

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, February 3, 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 Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Anny Cruz

Ms. Cruz, Salem Public Schools (SPS) employee and mother of two students who attend SPS, requested that the winter break encompass the entire weeks of December 22 and 29, 2025 because many staff and families travel during this time. Ms. Cruz also suggested that the start time at Bentley Academy Innovation School, which is 7:30 am be changed to a slightly later time to enable staff to drop off their children at daycare, most of which are not open at 7:15 am. Ms. Cruz voiced her support for a new 9-12 high school instead of 7-12 so that students can experience middle school in a separate building.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee meeting held on January 21, 2025
2. Approval of FY25 Warrants:
 1. 01/23/2025 - \$495,797.09
 2. 01/30/2025 - \$493,429.07

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

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Qualkenbush said that at a recent meeting, the students in the Student Advisory Group voiced that they would like a 9-12 grade configuration for the new high school because the maturity level of middle schoolers and high schoolers are different, a middle school already exists and that the influence of the high schoolers will affect middle schoolers. However the students said that they might consider a 7-12 grade configuration if the setup of the building was similar to the Masconomet High School where the 7th and 8th graders are separate from the higher grades. Student Representative Qualkenbush added that the students were still in favor of a 9-12 high school. The students also discussed the budget for next year and expressed that they do not want to add or increase fees for extracurricular or sports activities. There were suggestions to move New Liberty Innovation School and Salem Prep High School to an elementary school such as Saltonstall to eliminate rental expenses for the Witch City Mall; save money by not using Yondr pouches; creating more income by renting out extra spaces in school buildings; and reducing the school schedule so that there will be less periods. Student Representative Qualkenbush questioned if extra-curricular activities such as a buddy system where a multilingual student assists a newcomer student who is not fluent in English can be counted as credits. This would be similar to some schools that provide Physical Education (PE) credits for participating in certain sports. The student advisory group identified areas of focus such as support for multilingual and special education students; equitable access to programs, classes and opportunities; driver's education; and increased student independence.

Superintendent Zrike commended the student advisory group and noted that the administration team will be looking into improving access for all students to the many offerings at the schools. Superintendent Zrike suggested that the easiest way for the students to meet with the School Committee would be 1:00 - 2:30 pm on the first Monday of every month. The Student Advisory Group also suggested having one of the meetings at New Liberty Innovation School. Vice Chair Cruz suggested a different time or a hybrid option to enable more members to attend and reminded everyone that it would be a public meeting if a quorum of the School Committee were present. In response to Member Manning, Student Representative Qualkenbush said that the Student Advisory Group has about 18-20 members.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike said that the Early Education Greet and Meet would be on Thursday, February 6, 2025 at Collins Middle School from 5:30 - 7:00 pm.

1. Program of Studies

Member Campbell said that the Curriculum Subcommittee met recently to review the Program of Studies. Member Campbell said that there were minor changes and that the subcommittee voted unanimously to approve it.

In response to Member Manning, Ms. Meghan Sousa, Director of Salem High School College (SHS) and Career Center said that there are no changes to Advanced Placement course offerings. Ms. Sousa explained that the language for the seal of biliteracy was revised to clearly note the various distinctions.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, SHS Principal Burns said that the student advisory group can provide a presentation to the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) at SHS about receiving credits for the peer mentorship or PE. The ILT will review it and if approved, it will need a School Committee vote. In response to another question, SHS Principal Burns said that the review of the Program of Studies starts in November and it is presented to the Curriculum Subcommittee in January.

2. 2025-2026 Calendars Draft (Strategy 4.2)

Superintendent Zrike explained the changes made to the calendar. Superintendent Zrike added that the primary elections were not incorporated to the calendar yet as the district

is awaiting feedback from the City. Ms. Manning brought up the matter of differentiating Professional Development and Parent Teacher Conferences.

3. 2025-2026 Enrollment Targets for Student Assignment (Strategy 4.1)

Superintendent Zrike said that the percentage of low income students decreased a little from last year and proceeded to explain the targets set for each school. Deputy Superintendent Carbone said that extended day is offered at all sites and explained how the opportunities at SPS are being publicized to the community.

Vice Chair Cruz requested data about the low income and non-low income student percentages for the partner sites. Member Cornell suggested that the Policy Subcommittee review the assignment policy to discuss learning environments that are reflective of the community. Member Cornell also said that the Policy Subcommittee had looked at the Carlton Kindergarten placement model and there were questions on whether it would be beneficial to adopt the Carlton Kindergarten placement model district-wide. Member Campbell commented that for future years, it might be helpful to not include the PreK numbers in the school targets because it is known that the PreK numbers are a little skewed and it does not necessarily represent the continuum as they still have to apply under the controlled choice policy to what may or may not be the same elementary schools. Instead, Member Campbell suggested that perhaps PreK needs its own category. Member Campbell also suggested that more seats could be allocated at the beginning of the year in order to enable more than just one socio-economic group to take advantage of available opportunities. Superintendent

Zrike

agreed that the policy needed to be reviewed and that many families are sending their students to Saltonstall as it is a neighborhood school. Member Campbell said that looking at the percentages, it is not clear whether what the district is doing is working and whether this should be looked into further so that the district's goals are met.

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

Superintendent Zrike presented the memo in the packet in response to some questions raised at the previous meeting such as decoupling the sixth grade from the middle school as detailed in the packet. Superintendent Zrike said he raised the question

regarding the accountability impact of a 7-12 grade vs. 9-12 grade school to the Associate Commissioner in charge of accountability and the response was that there is a smaller cohort of 7-12 grade schools and more suburban. This would have a negative impact on the accountability rating. Superintendent Zrike also provided a list of 7-12 and 9-12 grade schools as well as the diagrams of 7-12 grade schools. In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Superintendent Zrike said that the Project Manager can help facilitate visits to the schools.

5. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike said that there was no additional updates on this matter.

6. Finance and Operations Report

1. FY 26 Capital Requests

Assistant Superintendent Pauley provided a presentation on the capital requests. Vice Chair Cruz said that it needs to be highlighted that the priority is both on outdoor and indoor play spaces and not just outdoor.

Superintendent Zrike announced all the budget forums happening in the next two weeks. Superintendent Zrike said that Salem Public Schools was featured in a report by the Rennie Center, specifically the eight grade pilot program and the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI). Superintendent Zrike thanked Ms. Laura Assade, Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Engagement for organizing an Immigrant Support Webinar on January 31st. Superintendent Zrike added that some School Committee members had attended a webinar on a similar topic hosted by the Attorney General's Office.

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. Program of Studies

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the Program of Studies for Salem High School and New Liberty Innovation School. 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.

2. 2025-2026 Calendars

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the 2025-2026 calendars with further discussion on the colors. 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.

3. 2025-2026 Enrollment Targets for Student Assignment

Member Miranda made a motion to approve the 2025-2026 enrollment targets for student assignment. 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.

4. New Salem High School Building Grade Configuration

Vice Chair Cruz thanked everyone who worked on this project for the past 8 years. Vice Chair Cruz also said that while there was merit for both options, he was in favor of the 9-12 grade configuration as there was fiscal and programmatic elements that supported this configuration. Mayor Pangallo commented that over the last few weeks, with more information on cost projections for a project of this magnitude, there was a need to be realistic and responsible for what the community can afford. Mayor Pangallo added that

with the existence of the Collins Middle School and questions around the separation of 6th grade which were not fully addressed as well as the accountability structure, he was in favor of the 9-12 grade configuration. Member Manning added her support for the 9-12 grade configuration. Member Manning advocated for having Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs at the middle school level.

Member Manning made a motion to approve Grade 9-12 configuration for the new Salem

High School Building. Vice Chair Cruz 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.

5. **FY 26 Capital Requests**

Member Manning questioned if there was a deadline for a vote on this matter because in view of the financial outlook, a closer look might be warranted. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that there is a deadline but that conversations with the city finance office has not begun yet. Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that there will be opportunities to revisit this later. Mayor Pangallo explained that the city finance department is awaiting capital expense figures from all departments in order to start the review process. Member Campbell expressed concern that the district did not have a public address (PA) system at Bentley Academy Innovation School and hoped that this would be made a priority. Assistant Superintendent Pauley and Superintendent Zrike said

that Bentley does have a PS system but that the coverage is not as good in certain areas and staff have walkie talkies.

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the FY 26 capital requests. 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.

6. **[Policy 5103](#) Controlled Choice Student Assignment - Third Reading**

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve Policy 5103 Controlled Choice Student Assignment for third reading. 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.

7. Policy 5214.01 Graduation Requirements and Competency Determination - First Reading

Superintendent Zrike said that following the vote on the 2024 ballot “Question 2: Eliminating the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) graduation requirement” which recently passed, a new policy on graduation requirements and competency determination is needed.

Superintendent Zrike noted that if this policy is approved by School Committee vote, it would need to be advertised publicly because former senior students from as far back as 2003 when the MCAS became a graduation requirement, can come back to get their diploma if they did not receive a diploma in the past due to not being able to pass the MCAS, provided they can demonstrate that they passed their courses.

In response to Member Manning, Ms. Sousa said that transcripts are kept for 99 years. Member Cornell commented that if the School Committee votes in favor of the competency determination, it might be a good idea to have this publicized in the Salem News. In response to Member Campbell, SHS Principal Burns said that they received clarification from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) that two years of English would meet the competency requirement. In response to Mayor Pangallo, SHS Principal Burns said that this competency determination is similar with what most other districts are doing as well. Superintendent Zrike said that there is an urgency because the Class of 2025 would need a policy in place to allow them to graduate with a diploma since the MCAS cannot be used as a graduation requirement anymore. Superintendent Zrike elaborated that competency determination is driven by the standards whereas the criteria for graduation requirements can be determined by the School Committee. At the moment, the graduation requirements are aligned to MAssCore for the most part. In response to Mayor Pangallo, SHS Principal Burns said that he can provide the exact number of students from the Class of 2025 who have not yet passed the MCAS. There were about twelve students who did the Biology retest recently. SHS Principal Burns added that typically, there are about 20 students and some of them are transfer students. Vice Chair Cruz informed the School Committee that the State is putting together some guidelines about competency determination. Vice Chair Cruz added that the Policy

Subcommittee recognized that there are inequities faced by students with disabilities and others where they receive a Certificate of Attainment instead of a High School Diploma because they are unable to meet the graduation requirements. Vice Chair Cruz more work is needed in this area.

Member Campbell made a motion to approve Policy 5214.01 Graduation Requirements and Competency Determination for first reading. Vice Chair Cruz 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

Adjournment

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to adjourn at 8:41 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