APPROVED

# Salem Academy Charter School

## Minutes

### Governance Committee Meeting

**Date and Time**
Friday July 10, 2026 at 8:00 AM

The Salem Academy Charter School Governance Committee will via Zoom.

Zoom Link: https://salemacademycs.zoom.us/meeting/register/GDVo5gXZQuSnT_DV4PLB1Q

**Committee Members Present**
Beth O'Donnell (remote), Jeff Whitmore (remote), Rich Cowdell (remote), Steve Palmer (remote)

**Committee Members Absent**
*None*

**Ex Officio Members Present**
Kara McLaughlin (remote)

**Guests Present**
Fallon Burke (remote), Steven Oliver (remote)

**I. Opening Items**

A. **Record Attendance**

B.

### Call the Meeting to Order

Jeff Whitmore called a meeting of the Governance Committee of Salem Academy Charter School to order on Friday Jul 10, 2026 at 8:01 AM.

### C. Approve Minutes

Beth O'Donnell made a motion to approve the minutes from Governance Committee Meeting on 06-12-26.
Steve Palmer seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

## II. Prospective Trustee Interview

### A. Interview Preparation

The committee spent time preparing for the upcoming prospective trustee interview. This discussion provided committee members with an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and align on the interview process.

Jeff provided a brief overview of the prospective trustee's previous meetings with Salem Academy and summarized prior conversations to provide context for the committee. Members also discussed the interview format and identified which committee members would lead various portions of the conversation.

The committee reviewed the standard interview question guide and noted that, while it serves as the framework for the discussion, members are encouraged to ask additional questions as appropriate based on the conversation.

### B. Interview with Prospective Trustee

The committee interviewed prospective trustee candidate Dr. Steven Oliver to discuss his interest in serving on the Salem Academy Board of Trustees, his professional background, and his prior board experience.

Dr. Oliver began by introducing himself and describing his work in higher education, including his role at Salem State University and his experience teaching early college courses. He shared that he enjoys collaborative problem-solving and contributing his experience to help organizations navigate challenges. He also expressed that serving on the Board would provide an opportunity to remain connected to the realities facing K–12 educators while continuing to support the development of future teachers.

In response to questions from Beth O'Donnell, Dr. Oliver discussed his interest in serving on the Board of a charter school. He shared that he has long been interested in the opportunities charter schools have to innovate while navigating state accountability requirements. He also reflected on his visit to Salem Academy, noting the positive school

climate and interactions he observed between students and staff. Dr. Oliver shared that his previous personal and professional connections to Salem make the opportunity especially meaningful.

Dr. Oliver also discussed his teaching experience, including early college and introductory education and sociology courses. He shared his belief that students benefit from reflecting on their own educational experiences and exploring the many career pathways available within education.

In response to questions from Steve Palmer, Dr. Oliver described his previous board service at two small colleges. He reflected on the challenges facing institutions of higher education, including enrollment and financial pressures, and discussed his experience serving on committees focused on curriculum, institutional sustainability, diversity, and student success. He emphasized the importance of a collaborative relationship between boards and staff, where trustees serve as thought partners and advisors rather than attempting to manage day-to-day operations.

Committee members then described Salem Academy's governance model and Board culture. Steve Palmer explained that the Board seeks to be an enthusiastic and resourceful partner while fulfilling its governance responsibilities. Kara McLaughlin, Rich Cowdell, Jeff Whitmore, and Fallon Burke discussed the Board's committee structure, opportunities for trustee engagement with the school community, and the distinction between governance and management.

Dr. Oliver asked the committee about the Board's strategic priorities over the next three to five years. Committee members highlighted several priorities, including implementation of the Strategic Plan, strengthening academic outcomes, improving attendance, supporting teacher recruitment and retention, continuing Board development and succession planning, and identifying a long-term facilities solution for the school. Fallon also shared the Board's ongoing efforts to strengthen governance practices through BoardOnTrack and continued policy development.

Dr. Oliver expressed appreciation for the discussion and reiterated his strong interest in serving on the Salem Academy Board of Trustees.

Following the interview and discussion, the committee reached consensus to move forward with nominating Dr. Steven Oliver for election to the Board of Trustees at the July Board meeting. Jeff will communicate next steps with the candidate, and Beth will prepare the nomination form for Board consideration.

## III. Governance

### A. Board Self Assessment Review

Jeff initiated a discussion building on themes identified during previous meetings and the recent Board Self-Assessment. He noted that the assessment highlighted several areas where additional trustee education would be beneficial, particularly in finance, development, and education.

Rich Cowdell shared that the Education Committee has discussed using the September Board Retreat to provide trustees with foundational knowledge about the school's academic reporting cycle and accountability measures. He explained that strengthening trustees' understanding of these topics would allow future Education Committee reports at Board meetings to focus more on the substance of the reports, rather than spending significant time explaining the background and terminology.

Fallon Burke updated the committee on plans for the Development Committee's August retreat, where members will engage in strategic planning and review the development-related Board Self-Assessment results. Fallon also reminded the committee that the BoardOnTrack survey only allowed sections to be included, rather than selecting individual questions. As a result, some of the development questions were not directly applicable to the Board's current fundraising structure and should be interpreted with that context in mind.

The committee discussed opportunities to strengthen trustee education based on the Board Self-Assessment results. No action was taken. Committee leaders will continue incorporating the assessment findings into upcoming committee and Board retreat planning.

**B. Board Retreat Planning**

Building on the discussion of the Board Self-Assessment results, the committee briefly discussed potential topics for the upcoming Board Retreat.

Kara noted that she anticipates a significant portion of the retreat will focus on education and trustee learning, led by Rich Cowdell and the Education Committee. Members also discussed the importance of viewing trustee education as an ongoing governance responsibility rather than a one-time training, recognizing that Board membership will continue to evolve over time.

The committee also discussed Board recruitment, including continuing to build relationships with professional organizations and networks to strengthen the trustee pipeline.

Members agreed that additional time is needed to further develop the retreat agenda and priorities.

The committee agreed to continue planning the Board Retreat at its next Governance Committee meeting. Kara and Jeff will remind trustees of the September retreat date at the July Board meeting, emphasize the importance of attendance, and encourage members to RSVP.

## 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 9:02 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

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**Documents used during the meeting**

- Prospective Trustee Interview Questions_.pdf
- CV 2026 Oliver Salem Academy Charter School.doc
- 2026 Board Assessment Report.pdf
- Salem Academy Assessment Report.pdf