

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, December 1, 2025
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.
Hybrid Meeting**

Members Present: Mayor Pangallo, Vice Chair Cruz, Amanda Campbell, AJ Hoffman, Beth Anne Cornell, 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 Campbell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Lori Marenda, History Educator at Salem High School (SHS)

Ms. Marenda said she is open with her students about her own experience with mental health so that they know there is someone who understands what they are going through. Ms. Marenda spoke about Mental Makeover, a non-profit organization started by two former Salem High School graduates, committed to fighting stigma surrounding mental health as well as empowering young people to learn and talk about mental health. Ms. Marenda continued to explain the activities and events organized by Mental Makeover including educational boxes as well as the two major fundraisers for Mental Makeover which are “The World Needs You Here Walk” in July and “Polar Plunge” in January. The proceeds fund scholarships for students. Ms. Marenda invited the School Committee members to the 4th Annual Polar Plunge event on January 31st at 10:00 am at Winter Island. More information is available at mentalmakeover.org.

Jade Bachmann, School Nurse at Horace Mann Laboratory School (HMLS)

Ms. Bachmann, a former Salem Public Schools (SPS) student, spoke about her own experience with school transitions as a student. Ms. Bachmann continued to relate her work experience at SPS and the impact of school reconfiguration on nursing. Ms. Bachmann said that HMLS currently serves about 300 students and adding almost the same number of students doubles the nursing workload in one building. Ms. Bachmann urged the School Committee to maintain full nursing staffing if a merge occurs. Ms. Bachmann said that school nurses do not work over

the summer and therefore the changes must be fully planned before the school year begins as the nurses will be expected to immediately manage new students, systems and clearances.

Melinda Baker, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Baker said several community members are asking for a delay in the elementary reconfiguration decision because the district seems to be pressure testing different scenarios without considering the emotional turmoil of families. Ms. Baker continued that the district is facing pushback because instead of providing the next logical step to explain and plan for the new school that would be created, the district has provided the speculative cost savings that do not fill the following year's and subsequent years' budget gap. Ms. Baker asked the district to do the work to gain the buy-in from the community.

Alexandra Dietrich, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Dietrich shared her child's educational experience at Carlton. Ms. Dietrich said that the reconfiguration has a great impact on students.

Tatiana Buchanan, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Buchanan related her experience in SPS and Salem as well as the challenges she faced. Ms. Buchanan also spoke about her child's experience at Bates and Carlton. Ms. Buchanan said that if schools are going to be merged, there must be a plan for all those who will be affected.

Elizabeth Ide, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Ide said that researchers found school closures to have profound and lasting negative outcomes for the whole community. Ms. Ide requested everyone to work together as a community to balance the budget by finding somewhere else to save money and protect all of our public schools.

Carlton Innovation School Student

The student spoke about loving Carlton and that if schools were combined, it is not worth it for students as they would be bullied.

Member Manning joined the meeting at 7:40 pm.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee Meeting held on November 3, 2025
2. Approval of Minutes of Public Forum held on November 17, 2025
3. Approval of Minutes of Public Forum in Spanish held on November 24, 2025
4. Donations
5. Approval of FY26 Warrants:
 1. 11/06/2025 - \$519,099.15
 2. 11/13/2025 - \$600,061.82
 3. 11/20/2025 - \$438,580.01

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve the consent 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 voted YES
Motion passed unanimously.

Student Representative Report

Superintendent Zrike provided a brief update as Student Representative Sula was unable to attend. Superintendent Zrike said the Student Advisory Group was working on a project to welcome new students to Salem who enroll after the start of the school year. They hosted a luncheon for new students which they felt was not well attended because not enough promotion was done. The Student Advisory group met with Laura Assade and Kethleen Silva from the Family Welcome Center, as well as Ana Gratereaux from the College and Career Center earlier in the day to discuss how to welcome new students. Superintendent Zrike continued that Student Representative Sula wants to update the by-laws. The Student Advisory Group has invited five 9th graders to join as there will be seniors who will be leaving at the end of the year. Superintendent Zrike added that the students tentatively spoke about a Zoom meeting with the School Committee for the following week.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike asked for a moment of silence for Ms. Karen Cleary, a longtime Food Service staff member who passed away on November 28, 2025. Ms. Cleary was an invaluable member of the Horace Mann community over the past several years, and her earlier work at Collins Middle School.

Superintendent Zrike said that Lori Marenda was named to the Holocaust Museum Boston Teacher Advisory Council. The museum is projected to be complete by the end of 2026. The role of the Teacher Advisory Council will be to support the Director of Education.

1. Certificate of Academic Excellence

Superintendent Zrike provided some information about the certificate of academic excellence. The certificates were presented to Jay Thompson from the New Liberty Innovation School and Alexia Coleman of Salem High School.

2. FY26 Budget Update

Superintendent Zrike said that the budget is very challenging for FY26 and FY27. Assistant Superintendent Pauley presented slides about the status for FY26.

In response to Member Cornell, Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that the personnel costs for this year seems much higher than last year but a more accurate number will be provided once it has been reviewed.

In response to Vice Chair Cruz, Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that there have been twice as many leaves taken by employees. Vice Chair Cruz requested a breakdown of leaves taken since the new bargaining unit contracts took into effect. In response to another question, Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that the grant information is received late and salaries sometimes need to come out of the general fund instead of fully on a grant. As for the budget freeze, Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that based on the last two years, a pause started in January but that the freeze was closer to April. Assistant Superintendent Pauley added that the freeze would probably happen sooner rather than later. Superintendent Zrike added that the district is looking at not filling certain positions that are not critical for student needs, shifting roles and utilizing staff differently. Superintendent Zrike added that the effects of the recent bargaining unit contracts are being felt more now than in the first year. Other factors that impact the budget include increasing enrollment as well as needs of students who have recently moved into the district.

3. Elementary Reconfiguration Presentation and Discussion

Mayor Pangallo thanked everyone who provided feedback. Mayor Pangallo added that these discussions are the outcome of a process that began with the district facility master plan in 2021 continued through multiple retreats and committee meetings looking at the portfolio of facilities in light of budgetary challenges, new models of learning, building needs and declining student enrollment. That process led to a number of important decisions for the community including the decision to pursue a new high school building in 2023. Many other components of the district's trajectory since then have also been shaped by the foundation of that effort including the ongoing review of school assignment policies, transportation plans, capital budgeting priorities and a conversation about Salem's elementary school buildings.

Mayor Pangallo continued that earlier this year, two specialists in the field who are Salem residents and parents were brought in to assist the School Committee in examining the data and the opportunities for action that might help address the financial challenges, minimize the need for staff reductions which would increase class sizes across the district, as well as maintain and expand students access to the most successful programs. In evaluating the options or whether to act at all, the School Committee is centering the same values that have been centered for years, which are equity, elevated learning experiences for every child and financial sustainability.

Mayor Pangallo acknowledged that conversations about changes to schools are emotional and families care about their schools. Mayor Pangallo said a parent asked about the vision of Salem Public Schools at a recent public forum. The vision is for a diverse and welcoming community that promotes each student's academic, social, emotional and physical development through the equitable delivery of challenging, relevant and joyful learning experiences. Mayor Pangallo continued that the strategic plan is centered on elevated learning, empowering educators, centering belonging and strengthening the district's foundations. The reconfiguration discussion is an extension of the vision and strategic plan. It is part of the actions of this committee and preceding

committees, educators and caregivers had been putting into place for years. Mayor Pangallo provided examples of the efforts across the district towards these goals.

School Committee members were invited to comment or ask questions.

Questions included why the option of moving Carlton and Saltonstall to Bentley, and moving Bentley to Saltonstall was not recommended by the consultants when that option seemed to address equity and access issues. The response was that this option would require moving over 700 students. Also, the Bentley building which has not received any significant updates would now be receiving them but the Bentley students would not be able to benefit from it. The equity concern is that the Bentley building is only getting updates when the predominantly Latino students move out.

Another question was about innovation plans in relation to mergers, closures and reconfigurations. The response was that the School Committee and Superintendent can work with the school to amend an innovation plan as it is governed locally.

A question was raised about the timeline for the city contribution to the budget. The response was that Chapter 70 funding is known at the end of January, work proceeds with the budget in February and March, thereafter the draft budget comes before the School Committee in early April. No major changes in the state's allocation is expected based on the trend of the last few years.

The next question was about where in the process would the School Committee advocate to the City Council for increased contribution. The response was that the City Council reviews the budget in May or June as the City Council does not have a role in the development of the budget. The School Committee and city departments work on the budget development. A lot of the constraints for budget development are governed by state law such as those around property tax and excise tax. The city is currently charging the maximum that it is allowed to under the law for hotels and meals excise.

There was a question about the conservative savings projected for the mergers. The response was that there would be no savings from educators as they would all be maintained. The conservative savings projected would allow for any additional transitional supports that may be needed.

Questions also included whether space and availability of bathrooms for various programs and needs were taken into account. The response was that the spaces would be maintained. None of the scenarios involved dismantling any special education programs.

Another question was about implementing recommendations received about improving traffic flow around the high school. The response was that the recommendations could be implemented.

A question was raised about having one calendar instead of two for the elementary schools. The response was that this can be reviewed or adjusted.

The next question was about relocating all PreK programs at Carlton and the issues of not having bathrooms in the classrooms. The response was that there are no requirements to have bathrooms in any classrooms. The question about having a PreK/K center was posed. The response was that most of the feedback favored having a PreK center but not necessarily including Kindergarten.

Another question was about projected budget deficits for subsequent years. The response was that next year the budget gap is estimated to be about \$4.5 - \$5 million gap and that there are a number of unknowns for subsequent years such as new bargaining contracts as well as federal and state grant cuts.

The management and composition of transition committees for school mergers was raised. The response was that it would require a team of administrators, educators, families and students who would meet regularly through the summer and into fall. Meeting with the union and school leaders would also be important.

A comment was made that equity cannot be disentangled from budgetary concerns. The difference between a closure which involves students being dispersed and a merger was emphasized. Research on closures have shown that they disproportionately adversely affect students of color and low income students. Another comment was that delaying a decision could mean changing the working conditions or eliminating positions.

One of the questions was whether there would be a need to hire an administrator or non-classroom staff due to a larger student population in a building. The response was there would not be a need to do so. A follow-up question was whether a relocation can be phased over time. The response was that it would be challenging especially in trying to create a new identity.

There was a question about whether all students come under an innovation plan when there is a merger of an innovation school with another school which does not have an innovation plan. The response was that the innovation model could be slowly expanded to the entire school but that it would also depend on the innovation model itself. The next question was whether the choice to select a school will be provided to students from both the sending and receiving schools. The response was that choice would be afforded to the families and it would be part of the transition plan.

Questions also included whether the Carlton innovation model can work for a larger group of students. The response was that the model can work for a larger number of students. As to the question about the demand for the Carlton innovation program among families, the last three years of kindergarten enrollment data showed that 68% of those who ranked it as their first choice attend Carlton. Carlton was the second least chosen school among families.

Another question was about what has been done to expand the dual language program. The response was that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education had just accepted the plan to expand the program to the middle school.

Comments included that this should not be a decision to address just a budget shortfall but also to move the vision forward as any delay in a decision might mean that there are no resources to expand innovative programs. Additional comments included whether pieces of programs can be moved around, what other districts in similar situations are doing, the importance of not delaying a decision, and repairs needed at the Bentley building. A response was provided that the Bentley building need not be vacated while repairs are being performed. Another comment was that as long as the building continues to be used for educational purposes, there will be no impact to the funds received from the Massachusetts School Building Authority. A comment was made that if any new scenario or a modified scenario was proposed by any School Committee member, it would need to be discussed before a vote is taken.

Another question raised was about the location of the dual language program. The response was that it is complicated if the dual language program is placed further away from the community it is supposed to serve. A follow-up question was how the dual language program came to be placed at Bentley. The response was that it was an opportunity to hire a dual language principal and not have another school which was in transition.

Mayor Pangallo spoke about additional opportunities for the community to provide feedback. Upon further discussion, the School Committee members agreed that another meeting is needed to review the options.

4. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike provided the MSBA update.

3. Finance and Operations Report

Assistant Superintendent Pauley explained the budget transfer requests.

Member Cornell made a motion for a 3-minute recess at 9:51 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 voted YES

Motion passed unanimously.

Member Miranda left the meeting at 9:52 pm.

The meeting resumed at 9:53 pm.

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. Budget Transfer Request**
Member Campbell made a motion to approve the budget transfer request. 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 ABSENT
Mayor Pangallo voted YES
Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.
- 2. Policy AA: School District Legal Status - Second Reading**
Member Cornell made a motion to approve Policies AA, AC, AC-R, ACA, ACE and ADC for second 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 ABSENT

Mayor Pangallo voted YES
Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

3. **Policy AC: Nondiscrimination - Second Reading**
This matter was addressed in the previous section.
4. **Policy AC-R: Harassment and Violence - Second Reading**
This matter was addressed in the previous section.
5. **Policy ACA: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex - Second Reading**
This matter was addressed in the previous section.
6. **Policy ACE: Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability - Second Reading**
This matter was addressed in the previous section.
7. **Policy ADC: Tobacco Products on School Premises Prohibited - Second Reading**
This matter was addressed in the previous section.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Adjournment

Member Cornell made a motion to adjourn at 9:55 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