

Board of Education Meeting

Liberty School Board Room

October 28, 2025, at 6:30 PM



MINUTES

Mission

We, the Saline Area Schools, will equip all students with the knowledge, technological proficiency, and personal skills necessary to succeed in an increasingly complex society. We expect that our students, staff, and the Saline Community will share in these responsibilities.

OPENING

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Board of Education Meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm by President Michael McVey.

Board Members Present: Darcy Berwick, Lauren Gold, Michael McVey, Jennifer Steben and Jason Tizedes

Board Members Absent: Tim Austin and Nate Hanson

Central Administration Present: Superintendent Kowalski, Assistant Superintendents Baaki Diglio and Owsley, Executive Directors Clary, Davis and Voelker

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. PUBLIC COMMENT - None

4. RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS PUBLIC COMMENT

AGENDA

5. REVISIONS/APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION made by Secretary Berwick, support Trustee Tizedes **to approve the agenda as revised.**

Revision: Remove Action Item 8A regarding policy 7740.01 Video Surveillance and Electronic Monitoring. The Board has received stakeholder feedback that they would like to consider before moving forward with action on this policy.

Ayes - All Present - **MOTION CARRIED 5-0**

6. STUDENT SHOWCASE

Connecting Program

Presenters: *Kennedy Kirk, Abby Schroeder, Alex Hatlem, Olivette Ernest, Charlotte Warren, Aly Broekhuizen, Maren Robinson, Sofia Vespremi (Advisor Sophia O'Connor)*

The Connecting Program at Saline High School is a program where students take courses on special education and then gain hands-on experience by working with students and adults with exceptionalities in schools and programs across the district. Connecting II focuses on leadership and service learning. Many graduates pursue careers in special education. Over the years, the Connecting Program has had positive and transformative effects on students, teachers and the community.

As peer mentors students assist with socialization and academic tasks, lead by example and be a support person and friend. As leadership skills are developed, students often help to organize unified events, Inclusion Weeks and design program t-shirts. One of the most special events is the annual holiday shopping assistance event at Briarwood Mall.

Unified events include PE, clubs, sports and lunch groups. Inclusion week celebrates diversity, fosters safety, acceptance and respect. Another key event is the annual Polar Plunge fundraiser which raises money for area Special Olympics. Last year over \$20K was raised by the students and community.

7. ADMINISTRATION AND BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES

Superintendent (Kowalski) - Attended the SAS Luncheon. \$43K was raised to support classrooms across all grade levels. The event featured student and teacher presentations showcasing grant funded projects. SAS is partnered with the Saline Chamber for its 50th Anniversary Parade Logo Design Contest. The winner was Cooper Bush (SHS 12th Grade) and 2nd place Marlow Samp (SHS 11th Grade) highlighting their skills learned through SWWC classes. Also participated in Trunk or Treat with the Core Team. Upcoming community events include Tailgate with the Team on 10/24 and the Special Education Listening Lab on November 12th. A service project is being planned for in January. Also highlighted all the great things happening in sports, Equestrian (2nd at Districts, 6th at Regionals) Girls Gold (4th at Districts, 14th at Regionals), Boys Soccer (SEC Champs), Field Hockey (Regional Champs, State Semifinalists) CC Boys & Girls (2nd at Regionals, qualified for States), Football (SEC Champs, advancing to playoffs). Strong performances in Tennis, Water Polo, Volleyball, Swim & Dive, Rowing and Cheer. Encouraged community members to vote on November 4th, highlighting the proposed CTE millage and the opportunities it provides students.

Student Representative (Hayes) - No report

Citizens for a Quality Community (McVey/Hanson) - Next meeting in November

Chamber of Commerce (Austin) - No report

Foundation for Saline Area Schools (Steben) - Thank you to all the volunteers, presenters and students who added to the success of the fall fundraiser.

Board Associations (McVey) - Recently attended the MASB Annual Leadership Conference in Traverse City which is always a great networking opportunity with Board members from around the state.

Sex Education Advisory Board (Gold) - No report

DEI Advisory Committee (McVey/Gold) - Next meeting in November. Dr. Kowalski will be in attendance

Wellness (Berwick) - No report

City of Saline (McVey/Steben) - No report

CARES (Berwick) - No report

Miscellaneous - Vice President Steben encourages community members to vote on November 4th.

8. **ACTION ITEMS**

A. ~~**Motion ... to approve policy 7740.01 Video Surveillance and Electronic Monitoring as submitted by the Policy Committee.**~~
Removed as revised under 5. Revisions/Approval of Agenda

B. **Motion** made by Vice President Steben, support Trustee Gold **to approve the reappointments of current trustees Stephanie Gray and Lori Byron to the Saline District Library Board for a 2 year term beginning December 1, 2025 as submitted by Dr. Kowalski, Superintendent.**

Ayes - All Present - **MOTION CARRIED 5-0**

9. **SCHEDULED REPORT**

A. **Superintendent's Transition Plan Update**
Presenter: Superintendent Kowalski

Dr. Kowalski presented an update on her transition plan, outlining the process since she joined the Saline Area Schools and detailing future priorities.

The transition was initially organized into three phases from May through October:

1. Transition: Work focused on establishing early initial relationships and collaborating with Dr. Latch and the board.
2. Joining: Dr. Kowalski officially joined the team on July 1st, beginning the listening and learning process, deepening relationships with staff and families, and launching the 2025-2026 school year.
3. Strengthening: Focused on increasing collaboration and gathering further insights through community listening labs.

Dr. Kowalski coined the current stage as Phase 4: "aligning insight into action".

Key Feedback and Recurring Themes

Dr. Kowalski synthesized feedback collected through authentic connections, community events, and intentional school visits which started in August.

From Families and Community:

- Great pride in the district's excellence and the staff who serve students.
- Desire for more consistency across schools.
- A continued focus on the whole child, emphasizing arts, academics, and athletics.
- Emphasis on supporting the emotional and psychological safety of students.

From Staff:

- A matching call for consistency across schools regarding attendance, behavior, discipline, curriculum, and daily operations.
- Need for continued time for collaboration and learning.
- Desire for flexible and unstructured time to plan together.
- Focus on balance and manageable workload, including protected planning time.
- Requests for increased mentorship and elevated onboarding processes for new staff.

Dr. Kowalski has visited approximately 55 to 60 classrooms and plans to conduct further listening labs with students at the middle school (November), Heritage (December), Liberty/Alternative Ed (January), and lower elementary schools (early spring).

Foundational Moves and Early Wins

During the initial phases, several foundational moves were supported by the team, including:

- Establishing stability and momentum by settling the SEA contract.
- Identifying possibilities for leadership pipeline collaboration with a higher education partner and a potential ISD partner to credential emerging leaders.
- Increasing the emphasis on physical and psychological safety through cross-departmental collaborations involving the Director of Safety and Security.
- Launching Parent Square to improve transparency in communication with families.

Phase 4: Aligning Insight into Action ("Big Rocks")

For the upcoming months, Dr. Kowalski identified three major priorities, referred to as the "big rocks," that require immediate focus:

1. Reorganization of District Leadership: This involves reviewing the staffing alignment and organizational structure at the central office and building levels. A key recommendation will be reorganizing the Teaching and Learning Department to focus on clarity, coherence, and aligned supports. Dr. Kowalski is recommending a flat organizational chart to provide direct mentorship, support, increase accountability, and improve communication.

2. Rapid Increase in Early Childhood Expansion: The goal is to quickly engage families and develop a unified vision for expansion. The plan builds on recent achievements, such as doubling GSRP capacity at Liberty School and hiring an Early Childhood Program Director. Next steps include meeting with

private providers for potential wraparound services and assessing the need for additional staffing and space. Dr. Kowalski may recommend a planning principal for the next school year to explore partnerships and planning for a selected avenue.

3. Strategic Planning: The team will launch the "waiting in the wings updated compass," which involves extensive stakeholder work, and develop it into a formal strategic plan for board adoption. This plan aims to define priorities and measure progress.

Cardinal Directions and Values of the Proposed Compass:

The proposed compass focuses on four areas ("Cardinal Directions"):

- North (Ignite Purpose): Connecting learning to meaning and promoting reflection.
- East (Exploring Possibilities): Fostering innovation, expanding experiential learning, electives, and rigorous experiences.
- South (Embracing Challenges): Creating supportive environments, ensuring all voices are heard, and addressing the challenges posed by a diverse group of learners.
- West (Strengthening Connections): Building trust, belonging, and collaboration across schools and the wider Saline community.

The proposed values identified are Integrity, Curiosity, Community, and Growth.

Supporting Priorities and Next Steps

Dr. Kowalski also identified several other important priorities ("little rocks") that will feed into the strategic plan:

- Aligning staffing to building needs, particularly in lower elementary schools.
- Aligning athletic support and systems, ensuring MHSAA sports are supported and other extracurriculars are addressed.
- Ensuring intentionality around personalized and innovative learning in the alternative education/Liberty building.
- Expanding leadership across the district through new partnerships and programming.

Dr. Kowalski emphasized that the strategic plan must include goal-oriented strategies with measurable outcomes (e.g., closing a specific gap by a certain percentage by a certain year) so the board can hold her accountable through the superintendent evaluation model.

Timeline for Strategic Plan Development:

- Mid-November: Core team retreat.
- January: Administrative team retreat.
- February: An update on the plan brought to the board.
- May 2026: Formal submission of the updated compass and strategic plan for board adoption.

Dr. Kowalski's plan focuses on translating extensive community and staff feedback into concrete, measurable actions to ensure future initiatives are systematically aligned with the district's core purpose and goals.

10. DISCUSSION ITEMS

A. Board Policy Committee Update

Facilitator: Lauren Gold, Chair

The policy committee met prior to the Board meeting. The only item on the agenda was the discussion to transition to Thrun Law Policy Service from Neola. Neola is no longer endorsed by the Michigan Association of School Boards. There would be a pause on Neola policy updates while evaluating the new service and the next step will be to ask the Thrun policy team to attend the next Policy meeting in order to walk the committee through the process and give time for asking questions prior to the next full board discussion. Constituent districts who have made the switch include Chelsea, Dexter and Milan. The average rollout time frame is around 6 months. The recommendation to Thrun is fully supported by the District Administration.

11. CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION made by Secretary Berwick, support Trustee Tizedez **to authorize the Consent Agenda as amended** (pull C. and add to November 11th Consent Agenda):

- A. **Approval** of the Regular Board of Education Meeting Minutes of October 14, 2025
- B. **Approval** of the Board Finance Committee Meeting Minutes of October 14, 2025
- ~~C. **Approval** of the Board of Education Retreat Minutes of October 16, 2025~~
- D. **Approval of Payment** of the General Fund Accounts Payable of October 28, 2025, in the amount of \$5,018,913.74
- E. **Approval of Payment** of 2023 Bond Fund Series I Accounts Payable of October 28, 2025, in the amount of \$1,088,628.28
- F. **Approval of Payment** of 2025 Bond Fund Series II Accounts Payable of October 28, 2025, in the amount of \$3,621,955.23
- G. **Receive and File** Finance and Human Resources Reports

CLOSING

12. ITEMS SCHEDULED ON NEXT AGENDA

Audit Presentation
Resolution on Summer Taxes
Discussion on 2026 Board Calendar

13. PUBLIC COMMENT

STUDENTS

Carmen Lauchu, SHS Alumni , UM Student - Spoke regarding interest on policies regarding generative AI for the superintendent and board and plans for student/staff education on this topic.

OTHER PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS

14. NEXT MEETING

The next Board of Education Meeting will be held on November 11, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

15. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION made by Trustee Tizedes, support Trustee Gold **to adjourn the Regular Board of Education Meeting of October 28, 2025 at 7:41 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darcy Berwick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Darcy Berwick
Board Secretary

Recorded by: Betty Jahnke