

**MINUTES**  
**of the strategic planning meeting of the**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS of SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS**  
**June 20, 2020**

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Nevada held a public strategic planning meeting on June 20, 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 8:11 a.m. In attendance were Board members John Bentham, LeNora Bredsguard, Sarah McClellan, Travis Mizer, Cody Noble, Will Harty, and Gary McClain.

Also present were Principals Lee Esplin, Cesar Tiu, Christina Threton, Jessica Scobell (via Zoom), and Kate Lackey (via Zoom); as well as Somerset Academy Inc. representative Bernie Montero. Academica Representatives Crystal Thiriot, Ryan Reeves, Marla Devitt, and Victor Barroso were also in attendance.

**2. Public Comment and Discussion**

There was no public comment.

**3. Approval of Minutes from the June 2, 2020 Board Meeting**

**Member Mizer moved to approve minutes of the June 2, 2020 board meeting. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**4. Report on Goals**

**a. All Schools to be 4 or 6 Stars by September 2022**

Ms. Crystal Thiriot addressed the Board and stated that Ms. Jessica Barr was working with the principals to come up with five-year plans for each campus that would assess where they currently were, what their goals should be for growth, and what steps need to be taken to reach their goals. Principal Lee Esplin addressed the Board and reviewed the Sky Pointe plan which was included in the support materials. Ms. Thiriot stated that each school would complete a road map which would be forwarded to the Board when they were available.

Member Mizer asked how the Star ratings would be addressed with the school closure. Ms. Thiriot stated that a Federal waiver was issued for the 2019-2020 school year and Star ratings would not be issued. Mr. Ryan Reeves addressed the Board and stated that there were two possible approaches to future Star ratings. One scenario would be to create a two-year growth model using the testing from the end of the 2018-2019 school year. The other scenario would be to test at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year and again at the end of the year to determine growth. Mr.

Reeves stated that the most likely scenario would be to use the two-year growth; adding that students who were new to the state would not be counted in the growth models.

Principal Christina Threeton addressed the Board and stated that it was predicted that there would be a one-year loss in data for MAPP testing. She stated that as soon as the MAPP testing was completed Ms. Barr would work with the schools to create a report card with the adjusted numbers. Discussion ensued regarding testing and growth measurements.

Member Bentham asked the Board members if they wanted to make any adjustments to the goal. Following discussion regarding methods to measure growth it was determined to continue with the goal with the option to revisit if the schools experienced extended closures.

**b. Utilize Character and Leadership Programs in the schools by 2021-2022**

Ms. Thiriot stated that she and Member Bentham had met with Leader in Me representatives to negotiate a system-wide price that would be affordable for all campuses. Member Bentham stated that the system-wide price included PD days. Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of implementing the program system-wide if the negotiation to make it affordable were successful. Principal Esplin explained that each campus could use creativity in the implementation to ensure that it fit the specific needs of each campus. Member Noble agreed and noted that the roadmap to 5 Stars was also unique to each campus. Member Noble stated that the Board's responsibility was to set the direction and allow the principals to implement the directive.

**Member Noble moved that, as a Board, they adopt the Leader in Me program as the character and leadership program of our schools, give the principals the charge to implement with their campuses according to the circumstances of their campuses, pending successful negotiations with Leader in Me. Member Harty seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**c. Become Financially Sound to Facilitate Increasing Teacher Pay and Facility Maintenance**

Mr. Reeves reviewed a three year look at the four major budgetary categories as a percentage of the budget as shown in the support materials. He noted that the facility percentage was reduced over the three-year period from 14.58% to 14.53%, while the salaries and budget increased from 62.65% to 65.22%. Mr. Reeves stated that some of the growth in benefits came from the increase in the retirement fund contribution; adding that Somerset absorbed all of the increase while the district split the increase with the teachers. Member Bentham asked the principals if the teachers recognized that benefit. Principal Esplin stated that he communicated that information because it was a perk of the system he wanted them to understand.

Mr. Reeves referred to the support materials and reviewed the facility cost analysis, noting the three ways to look at the facility costs: the cost per square foot, the cost per pupil, and the percentage of the lease/bond payments as a percentage of the budget. Mr. Reeves stated that the North Las Vegas campus was the first Somerset campus and was acquired before Somerset had been established and proven as a strong system. After Somerset had been able to demonstrate that they were a strong system better financing and construction options became available. Mr. Reeves further explained that Somerset had purchased a portion of the North Las Vegas campus through bonds and were leasing the remaining portion; adding that the lease for the remaining portion

would expire in the summer of 2022. Discussion ensued regarding options for the future of the North Las Vegas campus, including a possible lease extension, a possible purchase of the leased portion, and looking into eventually being able to purchase a different site and building new. The members of the Board stated that it was important that every student who came into the system could stay in the system through graduation.

Mr. Reeves reviewed the State budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic and shutdown. He stated that more answers about the budget would be available after the special legislative session which should be held soon.

## **5. Review and Approval of a Revision to the Somerset Academy of Las Vegas Board of Directors Bylaws**

### **a. Moving of Annual Meeting**

Mr. Reeves stated that the first part of the revision would change the annual meeting from June/July to January/February; adding that it was difficult to confirm a quorum in June or July due to vacation schedules.

**Member Harty moved to change the annual meeting to January or February. Member Bredsguard seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

### **b. Adjustment and Clarification of Board Member Terms**

Mr. Reeves explained that the Board member terms were intended to be staggered to ensure that the Board did not lose a majority of members in any one year. The term lengths had been confused over time due to an ambiguity of the term length for new members who replaced a member who had resigned. The intent was to have the new person fill the remainder of the member who had resigned; however, in practice, the new person was given a five-year term. Mr. Reeves further explained that the bylaws stated that a Board member was eligible to serve two consecutive standard terms, which also led to some ambiguity on how many years each member was eligible to serve.

Mr. Reeves referred to the chart in the support materials which showed possible scenarios for term lengths. One scenario would be for each member to complete the term of the previous member, or the term from the original drawing of terms, and then be eligible for two 5 year terms. This scenario would have total term lengths ranging from 11 ½ years to 14 ½ years. The second scenario would have each Board member eligible to serve two 5 year terms. The third scenario would have each member complete the term of the previous member and be eligible to serve one additional 5 year term. The final scenario would be similar to the third scenario with an adjustment for the members who were currently off-schedule to be re-elected for a 5 year term.

Discussion ensued regarding the scenarios and the advantages and disadvantages of members serving for long periods of time. Further discussion ensued regarding designating members who termed out as emeritus status who would retain priority seating but would not have a voting status. The Board determined to have the standing Board members serve under the first scenario and new members would serve for two 5 year terms and include an emeritus status for members. Mr. Reeves stated that he would revise the bylaws to include the requested changes.

## **6. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Somerset Academy Administrative Leadership Structure**

### **a. Review of Current Principal Cohort System**

Mr. Reeves state that the leadership structure had changed from an executive director system to a principal cohort system. He explained that, after discussion at multiple Board meetings the Board had determined to move away from the executive director lead system and tasked the principals with bringing forward an administrative coordinator job description and candidate. Following the approval of the job description, the principals approached the Board asking to forego the administrative assistant position and allow the principals to work as a cohort. The Board approved to postpone the administrative coordinator position, in lieu of status checks at future Board meetings. The principal cohort designated one principal to serve as the lead principal, with her extra duties included in the support materials. Mr. Reeves noted that the Board did not approve a lead principal position or designate a principal to serve in that position; however, the principals had used that model during the 2019/2020 school year. The Board would now need to discuss the continuation of the principal cohort structure. If the principal cohort structure was to continue a process for designation of a lead principal would need to be discussed, as well as a compensation structure.

Member Bentham stated that a confidential survey of the principals had been conducted regarding the principal cohort and lead principal position. Overall the principals had enjoyed the cohort, with an average of four on a scale of one to five. All six of the principals who had worked under both leadership structures preferred the principal cohort to the executive director structure. Although the suggested amounts were different, all of the principals thought the lead principal should receive compensation. Member Bentham stated that, from his perspective as Board chair, the principal cohort structure provided a smoother year, with more honest communication from the principals. He noted that the principals felt more empowered to help each other and to call on each other for help.

Discussion ensued regarding lead principal/president structures and compensation in other charter systems. Member Bentham stated that, from attending the principal meeting and reading the comments from the surveys, it had been acknowledged that Academics had provided assistance to the principals as needed. He noted that some principals felt that they did not receive the mentoring they needed during the 2019-2020 school; adding that they also did not receive it under the previous leadership structure. Member McClellan expressed concern that the principal cohort system did not provide a leader to review data with the principals at the beginning of the year to determine a course of action to improve the schools. Mr. Bernie Montero addressed the Board and stated each Board member was over a campus in the system who could meet with the principal. Together they could meet with Mr. Goodsell, the Academics CFO, to discuss the budget; and with Ms. Barr, the Data Analyst, to manage and monitor the data.

Member Noble stated that, with the current financial situation, it might be best to make a decision for 2020-2021 and then open the discussion back up after the 2020-2021 school year when more financial information was available. Member Bredsguard stated that she liked the collaborative nature of the principal lead structure; however, she was concerned that without a lead principal job description the Board expectations might be unclear. Board members expressed concern regarding supervision and evaluation of principals under the principal cohort system.

Member Bentham noted that an Evaluation Committee had been created, with three Board members and Mr. Montero, to determine an evaluation system and to evaluate the principals. Discussion ensued regarding expectations for, and the responsibilities of, the lead principal.

Mr. Reeves pointed out that the Board was responsible for setting the mission, the vision, and the goals for the system and then to evaluate how the leadership fulfilled the goals. Member McClellan stated that the Board had an obligation to ensure that the campuses within the system were viable and that the correct administrators were in place to fulfill the goals. Member Noble expressed concern with delegating too much authority away from the Board and stated that he, and other Board members, had felt disconnected during the last school year. Member Bentham stated that he had felt more connected due to having each principal report during the Board meetings. Discussion ensued regarding extending the current structure for one year, with the Board appointing the lead principal from interested candidates, and then re-evaluating the leadership structure.

**Member Mizer moved to move forward with the lead principal, the names will be sent to Ms. Thiriote for Board review; and there will be stipend to be discussed at a later time once the qualifications and job description are submitted. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

Discussion ensued regarding compensation for the lead principal position. Member Noble clarified that the Board should not provide a stipend for a lead principal position that had not been Board appointed and suggested wording the compensation for the 2019-2020 school year as a stipend for the extra work done during year.

**Member Harty moved to approve a \$5000 stipend for Elaine Kelley for extra work done. Member McClain seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to approve.**

**b. If Principal Cohort to Continue, Process for Designation of Lead Principal**

This item was discussed in conjunction with item 7.a.

**7. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Structure of School Improvement with District Support**

Mr. Reeves referred to the support materials and explained that an outline was included for the Somerset, Inc. provided support, structure, and plan for improvement of Star ratings.

**8. Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Graduation Requirements**

Principal Esplin stated that the Somerset standard for graduation was higher than the State requirements which resulted in some students leaving Somerset their senior year to attend a CCSD school to ensure graduation. Principal Scobell stated that the requirements could put some special education students at a disadvantage and might lead to a due process situation. Member Harty stated that he thought that Somerset had multiple diploma options available. Principal Esplin and Principal Scobell explained that there were three diplomas, standard, advanced, and advanced honors; however, all three had additional

core requirements that exceeded the State core requirements. Discussion ensued regarding the diplomas and the requirements for each.

Principal Scobell stated that every time a student that could graduate left to go to a CCSD school the graduation cohort was smaller; adding that the smaller the cohort the more one non-graduating student could affect the graduation rate. Mr. Montero stated that it was disheartening to have a student in the Somerset system leave during their senior year; adding that flexibility to review on a case by case basis and have the student and parent sign a waiver would help keep those students through graduation. Principal Esplin asked for clarification of either allowing a waiver or not allowing a waiver so that he could be confident the Board would back his decision if the student and parent appealed to the Board.

Member Noble expressed concern with setting a standard and then allowing a student to sign a waiver and not meet the standard. Member McClellan stated that, although she previously felt that Somerset should not lower any of the requirements, such as the 100 hours of service, she understood the need for flexibility; adding that it was important to consider the recruitment and retention of the Somerset student. Discussion ensued regarding adjustments to the Somerset standard. Member McClain noted that the question was whether the need to adjust standards was common enough to warrant a reduction in the requirement or an allowance for the principals to make case by case adjustments. Ms. Thiriot reviewed the graduation requirements for the Pinecrest system and noted that, while they allow a student to graduate if the State standards were met, they maintained an expectation for higher standards. Mr. Montero stated that the culture of the school would help encourage the students achieve the higher standard if they were capable. Discussion ensued regarding allowing students to graduate if the State standard was met but maintaining the expectation to achieve Somerset's higher standard.

**Member Bredsguard moved that, as discussed, if a student meets the State standard for graduation, with the continuation of the 100-hour service requirement, they would be able to graduate. Member McClellan seconded the motion, and the Board voted 4-3 to approve, with Members Noble, Harty, and McClain voting in opposition.**

## **9. Principal Evaluation Update and Presentation on Proposed Evaluation System**

Ms. Thiriot stated that Evaluation committee elected officers with Mr. Montero elected as the Chair and Member Bredsguard as the Vice-Chair: adding that Member McClellan and Member Bentham were also on the committee. The committee would meet individually with each principal after they had performed a self-evaluation which would include data from Jessica Barr. Member Bentham stated that the Board could approve the evaluations in one motion or could decide to meet with the principals in a closed session. Discussion ensued regarding the possible evaluation criteria.

## **10. Discussion Regarding Governor's Declaration of Emergency Directive 022 Regarding School Reopening**

Mr. Reeves stated that the Board would need to hold a meeting at least twenty days before the schedule start of school to approve the reopening plan. He reviewed the requirements for the plan, including maintaining social distancing, sanitizing the building, and providing distance education. Discussion ensued regarding current and future restrictions and guidelines. Mr. Reeves stated that the Somerset principals had conducted a survey for families that would be referenced during the creation of the plan.

**11. Member Comment**

Member McClain stated that he had attended a State Public Charter School Authority meeting with Principal Threeton. He noted that a trustee had recognized that the discussions in which the Somerset Board participated helped them to be a better Board because they were able to discuss differences and maintain unity.

**12. Public Comment**

There was not public comment.

**13. Adjournment**

**The meeting was adjourned at 2:17 p.m.**

Approved on: 7.20.20

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Baird Chapman", written over a horizontal line.

Baird Chapman of the Board of Directors  
Somerset Academy of Las Vegas