

**Minutes of the Regular Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, March 23, 2026
Hybrid Meeting**

Members Present: Mayor Pangallo, Vice Chair Cornell, Yamily Byas, AJ Hoffman, Veronica Miranda and Meg Stott

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

Members Absent: Mary Manning

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.

Citations and Acknowledgements

1. Salem High School Boys Basketball Team

Vice Chair Cornell noted the Salem High School (SHS) Boys Basketball Team's achievement in winning the 2025-26 MIAA Division 3 state championship. Vice Chair Cornell also spoke about their skills and being good role models. Member Hoffman mentioned that the people who support the team should not be forgotten and hoped that the students would become coaches, and give encouragement to younger students. Superintendent Zrike said that the team brought tremendous joy to the community and expressed how proud the community was of them. Superintendent Zrike also recognized Coach Tom Doyle. Mayor Pangallo read the citations on the City seals. The Salem High School Boys Basketball Team including their coaches were presented with City seals by the Athletic Director, Reilly Christie. Mayor Pangallo presented one of the 100 limited edition commemorative coins specially made for Salem's 400th birthday in 2026 to Coach Doyle. Mayor Pangallo said that the coins are being given out to individuals in the community who represent the best of Salem. Coach Doyle acknowledged the team and the community support. State Representative Cruz congratulated the team. The team took a picture with the School Committee.

Vice Chair Cornell made a motion for a two minute recess at 7:25 pm. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Superintendent Zrike

Mayor Pangallo spoke about Superintendent Zrike's leadership and for putting the students' well-being, educational excellence, and equity at the forefront of every decision. Mayor Pangallo read the citation for Superintendent Zrike and presented him

with one of the 100 limited edition commemorative coins for Salem's 400th birthday in 2026.

Student Representative Sula thanked Superintendent Zrike and mentioned how much he cares for students. Student Representative Sula wished Superintendent Zrike the best of luck in his new job. member Miranda mentioned that Superintendent Zrike leads with integrity, compassion and brilliance. Member Stott extended her gratitude to Superintendent Zrike. Member Hoffman mentioned that Superintendent Zrike is a good listener and has given the community hope as well as inspiration. Member Byas thanked Superintendent Zrike. Vice Chair Cornell said that students recognize Superintendent Zrike. Salem teachers Union (STU) President, Ann Berman thanked Superintendent Zrike and recounted the time when he first started working for the Salem Public Schools (SPS). Ms. Berman hoped that Superintendent Zrike would use Salem as a model for other districts in the Commonwealth that have struggled in the past and want to do better. State Representative Cruz mentioned that Superintendent Zrike was the person the district needed when he was hired six years ago during a time of transition, to heal, repair trust, communicate, put students and their needs first. State Representative Cruz added that Superintendent Zrike believes in a culture of excellence for all students. State Representative Cruz read the citation for Superintendent Zrike from the House of Representatives. Gifts were presented to Superintendent Zrike. The School Committee took a picture with Superintendent Zrike.

Superintendent Zrike thanked the School Committee for their support and noted that the School Committee consistently places students before personal agendas. Superintendent Zrike continued that the governance in SPS is special. Superintendent Zrike also thanked the staff and union leaders. Superintendent Zrike spoke about the location of his office and how it was the best thing to be around students everyday. Superintendent Zrike thanked SPS students for giving him so much hope for a better future. Superintendent Zrike added that the students made him smile, laugh, inspired him, and taught him a lot about being a better educator, a leader, and person. Superintendent Zrike expressed his gratitude for being part of the community and pride to have been able to serve Salem over the last six years. Superintendent Zrike received a standing ovation from everyone in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

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

Public Comment

There were no comments.

Approval of Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes of the Regular School Committee Meeting held on March 9, 2026
2. Approval of Field Trip to Canobie Lake Park, NH for Bates 5th grade students on June

12, 2026

3. Approval of FY26 Warrants:
 1. 3/5/2026 - \$254,565.85
 2. 3/12/2026 - \$774,727.99

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

Student Representative Report

Student Representative Sula spoke about statistics for Advanced Placement (AP) courses at SHS where in 2025, 66.4% of SHS students who took an AP exam scored a three or higher out of a five on at least one exam. In the 2025-2026 school year, about 41% of SHS students are enrolled in at least one AP and more than 88% of juniors and seniors are enrolled in what the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) considers advanced coursework. Student Representative Sula mentioned that SHS offers 27 AP courses which is higher than neighboring districts. Student Representative Sula also mentioned the podcast at SHS, the continued work with welcoming newcomer students, as well as upcoming elections for the Student Advisory Group.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Zrike announced the upcoming concerts at the schools. Superintendent Zrike thanked the members of the Innovation Committee for their work during Design Day on March 14, 2026 as well as everyone who participated.

1. School Choice Recommendation SY26-27

Superintendent Zrike recommended changes as provided in the packet to School Committee members. The recommendation was to continue Salem Public Schools' participation in the Inter-district non-resident School Choice program, with some limitations. For incoming Grades 9-12, Salem High School will allow up to 10 students to enter at each grade level. This does not include Salem Prep High School unless a student makes the choice to enroll in SHS and is placed there based on their IEP. This also does not include New Liberty Innovation School unless a student makes the choice to enroll in SHS and ultimately meets the New Liberty Innovation School student profile. For incoming Grades K-5, 10 students would be allowed to enter at each grade level. The recommendation is to exclude the Sarah Parker Remond School as they focus on establishing the new school. For Grades 6-8, the recommendation is to not accept non-resident school choice students at the middle school level. With the recent transition of middle school students from Saltonstall, the district wants to continue prioritizing a smooth and stable experience for students, staff, and families. Additionally, class sizes at the middle school remain larger and more fully enrolled than at other grade levels. Superintendent Zrike explained that the other change would be to close school choice applications earlier this year at the beginning of August instead of September.

2. Carlton and Saltonstall Merger Update

Deputy Superintendent Carbone said that the merger is on track and presented slides about the Carlton and Saltonstall merger update.

3. Strengthening Belonging: Addressing Inequities in Discipline Practices

Superintendent Zrike introduced Executive Director of Student Support Services, Ellen Wingard who presented slides on the topic.

In response to Member Cornell, Ms. Wingard said that the district can obtain more data on percentages based on race and student demographics. Superintendent Zrike explained that incidents instead of suspensions were analyzed because there is more data. Superintendent Zrike continued that the figures mirror the incidents as a whole. Superintendent Zrike acknowledged that there are disparities based on race, IEP status, and high needs. Superintendent Zrike also noted that based on state law, the Superintendent or designee would need to give permission for suspension of students who are in Grade 3 or younger. There are not many suspensions for younger students but there are incidents and this helps identify patterns where certain students are getting disciplined more than others. Ms. Wingard added that according to the law, prior to suspending a student, principals need to consider other ways of disciplinary measures. Ms. Wingard continued that the suspension rates in SPS is lower compared to other districts of similar size and demographics. Executive Director of Special Education, Jennifer Doucette-Ly, spoke about the supports for educators and staff who work with high incident students in high incident programs and students who have frequent behavior referrals.

In response to Member Miranda, Ms. Doucette-Ly said that for vertical alignment, the professional development is run by teacher leaders. There is a monthly high incident behavior management professional development for special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Some of the professional development is run by Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and behavior specialists. In response to another question, Ms. Wingard said that there is incident data by classroom, school and demographics. Ms. Wingard continued that principals and assistant principals could look at the data more closely and move towards coaching and feedback. Superintendent Zrike added that the data based on schools can be shared with the School Committee. Superintendent Zrike continued that the risk ratio for schools is set based on this data. Superintendent Zrike continued that principals have conversations with specific educators who have high numbers of incidents and that usually is either a sign that more support is necessary or a classroom management issues such as relationships with students.

Member Miranda also raised the matter of adultification which is defined as perceiving a child as older, more mature and anger biased. Member Miranda continued that it is perceiving anger where it does not exist and that the phenomena is disproportionately imposed on black children more often compared to white children. Member Miranda acknowledged that these are difficult conversations and appreciated everyone's efforts to correct some of the disproportionality.

Vice Chair Cornell proposed to have the college application process updated at the May 11th School Committee meeting and to have a follow-up conversation on discipline disparity on April 27th.

In response to Member Miranda, Superintendent Zrike said that an equity audit was done but it was not in-depth and of poor quality. Superintendent Zrike said it is something that the School Committee could request. Student Representative Sula said that the data would probably highlight immigrant students who have been displaced from their home countries and feel fearful, and needing support from educators and staff. Superintendent Zrike concurred and said that the teachers union is also aware of this need.

4. Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) Update

Superintendent Zrike provided the MSBA update.

5. Finance and Operations Report

Assistant Superintendent Pauley said that the Finance Subcommittee members met and were briefed on the ongoing development of the FY27 budget proposal. Three meetings with principals and department heads were held to review the budget proposal. The questions and answers from the public forms are being compiled and will be posted. The budget book is being finalized. The preliminary budget proposal will be presented to the School Committee on April 6th. The Public Budget Hearing will be held on April 13th.

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 Stott said the subcommittee met the previous week and reviewed actions taken last year as well as reviewed additional policies.

6. Ad-Hoc Superintendent Search Subcommittee

Member Hoffman said that at the first meeting last week, next steps was discussed as well as process, timeline and the superintendent job posting. Member Hoffman highlighted the salary range of \$230,000 - \$255,000.

In response to Mayor Pangallo, Member Hoffman said that the setting up of the screening committee will be discussed at the next meeting of the subcommittee. Member Miranda said that the next subcommittee meeting would be on March 25th.

Motions and Resolutions

1. Field Trip to Costa Rica for Salem High School students from April 17-25, 2027

Member Miranda made a motion to take this item out of order so that it could be discussed earlier during the meeting. Vice Chair Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Zrike thanked Salem High School Photography and Art Teacher for organizing the trip. Vice Chair Cornell mentioned the exemplary way that the previous overseas trip to Belize was handled especially when complications arose.

Vice Chair Cornell made a motion to approve the field trip to Costa Rica for Salem High School students from April 17-25, 2027. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Superintendent Evaluation

Vice Chair Cornell said that the superintendent's evaluation does not require a vote as he is leaving. Vice Chair Cornell summarized Superintendent Zrike's evaluation based on the identified goals and stated some comments that School Committee members provided on Superintendent Zrike's evaluation. Vice Chair Cornell added that Superintendent Zrike achieved an overall rating of exemplary and that this rating was achieved two years in a row. Vice Chair Cornell thanked Superintendent Zrike for his partnership.

Superintendent Zrike thanked everyone and said that he has confidence in the leadership team.

3. Resolution in Support of the Salem High School Building Project and the May 5, 2026 Debt Exclusion Ballot Question

Member Stott read the resolution. Member Stott said that this is an avenue to show support as a unified body for the Salem High School building project. Member Stott thanked the High School Building Committee and everyone who has been involved with the process. Member Stott recognized that a lot of work and effort has been devoted to

the project over the years. Member Stott added that this is also another opportunity to get the information out to the community about the project. Member Miranda thanked Member Stott and Vice Chair Cornell for their work.

Member Stott made a motion to pass the resolution. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

4. School Choice Recommendation SY26-27

Vice Chair Cornell made a motion to approve the School Choice recommendation. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

5. Motion to reconsider the immediate adoption of Policies AA, AC, AC-R, ACA, ACE and ADC, and hold the implementation of the policies until the completion of the full Policy Manual review

Member Stott said that the policies mentioned were adopted last year but the representative from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), who is assisting the district with reviewing and ensuring that they are in line with state regulations, recommended that the immediate adoption be held until the entire section and policy manual is ready to be adopted. The switch over needs to happen in its entirety because the district has a word document based on numbers whereas the MASC version is based on letters and hosted on their website. Once this is done, the policies can be reviewed again more thoroughly. Vice Chair Cornell added that if there is any policy that needs to be implemented immediately in the meantime, this can be done and included in the current policy manual.

Member Stott made a motion to reconsider the immediate adoption of Policies AA, AC, AC-R, ACA, ACE and ADC, and hold the implementation of the policies until the completion of the full Policy Manual review. Vice Chair Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Motion to approve the recommendation of the Policy Subcommittee for Section A of the Policy Manual and hold implementation of the policies until the completion of the full Policy Manual review for first reading

Member Stott explained that some of the policies which were not recommended for adoption were discussed last year at the Policy Subcommittee meetings. In response to Member Miranda's question about why Policy AB was not recommended by the Policy Subcommittee, Member Stott said that the Executive Assistant to the School Committee, Shirley Dorai could provide her with more information. Vice Chair Cornell added that MASC recommends that when there are questions about particular policies, it can be referred to the School Committee attorney and the School Committee should follow their attorney's advice.

Member Miranda made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Policy

Subcommittee for Section A of the Policy Manual and hold implementation of the policies until the completion of the full Policy Manual review for first reading. Vice Chair Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

7. Superintendent Position Profile

In response to Member Miranda, Mayor Pangallo said that the compensation is as anticipated as it is competitive with the approximate salary range for gateway cities and urban school districts. Mayor Pangallo added that the profile calls out the strategic plan that is ending but that it is worth including since that is the framework that the new superintendent would be working on. Mayor Pangallo thanked the members of the Ad-Hoc Superintendent Search Subcommittee for their work and thoughtfulness in developing the profile.

Vice Chair Cornell made a motion to approve the superintendent position profile. Member Hoffman seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Newsletter Items

Vice Chair Cornell said that the topics that would be included in the next newsletter would be improvements to graduation and dropout rates; update on the process timeline for the Interim Superintendent and Interim Deputy Superintendent; commendation for the high school basketball team; Superintendent Zrike's final School Committee meeting and evaluation; initial budget presentation; budget hearing; change in the agenda topic calendar to have a follow-up on discipline disparity; New Liberty Innovation School and Salem Prep High School move; resolution to support the high school building project; and the superintendent job profile.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Cornell made a motion to adjourn at 9:42 pm. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Shirley Dorai

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent