

**Sarasota Military Academy**  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
MEETING MINUTES (IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL)  
31 AUGUST, 2021

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**Board of Director Members' Attendance**

**Present:**

Thomas J. McElheny, EdD, Capt, USMC (Ret), Chair  
Mr. Warren P. Hudson, CAPT, USN (Ret) Vice Chair / Treasurer  
Dr. Brian Crupi, LTC, USAR  
Ms. Erica Gregory, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), (Virtual)  
Mr. Scott Lempe, LTC, USA (Ret)  
Ms. Linda Long  
Mr. Pete Skokos (Virtual)  
Ms. Tessa Suplee, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)  
Ms. Cynthia West

Howard G. Crowell, Jr., LTG USA (Ret), Chair, SMA Foundation Inc. (Virtual)  
Mr. Herb Jones, Vice Chair, SMA Foundation Inc.  
Frederick M. Derr, Capt (Ret.), Treasurer, SMA Foundation Inc. (Virtual)  
Mr. Anthony Baade, Trustee, SMA Foundation Inc. (Virtual)  
Mr. Rafael Robles, Executive Director, SMA Foundation Inc.

**Absent:** Ben Knisely, COL, USA (Ret), Secretary; SMA-LTC Lisa Currie, Assistant Head of School, Middle School; SMA-MAJ Leslie Smith, Athletic Director, Middle School

**SMA Administrative Staff in Attendance:**

SMA-COL Christina Bowman, Chief Executive Officer  
LTC Ben Weiss, Commandant of Cadets  
SMA-MAJ Steve Kok, Director of Finance  
SMA-COL Frederick Fout, Head of School, High School  
SMA-MAJ Charlie Carver, Athletic Director, High School (Virtual)  
SMA-COL Tom Vara, Head of School, Middle School (Virtual)  
SMA-LTC Ryan Lee, Assistant Head of School, Middle School (Virtual)  
MAJ Becky Morris, Assistant Head of School, Middle School (Virtual)

**Guests in Attendance:** Ms. Erica Gregory; Ms Susan Hartman, PTCC HS President; SMA-MAJ Michael Finley, Department Chair, Performing Arts; Mr. Drew Baggiani (virtual), 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Parent; SMA-CPT Jeanette Marks (virtual), Marine Science Instructor

Location: In-Person and Virtual

The chairman called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm.

Chair Thomas McElheny recommended to change the agenda with the Nominating Committee Report following the approval of the minutes and the Mask Policy to New Business.

**Vice Chair Warren Hudson motioned to approve the recommended agenda change; Mr. Scott Lempe seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

**Motion to Approve the 17 June, 2021 Minutes:**

Ms. Linda Long motioned to approve the 17 June, 2021 minutes; Mr. Lempe seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.

**Motion to Approve the 1 July, 2021 Special Meeting Minutes:**

Vice Chair Hudson motioned to approve the 1 July, 2021 Special Meeting minutes with the noted corrections; Ms. Cynthia West seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.

**Committee Reports:** Vice Chair Hudson presented to the board the recommendation of the Nominating Committee to extend to Ms. Erica Gregory a placement on the Board of Directors as a new Director. He detailed her experiences, as well as an Air Force Academy graduate, would be a benefit to the board.

**Ms. Tessa Suplee motioned to approve the recommendation of Ms. Erica Gregory joining the Board of Directors as a Director; Ms. West seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

**Executive Director of Schools Report:** SMA-COL Christina Bowman provided a read-ahead report. She presented the new rank of SMA-LTC to SMA-MAJ Steve Kok as he has taken on additional responsibilities and has earned it. SMA-COL Bowman discussed the current enrollment numbers on both campuses and the need to fill three more positions. She recommended to the board to opt-out of the school grade for last school year based on the math and reading scores. Vice Chair Hudson expressed his disappointment and retracts his decision of an opt-in as he understands the results will not be favorable. Mr. Lempe stated the need for all to understand the components that derive the school grade so to focus energy on areas that can be directly impacted and recommended presenting an explanation to the board. Chair McElheny inquired as to revising the strategic plan to include the components in which Vice Chair Hudson replied that the committee relied on the administrative team to express the areas to include in the strategic plan.

SMA-COL Bowman stated board approval is needed for the out-of-field instructors who are in the process of receiving their certifications.

**Ms. Suplee motioned to approve the out-of-field list of instructors; Ms. West seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

SMA-COL Bowman stated board approval is needed for the Employee Handbook to include revisions to the FRS (Florida Retirement System) section.

**Mr. Lempe motioned to approve the Employee Handbook with revisions; Ms. West seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

SMA-COL Bowman stated board approval is needed for the new Community Speakers policy that she has created utilizing the district policy for speakers to ensure proper vetting.

**Ms. West motioned to approve the Community Speakers Policy; Vice Chair Hudson seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

Vice Chair Hudson inquired as to the progress on the ESSER II funds in which SMA-COL Bowman replied that she had submitted for the ESSER I and II as well as Title II and IV funds with the request of the full amounts.

**Technology and Data Impact Report:** N/A

**SMA Head of School Report, Middle School:** SMA-COL Tom Vara provided a read-ahead report. He stated a successful faculty training week with the new staff and working with the department chairs on the academic challenges of the quarantined cadets. Vice Chair Hudson inquired as to the drop in enrollment in which SMA-COL Vara replied the main reason is the restrictions of in-person enrollment meetings due to COVID protocol. Dr. Brian Crupi inquired as to the plan moving forward to allow prospective families back on campus in which SMA-COL Vara replied that they will be starting with small groups for tours. Mr. Lempe stated the benefits of identifying the elementary and middle schools that are the biggest feeders in and out of county.

**SMA Middle School Athletics Report:** SMA-MAJ Leslie Smith provided a read-ahead report. SMA-COL Vara stated that volleyball and flag football tryouts have commenced along with the running club as pre-cursor to cross country season.

**Instructional Design & Curriculum:** N/A

**SMA Head of School Report, High School:** SMA-COL Fred Fout provided a read-ahead report. He discussed the COVID numbers along with the breakdown of positive cases and contact tracing. SMA-COL Fout stated that open enrollment begins October 1<sup>st</sup> with hopes of expanding on-campus opportunities and overcoming challenges of virtual recruiting. He discussed the PTCC assisting with in-person events at different geographic locations. SMA-COL Fout stated that he's worked with the department chairs in creating an action plan reflecting literacy initiatives in reading, writing and digital literacy that will be presented at next board meeting.

**SMA HS Athletics Report:** SMA-MAJ Charlie Carver provided a read-ahead report. He stated that there is a 35% increase in cadet participation across all sports from previous years with a record number of almost thirty cadets in cross country alone. SMA-MAJ Carver discussed SMA hosting their first cross country meet held at the middle school with nine schools participating and the return of the basketball program with boys and girls Varsity and JV boys. He discussed the strain on facilities with only the middle school gym available for any court sports as well as the county limiting field use and continues to work with SMA-MAJ Smith for solutions.

**SAI/Commandant's Report:** LTC Ben Weiss provided a read-ahead report. He explained the new grooming modifications for females that has been implemented. LTC Weiss stated that the first formations on both campuses were a huge success and the cadet representation is exceptional. He mentioned the presentation of the Legion of Valor Bronze award to C/COL Abigail Koester will be on 21 September during formation and mentioned certain members of the community will be in attendance such as the Mayor and Commissioner. LTC Weiss stated the color guard was in audition to present at a large event for Governor DeSantis and Congressman Vern Buchanan.

**Staff Representatives:** SMA-COL Vara stated that SMA-MAJ Smith provided a read ahead identifying concerns with obtaining substitute teachers as there is a shortage.

**Media Report:** N/A

**Treasurer's Report:** SMA-LTC Steve Kok provided a read-ahead report and balance sheets per campus. He discussed last year's budget as well as the proposed budget for this 2021-22 fiscal year. SMA-LTC Kok stated the PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) loan has been forgiven as well as the loan to SMA Foundation by SMA. He discussed the FTE amount was lower last year compared to a seven year average. SMA-LTC Kok stated that SMA should qualify for the ESSER I & II funds. Vice Chair Hudson stated that he wants leadership to come back at next board meeting with suggested cuts in order to balance the budget. Ms. Linda Long stated that enrollment and staffing need to go hand in hand and inquired as to the district's number of administrators per students.

**PTCC Report:** Ms. Susan Hartman provided a read-ahead report for the high school. She discussed a successful board with all positions filled as well as the implementation of the online SMA Spirit Store. Ms. Hartman stated that this year's focus is to refresh the PTCC brand and energize families for an increase in participation and stated that families are responding by wanting to be involved.

**Foundation:** Mr. Rafael Robles provided a read-ahead report. He discussed financials to include a breakdown of revenue from campaigns and expenses. Chair Howard Crowell stated that a program strictly to marketing is necessary and urges an external community wide marketing program. Mr. Robles stated that he is currently working on an Academy wide tri-fold to market to prospective families as well as a marketable display of the strategic plan document. Chair (SMA) McElheny stated that a marketing budget is in place to create promotional videos and materials that will build brand awareness to ensure a healthy enrollment number for next school year.

**Marketing and Communications Report:** N/A

**Chairman:** N/A

**Old Business:** N/A

**New Business:** SMA-COL Bowman asks the board to consider adopting the Sarasota County School District Mask Mandate Policy with a 60-Day consideration instead of 90-Day due to the disruption in education over COVID numbers. Dr. Crupi inquired as to the types of tests that are acceptable to return to class in which SMA-COL Fout replied that the Ellume At Home Test is acceptable but hard to find in local stores as well as the PCR test. Dr. Crupi inquired as to the quarantine cadets are due to contact tracing or positive cases in which SMA-COL Fout replied that it was mostly due to contact tracing. SMA-COL Bowman stated the Department of Health commended her for both campuses successful in contact tracing with fidelity. She recommended for families to have through the long weekend and for the Mask Mandate to commence on the first day back on Tuesday, 7 September with masks unless provided a medical opt-out.

SMA-MAJ Michael Finley, Performing Arts Department Chair, shared his comments on implementing the mask mandate. Mr. Drew Baggiani, a ninth grade parent, shared his comments on implementing the county's mask mandate. SMA-CPT Jeanette Marks shared her comments on implementing the county's mask mandate. Dr. Crupi inquired as to why a parent opt-out can't be incorporated in which SMA-COL Bowman replied that it would be too difficult for the faculty to follow.

**Ms. West motioned to approve the adoption of the District Mask Mandate Policy as written but for 60-days starting on 7 September with the ability to suspend if below 8%**

**for three (3) days in a row; four (4) board members voted in favor; four (4) board members voted not in favor.**

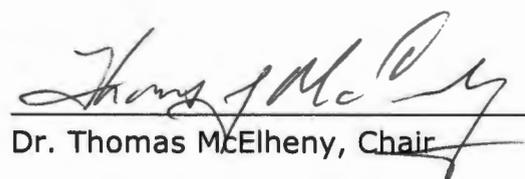
A second vote was taken after the Chair considered what was best for the safety and well-being of the cadets and Academy.

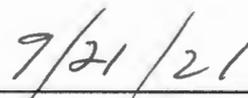
**Ms. West motioned to approve the adoption of the District Mask Mandate Policy as written but for 60-days starting on 7 September with the ability to suspend if below 8% for three (3) days in a row; five (5) board members voted in favor; three (3) board members voted not in favor. Majority stands and the motion approved.**

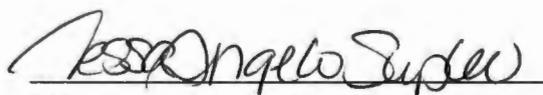
**Public Comments:** N/A

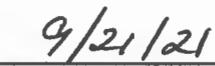
The next virtual board meeting will be on 21 September, 2021 at 2:30pm.

The chairman adjourned the meeting at 4:40 pm.

  
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Dr. Thomas McElheny, Chair

  
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Date

  
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COL Ben Knisely, Secretary  
Tessa Suplce for Ben Knisely

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date