

**Minutes of the Meeting**  
**The Davidson Academy Governing Board**  
**November 09, 2020**

**Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Governing Board was called to order at 2:00 p.m. Due to the current State of Emergency declared by the Governor because of the COVID-19 virus, and more specifically the Governor's Directive 006, Section 1, this public meeting was held via videoconference with no physical meeting location.

Because he was calling in from a remote location, Board Chair Bob Davidson asked that Mark Herron chair this meeting.

**A. Roll Call**

Roll call was completed by the Chair of the Meeting, Mark Herron. Bob Davidson, Roger Davidson, Mark Herron, Richard Trachok, Brian Krolicki, Lauralyn McCarthy Sandoval, Brian Sandoval, Annette Whittemore and Kristen McNeill were present. Academy Director Colleen Harsin, Director of Online Learning Stacy Hawthorne, Legal Counsel Ann Alexander, Controller Karin Dixson and Clerk of the Board, Holly Lorge' were also present. Jhone Ebert was not present. Following completion of roll call, a quorum was confirmed.

**B. Welcome and Introduction**

Mark Herron welcomed Board members and members of the public in attendance. He introduced and welcomed new ex-officio Governing Board member, and University of Nevada, Reno, President, Brian Sandoval.

**C. Public Comment**

Mark Herron provided instructions concerning public comment as stated under item C of the meeting agenda.

Mr. Herron also read the State of Emergency information and provided the link from agenda and confirmed that public comments, if made, would be received by email. There were no comments from the public.

**D. Approval of Agenda**

Mark Herron requested a motion for approval of the Agenda. Motion was made and seconded for approval of the meeting Agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

## **E. Approval of Minutes**

Mark Herron requested approval of the minutes for the meeting of September 21, 2020, under TAB 1 of the Board Book. Motion was made and seconded for approval of the minutes as submitted. There was no discussion and the motion carried unanimously.

## **F. Reports**

### **1. Academy Director**

#### **a. General Program Updates**

Davidson Academy Director, Colleen Harsin, began her report by confirming for the Board that the Academy currently has 169 in-state students across both campuses, for the current school year. The Reno campus has moved to virtual tours for prospective applicants and their families. The tours are scheduled to coincide with online campus tours but do not overlap with those tours, so that prospective families have the option to investigate both options.

Ms. Harsin reported that application numbers are down for the Reno campus, but also noted an increase in submitted applications for the Online campus. Ms. Harsin reported a total of 106 applications in progress; 34 of are those for Reno campus. She confirmed this was not unexpected due to the national COVID-19 pandemic and related logistics in moving to the Reno area in order to access in-person learning at the Reno campus.

Ms. Harsin shared with the Board activities going on at the Reno campus. As of mid-November the Academy has had a total of 19 college visits. Representatives from these schools met virtually with our high school students and counselors. A successful in-person administration of the PSAT was completed in October. Virtual parent meetings were completed at the Reno campus, attended by 20 families for the morning meeting and 27 families for the evening meeting. Monthly parent meetings will continue, covering details and information concerning the current school year, and a question and answer session.

Ms. Harsin continued with an update on Student Council events. Ms. Harsin complimented the Student Council on successfully figuring out ways to keep important activities that were previously conducted in person, just as meaningful in a virtual environment. Virtual events to date have included a Microsoft paint competition, a Halloween costume contest, and a scavenger hunt. Student Council is currently putting together a gratitude and recipe book in celebration of Thanksgiving.

Ms. Harsin reported that students continued to participate in competitions and Club meetings online, as well as participate in Club activities such as Film Making Club's Scary Movie Night. Ms. Harsin gave an update on Academy Yearbook students, noting that they are well under way collecting photos and quotes with a different format for the current school year.

The Academy's Back to School night was held virtually. Parents followed their student's schedules and interacted with teachers through Zoom. The Back to School Zoom night worked very well, and was much better attended than our traditional in-person Back to School nights. Ms. Harsin stated the Academy will seek to continue options for virtual participation in events even as in-person participation is reinstated at some point, as having virtual options creates more opportunities for participation.

Ms. Harsin discussed that some students are attending school at the Reno campus for in-person instruction. The Academy's hybrid learning option allows students to sign-up to attend on any available day during the scheduled school week. The average student count in the building is usually between two and ten and averages about seven each day. To date, the Academy has not had any attendance issues with the remote learning option. Students are making contact with instructors and other students on a daily basis. Parents also indicate when their student is ill and will not be participating that day. Optional in-person attendance will continue unless there is a physical shutdown.

Ms. Harsin confirmed that the Academy will continue with its previously approved academic calendar, although the University academic calendar has shifted for the spring semester. Spring semester Academy classes will start on 1/19/2020, and the week-long spring break in March will stay in place. This is the case for both Academy campuses. Academy students with University classes will proceed with their University classes according to the University academic calendar.

Ms. Harsin referred Board members to TAB 2 of their Board Books concerning her report in response to the Nevada Path Forward Directives provided last summer, for an accounting of student online connectivity. This information was provided by the Academy in early October per Guidance Memo 20-05. The total number of students at both campuses is 234. Of those students, none are without a device or access to the Internet. The Reno Campus has issued 24 Thinkpad laptops for student use at home or in the Academy building. The Academy also issued one webcam for student home use. Ms. Harsin further explained this is at no additional cost, as these are items that were already available at the Academy.

Ms. Harsin referred Board members to TAB 3 of their Board Books for a summary of Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), which represents the Davidson Academy 2017-2018 school year. This information was published since the last Board meeting and is typical of nationwide data analysis. In 2017-2018 the Academy had 172 students enrolled. That academic school year also marked the first year that the Davidson Academy Online full program was available to students. The Davidson Academy is recorded as a magnet program, and gifted and talented. In this data, regarding enrollment and chronic absenteeism, the Academy reported 2.3%, meaning there were approximately four students with attendance issues. The Academy was in contact with

the students at that time regarding chronic health or other relevant issues concerning their attendance. The Academy did not have any students who needed to be retained, failed or had disciplinary issues.

Also included under TAB 3 was a summary of the 2017-2018 CRDC Staffing and Finance data. Legislation indicates that the Academy at least have a 70% teacher licensure. The reported data indicates the Academy as exceeding that requirement at 81.2%. The Academy's average teacher-to-student ratio was reported as 7 to 1.

Ms. Harsin reported and further clarified the CRDC data for 2017-2018 regarding the Academy's 8<sup>th</sup> grade math/Algebra 1 as presented in the data collection. The demographic data for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in Algebra I indicates 100% of those students reporting as White. Since the Academy does follow a grade level progression based on age, the requirement to report data based on age/grade designation does not accurately reflect the advanced, rigorous nature of the Academy curriculum. Academy students take appropriate math courses based on their academic ability in that subject. Ms. Harsin also stated many Academy students are past Algebra 1 by 8<sup>th</sup> grade and are accessing a higher level course in Mathematics. Thus, the CDRC data is not generally indicative of most Academy students' math progression. Davidson Academy students do not move forward with grade level progression.

Brian Krolicki commented that the optics of the data as presented are difficult and was concerned about public perception absent Ms. Harsin's explanation. He asked if there was any way to asterisk an explanation within the available data collection currently available to the public. Ms. Harsin said she will look into the possibility of adding information to clarify the presented data.

Lauralyn McCarthy Sandoval asked if the Academy's information is presented with other schools. She reiterated Mr. Krolicki's concern about public perception and is there a way to solve that problem. Ms. Harsin stated she is not aware of a current solution, but will follow-up to request an option to provide more information on the Academy's behalf.

Ms. Harsin referred Board members to TAB 4, for discussion of the Academy's updated School Profile Letter, which is representative of both campuses. The document includes results of consultations with the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC), geared towards what universities are looking for from applicants. The letter also includes direct communication about the Academy's COVID-19 response. The School Profile reports 238 students currently enrolled between the Online and Reno campuses, how many students of color, financial aid, states represented, student-to-teacher ratio and number of enrolled seniors. Ms. Harsin noted that this year is our largest graduating class, with 40 seniors set to graduate in the spring of 2021 and also the Academy's largest number of National Merit semi-finalists.

## **2. Director of Online Learning**

### **a. General Program Updates**

Director of Online Learning, Dr. Stacy Hawthorne, began her report and referred Board Members to TAB 5 of their Board Books to discuss the 2021-22 application review process, which is now open. When this data was printed two weeks ago the Academy had received 65 applications, but as of today's Board meeting 99 applications have been submitted for Davidson Academy Online. Of these, 72 applications are in progress and 27 applications are fully completed. Last year, in November 2019, the Online campus had reported 15 applications, thus the Online campus is showing significant growth again this year.

Dr. Hawthorne shared that 11 prospective students will be assessing Thursday and Friday, and a total of 44 students have already assessed for 2021 admission. Of those applicants, five have been accepted. Decisions are pending and further acceptance decisions will be going out next week. Dr. Hawthorne recognized that some of this growth is a response to COVID-19, but also complimented that this is a testament to the quality and good work of our Reno campus and online programs.

Dr. Hawthorne confirmed that Online campus open houses are continuing as they have in the past online with parent/student panels where current Academy students talk about their experiences as members of the Davidson Academy Online community, as well as presentations by Dr. Hawthorne and other Online staff. Shared perspectives by current students is helpful so families and applicants know what to expect when applying, which keeps the process honest and authentic.

Dr. Hawthorne discussed new spring electives: Women's Studies, Psychology, Organic and Bio-Chemistry, Chinese Martial Arts Film and Peer Mediation. The Davidson Academy Online electives are semester long, and are developed by current Online staff.

Dr. Hawthorne also shared student and family stories included in TAB 5 of the Board Books. These student stories come to her via email, which Dr. Hawthorne shares with Online staff. These are uplifting emails from students and parents about how the Davidson Online staff has impacted them in a positive and meaningful way.

Dr. Hawthorne discussed how the Online staff are continuing to build community with their currently enrolled 79 online students. The staff have brought in guest speakers, and Reno campus students are also invited to attend and enjoy the speakers. Speakers so far this year have included: NASA engineer Manuel Retana who was invited to speak with the Spanish classes, and Dr. Robert Leonard, a Forensic Linguistics Investigator who shared forensic files and clues with our students. Both speakers were highly impressed with Academy students.

Another guest speaker was Zoe Griffiths of Think Maths who presented to Academy students from both campuses live from England, sharing “Math Adventures in the Fourth Dimension.”

Dr. Hawthorne mentioned that the first virtual dance of the school year (and the second ever) will be held next Friday. The students chose ‘Winter Formal’ as their theme. The Online campus Student Council is posting events weekly and has held game and movie nights already this year. Dr. Hawthorne added that the parents appreciate that their students have these opportunities to enjoy themselves and feel connected.

Dr. Hawthorne concluded her report by referring Board Members to TAB 5, announcing that for the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year all Davidson Academy Online courses are approved by the University of California system for A-G credit.

### **3. Media and Outreach**

Dr. Hawthorne provided the Board with a report of the Academy’s recent media and outreach efforts summarized under TAB 7 of the Board Books. The summary highlighted places the Academy has been listed in the media or mentioned on notable websites. Due to outreach, Dr. Hawthorne was asked to present this week to a panel of parents and students at a gifted school in Austin, TX. Dr. Hawthorne commented that the Academy has had success reaching out to K-8 schools for gifted students, who have no affiliation with a high school. The Davidson Academy has already received several applications for next school year due to this successful outreach.

Dr. Hawthorne added that there has been a lot of work on the Academy’s main website search engine optimization (SEO), and a new website will be launching next year. The Website Metrics show traffic has increased by 107% over last year with an increase in demand for both campuses. A large portion of that increase was due to organic searches for “online gifted school and/or gifted school” in which 50% of people looking online are finding the Academy on their own. Over half of the website traffic is coming from the state of Nevada (Reno and Las Vegas), and there is increased traffic coming from New York and Los Angeles.

Dr. Hawthorne pointed out that the Davidson Academy has moved up in search rankings, from 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, to now 3<sup>rd</sup> in ranking for “online classes for gifted children” and “academy for gifted students.” The Davidson Academy is still rated #1 search return for “online gifted high schools.” Dr. Hawthorne noted we are moving in the right direction, and will continue our ongoing outreach, newsletters, and open houses.

### **G. General Business**

Mr. Herron referred Board Members to TAB 7 of their Board Books which included, a draft Resolution regarding Employee Timekeeping and Allocations. This action item was

in response to a suggestion stemming from the Audit Report and the related AU260 letter presented at the September 21, 2020, Governing Board meeting. The auditors found a potential deficiency relating to how the Academy collects employee time for payroll and budget purposes, specifically employees whose time allocations may change between pay periods. Due to the Academy's timekeeping change this year from paper-based to electronic time collection, it did not have a formalized mechanism to report time allocation variations. The Academy has new forms for the employees to allow for reporting of this information. The auditors asked that the Academy adopt a Board policy regarding this issue and the proposed resolution does that.

Mr. Herron asked for a motion to adopt the resolution as presented. The motion was made, seconded, and after some discussion carried unanimously.

Mr. Herron then presented for discussion proposed Board meeting dates for the 2021: February 16, public hearing for Budget May 10, May 24, Sept 20, and November 8, 2021.

#### **H. Public Comment**

Mr. Herron reminded everyone that the rules for public comment have not changed. There were no comments from the public.

#### **I. Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board in public meeting, Mr. Herron asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:53 p.m.

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*Respectfully submitted by Holly Lorge', Clerk of the Board*