

September 25, 2024

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
135 Santilli Highway  
Everett, MA 02149

Dear Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education:

On behalf of the Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees, I respectfully request your approval of an amendment to change our charter to increase our maximum enrollment from 480 to 550 students. This change to our charter will be effective upon the approval of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for initial implementation in the 2025-2026 school year.

The Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) Board of Trustees seeks to expand our maximum enrollment to meet the persistent demand within our community and to enhance programming for our current students. Over the past five years, we have averaged 340 applicants for 92 available seats, and over 50% of students in Salem enter the lottery for our 6th grade, underscoring the significant interest in our school. By increasing our enrollment, we aim to accommodate this demand, ensuring that more students have the opportunity to benefit from our educational offerings.

Expanding our enrollment will also allow us to enhance the range of courses and extracurricular activities we provide. With a larger student body, we can introduce a broader spectrum of programs that cater to diverse interests and academic needs, enriching the overall educational experience and improving outcomes for all students.

Furthermore, this expansion aligns with our mission to serve Salem's diverse population. By increasing our capacity, we can better fulfill our commitment to supporting a wide array of students and their unique needs. This decision follows our recent strategic planning process which engaged staff, students, families and community partners.

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees voted to approve this request on September 20, 2024 at a meeting held in compliance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25. At that meeting, the Board of Trustees authorized me to submit this request on their behalf.

Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) continues to demonstrate remarkable success in delivering on its mission, as evidenced by the Year 20 Review conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Salem Academy Charter School is an academic success, a viable organization, and faithful to its charter's terms. We were renewed, without conditions, this year (2024) for our 5th charter term. Our Year 20 review highlights that SACS has been consistently faithful to its mission of educating Salem's diverse student population through a rigorous college preparatory program paired with Service-Learning. Key design elements have been successfully implemented, leading to strong academic performance and high student engagement.

One of SACS's core achievements is our commitment to a college preparatory program that ensures equitable access to advanced coursework, including AP classes. Consistently, 100% of graduates are

accepted to college, a testament to the school's ongoing efforts to prepare students for post-secondary success. Our new College Success Program further supports alumni, particularly first-generation and economically disadvantaged students, by addressing the unique challenges they face in higher education.

Salem Academy's Service-Learning program is a key design element that empowers students to apply their academic skills to real-world issues such as immigration, food insecurity, and climate change. Our strong commitment to social-emotional learning (SEL) is integrated throughout Service-Learning and explicitly taught at each grade level. This ensures that students' emotional and social needs are met, further reinforcing a safe and supportive school culture.

DESE also commended SACS for its consistent progress in academic achievement, driven by a standards-based curriculum and a shared understanding of high-quality instruction. The school's dedication to cultural proficiency and high expectations ensures that all students, regardless of background, are challenged and supported. These elements, coupled with stable leadership and financial strength, position SACS as a leader in the charter school community and affirm its ability to meet the commitments made in its charter.

The Salem Academy Charter School Board of Trustees requests that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approve this request at its November meeting, if possible.

Please contact me at [scallahan@salemacademy.org](mailto:scallahan@salemacademy.org), 978-744-2105 x.148 if you have any questions about this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Callahan', with a stylized, flowing script.

Stephanie Callahan  
Executive Director

C: Alyssa Hopkins, Assistant Director of the Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign (OCSSR), [Alyssa.K.Hopkins@mass.gov](mailto:Alyssa.K.Hopkins@mass.gov)

Brenton Stewart, Coordinator of School Redesign and Impact, OCSSR, [Brenton.Stewart@mass.gov](mailto:Brenton.Stewart@mass.gov)

Enclosures

## **SACS Response to Criteria for Increasing Maximum Enrollment**

### ***Rationale for Expansion***

#### **Determining the Need for Increased Maximum Enrollment**

Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) has identified a need to increase its maximum enrollment based on several key indicators. For over five years, SACS has averaged 340 applicants for just 92 available seats, with roughly 50% of Salem students entering the lottery for 6th grade, underscoring the high demand for enrollment. The need to increase maximum enrollment was consistently emphasized during the strategic planning processes conducted in 2018 and 2024. The Board of Trustees (BOT) thoroughly reviewed growth possibilities at its annual retreats in 2021 and 2022.

In 2021, the BOT submitted an amendment for expansion, but it was denied due to a 9% tuition cap in Salem. Despite this setback, the BOT remained committed to addressing the demand for more seats. In 2022, the BOT reviewed the possibility of adding sending districts. It concluded that doing so would detract from the school's mission of serving Salem's diverse population and reduce opportunities for Salem students. Annually, the Board has reviewed feedback from families who consistently express a desire for more robust extracurricular and academic programming, which would be possible with increased enrollment.

An amendment request for 70 additional seats, supported by a waiting list of over 200 students, provides strong evidence of the demand and capacity to fill additional seats. Without approval for increased enrollment, SACS risks being unable to meet our community's educational needs and aspirations, limiting its ability to provide robust opportunities necessary for preparing students for college, careers, and the demands of a rapidly evolving 21st-century global economy. Without growth, SACS also risks being able to keep pace with regional teacher salaries. As a charter school, Salem Academy spends roughly 15% of its operating budget on facilities, an expense traditional public districts do not have to contend with. To retain our high-quality faculty and staff, SACS must stay competitive with regional teacher salaries.

#### **Input Provided by the School Community**

The SACS community has played an active role in shaping the proposed enrollment amendment. Feedback from parents, families, and faculty was gathered through surveys, focus groups, and meetings. Parents of both current and prospective students have voiced their support for expanding enrollment, citing the school's strong academic program and the desire for increased access. Survey results revealed overwhelming interest in securing more seats, with prospective families frequently expressing their eagerness to enroll their children at SACS but unable to do so due to limited capacity.

#### **Determining Sufficient Parent Support and Interest**

SACS has determined there is sufficient support to fill current and proposed additional seats based on several factors. The steady influx of applications year after year, paired with a growing waiting list of over 200 students, indicates that the school will have no difficulty filling the 70 additional seats requested in the amendment. Families of prospective, and current students, have shown strong interest, with more than 50% of eligible Salem families entering the lottery for 6th grade.

Students have repeatedly expressed interest in having a larger peer group, while caregivers have expressed a desire for more extracurricular and academic offerings, such as advanced coursework and enrichment programs.. These opportunities can only be made possible through increased enrollment. Students have repeatedly expressed interest in having a larger peer group.

Without approval for the additional seats, we will need to adjust the number of seats available in 6th and/or 9th grade every two years to avoid being over or under-enrolled. This may impact our ability to offer the breadth, depth, and consistency of programming our students deserve. In addition, families and students risk missing out on the quality education and opportunities they seek if the amendment is not granted.

### *Planning for Enrollment*

#### **Historical Distribution of Enrolled Students**

In 2015, when our maximum enrollment was increased to 480, we strategically planned to enroll 72 students in grades 6-9, allowing for backfilling throughout the year as needed and anticipating potential attrition in grades 10-12. This number was based on maintaining class sizes of 24 students.

Our goal was to grow the program, and as we expanded, demand for our offerings increased. In the early years of growth, we rapidly built our high school to provide the comprehensive programming students and families sought. During and after the pandemic, however, lower-than-expected attrition led to over enrollment. In response, we have since adjusted the number of available seats in grade 9 annually and have carefully monitored enrollment in grades 6-8, occasionally enrolling fewer than 72 students in those grades. In 2022, we enrolled 75 students in grade 6 due to an unusually high number of triplets and twins. This experience demonstrated that we have the capacity to increase enrollment in grades 6-8 by 4%,

	<b>Planned Enrollment</b>
<b>6</b>	72
<b>7</b>	72
<b>8</b>	72
<b>9</b>	72
<b>10</b>	65
<b>11</b>	62
<b>12</b>	59
	<b>474</b>

#### *2015 - 2020 Growth*

	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
<b>6</b>	72	72	74	72	72

<b>7</b>	72	72	73	73	72
<b>8</b>	72	72	72	72	72
<b>9</b>	67	82	84	79	80
<b>10</b>	43	59	73	64	70
<b>11</b>	50	39	56	68	60
<b>12</b>	45	42	44	52	64
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>490</b>

*2020 - 2025 Enrollment by Grade*

	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>
<b>6</b>	71	71	75	72	73
<b>7</b>	73	71	69	75	71
<b>8</b>	72	70	70	72	74
<b>9</b>	71	76	71	75	80
<b>10</b>	76	67	72	56	62
<b>11</b>	70	70	65	68	55
<b>12</b>	59	64	67	62	67
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>482</b>

In 2023, Salem Academy faced an unexpected and unprecedented rise in attrition between grades 9 and 10. Post-pandemic shifts, including increasing housing costs and the desire for families to relocate closer to relatives, contributed to this trend. Additionally, some students new to Salem Academy struggled with the academic and social transition, leading them to seek other options. Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, we took swift and strategic action. By 2024, our efforts led to a return to more typical attrition rates.

We have since revamped our 9th-grade orientation program to ensure a smoother transition for all incoming students, significantly increased our communication and outreach to 9th-grade families, and launched the BRYT program to provide intensive support. Additionally, we expanded our Student Services Team to offer enhanced social-emotional resources, ensuring every student feels academically and personally supported. These comprehensive changes have strengthened our ability to retain and support students, positioning Salem Academy for continued success. We also increased enrollment in grade 9 to 80 students this year, allowing for more sections of smaller class sizes in grade 9.

### Projected Students by Grade 2025 -2029

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
6	75	80	80	80
7	75	75	80	80
8	75	75	75	80
9	84	84	84	84
10	74	78	78	78
11	59	70	74	74
12	52	56	65	70
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>546</b>

We plan to increase our maximum enrollment to 70 students over a four-year period, focusing primarily on 6th and 9th grades as key entry points. We will backfill grades 6-9 as needed to accommodate enrollment variation. Our financial model has been designed with a projected increase of 60 students over this timeframe to ensure financial sustainability and to avoid the need for future minor amendments.

### Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Salem Academy assesses the effectiveness of its recruitment and retention strategies by utilizing CHART (Comparison, Attrition, Retention, and Transition) data annually. This data allows the school to analyze trends and disparities in student enrollment and retention, helping to identify areas where adjustments may be necessary. For example, the CHART data provides insights into demographic trends, attrition rates, and the success of outreach efforts to different student populations. Based on this data, the school can adjust its strategies to address specific challenges, such as ensuring equitable access for underrepresented groups.

Over time, these strategies have evolved to better address the community's changing needs. For instance, recognizing challenges related to socioeconomic diversity and access to resources, Salem Academy has focused on targeted outreach to families through partnerships with local community organizations, offering additional academic and social support to ensure student success and retention.

If changes to the maximum enrollment are granted, the school anticipates incorporating several additional strategies in its recruitment and retention plan. These include expanding marketing efforts to reach a broader audience within Salem, strengthening partnerships with community-based organizations to provide more targeted support services, and increasing communication efforts to prospective families about the school's inclusive and equitable environment. Moreover, the school plans to enhance its support services for multilingual learners and students with disabilities to improve retention and ensure all students are well-supported.

### Enrollment Policy and Lottery Application Form

Please see the attached draft of the enrollment policy and admission application. There are no anticipated changes to entry point(s) or the backfilling of vacancies.

### ***Educational Program***

#### **Expanding Educational Opportunities**

An increase in enrollment at Salem Academy Charter School will enhance educational opportunities for families by allowing the school to expand its capacity to serve a diverse population while maintaining its high standards of academic rigor and individualized support. With additional students, the school will be able to offer more robust programs, such as increased offerings in the arts, STEM, and language instruction. For example, the planned increase in staffing includes hiring a full-time Spanish teacher and additional electives teachers, providing students with broader learning opportunities to explore their interests and passions.

An increase in enrollment at Salem Academy Charter School will provide access to all students in 6th-8th grade to start taking Spanish classes in middle school, creating a clear pathway for students to achieve a diploma with a seal of biliteracy. This expansion will significantly enhance the language education opportunities available to students, allowing them to build proficiency in Spanish earlier in their academic careers. By establishing a solid foundation in middle school, students will be better positioned to continue their language studies throughout high school, ultimately preparing them for the Seal of Biliteracy. This credential demonstrates high proficiency levels in two or more languages and increases post-graduation opportunities.

The expansion will also support the school's commitment to fostering all students' social-emotional and academic development. Adding a full-time adjustment counselor will ensure that students receive the guidance and support they need to thrive emotionally and academically. At the same time, the increased nurse staffing will help meet the health and wellness needs of a larger student body.

New students joining the school will benefit from Salem Academy's key design elements, including its strong emphasis on college and career readiness, safe and supportive culture, and Service-Learning. The school's comprehensive orientation process ensures that new students quickly become part of the caring and inclusive school environment. They will experience a rigorous academic curriculum, such as the PreAP courses and the Investigating History and iCivics programs, which challenge students to think critically and apply their knowledge in meaningful ways.

This growth will benefit individual students and families and provide broader advantages to the community. With a larger student body, Salem Academy can further its partnerships with local organizations, expand its Service-Learning initiatives, and deepen its impact on the surrounding community. By preparing more students to be active and engaged citizens, the school contributes to the long-term social and economic vitality of Greater Salem, creating a ripple effect that extends well beyond the school's walls.

#### **Family Engagement and Partnership**

Salem Academy Charter School engages families and the broader community to ensure its instructional model serves all students, including those with disabilities and English learners. The School-Family-Community (SFC) meetings are central to this effort, providing caregivers with opportunities to participate in discussions about school programs and policies. These meetings offer a



platform for parents to voice concerns, offer feedback, and collaborate with school leaders to shape an inclusive instructional model that meets the diverse needs of the student body. In addition, Salem Academy engages families, educators, staff, and community members in processes such as strategic planning and hiring for senior leaders.

For students with disabilities and English learners, Salem Academy prioritizes family input through one-on-one meetings, IEP discussions, and our SEPAC and EL-PAC groups. This ensures transparent communication and meaningful involvement in instructional strategies, accommodations, and support services decisions. The school also partners with community organizations to connect families with resources to support students' learning needs.

Moving forward, Salem Academy will continue engaging families through surveys, focus groups, and open forums to gather input on curriculum development and instructional practices. For instance, the school's commitment to expanding language instruction and creating a pathway to biliteracy has been shaped by family feedback. Additionally, the school plans to enhance professional development for teachers, particularly around inclusive teaching strategies, ensuring all students receive the support they need.

Salem Academy's approach fosters strong family-school partnerships, actively involving parents in their children's academic journey and social-emotional well-being. Through regular communication and involvement in decision-making processes, the school ensures that families are informed and key collaborators, contributing to their children's academic progress and social-emotional well-being.

## *Capacity*

### **Implementation of the Request by Staff**

The staff at Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) will implement the expansion request through a structured, incremental process, ensuring the school maintains its high standards during the early years of expansion and through full implementation. Staff will follow an action plan that includes key roles, timelines, and responsibilities. The leadership team, teachers, and support staff will ensure the smooth integration of new students, scaling academic, social-emotional, and extracurricular programming proportionally to support growth. Key individuals, including the Executive Director, Senior Director of Academics, Managing Director of Operations and HR, and our Instructional Leadership Team, will monitor the process and provide regular updates to the Board of Trustees (BOT) and school community. Communication with staff, parents, and students will be clear, timely, and transparent.

### **Staffing Chart and Narrative**

As outlined in the attached organizational charts, at full capacity, Salem Academy staffing will expand slightly in key areas. In the Lower School, one full-time adjustment counselor and one full-time Spanish teacher will be added to accommodate growing student support and language instruction needs. The school nurse staffing for grades 6-12 will increase from 1 FTE to 1.5 FTE, ensuring adequate medical support for the expanded student body. Electives Teachers for grades 6-12 will increase from 5 FTE to 6 FTE, allowing for greater diversity in elective offerings. While the Upper School and Operations staffing models will remain largely the same, there is room for adjustments, particularly to support students with disabilities and multilingual learners if enrollment necessitates further modifications.

### **Action Plan for Implementation**



*Phase 1: Preparation and Early Implementation (Year 1)*

Timeline: Fall 2024 - Summer 2025

Actions to be Taken:

1. Submit amendment request.
2. Finalize the enrollment increase plan and timeline.
3. Communicate expansion plans to the school community.
4. Recruit additional teaching and support staff.
  - a. Staffing Changes: Add one full-time Spanish teacher and one adjustment counselor in the Lower School; begin recruitment for additional elective teacher and part-time nurse

*Phase 2: Incremental Enrollment Growth and Full Implementation (Years 2-5)*

Timeline: Fall 2025 - Fall 2029

Actions to be Taken:

1. Implement gradual increases in student enrollment each year.
2. Adjust staffing levels to meet growth (electives teacher, part-time nurse).
  - a. Staffing Changes: Hire an additional electives teacher and increase 6-12 nurse staffing to 1.5 FTE.
3. Evaluate success based on enrollment, student outcomes, and community feedback.

*Phase 3: Long-Term Sustainability and Evaluation (Year 5 and Beyond)*

Timeline: Fall 2029 onward

Actions to be Taken:

1. Conduct a full evaluation of the expansion's success based on student outcomes, enrollment, and financial health as part of our next five-year Strategic Plan.
2. Make necessary adjustments to staffing and programming based on findings.
  - a. Potential Staffing Changes: Evaluate the need for further adjustments, particularly for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

Through this phased approach, SACS will ensure smooth implementation of the requested expansion, with appropriate staffing to support the growing student population. Regular assessments will help maintain academic excellence and operational efficiency.

## **Governance**

### **Implementation and Evaluation of the Expansion Request by the Board of Trustees**

The Board of Trustees (BOT) at SACS will effectively implement the request for expansion through a structured and strategic approach. First, the BOT will oversee the incremental addition of students, starting with a manageable increase each year to ensure smooth integration and effective resource allocation. This phased approach allows the school to adapt to rising enrollment while maintaining high-quality programming and staffing levels.

The BOT will monitor progress by establishing clear milestones and metrics for success. This includes setting targets for enrollment numbers, monitoring financial health, and evaluating the impact of the expansion on student outcomes and program quality. Regular updates and reports will be reviewed at BOT meetings, ensuring that any challenges are promptly addressed and adjustments are made as needed. The BOT will also solicit feedback from stakeholders, including parents, staff, and students, to assess the effectiveness of the expansion and make informed decisions about future adjustments.

### **Documentation of the Board's Decision-Making Process**

The materials used by the board to make the decision to pursue the proposed amendment include:

1. Agendas and Approved Board Minutes:
  - a. September 2021 Agenda and Minutes: Board Retreat
  - b. September 2022 Agenda and Minutes: Board Retreat
  - c. June 2024 Agenda and Minutes: Board Meeting
  - d. August 2024 Agenda and Minutes: Board Meeting
  - e. September 2024 Agenda: Board Retreat
2. Supporting Documentation:
  - a. Financial projections, including multi-year revenue and expenditure forecasts.
  - b. Surveys and feedback from parents, faculty, and community members expressing support for the expansion.
3. Strategic planning documents from 2018 and 2024 highlighting the identified need for increased enrollment.
  - a. Strategic Plan 2018-2023
  - b. Strategic Planning Documents 2024
4. Reports on application trends, waiting list data, and other evidence supporting the demand for additional seats.
  - a. Executive Director Reports: March 2021, March 2022, March 2023, March 2024

These documents provide a comprehensive view of the BOT's decision-making process and the rationale behind pursuing the amendment.

### ***Finance***

#### **Financial Resources for Expansion**

The projected tuition revenue from the additional students will ensure the fiscal viability of Salem Academy Charter School (SACS) and the successful implementation of the proposed changes. As more students are enrolled under the approved amendment, the per-pupil funding from state and district sources will increase proportionally, providing the financial support necessary to cover both operational costs and expansion-related expenditures.

The school's revenue model includes public funding, annual giving campaigns, and potential grants to supplement programming needs. SACS has factored in a conservative growth model to ensure fiscal viability, adding a manageable number of students each year to prevent overwhelming the school's resources. This approach allows for steady, sustainable financial planning and operational execution.

#### **Contingency Planning for Potential Financial Challenges**

SACS has developed targeted strategies to mitigate potential cash flow or budget shortfalls during its expansion, including projecting conservative enrollment numbers to create a financial buffer, expanding enrollment incrementally to manage risks, and bolstering a reserve fund through strategic budgeting and fundraising. The school plans to diversify revenue streams with additional fundraising and grant

opportunities, hire staff gradually in line with actual enrollment, and prioritize essential spending while deferring non-critical expenses. A flexible budget with contingency plans, access to emergency credit lines, and careful monitoring of enrollment and expenditures will support financial stability. Transparent communication with families and staff will help maintain trust and support, ensuring that potential revenue shortfalls are managed without compromising programming or staffing.

### **Financial Projections for Expansion**

SACS has prepared detailed multi-year financial projections (*see attached*) that consider immediate and long-term revenue and expenditure trends to support the proposed expansion. Over the next five years, adding new students is projected to provide sufficient revenue to cover operational costs, staffing, and program enhancements. The projections are based on the following assumptions:

- **Public Revenue:** Tuition revenue from the anticipated increase in student enrollment, with conservative estimates for per-pupil funding increases.
- **Fundraising Revenue:** Annual giving campaigns, community fundraising, and potential grant funding will supplement the public revenue, particularly for facility improvements and extracurricular programming.
- **School Expenditures:** These include staff salaries, educational programming expenses, and facilities-related costs. SACS plans to add staff gradually as enrollment increases to align with the needs of the growing student body.
- **Long-Term Viability:** Financial forecasts indicate that additional students will generate sufficient revenue to support growth, maintaining the school's commitment to small class sizes, robust programming, and strong academic support.

### **Facility to Support Expansion**

The current SACS facility can fully support the proposed increase in student enrollment. The facility is ADA-compliant and does not require any modifications to accommodate the additional students. With careful planning for class distribution and using existing space, the school is prepared to welcome new students without needing additional space.

### **Transportation Services**

Salem Public Schools provide transportation for SACS students, and this arrangement will continue as the school incrementally increases enrollment. To ensure smooth integration of the additional students, SACS will inform Salem Public Schools of enrollment changes by the February 1st deadline each year, allowing time to adjust transportation services as necessary. Since the growth will be implemented gradually, there will be ample opportunity to make any necessary logistical modifications to accommodate the increase in ridership.

By following this structured and conservative approach to growth, SACS is well-positioned to manage the financial, facility, and transportation aspects of its expansion while continuing to offer high-quality educational opportunities to its students.

## ***School Performance***

### **Data Trends**

### *Discipline*

Since 2017, Salem Academy has progressively integrated restorative practices into its approach to student discipline, moving away from traditional punitive measures toward a restorative justice model. The school recognizes that challenging behavior often reflects lagging skills, which can be addressed through reflection and skill-building. This shift includes replacing demerits with constructive guidance and detentions with individual and small group reflection sessions. Despite these changes, the focus remains on proactive and preventive practices, particularly in response to the mental health challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

While suspensions had been decreasing from 2017 to 2020, the return to full in-person learning in 2021-2022 led to an increase in suspensions due to new challenges. The school has reserved suspension for severe infractions such as physical violence, bullying, and drug-related offenses. In response to the rise in challenging behaviors, Salem Academy has prioritized restorative practices, using student data to inform individualized supports. Special efforts have been made to address disparities in suspension rates among students of color and students with disabilities, with the integration of restorative practices within the school's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

The school also recognized the widespread social-emotional impacts of the pandemic, including increased substance abuse, social withdrawal, and aggression. To address these challenges, Salem Academy implemented various programs, including a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum, the BRYT program for counseling and academic support, and partnerships with community organizations to provide mentorship and psychoeducational services. The school further expanded its Student Services Team and secured a \$250,000 grant to enhance its trauma-sensitive practices and multi-tiered supports.

In recent years, Salem Academy has adopted new initiatives, such as the Positive Alternatives for Student Support (PASS) program, providing alternative interventions for students facing non-violent suspensions. Despite progress, challenges remain, particularly with newer staff members who may struggle to adopt restorative practices in the absence of a traditional discipline system. This year we have developed our own PASS program for Lower School students, and are re-partnering with the Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI) to offer comprehensive training for staff, ensuring consistent implementation of trauma-sensitive, restorative practices across the school.

### *Student Outcomes Comparison Tool*

DESE's [Student Outcomes Comparison Tool](#) shows that Salem Academy students have lower chronic absenteeism rates than their peers locally and across the Commonwealth. In addition we have higher rates of 9th graders passing their courses, a 100% 5-year graduation rate, and a 0% drop out rate. As noted above, we had higher rates of out-of-school suspensions in 2023, which we are addressing in strategic ways.

	SACS	MA	SPS
2023 % Chronic Absenteeism	19	22.2	24.9
2023 % Out of School Suspension	4.9	2.5	2.5
2022 % of 9th Graders Passing	96.2	77.4	64
2022 % Drop Out	0	3.5	2.1

2021 % 5 Year Graduation	100	91.8	83
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### *Recruitment and Retention*

Salem Academy Charter School is committed to recruiting and maintaining a diverse student body that reflects the city of Salem. While the school has met many of its comparison index and gap-narrowing targets, it has faced challenges in recruiting English Learners (ELs). Factors such as the enrollment lottery process and the entry grades (6-9) limit the ability to weigh ELs or enroll students who miss the lottery. However, over 25% of the student population speaks a language other than English at home, and the school has often met its comparison index for this group, despite having fewer active ELs.

The school has seen significant growth in its populations of students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students. From 2019 to 2023, the number of students with disabilities increased by 32.8%, and while the school met comparison index targets for several years, 2023 presented challenges due to a spike in special education enrollments at comparison schools. Salem Academy has expanded its special education services and maintained low attrition rates for this subgroup. The economically disadvantaged population has grown by 66% since 2019, and the school has consistently exceeded gap-narrowing targets, thanks to strong family communication and a multi-tiered support system.

Retention has been a strong focus, with the school retaining over 95% of its students in the past year, surpassing its goal of 90%. Contributing to this success are strategies like therapeutic support for students with disabilities, increased multilingual communication, and connecting families to necessary resources. The school remains committed to equity, continuously refining recruitment and retention efforts, particularly through community partnerships, staff diversification, and promoting specialized programs for all students, including English learners and those with disabilities.

### **Academic Performance**

During Salem Academy's most recent charter term, the state transitioned to the next-generation, computer-based MCAS, alongside disruptions caused by the pandemic. These changes affected testing in 2020 and 2021, with 2022 marking the first full implementation of the new MCAS. Consistent with statewide trends, Salem Academy experienced a decline in student performance post-pandemic. However, prior to 2020, students showed strong growth, with 2019 MCAS results exceeding statewide averages in all subjects except for the newly introduced Grade 8 Science, Technology, and Engineering (STE) exam, where students met the state average.

Salem Academy implemented an accelerated learning model in 2021 in response to the decline. By 2022, student outcomes were mixed: high school students outperformed the state average in most subjects, while middle school students exceeded state averages in ELA but faced more challenges in math. In addition to MCAS, the school uses Achievement Network (ANet) interim assessments to guide instructional strategies and monitor progress, though gaps in comparison data and trends exist due to curriculum transitions and pandemic disruptions.

Participation in Advanced Placement (AP) exams has increased significantly since 2019, with more students enrolling in AP courses and exams despite pandemic-related setbacks. The school maintained consistent AP performance, with stronger results in humanities exams compared to STEM subjects.

In 2022, the national average SAT score was 1050, the lowest since 2016. Salem Academy experienced a similar decrease due to pandemic disruptions in early high school. At SACS, 100% of students take the SAT, as opposed to 55% of students across the state. Our students met the national average for Math with 521 and scored slightly below the national average for ERW with 527. Salem Academy's average score was close to the national average at 1049. In addition, our most recent Hispanic/Latino graduates averaged a total SAT score of 977, above the national average of 964. 55% of graduates exceeded the national average, and 63% met college-readiness benchmarks.