

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Board of Trustees of Salem Academy Charter School
October 23, 2024**

Members present in person:

Eddie Aroko, Rich Cowdell, Domina DiBiase, Kara McLaughlin, Sal Martinez,
Toyuwa Newton, Julie Rose, Mark Stevens, Amy Stewart, Rick Winter

Members present remotely:

Mark Stevens

Members absent:

Robert Rogers, Jeff Whitmore

Staff present in person:

Fallon Burke, Stephanie Callahan, Drea Jacobs

Staff present remotely:

Sabrina Williams

Guests present in person:

Lise Hansen-Damato, Bessie Marashi

Recorder present in person:

Shelby Hypes

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Toyuwa Newton officially called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM.

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Vote to Approve Meeting Minutes

After reviewing our by-laws, The Governance Committee moved to amend the minutes of June 17, 2024, to clarify that Jeff Whitmore is completing the term of Alison Palmer ending December 31, 2025, and may be nominated to his own three-year term at the December 2025 meeting. The vote passed unanimously by roll call vote.

The Governance Committee similarly moved to amend the minutes of July 17, 2024, to clarify that Domina DiBiase is completing the term of Shelby Morrison ending December 31, 2024, and may be nominated to her own three-year term at the December 2024 meeting. The vote passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Our failure to meet the Open Meeting Law requirements voided action taken at our August 21, 2024, and September 20, 2024, and required that the minutes of these meetings be approved anew.

- Kara McLaughlin moved to accept the minutes of August 21, 2024. The motion was seconded by Amy Stewart and passed unanimously via roll call vote.
- Discussion of the minutes of September 20, 2024, called for the following corrections:
 - "Toyuwa Newton reviewed the roles and responsibilities of trustees, as presented in the written document distributed prior to the meeting."
 - In regard to the loss of long-serving trustees, wording was amended to say, "Our current situation reflects the fact that, although new trustees were added in 2021, they are no longer board members and more recently added trustees are now being asked to step into leadership roles."

Kara McLaughlin moved to accept the amended minutes, seconded by Julie Rose. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote.

Minutes of the special meeting held on October were presented for discussion. The following changes were requested:

- Rick Winter was present.
- The following wording was added at the end of the public comments section. "In regard to the expansion request, the application has been submitted, and it is up to DESE to evaluate, then accept or deny the request. We anticipate that all parties will respect DESE's decision.
- The second bullet under Questions and comments from board member was changed to show the correct statistics. 54.5% of Salem Academy students are considered low income or disadvantaged, and 63.4% are classified as high needs.

Julie Rose moved to accept the minutes with the proposed amendments. The motion was seconded by Domina DiBiase and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

IV. SFC Report

Bessie Marashi reported on the SFC's recent and upcoming events.

- The 3.8 brunch was successful, as were graduation activities. Flowers (boutonnieres and arrangements) came from Maria's Flowers in Peabody this year, as their prices were significantly lower than those offered by our usual florist, Flowers by Darlene.
- The school picnic will take place at Winter Island on August 28th and will include a 50/50 raffle, ice cream truck and merchandise sales. Stephanie Callahan indicated we are looking into hiring someone for grill duty.
- Bessie is actively recruiting parents to become involved in the SFC and assume leadership roles.

V. Executive Director's Report

Stephanie Callahan began by providing an update on the arrest of a former SACS teacher and athletic coach for child exploitation in Newbury on July 3rd. Salem Academy suspended him immediately, termination papers were hand-delivered, and

professional movers took all of his personal effects and equipment to his home. We have been and will continue to cooperate fully with the police.

There has been basically no reaction from families, perhaps because school is not in session. Our adjustment counselors have been alerted, and we will have opt-in counseling available for several days when school reconvenes. We will promote “see something/say something” awareness more strongly, as trust is so important to the Salem Academy culture.

Grants

Stephanie reported a good visit with the Read Trust, which has fully funded our 2025 request. For the fifth year, we received a \$50,000 grant from the Mifflin Memorial Foundation; this will continue to provide funding for our college and post-secondary success initiatives and, new this year, will support alumni services and programs.

Strategic Planning

The time required to deal with the arrest incident above has left \ little time to study our expansion options. The Strategic Planning Committee will be meeting with our consultant on July 18th and in a retreat on July 24th. We may need to schedule a Board meeting in August to determine how we want to proceed; we need to submit any expansion proposal to DESE by September 25th.

In brief, there are two major questions on the table. How large an expansion, if any, do we want to consider? What happens if we expand, and then the increased funding disappears when/if SPS moves out of the bottom 10 percent? Normally, charter capacity is nine percent of a district’s eligible students; if a district is in the bottom 10 percent of MCAS scores, charters may expand to 18 percent of district students. A past SACS expansion resulted in having 15 “unfunded” students when funding reverted to paying only for the 9 percent number.

Mitigating factors include the fact that large districts, such as Boston, are about to confront a similar funding dilemma; we don’t know what will happen. Also, we can expand in stages and at whatever level we choose. We do not need to be overly detailed or specific in the proposal we submit in September. Last, we can choose to do nothing at this time, although it could be a lost opportunity if SPS rises above the bottom ten percent in the year ahead.

Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan

SOA plans are designed to highlight a few key areas where evidence-based approaches can provide more equitable access to learning opportunities and more equitable outcomes for all students. SOA plans are submitted to DESE every three years, and state funding is provided, although we don’t know how much we will receive. Some districts receive significantly more funding than we have in the past. Outcomes are reported each year.

SOA plans are developed by averaging out MCAS data to identify which subgroups are not hitting that average. For us, students with disabilities and low-income students are target groups with chronic absenteeism and lower performance on MCAS and other academic indicators.

The plan we are submitting focuses on co-teaching training for special ed and regular teachers; this will be provided by Blue Engine, with whom we have worked in the past. Our plan also focuses on recruiting and retaining a more diverse staff and, third, on developing teaching materials to reinforce school culture and ensure students are excited, supported and successful. It was noted that these programs benefit all students, not just the target groups.

Annual Report

This fairly extensive report is submitted to DESE annually and focuses primarily on accountability, i.e., how well we are doing in meeting our stated goals. Prior to a review of the proposed report, Stephane Callahan commented on the following:

- Suspension rates are higher than the state average, in part due to the fact that, although we use alternatives to suspension whenever possible, we are very clear about, enforce, and report all activities subject to suspension, e.g., physically assaulting someone or bringing something dangerous to school. This is a hard call, as many kids are dealing with significant emotional disabilities.
- Recruiting and retaining students that reflect the SPS population remain a challenge as we admit students only once a year, only by lottery, and only up through grade nine. This particularly affects ELL students, who may immigrate at any time and special needs students, who may be reluctant to leave established programs. Additionally, if students graduate out of the ML program, our upper grades show even fewer ELLs. We also lose students with disabilities when they move away or transfer to Essex Tech. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that each year we must indicate more new strategies we will adopt to improve our position. Last, despite “intent to return” questionnaires in the spring, last-minute changes or relocations occur.

Drea Jacobs then walked the Board through the objectives outline in the plan. It should be noted that

- The report details how well we did in the 2023-2024 school year based on data from 2022-2023. Planned actions are for the 2024-2025 school year.
- The initial goals were established in our 2019 strategic plan, i.e., before Covid, which clearly upset the proverbial apple cart.

Overall, we are meeting our primary academic objective of preparing students for college, with the exception of performance on SATs. With many colleges dropping the SAT requirement, we put less emphasis on this and more on students’ in-class experience. The importance/relevance of SATs is a topic being much discussed everywhere at this time.

Measuring student performance by our internal standards also shows the lingering effects of catching up post-Covid. While 7th graders passed all tests, many subgroups are still underperforming. High school is more complex; for example, some students know they have enough credits to graduate without having to pass all courses. We do have a robust and effective summer school program that clearly delineates for every student just what they need to do. Our numbers are improving, but probably not enough to meet all academic achievement goals.

In regard to service learning goals, what is meaningful to students varies by age. Younger students are looking at broad issues—housing and food insecurity or the environment. As they get older, they can narrow their focus and, by the time they are seniors, they are usually actively engaged in a something they have chosen and structured themselves

Compared to prior years, this year's report indicates that a slightly lower percentage of students consider ours a safe and supportive culture. We attribute this, at least in part, to lack of an assistant dean and a changing senior leadership roster. We now have new leaders securely in place and are moving forward, strengthening relationships with families as well as students.

Action plans are in place to address all goals that were not met. More details on all of the above topics are contained in the written Executive Director's report, SOA plan, and Annual Report draft. Kara McLaughlin moved to accept both the SOA plan and the Annual Report as written, with the addition of any updated summer school data. Julie Rose seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously, with an abstention by Mark Stevens.

Mark raised the question of what happens should MCAS be discontinued in Massachusetts, (This is a ballot question in the November election.) While it would not change how we prepare the Annual Report, we would have to rely more on our own internal performance measures. The SOA would be totally different as it is based on MCAS data.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Development

Fallon Burke thanked the trustees for their contributions of time, talent, and money, all of which contributed to a very successful 20th anniversary fundraising year. We raised well over \$125,000 against a \$100,000 goal, with not all pledges yet paid.

Fallon's written report detailed how each of our major efforts performed. The largest, the Reach for College Gala, exceeded its \$65,000 goal, generating \$71,000+. The live auction performed well, but technology problems undermined the silent auction a bit.

The first 2025 program will be Reach the Beach and Health and Wellness Week, taking place this ear the week of September 9th. The Development Committee will be setting its fundraising goals soon.

B. Finance

Stephanie Callahan presented the monthly financial report, which shows us to be in sound financial condition. Referencing the percent of expenses paid by tuition, she noted that, compared to non-charter public schools, we have the added burden of paying for a longer day, longer year, not to mention paying rent for our facilities. We are at 86 percent, compared to the 85 percent benchmark to be considered low risk. The FY2024 report she presented is very close to final, with perhaps very minor changes to be completed by 7/31/24.

C. Governance

Kara McLaughlin moved to accept the proposed Board and Board committee meeting dates for the year ahead. This was seconded by Mark Stevens and passed unanimously via roll call vote.

The Governance Committee put forward Domina DiBiase as a new trustee. She will complete Shelby Morrison's term ending December 31, 2024, and may be nominated for election to her own three-year term at the December 2024 Board meeting. As a committee recommendation, the motion did not require a second. It passed unanimously via roll call vote. Eddie Aroko will be her mentor

VII. Vote to Adjourn

Julie Rose moved to adjourn, seconded by Eddie Aroko. The motion passed unanimously via roll call vote, and the meeting ended at 7:36 PM.