

APPROVED



## Salem Academy Charter School

### Minutes

#### Board of Trustees Meeting

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##### **Date and Time**

Wednesday April 30, 2025 at 6:00 PM

##### **Location**

45 Congress St.  
Salem, MA 01970

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This meeting took place in person at Salem Academy Charter School located at 45 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970.

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##### **Trustees Present**

Amy Stewart, Domina DiBiase, Edward Aroko, Jeffrey Whitmore, Kara McLaughlin, Laurie Kennedy (remote), Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Rich Cowdell, Robert Rogers

##### **Trustees Absent**

Chris Graham, Sal Martinez, Toyuwa Newton

##### **Guests Present**

Fallon Burke, Shelby Hypes, Stephanie Callahan

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#### **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 Apr 30, 2025 at 6:07 PM.

### **C. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

### **D. Approve Minutes**

Nohara Lopez-Okoli made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 03-26-25.

Amy Stewart seconded the motion.

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

## **II. SFC Report**

### **A. SFC Updates**

SFC Moderator Bessie Marashi reported the following:

- Micah Hapworth will be the SFC moderator next year; she will also continue to fulfill her current duties as treasurer. She is well known and will be good at encouraging participation.
- Fifty-one senior essays for the Rachel Hunt Award are currently being read by parent reviewers.
- Plans are in the works for the Teacher/Staff Appreciation lunch at the end of May.
- Leni De los Santos is sending the survey to determine who will receive the Sean O'Neil Award.
- Last month's meeting featured a speaker who talked about the Nan Project, which addresses the role parents can play in preventing teen suicide.
- Flowers have been ordered for graduation and plans for the 3.8 Brunch and other graduation activities will be the SFC's focus in the weeks ahead.

## **III. Chair Report**

### **A. Updates from Board Chair**

Kara McLaughlin reported that the Cummings Foundation site visit went well. This \$75,000/year, three-year grant supports our college/alumni success program. With several alums on hand to talk about how the program has helped them stay in school, get the courses they need, etc., it was clear that Melissa Lappen and Bernie Peeples have established strong relationships that are having a positive impact on our alumni.

Kara asked about Board participation in the Faculty/Staff Appreciation lunch. In the past, the Board has hosted a successful morning coffee “meet and greet,” separate from the luncheon. We will do this again, scheduling it on a day when there are no AP tests; 7:45 to 9 AM is a good time for both trustees and teachers. Kara will work with Fallon Burke on this.

#### **IV. ED Report**

##### **A. School Updates**

Stephanie Callahan reported that we did receive a Teacher Diversification grant from DESE again; this will be used for professional development training and workshops focused on supporting a welcoming and diverse school culture.

Two finalists have been selected for the Upper School Principal position; Melissa Lappen is an internal candidate; Dana Watson is an educational consultant in Washington, DC. Many stakeholders—parents, staff, faculty, etc.—have been involved in the process of narrowing the field from eight candidates to the two finalists. After extensive interviews, observation and discussion, the instructional leadership team is now evaluating how each would add value to our priorities, work with our team, etc.

While the above position has been the focus of the hiring season to date, we have a number of positions to fill. We had many new hires last year, not all of whom have worked out for reasons that range from relocation to the realization that either teaching in general or at Salem Academy was not a good fit for them. Hiring in the past was very competitive due to a nationwide teacher shortage and the availability of Covid funds. Those funds are gone, and, locally, strikes have resulted in significant pay raises, so there may be fewer positions available.

Last, with the approaching end of the school year, many activities are included in the ED’s written report, e.g., College Decision Day, our Service Learning Fair, Senior Caregiver Appreciation Night.

#### **V. Education**

##### **A. High School Graduation Requirements & Competency Determination**

Now that passing the MCAS is no longer a statewide graduation requirement, it is up to each district to determine its own graduation requirements as well as how it will certify that students have shown proficiency in 10th grade MA standards for English, Math, and one Science course.

Graduation Requirements

At Salem Academy, we will continue to use standards-based grading practices, and students will continue to take MCAS tests, which remain a valid means of measuring performance. To graduate, students must either pass the MCAS exams or meet expectations through other means, such as a portfolio, rather than re-take the MCAS exams until they pass. This approach, similar to the current Educational Proficiency Plan (EPP) protocol, allows more flexibility and customization, which is especially helpful for students with disabilities.

The Education Committee proposed the following motion, which was approved unanimously via roll call vote:

“All Salem Academy students are required to take all state-mandated MCAS assessments for English, Math, and one Science/Technology/Engineering course and must meet expectations; if they do not pass, results will be reviewed to create a SACS Education Proficiency Plan aligned to areas of improvement identified by the MCAS.”

#### Competency Determination

The Education Committee proposed the following motion, which was approved unanimously via roll call vote:

“All students will be required to take and earn proficiency in courses aligned to the 10th grade MA standards for English, Math, and Biology. This means earning a 3.0+ in English 10, Algebra 1, Geometry, and Biology. If students do not earn a 3.0 or higher by the end of the course, they will be required to attend Summer School to do so.”

## **B. Progress Toward Committee Goals**

Rich Cowdell reported the following:

- The Multi-Lingual Program review by DESE went very well; Rich recognized the excellent contributions of Anna Kogos, our Multi-Lingual Learning Coordinator. Nonetheless, DESE requires that all ML students have access to Spanish classes. This did not happen this year due scheduling conflicts but will be addressed through English classes next year. All teachers now have SEI endorsement.
- We are making good progress on lowering the number of students classified as chronically absent; seniors are still a concern as, historically, their attendance drops toward the end of the school year.

- Lower School academic intervention programs are providing good support in all three grades. The Win Block at the high school is supporting 9th and 10th graders as well, but we will evaluate the effectiveness of our programs before the end of the school year and are already planning to start academic intervention earlier in the next school year, based on EOY data.

Despite significant progress on the above, we are not on track to hit our goal of raising our ability to meet accountability measures by 15% over prior year. We do hope to gain points for the growth we have made.

Due to focus on the above, we have not made progress as yet on adding a new trustee with educational experience.

## **VI. Finance**

### **A. March Financials**

Amy Stewart reported no significant changes or red flags in our financial performance. The Committee's focus is on EOY purchases and capital expenses, given the uncertainty of funding in the year ahead.

### **B. Progress Toward Committee Goals**

In the process of adding financial milestone dates to the calendar, it became apparent that our Financial Policies and Procedures Manual needs updating. This is now a new goal for the committee and will be subject to an annual review going forward.

No progress has been made on the goal to identify potential new trustees.

## **VII. Facilities**

### **A. Progress Toward Committee Goals**

Robert Rogers reported the following:

- Short-term space planning is no longer an issue as our expansion request was denied; not much is happening on the long-term planning front.
- Facilities is working with the Finance Committee to identify upcoming needs and cost estimates.
- The Committee is also exploring sustainability initiatives, such as green electricity and possibly having Root provide our lunch.
- The Committee has some leads for possible new trustees.

## **VIII. Development**

### **A. April Development Report**

Fallon Burke reported that we now have nearly \$30,000 in pledged sponsorships. With anticipated revenues of around \$10-15,000 from the giving wall, silent and live auctions, we are hoping the Gala will raise between \$40,000 and \$50,000. We are on track to reach our Annual Fund goal of \$110,000.

### **B. REACH for College Gala Updates**

Nohara Lopez Okoli has been working to get great prizes for our auctions, including a signed Celtics basketball. The silent auction goes live the first week of May, and trustees are encouraged to share this information with others.

### **C. Progress Toward Committee Goals**

Laurie Kennedy reported progress on all four committee goals.

1. As stated above, we are optimistic about reaching our Annual Fund Goal.
2. The Committee is reviewing templates for a Development calendar, which will be a good tool for tracking our Annual Fund progress.
3. Because of the focus on the Gala, the Committee has not spoken with all trustees individually about their role in Development.
4. The Committee has yet to identify prospective trustees with development experience.

## **IX. Governance**

### **A. Progress Toward Committee Goals**

Jeff Whitmore reported on several initiatives:

- Robert Carpenter, our contact at MCPSA, has emailed a link to our self-assessment results dashboard. On May 2, he will give a seminar on what's in it and how to read it.
- Kara McLaughlin emailed suggestions to everyone for using LinkedIn to identify prospective Board members. We have two prospects currently: a woman with an MBA in Marketing suggested by Latinos for Education, and an architect identified through LinkedIn search whom Mark Meche was able to introduce us to.

- The mentoring program is active, all new trustees have been assigned mentors, and a mentor description is in the works.
- Planning continues for the strategic retreat in September, date and goals TBD. Mike Mizzoni from Board on Track will facilitate and may do a presentation.
- We have not yet received feedback from DESE on our Bylaws update.
- All Board and committee goals have been input into Board on Track, along with progress steps.

Several trustees noted problems with email or access to Board on Track; Fallon will look into this.

## **X. Other Business**

### **A. HR Committee Report**

Kara McLaughlin noted that the HR Committee report needs to be added to our monthly agenda. Eddie Aroko indicated there are no updates at this time.

## **XI. Closing Items**

### **A. Adjourn Meeting**

Amy Stewart made a motion to adjourn.

Jeffrey Whitmore seconded the motion.

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

The meeting ended at 7:51 PM

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:51 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Shelby Hypes

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## **Documents used during the meeting**

- Executive Director Report 4.30.25.pdf
- High School Competency Policy Proposal.pdf
- March Financials Summary.pdf
- Salem FY25 Financials\_March.xlsx
- Development Reports FY25 - 4.30.25.pdf