

Minutes of the Meeting
The Davidson Academy Governing Board
February 16, 2021

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Governing Board was called to order at 2:03 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.

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, and Brian Sandoval were present. Also present, were Academy Director, Colleen Harsin, Director of Online Learning, Stacy Hawthorne, Legal Counsel, Ann Alexander, Controller, Karin Dixon, Director of Human Resources, Dee Carey and Clerk of the Board, Holly Lorge'. Jhone Ebert, Lauralyn McCarthy-Sandoval, Annette Whittemore and Kristen McNeill were 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. Colleen Harsin welcomed Academy parents who were joining us, as well as Matt Means, Dean of the University of Nevada, Reno Honors College and the new Davidson Group Director of Human Resources, Dee Carey.

C. Public Comment

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

Mr. Herron also read the State of Emergency information, provided the link from agenda and confirmed that public comments, if made, would be received by email.

D. Approval of Agenda

Mr. 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 November 9, 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 directing Board members to TAB 2 of the Board Book and sharing that the Academy currently has 115 applications in progress for the Reno campus, with a final deadline of March 31st. Sixteen applicants have been assessed and of those, seven have been accepted, including five local students, as well as one from southern Nevada, and one from Washington. The most recent curriculum based assessment, completed in January included applicants from a broader range of states and locations. Ms. Harsin shared that the applications tend to increase over the course of the application period, so the numbers tend to be fairly low in the fall and increase in the spring. However, application numbers were acknowledged as being lower than in the past. Ms. Harsin reported that the Reno campus will have its largest graduating class in 2021, and also likely its smallest incoming new student enrollment in 2021. Online outreach is continuing, and the Academy is aware of the circumstances complicating the ability of families to move during this time.

Ms. Harsin continued her report with TAB 2 of the Board Book for a summary of student in-person attendance at the Academy. She brought the Board's attention to the state requirements in providing high-quality remote learning for the entire school year, while also offering a version of hybrid learning in the building at the Reno campus. Ms. Harsin noted that in the ten weeks since the November Board meeting, there is still low in-person attendance, fewer than 10 students per day, although there has been a slight increase since spring semester has started. The Reno campus teachers are primarily teaching remotely via Zoom. Students who are attending in-person are engaged via Zoom for their classes. They typically choose to come into the Academy campus for a change of scenery and to engage socially with other students also attending in-person. The continuing plan is to reach out to the Academy community for feedback from parents, students and staff on reaching the goal of returning to the building for the next school year.

Ms. Harsin continued with an update on reports in progress. There was a Reno campus mid-year parent survey in February, with 41 parents completing the survey as of this meeting. Ms. Harsin will have more information and additional survey completion updates by parents for the next Board meeting scheduled for May 24, 2021. Ms. Harsin also shared the status of the Nevada Department of Education Dual Credit Data Request for the 2020-2021 school year. Approximately one-third of the Reno campus

students are taking University classes for dual enrollment at any given time. Ms. Harsin will give an update on this subject at the next Board meeting.

Also included in TAB 2 was the NRS.388C.120(5) report, due March 1, 2021. This report is due every odd-numbered year. Ms. Harsin and Dr. Hawthorne are in the process of working to revamp this format which goes to the Legislative Counsel Bureau and Department of Education, as well as UNR President, Brian Sandoval. In addition, the annual application to operate an alternative schedule will be submitted this spring. Copies of these submitted documents will be provided at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Harsin discussed the accreditation engagement review for the 2023-2024 school year. The Academy is currently waiting for further instruction as to the upcoming review process. Ms. Harsin reached out to the Cognia Standards and Protocol's Senior Director for Accreditation Services for an update and timeline, and she was told Cognia is working on completing certain elements and we will be contacted when the final materials are available.

Ms. Harsin shared student awards and recognition, including Reno campus student, Annabelle Choi, who received the *Silver Key and Golden Key Award* and is also an American Visions nominee, whose work is being displayed at the Nevada Museum of Art.

Every year the College Board National Recognition Program (CBRP) Scholars provides National Recognition of Scholars. This year, Ikenna Okpukpara is being recognized for the National African American Recognition Program and Asher Hansen for the National Hispanic Recognition Program. Both students attend the Reno campus.

Ms. Harsin's discussion continued under TAB 2 with congratulations to the 2021 National Merit Scholarship Program Finalists; all eligible semi-finalists from the Academy advanced. The list of Finalists includes one student from the Online campus. Ms. Harsin continued with the announcement of 21 U.S. Presidential Scholar nominees, which includes two of the Online campus students – one of whom lives in Pennsylvania and one who lives in southern Nevada; the rest are Reno campus students.

As of February 8, 2021, the college counseling staff confirmed that 39 graduating Academy students have submitted 494 applications which is the largest number of applications ever submitted by an Academy graduating class. Ms. Harsin added that many students are turning in more applications than they normally would, in response due to the higher deferral rate of applications this year. Continuing with the college counseling report Ms. Harsin indicated that Academy students have applied to 143 different colleges. Thus far, 85 have been accepted, 26 have been deferred and 13 have received denials. Many schools are still in play, and there will be more to share at the next Board meeting.

2. Director of Online Learning

a. General Program Updates

Director of Online Learning, Stacy Hawthorne began her report and referred Board Members to TAB 3 of their Board Books to give an applications update. Dr. Hawthorne commented that online learning is gaining more widespread acceptance and our application numbers reflect that as seen in the graph on page 15. Applications are up again for the fourth consecutive year, with the graph reflecting total count through the end of February for each year since 2017. While the chart showed 199 applications, there are actually 289 applications when the extended applications from summer are included.

Dr. Hawthorne continued that the Online campus has completed eight assessment cycles, with a total of 88 applicants assessed currently this year. Nineteen applicants have been fully accepted and 25 are awaiting decisions. Assessments are being administered every two weeks to keep up with the flow of applications, with more being added in March. The goal is to finish assessments by the end of May so that families can make decisions in a timely manner and be ready by start of school in August.

Richard Trachok asked Dr. Hawthorne if those 88 assessed students are awaiting a decision “from us, or we from them?”

Dr. Hawthorne replied that 88 have been through the assessment cycle, 25 are waiting a decision from the Online campus, which means 53 have already gotten their decision, and of those 53, 19 were accepted. Dr. Hawthorne added that the normal acceptance rate hovers around 50%, but with extended applications from summer 2020 applications, different test scores were allowed to be submitted because testing was a problem due to Covid-19 restrictions. Dr. Hawthorne added that as long as there a test score somewhere in the application that showed a qualifying score, applicants were invited to assessment. This allowed applicants who do not meet posted testing requirements to be invited to assessment. Unfortunately, this led to a lower acceptance rate. However, this does help validate posted qualification criteria. Dr. Hawthorne also stated that typically applicants under the age of twelve are required to submit achievement testing, not IQ testing to show performance in each of the subjects. Last year an IQ or achievement score may have qualified and the acceptance rate went down as they weren't able to show goodness-of-fit on our curriculum-based assessment. Dr. Hawthorne shared the acceptance rate is now back to 50% due to getting through those summer assessments.

Brian Krolicki inquired about the number of online students the Online campus is comfortable accepting, acknowledging that the admission process is still ongoing, and not all have been assessed yet, but what is that comfortable number?

Dr. Hawthorne responded by saying the goal is 70 new students this year. She explained that number is close to double what was added this year, and that this year started with 79 new students. Dr. Hawthorne explained that more Zoom rooms can be added with hiring more teachers, but maintaining quality is difficult the faster the growth. The target number of total students for 2021-22 is 100 to 125 students, but could be as many as 140 students.

Dr. Hawthorne explained that there is a lot that happens once a new staff member is hired, adding that in regards to professional development, there are three important items: 1. expertise in content area; 2. disposition and experience with profoundly gifted students; and 3. technology skills. If the newly hired teacher has items 1 and 2, then item 3 can be something trained. Newly hired teachers start professional development on July 1 with a 7-week hands-on introduction to online learning the Academy way, policies, school culture, and technology. Mini-training workshops are offered throughout the year for all instructors.

Dr. Hawthorne continued with TAB 3 to share with the Board the Professional Growth report, and the award being applied for in this program. Each semester, students are asked to rate the courses in three areas – course content in Blackboard, live sessions, and the instructor. The questions and composite for each area scores are shown in detail on pages 16 and 17 in the Board Book. The composite scores for all categories have increased over the last three years, and any score over a 3, with scoring being 0 to 4, shows the quality of the program and how it is growing.

Dr. Hawthorne shared that this year an ‘Accepted Families Night’ was created to help new families and students have questions answered. This event has helped new families understand more about the Academy’s courses, credits and processes before they enroll. This will also allow the counselors and advisors to dedicate more time during personalized learning plan meetings in the spring to get to know the students since these basic questions have already been addressed. The family nights are one hour long via Zoom and in a small group format. The format allows each of the staff members to talk about their area of responsibility and for parents to ask questions, meet each other online and see who was also accepted. This event was positively received, and a second ‘Accepted Families Night’ is scheduled later this month.

Dr. Hawthorne highlighted Online student Lucia M. for her progression to the national level of Cyberstart America Competition. This is the first year, first level for this new DAO course called “Cyber Society.” This is a free national program for high school students to master cybersecurity, increase their digital skills and compete for college scholarships. The Academy is very excited that Lucia M. has made it to the national level in this competition. There were also additional students Dr. Hawthorne mentioned in grades seven to twelve (age thirteen and up) that won Scholastic Art & Writing Awards.

3. Media and Outreach

Dr. Hawthorne provided the Board with a report of the Academy's recent media and outreach efforts summarized under TAB 4 of the Board Book. Dr. Hawthorne pointed out the Academy students are continuing to do well in Science Olympiad, with student Annabelle W. being named a Top 25 finisher and Julia S. created an award-winning volunteer-matching app. The Online campus was featured and recognized in Education Week, a news source focusing on educational issues, as an online school that has systems and practices in place to mitigate any potential technology issues. Dr. Hawthorne also shared that student Derek C. was named a top 300 scholar in Regeneron's Science Talent Search. Both Derek and the Academy will receive \$2,000 to be used toward STEM-related activities.

Dr. Hawthorne reported that total website visits are up 31% year over year. The Academy is now in the top three rankings for key words that include or mention: online classes for gifted children, online gifted middle school, online gifted programs, online gifted education and online programs for gifted students. Dr. Hawthorne discussed the Academy's 'keyword rankings' on page 23 which showed the full list of key word rankings and moving up/growth in those positions.

Dr. Hawthorne concluded her report discussing the outreach of the Online campus via virtual open houses. There have been three Online campus and two Reno campus virtual open houses with one more to come in March. Dr. Hawthorne added that the e-Newsletter reaches 6,000 people every other month, and Academy information can also be found on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

G. General Business

Mr. Herron referred Board members to TAB 5 of their Board Books to discuss a proposed resolution revising a current policy requiring multiple signatures on Academy checks for amounts in excess of \$10,000. Mr. Herron stated this policy was adopted by the Board at the first Board meeting 15 years ago. Mr. Herron ask the Board to consider removing this item for two reasons: the Academy's internal controls have evolved since 2006, and they are now subject to an annual audit, which covers the internal controls. Mr. Herron added that being in a 'virtual world' and working remotely, getting two signatures on checks has proven to be difficult in a timely manner to get vendors paid when due. There are currently two levels of approval for all purchases over a nominal amount, there is an accounts payable process that requires documentation and signed off by at least two individuals or more before moving next to the accounting function, and in that step payable requests are matched for approval. Mr. Herron continued it was then sent to a check generation process and signature process that is electronic to create physical checks within an electronic platform. Those checks are printed at three dedicated printers at three office locations, so no person can print a

check at random. Mr. Herron stated that he and Colleen Harsin are the only authorized signatories.

Richard Trachok asked two questions of Mr. Herron: “How many checks are written per month, actual physical checks,” and “Are you proposing to remove the policy entirely or to increase the amount?” Mr. Herron stated checks are processed once a week, approximately 10 to 20 checks, which can vary. For example, the Academy reimburses tuition that students pay, and at that time of year there can be a sizeable number of checks to be processed. Mr. Herron also confirmed his request to remove the limit. Mr. Herron added that another way vendors are paid is through wire transfers, and that does not require two sign-offs, those processes tend to merge and Mr. Herron would like to make them similar.

Brian Krolicki asked Mr. Herron from a governance standpoint for the accounts payable on a weekly basis, who reviews them after the fact. Mr. Herron confirmed reconciliation is done by an independent party, independent of Karin Dixon. Ms. Dixon reviews, and then Mr. Herron also reviews.

Brian Krolicki stated this is perfectly common, safeguards are in place in this technology world accentuated by Covid-19. Mr. Krolicki made a motion to approve removing the requirement for the double signatory. The motion was seconded.

Mr. Herron invited further discussion. There was no further discussion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Harsin referred Board Members to TAB 6 showing a list of Davidson Academy Reno campus students who have made satisfactory progress toward graduation, meeting and/or exceeding graduation requirements. Ms. Harsin added that if for some reason a student does not meet the requirement, even if approved by the Board today, that student will not graduate.

Ms. Harsin asked for a motion of approval for this list of 2021 graduates. The motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously.

Brian Krolicki asked the Board to compliment to Ms. Harsin and Dr. Hawthorne and all the teachers and staff of both Academies, as well as the National Merit Finalist students, the nearly two dozen Presidential Scholarship finalists, and for the Board to acknowledge the positive response and growth rates for the Online campus. Mr. Krolicki commented this was a spectacular performance within the challenges of this last year, and wanted to acknowledge the extraordinary achievements of the students as they are mentored by the Academy’s staff and teachers. Ms. Harsin agreed, and stated how fortunate it is to work with such a great team.


Mr. Herron mentioned to the Board there is a Public Budget meeting on May 10, and that Board members are not expected to participate in that meeting. Mr. Herron also reminded the Board of upcoming Board meeting dates of May 24, September 20 and November 8, requiring their attendance.

H. Public Comment

Mr. Herron reminded everyone of the process for public comment. No comments were received.

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 2:48 p.m.



Respectfully submitted by Holly Lorge, Clerk of the Board