APPROVED

Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Education Committee Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday July 7, 2026 at 8:00 AM

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

Zoom Link: https://salemacademycs.zoom.us/meeting/register/cdZuSnk9TEOYHKDV23at2Q

Committee Members Present
Domina DiBiase (remote), Rich Cowdell (remote), Sarah Morrill (remote)

Committee Members Absent
None

Guests Present
Drea Jacobs (remote), Fallon Burke (remote), Meghan Blume (remote), Sabrina Williams (remote), Stephanie Callahan (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 Jul 7, 2026 at 8:03 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Sarah Morrill made a motion to approve the minutes from Education Committee Meeting on 06-09-26.
Domina DiBiase seconded the motion.
with noted changes.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Education Committee Reports

A. Annual Report 2025-2026

Stephanie Callahan presented the draft Annual Report and provided an overview of its purpose, statutory requirements, and timeline for Board approval. The committee engaged in an informational review of the current draft, with members asking clarifying questions and providing feedback. No formal action was requested at this stage.

Stephanie reviewed the major sections of the report, including the school's mission and key design elements, faithfulness to the charter, organizational viability, and recruitment and retention efforts.

Criterion 1 – Mission and Key Design Elements
Stephanie explained that this section remains largely unchanged because it is drawn directly from the school's charter. Minor updates have been made to reflect current-year examples, including the Mayor's attendance at the Lower School Service-Learning Fair.

Criterion 2 – Access and Equity
The committee reviewed updates related to enrollment, selected student populations, and 2024–2025 student discipline data.

Criterion 4 – Dissemination
Stephanie reviewed revisions to the dissemination tables, which now distinguish dissemination activities involving district schools from those involving schools outside the district. Updates include participation by School Resource Officers in the school's ALICE training and Salem Academy's presentation at the DESE Dissemination Fair.

The committee discussed what constitutes dissemination under the Annual Report requirements. Sarah Morrill asked whether dissemination should reflect activities intentionally designed to share best practices or whether participation in community events could also qualify. Stephanie explained that events such as the Lower School Service-Learning Fair represent dissemination because students publicly present and share their work with community stakeholders. She also noted that building stronger

dissemination partnerships with the local district has remained challenging due to limited district participation. Stephanie shared that a charter high school principal has recently convened a collaborative group focused on sharing best practices among schools.

Criterion 5 – Student Performance and Academic Program Success
Stephanie reviewed updates related to external assessment data, including MAP results, College and Career Readiness programming, and curriculum implementation.

Criterion 10 – Finance and Organizational Viability
Stephanie informed the committee that the Finance Committee would review and vote on the updated Capital Plan later in the week before its inclusion in the Annual Report.

Appendix A – Accountability Plan
The committee reviewed preliminary Accountability Plan results.

- **Objective I:** Measure A has been met; Measure B has not yet been met for High Needs and Hispanic student groups.
- **Objective II:** Results will be finalized following the completion of summer programming.
- **Objective III:** Measure A is close to being met based on current summer school data but remains under review. Measure B has not yet met the established 85% target.
- **Objective IV:** Stephanie reviewed updates related to the school's Safe and Supportive School Culture objective.

Stephanie noted that additional revisions will be made as updated data become available. The revised draft Annual Report will be shared with committee members for further review prior to Board consideration.

An updated draft will be shared with the committee after additional revisions have been completed, and the report will return for Board approval at the July meeting.

B. 2026 Committee Goals

The committee reviewed progress toward its FY26 goals, with a focus on the chronic absenteeism goal and other Accountability Plan measures. The discussion was informational and centered on preliminary year-end data. No action was taken.

Chronic Absenteeism
Drea Jacobs reviewed preliminary chronic absenteeism data, noting significant progress, particularly at the Lower School.

Sabrina Williams shared several strategies that have contributed to improved attendance outcomes, including:

- The third year of implementing the advisory program, with each teacher serving as an advisor for approximately 9–12 students.
- Weekly informal advisory check-ins, with more structured meetings every four to five weeks using attendance, grades, and other student data.
- Dedicated time during Form Team meetings to identify attendance trends and discuss student concerns.
- Increased use of data to proactively identify students needing support.
- Weekly meetings with Dr. Meyers to review attendance data and flag students requiring intervention.
- Designing the advisory model to mirror a college advisory structure and strengthen student relationships.

Rich Cowdell commended Sabrina and the Lower School team for their progress. Drea highlighted that, while the Lower School Lowest Performing Group did not meet the Accountability Plan target, chronic absenteeism for that student group decreased significantly from 20% in 2025 to 8.6% in 2026, representing substantial improvement.

Drea then reviewed Upper School results, noting that the school is just short of meeting the overall chronic absenteeism goal for all students and did not meet the target for the Lowest Performing Group.

The committee also discussed how the Accountability Plan targets are established. Drea explained that meeting the overall student target would result in approximately a 1.1% reduction in the chronic absenteeism target for the all-students group.

Sarah Morrill asked whether there is any relationship between chronic absenteeism among the Lowest Performing Group and graduation or college matriculation outcomes for Hispanic students. Drea explained that this is the first year the school has tracked the Lowest Performing Group as part of the Accountability Plan, so that analysis has not yet been conducted. She noted that it could be a valuable area for future review.

Rich Cowdell asked how Salem Academy's chronic absenteeism rates compare with those of the district and state. Drea shared that, based on the previous year's data, Salem Academy's rates were lower than those of Salem Public Schools.

Other Accountability Plan Measures
Drea also provided a brief update on additional Accountability Plan measures. Updated percentages will be calculated once final data are available.

Final results will be reviewed after accountability data are finalized and incorporated into the Annual Report.

C. Committee Retreat Topics

Rich Cowdell shared key takeaways from a recent professional development session for Education Committee chairs, which focused on strengthening the connection between committee work and full Board governance. The committee discussed potential topics for the September Board Retreat. No formal action was taken.

Rich noted that the training emphasized keeping Education Committee reports to the full Board concise whenever possible, with more detailed discussions remaining at the committee level. He observed that Board meetings often require significant time explaining reports and educational concepts before trustees can engage in discussion.

To strengthen Board understanding, Rich proposed dedicating time during the September Board Retreat to building trustees' foundational knowledge in two areas:

- The Academic Calendar Cycle: An overview of the major instructional, assessment, and reporting activities that occur throughout the school year and how they align with Board oversight responsibilities.
- Accountability and the Annual Report: A review of the purpose of the Annual Report, the Accountability Plan, and key academic performance measures so trustees have a stronger understanding of how to interpret results and monitor school performance.

The committee discussed how providing this background knowledge would allow future Board meetings to focus more on governance, strategic discussion, and interpretation of results rather than explaining terminology or reporting processes.

Domina DiBiase agreed that this would be particularly valuable given the number of newer trustees currently serving on the Board.

Rich Cowdell will meet with school leadership, including the Executive Director and Senior Director of Academics, to further develop the proposed retreat content.

D. Hiring Update

Stephanie Callahan provided the committee with an update on hiring for the 2026–2027 school year. The committee received the hiring update and discussed current recruitment efforts. No action was taken.

Meghan Blume officially began serving as Upper School Principal on July 1.

Stephanie reviewed the school's remaining staffing priorities, which include hiring for the following positions:

- Dean of Students
- Director of Special Education
- Three Special Education Teachers

- Two Lower School Science Teachers

Stephanie reported that the school has received the strongest interest for the Dean of Students position and continues to interview candidates. However, she noted that many applicants do not yet possess the combination of experience and qualifications the school is seeking.

The Director of Special Education position continues to be the most challenging vacancy to fill, with no candidates currently in the hiring pipeline. She shared that the school is expanding its recruitment efforts by utilizing sponsored job postings and targeted direct outreach services to increase the visibility of the position.

No follow-up requests were made by the committee.

III. Other Business

A. Development Update

The committee received the development update from Fallon Burke. **No action was taken.**

Fallon shared that final FY26 fundraising totals will be presented at the July Board meeting. Preliminary year-end results indicate that Salem Academy met and exceeded its FY26 Annual Fund goal, raising just over $136,000.

Fallon also announced that Salem Academy received its FY27 Norman H. Read Trust grant. In addition to awarding the school's full requested amount, the Foundation provided an additional $50,000. These supplemental funds will support instructional technology enhancements and staff professional development.

Final FY26 fundraising results will be presented to the full Board at the July meeting.

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 9:07 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

- SACS Annual Report 2025-26.DRAFT.pdf
- Academic Report 7.7.26.pdf