

**MINUTES  
OF THE MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SOMERSET ACADEMY OF LAS VEGAS  
OCTOBER 14, 2024**

The Board of Directors of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas held a public meeting on October 14, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at 50 N. Stephanie Street, Henderson, NV 89074.

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Board Chair Travis Mizer. The following Board members were in attendance: Travis Mizer, John Bentham, Matt Hurley, Renee Fairless, and Matt Morris.

Board Members LeNora Bredsguard and Sarah McClellan were not in attendance.

Also present were the following principals: Lee Esplin, Jessica Scobell, Shannon Manning, Cesar Tiu, Kate Lackey, David Fossett, and Mindi Palomeque. Assistant Principal Jennifer Ludtke and Academica representatives Gary McClain, Ryan Reeves, Trevor Goodsell, Travis Keys, and Marla Devitt also attended the meeting.

Principal David Fossett addressed the Board explaining that the Stephanie campus had recently held a contest for the Kind T-Shirt design. The winning design, receiving the most votes, was created by 3rd-grade student Niccola Evangelista. The Board and attendees congratulated Niccola.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Travis Keys introduced himself as the new Managing Director at Academica and stated that he would be attending most Board meetings. He also stated that he had recently completed a twelve-year term on the Pinecrest Academy Board of Directors.

**3. CONSENT AGENDA**

- a. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE AUGUST 5, 2024 BOARD MEETING**
- b. APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**
  - 1. APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 2, 2024 FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**
  - 2. SCHOOL FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE (NOT FOR ACTION)**
  - 3. ACCEPTANCE OF CTE ALLOCATION**
  - 4. APPROVAL OF LTRS EXPENDITURE SYSTEM-WIDE**
  - 5. APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL UPDATE**
- c. APPROVAL OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATION COMMITTEE**
- d. GENDER DIVERS STUDENT POLICY (NOT FOR ACTION)**
- e. APPROVAL OF READ BY GRADE 3 REPORT**

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

#### **4. ACTION & DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **a. CAMPUS UPDATES**

Member Mizer stated that item 4.a. would be combined with item 4.d. The principals of Somerset Academy of Las Vegas addressed the Board, providing updates and highlights from their respective campuses. Sky Pointe Principal Lee Esplin provided an update on the high school cross country team, the volleyball team, fundraising efforts, and academic celebrations. He noted that the middle and elementary campuses achieved 5 Stars and the high school was one point away from a 5 Star rating.

Losee Principal Jessica Scobell shared recent highlights, noting high engagement on social media with a cheer reel reaching 122,000 views. The school recently held a band pre-competition in collaboration with Sky Pointe, with additional band, dance, and choir concerts scheduled. Two new instructional coaches were added in elementary, and new interventions were improving middle school behavior and culture. The high school boasted a 97% graduation rate, with all students who completed their studies at Losee walking at graduation. The football team, ranked number one in 4A and performing well on the field, was also named 4A Nevada State Academic Champions for football. Volleyball and cross-country teams were similarly excelling, positioning well for playoffs and state qualifiers.

Principal Scobell presented the school improvement plan for the elementary campus. She outlined a plan to address math performance gaps, especially in 4th and 5th grades, by refining intervention times and creating more targeted student groupings for both ELA and math. She had hired new instructional staff, including a literacy strategist and EL strategist, and expanded curricula with the Write Score program for objective writing assessments. Principal Scobell outlined grade-level focus in Tier 1, structured math and reading support, and active monitoring of progress through i-Ready. Attendance concerns were being addressed by meeting with parents and students who exhibited chronic absenteeism.

Assistant Principal Jennifer Ludtke addressed the Board and presented the school improvement plan for the middle school campus. She reviewed the challenges with student growth targets, particularly in 8th grade math, where many students faced unattainable expectations. Analyzing SBAC data by teacher revealed that while teachers were successfully helping students meet their targets, a significant number of students were falling behind as they progressed through grades. The team identified that starting in 6th grade, the number of students with achievable goals significantly decreased, contributing to their struggles in meeting proficiency by 8th grade.

Assistant Principal Ludtke explained that to address these issues, the school had implemented targeted interventions, including double-blocked ELA classes for 6th to 8th graders and dedicated instructional aides working with small groups of students. There was a focus on improving tier one instruction to ensure all students received quality education. She

noted the need for careful monitoring of student progress, particularly for those who were struggling, while ensuring that proficient students continued to advance. There was a collective determination to refine strategies and support systems to better meet the needs of all students.

Skye Canyon Principal Kate Lackey shared several highlights, noting that the school had achieved 5-star ratings for the sixth consecutive year in both elementary and middle schools, with the elementary ranking 6th and the middle school 17th in Nevada. Although middle school math growth slightly declined, attendance improved. The focus this year would be on enhancing math and science instruction, especially after recognizing a drop in 5th-grade math performance. Principal Lackey reviewed various extracurricular activities, including fall sports and cheerleading, as well as upcoming teacher conferences, which would include a student-led component in February. The school community was rallying to support 5th-grade science teacher Shannon Harkins, who was battling Hodgkin's lymphoma, with a "Go Purple" day planned to show solidarity. The school was also promoting breast cancer awareness and participating in a community service project to support at-risk youth through a program called Street Teens. The fall festival was set for Friday.

Lone Mountain Principal Cesar Tiu reported that the middle school achieved a top 3 ranking in the state with its highest index score since opening in 2015, while the elementary school earned a 4-star rating. There had been notable improvements in student achievement in math and English, but there were still challenges in closing opportunity gaps, particularly in math and science proficiency. Principal Tiu explained that to address these gaps, the school had invited an Amplify Science coach for classroom observations and was implementing structured learning walks for math classes. He also highlighted the revival of the "Leader in Me" book study and the school's applications for Lighthouse and Purple Star status. Recent events included a successful family engagement event and the achievement of the elementary flag football team, which was currently undefeated.

Principal David Fossett shared several highlights, emphasizing the success of the school's implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), where they achieved 100% on their review framework, leading to recognition as a model school. The school had shown impressive growth in student proficiency over the past two years, with significant increases in math and science scores. The campus had a 4-star rating in elementary and a 5-star rating in middle school, with the highest growth rates recorded since 2016. Principal Fossett acknowledged challenges with the new curriculum, requiring extra planning time for teachers, but noted positive initial feedback on its rigor and effectiveness. Additional support had been provided for planning and implementation, ensuring that staff received the necessary resources and guidance.

North Las Vegas Principal Mindi Palomeque provided an update on the school's performance, noting they fell short of their goal of achieving 3 stars, missing by just 4 points. However, they saw significant gains, with their index score nearly doubling from 24.5 to 46 and achieving maximum points for WIDA assessments. They improved in math and ELA median growth percentiles, but continue to face challenges with attendance, proficiency rates, and parental involvement. Principal Palomeque stated that the school had implemented incentive

programs, increased communication with parents, and introduced differentiated small group instruction in ELA and math. They had also organized ability-based teams for grades 3-5 to enhance instruction and foster collaboration among teachers.

Principal Palomeque stated that the school community was engaged in various activities, including a breast cancer awareness event and a food drive, highlighting their commitment to both academic and community support. She noted the importance of focused instruction and utilizing data to drive improvements, particularly in phonics to enhance reading skills.

Aliante Principal Shannon Manning reported that the elementary school received a 3-star rating, with a focus on closing the opportunity gap through targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction and small group interventions. A highlight was their English Language performance, earning 9 out of 10 points. The middle school, rated 5 stars, excelled with a perfect score in student engagement and a low chronic absenteeism rate of 3.8%. The school was also designated a Governor's STEM school and recognized as a Purple Star School for supporting military families. Principal Manning noted progress in student growth from recent assessments and celebrated the induction of 40 students into the NEHS. The school was promoting inclusivity through lessons on Spina Bifida and raising funds for various charities, including \$200 for childhood cancer last month. Upcoming events included a collaboration with Somerset Losee for a dance workshop and a performance by the middle school cheerleaders at a UNLV game.

**b. APPROVAL OF MOU FOR SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF POWER-BASED VIOLENCE UNDER ASSEMBLY BILL 245**

This item was tabled.

**c. UPDATE ON RESERVE EXPENDITURES AND RESERVE FUNDS**

Mr. Gary McClain addressed the Board and provided an update on reserve expenditure and reserve funds. He reported a year-end unrestricted cash balance of \$45 million for 2024, detailing that \$4.6 million of this amount had been allocated to approved projects and contingency funds to cover potential unexpected costs. After accounting for all the committed funds, a remaining balance of \$39.6 million was available, with a surplus comfortably exceeding the board's 120-day minimum reserve. This surplus was set to support both technology and curriculum investments, as well as an asset replacement fund, funded at 75%—a level considered safely conservative.

Member Bentham thanked Mr. McClain for the information and asked for an update on the current projects. Mr. McClain stated that construction at the Sky Pointe location was progressing with asphalt removal, while permit approvals for the Aliante and Skye Canyon projects were expected soon. Additional projects, such as the Lone Mountain Gym and the Sky Pointe Performing Arts Center, were moving forward, despite minor delays related to permits and fees. Member Bentham asked about the impact of construction on school activities, Mr. McClain explained that the project team had been accommodating by scheduling louder activities outside of school hours, especially near the Sky Pointe kindergarten classrooms. Efforts were ongoing to ensure that construction remained as unobtrusive as possible to the school environment, with

the team leveraging every opportunity to work during off-school days and minimizing visible disruptions for students.

**d. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING THE PLAN OF IMPROVEMENT AND TO SOLICIT SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE FOR THE LOSEE AND NORTH LAS VEGAS CAMPUSES**

This item was discussed in conjunction with item 4.a.

**e. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE EMO EVALUATION FOR ACADEMICA NEVADA**

Principal Esplin reported on a recent EMO evaluation conducted in the spring. The evaluation highlighted the need for support in areas such as payroll, leading to the hiring of a new director of payroll. Mr. McClain stated that the finance team would work to replace Netsuite as the accounting software over the summer. Member Bentham expressed appreciation for the proactive efforts in addressing the needs of principals and the Board.

**MEMBER BENTHAM MOVED TO ACCEPT THE EMO EVALUATION AS PRESENTED. MEMBER MORRIS SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE BOARD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE.**

**5. LONG RANGE CALENDAR/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- **NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING IS DECEMBER 2, 2024 AT 6:00 P.M.**

Mr. McClain stated that the Board would need to meet before November 15<sup>th</sup> to approve the power-based MOU. The audit would also need to be approved before the end of November. The November meeting would take the place of the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. The next meeting would be the annual meeting in February.

Principal Esplin stated that the principals had been working on the 2025/2026 school year calendar, which should be ready by the November meeting for Board approval. The new calendar will transition from a day-based format to a minutes-based format.

**6. MEMBER COMMENT**

Member Morris thanked the Academica staff for their responsiveness and efforts in providing board members with the necessary information for meetings. Member Fairless also thanked the Academica staff and complimented the principals for their work. Member Hurley agreed with the previous comments.

Member Bentham also expressed appreciation. He noted the value of the Purple Star School designation, sharing his personal experience as a military child and emphasizing the importance of supporting military families. He stated that achieving this designation as a system could showcase Somerset as a leader in education while making a meaningful difference in the community. Principal Manning stated that, with many staff members eager to participate in the Purple Star committee, it required very little effort from the campus administration.

Member Mizer stressed the importance of succession planning and urged school leaders to involve emerging staff members in board meetings. He noted that the board had limited interaction with those running the schools and encouraged principals to give potential leaders, including

teachers and assistant principals, opportunities to present and engage with the board. He concluded by praising the principals for their hard work.

**7. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**8. ADJOURN MEETING**

**THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:16 P.M.**

**Approved on: November 13, 2024**

  
John Bentham (Nov 13, 2024 08:28 PST)

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