APPROVED

Salem Academy Charter School

Minutes

Education Committee Meeting

Date and Time
Tuesday September 15, 2026 at 8:00 AM

Location
Zoom: https://salemacademycs.zoom.us/meeting/register/z57dWnxKQvCp5NiRQp8RFg

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

Committee Members Present
Domina DiBiase (remote), Rich Cowdell (remote), Sarah Morrill (remote), Steven Oliver (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 Sep 15, 2026 at 8:02 AM.

C. Approve Minutes

Domina DiBiase made a motion to approve the minutes from Education Committee Meeting on 05-19-26.
Sarah Morrill seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

D. Approve Minutes

Domina DiBiase made a motion to approve the minutes from Education Committee Meeting on 07-07-26.
Sarah Morrill seconded the motion.
The committee **VOTED** unanimously to approve the motion.

II. Education Committee Reports

A. Back to School Updates

Drea Jacobs started the meeting the Back to School updates, noting that SACS started the school year strong and has already completed a full week of testing for grades 6–12. No action was taken.

Sabrina Williams gave an update on the Lower School. Update. MAP diagnostic testing has been completed, and content retreats are starting today, beginning with the Science Retreat. Teachers will use some of that time to review MAP diagnostic data to see where students are academically. An Amplify Science curriculum representative will be with the Science Team for today's retreat, as the team has two new science teachers. Sabrina noted that while interventions focus on math, reading, and writing, science and history teachers also use the data. Regarding school culture, the Lower School started the year with several community meetings featuring presentations from the Dean, Nurse, Principal, and other staff members.

Sabrina also provided an update on REACH Day trips scheduled for Friday. Sixth graders will travel to Blue Hills, while seventh and eighth graders will visit Wachusett. Ms. Bruno, the new Sixth Grade Form Team Leader, has spent the last few weeks doing a lot of skill-building around what it means to be a middle schooler and helping students get acclimated. Ms. Bruno is a veteran Form Team Leader, returning to the role following the departure of the previous FTL. Academic Support Blocks have been used for this skill-building.

Discussion: Rich Cowdell asked whether Amplify Science has a standardized test. Sabrina explained that it does not, but SACS uses Pearson for interim exams. Teachers can select the standards, and the platform builds an exam using MCAS-style questions.

Meghan Blume gave an update on the Upper School. This month's focus is on looking at student work together. Meghan shared that the new cell phone ban is yielding stronger student focus.
The previous policy was working toward a bell-to-bell schedule, but students now turn in their phones to designated cell phone lockers at the beginning of the day and receive them back at the end of the day.

Meghan also provided updates on course selection and AP classes, including course requests and the add/drop process. A small group of seniors advocated to take an AP course, and those students have been allowed to take the course online.

Regarding school culture, Meghan shared that students participated in orientation sessions with the Dean of Students. In terms of the phone-free culture, she noted that there is a joyful atmosphere in the hallways and cafeteria as students learn what phone-free looks like.

The Upper School is still steadying its systems and addressing student behaviors. Student voice continues to be incorporated, with Student Government officers in place and National Honor Society activities kicking off soon.

Meghan also highlighted joyful community-building activities, including dodgeball games and a match between 11th and 12th grade students. REACH Day trips are scheduled for Friday, including a trip to Take Flight for tenth graders.

Discussion:

- Steven Oliver asked whether there have been adjustments for staff and teachers and how pedagogy has changed. Meghan shared that her priority is low-tech, high-engagement instruction. Staff have been excited about the change, and students have not fully pushed back, although it is still early.
- Domina DiBiase asked whether there has been feedback from parents. Meghan explained that when the policies were first sent out, some families reached out with logistical questions, including where phones would be stored and who would have access to them. Some families are also choosing not to send their students to school with phones. If a student says they do not have a phone, an email is sent to the family to confirm. Meghan also noted that staff are having conversations about being mindful of their own phone use.
- Sarah Morrill asked what supportive structures are in place for young people who may struggle with phone dependency. Meghan explained that if a student says they do not have a phone but is later seen with one, the school is giving grace for the first instance. A second instance would result in a family meeting to partner with the family. Meghan emphasized that everyone is aligned on the reasons behind the policy and that there is a significant amount of data showing how phone

use impacts student focus. Adjustment counselors are also aware of students who may experience heightened anxiety.
- In response to a question about whether the state is requesting data regarding phone-free policies, Meghan noted that no data has been requested yet.
- Rich Cowdell shared an anecdote about running a summer camp with a phone-free policy. An end-of-camp survey indicated that one of the positive aspects of the experience was not having phones.
- Meghan noted that 9th and 10th students are finding it easier to adapt to the policy than seniors.
- Rich asked whether all 9th and 10th grade students participate in early MAP diagnostic testing. Meghan confirmed that they do, in math and reading.

B. Board Retreat Preparation

The discussion transitioned to Board Retreat planning. Rich Cowdell updated the committee on the plan for the Education Committee section of the retreat. There will be two segments:

- Academic Calendar: Cycle of the academic year.
- Accountability Data Presentation: Originally, the plan was to present the accountability report template and explain what each piece means. However, it is now expected that results will be un-embargoed on September 22nd and available for review at the retreat.

The overall goal is to minimize lengthy discussions about the foundational aspects of the accountability report throughout the year. By educating trustees on what each part of the accountability report means, future conversations can focus on the results rather than explaining the accountability measures in the first place.

C. Hiring Update

Drea Jacobs gave a hiring update. SACS is still searching for a Director of Special Education and Dean of Students. The principals are supporting the school-level deans. There is also still a need for Special Education Teachers and paraprofessionals. Staffing is stable among general education teachers.

The Assistant Deans have transitioned to school-level dean leadership roles: Lower School Dean and Upper School Dean. As the school year has started, there has been a clear need for a school-wide Dean of Students to provide oversight and serve as part of the instructional leadership team.

III. Other Business

A.

Development Update

Fallon Burke gave a development update. e. REACH Day trips are just a few days away, and the Reach the Beach campaign is nearly 60% of the way toward its fundraising 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 8:46 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Fallon Burke

Documents used during the meeting

- LS BOY Updates EdComm 091526.pdf
- US BOY Updates EdComm 091526.pdf