APPROVED

Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Governance Committee Meeting

Date and Time
Friday September 11, 2026 at 8:00 AM

Location
Zoom: https://salemacademycs.zoom.us/meeting/register/ecCmYvHUQd-ea3BQnuYl9A

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

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), 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 Sep 11, 2026 at 8:04 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Rich Cowdell made a motion to approve the minutes from Governance Committee Meeting on 08-14-26.
Beth O'Donnell seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Roll Call	
Rich Cowdell	Aye
Beth O'Donnell	Aye
Jeff Whitmore	Aye
Steve Palmer	Abstain

II. Governance

A. Retreat Planning

The committee discussed preparations for the September 25 Board of Trustees Retreat and discussed and provided feedback on the retreat agenda, content, materials, and annual Board cycle. The current agenda includes a welcome and opening activity, Strategic Plan update, and dedicated sessions for the Education, Finance, Development, and Governance Committees, followed by a closing reflection.

Retreat Content

- **Education:** Stephanie Callahan and Drea Jacobs will develop the Education presentation, with Rich Cowdell supporting refinement of the presentation and activities. Topics will include the academic calendar cycle and accountability reporting. With MCAS results anticipated prior to the retreat, the 90-minute session will also allow time to review and discuss available data.
- **Finance:** The Finance session will focus on SACS revenue sources and the charter school funding formula, as well as a “Finance 101” overview of how trustees should read and understand the school’s financial reports.
- **Development:** Laurie Kennedy and Fallon Burke will prepare the Development session.
- **Governance:** The Governance session will address Board and Governance Committee roles and responsibilities, onboarding, and the Board Self-Assessment. Kara McLaughlin presented a draft template for an annual Board cycle/calendar. Committee members agreed that the structure provides a useful framework that individual committees can supplement with their recurring activities. Fallon Burke and Laurie Kennedy will add Development-related activities to the calendar.

Materials and Feedback

The committee discussed using BoardOnTrack resources related to trustee and committee roles and responsibilities as reference materials during the retreat. Trustees will also receive Board job descriptions for reference when completing a committee and leadership interest survey. The survey will be revised to include information about anticipated time commitments and a question asking what support trustees would need to consider taking on a Board leadership role.

The committee also discussed an exit ticket/feedback survey and logistical materials needed for the retreat, including scrap paper, pens, sticky notes, and chart paper.

Pre-Work and Presentations

Trustees will be asked to review the Strategic Plan in advance of the retreat. Committee presentations and materials should be submitted to Fallon Burke by the end of the day on September 21.

Committee Chairs will continue developing their respective sessions and submit final presentation materials by September 21.

B. Board Membership, Leadership, and Recruitment

The committee transitioned to a discussion of Board membership, leadership, and recruitment. Building on a question previously raised by Rich Cowdell, members discussed whether trustees should be encouraged or expected to take on a Board or committee leadership role as they progress in their service. Kara McLaughlin suggested that leadership expectations could be introduced as part of the trustee onboarding process.

The committee discussed the upcoming departure of Domina DiBiase who currently chairs the HR Committee, and the resulting need for a leadership transition. Members reviewed the HR Committee's meeting frequency, noting that it had previously met quarterly before transitioning to monthly meetings. Stephanie Callahan recommended maintaining the current frequency through the end of 2026 given the committee's upcoming work, including development of the Compensation Philosophy.

Beth has agreed to assume the role of HR Committee Chair. She expressed interest in evaluating the committee's meeting frequency and responsibilities after 2026, as well as its membership and whether additional trustees should join the committee. Stephanie and Beth will connect to review the committee's upcoming work and leadership transition. Members also identified HR expertise as an ongoing priority for Board recruitment.

The committee also discussed the potential value of conducting exit interviews with trustees as they leave the Board or complete their terms.

No formal action was taken. Beth will connect with Stephanie regarding the committee's upcoming work and membership needs. Governance will continue discussing trustee leadership expectations, Board recruitment needs, and a potential trustee exit interview process.

III. Other Business

A. Development Update

The committee received a Development on Reach the Beach update from Fallon Burke. The Reach the Beach relay has been canceled for 2026, and Team SACS runners are pivoting to the Wicked Half Marathon in Salem. Despite the change in race, Reach the Beach remains one of SACS's major annual fundraisers, with the campaign continuing to support the same student programs and experiences. SACS continues to seek event sponsors and donations toward the campaign goal.

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 9:13 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

- _BOT Retreat Agenda 9.25.26 Planning doc.pdf