

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Education Committee Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday December 16, 2025 at 8:00 AM

The Salem Academy Charter School Education Committee will meet via Zoom.

Zoom Link: <https://salemacademy.cs.zoom.us/j/98254822222>

Committee Members Present

Domina DiBiase (remote), Drea Jacobs (remote), Melissa Lassen (remote), Rich Cowdell (remote), Sabrina Williams (remote), Sarah Morrill (remote), Stephanie Callahan

Committee Members Absent

None

Committee Members who left before the meeting adjourned

Domina DiBiase, Melissa Lassen, Sabrina Williams

Guests Present

Fallon Burke (remote)

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B.

Call the Meeting to Order

Rich Cowdell called a meeting of the Education Committee of Salem Academy Charter School to order on Tuesday Dec 16, 2025 at 8:05 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Domina DiBiase made a motion to approve the minutes from Education Committee Meeting on 11-18-25.

Stephanie Callahan seconded the motion.

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

II. Education Committee Reports

A. VOTE: Competency Determination

Drea Jacobs updated the Education Committee on recent changes to the state's Competency Determination (CD) requirements. While Salem Academy developed its own CD policy in the spring after districts were first charged with creating local policies, DESE has since issued updated guidance that requires revisions. Under the new framework, each district's CD policy must clearly outline the specific coursework that qualifies in each required subject, the measures used to determine mastery, considerations for students with disabilities, English learners, and late-enrolling students, limited circumstances in which MCAS scores may be used, the appeals process for students who are denied a CD, and the process for transcript reviews.

For Salem Academy, the CD for the Class of 2026 will include English, Math, and Biology. Beginning with the Class of 2027, U.S. History will be added as an additional required subject. There are no changes to overall graduation requirements. The updated policy expands eligible coursework to include AP English, Physics, and multiple U.S. History courses. It also addresses late-arriving students, aligned with the school's amendment request to backfill grades 10–12, and creates a formal process for transcript review and individualized competency pathways for students who enter Salem Academy after 9th grade.

Domina DiBiase made a motion to vote to approve the Competency Determination.

Sarah Morrill seconded the motion.

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

B. School Updates

Drea, Sabrina, and Melissa shared school updates as the community prepares for Winter Break in four days. In the Lower School, students participated in a Surprise FAB event last week, Service-Learning Day 5 took place on Friday, and a Winter Dance is planned for January. Interim assessments are being administered this week to close out the quarter before the break.

In the Upper School, the Homecoming dance in November was very well attended and fully student-led. The school has added both a Student Government advisor and a Yearbook advisor, strengthening student leadership opportunities. A celebratory event was held following midterms, and Form Team Leaders met with Melissa Lassen to align on strategies to end the quarter strong. MAP testing was completed last week for 9th and 10th graders, and the school is supporting several teacher transitions related to family leave.

C. MTSS Updates

Sabrina Williams shared Lower School MTSS updates, noting that the team is “knee deep” in implementing the Academic Support Block (ASB). A guidance document created by the Managing Director of Student Services outlining the different MTSS tiers—along with feedback from teachers and school leadership—was condensed by Sabrina into a two-page summary table to support staff. Interim Assessments are taking place this week, followed by data retreats and a scheduled planning session on January 5 to restructure ASB rosters based on student performance. Sabrina noted growing teacher buy-in, with staff approaching the process thoughtfully and constructively. The team has also reinforced that ASB is not intended to function as a homework club or recess. Recently, IXL and Chromebooks were integrated into the block to better assess student skill levels, and pod time (Humanities and STEM) is being used to collaboratively plan for more targeted academic support.

Melissa Lassen provided updates on Upper School MTSS, sharing that the Academic Support Block currently looks different in every classroom due to scheduling and system limitations, including the lack of a robust student information system. The team is experimenting with different approaches and using the block to help students prepare for upcoming midterms, while continuing to refine how the time will be used in Quarter 3. A major challenge is that ASB occurs at the end of the day, when student engagement and behavior can be more difficult to manage. The shared timing also requires all Upper School students to be scheduled simultaneously, which creates space and tracking challenges. Despite these obstacles, the Upper School is working to create much smaller support groups and has identified a need to strengthen Tier 1 instruction as a foundation for the MTSS model.

Melissa Lassen left at 8:45 AM.

Sabrina Williams left at 8:46 AM.

D. School Council Updates

The committee noted that a community member still needs to be identified to serve on the School Council. Stephanie recommended exploring a partnership with LEAP for Education, and Drea will reach out to identify a potential candidate.

III. Education Committee Goals

A. 2026 Goal Setting

Last year, the committee set a goal to improve MCAS accountability performance by 15% across all areas. That goal was largely achieved, and Salem Academy was recognized by DESE as a School of Recognition. Building on that success, the committee discussed a new accountability goal for the current year.

Goal 1 – Accountability:

The proposed goal is to increase overall accountability performance by 10%, from 62% to 68%, across all accountability measures for both the Lower and Upper Schools. This would include indicators in achievement, student growth, graduation rate, advanced coursework (AP), and chronic absenteeism. The lowest-performing subgroup refers to students who have been enrolled at SACS for two or more years and fall in the bottom quarter of performance. The committee discussed whether this goal is ambitious yet achievable. Members noted that systems are already in place—particularly in the Lower School—to support this growth, though additional support will be needed in 9th and 10th grade. The committee agreed that while the goal is challenging, it is aligned with DESE expectations and supports the school's continued improvement trajectory.

Goal 2 – MTSS Implementation and Outcomes:

The committee also discussed a second goal focused on MTSS. Members debated whether this should be framed as an implementation goal, an outcome goal, or a combination of both. Drea and Sarah emphasized the value of measuring both student outcomes and internal implementation fidelity. The committee discussed the importance of strengthening Tier 1 instruction, building staff capacity to use data effectively, and creating clearer structures for Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. MAP data was identified as a potential tool for informing Tier 1 instruction and identifying students for MTSS, particularly in grades 6–10. There was also discussion about using this year as a capacity-building phase—focusing on training, data use, and teacher practice—so that a stronger, more consistent MTSS model can be launched next year.

Members noted that in the Lower School, systems are working well, but teachers still need more tools and training to apply data effectively. In the Upper School, logistical and scheduling challenges make MTSS more difficult, especially since support blocks occur at the end of the day. The committee discussed the need for clearer data routines, professional development, and the identification of reading and math intervention programs to serve as Tier 2 supports. The goal would be to select and secure these programs by the end of Q3, provide training in Q4, and be ready for full implementation next year.

The committee agreed that the accountability goal will be finalized and voted on at the January meeting. Instructional leaders were asked to clarify and draft proposed goals connected to this work so the Education Committee can better support implementation.

Next Step:

Drea will reach out to the principals to request draft goals outlining priorities and areas where support is needed for the remainder of the school year.

Domina DiBiase left at 9:03 AM.

IV. Other Business

A. Development Update

Fallon provided a GivingTuesday update and Annual Fund December Appeal update.

V. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:23 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

- Competency Determination Policy 12.16.25.pdf
- LS Q1 x Q2 ASB Codification x Tier 1 MTSS Framework Plan.pdf