

**Salem Public Schools  
Salem School Committee  
Special Meeting Minutes  
August 9, 2021**

On August 9, 2021 the Salem School Committee held a Special School Committee meeting at 4:00 PM using the Zoom platform.

**Members Present:** Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, Ms. Mary Manning, Mr. Manny Cruz, Ms. Amanda Campbell, Dr. Kristin Pangallo, and Ms. Ana Nuncio

**Members Absent:** Mr. James Fleming

**Others in Attendance:** Superintendent Stephen Zrike, Assistant Superintendent Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent Mary DeLai, and Chelsea Banks

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Mayor Driscoll called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. Mayor Driscoll read the new Public Participation Policy 6409 and also explained the request for Spanish interpretation for participation.

**Approval of Agenda**

Mayor Driscoll requested a motion to approve the Regular Agenda. Ms. Manning motioned and Ms. Nuncio seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Ms. Manning	Yes
Mr. Cruz	Yes
Dr. Pangallo	Yes
Ms. Nuncio	Yes
Ms. Campbell	Yes
Mayor Driscoll	Yes

Motion carries 6-0

Mr. Cruz entered the meeting at 4:10 p.m.

**Public Comments**

The School Committee Secretary announced that there were several public comments. Mayor Driscoll announced that although under normal circumstances public comments are only allowed in the beginning of the meeting, she will allow additional time later in the meeting.

Sarah Blodgett, 2 Reliance Row, asked to have her comments read.  
*I strongly agree with the masking recommendations and hope they are adopted.*

Judith Forman, 18 Southwick Street, asked to have her comments read.

*YES! Thank you to the Salem Public Schools for crafting such a comprehensive, thoughtful, and SAFE plan to get our kids back to school. I am SO pleased to see that masks are being required universally to keep everyone safe and in school. The outlined testing strategy is so smart as is the commitment to as many outdoor meals as possible. Salem's plan should be a model for districts across the Commonwealth. Thank you to Dr. Zrike and his team for putting safety first - and making sure all of our children have the chance to learn IN SCHOOL this year. I am so proud to be a Salem parent!*

Elisabeth Wrenn, 4 Gardner Street, asked to have her comments read.

*Schools are a space for education and learning. We must practice what we preach and learn from our own history and science. What we have learned from science is that breakthrough cases occur in dispute vaccination. We have also learned that COVID is spread indoors. If it was a science lesson for our students, we'd expect them to follow the data and I expect our school committee to do exactly that. Prevention and data are critical for public health. All students, faculty and teachers should be required to wear masks indoors despite their vaccination status. Let's not repeat history and let's keep students learning in person.*

Heath Stewart, 2 Carriage Hill Lane, asked to have her comments read.

*Hi, Thank you for listening to my concerns. As the father of two children enrolled in the fall I strongly oppose any mask recommendation. If the kids are truly the number one concern of the committee then masks should be optional for students and staff. The vaccine has been made available to everyone who wants it. The teachers are vaccinated and protected. The kids are at a miniscule threat of severe illness and virtually all the science proves this. I firmly believe masks should be optional. So much so that if masks are mandatory I will withdraw both of my children from school. Please do what is in the best interest of the students. Not the best interest of the teachers or parents, staff or anyone else. Masks should be optional! Thanks for your time.*

Maria Cameron, 25 Crowdis Street, asked to have her comments read.

*Due to the recent uptick in cases in our city, as well as a highly transmissible variant, I urge the school committee to implement mitigation measures such as masking regardless of vaccination status, ventilation, filtration, outside time when learning and eating (weather permitting), as well as weekly testing. It is important for our children to have in person learning without disruption, and local epidemiologists and infectious disease doctors have stressed the importance of these necessary measures until community transmission is very low. In addition, many children have underlying health conditions that sometimes can be exacerbated by illness, including my daughter. All students should have the opportunity to feel safe in the classroom while being a part of their community. We are very much still in a pandemic, and our elementary aged children have no access to a vaccine for COVID-19 at this time. I am hopeful that the recommendations out forth by the school committee are best at this time, and will also help to limit community spread.*

Rosemary Malfi, Larchmont Road, asked to have her comments read.

*I am a parent of a rising second grader at Bates Elementary, and I wanted to offer the comment that I am very proud of the leadership demonstrated by Principal Softic, by the superintendent, and by our mayor and school committee over the last year. And I continue to be impressed by their decisive leadership when it comes to developing safety protocols for the coming year based on evolving public health information. I am in support of the proposed plan relayed by Superintendent Zrike in the most recent correspondence to SPS parents. I am glad that the district is committed to having children in school this fall and to implementing public health measures that will make our return as safe as possible, including weekly testing, masking indoors, and maximizing outdoor time. Thank you for your continued service during this time of unease.*

Sarah Dulong, 2A Arnold Drive, asked to have her comments read.

*Dear Members of the School Committee*

*I have never had a pit in my stomach like I do sending my kids into school this year (which is not the feeling you want to feel entering a new school year) greatly due to the delta variant and the 12 and under kids not being vaccinated .*

*I am writing on behalf of my 2 under 12 Salem Public School children who are not eligible to be vaccinated yet. I hope you will do your best to protect my kids and the kids of Salem by making strong decisions in keeping safe the children of Salem from Covid 19 especially the delta variant which is just as contagious as the chicken pox (when I was in first grade my elementary school in marblehead had to shut down because the majority of the kids caught the chicken pox....the contagious factor is obviously extremely strong).*

*I hope you will all be universally in favor of universal mask wearing of all kids and staff which is the best way to stop the spread, as well as in school testing for covid (and encourage and inform why every family should take advantage of pool testing so we can help protect our children and stop community spread with this). I also feel that every family's risk tolerance and health issues are different and remote options should be available now more than ever with the Delta Variant. It's honestly shocking that it is not. Parents should not have to pull their children out to home-school because there is no remote option especially when vaccines for this age group is around the corner, and to stop that option now I feel is truly not right. (both my children had very successful remote experiences last year)*

*Please follow the science and protect ALL kids by implementing universal masking for Salem public schools as well as stronger mitigation efforts since this is a much more contagious variant and feel even more needs to be done than last year, and implement a remote option as well. Also smaller class sizes in person can be helpful as well .*

*I also feel schools should provide kn95 masks for kids because that may be needed to stop the spread of the variant and/or masks that fit properly on kids. Also to do lunches outdoors/ ,mask breaks outdoors/ and take advantage of outdoor learning and encourage outdoor learning as much as possible from the schools.*

*Thank you for all you do,*

*Sarah Dulong*

Debra Turner, 1 Cherry Street, asked to have her comments read.

*Hello, all! It's me again and I promise to make it short and sweet:*

*I am SO excited that my daughter was picked in the second pre-k lottery!!! I couldn't tamp down my emotions when I got that call. (Thank you to Emily for her patience with me on the phone!) With this, all my (5) kids, big and small, will be in Salem schools this year and I am so grateful that my youngest gets to join her older siblings in SPS.*

*With all my excitement, however, I am concerned about the delta variant and Covid resurgence as the kids start school in a matter of weeks when they were all remote all year last year. I trust you all to do what's right to please, please keep in mind the kiddos counting down the days (23 for kindergarten) to get back into school buildings and keep my "babies" and others safe when there is no remote school this year, but no vaccine for these kids either. We have been super safe in our house and plan to be at school as well for everyone's sake. We love our schools and all our friends and want everyone healthy and well for the start of the school year, through \*gulp\* October in Salem and beyond!*

*Thank you for all you do.*

*- Deb*

## **Educator's Showcase**

None

## **Report of the Superintendent**

### **a. Health and Safety Protocols for the School Year**

Superintendent Zrike presented to the Committee his health and safety protocol recommendations for opening school. He explained that Salem has had a recent increase of new cases with the Delta Variant and although 67.5% of Salem residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, the youngest population (age 12-15 and 16-19) are the lowest percent vaccinated. Dr. Zrike noted that as we prepare for fall, we need to take into consideration the new lessons that we have learned from this virus. Our goal is to have everyone back safely and to minimize the disruption of learning to the students and their families. Superintendent Zrike has made the following recommendations, which includes strong health & hygiene, COVID-19

surveillance testing, supplemental ventilation, universal mask policy, and meals and mask breaks. Chelsea Banks explained the importance of a commitment from everyone to stay home when symptomatic, weekly test and on-site rapid tests to minimize quarantines, ensuring all HVAC systems and HEPA filters are properly functioning, universal mask policy regardless of vaccination status and the encouragement of meals to take place outdoors whenever possible in addition to physical distancing during indoor meals or mask breaks.

Dr. Zrike explained the next steps would include a community health & safety webinar with Dr. Clovene Campbell, Dr. Kristin Pangallo and other health advisors on Tuesday, August 24th at 5:30 pm. A staff health & safety webinar will also be scheduled. In addition, all staff will be reviewing strategies and training during PD for 4 days before the start of school.

Ms. Manning commented that she is in support of the recommendations, but does have a concern regarding students who may need remote accommodations and Dr. Zrike responded that he would be in contact with the family to determine the conditions. Dr. Pangallo asked for clarification on the Positive Pool Testing. Ms. Banks responded that there will be a staff and family health webinar that will explain how the COVID pool testing will be done. Dr. Pangallo asked additional questions, including some mask break concerns. Ms. Banks explained that mask breaks will always be done safely and outside whenever possible. Dr. Pangallo asked additional questions regarding masks and the importance of their proper fit. Ms. Banks added that there is an abundance of supply of masks in the schools. Dr. Pangallo also spoke of the importance of everyone being vaccinated and stressed to parents to speak to their pediatrician if they should have questions or any concerns. Mr. Cruz is also in support of the recommendations and requested more use of the outdoor spaces for the fall. Ms. Campbell thanked the Superintendent and his team for putting together something so comprehensive and added her support for the Test and Stay program.

The Mayor stated that on the city side, employees are required to either be vaccinated or are mandated to have testing. She is asking businesses to mirror the same policy. She also suggested thinking about vaccines for athletes and bands or biweekly testing for those not vaccinated. Dr. Zrike responded that they are supportive to move forward with whatever can be done legally. He stated that so far the MIAA has not recommended a mask policy, and added that they are planning on additional recommendations to be proposed at the next School Committee meeting on Monday.

### **Public Comments - continued**

The School Committee Secretary announced that there were additional public comments.

Lisa Greco, 10 Wisteria Street, asked to have her comments read.

*I completely disagree with all recommendations of masking our children again and of testing them in school, voluntarily or not. You cannot use science to say masks work when the CDC itself has flip flopped so much and the science proves otherwise. I have spent hours upon hours researching this and learning about covid. You are basing this on something that causes no deaths in healthy children anywhere. The testing itself is unreliable and no longer promoted by the CDC as 50 percent have been false positives and it cannot distinguish between flu and covid or any supposed variant. They have never been able to isolate the Sars Cov 2 virus, and without that, they cannot*

*determine whether or not they can put up a public health act. You must have the science to back up what you're saying otherwise it is fraud. You are asking my children to wear masks and breathe in their own carbon dioxide and toxins that they breathe out. This is the most unhealthy thing I can think of to do. This is a human rights violation to make them wear masks without science to back it up. You are instilling fear in our children and also in parents. I know for one that I no longer trust you with my children. I am sick over the thought of sending them back to a school environment that you are recommending. No parent should have to worry like this. Your job is to educate not to make decisions regarding my children's health . At the very least masks should be optional and it should be the parents' decision not yours. The schools need to focus on education and stay out of health matters, political matters, or sex discussions. Do your only job and teach math, English, and science, and how about history also. I want a remote option for my children again if you pass this mask policy as I will not be sending them with masks. You are robbing them of their childhood and friends and normal activities by going backwards. Covid is not nearly as deadly as media and propaganda make it seem. I'm looking for homeschool options now as I refuse to send my children back this way. You are putting us all in a bad position with work etc. But my children come first and always will. Their health, both mental and physical, is of utmost importance to me and you are taking my decision making power and right as a parent away. I should not have to worry about sending my children to school and then being questioned about covid and contact tracing and their vaccine status. I have never ever been so disgusted with a school system in my life. Let my kids breathe free and leave the decision making to the parents, who know what is best for their own children.*

Ann Berman, 1401 Crane Brook Way, Peabody asked to be recognized to speak.

*Ms. Berman announced that the Salem Teachers Union is excited to partner with the district in keeping everyone safe and do whatever is necessary to keep the staff and students safe.*

Dr. Pangallo asked if she could respond to the public comment. She wanted to urge that everyone is getting their information regarding the pandemic from your doctor and reliable health professionals since there were several incorrect statements in tonight's public comments.

Superintendent Zrike thanked all the unions for working with the district's recommendations. He added that the STU contacted him and offered free face shields for children who may need them.

#### **Report from the Student Representative - Hawa Hamidou Tabayi**

None

#### **Old Business**

##### **a. Deliberation and Vote on the Revised 2021-2022 Annual School Calendar for the Carlton Innovation School**

Superintendent Zrike explained that there was a small change to the Carlton Innovation School calendar. The first day of kindergarten was moved to September 3rd since the original date fell on Rosh Hashanah.

Dr. Pangallo made a motion to adopt the revised 2021-2022 annual school calendar for the Carlton Innovation School. Mr. Cruz seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Ms. Manning	Yes
Mr. Cruz	Yes
Dr. Pangallo	Yes

Ms. Nuncio                      Yes  
Ms. Campbell                 Yes  
Mayor Driscoll                Yes  
Motion carries 6-0

### **New Business**

#### **b. Deliberation and Vote to Accept the Recommendation of the Superintendent for School Opening**

Ms. Manning made a motion to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent for school opening. Ms. Nuncio seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Ms. Manning                 Yes  
Mr. Cruz                      Yes  
Dr. Pangallo                 Yes  
Ms. Nuncio                    Yes  
Ms. Campbell                 Yes  
Mayor Driscoll                Yes  
Motion carries 6-0

### **Finance Report**

None

### **Subcommittee Reports**

None

### **School Committee Concerns and Resolutions**

None

### **Adjournment**

Mayor Driscoll requested a motion to adjourn. Ms. Manning motioned and Dr. Pangallo seconded. A roll call vote was taken.

Ms. Manning                 Yes  
Mr. Cruz                      Yes  
Dr. Pangallo                 Yes  
Ms. Nuncio                    Yes  
Ms. Campbell                 Yes  
Mayor Driscoll                Yes

Motion carries 6-0. Meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

*Nancy A. Weiss*

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent

**Approved September 13, 2021**