

**Sarasota Military Academy**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**25 FEBRUARY 2025**

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**Board of Director Members' Attendance**

**Present:**

Dr. Thomas J. McElheny, Former Capt, USMC, Chair  
Erica Gregory, Lt Col, USAF (Ret), Vice Chair  
Ben Knisely, COL, USA (Ret), Secretary  
Pete Skokos, Treasurer (virtual)  
Brent Bogart, Former LT, USN  
Heather Koester, Former SGT, USAR (virtual)  
Carlos Moreira, 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt, USMCR  
Jerry Neff, BG, USA (Ret)  
Ron Skipper, Former Capt, USAF  
Richard Swoope, COL, USA (Ret)  
Michael Tollerton, Former CPT, USA

**Absent:** Scott Lempe, Lt Col, USAF (Ret); SMA-MAJ Charlie Carver, Athletic Director; SMA-CPT Ellie De Murias, MS Faculty Representative

**SMA Administrative Staff in Attendance:**

SMA-COL Christina Bowman, CEO/Head of High School  
Dr. Cheryl Korwin, Head of Middle School  
SMA-LTC Bryan Burns, Assistant Head of Middle School (virtual)  
SMA-LTC Caitlin West, Assistant Head of High School (virtual)  
SMA-LTC Abby Williams, Assistant Head of High School  
SMA-LTC Steve Kok, Director of Finance  
MAJ (Ret) Russ Osterfeld, SAI

**Guests in Attendance:** Brig Gen Charley Sugg; SFC Ernesto Ramirez, HS Faculty Representative; CSM Jack Phinney, JROTC Instructor; SMA-MAJ Michael Finley, Drumline Instructor; Ms. Nikki Orth, PTCC President

Location: SMA High School

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

Chair Thomas McElheny started the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Motion to Approve the 21 January 2025 Minutes:**

Mr. Brent Bogart moved to approve the 21 January 2025 minutes; COL Ben Knisely seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.

Chair McElheny introduced prospective board member, Brigadier General Charley Sugg, to the board. Brig Gen Sugg discussed his background as an Air Force Academy graduate and his career in the Air Force as an F-15 pilot.

**Head of Middle School Report:** Dr. Cheryl Korwin provided a read-ahead report. She shared state, district and school data of all components that make up our school grade for grades six through 12 posted on the Florida Department of Education website. Dr. Korwin pointed out the 2023-25 school year was the first year without sub-groups listed out of the past five years. She presented SMA's data on growth for reading and math for grades six through twelve starting with PM 3 of the student's previous year or school.

COL Richard Swoope inquired if teachers are aware of the areas students need to work on, in which Dr. Korwin replied that the data breaks down sections and proficiency for specific skills. Chair McElheny inquired if the data can be applied to necessary changes in the curriculum in the classrooms, in which Dr. Korwin replied the data can be a resource to make the necessary changes in the classrooms.

Ms. Michael Tollerton inquired the retention rate per grade, in which SMA-COL Christina Bowman replied that historically 10% is lost for each grade due to a variety of reasons such as moves, transportation and released to district schools.

**CEO/Head of High School:** SMA-COL Christina Bowman provided a read-ahead report. She stated the need for board approval of the high school out-of-field instructors.

**BG Jerry Neff moved to approve the high school's out-of-field instructors; Vice Chair Erica Gregory seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

SMA-COL Bowman mentioned the district approved SMA's 15-year charter contract and will present the superintendent letter to the board in April and will finalize in June. Chair McElheny mentioned SMA was announced at the charter school meeting with the School Board to have the highest graduation rate in the county, in which SMA-COL Bowman stated this year's target is 100%. SMA-COL Bowman provided data on student achievement and mentioned SMA night at the Circus on 2<sup>nd</sup> of March where she will be the honorary ringmaster along with the Color Guard presenting colors and the Choir singing the National Anthem.

**SAI Report:** MAJ Russ Osterfeld provided a read-ahead report. He discussed upcoming JROTC events, such as the District Drill Meet at Booker High School on 1 March, Mud Pit Day on 14 March and the Flag Retirement Ceremony on 4 April. MAJ Osterfeld thanked Ms. Tollerton for the invitation for himself and two cadets to attend the Leadership Conference held at University of Tampa.

**Academy Athletics Report:** SMA-MAJ Charlie Carver provided a read-ahead report.

**Staff Representatives:** N/A

**Treasurer's Report:** SMA-LTC Steve Kok provided a read-ahead report. He reported the first year for SMA to participate in the quarter penny sales tax that resulted in an additional annual amount of 316k. SMA-LTC Kok stated this will be an annual amount that he assumes will increase each year. He mentioned the need for board approval on both the operating and Foundation's 990 tax forms.

**BG Neff moved to approve the Operating Board's 990 tax form; Mr. Bogart seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

**BG Neff moved to approve the Foundation's 990 tax form; COL Knisely seconded the motion and the board unanimously approved.**

**Bylaws Committee:** Vice Chair Gregory stated in the process in hiring an outside consultant to review the bylaws and articles of incorporation.

**Nominating Committee:** COL Knisely reported no action at this time.

**PTCC Report:** Ms. Nikki Orth provided a read-ahead report. She mentioned upcoming events such as the middle school walk-a-thon and working with SMA-CPT Carly Loyd for a Scholastic book fair for each campus.

**Facilities Report:** Chair McElheny will include in Chair Report.

**Chair Report:** Chair McElheny discussed conversations with financial institutions that have specific resources dedicated to charter schools, in which he is learning the multiple facets of nonprofit financing. He stated meeting with architects out of South Carolina who has designed over forty charter schools and invited to meet with them on each campus on 24 and 25 March. Chair McElheny explained to the board his goal of gathering information for two scenarios of either building a new high school campus at a new location or rebuilding the existing high school campus. He discussed the meeting with realtor in assessing a true value of the existing high school campus.

Chair McElheny reiterated that although the facility is important, student achievement and culture to be clarified and directed will be what drives our school. He stated the workshop with SMA-COL Bowman, Dr. Korwin, Lt Col Lempe, SMA-LTC Kok and himself will occur every month and he will provide a summary to the board for confirmation of the board's clarification and directives to administration.

Ms. Tollerton inquired as to the status of the Service Academy Cohort Program, in which MAJ Osterfeld replied he meets with the cadets in the program three times a week and currently looking for adding SAT/ACT test preparation. Ms. Tollerton stated she is volunteering to assist in contacting the academy representatives and shared with the board her idea of introducing a Leadership Conference hosted by SMA. Chair McElheny stated he fully approves Ms. Tollerton moving forward as this conference builds on our unique differentiation.

**Old Business:** N/A

**New Business:** N/A

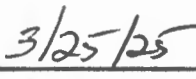
**Public Comments:** N/A

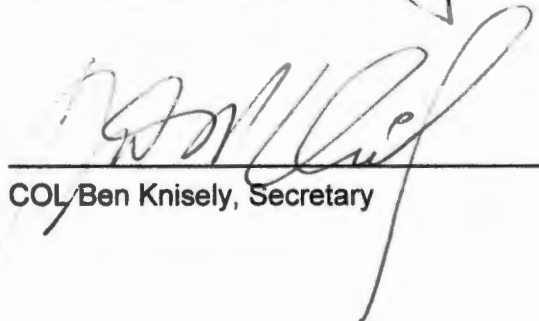
**Board Comments:** COL Knisely asked for the board's assistance in purchasing a yearbook that can be donated to a senior who can't afford. SMA-COL Bowman confirmed by stating that seniors are unfortunately having to pick and choose the activities to attend due to costs.

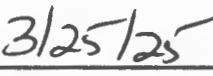
The next board meeting will be on 25 March 2025 at 4:30pm at the Middle School campus.

The chair adjourned the meeting at 3:41pm.

  
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Dr. Thomas McElheny, Chair

  
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Date

  
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COL Ben Knisely, Secretary

  
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Date