

**Minutes of the Regular Session  
of the Salem School Committee  
Monday, September 8, 2025  
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.  
Hybrid Meeting**

**Members Present:** 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:** Mayor Dominick Pangallo

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Vice Chair Cruz called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm and informed the public that the docket contains the public participation procedure and how to access Spanish interpretation.

**Approval of Agenda**

Member Campbell 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 voted YES

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo ABSENT

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Approval of Consent Agenda**

There were no items on the consent agenda.

**Student Representative Report**

Student Representative Sula introduced herself as a senior at Salem High School and provided more information about her background, academic and extra curricular participation as well as her aspirations for the future. Student Representative Sula provided updates on the freshman orientation, PSAT/SAT dates, AP results, new cafeteria options, preparations for spirit week and the start of fall sports.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Superintendent Zrike said that the first meeting with the Student Advisory Group will take place on September 15th. Superintendent Zrike thanked everyone for the smooth start of the school year. The facilities team worked hard to prepare the buildings for students. The Collins Middle School welcomed about 150 students from Saltonstall. The Bates playground was opened recently. Superintendent Zrike said that enrollment has increased as there are 80 students more than last year at the same time. Some transportation matters are being addressed.

Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that families are now using trip finder apps to see where their students are on the bus. There was an issue with the app which has now since been resolved. Superintendent Zrike mentioned that the traffic congestion at the Collins Middle School has increased.

Superintendent Zrike provided a quick update about the high school building project. Since the last School Committee meeting, the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) voted to approve the project's preferred schematic report. The next step is to submit the final design. The MSBA will be changing the reimbursements for the project which means that the rates would be increasing beginning in January. The designs for the project will be displayed at all the schools. The MSBA also approved the \$2.5 million reimbursement for the Bates Elementary School roof project which is scheduled for next summer.

Superintendent Zrike commented that Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll visited Salem along with the Department of Public Health Commissioner to learn more about Cartwheel, tele mental health partner.

Member Miranda said that some parents voiced that certain crosswalks had no crossing guards. Superintendent Zrike asked families and School Committee members to email him about these locations so that he can follow-up. Superintendent Zrike informed the School Committee members that he would email a list of areas where crossing guards are present. Member Hoffman suggested having flashing lights on Jackson Street to indicate students crossing. Member Hoffman also suggested placing the new high school building designs for the project at the community center to inform the public.

Superintendent Zrike announced that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Engagement Director, Laura Assade, has been appointed to the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

#### **1. Summer Programs Update**

Deputy Superintendent Carbone provided a brief introduction of the summer programs. Director of Extended Academics & Enrichment Services, Taylor MacDonald, presented the summer programs update.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Ms. MacDonald said the students in the summer internship program were paid hourly.

**2. Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance and Discussion**

Deputy Superintendent Carbone provided a brief introduction of artificial intelligence. Executive Director of Instructional Technology, Marc LeBlanc, presented the artificial intelligence guidance and discussion.

Student Representative Sula commented that the student AI chat is helpful. Member Miranda mentioned that students should be aware that AI should not be used to replace real connections with humans. Member Miranda asked about mental health as well. Mr. LeBlanc said that there are modules for students that speak to social media and AI. Mr. LeBlanc further explained that there is a filter built into all Google products including Google Gemini where anything that a student writes into a chatbot that raises any suspicion about the mental health or well-being of a student, designated individuals at the school will get alerts. Deputy Superintendent Carbone added that some information about AI and school counselors can be added into professional development. Member Cornell said that at a recent training, there were professionals who were talking about how AI can help students on the autism spectrum to understand facial cues and tone.

Vice Chair Cruz said that the federal government is allowing acceptable use of federal grants for education which includes AI professional development. The AI task force from the White House released several initiatives regarding AI in education and one of them is a presidential challenge to allow educators and students to use AI to solve real world problems as part of civics projects. Vice Chair Cruz continued that there are about 60 or so signatories for an AI pledge in education and major companies are considering releasing curriculum and workforce development opportunities. Vice Chair Cruz also mentioned that there are ethical considerations in using AI.

Superintendent Zrike said that there are three policies in the pipeline that need to be voted on by the School Committee in the next two months which are requested by DESE. One of which is the middle school pathway policy on College, Career and Technical Education (CTE) for middle school exploration. The second is the review of the admissions criteria at the high school so that it matches the new guidelines. The third policy is the competency determination which needs to be revised to incorporate new guidance.

**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**

Member Campbell made a motion to refer the CTE middle school pathway, admission criteria at the high school level and competency determination to the Policy Subcommittee. 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 ABSENT

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

**Motions and Resolutions**

**1. Approval of Salary Adjustment for Superintendent**

Vice Chair Cruz said that according to the Superintendent's five year contract that was set in 2022, the School Committee needs to meet with the Superintendent annually to discuss compensation. This has not been done for the last three years. Vice Chair Cruz said that the Superintendent has requested a 7% increase to cover the last three years which would be an annual increase of 2.33% and this is less than what was received by non-union personnel as well as the bargaining units. Vice Chair Cruz added that Superintendent Zrike had a proficient rating the first year and exemplary ratings for the following two years for his evaluation. Vice Chair Cruz expressed appreciation for the selflessness of Superintendent Zrike for requesting less than what he deserves.

Vice Chair Cruz continued that the Personnel Subcommittee met to discuss and referred the matter to the School Committee which was taken up in an Executive Session.

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the 7% salary increase for Superintendent Zrike. 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 ABSENT

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

Vice Chair Cruz said that according to the Superintendent's contract, the School

Committee needs to meet annually before April 30th to discuss the Superintendent's compensation.

**Announcements**

Vice Chair Cruz said that the playground at the Early Childhood Center (ECC) looks fantastic and thanked the ECC staff.

**Adjournment**

Member Campbell made a motion to adjourn at 8:08 pm. 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 ABSENT

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

Respectfully submitted by,

***Shirley Dorai***

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent