

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, November 4, 2024
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.
Hybrid Meeting**

Members Present: Mayor Dominick Pangallo, Vice Chair 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 7:00 pm and informed the public that the docket contains the public participation procedure and how to access Spanish interpretation.

Approval of Agenda

Member Cambell made a motion to approve the agenda. Member Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on October 21, 2024
2. Approval of Warrants:
 1. FY25:
 - a. 10/24/2024 - \$325,259.09
 - b. 10/31/2024 - \$734,568.12

Member Manning made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike provided a brief update on the smoke situation caused by brush fires. An official from the Salem Health Department of Health visited the Salem High School (SHS) and Horace Mann earlier in the day. The official did not see the need to adjust the school day but the schools had all their activities indoors during the school day.

Superintendent Zrike added that last week when SHS was dismissed early and Horace Mann students were relocated, it was because of the proximity of the fires and the higher level of smoke in the buildings. School staff were on hand for any staff or students who were facing any difficulty with the situation due to any health issues. Mayor Pangallo said that the city monitors the wind forecast when considering the effects of the fires. The Mayor, City Fire Chief, state Fire Marshall, City Health Department and Superintendent regularly consult each other about the situation. Member Cornell suggested that based on some feedback from parents, it would be helpful if there were guidelines about the situation and what parents can do.

1. Equity Audit

Laura Assade, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) & Engagement introduced Ms. Cyndi Weekes-Bradley, Founder of The Equity Process who spoke about the work that is on-going in Salem Public Schools. Ms. Assade continued with the presentation about the equity work.

In response to Member Cornell's question, Ms. Assade said that the complete equity report which will ready soon will address whether the School Committee policies are equitable and also provide recommendations. Ms. Weekes-Bradley commented that the School Committee policies look great but the focus is on the implementation and alignment from an equitable aspect. Ms. Weekes-Bradley also mentioned the four stages of psychological safety which are research based: inclusion safety; learner safety; contributor safety; and challenger safety.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz's question about engagement in the budgetary process, Ms. Weekes-Bradley said that the messaging needs to be clear that the budget will be done through an equitable process. Ms. Weakes-Bradley provided an example for the need for transparency around the reasons why one department receives more money than another department. This will prevent folks from creating their own narratives as to why this happened. Ms. Weakes-Bradley continued that the executive team would need to review the budget and address the areas of concern.

Vice Chair Cruz asked about the Human Resource function and equity. Superintendent Zrike said that Assistant Superintendent Pauley is working on equitable resource allocation. Superintendent Zrike said that the HR department is overloaded with a lot of transactional work and there is not enough staff or resources to focus on hiring, retention and moving staff through a career pipeline.

Member Manning mentioned that there is a challenge in going back to each of the 19 groups that contribute to the budgetary process to inform them why a certain decision was made. In response to Member Manning about the absence policy, Ms. Assade said that for families, the excused and unexcused absences need to be clarified so that it is equitable. Ms. Weakes-Bradley added the point about what the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) expects and the flexibility within the school system, for example, to accommodate families that might want to travel to go back to visit family during the winter months.

In response to Member Cornell, Ms. Weakes-Bradley said that one way that the voices of staff of color can be elevated is through affinity groups. Ms. Assade provided examples of how this was done and identified the pain point which is that there is no right time to have these groups meet because everyone's schedules vary so much. Superintendent Zrike mentioned that there is a Race and Equity Task Force as well to help in this area. Superintendent Zrike added that there are teachers of color in the Superintendent's Teacher Advisory Group too. Superintendent Zrike mentioned topics such as evaluation and support for educators of color which staff have sometimes brought up to both Ms. Assade and himself. These conversations can be sometimes painful but Superintendent Zrike said that they are not offended because this will make the system better and improve the experience for staff.

Member Miranda asked about training for School Committee members on DEI as well as how restorative justice is practiced. Ms. Assade said that the kind of training that is needed can be examined. As for restorative justice, Ms. Assade said many educators and administrators have been trained on restorative justice and are implementing it in the schools. Vice Chair Cruz mentioned that hopefully there will be a new state law in place soon that would require every Committee to have an Educator Diversity Council. This would formalize the effort. Vice Chair Cruz said that the training would also be required.

Member Manning informed the School Committee about work previously done when the LGBTQ community was recognized. Member Manning suggested that the concept of allies utilized back then be researched so that it could be customized for this effort as well. Member Miranda highlighted that there needs to be more support for elected officials of color and especially from white elected officials in terms of resources or a hearing ear or encouraging them to run for office.

In conclusion, Ms. Weakes-Bradley provided her academic and professional background. Ms. Weakes-Bradley added that of all the School Committee meetings that she has attended, the Salem School Committee has had the most mindful School Committee meeting.

2. Salem Public Schools Family Survey

Ms. Assade spoke about the DEI work and how it is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. Ms. Assade spoke about the focus of the DEI Department as well as the survey and the responses received.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz's question about safety, Superintendent Zrike said the survey data showed that stakeholders were more concerned about lockdowns and violence compared to bullying. Superintendent Zrike added that a safety update can be presented to the School Committee at some point.

Ms. Assade said that they were expecting around 500 survey responses but that they only received over 300. Ms. Assade added that there were also other forms of outreach that were done. For many families, this is the first time that they have heard about this survey. Ms. Assade was hopeful that as families become more familiar, there would be greater participation and feedback.

Vice Chair Cruz indicated that by placing race and ethnicity together in one of the questions, it created a missed opportunity because participants could not clearly identify their background. Ellen Wingard, Executive Director of Student Support Services said that they could work with their representative from Panorama to see if that question can be customized. Superintendent Zrike said that the survey also showed that parents put a lot of emphasis on the relationship with their children's teachers. Superintendent added that this area needs to be reviewed to find a way to facilitate these relationships.

3. School Improvement Plans 2025

Superintendent Zrike requested a vote from the School Committee to accept the school improvement plans for 2025.

4. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Member Cornell said that three meetings on November 25th at SHS, December 3rd at Saltonstall School and December 5th via Zoom have been scheduled to introduce the building project goals, schedule and team to the larger community. Member Cornell added that there will be more opportunity for public input in the new year. member Cornell also said that the School Committee will be having a retreat on November 23rd to discuss grade configuration, whether it will be a middle/high school or high school. Superintendent Zrike said that he would be engaging staff in conversations about grade configuration as well. Superintendent Zrike added that he would be sending the data collected from the community meetings in the spring.

5. Finance and Operations Report

There was no report.

6. Saltonstall Middle School Grades Recommendation

Superintendent Zrike said that this topic was discussed at the earlier Special Meeting of the School Committee.

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Qualkenbush said that the Student Equity Group met earlier in the day and discussed safety issues such as a Hold In Place because students feel anxious not knowing what is happening. The lack of SAT prep for the junior and senior classes was also discussed. Some students highlighted the issue about phones not allowed during lunch and wanted to raise this matter with the school principal as well as faculty.

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**
Vice Chair Cruz made the motion to approve the School Improvement Plans 2025.
Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Announcements

Vice Chair Cruz reminded everyone that Tuesday, November 5th was Election Day and encouraged everyone to vote. Other than Carlton, all school buildings would be closed.

Adjournment

Member Miranda made a motion to adjourn at 9:05 pm. Member Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Shirley Dorai

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent