

**Minutes of the Regular Session  
of the Salem School Committee  
Monday, October 21, 2024  
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.  
Hybrid Meeting**

**Members Present:** Mayor Dominick Pangallo, 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:** Vice Chair Cruz

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Mayor Pangallo called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and informed the public that the docket contains the public participation procedure and how to access Spanish interpretation.

**Approval of Agenda**

Member Cornell 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 ABSENT

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

**Public Comment**

Pastor Richard Hyatt

Pastor Hyatt said that his wife and some members of their congregation went to school in Salem. Many of the youth in the congregation are attending Salem Public Schools. Pastor Hyatt was looking to build a relationship with the school district to help youth. Pastor Hyatt sought some terms to utilize the auditorium for a year for services and events.

Ms. Lise Hansen-Damato

Ms. Hansen-Damato, Saltonstall PTO Co-President, spoke in her capacity as a parent and resident stating that in 2007, the School Committee voted to expand Saltonstall from K-5 to K-8 at the request of families, teachers, staff and community who were devoted to the model the

school offered. Ms. Hansen-Damato quoted the Superintendent at the time who said, “public education in Salem has a strong and long-standing commitment to offering parents choices at the public school.” Ms. Hansen-Damato added that the School Committee in 2007 indicated that families were seeking alternatives at the middle school level and the district was attempting to retain more children who might otherwise choose the charter school. Families continued sending their children to the middle school in Saltonstall in spite of its smaller size. Ms. Hansen-Damato continued that she has had a child in Saltonstall for 9 years now and she has seen the programming as well as school experience be slashed and decimated. Ms. Hansen-Damato named some of the offerings that have been cut including Friday Club, extended year, modified schedule, intersession, multi-age classrooms, project based and interdisciplinary learning, National Honor Junior Society, Destination Imagination, New York, Philadelphia, Nature’s Classroom, school play, Erik Rodenhiser’s annual production of The Grinch, portfolio and others. Ms. Hansen-Damato said that parents were notified by letter on October 18th which is only two weeks before the School Committee would be voting on the matter. Ms. Hansen-Damato voiced her strong reservations about a plan that results in no choice at the middle school level. Ms. Hansen-Damato said that parents have options at every other grade level except middle school. Ms. Hansen-Damato urged the School Committee to consider the implications of this decision.

### **Approval of Consent Agenda**

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on October 7, 2024
2. Approval of Warrants:
  1. FY25:
    - a. 10/17/2024 - \$1,151,933.77

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

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz ABSENT

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

### **Superintendent’s Report**

#### **1. Annual Superintendent's Academic Excellence Certificate**

Superintendent Zrike spoke about the two senior students who were selected to receive this certificate, Thais Saldivar Diaz from Salem High School and Neo Larru from New Liberty Innovation School. The certificates were presented to both students by Mayor Pangallo and Superintendent Zrike.

## **2. Saltonstall Middle School Grades Recommendation**

Superintendent Zrike provided and elaborated on the presentation that had previously been shared with the Saltonstall families regarding the recommendations for the middle school grades.

Questions were raised by School Committee members about the possibility of having smaller middle school models for students who might need a different experience within Collins Middle School. Superintendent Zrike provided some examples of different models available at Collins Middle School and added that more could be done in this area. Comments made included that a staggered approach to a move can take a toll on students and staff. Concerns were also raised that this decision should not be made in a rushed manner.

In response to a question about any student feedback about the matter, Superintendent Zrike said that the Principal, Assistant Principal and teachers have spoken with students at Saltonstall. Superintendent Zrike mentioned that he received a suggestion from a community member to get feedback from staff and students who were involved with the Bowditch transition although it is not exactly the same situation.

Concerns were also raised about supports for students who might be entering a larger school in terms of 504, IEP, anxiety, mental health, bullying issues, etc. Another issue raised was school identity if a portion of the school is going to be closed. Achievement data for K-5 models versus K-8 models was also sought. There was a comment made that Saltonstall School was a K-5 school from 1994 to 2007 and thus if the middle school grades were removed, the school would be reverting to their initial identity. There was also a comment that Saltonstall did not portray an equitable opportunity for students in the city because it was always exclusive, disproportionately white and middle class. An opinion was expressed that there is a sense of urgency because students could receive more experiences, support and wraparound services.

Superintendent Zrike cautioned on delaying the matter too long as there are many things that need to be put in place if the change is to happen. Superintendent Zrike added that it is near impossible to offer the full middle school experience with just two classes per grade. A School Committee member commented that with the Bowditch situation, the takeaway from that experience was that the School Committee waited too long to make the decision.

In response to questions about the survey, Superintendent Zrike said that the survey was given to all Saltonstall families and there were 35 responses. Mayor Pangallo suggested that outreach to students be done as well. Mayor Pangallo also suggested that this matter be discussed further at another meeting and then brought forward for a vote on November 18th. Student Representative Qualkenbush commented that previous Saltonstall students who went to the high school had mentioned that it was difficult to transition to the high school as they did not know or have connections with other students. Additional comment was made that if the vote takes place to move all the middle grade classes from Saltonstall to Collins Middle School, some of the students will have to transition again to the high school in a short period of time. The affected students would need more support.

There was a request for all survey materials and results to be provided to the School Committee before the next meeting so that they could be more prepared for a discussion about the Saltonstall Middle Grades. In response to a question, Superintendent Zrike said that there are a total of 140 students in Grades 6, 7 and 8 at Saltonstall, and about 10 educators.

**3. School Improvement Plans 2025**

Deputy Superintendent Carbone presented the School Improvement Plans for the School Committee members' review. In response to a question raised, Deputy Superintendent Carbone said there were no big surprises with the MCAS results as the schools were engaged in data-informed decision making throughout the year.

**4. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update**

Member Cornell said that on October 8th, the MSBA designer panel consisting of the City Finance Director, Anna Freedman, Superintendent Zrike and herself participated in the designer selection interviews. The firm, Perkins & Will, was selected. The next step is to negotiate a fee agreement with the firm. Perkins & Will gave a presentation to the School Building Committee on October 17th. The next School Building Committee meeting will be on November 21st. Mayor Pangallo recognized Mr. Rick Jones and Mr. Nate Bryant, School Building Committee Co-Chairs.

Ms. Margaret Minor Wood, Anser Advisory, Owner's Project Manager for the MSBA and School Building Committee Co-Chair, Mr. Rick Jones gave a presentation on the next steps and timeline for the school building project. Ms. Wood explained that the initial steps for the project will take about a year and a half. The proposed timeline presented involves the School Committee deciding on the options of whether the building will be a high school or a middle/high school in December, providing approvals for the education program in January and space summary in February. Mr. Jones informed the School

Committee that funding can only be requested once from the MSBA and therefore, the information one has in order to make the decision about the amount is important. Ms. Wood explained that the escalation of cost from start to finish is built into the funding agreement. Mr. Jones said that the MSBA will weigh in on all the decisions the School Committee makes with regard to the project. Mr. Jones added that they are trying to get into a cycle with the School Committee meetings and the MSBA monthly meetings to move the project along in a timely manner. In response to a concern raised, Ms. Wood said that the Project Manager and Design team will be coming to the next few meetings with information for the School Committee about construction and operating costs. Mayor Pangallo said conversations with members of the school community have already taken place and more conversations will take place to gather feedback before the decision in December.

**5. Finance and Operations Report**

Assistant Superintendent Pauley thanked the School Committee members for participating in the National School Lunch Week program and the ribbon cutting at the Witchcraft Heights Elementary School playground.

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

Superintendent Zrike said that the Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) had a meeting on October 15th where SACS voted to resubmit their application to the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). SACS admitted to violating Open Meeting Law. Superintendent Zrike continued that the Salem City solicitor sent a letter to DESE indicating that the SACS application was late and should not be considered for expansion.

Superintendent Zrike said that based on his two conversations with the DESE Commissioner, there was already a precedent for accepting late applications. The next step involves the DESE Charter Office in reviewing the applications for completeness and merit in order to make recommendations to BESE in conjunction with the Commissioner in January or February. Superintendent Zrike added that in the meantime, the community in Salem has the opportunity to weigh in to the Commissioner and BESE about the application. Superintendent Zrike said that the Board would typically accept the Commissioner's recommendation. On his part, Superintendent Zrike said that the expansion request is not justified. Mayor Pangallo echoed Superintendent Zrike's comment. Mayor Pangallo added that their application was incomplete and their needs analysis was only reflective of their own community and not the larger community. Mayor Pangallo said that the whole premise of the charter school movement when it started in the early 90s was based on the idea that parents needed to have choices in school districts that were failing their students. It has been demonstrated that Salem Public Schools is not failing students and is on a path for improvement that places it at the top of the 26 gateway cities.

Superintendent Zrike mentioned to the Commissioner that it is very discouraging that there was no engagement with the community and Salem Public Schools which is a significant part of the community. Member Manning commented that one of the things that the charter school was supposed to do was share any innovative work or initiative with the public school district but in her experience, there was nothing that was shared.

### **Student Representative Report**

Superintendent Zrike introduced the new Student Representative, Mark Qualkenbush, SHS senior. Superintendent Zrike said that he had worked with Mark for the past one year as Mark was on the Superintendent Student Advisory Committee. Mark was elected by his peers to serve as Chair of the Superintendent Student Advisory Committee and Barbara Rowley was elected as Vice Chair. Student Representative Qualkenbush introduced himself. Student Representative Qualkenbush said that the Superintendent Student Advisory Committee recently discussed the implementation of a driver's ed program in the school system to improve access to this program as it is very costly. Another topic discussed was youth sports at the middle and high school levels. Superintendent Zrike added that the Superintendent Student Advisory Committee is seeking to recruit more members from Salem High School, New Liberty Innovation School and Salem Prep High School. Member Cornel commented that the students could approach State Representative Cruz who has been advocating for some changes to driver's ed.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

- 1. Finance Subcommittee**  
No report at this time.
- 2. Personnel Subcommittee**  
No report at this time.
- 3. Building and Grounds Subcommittee**  
No report at this time.
- 4. Curriculum Subcommittee**  
No report at this time.
- 5. Policy Subcommittee**  
No report at this time.

### **Motions and Resolutions**

- 1. School Improvement Plans 2025**  
Superintendent Zrike said that a vote to accept the plans will be requested at the next School Committee regular session meeting on November 4, 2024.

### **Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**Adjournment**

Member Miranda made a motion to adjourn at 9:05 pm. Member Cornell seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz ABSENT

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

Respectfully submitted by,

***Shirley Dorai***

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent