

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Wednesday March 26, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

45 Congress St.
Salem, MA 01970

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees will meet at 6:00 PM. This meeting will take place in-person at Salem Academy Charter School located at 45 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970.

Trustees Present

Amy Stewart, Chris Graham, Domina DiBiase, Edward Aroko, Jeffrey Whitmore, Kara McLaughlin, Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Rich Cowdell, Robert Rogers, Sal Martinez, Toyuwa Newton

Trustees Absent

Laurie Kennedy

Guests Present

Andrea Jacobs, Fallon Burke, Sabrina Williams (remote), Shelby Hypes, Stephanie Callahan

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B.

Call the Meeting to Order

Kara McLaughlin called a meeting of the board of trustees of Salem Academy Charter School to order on Wednesday Mar 26, 2025 at 6:10 PM.

C. Public Comment

There were no public comments

D. Approve Minutes

Jeffrey Whitmore made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 02-26-25.

Rich Cowdell seconded the motion.

Kara McLaughlin noted corrections made to the draft minutes on 3/26/25 regarding the need to read minutes online and the wording of the vote on our by-laws.

The board **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. SFC Report

A. SFC Updates

SFC Moderator Bessie Marashi reported the following:

- The Amazing Pizza fundraiser netted a total of \$625.00, including our percentage of sales, the sale of merchandise, and the 50/50 raffle, the winner of which gave their share back to the SFC. Ms. Bloomberg's (Lower School) and Ms. Stolberg's (Upper School) connection classes were recognized with free breakfast for their support.
- A new moderator will be elected for a one-year term at the 4/15/25 meeting. Leni De los Santos will send out nomination forms.
- Senior Ciara Lara will be at the 4/15 meeting to talk about her service learning project on AP classes and their importance.
- Leni will send out nomination forms for the Sean O'Neil Award, which honors a senior chosen by staff for their commitment to the school and our community.
- Plans are under way for Teacher/Staff Appreciation Day on May 30th, the 3.8 Brunch, and, of course, graduation.

III. Chair Report

A. Updates from Board Chair

Kara McLaughlin note that next month all committee chairs will be reporting progress on meeting their goals. We plan to make these reports quarterly.

Kara has also provided some guidelines on using LinkedIn to identify potential trustees.

This involves searching for local people with the skill sets we need and identifying people

we know who may have connections to identified prospects. She cited as an example having Steve Palmer or Mark Meche contact identified architects. Such prospects should be reported to the Governance Committee, which maintains a list of all prospects suggested over the past five years. Kara will update the guidelines and email to trustees.

IV. ED Report

A. School Updates

B. 2025-2026 School Calendar

Stephanie Callahan presented the proposed 2025-2026 school calendar, which is very similar to our current calendar. She noted that:

- Having professional development begin on Monday, 8/18 rather than the preceding Friday gives returning teachers an extra weekend of vacation.
- SPS will also be starting the last week of August, minimizing the difference in our start dates and, we hope, absenteeism.

Robert Rogers asked if we had considered shortening the school year, as discussed at our last meeting. This is a long process that requires DESE approval, so, while it might be considered in the future, it is not an option at this time.

Robert Rogers moved to accept the 2025-2026 calendar, seconded by Nohara Lopez-Okoli. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Charter Amendment Request Update

With the departure of Russell Johnston, Patrick Tutwiler is now the Acting Commissioner. Johnston encouraged the school to reapply in the future and commended improvements in mathematics curriculum and instruction. Johnston's letter outlined his reasoning. His decision was based on three main concerns:

- His decision was based on three main concerns:
- Decline in overall mathematics achievement, especially among female students and 10th graders.
- Student attrition issues, particularly between 8th and 9th grades and among students with disabilities.
- Planned attrition resulting in about one-sixth of each cohort leaving before graduation.

Should we reapply in the future, we will need better outcomes as well as more comprehensive data on student attrition from 8th to 9th grade including:

- The start of high school is when students leave for other, often larger or technical schools;

- Families relocate, often to more affordable towns and often out of state, both in general and for their child's high school years; and
- We do not backfill classes after 9th grade in order to fulfill our mission and commitment to graduating students ready for college.

SACS will provide an updated math performance report in the Quarter 3 report at the April Board meeting.

V. Finance

A. FY26 Draft Budget

Stephanie Callahan began this discussion by reviewing past budget-to-actual numbers for tuition. In summary, by being somewhat conservative, our projections have been fairly accurate. For the coming year, without Covid funds, with pay increases at SPS and surrounding districts, and with federal funding unpredictable. Budgeting for staffing and compensation is especially challenging.

The Finance Committee is proposing new guidelines. The key points of these are that we want to meet the North Shore average, compensate returning faculty according to the established scale to ensure retention, and plan to leave current open new positions unfilled. Guidelines were established in 2022 and are reviewed annually. The Committee is proposing increasing faculty step levels by 6-7%, resulting in average increases of 11.5% for returning faculty and slightly lower increases for paraprofessionals, entry-level Operations positions, and 6.11% for non-guideline employees.

The strongest driver of budget decisions remains the need to be at par with surrounding schools. Another factor is the fact that post-Covid SEL needs have settled down somewhat and we are back to the special ed staffing we had in 2019. Our new Managing Director of Student Services has also introduced an approach that is proving effective without anticipated staff additions.

Discussion included non-cash benefit comparisons, which are hard to assess as we do not have access to key data like retirement health insurance, and comparison with other charters.

The situation is further complicated by the apparent dissolution of the federal Department of Education and the extent of federal funding cuts. Accordingly, the worst-case scenario assumes zero federal entitlement grant funding. Should that happen, we can absorb some of the loss, fundraise for some previously funded programs, cut others, and shave costs wherever possible. It would be difficult, but it would not have us operating in the red. Nor would this be a SACS-only situation; schools everywhere will be in the same financial situation.

The Finance Committee moved to approve the best and worst case scenarios for Line 5000 (Wages and Salaries) of the FY26 budget. The motion passed unanimously.

B. February Financials

Amy Stewart reviewed the February financial report. We continue to be in sound financial condition.

C. Committee Updates

VI. Education

A. Committee Updates

Referring to the written Education Committee report, Rich Cowdell indicated that all topics have already been discussed.

B. Academic Report

Drea Jacobs presented highlights of her written report.

- We have six new teachers on board, who are off to a good start and receiving good collaborative support.
- The College Fair was a huge success with more colleges than ever (51) participating. College representatives continue to be impressed with the enthusiasm of our students and quality of questions they ask as well as the involvement of all students, including 6th grade.
- We just held our second Best Practices Showcase of the year; these allow teachers to share their successes and are proving very popular and helpful.

She also reported that the school play, *Once On This Island*, presented in conjunction with the North Shore Children's Theater, was a big success. Looking ahead, the spring testing season has officially begun, along with spring sports and preparations for graduation. In addition, the annual Read Trust visit will take place on May 21st, and we want to have several trustees in attendance.

Drea concluded her report with a preview of how we will approachh. the high school competency determination (CD) requirements going forward, as these will now be determined at the district level, She noted that:

- *Taking* MCAS tests is still required; it's just *passing* them that is no longer required in order to graduate.
- Changes do not affect the Class of 2025.
- In the past we used MCAS scores to identify and teach towere students need help
- We do have alternative pathways.

We are exploring what other districts and charters are doing and will have a proposal for discussion at our next meeting.

VII. Facilities

A. Committee Updates

Robert Rogers reported that Covid HVAC grant funds have been spent and the work completed, i.e., air purifiers and air quality monitors have been installed, and screens delivered and ready for installation.

Most of the Facilities Committee meeting focused on capital planning for next 2-3 years. This will include getting the doors done and some additional security items. The Committee is also looking at potential sustainability projects and is continuing to identify possible committee members.

VIII. Development

A. March Development Report

Fallon Burke began by reporting that Laurie Kennedy will chair the Development Committee. She then reviewed the March Development Report, pointing out that donor information is now more detailed and that expenses for the school play are being logged differently.

B. REACH for College Gala Updates

We are a little behind last year, not surprising as 2024 was a special 20th anniversary event. That said, we need to push sponsorships and now have sponsorship information in Spanish as well as English. She encouraged everyone to purchase their tickets now and help solicit items for our live and silent auctions.

C. Trustee Engagement

Trustee giving is more important than ever given the budget uncertainties we are facing, but it is participation that is most important. Fallon will continue to have one-on-one conversations with trustees about how they can be involved.

IX. Governance

A. Committee Updates

Jeff Whitmore covered a number of disparate topics in his report:

- He has been in touch with Chris Espinoza of Latinos for Education, and we are waiting to hear about candidates to review.

- All trustees are now involved in committees, all committees have chairs in place, and all new trustees now have mentors.
- Pre-planning for the September Board retreat, date TBD, is underway; Mike Mizzoni of Board on Track has volunteered to facilitate the retreat.
- We had a good response to our trustee survey. MCPSA will give us a personalized dashboard by April, which will help identify our strengths and weaknesses compared to statewide data.
- DESE is reviewing our by laws and will report back to us by mid April.
- All trustees are encouraged to fill out their online profile.

X. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Amy Stewart moved to adjourn, seconded by Chris Graham. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:52 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelby Hypes

Documents used during the meeting

None