

Salem School Committee

Meeting Minutes

October 5, 2026

29 Highland Avenue, Room 227,
Salem, MA (with Zoom/SATV remote option)

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by the Chair. It was noted that one member was participating remotely via Zoom, requiring all votes to be conducted by roll call.

Attendance / Roll Call

Members Present: Member Cornell (Vice Chair), Member Hoffman, Member Manning, Member Miranda, Member Stot, Member Byas, Chair.

Administration Present: Dr. Tommy Welch (Superintendent), Kate Carboni (Deputy Superintendent), Sonia Andrews (Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning), Elizabeth Poley (Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations), Finn Billings (Student Representative).

II. Approval of Agenda

Motion: To approve the meeting agenda.

Moved by: Member Cornell

Seconded by: Member Hoffman

Vote (Roll Call): Member Cornell: Yes; Member Hoffman: Yes; Member Manning: Yes; Member Miranda: Yes; Member Stot: Yes; Member Byas: Yes; Chair: Yes. **Motion passed 7-0.**

III. Public Comment

1. Melinda Baker (Parent, Sarah Parker Remond School):

Expressed concern regarding the fragmentation of the school calendar at Sarah Parker Remond and across elementary schools.

Noted that there are only five 2-week periods in the entire school year containing 10 full, uninterrupted school days due to frequent holidays, early releases, and half days for professional development/conferences.

Urged the committee to consider sustained instructional time and routine consistency when developing future school calendars, particularly given declining MCAS scores.

2. Abby Conway (Parent, Witchcraft Heights Elementary):

Raised questions regarding classroom technology integration and screen time, particularly in kindergarten and early elementary grades.

Requested district-wide guidelines on screen time caps, transparency on edtech apps used, and a debate on 1-to-1 device programs versus alternative approaches.

Recommended the book *The Digital Delusion* and urged the committee to address tech policies with urgency.

IV. Consent Agenda

A. Consent Agenda Items

The consent agenda originally contained:

Minutes of the September 22, 2026 School Committee Meeting.

Approval of High School CTE SkillsUSA Fall Leadership Conference field trip.

Approval of Salem High School trip to the Dominican Republic (February 2028).

Approval of Warrants dated September 23 and September 24, 2026.

Motion to Sever Item: Member Stot moved to split the consent agenda to pull the Dominican Republic trip for separate discussion due to missing application forms in the packet. Seconded by Member Miranda.

Motion to Approve Revised Consent Agenda (excluding Dominican Republic trip):

Moved by: Member Manning | **Seconded by:** Member Cornell

Vote (Roll Call): Member Manning: Yes; Member Miranda: Yes; Member Stot: Yes; Member Byas: Yes; Member Cornell: Yes; Member Hoffman: Yes; Chair: Yes. **Motion passed 7-0.**

B. Discussion & Vote on Pulled Item: Dominican Republic Field Trip (Feb 2028)

Discussion: Member Stot requested background on the trip structure. The trip organizer (art teacher) and Member Cornell explained that EF Educational Tours runs the trip. It is non-subject-specific to remain equitable and open to all high school students. Activities include cultural immersions, carnival mask making, pottery, and dancing lessons. Early approval is critical to lock in ~\$3,000 in early EF scholarships and keep monthly

payments affordable. The trip takes place during February vacation, so no school days are missed.

Motion: To approve the Salem High School EF field trip to the Dominican Republic for February 2028.

Moved by: Member Cornell | **Seconded by:** Member Hoffman

Vote (Roll Call): Member Hoffman: Yes; Member Manning: Yes; Member Miranda: Yes; Member Stot: Yes; Member Byas: Yes; Member Cornell: Yes; Chair: Yes. **Motion passed 7-0.**

V. Student Representative Report

Student Representative Finn presented the following updates:

Superintendent Advisory Meeting: Scheduled for Thursday, October 8th, in Room 140 at 1:40 PM. Previous members and interested new students will meet Dr. Welch and Ms. McGee to discuss potential student projects.

Application Form Review: Reviewed the draft student advisory application form, which gathers student perspectives, proposed district improvements, extracurricular involvement, and commitment to monthly meeting schedules.

Outreach to Alternative High Schools: Requested contacts at Salem Prep and New Liberty to ensure student representation across all district high schools. Administration agreed to facilitate contact with the respective principals.

VI. Superintendent's Report

A. Announcements & District Highlights

National Principals Month: Celebrating school leaders throughout October.

National Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Recognized in connection with HAWC's annual breakfast.

National College & Career Awareness Month: Highlighting post-secondary pathway planning and awareness across district campuses.

Hispanic/Latino Heritage Month Events: Highlights include the 4th Annual Multicultural Potluck Dinner at Bentley Academy Charter School on Thursday at 6:00 PM.

Community Engagement Update: School listening sessions are nearly complete; classroom visits continue with a goal of visiting 100% of classrooms.

Haunted Happenings Parade: Celebrated district participation in the annual parade and community festivities.

B. MCAS, ACCESS, and Accountability Results Presentation

Superintendent Welch, Deputy Superintendent Carboni, and Ms. Andrews presented a comprehensive analysis of state accountability results, MCAS performance, student growth percentiles (SGP), and ACCESS testing for Multilingual Learners (MLs).

1. State Accountability Overview:

Salem earned the state designation of **"Substantial Progress Toward Targets"** with a 51st criterion-referenced percentile overall.

Bates, Collins Middle, Horace Mann, and Witchcraft Heights also achieved the "Substantial Progress" distinction individually.

Chronic Absenteeism: Chronic absenteeism dropped to 16.8%, putting Salem below the state average and second-lowest among all 26 Gateway Cities.

Advanced Coursework: Over 81% of 11th and 12th graders passed AP or Early College courses, placing Salem near the top among Gateway Cities.

2. Gateway City Benchmarks (Grades 3-8 & Grade 10):

Grades 3-8 ELA: 30% met/exceeded expectations (ranked 7th out of 26 Gateway Cities, tied with Methuen and Peabody; 10 points behind state average of 40%).

Grades 3-8 Math: 25% met/exceeded expectations (ranked 13th out of 26 Gateway Cities, tied with Worcester; 16 points behind state average of 41%).

Grades 5 & 8 Science: 30% met/exceeded expectations (ranked 4th out of 26 Gateway Cities, tied with Westfield; 11 points behind state average of 41%).

Grade 10 Rankings: ELA ranked 7th (43% proficient); Math ranked 4th (32% proficient); Science ranked 4th.

3. Deep-Dive Findings & Subgroup Disproportionality:

Disproportionality & Subgroups: Severe performance gaps persist for low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, and high-needs students across all grade levels.

Lowest Performer Growth Floor: In Grade 10 ELA, lowest-performing students had an SGP of only 26.9. In Grade 10 Math, while the overall group SGP was ~70, the lowest-performing subset registered an SGP of only 20.6, indicating that the students furthest behind are growing at the slowest rates.

Writing / Idea Development: Early progress was shown in Grades 3-5 (reducing 0s and 1s) and Grade 7 (notable jump in 3.5-5 scores). Grade 10 writing scores declined, coinciding with higher participation in advanced coursework.

ACCESS for ELLs: 48% of Salem MLs met progress targets (outperforming the state average of 46%). Year-over-year comparison is cautioned due to WIDA 2020 standard alignment updates.

4. Priority Initiatives & Action Plan:

Daily Instructional Cycle: Focus on rigorous grade-level content, high cognitive demand, avoiding over-scaffolding, and ensuring active learning in every class every day.

Tier 1 & Tier 2 Coherence: Aligning intervention work directly to core classroom instruction, using pre-teaching and just-in-time prerequisite skill support (e.g., Eureka Math Catalyst).

High-Quality Tools: Implementing a K-5 Writing Toolkit and structured literacy pathways.

Targeted Walkthroughs: Conducting 3 rounds of structured walkthroughs (~100 classrooms per round) to evaluate instructional practice and provide immediate feedback.

Systemic Bottlenecks: Central office commitment to address "boosters and blockers" identified in School Improvement Plans.

5. Committee Discussion & Feedback:

Member Cornell: Expressed concern regarding low expectations and over-scaffolding for vulnerable students. Highlighted that the current 10th-grade cohort endured extreme disruption (5 principals in 5 years between middle and high school) and stressed tracking cohort human stories behind numbers.

Member Byas: Asked for concrete examples of in-classroom vs. out-of-classroom support. Assistant Superintendent Andrews detailed small-group pre-teaching routines in early literacy and Eureka Math Catalyst modules.

Member Miranda: Inquired about dual-language outcomes at Bentley Academy (75% high-needs population) and immediate pivoting mechanisms. Deputy Superintendent Carboni and Member Cornell noted MCAS is not pedagogically aligned with dual-language models. Staffing turnover (3-year visas for international teachers from Spain/DR teaching 4 subjects) was identified as a major structural bottleneck requiring HR/union collaboration.

VII. Financial & Operations Update

Assistant Superintendent Elizabeth Polley presented operational updates:

Grants Update: As of late September, the district has secured \$11,329,340 in federal, state (DESE), entitlement, competitive, and private grants, putting Salem on pace with previous fiscal years. A full FY27 grant/budget outlook will be presented in late fall.

Transportation: Addressing route crowding and structural challenges on mini/large buses in partnership with NRT and Haley. Reinforcing student bus card "tap-on / tap-off" protocols to capture accurate ridership data.

Food & Nutrition Services: Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month with special culturally reflective menus (tamales, quesadillas, burrito bowls with local Mexican corn). October is Farm-to-School Month, with 50% of food locally sourced. Back-of-house composting is active across all 8 kitchens; front-of-house cafeteria composting (partnered with Black Earth) is live at Salem High, Collins, Horace Mann, and Sarah Parker Remond, with a goal of 100% cafeteria rollout by the end of the school year.

National School Lunch Week: Invited committee members and local guest servers to join lunch service next week.

Bus Camera Enforcement (Member Stot Request): Member Stot requested a public update on the status of automated school bus stop-arm camera enforcement under the state law passed last year. Administration committed to providing an update.

VIII. Subcommittee Reports, Motions & Announcements

Subcommittee Reports: None.

Newsletter Items: MCAS summary report will be consolidated for approval at the next meeting.

IX. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn the meeting.

Moved by: Member Cornell | **Seconded by:** Member Hoffman

Vote (Roll Call): Member Miranda: Yes; Member Stot: Yes; Member Byas: Yes; Member Cornell: Yes; Member Hoffman: Yes; Member Manning: Yes; Chair: Yes. **Motion passed 7-0.**
The meeting was adjourned.