

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, December 15, 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 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 ABSENT

Member Hoffman voted YES

Member Manning voted YES

Member Miranda voted YES

Mayor Pangallo voted YES

Motion passed with 6 votes in favor and 1 absent.

Public Comment

Leila Hauck, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Hauck said that the School Committee has some ideas about the school reconfiguration but no actual plan. Ms. Hauck continued that a poorly planned reconfiguration will have detrimental effects on students and families, and added that the reconfiguration would cause some staff to lose their positions. Ms. Hauck requested the School Committee to take the time to make a plan, move forward with transparency and take the community's concerns seriously because if the schools were reconfigured by next August, it would cause an expensive and stressful web of new logistical problems to solve in addition to not closing the budget gap.

Vice Chair Cruz joined the meeting at 7:05 pm.

Megan McGough Christian, Saltonstall School Parent

Ms. Christian said that everyone is in agreement that options #1 and #2 of combining Saltonstall and Horace Mann fails to meet the district's value of equity and advance the goals of the reconfiguration effort to save money. Ms. Christian added that the idea of moving Bentley, which is not an open-enrollment school into the center of town and moving the open-enrollment schools from the center of town will do more harm than good. Ms. Christian continued that merging Carlton with Saltonstall and placing these schools in Bentley would result in there being no open-enrollment school in the center of town. Ms. Christian requested the School Committee to vote no on this option. Ms. Christian also addressed the reuse of school buildings by relating how Chicago where 50 elementary schools were closed in 2013, 26 of the 46 buildings were still vacant ten years after the closings. Ms. Christian said that the school closures in Chicago had a mixed record for success.

Community Member Comment via Zoom

The community member said that the late reintroduction of a scenario that the consultants did not recommend was deeply concerning as it undermines the integrity of the process. The community member continued that it reinforces why a large portion of the community declined to engage in this process because they perceive the process as predetermined rather than truly collaborative. The community member urged the School Committee to carefully consider the implications of this late change and the message it sends to families, staff and the broader community.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of Public Forum held on November 25, 2025
2. Approval of Minutes of Regular School Committee Meeting held on December 1, 2025
3. Approval of Minutes of Special School Committee Meeting held on December 6, 2025
4. Approval of Field Trip to Boston, MA for Salem High School Harvard Model United Nations Delegation from January 29 - February 1, 2026
5. Approval of FY26 Warrants:
 1. 11/26/2025 - \$733,414.12
 2. 12/4/2025 - \$883,108.82

Member Cornell made a motion to approve the consent 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.

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Sula said that when the Student Advisory group met with Dr. Zrike earlier in the month, they found ways to improve the welcome and connection of newcomer students to the school. They have improved the student mentorship program so that the mentors can help the new students with what they need throughout the year. Student Representative Sula added that five freshmen students have been invited to the next monthly meeting so that they can familiarise themselves with the Student Council. Student Representative Sula also mentioned that the students are working on the by-laws and that this work will continue during the break.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike informed the School Committee about the Salem High School musical, "The Prom: School Edition" on December 18-20; first free Community Dinner on December 17th organized by the Salem Public Schools (SPS) Food & Nutrition Services, alongside Root North Shore at the Saltonstall School Cafeteria; and the formal approval of the middle school dual language program for grades 6-8 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) which will be implemented beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. Superintendent Zrike wished everyone happy holidays.

1. Elementary Reconfiguration

This matter was addressed in the Motions and Resolutions portion of the meeting.

2. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike provided the MSBA update. Mayor Pangallo said that the construction estimates approved for the schematic report were quite consistent with the preliminary report, decreasing by about \$5 million. Mayor Pangallo added that it is a \$450 million project and it is estimated that the MSBA reimbursement would be about 40-50%, the actual amount will be known in February. In January, a bond order will be filed with the City Council to fund the project and a debt exclusion vote from the community would be requested, which will take place on May 5th if approved by the City Council. Mayor Pangallo said that the School Committee representative on the High School Building Committee will change to School Committee Member-Elect Megan Stott in January 2026. School Committee Member-Elect Megan Stott has been serving on the High School Building Committee as a representative of the City Council previously.

3. Finance and Operations Report

This matter was addressed in the Motions and Resolutions portion of 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

Member Campbell said that the subcommittee met and approved the Competency Determination which would need to be submitted to DESE by December 31st. The Competency Determination was referred to the Policy Subcommittee for their review and if approved would be brought before the School Committee for a vote. The Program of Studies for all three high schools were approved and will be brought to the School Committee for a vote.

5. Policy Subcommittee

Member Cornell said that the subcommittee met and approved the Competency Determination. Member Cornell continued that when this matter comes before the School Committee, a motion would be made to suspend the three readings and adopt the policy so that it can be sent to DESE by the deadline.

Motions and Resolutions

1. Budget Transfer Request

Superintendent Zrike said that School Committee approval is required because the \$51,000 total amount requested exceeds the \$15,000 threshold established by School Committee policy, and because these transfers are across cost centers.

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the budget transfer request. 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. Reconfiguration Vote

Vice Chair Cruz commented that it is evident that the community cares about their schools. Vice Chair Cruz continued that the driving factor for the decision is the fiscal situation, education modeling within the district and the long term vision. Vice Chair Cruz said that Option #3 (Carlton and Saltonstall merge at Bentley/ECC building AND Bentley moves to Saltonstall AND ECC co-locates at Horace Mann or moves to Carlton Building) allows the district to align programs and buildings in a more coherent, equitable and sustainable way over the long term. The second option that appealed to

Vice Chair Cruz was Option #4 (Carlton & Saltonstall schools merge at Saltonstall building). Vice Chair Cruz added that he would support Option #3 but would phase it in over a few school years. This option would require planning, capital and instructional design. Vice Chair Cruz proposed advocating for an increase in the City's educational allocation from 5% to 7-8%; a special act of the legislature to relieve some short-term financial pressure, and additional funding through the supplemental appropriations from the millionaires tax. Vice Chair Cruz also spoke about the possibility of building a new elementary school.

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to approve Option #3 (Carlton and Saltonstall merge at Bentley/ECC building AND Bentley moves to Saltonstall AND ECC co-locates at Horace Mann or moves to Carlton Building) on condition that the previously mentioned fiscal options are pursued. Member Miranda seconded.

Comments were made that it seems complicated to have the conditions on the vote when the conditions may not be met. Another comment was that this option proposes doing nothing for a year and the ramifications of this is potentially losing programs and staff.

Mayor Pangallo said that the City's appropriation is over 10% when the health insurance and debt cost is taken into account. It is also far too early to commit to any percentages but the City would be spending more on the schools. Mayor Pangallo continued that the legislature would probably not go along with providing a special act to give funding specifically to Salem when a lot of the financial challenges are a result of rising expenses that other districts are also facing. Mayor Pangallo was concerned that the phased-in approach would result in a loss of educators and families. Mayor Pangallo added that the consultants, Superintendent, district administration team and educators have indicated that moving 3-4 school communities and over 700 students in one summer is logistically fraught for the district to undertake at the same time as the high school project, the expansion of the dual language program to the middle school and all the other work going on.

Other School Committee members also expressed their concerns but there were also comments in favor of Option #3 without the contingencies as well as Option #4.

Vice Chair Cruz amended the motion to approve Option #3 (Carlton and Saltonstall merge at Bentley/ECC building AND Bentley moves to Saltonstall AND ECC co-locates at Horace Mann or moves to Carlton Building) without conditions. Member Miranda seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Member Campbell voted YES

Member Cornell voted NO

Vice Chair Cruz voted YES

Member Hoffman voted NO

Member Manning voted NO

Member Miranda voted YES
Mayor Pangallo voted NO
Motion failed with 3 votes in favor and 4 against.

Members commented that Option #4 is short-sighted in the long run; was not requested by some families because of a reason; and that the dual language program which is the most research-based program for English learners continues to be inaccessible.

Member Cornell made a motion to approve Option #4 (Carlton & Saltonstall schools merge at Saltonstall building). Vice Chair Cruz seconded. A roll call vote was taken.
Member Campbell voted NO
Member Cornell voted YES
Vice Chair Cruz voted NO
Member Hoffman voted YES
Member Manning voted YES
Member Miranda voted NO
Mayor Pangallo voted YES
Motion passed with 4 votes in favor and 3 against.

The School Committee took a recess at 8:35 pm. The meeting reconvened at 8:39 pm.

Superintendent Zrike spoke about next steps and that information will be shared by the end of the week about the leadership of the new school as well as opportunities for families, staff and students at both schools to participate in a transition team and an innovation plan team. Superintendent Zrike continued that at the January 5th School Committee meeting, more specifics about the timeline and considerations for the merger will be shared. Superintendent Zrike said that this is an opportunity to create a new school that is stronger with a design that accentuates the strengths of both school communities and the majority of educators will have the option of being part of the new school.

3. Policy AA: School District Legal Status - Third Reading

Member Cornell made a motion to approve Policies AA, AC, AC-R, ACA, ACE and ADC for third 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.

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

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Adjournment

Member Cornell made a motion to adjourn at 8:44 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