

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Wednesday, September 24, 2025
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.
Hybrid Meeting**

Members Present: Mayor Pangallo, Vice Chair Cruz, Amanda Campbell, Beth Anne Cornell, and Mary Manning

Others in Attendance: Superintendent Stephen Zrike, Deputy Superintendent Carbone and Assistant Superintendent Pauley

Members Absent: AJ Hoffman and Veronica Miranda

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 Cornell seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman ABSENT

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda ABSENT

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 5 votes in favor and 2 absent.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee Meeting held on August 18, 2025
2. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee Meeting held on September 8, 2025
3. Approval of Field Trip to Cardigan Mountain and Lodge, Alexandria, New Hampshire for New Liberty Innovation School students on October 21-22, 2025
4. Approval of FY25 Warrants:
 1. 08/20/2025 - \$5,716.28
 2. 08/27/2025 - \$2,229.74
 3. 09/03/2025 - \$13,509.38
 4. 09/17/2025 - \$8,000.00

Approval of FY26 Warrants:

1. 08/21/2025 - \$395,708.35
2. 08/28/2025 - \$776,878.96
3. 09/04/2025 - \$1,041,650.39
4. 09/11/1015 - \$576,209.07
5. 09/18/2025 - \$588,899.74

Vice Chair Cruz 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 ABSENT

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda ABSENT

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 5 votes in favor and 2 absent.

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Sula was unable to be in attendance. Superintendent Zrike said that the Student Advisory Group had a meeting recently where 20 students attended. The students wanted to find a way to support newcomer students in Year 2 for Salem High School and New Liberty Innovation School. The students also wanted more gluten free options in the cafeteria, clarification regarding bathroom access procedures, and raised the matter of foul odors in the high school. Two of the students expressed interest in being in the State Student Advisory Council to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). Superintendent Zrike sent the names of the students and is waiting to hear from BESE. Superintendent Zrike added that he was going to work with the students to enhance their leadership skills.

Vice Chair Cruz highlighted the need for the Student Advisory Group to engage with the School Committee directly. Vice Chair Cruz and Member Campbell had done training with the Student Advisory Group in the past. Superintendent Zrike said that scheduling is a challenge and that a virtual meeting might be better.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike said that the current enrollment numbers is about 80-90 students more than last year at the same time. However, there are fewer newcomers to the district.

Superintendent Zrike added that the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test results embargo will be lifted on the following Monday. A letter will be sent to the community regarding the district performance and a presentation to the School Committee will take place on October 6th. Superintendent Zrike added that families will also receive a letter regarding the reconfiguration process at the elementary school level. There would be a presentation to the School Committee for consideration in November regarding this matter.

1. College and Career Counseling Update

Salem High School (SHS) Principal Burns and Director of College and Career Counseling, Meghan Sousa provided a presentation.

Member Cornell said that there has been a lot of measurable progress and ensuring the students understand the process. Vice Chair Cruz said that some districts are having conversations about using My Career and Academic Plan (MyCAP) at the middle school level. Principal Burns and Ms. Sousa said that there have been discussions with the Collins Middle School about incorporating MYCAP lessons into crew and advisory periods. The 8th graders have access to Naviance (college and career readiness software platform).

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Ms. Sousa said Naviance has been expanded to the alumni tracker which allows more data gathering to provide alumni support as they move to college. Ms. Sousa added that surveys are also used to gather data. Member Cornell spoke about the importance of having age appropriate conversations with younger learners about college. Member Cornell asked for an update in the near future about how this is being implemented into the curriculum for younger students. Member Cornell mentioned that middle school students should be prepared to do more homework so that they are prepared for the amount of work required in high school. Principal Burns mentioned that more academic conversations are happening at the 9th grade level especially around Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Superintendent Zrike commented that students are getting more access to AP courses. Superintendent Zrike said that the graduation rate alone is not enough, what students do beyond graduation in order to be competitive is also important. Superintendent Zrike added that the expanded partnership with OneGoal and others increases tracking and support for students' post secondary endeavours. Vice Chair Cruz asked if staff from OneGoal can speak at the School Committee in the future.

2. Playground Committee Update

Superintendent Zrike introduced Ms. Kathryn Mattern, a Parent Teacher Association member from the Bentley Academy Innovation School, who also led the Superintendent Advisory Playground Committee. Ms. Mattern along with Ms. Erika Clifford, Parent Teacher Committee President at Horace Mann Laboratory School, and Melinda Baker-Buzdygon, Parent Teacher Organization Co-President at Carlton Innovation School, presented the Playground Committee update.

Vice Chair Cruz asked the parents to share their research into playgrounds so that the conversation and advocacy on this matter can continue. Member Cornell said that for the past three years, about \$1.6 million has been spent on playgrounds and this was based on the most urgent needs in terms of the legal perspective or safety perspective. Member Cornell said that communication on how this process happens is needed so that the community can be aware. Member Cornell suggested using natural materials for playgrounds and getting input from landscape designers.

Ms. Mattern said that it is unrealistic to expect parents to raise a million dollars for playgrounds and added that using natural materials as well as involving a landscape designer still comes with a high price tag. Member Cornell commented that the current playgrounds are not sustainable financially or environmentally. Ms. Mattern highlighted that a landscaped playground might have accessibility issues and that the upfront cost would be high. Ms. Mattern added that a playground especially for an early childhood school is basic infrastructure. Ms. Baker-Buzdygon commented that hiring someone to look for grants will be more productive than having parents drive the effort.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Ms. Mattern said that the Early Childhood Center and the Salem Park, Recreation and Community Services collaborated and received a \$60,000 grant for a shade structure but it has not yet been installed. Superintendent Zrike provided information about the plans regarding playgrounds at some of the schools and added that mats are one alternative to eliminate having woodchips on the playgrounds. Assistant Superintendent Pauley provided information about playground improvements that occurred in the last five years including the installation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible mats at the Saltonstall School, installation of outdoor classrooms, repairing playgrounds, undertaking of a comprehensive playground study, addressing safety issues, doing work on the Witchcraft Heights Elementary School and Bates Elementary School playgrounds. Ms. Mattern commented that the playground study did not include the Carlton Innovation School playground. Member Campbell said more clear communication is needed regarding long-term and short-term plans.

3. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike provided an update on the high school building project. Mayor Pangallo added that community events where information about the project has already been taking place. Vice Chair Cruz thanked everyone involved with the building committee for their work.

4. Finance and Operations Report

There was no report.

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. Authorization for the Disposal of Surplus Materials

Member Campbell said these materials are outdated or broken. Superintendent Zrike said there is some urgency to remove these materials from Salem High School and the Collins Middle School so that the space can be used.

Member Cornell made a motion to dispose the surplus materials. Member Campbell seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman ABSENT

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda ABSENT

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 5 votes in favor and 2 absent.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to adjourn at 8:35 pm. Member Cornell seconded. A roll call vote was taken. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted YES

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman ABSENT

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda ABSENT

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 5 votes in favor and 2 absent.

Respectfully submitted by,

Shirley Dorai

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent