

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, July 29, 2024
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.
Hybrid Meeting**

Members Present: Mayor Dominick Pangallo, Manny Cruz, Mary Manning, AJ Hoffman, Veronica Miranda

Others in Attendance: Superintendent Stephen Zrike, Deputy Superintendent Kate Carbone, and Assistant Superintendent Elizabeth Pauley

Members Absent: Amanda Campbell and Beth Anne Cornell

Call of Meeting to Order

Mayor Pangallo called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm and explained the Public Participation Policy 6409 as well as the availability of Spanish interpretation.

Approval of Agenda

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve the agenda. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Grant Schmechel - Instructional Paraprofessional at Collins Middle School

Mr. Schmechel said that he has been living and working in Salem for four years. Mr. Schmechel continued that instructional paraprofessionals have to substitute for teachers frequently and this meant that they miss important meetings for their students and do not know when support plans were changed until way after the fact. Mr. Schmechel said that some students even forgot that he is supposed to support them. Mr. Schmechel stressed that Salem paraprofessionals need to be paid more and be able to afford to live in the city they work in.

Kristina Dragani - Carlton Innovation School PTO Vice-President

Ms. Dragani said that her family had lived in Salem for over 20 years and her son attends the Carlton School. Ms. Dragani also has experience working as a teacher. Ms. Dragani spoke about the role of paraprofessionals and the amazing work they do. Ms. Dragani added that teachers and paraprofessionals deserve better pay, sustainable work load, and extended parental leave. Ms. Dragani said investing in teachers and staff benefits all students as well as families to achieve learning goals, decrease absence rates, and increase quality of education.

O'Malley Barton - Salem High School Teacher and Salem Teachers Union (STU) Treasurer

Ms. Barton highlighted the overwhelming workload placed on educators and the lack of compensation for the requested work. Ms. Barton continued that the current demands on

educators is unsustainable and negatively affect their ability to deliver their best. This includes increasing non-instructional duties and substitute work. Ms. Barton added that Salem educators are among the lowest paid on the North Shore. Ms. Barton said that the district is facing challenges in attracting and retaining highly qualified educators due to insufficient compensation.

Jessica Tang - American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Massachusetts President

Ms. Tang said that in the national context, there is increasing teacher shortages, rising inflation which cuts away Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases, higher healthcare cost and rising housing cost. Ms. Tang continued that Salem Public Schools paraprofessionals make \$30,000 a year which is less than the median income of \$40,000 in Salem. Ms. Tang said educators are faced with difficult choices and they need a contract that creates sustainable working conditions.

Ann Berman - STU President

Ms. Berman said that an adequate wage allows workers to meet their basic needs, support their families, and live with dignity. Ms. Berman added that many educators struggle to make ends meet. The proposed wage increase for the Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PRSP) Unit and Teacher Unit is a step towards equity and sustainability. Ms. Berman elaborated on some key points of the proposal which included a living wage standard, regular adjustments, and better working conditions. Ms. Berman concluded that together we can build a district where hard work is rewarded with a fair wage, educators and students can thrive, students have stability, as well as where the society reflects justice and equality.

Mayor Pangallo called for a recess at 7:25 pm. Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to recess. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting resumed at 7:28 pm.

Approval of Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on June 17, 2024
- B. Approval of Warrants:
 - 1. **FY24:**
 - a. **7/10/24** - \$1,136,406.52
 - b. **7/17/24** - \$198,936.04
 - 2. **FY25:**
 - a. **7/18/24** - \$81,260.92
- C. Approval of the Carlton overnight trip to the Farm School in Athol, MA from 9/23-9/25 and 9/25-9/27

Mayor Pangallo said that Item A of the consent agenda is not ready and only items B as well as C are before the School Committee for approval.

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to table Item A of the consent agenda. Member Miranda

seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve Items B and C of the consent agenda. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike introduced Shirley Dorai, Executive Assistant to the School Committee and Superintendent, whose first day at Salem Public Schools was August 29, 2024. Superintendent Zrike said that Ms. Dorai comes with many years of experience in public education and most recently in a similar role at Malden Public Schools.

1. Update on Strategic Plan (All Priorities)

Superintendent Zrike said that the strategic plan update will be presented at the next meeting so that all the School Committee members can hear about additional information.

2. Recap of Educator Trip to the Dominican Republic

Superintendent Zrike spoke about the educator trip to the Dominican Republic earlier in the year. Educators were able to learn about the education system in the Dominican Republic that informs the experience of many Salem Public Schools students and their parents. Superintendent Zrike thanked the Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Engagement, Laura Assade, for her effort in organizing the trip.

Ms. Assade said that she worked closely with Ms. Clara Benedicto, a retired educator who worked and lives in the Dominican Republic. Ms. Benedicto served as their guide for the trip. Ms. Benedicto joined the meeting remotely from the Dominican Republic. In addition to Ms. Assade, the others who went on the trip were Superintendent Zrike, Ms. Sarah Campbell, Ms. Anjala McAweeney, Ms. Arabelis Luciano and Ms. Evelyn Marin. Ms. Assade proceeded with the presentation of the educator trip to the Dominican Republic. Ms. Benedicto spoke about the education system in the Dominican Republic and the role of the Ministry of Education. Ms. Sarah Campbell, Ms. Anjala McAweeney and Ms. Arabelis Luciano also spoke about what they experienced and learned from the trip.

Member Miranda asked about the length of the school day. Ms. Assade and Ms. Benedicto responded that families enroll their children in an educational program that best suits their needs which includes different lengths of school days. Vice Chair Cruz thanked Ms. Benedicto and commented that this was a great opportunity. Vice Chair Cruz hoped that more educators will take advantage of such opportunities in the future. In response to a question from Vice Chair Cruz, Ms. Benedicto said that students are in school for 9 months of the year and that not all schools offer multilingual education for students as different schools offer different learning opportunities.

Superintendent Zrike hoped that more teachers and staff can have the opportunity to participate in these trips. Superintendent Zrike added that funding is a challenge and that the trip was made possible through funds from the Salem Education Foundation, funds from the district and educators paying out-of-pocket. Superintendent Zrike said that there is a need to look for investments to help subsidize the costs of educational trips. Superintendent Zrike also mentioned that the district would like to find a way to recruit educators from the Dominican Republic to work at Salem Public Schools. Vice Chair Cruz and Superintendent Zrike had some conversation with the Framingham Public Schools as they recruited some educators from Brazil because many of their students were from Brazil.

Vice Chair Cruz said that community members can get involved in advocacy which is necessary for reciprocity agreements with the state regarding this matter. Vice Chair Cruz also said that there is a need for strategic conversations about the development of multilingual programs in the city. Vice Chair Cruz spoke about his visit to the Framingham Public Schools, in particular to their two dual language schools. The Framingham Public Schools had set up an office for recruitment aimed at helping educators from Brazil to obtain visas and be able to teach for a certain length of time. Some of the educators have since received a different status and are able to continue staying in Framingham, providing sustainability for the programs as well as students. Vice Chair Cruz highlighted that there are some creative opportunities in terms of professional development, recruitment and curricula that can be explored.

3. Provide Update on MSBA SHS Building Project (Priority 4.3)

Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that an Owner's Project Manager (OPM) has been selected to steward this project going forward until the conclusion of the project. Assistant Superintendent Pauley explained that in early spring, an OPM Selection Committee was formed by the Salem High School (SHS) Building Committee and a Request for Proposal was released. Site visits were done with 19 firms and 10 of the firms submitted applications. Four firms were then shortlisted and subsequently hour-long interviews were conducted with the SHS Building Subcommittee. The firm, ANSER was selected based on their robust community engagement plan and significant experience leading Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) projects including building reconfiguration. Approval was sought and received from the MSBA's Owner's Project Manager (OPM) Review Panel. The next step is to select a Designer. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that there is a Designer Subcommittee that would be soliciting and interviewing candidates with the goal of selecting a Designer by the end of October. Together with the OPM and Designer, a feasibility study can be formally launched resulting in consensus about the type of building, whether it will be grades 9-12 or 7-12 building.

Vice Chair Cruz questioned whether MSBA provided any guidance on supplier diversity such as minority owned or women owned firms. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that she will gather that information. Superintendent Zrike said that the next meeting for the SHS Building Committee is August 15, 2024. Member Manning suggested that the School Committee representative on the SHS Building Subcommittee provide periodic reports at the School Committee meeting regarding the project.

Student Representative Report

None

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Finance and Operations Report

None

Subcommittee Reports

Personnel Subcommittee

Vice Chair Cruz said that the 9th negotiation session was held earlier in the evening with the STU. Vice Chair Cruz added that it has been a collaborative process with positive dialog. Vice Chair Cruz requested Superintendent Zrike to share the Personnel Subcommittee's responses to the STU proposals with other members of the School Committee. Vice Chair Cruz said that another Executive Session would be needed next month to update the School Committee about the negotiations.

Policy Subcommittee

A. Policies with no substantial changes:

- Policy 2201 and Policy 2203

Member Manning said that there were no substantial changes in Policy 2201 and 2203.

B. Policies for first reading:

- Policy 2202
- Policy 2500

Member Manning said that Policy 2202 is just changing the wording so that legal counsel can represent the School Committee in personnel negotiations. As for Policy 2500, the changes have to do with Principals in consultation with School Councils adopting educational goals for School Improvement Plans.

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve Policy 2202 and 2500 for a first reading. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

School Committee Concerns and Resolutions

None

Adjournment

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to adjourn at 8:34 pm. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Shirley Dorai

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent