

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Wednesday May 28, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

45 Congress St.
Salem, MA 01970

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees met at Salem Academy Charter School located at 45 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970.

Trustees Present

Chris Graham (remote), Domina DiBiase, Kara McLaughlin, Laurie Kennedy, Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Rich Cowdell, Sal Martinez (remote)

Trustees Absent

Amy Stewart, Edward Aroko, Jeffrey Whitmore, Robert Rogers, Toyuwa Newton

Guests Present

Andrea Jacobs, Fallon Burke, Melissa Lassen, Shelby Hypes, Stephanie Callahan

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B.

Call the Meeting to Order

Chair Kara McLaughlin called the meeting to order at 6:10 pm. A round of quick introductions welcomed two prospective trustees, Ilene Vogel and Giselle Ortega.

C. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

D. Approve Minutes

Domina DiBiase made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 04-30-25.

Rich Cowdell seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

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

II. SFC Report

A. SFC Updates

Bessie Marashi reported that the presentation by The NAN Project at the last SFC meeting was well-received and was very helpful. This program focuses on teen depression, anxiety, and suicide prevention. Both high school and college kids talked about their experiences. There were many Lower School parents and Spanish speakers attending, and translation was provided.

The SFC is focused on upcoming events, including the Teacher/Staff Appreciation Breakfast on June 9th, the 3.8 Brunch on June 17th, and, of course, high school graduation on June 6th. Balloons, flowers, etc. have been ordered, as have the tee shirts for our 8th grade graduation on June 17th.

The recipient of the Rachel Hunt award has been chosen, and the SFC is now considering the three final candidates for the Sean O'Neil Award. Bessie explained these awards briefly for the benefit of our guests.

As this is Bessie's last meeting, Kara McLaughlin presented her with flowers and a card of appreciation from the Board for her many contributions to Salem Academy.

III. Chair Report

A. Updates from Board Chair

Kara McLaughlin requested volunteers to help with the Teacher/Staff Appreciation and Board Meet and Greet Breakfast. Rich Cowdell, and possibly Domina DiBiase, and Nohara Lopez-Okoli offered to help.

IV. ED Report

A. School Updates

Stephanie Callahan attended the Latino Educators Shine Awards, at which Ana Brea received citations from both the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives.

Trustees Kara McLaughlin, Laurie Kennedy, and Amy Stewart, plus two current Salem Academy students and two alums joined the Read Trust annual visit, which went well. Our new funding requests include a math interventionist, an additional graduation prize, and a new Lower School science curriculum, which Salem Public Schools will also be inaugurating next fall. The Read representatives asked how they could help in the current financially uncertain environment; we shared anticipated entitlement funds scenarios and indicated that an additional contribution would be appreciated if a worst-case scenario develops.

Stephanie also reported that we received a \$16,000 civics grant and that our Service-Learning Fair will take place Friday, May 30th. We look forward to welcoming Mayor Pangallo, Superintendent Zrilke, and Sarah Roy, Director of the Salem Children's Alliance, among others.

On the hiring front, Stephanie announced that Melissa Lassen, currently our Director of College Counseling and Post-Secondary Success, has been selected as our new Upper School Principal.

V. Education

A. College Counseling & Post-Secondary Success Department Updates

Melissa Lassen reported that the Going Merry scholarship platform has proven to be a good clearing house for students to find and track possible scholarships. What is really proving helpful, however, is that we now have a way of determining the cost per student based on their Student Aid Index (SAI). Comparing this to the schools where students commit shows that 85% of the time we are meeting our goal of a \$10,000 or less gap between the cost of the school and their ability, with financial aid, to pay. This means students are making sound, financial decisions.

She reviewed our college readiness program grade by grade, explaining how understanding college and preparing for it is integral to the Salem Academy curriculum and culture. Activities and classes by grade are detailed in her written report, as are demographic data and details on college applications and acceptances. Additionally, she described how we celebrate Decision Day with cupcakes made by faculty and staff and representing all of the colleges to which seniors have committed as well as teachers' alma maters. Teachers also share their college experiences with students.

Melissa also responded to a variety of questions.

- This is the first year we will be sending a graduate to Tufts.
- SATs are offered both in the spring of junior year and in the following fall. We send test results when appropriate, but not always.
- Likely funding cuts will mean that some alumni-oriented programs will not be available.

B. Q3 Academic Report

We are very much in testing season, as Andrea Jacobs reported. Attendance was strong for the 10th grade MCAS last week; 100% of our sophomores took both English and Math MCAS, a testament to their feeling prepared and in high spirits. Overall, testing preparedness has been a focus of this past year, and we are cautiously optimistic our efforts will result in strong performances.

We continue to monitor chronic absenteeism and are already ahead of our Lower School goal (14.4%) with a current projection of 12.3%, a reflection of the advisory system implemented this year. While senior absenteeism is especially problematic at the end of the year, 10th graders have a very low absentee rate, a reflection of strong veteran teachers who are good at communicating with families.

Progress in reaching our accountability goal of having 90% of students passing all classes varies. In general, we are on track in the Lower School, while progress in the Upper School differs by grade, by subject and by subgroup.

We are paying particular attention to math and now have some strong young teachers on hand. This added staff capacity and schedule will enable us to run two 9th grade algebra classes and two 10th grade MCAS classes. There will also be more options for students who are more proficient in math, including adding both AP Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus.

C. Progress Toward Committee Goals

VI. Finance

A. April Financials

Chris Graham reported that our April financials remain strong and stable. The Finance Committee is considering initiating a strategic/capital reserve where any budget surpluses can be set aside for future use.

B.

FY26 Draft Budget

The budget for FY26 is in progress and will be presented at our next meeting. In the meantime, we have received updated revenue projections, which are \$173,000 lower than previously announced but still slightly above our own more conservative budget figures. Some cost shavings will be required.

In another matter, at the state level, facilities budgeting, which affects charter schools, is still being considered by the Senate.

C. Auditor Nomination

On behalf of the Finance Committee, Chris Graham moved that our longtime auditor, Daniel Dennis and Company continue to be our auditor for the coming fiscal year. Per our finance policy, this is now an annual nomination. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

D. Progress Toward Committee Goals

Work continues on the common goal of the Finance Committee and the Facilities Committee is to consider initiating a strategic/capital reserve where any budget surpluses can be set aside for future use.

VII. Facilities

A. Progress Toward Committee Goals

As indicated above, the Facilities Committee, in collaboration with the Finance Committee, is continuing to outline and prioritize anticipated capital improvement expenses. This is where a strategic/capital reserve fund could play a role although, given today's uncertain economic environment, that will not happen this year.

We are currently looking at a new PA system, another recommendation from the Ed Davis safety assessment of three years ago. Today, announcements are made through the phone system, which does not reach all areas of the school. Another need is for interactive whiteboards.

VIII. Development

A. May Development Report

Targeted outreach and our end-of-year appeal are in the works to ensure we reach our \$110,000 Annual Fund goal.

B. REACH for College Gala Update

Fallon Burke began with a shout out to everyone who helped make the REACH for College Gala a success. The Gala raised just under \$48,000, and, with outstanding pledges and other anticipated donations, we are within \$1000 of reaching our \$110,000 Annual Fund goal.

C. Progress Toward Committee Goals

Laurie Kennedy reported that, with the Gala over, the Development Committee will refocus on discussing trustee engagement individually with all Board members. The goal is now to create a culture of continuous giving. The Committee will work on this over the summer.

IX. Governance

A. Progress Toward Committee Goals

Kara McLaughlin reported that the Governance Committee is actively focused on building Board membership, as evidenced by the presence of two prospective trustees. She also noted the committee is working on succession planning.

Other Governance Committee activities include the following:

- We have begun the annual ED review process with a staff survey.
- There has been no word to date from DESE on approval of our bylaws revisions.
- The Committee is meeting with Board on Track re our strategic retreat in September, date TBD.
- The Committee will report on the Board self-assessment at our next meeting.

X. Other Business

A. Essex County Community Foundation

The Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF) Institute for Trustees is in progress, with many informative workshops available, via zoom as well as in person.

XI. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Rich Cowdell moved to adjourn, seconded by Nohara Lopez-Okoli. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelby Hypes

B. Documents Referenced in Meeting

Academic Report 5/28/25
College Counseling and Post Secondary Success Class of 2025
Development Report May 2025
Executive Director Report 5/28/25
Minutes of Board of Trustees Meeting 4/30/25
Salem FY25 Financials 4/30/25

Documents used during the meeting

- Executive Director Report 5.28.25.pdf
- Academic Report 5.28.25.pdf
- Salem FY25 Financials April (1).xlsx
- Development Reports FY25 - May 2025.pdf