

**The SABIS International Charter School  
160 Joan Street  
Springfield, MA 01129  
Board of Trustees**

**Minutes of SABIS Board of Trustees Meeting – May 7, 2019**

In Attendance: Sonja Shaw, Joyce Gondek, Olivia Kynard, Wilfredo Lopez, Daryl Lovell, Ellen McDonald, Paula Meara, Anne-Marie Nicolai, Patrick White, Atu White  
Guests: see sign-in sheets  
Not Present: Luis Aponte, Derryl Gibbs

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I. Meeting called to order at 6:31 pm

II. **Community Input Forum**

Sonja Shaw introduced herself and welcomed and thanked all for attending. She introduced Atty. John DaCruz as moderator.

John DaCruz. You may be wondering why I am here and why this SABIS Board of Trustees meeting is using a different format. The Board of Trustees is beginning the process of considering how the school will be managed in the future. The management contract in place is running out. The trustees have to make several decisions. First, they have to decide what the viable options are for managing the school in the future. The two principal options are hiring a management company as they do now or moving to self-management. Second, they have to decide whether to renew the contract with the current management company or enter into a new contract with a different management company. Massachusetts law provides that meetings on contract negotiation and strategy should be held in executive session. This means that the public is excluded from those meetings. Because this is a critical series of decisions, the trustees want to be sure to provide an opportunity for community input at the beginning of the process. So that is the purpose of this meeting – to give the SABIS community an opportunity to weigh in on the questions the trustees will be deciding. Because they want to be sure everyone understands that no decision has been made and no decision will be made until the trustees determine that all facts necessary are at hand, the trustees themselves will not be speaking or responding. They will be listening. Our format for tonight’s meeting is that each person will have three minutes to make whatever statement or presentation they wish. Anyone who does not wish to identify themselves and make a public presentation may submit comments in writing. Written comments will be read by me after all presentations are finished if there is time. If not, appropriate written comments will be noted in the minutes. The rules on the

presentations are as follows: First, members of the SABIS community will have an opportunity to make comments and presentations. Second, after comments and presentations by members of the SABIS community are complete, members of the general public will have an opportunity to make comments and presentations. Third, each speaker will be limited to three minutes. Fourth, all comments should be respectfully made and no one should interfere with any presenter. Fifth, if there is time after all the speakers have spoken once and any written comments have been read, there will be an opportunity for speakers to make additional comments limited to one minute. Finally, to respect everyone's time we will close this meeting at 8 PM.

Please understand that in order to make sure that no one confuses a statement by a trustee as a statement of any sort of policy, the trustees will not be making any statements tonight. They are not being rude; they are concentrating on your comments and concerns.

Before we begin, are there any questions about the process?

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### **Speakers:**

Brittany Archey (graduate of SICS and 9<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher). Doing what is right for students now and in future. Graded on performance/exams; expected to get to 85% and pacing charts. Uses point system of instruction. Holding from full potential. Students learn differently; need access to resources. No flexibility in curriculum; put decisions in teacher hands, they know kids and how they learn. Quoted Albert Einstein / fish climbing tree. Teaching them to pass tests. Celebrate differences. Make decisions that are best for students. Relationships with peers were best.

Maretta Thomsen (first academic leader of the school and second director in 2000). SABIS was selected as management company very carefully; they did different things like training, creating positive school culture, instilling trust, method of instruction, system to follow progress weekly, SLO, tools that no child fell between cracks. Dramatic academic progress; ownership. Gaps filled and culture was positive. Created success, trust, commitment to grow on part of all. SABIS has changed many lives in positive ways to include families, students, staff, and city. Built state-of-art school. Student success stories, 100% graduation rates; students cared about success of peers, sports programs thrived; no one gave up. SABIS devoted resources necessary. Hope to continue to give students a SABIS education and continue to demonstrate success as demonstrated over past 24 years; home to many people.

Andres Gomes (former student; class of 2003). Frightened to hear of what is going on; came to SABIS from Puerto Rico and other local public schools. SABIS challenged and pushed, a lot due to leaders; changed course of life. 25 years of success over district and

across nation. Don't want to trade 25 years of proven success for possibility of failure; don't want to give up.

Israel Garcia (High School Spanish teacher of two years). Students cannot learn same way as ten or 20 years ago. Evolving; always something new. Spanish curriculum is tricky; not all students learn the same way; only certain time for assessments cripples them. Not allowing them to show what they are learning. A lot of writing tests; not showing. Books using vocabulary they won't use. 100 words to learn in the chapter. Questions on tests sometimes change from what they read. Frustrating as teacher to keep them engaged and make them feel good. Re-testing over and over. No grades for quizzes or homework.

Rob Cote (parent). They have two children here. Love the school; frustrated right now. Past is fantastic but looking toward future; daughter is going to private tutoring. 30 kids in school tutoring isn't working. 30:1 not good odds for our future. High School numbers are amazing. K-8 failing. Curriculum pushes; next test; flying through material; teachers' hands are tied. Parents, teachers are frustrated. Teaching to MCAS; what about teaching for life and future? Think about how teachers used to teach: each kid is individual. Escort students; cannot teach for a test. They need to know how to think on feet out in world. Society lives in electronics. Teach them to get into a book and feel accomplished. Teachers are behind. Son hates school; no calm to the storm. Youth does not respect. Have to teach them a certain way. Board, please listen to what people are saying.

Jason Flanders (alumni/class of 2005). Thanked board for holding meeting. Have heart set on the school but reality is that standardized test/one size solution doesn't fit all, but had great teachers who impacted them. Struggled in college. One size solution does not fit all.

Regina Lopez (high school English teacher and Department Head). Have been here since 2013 and enjoyed many incredible students come through the school. Sometimes hope doesn't equal academic success. Been able to differentiate curriculum and meet needs for MCAS, AP exams, etc. Teaching to test is important but many other paradigms like creativity and original thought; stress daily to ELA teachers but doesn't always fit into system (teach-practice-check), stir empathy of students to connect to complicated texts. Throws off pacing charts; teachers need more leeway. Many students arrive with lower reading levels; may need to slow pacing; may have difficult time with writing; teachers slow down to assist. Many class periods going through assignments to create in-depth learners. Each student is different so teacher should have ability to augment group, allow teachers to differentiate. Class sizes some have 35; difficult to give individual student attention. Class time turns into listen; take test and forget. Not seeing connections between academic departments—no time to coordinate. Allow teachers to work together to benefit school and students.

Tina Le (high school math teacher and department head). Has been here 20 years. Here to support idea of school being independent. May not understand; glad others and she did have good experience. In “old days; were flexible in assessment for testing on what is relevant/there was time to teach to mastery. But now class sizes are over 30 in most grade levels. Pacing chart same time/same place teachers feel rushed. Struggling with pacing. Teach exact same way; same examples. Problems are ready, but why need change? Because not working for students; see struggles of students and nothing they can do. Have lost many good teachers; was there when lost many on middle school team. Everything asked for here is for students; not for teachers. All about students. Supporting independence for teachers to work their magic.

Rebecca Larson (HS math teacher). Thanked board for opportunity to teach, 13 years HS math. Also parent of alumni, class of 2014. Parents here in audience—you did not look for a management company to educate your kids. You looked at school that was doing best; spoke with AQC at time of her son starting school; he made the lottery. He was here in attendance before she was. Grateful to come in as a teacher; son doing remarkably well despite educational constraints on teachers. Currently supposed to give a test to her students where 43% of the material on it is not what the kids learned. Constraints on math department are ridiculous; the more there are; the worse the school does. You sent kids here for the people; they understand dedication and what it takes. Every person working here that interacts with students is at the top level. Trust them to do what’s right. Support independent charter school.

Robert Markel former board member; previous mayor of City when the school first received its charter). Worked with Dr. Negroni and Bill Weld. School committee reviewed number of applicants and decided to contract with SABIS. There was a rebellion against it; then decided to give them a school that was #28 out of 29 for performance – took over Glickman and was on Board. All new; wanted to see what doing and how doing it and protect city interests. Served on board for three years. Went up to fourth best in City and then best in City. Record worth understanding if there is a decision to be made. Arguably one of best in State with same type of curriculum. One of 21 best high schools in US and has all the challenges of other schools in the City. Support public education; built seven schools as mayor; public education is important and so is this school as measure of competition with public sector. Worked very well. Curriculum has been success. Not seeing evidence across State that board management will work. Important for parents to have choice.

Edouard deVarennes (science teacher and department head in 16<sup>th</sup> year). May have read article; students do very well on science MCAS. Last year no student in 9<sup>th</sup> grade failed biology MCAS. Never had one fail to graduate. Many score 3+ on AP and earn college credit. Many graduates have gone on to STEM fields. HS science department has never used curriculum or pacing charts. The teachers create the curriculum and assessments themselves. If the science department can prepare students, then its colleagues in other departments are capable of doing the same. Everything we are

buying from SABIS, we could get other places, better/cheaper or make ourselves. Would save millions by not renewing – and this could be invested in students. Support choice to become an independent, self-managed charter school.

Jose Afonso (SABIS/head of business development for SES). History—worked for department of Ed and was involved with charter; saw school become role model that it is. Been with SABIS for 19 years; joined for its record; amazed at performance and way programs worked and achieving results. Most schools struggle with closing achieve gap, wide gap between low income and minority students and their more affluent peers: this school used as measuring stick; wish to replicate in other parts of State. Operational hiccups here and there; large operation; some may not fit in with the program and is understandable. Not understandable is position we're in today given school's success; for example 10<sup>th</sup> grade math 97% proficient; outperforming. Putting at risk a program that has served students very well. As board considers, SABIS is extraordinarily proud of the record achieved and hope to continue to deliver. Very proud of record. Hope decision is made to continue, and to continue to make a great school even better.

Karen Reuter (School Director). You can see by attendance here that people care very deeply about this school and students served. Care very deeply about students in this school and its future. As it is teacher appreciation week – shout out to all the teachers in the building. Ask to pause and recognize that SABIS was a trailblazer in 1995 unafraid to challenge the status quo. Over 1400 graduates have benefitted from its commitment to serve the community and students of Springfield. The SLO (student life organization) launches leaders of future through real time planning. Grateful that SABIS put real money on table to create a beautiful facility. Members of our community have much to be proud of. Highlights; recognized by US News and ranked in top 15% of charter schools nationally. Currently HS MCAS results rival wealthier suburban districts in math, ELA, and biology. Our waitlist numbers outnumber the amount of students here. Since 2011, \$82M has been earned in senior scholarships. John & Abigail Adams scholarship amounts bring that number to \$100M. College admission staff say all the time that SABIS students are well prepared; all has been achieved with SABIS as management company, with support national and regional offices.

Ronald Watson (retired teacher, after 17 years). Yes the school has a good solid history. What about future? What about children moving forward? Brag rightfully so about MCAS scores. It was not SABIS that put program together; it was the math department. 10<sup>th</sup> grade program worked for years, a mutual program. Complaints from teachers is valid; there is no flexibility with SABIS system. What made them different: found solution; fixed and made things work. Things are not working as well. First graduating class was 2001 (needs correction on flyer). Questions are asked over material not taught or not in book any more. Some things need to be fixed. Whether they are fixed by SABIS or on own, they need to be addressed. It can continue to work. Not sure about direction will take to make it work.

Peter Negroni (founder). Worked hard for charter school movement to be possible in this State, thanks to Mayor Markel. Have since been able to create this wonderful school. Would like to add support for teachers who are the underlying reason why things work however there are wonderful teachers in this country in schools that are not working; fear is that this school after all is said and done that it will not exist as it exists today. SABIS made this work with the wonderful teachers. Schools failing across country with good teachers. Something is wrong. Think hard about decision; self-management sounds great but it's not working anywhere in the country. Support SABIS because have seen what happened here and seen others across world run by SABIS who provides a quality education to different cultures. Problems have to be worked out, and community deserves to have school to educate all its kids to get into college; doesn't happen anywhere in country and is happening here. This is about kids getting quality education. Be smart and consider children need SABIS.

Amy Wesley (SABIS executive director of marketing and communications, and former SABIS teacher). Watching SICS for many years; take great pride in telling stories of students and success of school. Heard about teaching students to do incredible things and preparing them for success, which SABIS has done since it started and continues to do this day. Talking about present and future. Give voice to individuals who could not be here; graduated in 2018, 2017, and 2002/examples, "thanks to rigorous classwork was able to hit ground running at college and ready to compete at Morehouse; premier school" "SABIS taught me to work well under pressure, manage time, can have social life and get work done without sacrificing." "If not for SABIS would not have had educational foundation to make it through Coast Guard Academy; opened doors didn't know were available." "Wouldn't be where I am today and have the confidence to get thru MIT if not for SABIS." "SABIS gave me the opportunity to strive and the ability to enjoy academics." These voices will continue with SABIS.

Michael Glickman (first director in 1995). Spent 27 years in Springfield Public Schools as teacher and administrator and then in 1995 when City would open its first charter; was selected to be first director. Challenge: what makes the board consider the actions it has to take? Look at what makes SABIS different. The point system of instruction; the skill and concept. Prefect system is important, SLO, tutors, activities. Getting students involved. Help them take responsibility for themselves and others. Testing is an aspect of learning; shouldn't be surprised at report card time when students get tested weekly and monthly. Athletic programs and academic competitions; uniform code. Student management: disruptive students should not take time from other students. Student Management is not what it used to be; get back to it – SABIS program works. It is not curriculum. It's the teachers; it's the whole program and it does work. Is it being properly implemented? Responsibility lies with Director of school. Thanked board.

Dr. Sonia Pope (SABIS/Holyoke Director): thanked everyone. Bring message from sister school. 35 year educator in Holyoke. Work many years with low income and first generation college students. So many challenges within city. All on same page to provide

outstanding education with respect for all; teachers; staff; parents. 15 years ago met with George Saad who was VP of US operations. Looking in Holyoke to help children. Holyoke was unique; need to do something different – SABIS never said “no”. They asked what do you need; what will move children from point a to b; clear plan. Know that if bring SABIS to the table and discuss the real needs of students in school, know that they are eager to hear that concern and work to get concerns worked out. Believe teachers saying they are working at pacing and exams but there is always a way to fix things; and way to increase communication along with educational management. Believe in SABIS because saw kids performing and how they perform now; 90% Latino students are now competing at state level. Believe that we can do this together.

Justin Baker (SABIS). Conceded his speaking time to a parent or community member.

Maria Wysinski (parent). Lived near the original SABIS. Understood the excitement and enthusiasm, the achievement and excitement of having a charter school in the City. She has a 10<sup>th</sup> grader in the school and a 7<sup>th</sup> grader who is out of SABIS. Has seen some changes. During Kindergarten registration noting this is not school for everyone. Also parents, this is a full-time job; when to study what to study; kids will get tested every week. If you’re on Facebook complaining, then you didn’t know what you were signing up for. Teachers needs more support--cannot have 35 kids in a class. Kids are more difficult; parents need to understand it’s not a school for everyone. Teachers need more support; look at class sizes. Can we have another meeting? This cannot be done in one night.

Heather Aponte (parent). A lot of talk about high school and MCAS and how it’s running. Teachers are doing their own curriculum; not going by what SABIS is telling them to teach. Elementary struggled because with pacing chart; class moves on. Her family is spending money on outside tutoring; Student Life tutoring does not happen weekly. Her child fell behind. Believe the school should be self-managed: teachers need to teach the way they need to for the classroom. 30 students in a classroom is ridiculous. Kids are learning on different levels.

John Decaro (Parent). His daughter has been here since 3<sup>rd</sup> grade loves school and teachers. Where is book when doing homework? Teacher says we don’t teach out of the book. Math is done in 18 steps. Maybe if teachers could teach their way, students can achieve. MCAS is really to see how teachers are doing. Teachers need the help. We can change things. Doesn’t work in real world-- can’t “redo” your work like redoing tests. In workplace cannot re-do.

David Short (parent). Thank you to all the teachers. Has granddaughter here. This (paper) looks good. But what’s wrong? It states the students are performing in grade 10. What happened to grades 3-8? Too many are being left behind with focus on standardized score. Teachers are most amazing people. Need to help our teachers. All sounds good. Cannot just look at 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Let teachers teach.

Adam Gomez (parent). Here to represent his son and nieces and nephews. Represent poor district in the north end of Springfield. His wife cried when accepted to SABIS, prestigious school. Could have gone to school where students eat lunch in classroom, no gym, 100 years old... it was a great day to be selected in lottery. Thanking this process. When you do sign up for school you know what you're getting into. Still on waiting list for daughter. Independent schools-- 70% fail. Understand as city councilor if the school fails, that's 1500 kids. On state level underfunding mechanism, Springfield schools \$90M. But what to do, take chance and roll dice? The Board has a difficult decision to make. If it doesn't work out, parents, there is a democratic process in that you have say. Need medium ground to get things done. Believe that maybe amendment or put SABIS on standby. Don't make rash decision. Need more of community that comes together. Frustrated that found out about this meeting just last week. If issues were going on. let's continue dialogue. Thank you teachers; that's what it's all about. Just here for son.

Christine Scott (parent, with Senior student Paris who will be attending Springfield College on full scholarship). There are success stories. Also a teacher. Yes SABIS has done wonders for her kids. Now has 8<sup>th</sup> grader and another senior. But they've been stressed out getting there. Class sizes are too big. Youngest loves teachers and students; kudos to teachers; have to find way to compromise. Oldest had learning disability and did not know; teachers here helped her be who she is. Knew what was in for but also know responsibility for everyone else; in it together; have to find way to make sure taken care of. Compromise. Yes, different instruction. Was so happy when kids got into SABIS. It's all of us; it's not just this name. Paris: different to think of what something can be. Has been in school since kindergarten. Focus on job as community; prioritize future success of students. Can list statistics; but statistics are generalizations. They cannot represent success of many generations to come. Yes curriculum is rigorous however can speak to how SABIS is flawed; staying up all night studying; and after test couldn't tell you what was asked/memorization, such as with Spanish class just to pass test and forgot material almost instantly. Hope that Board consider student concerns from inside. There needs to be change and modifications. Why is this the first time public is hearing about this? Love SABIS very dearly.

John DaCruz noted that the Board is beginning its process to decide on future management of the school. Honest reflection of where we are and where we want to be in future and the ways to get there. Atty. Cruz closed the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Olivia Kynard, Secretary  
SICS Board of Trustees

Attachments

Attendees/sign-in sheets

Staff Member request with signatures  
Notes from attendees who did not speak