

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, November 18, 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 Cornell made a motion to approve the 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.

Public Comment

Derek Papalegis, Saltonstall School Parent

Mr. Papalegis spoke in support of the middle school grades move from Saltonstall to Collins starting in 2025-2026. Mr. Papalegis who has a 6th grade student at the Saltonstall School said that the students at Saltonstall are missing out on opportunities that cannot be provided at Saltonstall. Mr. Papalegis said that his student moved from Witchcraft Heights Elementary School in the middle of 3rd grade to Saltonstall and did well despite their initial fears. Mr. Papalegis added that children are resilient and advocated that all the middle school grades move at the same time instead of a staggered move.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on November 4, 2024
2. Approval of Minutes of Special School Committee meeting held on November 4, 2024
3. Approval of Warrants:
 1. FY25:
 - a. 11/07/2024 - \$526,034.24
 - b. 11/14/2024 - \$1,093,884.48

Member Manning made a motion to approve the consent agenda. 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.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike thanked the staff of the Salem Public Schools ahead of the Thanksgiving holidays. Superintendent Zrike continued to speak about the activities and events happening in schools during the past week and the next few weeks.

1. Technology Plan Update

This matter was tabled.

2. Mid-course Budget Update

Assistant Superintendent Pauley presented the mid-course budget update.

In response to Member Manning's question about the seven students who are awaiting placement, Executive Director of Special Education, Jennifer Doucette-Ly said that the students are waiting for placements for various reasons such as looking for a placement that best suits their needs.

Superintendent Zrike commented that the district was getting additional funds for students living in a migrant shelter who were not part of the October 1st census from the previous year. Superintendent Zrike added that there are just as many, if not more unhoused students than the year before but because they do not live in a dedicated site, the district does not receive the same level of additional funding. The number of students who would fall into this category is difficult to predict as they continue

to rise, especially post election. In response to a question from Mayor Pangallo, Superintendent Zrike said that the only districts who get additional funds are those that have a site and the students from the site attend the districts' schools. Superintendent Zrike said that there is a plan to add a new Kindergarten Transitional classroom possibly at the Witchcraft Heights Elementary Classroom for struggling students who are stepping into a school for the first time.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz's question, Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that there has not been an intentional strategy with the Salem Teachers Union (STU) about increasing the hiring of retired teachers to do substitute teaching but she believes that through Vice Chair Cruz's mentioning this matter during negotiations and public meetings, more retirees have been hired. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that more work is needed to make the attractive substitute pay rate for retired teachers known. Vice Chair Cruz said that perhaps Superintendent Zrike and STU President Berman can see how this opportunity can be communicated. Member Manning said that she can help publicize it in her circles as well.

Superintendent Zrike added that the student enrollment increased slightly this year and has been on the upward trend for the past few years which helps with funding.

3. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike spoke briefly about what has been scheduled for moving ahead on the building project and interaction with stakeholders as well as gathering stakeholders input.

4. Finance and Operations Report

There was no additional report.

5. Saltonstall Middle School Grades Recommendation

Superintendent Zrike said that along with Collins Middle School Principal Softic and Saltonstall School Principal Jellison, a transition plan was drafted in response to a request from the School Committee at the previously held special meeting.

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Qualkenbush said at the Superintendent Advisory meeting earlier in the day, the students spoke about a survey that Salem High School (SHS) Principal Burns will be sending out about having phones at lunch. The students also discussed about moving the graduation from the commons to the Bertram field instead. Elections will be held to fill positions for representatives from each high school, SHS, Salem Prep and New Liberty.

Subcommittee Reports

1. Finance Subcommittee

No report at this time.

2. Personnel Subcommittee

Vice Chair Cruz said that the Salem Administrators Association (SSA) provided notice that they would like to begin bargaining. The personnel Committee will respond to the request with dates in December.

3. Building and Grounds Subcommittee

No report at this time.

4. Curriculum Subcommittee

No report at this time.

5. Policy Subcommittee

Member Cornell said that at a future meeting, there will be a motion to vote on changing the way the School Committee Policy Manual is managed. This would involve Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) hosting the policy manual. A representative from MASC was present at the Policy Subcommittee meeting to clarify information and answer questions. Member Cornell also provided some of the benefits of having the policy manual hosted by MASC which included easier search functions, cross referencing with Massachusetts General Law, and other school districts can easily see Salem Public Schools' (SPS) policies. Member Cornell said SPS does great work around equity and inclusion.

Member Cornell added that a resident who has young children who are not yet enrolled in SPS brought up the matter of changing Kindergarten start dates. The Policy Subcommittee had a discussion about the matter and realized that a larger conversation was needed about the model at Carlton which has three entry points for Kindergarten and the benefits of replicating that in other schools in the district.

Motions and Resolutions

1. Saltonstall Middle School Grades

Member Manning explained that her rationale for supporting the moving of the middle school grades from Saltonstall to Collins Middle School is based on among other things, better access to resources in one location. Member Manning added that the survey results showed that many of the current middle schoolers at Saltonstall wanted the move, some students had no preference, some students were nervous but willing to make the move, and there were a few who were against it. Member Manning continued that similar responses were received from the parent survey. Member Manning clarified that for parents who are against the move, the middle school grades at Saltonstall now are different from what it was. Member Manning commented that the initiatives

mentioned at a previous meeting during public comments were first introduced at the Collins Middle School. Member Manning also recommended that all the middle school grades at the same time instead of a staggered approach. Member Manning continued to explain the reasoning behind this recommendation as to how the staggered approach impacts students, parents and staff.

Member Cornell said that the middle school teachers at Saltonstall are overwhelmingly in favor of moving the middle school grades to Collins Middle School in a complete move instead of a staggered move. Member Cornell added that this is in line with conversations around equity and access. Member Cornell emphasized that this recommendation is not because of budgetary reasons but rather what will benefit students and the school community. Member Cornell reiterated that class sizes are not bigger at Collins Middle School. As for whether to take a staggered approach or moving all grades 6-8 at once, Member Cornell said she was in support of moving all the grades at once. Mayor Pangallo and Vice Chair Cruz echoed the comments regarding the transition of the middle school grades from Saltonstall to Collins Middle School as well as the support the students will receive at Collins. Mayor Pangallo requested that Saltonstall families who have concerns to reach out to Collins families. Mayor Pangallo said that he is also a Collins parent.

Superintendent Zrike said that the district is committed to making a smooth transition for everyone involved. Superintendent Zrike welcomed feedback from students, staff and families if they think that there is something that could be done differently or better.

Member Manning made a motion to move the middle school grades 6-8 from Saltonstall to Collins Middle School at the same time starting in the 2025-2026 school year.

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. Open Meeting Law Complaint filed by B. Keaney

Mayor Pangallo brought up the matter of the Open Meeting Law complaint filed by Brian Keaney on November 8, 2024 alleging that the School Committee acted inconsistently with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 30A §18-25. Mayor Pangallo continued that specifically the complaint alleged that there was a serial deliberation via email between a quorum of the School Committee regarding a joint statement.

Member Cornell made the motion to refer the matter to legal counsel to respond appropriately. Member Campbell seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz ABSTAINED

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 abstention.

Mayor Pangallo read the statement referenced in the complaint as follows:

“The Salem School Committee denounces, in the strongest terms possible, the comments made by Congressman Seth Moulton regarding children’s athletic participation, Congressman Moulton’s comments with respect to trans and non-binary children do not reflect our values. We want to reassure our LGBTQ+ students that we, as district leaders, will always celebrate your identities, support your dreams and aspirations, and applaud your accomplishments. Neither fear nor political whim will shake our commitment to you.”

Member Cornell made a motion to affirm the statement. 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.

Announcements

Member Miranda suggested that given the concerns that many in the community such as the LGBTQ+, immigrant and other marginalized groups have expressed under the impending Trump presidency, to discuss and adopt a resolution reaffirming the district’s commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of all residents in Salem at a future meeting.

Vice Chair Cruz requested that at a future meeting, Superintendent Zrike could speak on the ways in which the district is empowering educators to manage potential conflicts that might be associated with particular protected classes within the district and how students might be responding to the national election. Vice Chair Cruz added that he has been receiving inquiries from colleagues from around the state asking if there has been an increase in incidents between students involving bigoted language originating from differences in political beliefs. Vice Chair

Cruz said that it is important to be proactive and have uniform conversations as educators with students in classrooms. Superintendent Zrike said that he will follow-up on the matter and added that there is fear among students and staff, especially those who are immigrants and those in the LGBTQ+ community. Superintendent Zrike commented that he has not seen an increase in issues between students.

Vice Chair Cruz reminded members of the public that the Salem School Committee, over the last five years, affirmed their support for a local ordinance related to ensuring that all residents regardless of immigration status would get equal access to resources, law enforcement, schools, etc. Vice Chair Cruz continued that the School Committee took a position several years ago on a ballot initiative to uphold the rights of the trans and non-binary community to have access to their civil rights.

Mayor Pangallo mentioned that the mobile Mayor's Office will be at the Salem High School on November 21, 2024 from 3:00 - 7:00 pm.

Adjournment

Member Cornell made a motion to adjourn at 8:19 pm. Member Campbell 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