APPROVED

Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Board of Trustees Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday July 15, 2026 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
Beth O'Donnell, Blake Cullimore, Chris Graham, Domina DiBiase, Ilene Vogel, Imelda Barnhurst, Jeff Whitmore, Kara McLaughlin, Nohara Lopez-Okoli, Robert Rogers

Trustees Absent
Giselle Ortega, Laurie Kennedy, Rich Cowdell

Guests Present
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 6:03 PM.
Kara McLaughlin called a meeting of the board of trustees of Salem Academy Charter School to order on Wednesday Jul 15, 2026 at 6:03 PM.

C. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

D. Approve Minutes

Jeff Whitmore made a motion to approve the minutes from Board of Trustees Meeting on 06-15-26.
Nohara Lopez-Okoli seconded the motion.
The Board noted minor spelling and spacing corrections, with the understanding that these corrections would be incorporated into the approved minutes.

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

II. Chair Report

A. Updates from the Board Chair

Kara McLaughlin indicated that participation in the family satisfaction and Executive Director surveys improved significantly over last year. Eighty-eight families responded to the satisfaction survey this year compared to 34 families last year; that included all levels and Spanish-speaking families. Forty-five vs. 39 families responded to the Executive Director survey. Kara indicated she will reach out to trustees to be involved in the Board's Executive Director evaluation this year; last year, only the Executive Committee was involved.

She ended her report reminding trustees of any outstanding financial commitments and of the need to RSVP to the strategic retreat invitation. There were no comments or proposed actions response to this report.

III. Facilities

A. Capital Plan

Robert Rogers reviewed the proposed FY27 capital plan, which is similar to the FY26 plan with a few additions.

- The following are in progress or scheduled, with work proceeding depending on grant funding: new surveillance system, new interactive white boards, and updating the firewall infrastructure. Funding for the firewall work has been received.

- The following will be funded from the operating budget: replacing entry doors, surveillance cameras, bathroom faucets and countertops, kitchen sink and counter.
- A new PA system is our #1 safety concern and is dependent on grant funding.

The Board asked for more information regarding outstanding grant applications. We expect several to be approved in the near future, along with some earmarks in the state budget. We have received funding from the Read Foundation to replace the interactive whiteboards in STEM classrooms.

Ilene Vogel moved to approve the capital plan, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. the motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Stephanie Callahan explained that the capital plan section of the Annual Report to DESE differs from this plan in that the DESE report cannot include replacement items unless we have a revenue surplus. Approval of the Board's capital plan is based on the collaborative planning of the Facilities and Finance Committees.

B. Committee Updates

Robert also updated the Board on the Facilities Committee's ongoing work and progress toward goals. Most of the current projects are routine, e.g., flooring, stair treads, carpet repairs. Work has been scheduled to replace the kitchen sink, but we are waiting for a start date for Prime to repair the ramp. There were no questions regarding these projects.

There was considerable discussion regarding the choice of vendor to provide school lunches in the coming year. Root had been our #1 choice because, in addition to providing good food, its proximity in terms of minimizing transportation and commitment to composting met the Committee's sustainability goal. Unfortunately, their response to our RFP was inadequate in terms of certifications and meeting state requirements. Discussion disclosed that they were fully aware of these criteria and had plenty of time to ask questions or respond more comprehensively. As a result, the Operations team will be reevaluating the submissions we did receive and awarding a one-year contract with the hope that Root will be fully vetted by next year.

It was pointed out that the Facilities Committee does not have responsibility for or participation in this decision but was involved only because of the relevance to the Committee's sustainability goal. The Committee will, however, pay closer attention to this contract; in addition to sustainability issues, we care about providing the best food possible for our students. While we know this would have been Root's first school contract, we do not yet know why they failed to submit an acceptable bid.

Robert indicated that progress toward safety initiatives was covered in the presentation of the capital plan. In regard to long-term planning, Prime has not provided any updates; accordingly, we will proceed with exploring a lease extension from 2031 forward.

Stephanie indicated that Prime has finally responded to our request to meet regarding a potential memo of understanding re current needs and timing.

Last, Robert indicated no new activity regarding prospective trustees. There were no additional questions or actions planned.

IV. ED Report

A. Annual Report 2025-2026

Stephanie Callahan's report focused on the 2025-2026 Annual Report to be submitted to DESE by mid-August. All charters must submit a 25-page max report (plus appendices) for review and revisions; once approved it is sent to the Superintendent of the SPS and the Chair of the School Committee, in our case, Mayor Pangallo. Although not indicated in the Annual Report, we appreciate his increased involvement with Salem Academy this past year and the greater awareness of Salem Academy and its accomplishments this has brought.

All charters are measured by faithfulness to their charter, academic success, and financial viability. It is a public document and eventually posted on DESE's website.

Stephanie briefly reviewed the entire report, pointing out key facts or changes from prior year. Key among the changes is the list of ways in which we disseminate information. This is shorter than in the past because guidelines no longer include dissemination to other charters. The Board discussed the topic of dissemination because, in addition to sharing via DESE panels, we have shared programs, processes, and initiatives with SPS, as legally obligated, especially when SPS fell into the bottom 10% schools in Massachusetts. Charters do not always get credit for their initiatives; the situation can be sensitive due to resentment of charters and the inherent competitive nature of the relationship.

Most of Stephanie's report concerned Appendix A: Accountability Plan Evidence 2025-2026 and Appendix B: Recruitment and Retention Plan 2026-2027. She focused on areas where we did not meet goals, explaining why and noting new strategies that will be implemented.

Appendix B refers to how we recruit and retain students. Goals for subgroups are set by the state; if we do not meet a goal, we must provide additional strategies for the year ahead. Stephanie called attention to the issue we face in recruiting English language learners (ELLs). Our goal is 8.9% but only 6.3% of our students are ELLs. One key reason for this is that we admit students only once a year and by lottery; ELLs new to Salem at any other time are not eligible and thus generally enroll in SPS. We have discussed this with DESE repeatedly.

Our program is actually very successful, to the point where students move out of the program, become former ELLs and thus no longer count towards meeting our goal. The success of our recruitment efforts is evidenced by the fact that 27% of incoming 9th graders are ELLs, more than double the percentage of currently enrolled ELLs. And our attrition rate is 0%.

Stephanie pointed out that in addition to current successful strategies we will be collaborating with a quarterly advisory group of current and former ELL families to obtain feedback, and we will be partnering with local organizations serving new immigrant families so that they know about us.

In discussing Appendix A, Stephanie explained that one of the measures of preparedness to succeed in college is that 85% of graduating seniors are enrolled in college within 15 months of graduation. This refers to the class of 2024. While overall matriculation was 89%, we did not meet this goal because the Spanish-speaking subgroup matriculation rate was only 79.3%, meaning seven students were not enrolled. Thanks to our alumni success program, we know some are in technical programs, and others working.

In reference to Objective 2, internal grade-level proficiency, Stephanie indicated we may not meet this goal, which is complicated because of differences in how passing grades are calculated and because meeting the goal then results in an even higher goal subsequently.

Drea Jacobs pointed out that, regardless of the state-imposed goal of a 3.4 grade average, our own internal goal is a 3.5 average as that is a key indicator of future success. We make major efforts with students and families to reinforce understanding of the difference in grading systems and the importance of reaching that 3.5 goal. We also help staff develop tier 1 (in classroom) ways of supporting students, especially those with disabilities. It is a big part of our professional development efforts.

Other measures in which we did not meet goals included whether students felt they were able to apply their academic skills to their service learning project, whether they agreed that Salem Academy is a safe and supportive community, and whether challenging behaviors have been reduced by 50%.

Stephanie reviewed the strategies that will be implemented to improve our success rate in these areas. One of the most important will be once again having a student success coach who is bi-lingual and familiar with our school.

There were questions about what contributes to failing to meet some goals. In regard to service learning, it is not well understood by DESE, which results in different measures from year to year. In regard to behavior-related goals, Stephanie explained that this year’s results reflect in part the large number of students who were new to Salem Academy and unfamiliar with our culture. Also, duplicate referrals may have inflated the

number, and being understaffed in some areas may have resulted in overuse of referrals. We have implemented e-hall passes and texting to families and, again, having a student success coach helping to manage behavior issues will be good. There has been sone retraining and more is planned to empower teachers and minimize referrals. New data has come in, but staff has not had time to review it. Although we do not know how or if these results affect charter renewal, as one trustee asked, we consider them important issues in and of themselves.

In regard to other aspects of the Annual Report, Stephanie indicated that teacher attrition is better but remains an issue we will continue to monitor. She also pointed out non-statewide external assessments we value, such as significant MAP test achievements and making advanced coursework more widely available.

As this was primarily an informational report, there was no further discussion other than indicated above or specific actions required on the part of the Board. Domina DiBiase moved to approve the Annual Report as meeting all DESE requirements and providing complete and accurate information. Jeff Whitmore seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote.

V. Education

A. Student Cell Phone Policy

Drea Jacobs presented the proposed student cell phone policy. We have always had a policy, although now it is mandated by the state. We have not allowed cell phones in the Lower School, but Upper School students have been allowed to carry phones (turned off) on their body or in a backpack until now.

The new policy mandates that phones be stored in lockers. They are permitted if students are off campus, involved in a Service Learning project, for instance. We are previewing this policy during summer school. The fact that the policy affects everyone, not just a few offenders, is good.

Discussion included a review of the consequences and a correction to policy wording to indicate that confiscation may be in order after the third offence.

Ilene Vogel moved to approve the Student Cell Phone Policy 2026-2027 with the above amended wording. Nohara Lopez-Okoli seconded the motion, which passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. Committee Updates

Domina DiBiase reported that the Education Committee has been focused on the Annual Report and our progress toward the goals therein. The Committee is looking at providing

educational content at our strategic retreat in September to help trustees understand the details of these measures and reports.

VI. Finance

A. June Financials

Chris Graham presented the June financials, which also represent the end of FY26. Thanks to stable enrollment and adroit management of the tuition overpayment/repayment situation, we ended the year with a net surplus of $157,713. There may still be some very minor adjustments to the numbers.

B. Committee Updates

The surplus provides the flexibility to either invest or hold these funds in reserve. The Finance Committee is still discussing our options with Central Source, our accounting firm. If we decide to hold back some funds it may make sense to do this through the Foundation.

Chris went on to discuss the capital plan, already presented by Robert Rogers as it was developed collaboratively by the Facilities and Finance Committees.

The Finance committee will be meeting with our auditor and accountant, both of whom also work with other charters. Pre-audit work is already underway, and they will be reviewing Board minutes and contracts for compliance. We can expect to vote on the audit in October; it is due in November.

One anticipated difference, due to changes in the law and little likelihood of a government shut down, is that we no longer meet the $1 million threshold for higher compliance requirements; our auditor expenses should be lower.

Last, Chris reported on progress toward Finance Committee goals. They have not yet referred anyone to Governance as a prospective trustee. Blake Cullimore will undertake exploring what we can do to strengthen our position as a potential borrower. Finance will continue to partner with Facilities. Chris has reviewed the committee's responsibilities but has not yet calendarized them.

VII. Governance

A. Trustee Nomination

On behalf of the Governance Committee, Jeff Whitmore nominated Dr. Steven Oliver as a prospective trustee to complete Amy Stewart's term, ending on December 31, 2026. In addition to his impressive CV, he has met with the Committee and ED and has visited the

school. He would serve on the Education and Finance Committees. The motion was seconded by Beth O'Donnell and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

B. Committee Updates

Before reviewing the Governance Committee's progress toward goals, Jeff reiterated the importance of responding to the September strategic retreat invitation and the need for committees other than Governance to recruit prospective trustees. Beth O'Donnell emphasized that prospects need not be experienced; this is a great learning experience. Also, many prospects, once approached, are very interested and there are many people who would like to serve on a board or at least on a committee. We especially need someone with financial experience.

Looking ahead, Governance is continuing its work on formalizing policies and completing job descriptions, including clarifying leadership roles. In addition, they will be looking at succession planning for officers and committee chairs, reviewing compliance structures, and calendarizing Board activities.

VIII. Development

A. Development Report & Campaign Updates

Fallon Burke presented the Development Committee report, headlining the fact that we exceeded the Annual Fund goal by 9%, raising more than $136,000. The Gala and Reach the Beach are our two biggest campaigns. The Development Committee is currently seeking sponsors for the latter.

She took the time to explain the importance of Reach the Beach to Salem Academy. This race not only raises funds for student wellbeing but also serves as an important way to encourage a sense of belonging, feel connected, and cultivate relationships with peers and teachers. Participants in the race itself must be 21+ and many faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and families are involved. For students, Reach the Beach is an all-school field trip, rare for so early in the school year. As Nohara Lopez-Okoli pointed out, Some have never hiked before, done a scavenger hunt, or seen the top of a mountain. Reach the Beach is important.

B. Grant Updates

Fallon also reported on our various grant applications.

- We received our full request from the Read Foundation, plus an extra $50,00, which will be used for STEM educator professional development and instructional technology.
- We hosted our final Cummings Grant visit and were able to share the impact of that program. Their 2027 cycle just opened, and applications are due in September. Notification to advance will take place in December, and full proposals submitted in the spring. That would be for a FY28 grant. We have had past grants from them and thus will be eligible to apply for a 10-year grant.
- We received our funding from Mifflin Memorial Fund.
- We did not receive funds from The Amelia Peabody Foundation, which has changed priorities to focus on housing insecurity and did not respond to requests for feedback from us based on last year's application.

C. Committee Updates

Finally, Fallon reviewed the committee's progress toward goals.

- They met and exceeded the Annual Fund goal.
- Development is working with the Foundation more. Spring proved too hectic for a joint lunch and learn, so this will happen in the fall, date TBD soon.
- The Committee is working on a prospect list and foundation pipeline.

They have increased the number of recurring donors among trustees.

IX. Human Resources

A. Committee Updates

Domina DiBiase reported that the HR Committee has been focused on hiring and is reviewing a pay equity tool they may integrate into their work next year. They have also discussed school policies re attendance, dress code, etc. Because this is a new committee, they are just now setting goals, which include:

- Supporting the development of a compensation policy by 1/31/27
- Recruiting one potential trustee
- Implementing an annual review of the employee handbook
- Calendarizing HR-related activities and responsibilities

Kara noted that Domina is doing an excellent job of getting this committee up and running.

X. Closing Items

A.

Adjourn Meeting

Domina DiBiase moved to adjourn, seconded by Jeff Whitmore. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote and the meeting adjourned at 8:27 PM.
There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 8:27 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelby Hypes

Documents used during the meeting

- FY27 Capital Plan (Updated).pdf
- SACS Annual Report 2025-26.DRAFT (1).pdf
- DRAFT Personal Electronic Device and Cell Phone Policy 2026-27.pdf
- Salem June 2026.pdf
- Nomination Form Steven Oliver July 2026.pdf
- CV 2026 Oliver Salem Academy Charter School.doc
- Development Reports FY26 - 6.30.26.pdf
- RTB Sponsorship Opportunities 2026.pdf