APPROVED

Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Governance Committee Meeting

Date and Time
Friday August 14, 2026 at 8:00 AM

The Salem Academy Charter School Governance Committee will at 8:00 AM via Zoom.

Zoom Link: https://salemacademycs.zoom.us/j/87880535287?pwd=xekom6xfBBvlQbmWAaUmrCgQS0vHiK.1

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

Committee Members Absent
Steve Palmer

Ex Officio Members Present
Kara McLaughlin (remote)

Guests Present
Fallon Burke (remote), Stephanie Callahan (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 Aug 14, 2026 at 8:08 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Rich Cowdell made a motion to approve the minutes from Governance Committee Meeting on 07-10-26.
Beth O'Donnell seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Governance

A. Retreat Planning

The committee discussed and further developed the structure and content of the September Board Retreat. No formal action was taken.

Jeff Whitmore shared that the retreat will build on the Board Self-Assessment results, with the overarching goal of deepening trustees' shared understanding of the work of the Board and its committees. The committee discussed using the retreat to provide trustees with foundational knowledge about key areas of Board oversight and to strengthen understanding of the specific responsibilities of a Salem Academy trustee.

Education

Rich Cowdell reported that he met with school leadership to discuss the Education Committee's portion of the retreat. The group identified three areas where additional foundational knowledge would help trustees better understand and engage with Education Committee reports throughout the year:

- Academic calendar and annual reporting cycle
- Interim assessments and interventions
- DESE accountability measures

The Education Committee anticipates needing approximately 60–90 minutes for this portion of the retreat. Executive Director Stephanie Callahan and Senior Director of Academics Drea Jacobs will work with Rich to develop the content.

Finance

The committee discussed finance as another area for growth identified through the Board Self-Assessment. Members identified two distinct areas of trustee education: understanding how Massachusetts charter schools are funded and understanding Salem Academy's budget and annual financial cycle.

The committee discussed the complexity of the charter school funding formula, including the foundation and above-foundation rates and facilities funding. Jeff expressed interest in helping trustees understand how funding has changed over time. Stephanie recommended separating education about the charter school funding formula from a more SACS-specific "Budget 101" discussion.

Beth O'Donnell shared that, from the perspective of a newer trustee, understanding the charter school funding formula would be particularly valuable and would help trustees speak more knowledgeably about charter school finances. Stephanie noted that a deeper presentation on the funding formula may benefit from an outside presenter, potentially from MCPSA, BoardOnTrack, or Central Source.

Kara McLaughlin will connect with the Finance Committee Chair to further develop the Finance Committee's portion of the retreat.

Development
Kara noted that the Development Committee recently held its own retreat and discussed potential content for the full Board Retreat. Members discussed using the Development portion to help trustees understand private funding and how development contributes to Salem Academy's overall revenue structure. The presentation could also reinforce the distinction between staff, committee, and full Board responsibilities.

Governance and Board Leadership
The committee discussed concluding the retreat with a Governance section that brings the individual committee presentations together into a broader understanding of the Board's annual cycle. Potential topics include trustee recruitment, Board and committee leadership, succession planning, and sustaining an effective Board over time.

Beth suggested asking trustees what knowledge, experience, or support would help them feel prepared to serve as a committee chair or Board officer. The committee discussed adapting an existing Board leadership questionnaire to gather this information and inform future Board development. Members also considered incorporating perspectives from current committee chairs about their roles and the knowledge or experience needed to lead effectively.

Rich asked whether progression into Board leadership should be an expectation for trustees. Stephanie noted that trustees and committee chairs do not need to be subject-matter experts in every area they oversee, however expertise is needed on the committee.

Retreat Structure
Based on the discussion, the committee developed the following tentative structure:

- 8:30–9:00 a.m. – Breakfast

- 9:00–9:30 a.m. – Welcome, Introduction & Retreat Kick-Off
- 9:30–11:00 a.m. – Education
- 11:00–11:10 a.m. – Break
- 11:10 a.m.–12:00 p.m. – Finance, Part I
- 12:00–12:45 p.m. – Lunch
- 12:45–1:15 p.m. – Finance, Part II
- 1:15–1:45 p.m. – Development
- 1:45–2:30 p.m. – Governance
- 2:30–2:45 p.m. – Closing

The retreat will conclude by 3:00 p.m**.** Committee Chairs, in partnership with school leadership as appropriate, will lead their respective sections.

Rich Cowdell, Stephanie Callahan, and Drea Jacobs will continue developing the Education section, and Kara McLaughlin will connect with the Finance Committee Chair regarding the Finance section. The Governance Committee will continue refining the overall agenda, materials, and Board development components.

B. Trustee Recruitment

The committee briefly discussed trustee recruitment and Board membership updates.

The school recently received an inquiry from an individual interested in Board service who does not have a direct connection to Salem Academy but appears to have relevant finance experience. Following an initial exchange, the prospective candidate determined that she is unable to commit to serving as a full trustee at this time. The committee discussed the possibility of engaging her as a volunteer committee member instead.

Fallon Burke also shared that Dr. Steven Oliver's appointment to the Board was approved by the Commissioner the previous week.

The committee discussed a potential upcoming Board vacancy. Kara McLaughlin shared that Domina DiBiase has indicated that she may need to resign due to other committments. Members discussed whether reducing Domina's committee responsibilities could make continued Board service more manageable. Kara will speak with Domina about potentially stepping down from one committee and whether she would be able to remain on the Board through the end of the calendar year.

III. Other Business

A. Reach the Beach/REACH Day Updates

Fallon Burke provided a brief update on Reach the Beach, including the ongoing uncertainty regarding whether the relay race will move forward as planned. She also

shared that sponsorship outreach remains underway and that Salem Academy continues to seek sponsors for the campaign.

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 9:10 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

None