

**Minutes of the Regular Session  
of the Salem School Committee  
Monday, October 7, 2024  
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.  
Hybrid Meeting**

**Members Present:** Mayor Dominick Pangallo, Vice Chair Manny Cruz, Amanda Campbell, Beth Anne Cornell, AJ Hoffman, Mary Manning, and Veronica Miranda

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

**Members Absent:** None

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Mayor Pangallo called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm and informed the public that the docket contains the public participation procedure and how to access Spanish interpretation.

**Approval of Agenda**

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve the agenda. Member Miranda seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

Ms. Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Salem Resident, Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) Parent

Ms. Lopez-Okoli said that Superintendent Zrike has done a great job with Salem Public Schools.

Ms. Lopez-Okoli continued that she did not appreciate the tone of the letter that

Superintendent Zrike had shared because it seemed like a competition between two schools

and not a solution. Ms. Lopez-Okoli spoke about sports teams that have students from both

schools and other joint activities. Ms. Lopez-Okoli also spoke about the financial reimbursement

that the public schools could receive from the state to help with the budget when SACS expands their number of seats.

### **Approval of Consent Agenda**

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on September 16, 2024
2. Approval of Warrants:
  1. FY24:
    - a. 9/18/2024 - \$3,325.39
    - b. 9/25/2024 - \$484.42
    - c. 10/02/2024 - \$6,118.27
  2. FY25:
    - a. 9/19/2024 - \$554,924.68
    - b. 9/26/2024 - \$339,974.55
    - c. 10/03/2024 - \$1,567,706.10
3. New Liberty Innovation School (NLIS) Overnight Trip to Cardigan Mountain and Lodge - October 28-29, 2024

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Member Manning seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

### **Superintendent's Report**

#### **1. Recognition - Ms. Linda Richard and Ms. Vanessa Fagundes**

Superintendent Zrike acknowledged the service provided by Benefits Coordinator, Ms. Linda Richard and Transportation Manager, Ms. Vanessa Fagundes to the Salem Public Schools, and read the citation for both. Ms. Richard was unable to attend the meeting. A souvenir and city citation was presented to Ms. Fagundes. The School Committee thanked Ms. Richard and Ms. Fagundes for their service.

#### **2. MCAS and Accountability Update**

Superintendent Zrike said he was very proud of Salem Public Schools as well as the progress, growth and improvements made but there is more work to be done. Superintendent Zrike acknowledged the work of the students, teachers, school leaders, and the academics team. Superintendent Zrike introduced the Academics team who presented the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and accountability data.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Superintendent Zrike said he could provide the data about the percentage of Class of 2026 who met the new graduation requirement. Mayor Pangallo asked for more comparisons between different grade levels of students to see how well the new approaches to learning are helping students.

In response to Member Manning, Executive Director of Academics, Dr. Talbot, said the district committed to the students and educators 20 hours of professional development in mathematics differentiated by grade level. The professional development is already in progress at all the grade levels. In response to another question from Member Manning, Director of Multilingual Learner Education, Mr. André Fonseca, explained how work is in progress to extend the dual language learning at the Bentley Academy to the middle school level through a partnership with the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast (MABE) as well as potential curriculum changes. Mr. Fonseca explained that a proposal to DESE will need to be made as part of this process.

In response to Mayor Pangallo, Dr. Talbot said that the disproportionality of special education students is being seen throughout the state. Mayor Pangallo thanked everyone for the improvements.

### **3. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update**

Member Cornell said that on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 3 representatives from the district, Mayor's Designee, City Finance Director, Ms. Anna Freedman, Superintendent's Designee, District Liaison - SHS Building Project, Ms. Elizabeth Golden and Member Cornell sat in on the MSBA designer application review process. Eight applications were reviewed and four firms were shortlisted. These four firms will be interviewed on October 8<sup>th</sup>. MSBA accepted the interview questions generated by the Building Subcommittee.

Vice Chair Cruz asked if there was supplier diversity among the applicants. Member Cornell responded that one of the firms that was shortlisted is women owned but that overall the representation was disappointing and lacking. Member Cornell added that two of the firms had Spanish speaking public liaisons but that all the members from MSBA were white except for one. However, the composition of the building committee is quite diverse. Mayor Pangallo commented that the city's equity audit identified a need for improvements in the procurement process around access for minority owned businesses to city contracts. Mayor Pangallo said that as these improvements are made in the purchasing department, it will come into play for future procurements related to this project as well. Member Cornell added that one of the firms is from Salem. Member Manning asked if there is any possibility to request the firms who have been awarded the contracts to hire a certain percentage of Salem residents. Mayor Pangallo said that he would look into the matter.

### **4. Finance and Operations Report**

Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that the week of October 14<sup>th</sup> is National School Lunch week and that the School Committee members were invited to celebrate at lunch time. Assistant Superintendent Pauley added that a date and time for the ribbon cutting at the Witchcraft Heights Elementary School is being finalized.

**5. Salem Academy Charter School's Enrollment Expansion**

Superintendent Zrike thanked the speaker for the public comment that was shared earlier in the meeting about the SACS. Superintendent Zrike continued that a meeting has been scheduled on October 9<sup>th</sup> with the SACS leaders. In response to inquiries received from community members about how to send public comments to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Superintendent Zrike said they could be sent to the Charter Office at DESE in Everett. The deadline for public comments is Friday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. Vice Chair Cruz looked forward to collaboration with the SACS.

Member Cornell said that Superintendent Zrike's tone was appropriate for the situation. Member Cornell added that in the August meeting of the SACS Board of Trustees, the board discussed the implications of petitioning the state for additional seats and acknowledged that they remain in the difficult position of being able to grow in Salem only if the Salem Public Schools is having problems, creating an adversarial relationship that they do not want. Member Cornell said that the tension that exists between charter schools and district schools is created by the state that manages the charter program. Member Cornell continued that the SACS August minutes also noted that while they could petition the state to add more seats next year, after they had more time to develop a long-term plan, the risk is that the opportunity disappears if Salem Public Schools pulls out of the bottom 10%. Member Cornell said that the SACS Board did not have a well thought out plan for their expansion but in order to be eligible, they might have to rush ahead regardless and the success of Salem Public Schools is bad for SACS. Member Cornell reiterated that this is not about children's experiences or parent choices.

Mayor Pangallo echoed that the tone was appropriate and the justifications for the expansion are based on achievement. Mayor Pangallo added that the SACS minutes reflected that there was a window of opportunity. Mayor Pangallo continued that the window is no longer in place and the district is justified in objecting to the expansion and making a case to the state on the merits. There was no outreach by SACS prior to the vote. There was also no opportunity for public comment before the SACS Board voted on the matter. Mayor Pangallo said that the Open Meeting Law complaint was not about individuals, students, educators, or anyone but the manner in which it was carried out.

Vice Chair Cruz said that this is the first time the district has had an objection to the enrollment expansion of the charter school. In response to Vice Chair Cruz about the likelihood of success, Superintendent Zrike said it will depend on who is on the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and their views about the charter schools. Superintendent Zrike added that they would probably decide based on a case to case basis and that lately they have been focusing on community engagement as well as input leading up to any application.

### **Student Representative Report**

Superintendent Zrike said that the students were going to have another meeting so that more students could attend the selection process. The students had also requested Superintendent Zrike to send some information to all students about the purpose of the committee.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

**1. Finance Subcommittee**

No report at this time.

**2. Personnel Subcommittee**

No report at this time.

**3. Building and Grounds Subcommittee**

Member Miranda said that a meeting was held earlier that evening. Facility rental fees were discussed and it will be revisited at the next Building and Grounds Subcommittee meeting.

**4. Curriculum Subcommittee**

No report at this time.

**5. Policy Subcommittee**

Member Cornell said that the transportation policy specifies that multilingual learners who arrived in the United States within the last 12 months shall be eligible for bus transportation with no mileage restrictions for the remainder of the school year that they arrive in Salem Public Schools. Member Cornell continued that with input from Ms. Fagundes, this policy has been reassessed because it was found that newcomer students already receive the transportation opportunities that they need such as through the Superintendent's exemption. What is needed is more support from the district in educating newcomer families about what they are entitled to and how to navigate the system. The way the policy is written now, a stop or even a bus is being added for students who live within half a mile and this wreaks havoc on transportation. Member Cornell added that because this is a one year policy, many parents are caught off guard in year two when they are not entitled to transportation services anymore.

Member Cornell asked to suspend the policy for the multilingual learners and that during the suspension, the matter needs to be reviewed for feedback.

**6. Committee of the Whole**

Vice Chair Cruz said the Committee of the Whole met on September 30<sup>th</sup> and discussed the collective bargaining agreements, financial outlook for the district and the SACS enrollment expansion.

Vice Chair Cruz continued that the Committee of the Whole recommended that the contracts be ratified at the School Committee meeting for the successor agreements.

**Motions and Resolutions**

**1. Collective Bargaining Agreement - Salem Teachers Union**

1. Vote to Ratify the Successor Contract for a Term of Three Years (9/1/24-8/31/27) with the Teachers Unit

Member Manning made a motion to ratify the successor contract for a term of three years (9/1/24-8/31/27) with the Teachers Unit. Member Cornell seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

2. Vote to Ratify the Successor Contract for a Term of Three Years (9/1/24-8/31/27) with the Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PRSP) Unit

Member Cornell made a motion to ratify the successor contract for a term of three years (9/1/24-8/31/27) with the Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel (PRSP) Unit. Member Manning seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES  
Member Miranda voted YES  
Mayor Pangallo voted YES  
Motion passed unanimously.

**2. Student Transportation Services Policy (Policy 3601, Section 2C) - Multilingual Learner First Year Transportation Service Suspension**

Member Cornell made the motion to suspend multilingual learner first year transportation service for one year. Member Miranda seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES  
Member Cornell voted YES  
Vice Chair Cruz voted YES  
Member Hoffman voted YES  
Member Manning voted YES  
Member Miranda voted YES  
Mayor Pangallo voted YES  
Motion passed unanimously.

**Announcements**

Mayor Pangallo thanked everyone who participated in the parade. Mayor Pangallo reminded all that the voter registration deadline is October 26<sup>th</sup>. Superintendent Zrike said that instead of having student showcases at the School Committee meetings, members of the School Committee are invited to visit schools to see different programs, as well as students and staff engaged in the work that they do everyday.

**Adjournment**

Member Cornell made a motion to adjourn at 9:11 pm. Member Miranda seconded. A roll call vote was taken.  
Member Campbell voted YES  
Member Cornell voted YES  
Vice Chair Cruz voted YES  
Member Hoffman voted YES  
Member Manning voted YES  
Member Miranda voted YES  
Mayor Pangallo voted YES  
Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

***Shirley Dorai***

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent