

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Wednesday November 19, 2025 at 5:30 PM

Location

Salem Academy Charter School
45 Congress St.
Salem, MA 01970

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees will meet at 5:30 PM. This meeting will take place in-person at Salem Academy Charter School located at 45 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970.

Trustees Present

Chris Graham, Domina DiBiase, Edward Aroko, Giselle Ortega, Ilene Vogel, Jeff Whitmore, Kara McLaughlin, Nohara Lopez-Okoli (remote), Rich Cowdell, Robert Rogers

Trustees Absent

Amy Stewart, Laurie Kennedy, Toyuwa Newton

Guests Present

Blake Cullimore, Drea Jacobs, Fallon Burke, Imelda Barnhurst, Melissa Lassen, 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 Nov 19, 2025 at 5:39 PM.

Kara welcomed prospective trustees Imelda Barnhurst and Blake Cullimore.

C. Public Comment

None

D. Approve Minutes

Motion to approve the minutes fro Board of Trustees Meeting on 10-22-25.

The minutes of October 22, 2025, were amended as follows:

V. C. Human Resources

...This will include surveying staff and will address such topics as our longer school day and year.

V.D. MCAS & Accountability Results

...We are in the 86th percentile of all (130) combined middle/high schools in Massachusetts.

Jeff Whitmore moved to accept the minutes as amended. Eddie Aroko seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote.

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

II. Chair Report

A. Updates from the Board Chair

Kara McLaughlin began her report noting the full agenda covering many topics. The following discussions and supporting documentation should provide the information required for committees to begin thinking about their 2026 goals. She also noted that the discussion about the Executive Director's evaluation is not the actual evaluation but is conversation intended to identify themes and provide feedback for Kara and Rich Cowdell to draft the formal evaluation scheduled for the December meeting.

III. Education

A. VOTE: Charter Amendment Request - Revised Enrollment Policy (backfill grades 10-12)

In October, the Board voted to pursue a charter amendment that would expand backfilling admissions to grades 10-12. This reflected the fact that, due to attrition and a no-backfill policy, this year's sophomore class is 20% smaller than last year's sophomore class. Accordingly, Stephanie Callahan proposed the following wording, changes highlighted.

Changes in the Admissions Overview:

Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) is a public charter school that operates as an independent school district, which serves students in grades 6-12. Salem Academy is open to all Massachusetts students on a space available basis. Applications to Salem Academy are not integrated with those of the Salem Public School District; therefore, a separate application process for the district is required. Salem Academy accepts applications for admission in grades 6-12, and also backfills vacancies in grades 6-9 from the waiting list when they arise to meet statutory requirements. SACS may backfill openings in 10th-12th grades due to cohort size, staffing needs, academic needs, financial needs, or any other reason that SACS deems necessary. This level of enrollment is in accordance with Salem Academy's current 480 maximum student enrollment cap and the pre-enrollment submission to the Department in the previous spring in accordance with 603CMR 1.08 (5).

Changes in the Application Process:

3. ...The lottery is open to the public and all are welcome to watch online.

Changes in Lottery:

Salem Academy will run an electronic lottery using Rediker Software, which has been certified as a randomized lottery mechanism.

Changes in Waitlist:

...Students on the waitlist will be notified of the offer of admission by email and mail...

Changes in Enrollment Process & Confirmation

Families who receive an offer of admission, from either the lottery or from the waitlist, between the principal lottery date and May 31st, will have two weeks to accept the offer. Families that receive an offer of admission after May 31st or during the school year for which they applied, will have 3 business days to accept an offer of admission.

...The School's homeless liaison will work with students who may be considered homeless on a case-by-case basis to support them during the application process and to complete any additional enrollment paperwork, as they are able, if they are to gain admission.

Domina DiBiase moved to approve the charter amendment request with Stephanie's above edits. The motion was seconded by Chris Graham and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. Committee Updates

Rich Cowdell indicated that all of the topics in the Academic Report below are discussed thoroughly in committee. The staff anticipates trustee questions and is prepared with answers. Many new students have lower performance scores and higher rates of absenteeism than the students they replaced, which makes statistical improvement difficult. He commended the staff on their hard work and noted that MTSS is going strong.

C. Academic Report

Drea Jacobs reviewed MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) test results, noting that this is the second year we have used this test, and the first year we've used it in the tenth grade. MAP data pinpoints where students' math and English skills have gaps and allows teachers to reteach or intervene more precisely. MAP testing has been accepted enthusiastically at Salem Academy. There will be shorter checkpoint tests in December and January and more comprehensive testing next May. MAP is particularly helpful because it compares skill levels of our students to a very large number of students at the same grade level nationwide.

Highlights of the report, which was presented fully in printed form, were as follows:

- Reading and language usage scores remain stronger compared to the national averages, with 40-55% of 6th-9th graders performing in the top two quintiles on both tests. Tenth graders also showed relative strength, although fewer students scored in the highest quintiles.
- Seventh and eighth graders improved in math, although 75% or more students in 6th, 9th and 10th grade are performing below the 60th percentile. Ninth and tenth grade cohorts did show significant growth. Drea noted that this year's 10th grade class is very different from last year's due to significant attrition.
- There was not a lot of loss of learning from spring to fall results. Students are more invested and interested in their results.

Lower School interim tests allow teachers to see data and determine needed action. Learning to understand the data, then develop and share strategies for improvement has been a focus of Lower School Principal Sabrina Williams.

In regard to Upper School PSATs:

- In the 11th grade, a higher percentage of students met/exceeded readiness for college goals and fewer students were in the not-yet-approaching category.
- The 12th grade remains an outlier cohort, with comparatively lower scores than last year's seniors.
- Overall, we are far still well below pre-Covid scores, a reflection of the lower importance PSATs and SATs may hold for students, as SATs are no longer required by many colleges. They do, however, provide good information.

Drea also provided a MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) update. MTSS looks at SEL and social as well as academic issues. Tiers range from general classroom action to small group to individual intervention, all designed to identify problems early and provide both behavioral and academic support. Details at both LS and US levels are provided in her written report.

Last, Drea addressed the issue of chronic absenteeism. Because we met our goals last year, this year's goals are more aggressive, but we believe we can meet them. We are actively communicating the importance of school attendance to families as well as students, making phone calls, finding out why students are absent, and providing assistance where needed, e.g., gift cards for transportation.

All of the data mentioned above is useless if we don't allow time to review, analyze and plan responses. We are actively doing so.

We are also making efforts to prevent 8th graders from leaving. We are starting earlier this year, having family meetings, suggesting shadowing dates, and ascertaining how high school decisions are made. For some families, it is a parental decision, for others, it is more the student's decision. We lose students after 8th grade for various reasons: private schools, larger schools, vocational programs, sports opportunities, and because they want to be with their friends. We lose the most students to Essex Tech and Salem High School.

IV. Executive Director Evaluation

A. ED Evaluation

Staff members Stephanie Callahan, Drea Jacobs, and Melissa Lassen left the room prior to this discussion. Kara McLaughlin thanked everyone for completing the survey; our newest trustees did not participate in the survey but were invited to review and discuss the results with the rest of the board. Survey results were then distributed and Kara provided time for everyone to read and review them. Trustees were then divided into

pairs to discuss and highlight what they believed were the key takeaways from of the survey.

There was general consensus on all questions, with all pairs commenting on Stephanie's strong and extremely capable leadership, her strategic focus and awareness of what is happening in all areas and levels. The biggest area of opportunity concerns staff and student retention, both of which have significant ripple effects on staff workloads, school culture stability, funding, and the ability to grow.

The Board recognized that reaching some goals is not always within the ED's control. Responses also focused on what the Board can do to help the ED. Suggestions included attending more events, not just Board meetings, identifying meetings where the ED does not have to be present, and encouraging the importance of a good work/life balance.

Kara McLaughlin and Rich Cowdell will write a formal evaluation based on this discussion, the survey results, as well as all of the other relevant information that was available to board members when they completed the survey.

V. Governance

A. Committee Updates

Jeff Whitmore noted that two prospective trustees, Imelda Barnhurst and Blake Cullimore are attending this meeting, and a third candidate with legal and HR experience is under consideration. It is always good to have prospects in the pipeline and serving as committee members.

The Governance Committee will propose the 2026 officers slate at our December meeting. Jeff noted that most committee chair assignments involve approximately 1.5 additional hours per month in terms of a time commitment.

B. 2025 Board Assessment Results

Board Assessment results were provided in the printed materials and are available to trustees online. Discussion was limited, however, as Board membership has changed significantly in the past year, making it difficult if not impossible to evaluate the Board's effectiveness. It was noted that many previously identified issues are being addressed, e.g., Board composition and diversity. One area for future discussion concerns succession planning.

VI. Finance

A. October Financials

October financials remain strong; the budget is very tight, however, especially in light of increased expenses, e.g., utilities, accounting and legal fees. There were no questions.

B. Nominate FY26 Auditor

On behalf of the Finance Committee, Chris Graham moved to nominate Daniel Dennis as our auditor once again. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

VII. Development

A. Committee Updates

Fallon Burke reported that we raised \$2,600 for our Emergency Fund, a response to the recent SNAP crisis and to possible future financial hardship for some families if funding for federal programs on which they depend is cut. We are gearing up for Giving Tuesday and our EOY campaign; closing December strong generates energy for the rest of the fiscal year.

Fallon ended her report noting the individual conversations with trustees are continuing. She mentioned the Mobile Mayor's Office, scheduled to take place at Salem Academy on November 20th and reminded everyone to mark their calendars for the Reach for College Gala on May 1st.

VIII. Facilities

A. Committee Updates

Robert Rogers reported on several ongoing minor projects. Prime will repair the green wall by the cafeteria and will address the flood damage in the Albright Center. We have permission to hang banners in the gym. Repairing/replacing kitchen counters, originally planned for last year, are now underway.

Looking ahead, we are submitting grants to fund several projects, such as the new PA system. The Committee is 2026 goals, looking closely at long-term space issues and considering how to recruit new trustees.

IX. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Ilene Vogel moved to adjourn, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 8:17 PM.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelby Hypes

Documents used during the meeting

- Enrollment Policy Updates October 2025.pdf
- Academic Report 11.19.25.pdf
- Salem_Academy_Charter_School_-_BED_Report_2025__1_.pdf
- October 2025 Financials.pdf
- Salem Financials October.xlsx
- Development Reports FY26 - 11.19.25.pdf