

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, January 21, 2025
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 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

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve the agenda. 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.

Public Comment

Ms. Kate Mattern

Ms. Mattern said that her son attends Kindergarten at the Bentley Academy Innovation School but prior to that, he attended two years at the Early Childhood Center (ECC). Ms. Mattern said that the playground at the ECC which serves about 130 three and four year old students is very bare bones with a swing set, a water table that has no water source, a short tunnel and a spinning cup that is safety rated for children ages 5-12. Ms. Mattern continued that for many families and students, the playground is the first exposure to Salem Public Schools. The Salem Recreation Department owns the playground and they co-signed a grant for a shade structure which would be installed soon. However, the department is unable to commit more money or prioritize this property for grant opportunities in the near future because they have so many

properties to manage. Ms. Mattern added that the Salem Recreation Department can place a small climbing structure if the cost can be covered by the district. Ms. Mattern said that over the last two and a half years, she has contacted and written to many people and organizations for funding but has not been very successful.

Superintendent Zrike thanked Ms. Mattern for her involvement with the ECC even though her child attends a different school now.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on December 16, 2024
2. Approval of Overnight Field Trip to Orlando, Florida for Salem High School (SHS) Boys Basketball Team from February 19-22, 2025
3. Approval of Field Trip to Londonderry, NH Middle School for SHS Percussion Ensemble participation in the New England Scholastic Band Association Clinic on February 8, 2025
4. Approval of Field Trip to Salem, NH High School for Salem Junior & Senior Winter Color Guard & Percussion Ensemble Competition on March 15, 2025
5. Approval of Overnight Field Trip to Washington D.C for SHS Music Department from May 1-4, 2025.
6. Approval of FY25 Warrants:
 1. 12/05/2024 - \$567,913.13
 2. 12/26/2024 - \$635,029.59
 3. 01/09/2025 - \$615,378.15
 4. 01/16/2025 - \$415,636.52

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the consent agenda with the exception of Items #2 and #3. 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.

In response to Member Manning, Superintendent Zrike said that the basketball team's trip is during vacation and they will be practicing as well as looking for an opportunity to scrimmage while in Florida. Superintendent Zrike added that the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) had changed their rules about games.

Member Cornell said that this matter was raised last year where the coach was informed that if the students did not participate in a game or a play while on the trip, they needed to do some kind of service related activity. Member Cornell added that the field trip policy needs to be referred to the Policy Subcommittee.

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve Item #2. 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.

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Qualkenbush said the student advisory committee reviewed the building survey questions with particular focus on the types of spaces needed as well as the grade configuration for the new school. Most students favored the grades 9-12 option. Student Representative Qualkenbush mentioned that the spice bar in the cafeteria had been implemented with good reception from students. The student advisory committee has an official meeting room in Room 101 and a Google Meet link as the teacher who was on leave had returned. Student Representative Qualkenbush is in talks with students from the other two high schools about becoming members of the student advisory group. Their last meeting had between 10-12 new student members. The new members were selected via a survey.

The student advisory committee had a meeting about Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage. Student Representative Qualkenbush said that Salem Public Schools is taking a slow and steady approach instead of banning it outright. Marc LeBlanc, Executive Director of Instructional Technology had joined their meeting and discussed this matter.

Vice Chair Cruz said that the student advisory committee is supposed to have monthly meetings with the School Committee. Vice Chair Cruz suggested that Member Campbell and himself who are the liaisons could speak with Student Representative Qualkenbush about setting up the first meeting between the School Committee and Student Advisory Committee.

Superintendent Zrike congratulated Student Representative Qualkenbush on his acceptance to Boston University. Assistant Superintendent Pauley commented that the spice bar came about from one of the suggestions from the student advisory committee to the Food and Nutrition Services Department. Information about spices requested by students was gathered through a survey.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike commended the student advisory committee for their work, the Chicago student performance at Salem High School as well as the four students from Horace Mann Laboratory School (HMLS) who won the Salem State University's Center for Justice and Liberation Martin Luther King, Jr., Essay Contest. Superintendent Zrike also commended Mr. Joel

Tobin, the 5th grade teacher at HMLS who encourages his students to enter this contest every year.

1. New Salem High School Building Grade Configuration (Strategy 4.3)

Member Cornell said the designers, engineers, architects and the liaisons from the firms do not play any role when it comes to how the district educates students. The building will support the district's educational plans and objectives. The architectural firm, Perkins & Will, has already started engaging with students and different programs at the high school. Member Cornell stressed that any ideas they are sharing about the middle/high school are just ideas and that everything will depend on the School Committee vote around grade configuration. Member Cornell said that the recent School Committee retreat was productive and raised many considerations especially around the middle school experience. Member Cornell continued that middle school students deserve an educational experience that is unique to them, distinct from the experiences of high school or elementary students and that is driven as well as supported by middle school educators who understand and are committed to this particular age group.

Superintendent Zrike presented the Salem High School building configuration slides.

Member Manning provided some historical information on the Collins Middle School building which was built in the early 1900s. Member Manning continued that the building is well suited for the middle schoolers and proceeded to name the spaces in the school. Member Manning voiced her concerns over whether the 7th and 8th graders in the proposed new 7-12 high school will get a fair share of the use of spaces in the building. The increased scheduling to share these spaces will affect the flexibility of the middle school grades. Collins Middle School offers more spaces for smaller groups. Member Manning expressed that it is difficult to understand a decision in support of a Grades 7-12 High School with the expectation that programs, schedules, and educational needs can all be retrofitted afterwards.

Member Manning was also concerned that 6th graders will not have a "home". Member Manning said that the same reasons that Superintendent Zrike mentioned for moving the Saltonstall middle schoolers to Collins Middle School also applies to keeping all the 6th graders with the 7th graders. Member Manning cited expectations, responsibilities, climate, resource and organizational issues that need to be age appropriate. Member Manning also questioned how the pilot program can be extended to the 6th graders if they are with elementary students. Science and social studies are addressed differently at the elementary and middle school levels.

Member Manning noted that from the very beginning of the building project a few years ago, the feasibility consultants presented a mindset of a senior/junior high school to the Building and Grounds Subcommittee. Member Manning said that the current design team's interactions with parents involves just focusing on the 7-12 high school because they state that parents already know what a middle school model looks like. However, Member Manning pointed out that the parents do not have that understanding because their children are not yet in middle school. One of the presenters from the design team informed parents that it would be less frightening for 8th graders to transition to higher grades if it is a 7-12 school. Member Manning said that the vast majority of students are not afraid but rather they are excited and perhaps nervous. Member Manning added that there is also a lot of discussion on how to keep the students separate at the high school. Member Manning questioned why the middle schoolers are in one building with the high schoolers if the focus is to keep them separate. Member Manning said the presentations are unclear because they emphasize the high school grades even though it is supposed to be a 7-12 school.

Member Manning said that many were surprised that the decision on the grade configuration needed to be made quickly by the end of January. Member Manning was concerned that this does not provide much opportunities for discussions. Member Manning also raised the issues of parking, entrances and exits. Member Manning asked if one of the advantages of having a 7-12 school is more after school activities but she was concerned there might not be enough space for these activities. At this moment, some high schoolers come to the Collins Middle School for activities as there is not enough room at the high school.

Member Manning said that the money for the new building could be used to improve the current 9-12 high school instead of adding the 7th and 8th graders to the school. Member Manning continued that she has been working in middle school for a long time and spoken to many people who do not like the idea. Member Manning added that no one has told her a really good reason to proceed and that she has seen a lot of reasons not to do so.

Member Campbell asked about the accountability data to compare between 7-12 schools to review any unintended consequences. Superintendent Zrike said he would look for the data.

Vice Chair Cruz said that one of the takeaways from the retreat was for the design team to do a follow-up regarding configurations but that he has not received anything yet. Vice Chair Cruz also asked about opportunities to visit the firm's previous designs. In response to Vice Chair Cruz's questions about when this decision would need to be made, Mayor Pangallo said that it will be on the agenda for the next School Committee meeting. This timeline was established with the Superintendent by working backwards from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process. In response to Vice Chair Cruz's question about visiting previous designs, Superintendent Zrike said that he can provide the list of 7-12 and 9-12 buildings in the area.

Member Miranda asked if the School Committee members would be asked about their ideas for grade configuration after listening to the concerns about 6th grade and options for PreK and Kindergarten. Mayor Pangallo responded that this is the platform in which to do so and that there is some time to develop the teaching model for the 6th grade. Mayor Pangallo added that the facility master plan lays out a very strong concept for a configuration of a 7-12 building, 1-6 elementary schools and a centralized PreK/ Kindergarten facility as a potential future model for this district. Mayor Pangallo said that there is time and expertise in the district to have a solid program before the building is operational. Mayor Pangallo added that the timing for configuration decisions that the design team needs to have locked in place does necessitate some of these decisions being made now. Member Campbell raised the matter about 6th grade standards for English Language Arts, math, science and social studies. Superintendent Zrike would look into it.

Superintendent Zrike said schools are not going to be defined by grade configurations and that whatever is decided will require careful planning. Superintendent Zrike said that good questions were raised at the meeting. Superintendent Zrike said that what needs to be done should be in the best interest of the community and the moment in time. Superintendent Zrike added that there is work to do with continuity between grade levels as well as the alignment between middle and high school.

2. 2025-2026 Calendars Draft (Strategy 4.2)

Superintendent Zrike presented the slides on the draft 2025-2026 draft calendars.

In response to Member Hoffman, Superintendent Zrike said that the suggestion to change the back-to-back professional development days in March from Wednesday and Thursday to Monday and Tuesday instead was made to lessen the number of absenteeism on Friday.

Vice Chair Cruz mentioned that there will be a preliminary election in September and that it should be noted on the calendars. Vice Chair Cruz said that he is comfortable with the recommendation to have school on Good Friday but wanted to know about the staffing for that day. Vice Chair Cruz asked how long it would take to produce the attendance data for the attendance incentive. Superintendent Zrike said that the data could be available by early June. Superintendent Zrike added that the students already have no school on November 4th and that the messaging will only be for staff.

In response to Member Manning, Superintendent Zrike said that the back-to-back professional development days in March are for parent teacher conferences. Member Manning said that it should not be called professional development days as it could be confusing when counting all professional development days in the year.

Vice Chair Cruz commented that the longer winter break is good because families may extend their travels and also because there are incidents of illness during that period. Member Campbell was concerned that the Carlton draft calendar shows students returning for just one day on Monday before the start of the winter break. Member Campbell also indicated that she was uncomfortable that school would be in session during the preliminary election, especially in a year where the mayoral, city councillors and School Committee members elections are taking place.

Superintendent Zrike said that the longer winter break is a good idea as student attendance might be an issue. Mr. LeBlanc provided the following student attendance figures for January 2025 as follows:

1/2/2025 = 79.9%

1/3/2025 = 82.1%

1/9/2025 = 92.6%

1/10/2025 = 91.2%

Superintendent Zrike informed the School Committee that the district is receiving questions regarding immigration. The district is working on getting clear guidance to staff for when immigration officials come to the schools. Superintendent Zrike said that earlier in the day, there was some information about the ban on coming in and around schools being lifted which is very concerning. School leaders have been guided to direct officials to the Superintendent's Office and school district attorney. Superintendent Zrike added that the Salem Public Schools does not ask for any immigration status from current or prospective students and does not keep such data. The district is also working on getting information to families.

Member Hoffman asked how the district is going to protect immigrant and LGBTQIA+ students who are traveling out of state on school trips who might run into problems with bathrooms, locker rooms, gender identity and so on. Superintendent Zrike responded that he did not have an answer at the moment but that he would provide directions.

Vice Chair Cruz said that immigration and anti-discrimination law might require external support beyond School Committee counsel. Vice Chair Cruz informed Superintendent Zrike and the School Committee that he can provide a contact at the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Association as well as other state-wide legal groups such as Lawyers for Civil Rights and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Vice Chair Cruz added that some of these organizations are hosting "Know Your Rights" events and sending materials to school districts. Superintendent Zrike said that there are also a few state-wide webinars on this topic with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Association of School Superintendents.

Member Cornell requested that the School Committee meet again to review the language in policies and ways in which the School Committee can reaffirm to educators and district leaders that they have their support as well as making students feel safe and respected. Member Cornell added that more information is needed around what should be done for students who are going on field trips outside the state. Member Cornell suggested that the School Committee could invite Lieutenant Governor Driscoll to speak about areas where the district can do more in this area. Superintendent Zrike added that Laura Assade, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Engagement is already working on having a webinar on immigration matters for families towards the end of January.

Superintendent Zrike mentioned the virtual Early Childhood Expo scheduled for Wednesday, January 22, 2025 at 6:30pm. An in-person meeting will be held the week after at Collins Middle School.

- 3. 2025-2026 Enrollment Targets for Student Assignment (Strategy 4.1)**
Superintendent Zrike said the enrollment targets will be provided at the next meeting once the state publishes the data for low income households.
- 4. FY25 Mid Year Budget Transfers**
Assistant Superintendent Pauley spoke about the budget transfers as outlined in her memo which was part of the School Committee meeting packet. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that most of these transfers are moving from expense line items to personnel line items and that there were some corrections as some items that were meant for personnel line items were placed in contracted services line items.
- 5. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update**
This matter was addressed earlier in the meeting.
- 6. Finance and Operations Report**
This matter was addressed earlier in the meeting.

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

1. Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (MCJROTC) Memorandum of Agreement

The School Committee had previously referred this matter to the Policy Subcommittee for review. Member Cornell said that this does not require a vote and that all members of the Policy Subcommittee recommended that Superintendent Zrike sign the Memorandum of Agreement. Member Cornell added that from the perspectives of the Mayor and City Solicitor, having a rifle range at the high school violates the city ordinance prohibiting air rifles. Member Cornell said that this is not within the purview of the School Committee and that the City needs to bring this to the attention of the MCJROTC.

Member Cornell also provided an update on the Hall of Fame which does not require a vote. The Hall of Fame proposed two amendments to their by-laws which the Policy Subcommittee recommended that they move ahead both the amendments but with some

changes to the first amendment. The first amendment is the non-discrimination by-law because prior to 1972, schools made it difficult for women to participate in high school sports. As part of their rubric for analyzing candidates, their second amendment was to create a legacy level of Salem High Hall of Fame which retires a uniform for exceptional graduates. Vice Chair Cruz expressed his gratitude to the Athletics Director, Athletics Committee and Member Cornell for all their work on this matter. Member Manning also thanked the former Athletics Director, Mr. Robert Geswell and former Physical Education Teacher, Mr. Peter Dolan for researching and providing input.

Motions and Resolutions

1. Policy 5103 Controlled Choice Student Assignment - Second Reading

Member Cornell made a motion to approve Policy 5103 for second reading. Vice Chair Cruz seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

2. 2025-2026 Calendars

Superintendent Zrike said that this item will be deferred to the next meeting.

3. 2025-2026 Enrollment Targets for Student Assignment

Superintendent Zrike said that this item will be deferred to the next meeting.

4. FY25 Mid Year Budget Transfers

Member Cambell made a motion to approve the FY25 mid year budget transfers. Member Manning seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Announcements

In response to Member Manning's inquiry about students commenting that they would prefer a 9-12 high school configuration, Student Representative Qualkenbush said that there were no notes from the student advisory meeting but that he was going to raise the topic again when the students meet. Mayor Pangallo and Superintendent Zrike mentioned the upcoming budget forums.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 pm. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Shirley Dorai

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent