

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
December 18, 2024**

Members present in person:

Eddie Aroko, Rich Cowdell, Domina DiBiase, Kara McLaughlin, Toyuwa Newton,
Robert Rogers, Mark Stevens, Amy Stewart, Jeff Whitmore, Rick Winter

Members present remotely:

Sal Martinez

Staff present in person:

Fallon Burke, Stephanie Callahan, Megan Franco, Drea Jacobs, Sabrina
Williams

Guests present in person:

Steve Palmer

Recorder present in person:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Toyuwa Newton officially called the meeting to order at 6:07 PM.

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Vote to Approve Minutes of November 20, 2024

Robert Rogers moved to accept the minutes of November 20, 2024, as presented.
The motion was seconded by Kara McLaughlin and passed unanimously via roll call
vote.

IV. Vote to Approve the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

Kara McLaughlin, Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, began by thanking
everyone who has contributed to this plan; it was a lot of work. She then introduced
Her Co-chair, Steve Palmer, who chairs the Salem Academy Charter School
Foundation and brings the unique perspective of having been involved with the
school when it was founded.

Steve reviewed the mission and vision as stated in the Strategic Plan, noting that we
are refining the current plan as opposed to looking in new directions. He emphasized
the importance of taking the time to look to the future, noting how gratifying it is to
see what dreams become reality over the past 20 years. The Committee worked with
the same consultant who helped develop the current plan; they made a point of
engaging all stakeholders—students, families, faculty/staff, alumni, and community
partners—in the planning process. Our high level goals remain focused on school
performance and academic excellence, creating/maintaining a safe and supportive

school culture, attracting/retaining staff and faculty we want, and the sustainability of Salem Academy.

Stephanie Callahan also emphasized these goals, calling particular attention to having a diverse and high-performing staff and to a renewed emphasis on closing gaps in student performance. In regard to Goal #1, academic performance, she noted that academic success at Salem Academy is increasingly recognized not only as a precursor to success in college but also to later, long-term success as adults. She then reviewed the objectives and metrics we are using to meet this goal, from multi-tiered individual support to STEM-based performance to working with families on chronic absenteeism.

Creating a safe and supportive culture, Goal #2, has been impacted significantly by Covid, along with many new staff/faculty unfamiliar with the school's culture. Extensive surveys are leading to more training and opportunities of communication and engagement. While we have always sought to attract and retain an excellent staff and faculty (Goal #3), today's hiring environment is highly competitive and less stable as teachers enter/leave the profession and may leave during the school year. The 2025-2030 plan also includes a new equity statement. The objectives and metrics related to this goal include more frequent meetings, more mentoring, team building, and building better awareness of Salem Academy culture.

Kara McLaughlin spoke to Goal #4, which addresses organizational as well as financial sustainability. In addition to exploring more diverse revenue streams, the objectives and metrics focus on building a larger, more diverse Board with the skills and perspectives we will need in the years ahead.

Kara also addressed the decision-making framework the consulting team recommends and which we are implementing. SPADE stands for Setting, People, Alternatives, Decide, Explain. This is detailed very fully in the Strategic Plan. SPADE will help keep us on track and vigilant, along with an ad hoc Implementation Committee to be established in January 2025. She ended her remarks by thanking all who have been involved before moving to have the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan ratified. The motion was seconded by Mark Stevens and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

V. Vote to Approve the Executive Director's Evaluation Summary

In summary, Stephanie Callahan provided a strong and steady presence in a year marked by staffing issues and continued post-Covid disruptions. Her strengths in terms of fiscal responsibility, management skills, and ability to respond to new issues were particularly noted. Areas for growth center on staffing, staff communication, strengthening our school culture and building community relationships.

The areas identified for improvement reflect the issues the school and Stephanie have had to deal with this past year, particularly being understaffed. This is a problem nationwide; at the school level, it translates to unduly heavy workloads and increased stress for faculty and staff. As a small school, we may have just one teacher providing some courses as opposed to several teachers at a larger school.

We have also lost senior teachers and new faculty are challenged to keep up. Nor are we able to grow under our current fiscal restraints, i.e. the 480 student cap. More frequent and complete communication of issues is suggested as well as making the HR Committee a standing committee that meets more frequently.

Jeff Whitmore questioned the use of the term “partially meets expectations” on Standard IV, Professional Culture. Mark Stevens noted that the Board should reconsider this wording in the future. Stephanie clarified that the terms DESE uses are exemplary, proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory, and that one of those terms could be used instead. Robert Rogers moved to approve the Executive Director’s evaluation, with amended wording from “partially meets” to “needs improvement” on Standard IV, Professional Culture. Kara McLaughlin seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Domina DiBiase then moved to extend Stephanie Callahan’s contract one year, to June 2027. Robert Rogers seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote.

VI. Committee Updates

All committee reports focused primarily on 2025 goals. These are presented summarily below and in greater detail with completion dates in the printed Board Committee Goals document. Although not stated below, all committees also have a goal of recruiting at least one new Board member with experience/skills in that specific area.

A. Finance

Rick Winter reported that our financial standing halfway through our fiscal year remains strong. He then presented the Finance Committee’s goals for 2025. These include a draft FY2026 budget that addresses likely compensation issues, a three-year capital expenditure plan, and calendaring both Finance Committee responsibilities and time-related operating expenditures.

Robert Rogers moved to approve the 2025 Finance Committee goals, seconded by Amy Stewart. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. Facilities

Robert Rogers reported Facilities Committee goals that include a non-binding letter of intent from Prime Group regarding building a new school, exploration of other sites as Plan B, evaluation of facilities needs over the next three to five years, and collaboration with the Finance Committee on a three-year capital expenditure plan.

Jeff Whitmore moved to approve the 2025 Facilities Committee goals, seconded by Amy Stewart. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

C. Education

Per Rich Cowdell, the Education Committee's primary goal is to support school leaders in increasing the percentage of accountability measures met by 15 percent this year.

Robert Rogers moved to approve the 2025 Education Committee goals, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

D. Development

Fallon Burke reported another \$10,000 gift to the Annual Fund, bringing us to nearly \$46,000 of our \$110,000 goal. We hope to reach \$50,000 by 12/31/24.

Domina DiBiase addressed Board involvement. While participation is an expectation, we want to be more strategic by finding new ways trustees can be involved. The Development Committee or Fallon will be reaching out to all trustees to ensure everyone is involved, regardless of level of financial support. She also asked trustees to look for and alert the committee to grant opportunities.

The Development Committee's goals include reaching our \$110,000 Annual Fund goal, developing an annual Development calendar, and meeting with all trustees to discuss their philanthropic involvement.

Mark Stevens moved to approve the 2025 Development Committee goals, seconded by Domina DiBiase. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

E. Governance

Kara McLaughlin began with the sad news that Julie Rose resigned due to illness. On a happier note, Kara presented the 2025 proposed slate of trustees, officers, and committee assignments. Kara will become Chair, Toyuwa Newton, who has agreed to serve a second term, will be Vice Chair. Eddie Aroko will continue as Secretary and will chair the HR Committee. Amy Stewart will serve as Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee. All other committee chairs remain unchanged.

As Treasurer, Amy will represent the Board of Trustees on the Salem Academy Charter School Foundation's Investment Committee. We will need to identify one additional trustee to be part of that committee.

Kara also nominated three new trustees:

- Nohara Lopez-Okoli is a SACS parent and will serve on the Development Committee.

- Laurie Kennedy has volunteered on the Development Committee for several years and has charter school experience.
- Christopher Graham has a charter school background and will serve on the Finance Committee.

In addition, Domina DiBiase, who is currently completing Alison Palmer's term, was nominated to her own three-year term. Rick Winter will continue to serve on the Finance Committee; Steve Palmer will volunteer on the Governance Committee, as will Mark Stevens.

Mark Stevens moved to approve the 2025 Slate, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

The Governance Committee's goals include growing the board to 15 members; implementing Board on Track for improved communications, development and document sharing; completing Board self-assessments; updating the bylaws; and planning a Board retreat.

Robert Rogers moved to approve the 2025 Governance Committee goals, seconded by Amy Stewart. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

The meeting ended with recognition of the many contributions made by departing trustees. Toyuwa Newton thanked both Mark Stevens and Rick Winter, both of whom received a student-created piece of art.

VII. Vote to Adjourn

Mark Stevens moved to adjourn, seconded by Amy Stewart. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:19 PM.

Documents referenced during this meeting:

2025-2030 Draft Strategic Plan
2025 One-Page Strategic Plan Summary
2024 Executive Director Evaluation Summary
Development Report as of December 18, 2024
Financial Report as of 11/30/24
2025 Board Committee Goals
Governance Committee Board Member Nomination of Nohara Lopez-Okoli
Governance Committee Board Member Nomination of Laurie Kennedy
Governance Committee Board Member Nomination of Christopher Graham
Proposed 2025 Slate of Board of Trustees Members, Officers, and Committee Assignments