

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time

Wednesday December 17, 2025 at 6:00 PM

Location

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

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees will meet 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 (remote), Jeff Whitmore, Kara McLaughlin, Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Rich Cowdell, Robert Rogers

Trustees Absent

Laurie Kennedy, Toyuwa Newton

Guests Present

Beth O'Donnell, Drea Jacobs, Fallon Burke, 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 6:02 PM and welcomed prospective trustee Beth O'Donnell.

C. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

D. Approve Minutes

Jeff Whitmore moved to accept the minutes of November 19, 2025. The motion was seconded by Eddie Aroko and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Jeff Whitmore made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 11-19-25.

Edward Aroko seconded the motion.

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

II. Chair Report

A. Updates from the Board Chair

Kara McLaughlin reported that Amy Stewart has had to resign. She also discussed what the process that would need to be followed if it is ever necessary to remove a board member due to lack of participation. Per our current bylaws, we must send a certified letter informing the Trustee of the planned action, after which the Trustee would have 30 days to respond and the opportunity to address the board prior to any vote.

III. Executive Director (ED) Evaluation

A. ED Evaluation

Following last month's discussion, surveys and conversations, Kara McLaughlin and Rich Cowdell drafted the proposed formal evaluation presented this evening. It summarizes the strengths, areas for growth, methodology and terminology employed. The evaluation also reflects recommendations from Board on Track and the Board's focus on how we can help,

Stephanie cited the leadership team and involvement of Board committees, both of which are integral to the school's success. She noted the exciting progress we are making in different areas, including fundraising, staffing efforts, and compensation, which are significant in a tough environment.

Rich Cowdell moved to approve the Executive Director Evaluation, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. ED Goals

ED Goals

Student Learning Goals for 2025-2026 are a 10% improvement in meeting accountability targets, and meeting or exceeding the state-wide average on MCAS exams). These goals recognize several important factors:

- We need to be realistic in terms of achievability.
- Student cohorts change from year to year, making comparisons of this year's juniors to last year's, for instance, difficult
- DESE demands growth; it can be hard to maintain after a significant achievement
- We could miss an accountability target and still meet a growth target.

Rich Cowdell indicated that these are challenging goals, duplicate the Education Committee's goals, and reflect what we expect DESE to require.

The ED's Professional Practice Goal focuses on strengthening the faculty and staff team by reducing faculty attrition to 20% in 2026, not including retirements.

Schoolwide goals addressed facilities planning, development and school culture.

- We will be talking with Prime Group and documenting in writing negotiations regarding our current lease as this is the last of our five-year increments. We will also be drafting a plan to guide future facilities projects and long-term space needs.
- Development will look beyond reaching an Annual Fund goal by focusing on increasing non-tuition and non-entitlement grant funding by five percent from the current \$1+ million base.
- Last year, creating a safe and supportive school culture focused on getting new leaders on board. This year, the goal is building the capacity of the Instructional Leadership Team and Student Services Team to really understand, own, and reinforce Tier 1 interventions.

While facilities and development goals are measurable, progress in strengthening the school's culture may be reflected in fewer higher tier interventions and in senior management supporting rather than actually doing this work.

Domina DiBiase moved to approve the 2025-2026 ED goals. The motion was seconded by Jeff Whitmore and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

C. ED Contract

Jeff Whitmore moved to extend the Executive Director's contract by one year. Ilene Vogel seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote. The Board will send an official offer letter to Stephanie Callahan.

IV. Governance

A. Trustee Nomination

Jeff Whitmore presented Imelda Barnhurst, Blake Cullimore, and Beth O'Donnell as prospective trustees. Supporting résumés and nomination forms were provided in writing. They bring needed experience and perspective in several key areas. Imelda Barnhurst is an architect with an institutional background. She will serve on the Facilities Committee. Blake Cullimore is a Salem Academy parent and has a strong financial background that includes charter schools. He will serve on the Finance Committee. Beth O'Donnell, an attorney and the former Director of Human Resources for Peabody, MA, will be a member of the Governance and Human Resources Committees.

On behalf of the Governance Committee, Jeff moved to appoint these three candidates as trustees. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. 2026 Board Slate

Jeff Whitmore presented the 2026 Board of Trustees slate of officers and trustees. This included the including the Governance Committee, the membership of which, unlike other committees, must be officially approved by the Board.

On behalf of the Governance Committee, Jeff moved to accept both the slate and the Governance Committee. Following discussion concerning the inclusion of Toyuwa Newton as both a trustee and member of the Governance Committee, the motion was unanimously defeated via roll call vote.

Jeff then moved to accept only the Board of Trustees slate of officers and members. This was seconded by Nohara and passed unanimously via roll call vote. At this time, Toyuwa Newton remains a trustee.

In a separate motion, Jeff moved to approve membership of the Governance Committee, which will no longer include Toyuwa Newton.

Although no official votes were required, other changes include the following: Rich Cowdell will become Vice-Chair of the Board; Nohara Lopez-Okoli will serve as Secretary, and Chris Graham will serve as Treasurer. Domina DiBiase will chair Human Resources, and Eddie Aroko will become a volunteer member of that committee. Other committee chairs and members remain unchanged.

V. Education

A. Competency Determination

As Drea Jacobs indicated, we had put a competency determination policy in place in July 2025, following the elimination of MCAS proficiency as a requirement for graduation. The policy remains basically unchanged, just updated as required by DESE to include mastery of a U.S. history course aligned to the 10th grade standards in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Nohara Lopez-Okoli moved to accept the updated policy, seconded by Chris Graham. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote. We will submit this to DESE, and it will be available online.

VI. Finance

A. November Financials

Chris Graham presented the November financials, which remain solid. Facilities expenses are higher than budgeted but there may be some possible credits. Higher transportations costs were unavoidable but are stabilized now that the student involved lives in Salem.

VII. Development

A. Development Report & Campaign Updates

Development Report & Campaign Updates

We reached a new high for Giving Tuesday, \$8,600, as reported by Fallon Burke. She noted, however, that philanthropy is changing and foundations becoming more specific in what they support. For Salem Academy it means fundraising gains new importance in securing funding for programs that are unique to us and support our mission, such as paying for AP tests and college counseling. Accordingly, we are working to increase sponsorships and contacts to local or family foundations.

On a separate note, Rich Cowdell complimented Fallon on the excellent and highly engaging fundraising emails she has been sending.

VIII. Other Business

A. Recognition of Edward Aroko's Service

Kara McLaughlin presented Eddie Aroko with commemorative gifts as he concludes his second term as a trustee. Both Kara and Stephanie Callahan thanked him for his service, noting how important his presence and support as an alumnus has been to students. Eddie spoke to how important Salem Academy was in his life, especially service learning.

IX. Closing Items

A. Adjourn Meeting

Jeff Whitmore moved to adjourn, seconded by Domina DiBiase. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:35 PM.

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelby Hypes

Documents used during the meeting

- Executive_Director_Evaluation_Letter_2024-2025.pdf
- Callahan.Goals 2025-26.pdf
- IB_Resume_2025-08.pdf
- Cullimore_Resume_2025.3 (1).pdf
- Beth Brennan ODonnell Resume November 2025.pdf
- Board of Trustees Membership and Slate of Officers 2026 (Draft).docx.pdf
- Competency Determination Policy 12.16.25.pdf
- SACS November Financials 12.17.25.pdf
- Salem Financials November (2).xlsx
- Development Reports FY26 - 12.17.25.pdf