

APPROVED



Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Education Committee Meeting

Date and Time

Tuesday June 9, 2026 at 8:00 AM

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

Zoom Link: <https://salemacademy.cs.zoom.us/j/9876543210>

Committee Members Present

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

Committee Members Absent

Drea Jacobs

Committee Members who left before the meeting adjourned

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 Jun 9, 2026 at 8:03 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

II. Education Committee Reports

A. Upper School Updates

Melissa Lassen provided the committee with an end-of-year Upper School update and reflected on a series of questions shared by Rich Cowdell in advance of the meeting. The committee engaged in discussion and asked clarifying questions.

The committee discussed lessons learned from the instructional model during the school year. Sarah Morrill asked whether Melissa had observed differences between newer and more experienced teachers, and whether any patterns could inform future recruitment efforts. Discussion centered on the importance of hiring educators who are well-aligned with Salem Academy's instructional model and expectations.

Melissa shared that the school is continuing to strengthen its systems for collecting and analyzing instructional assessment and survey data. She noted that more consistent implementation of data collection processes, along with a fully staffed leadership team, will improve the school's ability to analyze trends and inform decision-making.

Melissa reflected on areas she would approach differently if restarting the school year, including developing a broader understanding of the Upper School principal role and maintaining greater consistency in upholding expectations.

The committee discussed how these reflections could inform hiring, professional development, and curriculum decisions. Rich Cowdell noted that the challenges facing the Upper School differ from those of the Lower School and should be considered when planning future supports and strategies.

No further action was taken after the discussion.

Melissa Lassen left at 8:15 AM.

B. Lower School Updates

Sabrina Williams provided the committee with an end-of-year Lower School update and reflected on a series of questions shared by Rich Cowdell in advance of the meeting. Sabrina noted that her written reflection document was color-coded to identify strengths, areas for growth, and action items. The committee engaged in discussion and asked clarifying questions.

The committee discussed lessons learned from the instructional model during the school year. Sabrina shared that student grades do not always align with performance on external assessments, highlighting an area for continued examination.

Sabrina discussed insights from instructional assessments and survey data as part of her overall reflection on the school year.

Sabrina shared that, if restarting the year, she would prioritize protecting more time for intellectual preparation and collaboration among staff. While content retreats were valuable, she noted that additional collaborative planning time would better support instructional quality.

Sabrina stated that her focus moving forward is not to introduce new initiatives, but to strengthen and improve existing practices. Rich Cowdell agreed that protecting staff from unnecessary change can be challenging but emphasized that maintaining consistency allows existing practices to be implemented more effectively. Sabrina also shared that she plans to review her reflections with the Lower School leadership team to gather additional feedback and inform future planning.

No further action was taken.

Sabrina Williams left at 8:25 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Domina DiBiase made a motion to approve the minutes from Education Committee Meeting on 04-14-26.

Sarah Morrill seconded the motion.

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

D. Hiring Update

Stephanie Callahan provided the committee with an update on staffing, recruitment, and hiring for the upcoming school year. The committee discussed current hiring efforts, staffing challenges, and potential strategies to strengthen recruitment and retention.

In response to an earlier question from Sarah Morrill regarding teacher pipelines and preparation, Stephanie discussed hiring and retention trends. She shared that the school experienced turnover, including mid-year departures, among newer teachers during the previous year. She noted that positions identified by DESE as hard-to-staff, particularly in math and computer science, continue to present recruitment challenges. While candidates may possess strong content knowledge, they do not always have formal teacher preparation or classroom experience.

Stephanie explained that Salem Academy's hiring process is designed to assess both instructional practice and the interpersonal competencies needed for success. Candidates participate in an initial screening, a demonstration lesson followed by observation and feedback, an opportunity to reflect on that feedback, and a formal interview. She noted that the school also places significant value on reference checks to better understand how candidates receive feedback and build relationships with students.

The committee discussed that transitioning to Salem Academy represents a significant change for both new and experienced educators. Stephanie shared that experienced teachers who have prior charter school experience or are seeking a shorter commute have generally transitioned more successfully into the school's model.

Stephanie also noted that Salem Academy does not currently have a consistent teacher preparation pipeline. The school continues to encourage current staff to pursue licensure, which could create additional student teaching and recruitment opportunities in the future.

Stephanie then shared the following staffing updates for the 2026–2027 school year:

- Sarah Sawyer will serve as Multilingual Coordinator after previously covering the family leave of the former coordinator.
- A former Special Education teacher has returned to Salem Academy in an 80% teaching role after previously returning part-time.
- A Salem Academy alumna and former Special Education teacher has joined the Student Services team as Student Success Coordinator after earning a master's degree in social work. Stephanie noted the position fills an immediate need and expressed hope that funding will be available to continue the role next year.
- Ben Petrides will transition to Physical Education, and a new Grade 7 ELA teacher has been hired.
- A new Grade 7 math teacher has been hired from a private school.
- Rebecca Bruno will transition from a part-time Special Education role back to teaching Grade 6 History and will also serve as the Grade 6 Form Team Leader.
- The Dean of Students resigned and departed earlier than anticipated.
- The search for a Special Education Director remains ongoing.

Committee members discussed broader workforce challenges affecting schools. Domina DiBiase noted that many educators are experiencing increased personal and professional challenges and expressed support for Salem Academy's strategy of recruiting former employees back to the organization.

Sarah Morrill suggested exploring mentorship opportunities by partnering staff pursuing licensure with experienced professionals who hold relevant credentials. Stephanie shared that, although Salem Academy has previously offered licensure reimbursement through grant funding, participation has remained limited. She suggested that partnerships with experienced educators from other districts could be explored as a potential pilot strategy.

Rich Cowdell expressed support for the ideas shared by Domina DiBiase and Sarah Morrill regarding creative recruitment and mentorship strategies.

No action was taken and no follow-up requests were made by the committee.

E. 2026 Committee Goals

The committee did not review progress toward its annual goals, as the state accountability results remain under embargo until late September. The committee will review progress toward its goals once the state accountability results are released later in the fall.

Stephanie Callahan noted that preliminary information from the spring MCAS administration will become available over the summer, including MCAS data released in June and July and preliminary accountability results expected in August. These data will provide an early indication of school performance. However, the committee will wait for the official accountability results before assessing progress toward its goals.

III. Other Business

A. Development Update

Stephanie Callahan and Fallon Burke provided the committee with an update on development and fundraising activities.

They shared recent grant awards, including:

- A \$20,000 grant from the Van Otterloo Foundation, representing new philanthropic support for Salem Academy.
- A \$50,000 grant from the Mifflin Memorial Fund, continuing the foundation's longstanding support of the school.

Stephanie and Fallon also reported that the school's FY26 Annual Fund goal has been achieved and noted that additional information about FY27 fundraising priorities and goals will be shared in the coming months.

The committee also received an update on the Foundation Board's recent mission and vision planning work. Stephanie shared that discussions are underway regarding a potential matching gift opportunity for the school's endowment, with additional details to be shared as plans are finalized.

IV. 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 8:59 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

- LS Ed Committee Reflection SY25-26.pdf
- Ed Committee EOY Lassen.pdf