Minutes of the Special Session
of the Salem School Committee
Monday, July 6, 2026
Rm. 227, 29 Highland Ave.

Members Present: Mayor Dominick Pangallo, Vice Chair Beth Anne Cornell, Yamily Byas, AJ Hoffman, Veronica Miranda and Megan Stott

Others in Attendance: Interim Superintendent Carbone

Members Absent: Mary Manning

Call of Meeting to Order
Mayor Pangallo called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and explained the meeting format.

Interview of Superintendent Finalist - Thomas Welch
Dr. Welch provided an opening statement.

Mayor Pangallo asked the first question: Equity often requires difficult choices. How do you approach decisions about allocating resources, opportunities, and supports across students, schools, and programs when needs exceed available resources?

Dr. Welch's response included the budget planning process, communication, understanding and investing in student needs as well as the strategic plan. Dr. Welch also provided an example.

Vice Chair Cornell requested an example of making choices based on the needs of the students. Dr. Welch responded by providing an example of funds for intervention programs prioritizing multilingual and special needs students. Member Stott requested examples of communication during the budgeting process. Dr. Welch provided an example of building capacity and the decline in enrollment necessitating finding ways to manage staffing.

Vice Chair Cornell asked the next question: Salem has worked hard to build a culture of high expectations for all students while also offering strong college and career pathways. How would you ensure students experience a coherent educational journey from elementary through high school and graduate prepared for success in college, careers and life?

Dr. Welch said that Salem's portrait of a graduate is not just a destination but a road map as students and families progress from PreKindergarten to graduation. Dr. Welch spoke about his personal work experience. Vice Chair Cornell inquired about how the candidate in the role of Superintendent would work together with teachers to assess effectiveness of the academic transitions and prepare students to graduate. Dr. Welch mentioned data fluency, assessments, difference between growth and achievement, encouraging parent involvement as well as teacher and principal accountability.

Member Byas asked the following question in Spanish. Salem views education as a community mission. How would you build strong partnerships with families, staff, city leaders, and community organizations, and how would you ensure that families from all backgrounds have meaningful opportunities to shape district decisions?

Dr. Welch responded in Spanish stating that listening is an important part of leadership. Dr. Welch also provided examples. Member Miranda said that the Salem community values stability and leadership , and inquired how Dr. Welch could reassure students, families and staff that Salem is a place to invest long-term. Dr. Welch provided examples of his work in Los Angeles and Boston. Dr. Welch also referenced the strategic plan and indicated his intention for the long run.

Member Byas asked in Spanish, how Dr. Welch would bring families who do not speak English and are not well-versed with technology to be part of their child's education. Dr. Welch responded in Spanish about word-of-mouth, being available and provided an example.

Member Hoffman asked the fourth question. Tell us about your experience supporting students who face significant barriers to success, including students from marginalized communities and those at risk of disengagement. How would you ensure Salem's systems identify needs early and provide effective support?

Dr. Welch responded by providing examples. Vice Chair Cornell asked about strategies to ensure that English learner students, low-income students and students of color are improving academically. Dr. Welch mentioned using data, tools such as MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) and interventions.

Mayor Pangallo asked another question. School districts across Massachusetts face significant fiscal challenges. Tell us about your approach to budgeting and resource allocation, and share an example of how you have navigated a period of financial constraint.

Dr. Welch spoke about responsible stewardship, fiscal, using allocated resources wisely and being proactive. Dr. Welch proceeded to provide an example. Vice Chair Cornell asked how Dr. Welch envisions the role of the Superintendent in helping to bridge the conversations between the School Committee and unions, especially the Salem Teachers Union in light of finances going forward. Dr. Welch's response included having regular communication, networking, reviewing previous contracts, strategic plan and focusing on students.

Member Miranda asked the next question. How do you balance supporting principals and school leaders with holding them accountable when student outcomes, school climate, or equity goals are not being consistently met?

Dr. Welch responded that support and accountability need to be balanced. Dr. Welch mentioned data fluency, sharing best practices, understanding new guidelines and diagnosing issues.

Member Stott asked the following question. Salem has a strong foundation and an ambitious future, including a transformative high school project that will impact the community for

generations. What should Salem's schools look like ten years from now? How can the superintendent ensure that long-term investments remain educationally sound, fiscally responsible, and responsive to community needs?

Dr. Welch said that in 10 years, Salem should be seen as the example of innovation, a district that leads with equity. Dr. Welch mentioned more opportunities and elevated expectations for students. Dr. Welch added that he would like to see Salem as the best public school system in the state and students having the sense of pride to give them a reason to come back to Salem. Vice Chair Cornell asked about Dr. Welch's approach to ensure the long-term investments remain educationally sound in terms of the portfolio of schools and buildings. Dr. Welch provided an example and referred to the long-term vision as well as working with the city to understand the demographic flows to see where stabilization can occur while paying attention to the future outlook of what the city is going to be facing.

Member Miranda asked another question. Describe a time when feedback from families, staff, or community members caused you to rethink your initial approach to an issue. How did you communicate your decision, and what did the experience teach you about leadership?

Dr. Welch responded that leadership is not about having all the answers. It's about being able to listen, think critically and correct plans. Dr. Welch added that flexibility is extremely important for an urban school leader and that gathering feedback is equally important. Dr. Welch provided examples. Vice Chair Cornell inquired about how Dr. Welch envisions communication and the relationship with School Committee members individually as well as a body. Dr. Welch mentioned communication as well as finding out what is important to each member. Dr. Welch also provided an example. Member Stott asked about communication with families and parents before decisions are made. Dr. Welch provided an example. Member Miranda asked about the accessibility of the Superintendent to parents. Dr. Welch provided an example. Member Hoffman asked how Dr. Welch would support trans and nonbinary youth as well as the LGBTQ community with regard to sports. Member Hoffman also asked how Dr. Welch would include them in the conversation and reach out. Dr. Welch responded that he is about inclusivity and he would work with the athletic director to create a space for these conversations as having multiple places to start the conversation is very important for a school district.

Dr. Welch provided a closing statement.

Adjournment

Member Stott made a motion to adjourn at 7:22 pm. Vice Chair Cornell seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,
Shirley Dorai
Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent