Salem School Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 6, 2015

A regular meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, July 6, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

**Members Present**: Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, Ms. Deborah Amaral, Mr. James Fleming, Ms. Rachel Hunt, Mr. Patrick Schultz, and Dr. Brendan Walsh

**Members Absent:** Mr. Nate Bryant

**Others Present**: Ms. Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent, Business Manager Philip Littlehale and Eileen Sacco, Secretary

**Call to Order**

Mr. Fleming called the Regular Meeting of the Salem School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Approval of the Agenda**

Dr. Walsh moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Schultz seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Regular School Committee meeting held on Monday, June 15, 2015 were presented for approval.

Dr. Walsh moved approval. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Questions and Comments from the Audience**

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

**Superintendent’s Report**

Mr. Fleming noted that this is the first meeting with the new Superintendent of Schools, Ms. Margarita Ruiz. Ms. Ruiz stated that she has prepared some remarks that she would like to give this evening, and are as follows:

Ms. Ruiz stated that she would like to express her excitement as she begins this important work for the city. Shen states that this is a very happy day for her in her journey as an educator!

Ms. Ruiz thanked Mayor Driscoll, and the School Committee for their faith in her leadership and stated that she would like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Steve Russell for his service to SPS and for his support during my transition. Please join me in thanking Dr. Russell for his service to SPS and wish him well in his future endeavors.

As I begin my work of leading our district, I vow to work tirelessly to deliver on the promise of excellence in all of the Salem Public Schools. All of our students and their families deserve no less. We must ensure we deliver on the promise of an excellent and rigorous education to all our students regardless of their socio-economic, linguistic or cultural background. This will be at the heart of the direction in which I will guide my leadership in SPS. We will be working hard to develop a solid plan to make sure we achieve the goals and priorities for our district. We have great talent in our district and I believe we have the capacity for achieving great success!

Before I set out to do this important work, I want to take time to learn more about the Salem Public Schools and the hopes and dreams of all stakeholders for the future of our district. In the coming weeks and months, and as part of my 100-day entry plan, I will be conducting a series of public forums and one on one meetings to listen to: students, parents/guardians, elected officials, community based organizations, small and larger business, and institutions of higher education, among many other stakeholders. The goal of these forums will be to listen and learn about the Salem Public Schools and the issues that are important for all our stakeholders. During these forums, I will also have the opportunity to share with you insight to the core values that will guide me as I lead our district.

I am sharing you tonight the dates and location of my initial forums with teachers, support staff, parents and community members. In the upcoming weeks, more dates will made public as to offer our families and community members several options to meet with me. Student forums will also be scheduled for September and these will be made public in the coming weeks. The dates that you see on the screen will be posted on the district online calendar and will be posted on the Superintendent’s Bulletin Board in our Salem Public Schools website ([www.salemk12.org](http://www.salemk12.org)). I encourage teachers, parents and community members to come join me at a forum that is convenient and I look forward to meeting you and to discussing the future of our district together.

We have successfully completed a school year in our wonderful SPS students have accomplished great things and have provided us with examples of wonderful civic engagement! These are some of the reasons we should feel proud of our students in SPS:

**1. Bates School** – the school had their first 'Literacy Festival.' The theme of this year's Literacy Festival was Dr. Seuss' "Think and Wonder, Wonder and Think" during which students read a total of 323,000 minutes at home, which was an average of 1,070 minutes per student.

**2. Carlton School** – During this winter our students read over 33,000 books and chapters for their Snowball Slam.

**3. Collins Middle School**- 14 students from Collins participated in the state Math Counts Competition and record number of 8th graders, **60 in total**, were inducted into the **National Junior Honor Society this spring**.

**4. Salem Prep** - Seven students graduated from Salem Prep High School by graduation day. An eighth student completed his requirements by the end of the school term. **Five students** are working as **Student Leaders** this summer in the **Early Childhood Center and K-5 summer programs.**

**5. Salem High School** - **Advanced Health students** coordinated several school-wide projects including the Project Purple Initiative (taking a stand against substance abuse) and the **Embrace the Struggle project (depression awareness**).

The 16 member **Witch Pitch** acapella group sang at the White House for the President and Mrs. Obama. They we coached by and traveledTo Washington with their teacher advisors Sam Gambaccini and LianneGoodwin.

**6. Witchcraft Heights** - Inspired by a book the students were reading, a second grade teacher and her class planned a garden. Little by little the garden began to grow and soon a special education teacher began an after school garden club. This school year their Life Skills class became involved.

With their classmates, Life Skills students worked to begin seedlings in their classroom and plant them in the garden. They helped to harvest and then with the help of fifth grade students organized a farmers market and sold the products to families in the school. Doing this gave all of their students an opportunity to learn about the science of plants, money in a real life situation, dealing with customers, and a great connection to literacy in a positive way.

There have been a number of student led projects at WHES. One project in particular the WHES is most proud of is an effort to raise fund for the Perkins School for the Blind. Three of our students reached out to us about creating Braille Pins. They worked closely with the art teacher and our vision specialist teacher to raise funds for the library at Perkins. The students collaborated with their blind classmate to create these pins and sold them to the school community. What a great example of students at work supporting our community!

I hope you all can join me in thanking all the wonderful students at SPS for their dedication to their academic growth as well as for their civic engagement and support of our community.

I would also like to thank and recognize the work and dedication of all our teachers in our district. They are on the frontlines of the important work of educating our students. Day in and day out our teachers display great dedication to make sure our students receive the best instruction and support they can provide. Thank you for all you do on behalf of our students and their families.

I also want to recognize the work of all our school leaders and their administrative staff for ensuring that their efforts are focused, effective and supportive of teaching and learning at the school level. We are fortunate to have great leaders in our district!

I must also thank the members of our central office staff, especially our Assistant Superintendents Kate Carbone and Margaret Marotta as well as our Business Manager, Phil Littlehale for their leadership in the work that has garnered improvements at our schools. I also give thanks many members of our central office staff for the work they have done this year in supporting the academic work in our schools. Thank you to all of you and please know that I look forward to working with you as we solidify the team that will support teaching and learning in SPS.

We have just closed as school year, but the work of planning for the next school year has begun in earnest! An important aspect of strengthening the work in our schools is hiring exceptional talent that will support our path to excellence. We have had a number of openings for principal positions in our district. This has prompted a search for the best talent we can have to lead our schools. Hiring and retaining effective, highly qualified school leaders in our district is one of my priorities as a Superintendent and it is also an objective in our Annual Improvement Plan. Highly effective school leaders inspire, build the capacity and support our teachers and in the process increase student achievement. Hiring strong school leaders is a key strategy for the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in our district.

To this end, I have introduced a new, very rigorous principal hiring process that ensures two key principles:

* to consider high quality candidates that have been vetted by central office staff and college partners for the basic skills required to lead a school
* to ensure participation and recommendation of the school community in the selection process

Following these principles, a number of highly qualified candidates have been hired as new school leaders in our district.

Tonight I would like to introduce to you some of the new members who have joined our SPS family:

**Dr. Johanna Even** – Dr. Even will be the new principal for the Nathaniel Bowditch School. Dr. Even is a fluent Spanish speaker with over 20 years of experience as an urban educator. She brings experience as a teacher, literacy coach, principal and leadership coach and has also worked in two schools with dual language programs. Dr. Even is a graduate of the EdM and EdD in Administration, Planning, and Social Policy from Harvard's Graduate School of Education. We are very fortunate to have such a highly qualified leader spearheading the transformation of the Bowditch School.

**Nick Gesualdi** - Mr. Gesualdi will be the Interim Principal for the Saltonstall K-8 School. Mr. Gesualdi comes to us from the Eliot School in the North End where he served as Director of Operations. Mr. Gesualdi has developed a solid background as a school leader by working with a very strong principal in the highest performing school in Boston (Eliot School). The Eliot School has very similar demographics as the Saltonstall School. Mr. Gesualdi’s experience in a similar K-8 school will be invaluable as the leads the Saltonstall School community. Mr. Gesualdi is currently completing a doctoral program in Ed Leadership from Vanderbilt University. Again, we are very fortunate to have such a strong leader at the helm of the Saltonstall School’s path to increased excellence in education!

To improve our support for English Language Learners instruction in all our schools, I have asked Rebecca Westlake to be the new director of English Language Learners services.

**Rebecca Westlake -** Ms. Westlake joins SPS after recently finishing her Master’s Degree in School Leadership from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. While pursuing her degree, Ms. Westlake completed a leadership practicum at the Rafael Hernández Dual Language K-8 in Boston. Previously, after receiving a Fulbright grant, Ms. Westlake spent a year working in a bilingual public school in Madrid. A fluent Spanish speaker, she has taught high school ESL in Chelsea and in Lawrence, and has held a variety of leadership positions at Phoenix Academy, an alternative high school, including ELL Director, Dean of Curriculum and Instruction, and Founding Assistant Principal. She has also led the Massachusetts Charter Association’s English Language Learner Community of Practice as Leader-in-Residence, and was a presenter at the 2015 Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages (MATSOL) conference. I am confident that the instruction of ELLs and the effectiveness of our ESL programs will improve and thrive under Ms. Westlake’s expert leadership.

Please join me in welcoming our newest, highly talented members of the SPS team! We look forward to working with all of you!

We have made great progress in the hiring for these key positions in our district. But there is much to be done in the coming weeks and months to position our district for success for the opening of the 2015-2016 year. Some of the immediate tasks include:

-Hiring a new school leader for the Horace Mann. I hope to have an update soon regarding this search.

-Plan for the implementation of the new Transportation Policy adopted by SC so that the impact for our families can be reduced. We are beginning this important discussion tonight.

- Finalizing the Bentley MOU is also a priority for us in the coming weeks.

-As I conduct my entry activities, I will be gathering data and insights from all our stakeholders during the next 100 days. This information will be instrumental in helping me frame the priorities for our district, which will be based on our AIP, and will inform the work of our district this year.

There is indeed much to be done. However, I am encouraged by the good wishes and the many offers of help from students, parents and partners in our community. It will be my goal in the coming months to learn as much as I can about our district and schools. I am eager to bring all of our stakeholders together with the goal of providing our students with a world-class education.

We are in Salem, where we are still making history. We are Salem Public Schools, where history is being made and where, united, we will make a difference for each and every one of the 4,200 students we serve every day. We are beginning a new chapter in the development and growth of our district. Great things are in store for our schools if we can live by the motto that I plan to use to guide our journey: “Salem Public Schools: United for our Children.”

Mr. Fleming requested that the contracts for the new principals be referred to the Personnel Subcommittee for review.

Mayor Driscoll stated that the School Committee does not typically review the principals’ contracts as they are negotiated by the Superintendent using the salary range that the School Committee approves.

Ms. Amaral stated that the contract language for the principals is boiler plate language.

Mr. Fleming moved that the contacts for the new principals be circulated to the School Committee members. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Assistant Superintendent Reports** - There was no report this evening.

**Finance Report**

Mr. Littlehale reported that the bids for the bus service have been received and opened and they are in the process of reviewing them. He explained that the lowest bid was $400.00 per day for five (5) buses.

Mayor Driscoll asked what is driving the increases in bus services. Mr. Littlehale explained that it could be a number of things noting the new law that requires employers to grant sick leave to staff. He notes that the price of gas is down.

Mayor Driscoll suggested that it might be worth it for the City to get back in the transportation business, noting the cost at $72,000 per bus.

Mr. Fleming expressed his concern about the two mile limit noting that it is tough to walk to school in Salem.

Dr. Walsh agreed noting that his concern is for the safety of the students and public safety as well.

Ms. Hunt stated that she would like to see minimal impact on the families regarding transportation.

Mr. Littlehale stated that they could look at the bell times for the schools as they look at the scheduling of the buses.

Mayor Driscoll suggested that the School Committee needs to look at the transportation policy at the next meeting on August 17, 2015. It was suggested that a Special Meeting be held regarding the transportation plan.

Mayor Driscoll suggested that a Special Meeting could be held on July 27, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. She suggested that staff look at meeting the maximum transportation to meet the current level if efficiencies and consolidation of buses allows for that. She stated that she would like to serve as many students as possible noting that she is concerned about attendance of older students.

Mr. Littlehale explained that they have a new software program that should better determine the bus routes and bus stops to be more efficient. He states that the staff will be analyzing the current riders and the bus routes. He also states that they need to get the applications returned and parents need to commit so they can know how many students to plan for.

**Approval of Warrants**

The following warrants were presented for approval:

June 11, 2015 in the amount of $143,275.99

June 18, 2015 in the amount of $619,043.18

June 25, 2015 in the amount of $202,263.32

June 25, 2015 in the amount of $150.00

Mr. Fleming moved approval of the warrants in the amounts specified. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Action Items**

1. Deliberation on the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Salem School Committee and the Bentley Academy Charter School

Mayor Driscoll reported that MOU is being reviewed and refined and suggested that the matter be tabled to the next School Committee meeting in August.

Mr. Fleming moved to table action on the MOU between the Salem School Committee and the Bentley Academy Charter School to the next meeting in August. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The motion carried.

1. Deliberation on the second reading of the policy on Accepting Foreign Exchange Students

Mr. Fleming moved approval. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

1. Deliberation on the second reading of the policy on Background Checks – Fingerprinting

Mr. Fleming moved approval. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

1. Deliberation on the approval of the second reading of the revision to the policy on Children of Non-Resident Teachers Attending the Salem Public Schools

Mr. Fleming moved approval. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

1. Deliberation on the approval of the second reading Use of Tobacco on School Property by Staff Members – (Replaces existing policy 4111 Tobacco Free Schools)

Mr. Fleming moved approval. Dr. Walsh seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Subcommittee Reports**

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**Finance Subcommittee**

Ms. Amaral stated that there are still some matter brought up during the budget sessions that are before the Finance Subcommittee that need to be addressed and due to vacation schedules etc. the Finance Subcommittee has not me. She reported that she has talked to Superintendent Ruiz regarding the issues and they are being reviewed.

**School Committee Concerns and Resolutions**

Ms. Hunt requested that the matter of the Teachers Cabinet be put on the agenda for a future School Committee meeting. She notes that some but not all members were in attendance for their presentation and suggested that the School Committee read the materials presented on their recommendations.

Mayor Driscoll agreed noting that the papers were distributed to the district leadership team and they should be distributed to all teachers in the district.

Superintendent Ruiz states that teacher leadership is near and dear to her heart and she would absolutely welcome the opportunity for a Teachers Cabinet as an advisor to her and to the district.

Dr. Walsh states that while many people think that they are doing great work, he would remind people that the Teachers Cabinet is not representative of the Salem Teachers as they were not selected by their peers they were chosen by an outside group.

Ms. Amaral stated that she does not think that it is the place of the School Committee to vote on the Teachers Cabinet and suggested that it should come from the Superintendent as an advisory group to her.

Mayor Driscoll stated that the work should be shared with the district leadership and the School Committee because we need to hear more from the front lines. She also stated that we need to hear from students and we are looking at formalizing the Student Advisory Council as well.

Dr. Walsh reported that he had received some phone calls about how we are teaching Social Studies in Salem. He stated that he understands that there is an ongoing study on how we teach social studies going on this summer. He requested that the study be reviewed with the Curriculum Subcommittee.

Mr. Fleming reported that he has talked with Superintendent Ruiz on the creation of the position of Chief of Strategic Operations without the approval of the School Committee on the job description or the funding of the position. He stated that he has requested a copy of the job description and he has not received it.

Mr. Schultz stated that as a former social studies teacher he thinks it is critical that we have highly engaging social studies education in this city that teaches critical thinking, creative thinking, objective analysis of social issues, civic engagement and all types of things. He states that he does not know that he has seen evidence of that not happening, or happening to the degree that this one complaint he read expressed, and he has to say the person who expressed it has expressed many, many, many complaints and she's one of the concentrated sources of unhappiness in the district and I don't think even though her complaint was strongly written that it is necessarily representative of anything but her perception of her own child's experience.

Mr. Fleming stated that, he agrees with Mr. Shultz’s analysis of the source of the complaint, however, there was an accompanying report card with the complaint that showed that there was not any in that marking period for social studies curriculum that was reportable or markable.

Superintendent Ruiz stated that she need to more deeply understand what has been done and noted that there is an opportunity in teaching social studies to combine it with literacy for students. She states that they are working with the Curriculum team to work to strengthen professional development and will be addressing this at the Summer Institute.

Mayor Driscoll reminded members that the School Committee will be having a retreat on Saturday, July 11, 2015 at Salem State University in Marsh Hall Room 210 from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Mayor Driscoll requested that the School Committee schedule a Committee of the Whole meeting for the review of Athletic and Student Activities Fees at Salem High School. She explained that there are some funds from the host community agreement with Footprint available and she would like to do something to reduce the fees noting that she would really like to eliminate them.

Ms. Amaral moved to schedule a COW meeting to review the current athletics and student activities fees at Salem School. Mr. Schultz seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Mr. Fleming requested that the regular School Committee meeting scheduled for August 17, 2015 be rescheduled. Mayor Driscoll suggested that it could be rescheduled to August 10, 2015. Members agreed and suggested that the Committee of the Whole meeting be scheduled for August 10, 2015 as well at 6:00 p.m.

**Questions and Comments from the Audience Regarding the May 18, 2015 Agenda**

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the School Committee this evening, Mr. Fleming moved adjourn the meeting. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Eileen M. Sacco, Secretary

Salem School Committee

**Meeting Materials and Reports**

School Committee Agenda July 6, 2015

Tobacco Policy

Policy on Accepting Foreign Exchange Students

Policy on Background Checks-Fingerprinting

Policy on Children of Salem Public Schools Teachers Attending Salem Public Schools