Paycom system from January to July addressed the problem, turning the challenges of the system switch into a positive outcome by ensuring compliance.

MEMBER McCLELLAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE SINGLE AUDIT FOR THE 2024 FISCAL YEAR. MEMBER HURLEY SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.

b. FACILITIES UPDATE:

- I. CONSTRUCTION IN PROGRESS UPDATE – ALIANTE, SKYE CANYON, SKY POINTE**
- II. UPDATE ON SKY POINTE THEATER – MASTER PLAN SUBMITTAL TO CITY**
- III. UPDATE ON LONE MOUNTAIN GYM – LAND USE APPROVAL**

Mr. Gary McClain addressed the Board and provided an update on change orders for the Aliante, Skye Canyon, and Sky Pointe projects, noting that contractors had bid strictly based on the plans and that any deviations had required change orders. He stated that there had been several change orders, including the following: a name change from "Somerset of Nevada" on documents, stucco removal at Aliante, additional concrete work at Skye Canyon, exterior power outlets added to Sky Pointe, and Aliante foundation adjustments, such as deleting a movable air wall to improve the floor plan, which had returned costs to the school.

Mr. McClain reviewed the pending/anticipated change orders: general contractor fees due to delays at Skye Canyon, Aliante safety tunnel costs returned due to unused scaffolding, grinding a concrete ramp at Sky Pointe to fix a floor discrepancy, and the installation of a fire riser at Skye Canyon, which had not been included in the original plans. Mr. McClain clarified that he had not approved costs; approvals had been handled by administrators. He noted that some changes had saved money and that the projects had remained within budget. Ongoing changes were expected to be minimal as the project progressed.

Mr. McClain provided an update on the Sky Pointe master plan, focused on the theater project and related improvements. He discussed challenges with traffic concerns, noting that a traffic study had been submitted and was awaiting approval. Sports lighting permits were obtained but delayed due to scheduling conflicts, with work now targeting spring break to minimize campus disruption. The theater plans included 28,000 square feet of space, featuring a band room, dance studio, black box theater, orchestra and choir rooms, a video production studio, and practice spaces, alongside a 450-seat auditorium. Parking adjustments were required due to increased capacity, and the project aimed to maintain existing city waivers. Mr. McClain noted the design's flexibility and the ongoing refinement of details pending land-use approval.

Mr. McClain stated that in December, a neighborhood meeting was held regarding Lone Mountain's proposed gym facility. Only three households attended, expressing concerns about traffic, though they generally supported the gym's concept over a previously approved three-story storage facility. Plans included relocating the driveway to improve traffic flow, merging the two parcels, and potentially building in phases due to financing. The gym would feature locker rooms, office space, storage, and a 500-seat gymnasium, costing an estimated \$8–12 million. Financing strategies, including bonds, were discussed. The gym was intended for shared use across the

Somerset system to address facility shortages and support athletic programs. Land-use approvals were underway, with a goal to secure permits by summer, aligning with plans for a theater project.

C. STRATEGIC PLANNING ITEMS

I. PREVIOUS STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Member Mizer stated that the strategic planning section of the meeting was more collaborative and welcomed everyone to join in the conversation. Mr. McClain explained that he originally provided past items to inform new members about significant outcomes but decided to keep them on the agenda for potential discussion. He introduced the first topic, which was classroom size. He noted that it had been extensively discussed, resulting in the agreed standards of 26 and 31 students, with flexibility for principals based on specific needs. Member Mizer noted that there had been no recent feedback from principals suggesting changes, so revisiting the topic might not be necessary. The other members agreed.

Mr. McClain introduced the topic of the principal evaluation procedure and committee. The discussion acknowledged the progress made in refining the process over recent years. Board members and principals highlighted the importance of tailoring evaluations to individual school contexts and growth trajectories while avoiding uniform benchmarks. They also acknowledged challenges such as unpredictable variables and demographic differences. The evaluation process was praised for its collaborative and supportive approach, which focused on reflection and planning rather than punitive measures. Feedback from previous evaluations was positive, with principals and committee members noting the benefits of in-person discussions and the diverse perspectives contributed by experienced educators and administrators.

Mr. McClain reviewed the evolution and refinement of the lead principal structure over several meetings. He noted the current stability within the system and suggested gathering feedback from principals and the board. Member Mizer provided historical context, explaining the transition from an executive director model, which many found ineffective, to the lead principal structure. Board members and principals, with input from Mr. Reeves and Mr. Keys, discussed the benefits of this model, such as cost-effectiveness, better support for principals, and improved collaboration. Concerns about succession planning were raised, with discussions on identifying and preparing future leaders. Several strategies were shared, including mentoring assistant principals, cross-training staff, and fostering leadership skills. Overall, the consensus was that the lead principal structure worked well, but proactive planning for leadership transitions remained essential. Further discussion focused on mentoring current principals to prepare them for future lead principal roles and guiding assistant principals toward becoming principals within the Somerset system.

The discussion on the Leader in Me program highlighted its implementation challenges and successes across different campuses. Board members and principals noted that Leader in Me was not a fixed program but a framework for fostering leadership, culture, and student accountability. They discussed adapting it to middle and high schools by embedding principles like the 13 trust behaviors and goal setting within existing curricula rather than standalone

lessons. Examples included using advisory periods, goal-tracking, and student-led conferences. They stressed the importance of gradual implementation tailored to each campus's unique needs while maintaining alignment with Somerset's focus on leadership development.

Mr. McClain summarized progress on a facility reserve study completed last year, which provided a detailed inventory of assets and a budgeting tool. He also highlighted Somerset's focus on teacher pay increases, emphasizing that any funding increases have been directed towards improving compensation. Discussion touched on Somerset's competitive standing in attracting talent compared to CCSD, though further funding was noted as necessary to reach desired pay levels. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and reviewed the key components of funding for charter school. He noted the systemic issues with Nevada's grad score system, which disproportionately allocated at-risk funding to underperforming schools, favoring CCSD. Efforts were underway to advocate for regulatory changes or pursue legal action if necessary. Another concern was the exclusion of charter schools from a \$250 million teacher pay increase proposed in the legislative session.

II. EXPANSION PLANS

Mr. Reeves outlined four strategic ideas for growth while emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement. He noted that growth was essential, as stagnation equated to decline. Mr. Reeves highlighted demographic challenges, such as declining birth rates and student populations in Clark County, explaining that growth would need to result from strategic efforts rather than natural population increases. He reviewed opportunities in North Las Vegas and Henderson, where both cities had become charter school authorizers, opening avenues for expanding charter networks within specific limits. He also detailed facility developments, including the city of North Las Vegas repurposing portions of the building attached to the North Las Vegas campus for pre-K and potential incubation spaces for new charters. Despite these changes, he expressed confidence in Somerset's established reputation and its ability to thrive amid competition.

Mr. Reeves stated that Academics' perspectives on growth had shifted due to rising land and construction costs, emphasizing the importance of maximizing the use of existing facilities. He cited Somerset's North Las Vegas campus as an example of a cost-effective, functional facility that supported sustainable growth. Instead of pursuing costly new sites, the focus had shifted to optimizing current resources, such as the long-standing success of smaller campuses. This approach allowed for growth through efficiency and ensured that schools remained financially viable while maintaining high-quality education.

Mr. Reeves reviewed growth opportunities for charter schools in Henderson, focusing on strategic land acquisition and long-term campus planning. He proposed leveraging city-owned or underutilized district properties through conditional letters of intent, highlighting collaboration with Henderson officials to secure reduced-cost or free land. He acknowledged the challenge of retaining students without a high school feeder system, emphasizing the potential impact of K-12 campuses on increasing retention and continuity. Mr. Keys and Member Bentham discussed program quality as a critical factor for student retention, stressing the need for robust extracurricular offerings such as sports and arts. Locations like Green

Valley, Horizon Ridge, and the Roseman University site were noted as potential school sites, each presenting unique logistical and financial considerations. The importance of aligning facilities and student capacity with program offerings was emphasized, striking a balance between growth and sustainability.

Further discussion centered on the benefits and challenges of separating K-5 campuses from K-12 campuses to optimize leadership focus and space allocation. A key advantage of this approach was that it simplified principal transitions by allowing leaders to focus on either K-5 or 6-12, rather than managing a full K-12 structure. Additionally, separating campuses would create more space for high school programs such as CTE, clubs, and arts, which were currently constrained. Mr. Reeves reviewed potential land opportunities near existing campuses, noting that negotiations were ongoing, and costs varied, with some parcels appearing more feasible than others. An alternative strategy discussed was taking over struggling schools, which could bypass the long timelines and high costs associated with new campus construction. This approach would provide ready-made facilities, immediate enrollment, and the ability to operate under Somerset's model. However, challenges could arise in navigating existing leases or purchasing agreements for the buildings. Additionally, the board discussed a new development in the northwest, like the Skye Canyon project, which presented a potential opportunity to collaborate with the developer to secure land for a school.

MEMBER HURLEY MOVED TO PRESENT LETTERS OF INTENT TO THE CITY OF NORTH LAS VEGAS AND HENDERSON. MEMBER BENTHAM SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.

III. SOMERSET MODEL – DISCUSS BUILDING A SOMERSET EDUCATIONAL MODEL FOR OPENING NEW CAMPUSES OR ONBOARDING NEW LEADERS

The Board discussed the idea of building a Somerset educational model for opening new campuses and onboarding new leaders, emphasizing the importance of leveraging the current leadership's successes and challenges to create a tool for future use. This tool could guide new principals, whether for new campuses or through leadership transitions—by providing clarity on Somerset's operational expectations and best practices. The discussion highlighted the need for a balance between offering autonomy to new leaders and ensuring alignment with the established Somerset model. Suggestions included creating a handbook or structured onboarding process to ensure smooth transitions and maintain consistency across campuses. The Board concluded the meeting by directing the principals and Academica to collaborate on brainstorming ideas and to present a detailed report at the next board meeting.

5. LONG RANGE CALENDAR/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. McClain stated that the annual board meeting was scheduled for February 3rd. The Somerset Losee and Sky Pointe boys' basketball game was scheduled for that night. The meeting could either be scheduled for 5:00 p.m. at the Losee campus, before the basketball game, or rescheduled to another night. If the meeting was held on February 3rd the board members could then attend the game between two of the Somerset campuses. A quorum poll would be sent to determine if it was possible to hold the meeting on February 3rd.

Mr. Keys explained that the role of "liaison" has been redefined to better reflect the responsibilities and impact of the position. Mr. McClain's role has been elevated to "school advisor," focusing on strategic advising rather than simply acting as a messenger between schools and boards. This change included providing broader training and support across the organization. Mr. McClain would now oversee and coordinate with the Academica team, ensuring that the necessary staff were engaged and responsive to specific school needs. While similar in function to the previous role, this new position would emphasize oversight, strategic guidance, and enhanced support for schools.

6. MEMBER COMMENT

There was no member comment.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

8. ADJOURN MEETING

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 12:18 P.M.

Approved on: February 3, 2025



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