

*Branchburg Township School District*

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

September 17, 2020

**Remote Meeting - Live Streamed on District Website**

**Executive Session - 6:30 p.m.**

**Public Meeting – 8:00 p.m.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

On a motion by Mr. Horowitz, seconded by Mrs. Curcio, and carried unanimously, the Board agreed to convene to public session at 7:01 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Board President, Theresa Joyce, who stated that the meeting was convened in compliance with the provisions of Chapter 231, P.L. 1975, the Sunshine Law; notices were sent to the *Courier News*, filed with the Township Clerk and posted in the Branchburg Township Schools.

The following members of the Board of Education were present: Vincent Carpentier, Cathy Curcio, Kristen Fabriczi, Noah Horowitz, Theresa Joyce, Olga Phelps, Keerti Purohit, Jonathan Sarles and Charles Tuma.

The following members were absent: None

Also present were: Superintendent of Schools Rebecca Gensel and Business Administrator/Board Secretary Theresa Linskey

**II.** The Secretary called the roll.

**III. CALL TO EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a motion by Mr. Horowitz, seconded by Mrs. Curcio, and carried unanimously, the Board agreed to convene to Executive Session at 7:01 p.m. to discuss Personnel, Student Matters, Contracts and Legal Issues.

On a motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mrs. Curcio, and carried unanimously, the Board agreed to adjourn Executive Session at 7:46 p.m.

On a motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz, and carried unanimously, the Board agreed to reconvene to public session at 8:05 p.m.

**IV.** The assembly saluted the flag.

**V.** Statement of Adequate Notice

**VI. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT**

Ms. Gensel spoke about the building walkthrough she did with representatives from the Branchburg Township Education Association.

Ms. Gensel gave an updated presentation on the reopening of schools.

**VII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**VIII. GOVERNANCE**

Motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz that Items VIII.A. through VIII.B. be moved upon the recommendation of the Superintendent.

On call of the vote, Items VIII.A. through VIII.B. were approved by Roll Call.

There was no Governance Committee report.

**A. Approval of Minutes**

It is recommended that the Board approve the Minutes of the Executive Session and Regular Meeting of August 20, 2020 and September 3, 2020.

**B. Approval of Submission of 2020-2021 Merit Goals of the Superintendent of Schools**

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board approve the submission of merit goals of the Superintendent for the 2020-2021 school year to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval.

**IX. POLICY**

Mr. Horowitz said the Policy Committee met last week and went over the policies that will be posted on the next agenda.

**X. EDUCATION**

Motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz that Items X.A. through X.C., be moved upon the recommendation of the Superintendent.

On call of the vote, Items X.A. through X.C., were unanimously approved by Roll Call.

There was no Education Committee report.

<b>A. Approval of 2020-2021 Out of District Program</b>					
Program/Location	Account Number	Student ID #	SY Tuition	SY Dates	Total Cost
Cornerstone Day School Mountainside, NJ	11-000-100-566-03-109-000	6422361974	\$75,275.20	9/1/20-6/25/21	\$75,275.20

<b>B. Approval of 2020-2021 One on One Aide for Out of District Program</b>							
Program/Location	Account Number	Student ID #	ESY		SY		Total Cost
			Aide	Dates	Aide	Dates	
The Eden School Princeton, NJ	11-000-100-566-03-109-000	3373948778	\$5,224.40	7/6/20- 8/22/20	\$34,511.75	9/9/20- 6/24/21	\$39,735.15

<b>C. Approval of Acceptance of Out of District Student for 2020-2021 ESY</b>				
Sending District	Student ID #	ESY Tuition	Dates	Total Tuition
Milltown School District Milltown, NJ	4259684500	\$311.25	7/6/20-8/13/20	\$311.25

**XI. HUMAN RESOURCES**

Motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz that Items XI.A. through XI.G., be moved upon the recommendation of the Superintendent.

On call of the vote, Items XI.A. through XI.G., were unanimously approved by Roll Call.

There was no Human Resources Committee report.

Mrs. Fabriczi wished Robert Cline well on his retirement, and said that he will be missed.

<b>A. Approval of Home Instruction Teachers</b>					
Name	Account Number	Hourly Rate	Dates	Discussion	
Danielle Cordaro Kristen Cardona Paul Cutaneo Kathleen Gaston Emily Hansen Jodi Harwood Devra Hobbs Lorien Holderbaum Michelle Jordan Leigh Keely Erica Landesberg Nina Manger Zachariah Miracle	Susan Mariani Sonia Pereira Amanda Perez Danielle Puglisi Danielle Puzzo Emma Ryan Abbie Sutherland Megan VanHorn Randi Lee Venturini Erica Viel Deb Volpe Emily Williams Lori Zelnick	11-150-100-101-03-066	\$45	9/18/20-6/30/21	As needed

<b>B. Approval of Revision of Maternity Leave</b>				
Employee #	Account Number	From	To	Discussion
5497	11-130-100-101-01-021-020	Paid Maternity/Disability Leave of Absence: 9/1/20-10/13/20 Personal Days: 10/14/20-10/16/20 NJ Family Leave Act/FMLA: 10/19/20-1/15/21 Unpaid Leave: 1/19/21-6/30/21	Paid Maternity/Disability Leave of Absence: 9/1/20-10/1/20 NJ Family Leave Act/FMLA: 10/2/20-1/8/21 Unpaid Leave: 1/9/21-6/30/21	Estimated date of return will be 9/1/21

<b>C. Approval of Retirement</b>				
Name	Account Number	Position	Location	Effective Date
Robert Cline	11-000-270-160-01-459	Transportation Supervisor	Transportation	12/31/20

<b>D. Approval of Extended School Day Counselor</b>				
Name	Account Number	Position	Rate	Date
Margaret Ryan	11-000-218-104-01-141-020	LCSW Counselor	\$63.68 per hour (not to exceed 100 hours total)	09/18/20-06/30/21

<b>E. Approval of Status Change</b>					
Name	Account Number	Position	From	To	Effective Date
Tiffany Medwick	11-000-270-161-01-470	Bus Driver	Part-Time	Full-Time	9/1/20

<b>F. Approval of Additional Title One Tutor</b>					
Name	Account Number	Location	Position	Rate	Dates
Joann Everson	20-231-100-101-02-648	WES	Teacher	\$41 per hour (not to exceed \$2,542)	9/18/20-6/30/21

<b>G. Approval of Resignations</b>				
Name	Account Number	Position	Location	Effective Date
Donna Eckel	11-000-251-100-01-529	School Accountant	BOE	10/16/20
Antoinette Lorenc	11-214-100-106-01-059	Instructional Aide	WES	7/31/20

## **XII. BUSINESS**

Motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz that Items XII.A. through XII.C. be moved upon the recommendation of the Superintendent.

On call of the vote, Items XII.A. through XII.C. were approved by Roll Call.

Mrs. Joyce said the Old York School/Harlan School Road Committee met on September 2, 2020, where they discussed both properties, with the primary focus on the Old York School property.

Mr. Tuma said the Business Committee met on September 15, 2020 and discussed the following:

- New boilers at Branchburg Central Middle School;
- New rooftop A/C systems;
- New gym floor at Whiton Elementary School;
- Masonry work at Branchburg Central Middle School;
- Robert Cline, Supervisor of Transportation, retirement; and
- Resignations on the agenda.

### **A. Bill List**

It is recommended that the Board approve the List of Bills for the period September 4, 2020 through September 17, 2020, totaling \$1,669,583.95.

**B. Approval of Settlement Agreement**

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves a settlement in the matter of S.P. o/b/o S.P. and E.P. v. Branchburg Township Board of Education, in the amount of \$3,000 for back tuition reimbursement.

**C. Approval of the Digital Divide Grant**

It is recommended that the Branchburg Township Board of Education approve a grant application award for the Digital Divide Grant Program through the New Jersey Department of Education in the amount of \$13,751.

**XIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Christine Kerrigan, 7 Darcy Drive, commented about the following:

- She appreciates the opportunity to communicate with the Board and the District during this very unusual school year with an open forum, and thanked them for providing an in-school opportunity;
- She expressed her concerns regarding the current virtual learning hours for small children, and the ability for them to pay attention and retain information to be extremely difficult; and
- She went over the reasons why extending the virtual day to watch On Demand videos is unnecessary.

Greg Kerrigan, 7 Darcy Drive, asked the Board the following:

- Can the Board or District educate the audience as to the criteria that are being used to make decisions for increasing in-school learning;
- Has the Board or District decided what will be the next step for increased in-school learning once those criteria are met;
- He listed some local, peer school districts that are utilizing entirely in-person learning; and
- Has the Board or District considered a more targeted approach than the current model that covers K-8.

Kristin and Gary Herman, 412 Clover Court, commented about the following:

- They thanked Whiton Elementary School and the first grade teachers for all their efforts to teach their children in person and virtually;
- They expressed their concerns about the young students at Whiton Elementary School being expected to go back on the computer in the afternoons; and
- They would like to know how the District or school is making the decision on whether to bring the students back full time, and what would be the earliest date that has been discussed to do so.

Staci Colis, 3 Strawberry Hill Road, commented about the following:

- First graders need to be in school four days a week. She said they are not able to focus on line for long hours, and it is a critical age to learn to read; and
- She stated that afternoons starting next week are not live, and asked why they are just posted lessons.

Alison Maider, 11 Shale Hill Road, commented on the following:

- She said congratulations on a successful start to a very different school year;
- She asked if there are any plans to bring the first grade back four days a week like the kindergarten;
- She stated that first graders also require a great deal of support to help them get through their day and cannot sit at a computer for that long;
- She expressed her concerns about the academic losses of the kindergarten students who had their year cut short; and
- She asked about the huge discrepancies between the class sizes.

Laura Faherty, 2 Nicholas Court, expressed her concern about the amount of screen time for virtual learning. She feels the younger children do not have the attention span to watch a screen for more than 30 minutes at a time, 40 minutes maximum. She said last year's distance learning model allowed families to work at their own pace and within the parameters of the child's attention span to complete the lessons. She hopes the students can return safely back to the classroom five days a week, even if it is a shortened day, without a cafeteria lunch period.

Heather Grande, 427 Whiton Road, commented about the following:

- She thanked all of the Branchburg educators and staff;
- She expressed her concern as to what the future investments the district is willing to make to ensure that the hard working teachers are having what they truly need to be able to execute the dual mode of teaching; and
- She said that with the hope of school being back full time, the district needs to stay prepared for the best way to provide a virtual learning environment.

Mike Fania, 862 Parsonage Hill Road, asked about the following:

- He thanked the Board of Education for allowing students to have some form of limited in-school instruction to start the year;
- He asked if there is a plan in place or objective standards being met or targeted that will allow full in-school instruction in the near future;
- Is there a reason the Cohorts cannot be collapsed in the near future for four or five days of instruction;
- If busing is the reason for the different Cohorts to accommodate social distancing, can the Board of Education explore a survey for parents to bring their children to school;
- Will the Board of Education be looking to move the younger children, grades 1 – 3, back to full in-school before the other grades; and

- Is there a reason that the curriculum has not been adjusted to have all Specials on Wednesday so students can focus on core subjects Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Kristen Simko, 3 Darcy Drive, commented on the following:

- She commended all the teachers and administrators for all the work that has been done to get the children into the classroom;
- She would like the District to consider eliminating the mandatory virtual afternoons for Whiton Elementary School and Stony Brook School, and instead have dedicated time in the afternoon where children can request 1:1, or a small group, time with the teacher to go over any questions they may have on lessons learned during the day;
- Rather than the current plan to have the K-5 children independently watch pre-recorded sessions for Science/Social Studies/Health in the afternoons, the District should incorporate these subjects into the morning teacher-led live instruction;
- Specials should not be prioritized over Science, Social Studies and Health; and
- Concerns that the children are spending way too much time in front of screens.

Jessica Gallico, 20 Watchung Trail, made the following comments:

- She thanked the District for the leadership and courage to place the needs of the Branchburg students and community over politics;
- She thanked Ms. Gensel for her leadership and steadfast support for the children and families who need and depend on the public education and her hard work in preparing the students to return to school in the middle of a pandemic;
- She thanked the Board of Education members for their stalwart support and for having the confidence in the Superintendent and the Administration to approve the reopening plan with no delays and no changes; and
- Lastly, she thanked all the teachers and staff members that prepared for the reopening of schools stating that “you are all heros”.

Randi Lee Childers, 68 Tussel Lane and Branchburg Township Education Association President, commented on the following:

- It has been wonderful to see the students and have them grace the classrooms, buses and halls;
- As President of the Branchburg Township Education Association, she said it is her responsibility to put the membership and Agreement at the forefront of decision making and actions;
- The Branchburg Township Education Association was able to schedule a walkthrough of all three school buildings;
- She noted the concerns from the walkthrough, as well as additional district concerns; and
- The Branchburg Township Education Association is eager to continue an open line of communication.

#### **XIV. BOARD LIAISON REPORTS**

Mrs. Fabriczi spoke about the following highlights of the Somerville Board of Education meeting which was held on September 15, 2020:

- The Somerville Student Board Member came to the meeting to say the reopening has gone really well, and that the students are happy to be back;
- The middle school PTO put their mascot, the “Bulldogs”, on masks for the teachers;
- The PTO has a new poster maker so teachers can now make full color posters to hang;
- The high school class of 2024 had their orientation on August 24 and 25, 2020;
- This year’s Somerset County Teacher of the Year is Somerville’s ESL teacher, Micki Cobos;
- The strategic plan overview survey was completed, data analyzed and priority issues were identified;
- Tickets for large events will be sold on line, and a new app is in the works for purchasing these tickets; and
- They went over absentee policy ideas.

Mr. Horowitz thanked the PTO for going above and beyond for the first day of school, where they provided a breakfast to all the teachers in all the schools.

Mr. Sarles said the Somerset County Educational Services Commission met on September 16, 2020 and discussed the bussing situation, and negotiated a different layoff period. He also said he is happy the students are in school and is hopeful that the teachers will face the challenge the pandemic has presented.

Mr. Carpentier spoke about the following:

- There is a Somerset County meeting scheduled for September 30, 2020; and
- The October New Jersey School Boards Association virtual workshop.

Mrs. Joyce spoke about the following:

- She said there were no school related discussions at the Branchburg Township Committee meeting;
- There will be a secure ballot drop box at the Municipal Building; and
- The Branchburg County Fair is still scheduled to take place on September 26, 2020.

Ms. Gensel said Matthew Barbosa, Principal of Branchburg Central Middle School and School Safety Specialist, shared information with the administration regarding the requirements for safety drills this year.

#### **XV. BOARD FORUM**

Mr. Sarles spoke about the struggles teachers and parents are having right now. He believes week to week improvements are going to be made.

Mrs. Curcio appreciates the organized rollout at this difficult time for the beginning of school. She thanked the administration for following systematic health, science and safety base guidelines moving forward to the closest normalcy at this point bringing the students back at the right time.



Mrs. Curcio also gave credit to the students and their families regarding them wearing their masks during the school day.

Mr. Horowitz thanked everyone in the district for having the schools cleaned and sanitized and being a gold standard for what reopening schools should be.

Mr. Carpentier thanked Ms. Linskey for reading the public comments. He also said Ms. Gensel's plan to ease back into school is the smart way to do it.

Mrs. Purohit thanked everyone one for the start of the school year going well, and for the administrators following the guidelines for everyone's safety. She also said how great the students have been for following the mask guidelines.

Mr. Tuma said he understands everyone's struggles, and if we have patience, things will get better. He said as parents and Board members we will get there.

Mrs. Fabriczi spoke about why Specials were being delivered live.

Mrs. Phelps said she was glad things were going well.

Ms. Gensel spoke about the following:

- She recognizes that the parent comments are important to the Board and District. She said what they express has a great deal of meaning for the plans going forward, and she appreciates the time it took for parents to send in their comments;
- Ms. Gensel thanked Ms. Linskey for reading through the comments; and
- She wished Bob Cline the best on his retirement and thanked him for his years of service to the district.

Ms. Linskey thanked Bob Cline for his years of service to the district, and said she relied on him heavily and trusted his judgment and ability to run the transportation department efficiently and safely. She said he was a true consummate, and that it truly encompasses what Mr. Cline is and what he has brought to this district.

Mrs. Joyce thanked Bob Cline for his years of service to the district. She said he was here for all weather events to determine if it was safe for schools to open or not, and made sure he was here until the completion of the new transportation garage. He was a true fixture in the district.

Mrs. Joyce said the next Board of Education meeting will be held on October 1, 2020.

## **XVI. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

There was no second Executive Session.

**XVII. ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mr. Sarles, seconded by Mr. Horowitz, and carried unanimously, the Board agreed to adjourn at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Theresa Linskey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Theresa Linskey  
School Business Administrator/Board