

Northern Highlands Regional High School Home and School Association, Inc., (HASA)  
Minutes of the General Meeting Held on Wednesday April 20, 2022

In Attendance:

Lisa Kulick, Naomi Ono, Thao Groenewald, Maggie Liljegren, Tamara James, Audrey Flynn, Grace Perruzzi, Shantala Kaikini, Lisa Mundy, Christine Ferrarie, Jane Bodnar, Despina Anastasopoulos, Lorraine Reichert, Jennifer Moodie, Cyrus Pavri, Sonia Agarwal, Amy Hesse, Bob Males, Rachel Milston, Patrice Duker, Debbie Cinquemani, Audrey Flynn, Mia Roewe, Anna Maria Pochatko, Inna Moor, Andrea Pennington, Renee Lardieri, Christi Yu, Susan Esserman, Kelli Moss, Yunha Bang, Joan Clifford, Jyotika Agochiya, MaryAnne Arber, Karen McWilliams, Brett Kelly, Denise Branca

School Administration in Attendance:

Dr. Scot Beckerman, Joseph Occhino, Jose Madhavasseril, Robin Knutelsky, Tony LaRocca, Michael Koth, Kelly Peterfriend

HASA President - Lisa Kulick:

Lisa welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

Superintendent's Report - Dr. Beckerman:

I will keep this report brief so I can attend the remote bond sale for the referendum this morning.

With this bond sale, we hope to have our money by the end of the day and anticipate the transaction to be complete by Friday this week.

We presented our budget at the Board of Education meeting on Monday. Although we are very close to completion, we are still waiting on ratable numbers from the towns of Allendale and Upper Saddle River, so we are not yet ready to share with you how much Allendale and Upper Saddle River taxes will increase next year.

Transportation numbers are also late to arrive for our budget process. Transportation is approximately \$1.6 million of our budget and is expected to increase about 41% next year due to continued rising costs related to staffing shortages, increased costs faced by the entire automotive industry, and rising gas prices.

We do anticipate making a budget presentation at the Board of Education meeting on Monday. We will post a copy of the presentation on the school website by Tuesday morning.

We have two projects scheduled to start this summer:

- Maple walkway project: those students who walk on Maple to school will have a sidewalk to use by next year.
- Scoir board project: the score board on the main field will be reallocated to the lower turf field and will be replaced with a new score board which will have LED capability to feature videos on the scoreboard.

We are also close to finalizing a new collective bargaining agreement with the NJEA, the teachers', secretaries', custodians' and paraprofessionals' union. We hope to make a joint announcement in the next few weeks upon reaching final agreement.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: will possible tax increase also affect HHK?

Dr. Beckerman answers: Like Saddle River, HoHoKus has a "Send and Receive" relationship with the school, so they pay tuition for their students to attend Northern Highlands. Certainly, since a portion of HoHoKus taxes pay for tuition, HoHoKus taxes will increase, but you will have to look at the HoHoKus tax or budget presentation to determine your tax rate. The only two school districts which are affected by our budgeting process are Allendale and Upper Saddle River. We are legally required to present to the public the budget numbers within the next few weeks, but our budget numbers are only relevant to Allendale and Upper Saddle River, so I would recommend you check the HoHoKus borough website to find your tax rate. Additionally, our Send and Receive relationship with HoHoKus is a ten-year contract, and those numbers will increase 2% of the Highlands contract, so tuition will increase a bit and is dependent on a ratable formula and state funding formula for calculation of overall tax impact.

Principal's Report – Mr. Occhino:

The period between the end of Spring Break and the end of the year is a very busy time of the

year, with numerous events and celebrations scheduled into the remaining two months of the school year.

- Tonight, we celebrate the induction of almost 160 students into the National Honor Society.
- We have the State test NJSLA next week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, just as we wrap up completion of the State test NJGPA. As our March letter stated,
  - There will be two different schedules for the start of school during the testing period, with a second and later bus pick up to transport non-testing students to school by 9:45am.
  - For non-testing students, there will be special programs planned for them for the duration of the testing period each day.
  - All Freshman students are required to take the math test unless they have not yet taken Algebra 1. In addition, all Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors who are enrolled in Algebra 1 for the first time this year are required to take the Math test.
  - All Freshman students will take the ELA test.
  - All Junior students will take the Science test.
  - Additional details will be shared with all teachers and students today to prepare them for testing next week.
- I will continue to share relevant information with you through Constant Contact, please take the opportunity to read those notices in detail so you can be aware of the many events taking place between now and the end of the year.

Parent Question: For graduation, will we go back to the old tradition of in-person attendance with students facing the parents and guests?

Mr. Occhino answers: Due to the popularity of the Jumbotron used in the past graduations, we plan to continue use of that option. However, if guests face our graduates in the bleachers on the home side, the Jumbotron is in a position which will require guests to turn their heads in order to view the Jumbotron. So as long as we have the capability of putting our kids on a large screen, we will be facing the end zone. As of now, I am planning on keeping the graduation set up in the same way as it has been for the past two years.

Parent Follow-Up Question: Would we then have more tickets issued since we get to use both sides of the bleachers?

Mr. Occhino answers: Yes, all families will receive seven tickets to graduation, with seats available on either side of the field.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: How many tickets do we get if graduation has to be inside due to weather?

Mr. Occhino answers via Zoom chat: Indoor graduation: Four tickets (2 for the auditorium; 2 for the gymnasium). Remember, graduation is livestreamed so other family members can watch graduation live from home.

Assistant Principal of Student Affairs - Dr. Tony LaRocca:

I have nothing to report, but I hope that everyone had a well-deserved, restful break.

Director of Guidance – Ms. Kelly Peterfriend:

Just before Spring Break, the counselors concluded their two months of meeting students for next year's course selections. Counselors have also met with all incoming ninth graders. We're moving to the next step internally to work on enrollment numbers and the master class schedule.

We are also continuing to meet with Senior students to help with college decisions as we approach May 1.

Counselors are still meeting with Juniors to guide college conferences or post-secondary meetings.

We are continuing with plans to have college rep visits in the spring as we have historically, and this year's visits will be in person.

We are continuing the shift away from Naviance, the platform we've historically used to help students with post-secondary planning, to the new platform Scoir. At this time during the transition, the Senior students are still housed in Naviance. This is where Senior students can find scholarship opportunities now, so it's important for Senior students to update their information in Naviance at this time. Now that they have completed the college application process, they need to move on to the scholarship application process. Please note that scholarship opportunities are updated regularly, so students should also be looking regularly in Naviance for opportunities.

For grades nine through eleven, students will be using the new platform Scoir, which is very similar to Naviance. Junior students have been introduced to Scoir and do already have access. Freshman and Sophomore students and their families will receive an introduction to Scoir shortly via an email with instructions on how to establish their own accounts. All Scoir information can also be found on our school website.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: Why are you switching away from Naviance?

Ms. Peterfreund answers: Naviance has been making a lot of changes to their platform and has become very user-unfriendly as a result. Our research yielded Scoir as a platform which is well-

received by other high schools and universities with a much more user-friendly interface. Our testing group comprised of students, administrators, and counselors have found the platform easy to navigate with excellent features to help guide the students' college and post graduate application processes.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: We have been on Scoir and have found the experience confusing; are there additional instructional resources available?

Ms. Peterfreund answers: There are videos and tutorials available on the school website, and parents and students can reach out to Guidance or individual counselors for help navigating the website, but do know that as of today, Junior students and families are the only users with access, so if you are a Junior or Junior parent experiencing difficulties with Scoir, please reach out to your counselor for additional support.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: When will scheduling be complete?

Ms. Peterfreund answers: Scheduling is complete. Students were given a window to review their course requests and an early April deadline to reach out with questions, requests, or appeals for changes. Students will have another opportunity to view their course requests but are no longer able to make any changes. Department Supervisors are currently reviewing all appeals submitted by students.

Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment - Ms. Robin Knutelsky:

My portion will be in two parts.

First, for the Summer Academy, we are proud to offer three new courses for the Summer Academy this year: in addition to Geometry for advancement, Honors Chemistry, Honors Biology and Financial Management, we are also offering CAD and Algebra 2/Trigonometry for advancement. We are also offering Creative Writing, a ten-day micro-course offered during Session I and earning 2.5 credits towards graduation requirements. We are currently working on enrollment-based staffing needs for the Summer Academy courses, so please complete your enrollment if you are interested. Our enrollment is almost double the numbers of last summer, so we are very excited to get started this summer.

As we start planning for graduation, I am letting parents of Senior students know of

opportunities for Senior students to try out to be at-large student speakers at graduation. I will be sending out information soon to Senior students about the try out process.

Parent question: Why do we have to pay \$900 for Summer Academy?

Ms. Knutelsky answers: This is considered summer school and credited outside the typical school year. Our summer tuition rates are below those of our surrounding school districts. These are courses for advancement. If we find that there are students who are struggling in English or Math, we would offer a "course recovery" program which will be free, but those students will not be identifiable until June. We do charge tuition for courses considered additional for advancement.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: Can students take more than one course for summer academy?

Ms. Knutelsky answers: At this time, this option is not available. The Summer Academy is a four-week offering. The full courses (earning 5 credits) are all-day learning experiences from 8:30am until 3:00pm, condense a year's worth of content into four weeks, and run the entire duration of the four-week Summer Academy, so students cannot take simultaneous courses.

Parent comment submitted via Zoom chat: My daughter is interested in the 2nd session of creative writing. I will send in the application.

Ms. Knutelsky answers: Please note that we are only offering Creative Writing for the first session.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: Will there be transportation during the academy? Ms. Knutelsky answers: There will be no transportation during Summer

Academy. Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: Is Personal Management 1st or 2nd session? Ms. Knutelsky answers: Financial Management is scheduled for the first session.

Parent question: If my student is taking a course for advancement during Summer Academy, for example Chemistry, how will that impact the course selection and scheduling for the next school year if she qualifies for advancement for the next school year?

Ms. Knutelsky answers: We work with our Genesis Coordinator as soon as Summer Academy concludes; if a student passes Summer Academy advancement courses with a certain grade to

qualify for advancement, we ask the students what their planned course of action would be, and individually coordinate the course selection and scheduling processes to make that happen. Often, after a Summer Academy class, a student may choose to take another science course rather than continue in the same branch of science at the AP level, so the change is not automatic and we will hand schedule those choices into the schedule upon receiving student input.

Parent comment submitted via Zoom chat: Are there any courses offered second session?

Ms. Knutelsky answers: At this time, there are no courses offered during the second session. We saw that enrollees overwhelmingly chose to start during the first session, so we staffed accordingly and will be offering no courses for the second session. We hope to expand our program and course selections each summer and hope our enrollment numbers will enable us to offer more courses and multiple sessions in the future.

The second portion of my report focuses on a presentation that Dr. Verdicchio and I prepared on Equity and Wellness and presented at our last Board of Education Meeting.

The presentation can be found in entirety at the following address:

<https://www.northernhighlands.org/cms/lib/NJ01000179/Centricity/Domain/3/Wellness%20Equity%20BOE%20presentation.pdf>

We are working on equity and wellness with our students and our staff at both the district level and the school level. It's important to note that this work is never really finished, equity and wellness are not one-year goals, we will continually work on these important areas.

There is a state mandate requiring us to align our resources and our units of study to provide LGBTQ+, students with disabilities, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders with resources embedded in our curriculum. We want to continue to ensure safety and foster care, empathy and belonging within our entire student body. If we consider this work as mirrors and windows, we want to provide students with the ability to see themselves as they develop their personalities and belief systems in the mirrors built into the curriculum and provide windows of opportunities for all our students.

We do have a steering committee of teachers which is part of our CJCEE Stakeholder Committee, we have provided our teachers with professional development with focus on the curriculum and best practices.

The Central Jersey Consortium for Educational Excellent (CJCEE) is a collaboration with Monmouth University. We have attended a series of six sessions led by Paul Gorsky focused on

racial equity in education, and we are participating in goal setting sessions and follow up meetings for our district. Our Steering Committee has 18 staff members and administrators and a group of participating students. Our student arm presented on the topic of Microaggression on our most recent Professional Development Day.

In October, our Professional Development Day was focused on gender and LGBTQ+. We held a panel discussion and a series of Professional Development discussions. In January, we focused on race, with a student presentation on microaggressions. We have also been working

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through our quad district to develop our Position Statement on Equity so all of our quad sending districts are aligned in the effort to support our students. Our librarians have assembled guides so our teachers have resources outlined by content area.

Some of our best practices at this point include asking students their preferred pronouns, creating and ensuring safe spaces for students, including gender-neutral bathrooms, and continuing to provide Wellness support.

Some of the services we have provided on the wellness side include:

- Last summer, during Summer Academy, as we were emerging from COVID distance learning, we offered some wrap-around services to help students transition from the extended period of distance learning to a consistently in-person environment.
- We offered bridge services to students who were struggling with the return to school after an extended period of being home.
- For the current sophomore students who did not have an in-person orientation last year, we offered a tenth grade Orientation Night this year.
  - We also offered Thrive programming for our parents, students, and staff on fixed vs growth mindset, mindfulness, gratitude, and recognizing strengths. The program was very well-attended last summer so we do hope to continue offering the program.
- We also focused on staff wellness and professional learning, with topics including creating gracious space in the classroom, continuing social and emotional learning, developing the empathetic educator, and establishing a positive classroom environment.

We expanded our Signs of Suicide (SOS) program, funded by the Sandy Hook Promise Grant.

- Our SAC counselors gave presentations to every student during class meetings about the ACT (Acknowledge Care Tell) component of SOS
- Students completed a quarterly wellness check-in
- We continue our NJ PASS Program for parents to bring in a series of speakers

We administered our PRIDE survey to over 900 students in November with active consent from



parents through the Genesis portal. The survey gives us information on drug and alcohol use, and although we are still analyzing the data, we have not found any significant difference from national trends.

We have developed partnerships such as the Positive Coaching Alliance in which we hosted seasonal workshops for under-class leaders on positive coaching and triple impact players, making team mates better, anti-bullying and anti-hazing practices.

Finally, we are in our second year with the JED Foundation as they work with us on

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- Promoting positive school climate
- Developing life skills through SEL
- Encouraging help-seeking behaviors
- Reviewing crisis management procedures
- Promoting safety around the school and district

We will continually review our work, keeping students at the center of our work, ensuring that our priorities and budget align, and providing continuous professional learning.

Parent question submitted via Zoom chat: How can students be part of the CJCEE student arm and what grade students can be a part of this?

Ms. Knutelsky answers: Please reach out to Dr. Jessica Verdicchio via email at [verdicchij@northernhighlands.org](mailto:verdicchij@northernhighlands.org)

On the topic of Wellness, Jose Madhavasseril adds the following via Zoom chat: Passing this along for NH Wellness! We're having a zoom webinar tomorrow to continue our NH PASS events. Please click on the link to register if you'd like to attend!  
<https://www.northernhighlands.org/Page/7429>

Assistant Principal of Athletics – Mr. Michael Koth:

Spring sports is in full swing.

Lacrosse

Girls' Lacrosse has cracked the top 20 in the state, suffered a tough loss yesterday to Mountain Lakes, while Boys' Lacrosse won a thriller against Mount Olive, winning by 1 point in the final minute of the game.

Track

Boys' and Girls' teams are preparing for the Bergen County Relays. The majority of the meets will take place at River Dell through the weekend.

#### Tennis

Both Boys' and Girls' teams are doing well through the start of the season.

#### Softball/Baseball

Both Boys' and Girls' teams have started off well, with baseball experiencing a roller coaster season so far.

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#### Golf

Both Boys' and Girls' teams have hit the links, with the Girls' Team ramping up for their first tournament with the Big North Championship taking place tomorrow.

It's still early in the season, so we don't have a lot of results to report yet but are looking forward to a strong season for all teams.

Our winter season was capped off at the All-County Banquets, and 35 of our student athletes received All-County honors this past winter. 14 of those 35 received First-Team All-County honors. Congratulations to all our athletes.

In addition, Coach Beswick and Coach Buono both received Bergen County Coach of the Year honors.

Our Ice Hockey Team and our Girls' Swim Team also received Team of the Year honors. Both teams capped their seasons with State Championships in their sports.

Our annual Northern Highlands Sports Association Golf Outing is scheduled for Monday May 23 this year. Please be on the lookout for information and come out to support all our sports programs by supporting the Sports Association.

The last installment of the Positive Coaching Alliance workshop series took place in March. The Alliance identifies underclassmen who are leaders in their program to receive leadership development. The Alliance works with student athletes to foster a Triple Impact Competitor: respecting yourself, respecting your teammates, respecting the game. The most recent workshop included 15 student athletes and focused on prevention of bullying and hazing behavior.

Although we have completed the final installment for this year, we plan to continue the series moving forward.

The administrative team has also decided to make a change in leadership of our Girls' Basketball program. We have started a search for a new basketball coach and hope to have a new head coach in place in the near future.

Parent comment submitted via Zoom chat: Can we post about softball on the Northern Highlands sports association or does the coach have to do it?

Mr. Koth answers: The Northern Highlands Sports Association has worked very hard to find parent liaisons for each program to facilitate the sharing of information. I will reach out to Frank Paparozzi to share your question with him so their website can be updated.

HASA President - Lisa Kulick:

We are still in search to fill a few open positions on our HASA Board and Committees as five of us have graduating senior students and are leaving the organization. We are still interviewing candidates to fill the positions of President, Co-Chair of Fundraising, and Fundraising Committee members.

Please send a quick email with your interest to [hasa@northernhighlands.org](mailto:hasa@northernhighlands.org).

Prior to my current position as President, I was Recording Secretary and have enjoyed my time serving on the HASA Board immensely. I hope you will consider joining a great group of parents to continue HASA's support of our students and our school.

With Teacher's Appreciation Week coming up, HASA will cater a Teacher's Appreciation Luncheon on May 6 for all the staff at the school. We will send out a letter to the Highlands community requesting donations of baked goods for the Luncheon. We would appreciate your help with this special event to appreciate the entire school staff.

HASA Treasurer - Naomi Ono:

As of April 20, 2022, our operating account balance is \$41,666, and our Money Market account balance is \$58,106.

As background, HASA President Lisa Kulick, Vice President Kelli Moss and I sat with Mr. Occhino earlier this year in March to review progress on the current fiscal year budget and to discuss next year's budget.

In a nutshell we're trending according to plan with this year's budget. Each year, HASA budgets about \$12-13,000 for programs that are repeated year after year. These allocations are designed to benefit many in the Highlands community. As many may remember HASA hosted the New Parent Breakfast at the Red Barn. When Back to School Night was in-person, pre-pandemic, we offered refreshments. We host and fund the Teachers Appreciation Luncheon which we hope you can help us organize in the next few weeks.

For our students, HASA funds many initiatives including the Boomerang Project, where our upperclassmen serve as Ambassadors to help incoming Freshmen acclimate to the high school environment – it's similar to the Positive Coaching Initiative that Mike just described to foster leadership development - but Boomerang is a separate initiative altogether. We help fund Student Assemblies, in addition to funding scholarships that are available to students in the Northern Highlands community.

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After going through each one of these programs line-by-line at the meeting, it was determined that HASA should set aside \$13,175 for the 2022-2023 fiscal budget.

We then asked Mr. Occhino what he believes is needed for next year. The response was that over the last two years, there's been a lot of faculty changes and there's been such a focus on addressing immediate needs that there are many teachers who still don't know each other. They've been wearing masks, they've been eating in their classrooms, they've been working and eating in their respective, subject-specific rooms that it's understandable. He requested modest funding to upgrade the Faculty Dining Room. Ideally, the upgrades would include tables and chairs conducive to conversation, there would be a sofa where teachers can relax and linger a bit longer during their downtime, and a bar-style charging station where they can work and possibly socialize, during lunch, during breaks in their day, and throughout the day.

The HASA leadership hasn't seen design plans yet but a figure of \$11,000 has emerged as an estimate to hopefully create an environment where teachers can cross-pollinate ideas and get to know each other as colleagues.

HASA Recording Secretary – Thao Groenewald:

I'd like to ask for primary and secondary motions to approve last month's meeting minutes. Audrey Flynn motioned for approval and Lisa Mundy seconded the motion.

HASA Membership - Audrey Flynn:

We are closing out membership for the current school year, with 289 households who are HASA members. We will reopen in August before the start of the new academic year.

Thank you to all who joined and thank you to all those who reached out to help at all our HASA events throughout the year.

To all those who are returning, I will see you next year!

Newsletter – Lisa Kulick on behalf of Shantala Kaikini:

Submissions for the May 9, 2022 Newsletter are due by April 27, 2022.

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Past Newsletters are always available to read at <https://www.northernhighlands.org/Page/6748>

Board of Education – Maggie Liljegren:

Thank you for sharing the allocations report, it's always great to stay updated on all that HASA does.

I encourage everyone to go to the school website to review the full presentation that Dr. Verdicchio and Ms. Knutelsky did.

Our budget next meeting will be held on Monday April 25, 2022, with details available on the school website.

NH Sports Association – Lisa Kulick on behalf of Kathy Travers:

To reiterate what Mr. Koth had mentioned earlier, the annual Northern Highlands Sports Association Golf Outing will be held on Monday May 23, 2022 with a shotgun start at 8:00am.

MPAA - Grace Perruzzi:

Our April 7 Band Concert went very well.

Future events include:

Wednesday May 11 at 7:00pm Chorus Concert

Monday May 30 at 9:30am Marching Band in Allendale \*

Monday May 30 at 10:30am Marching Band in HoHoKus \*

Monday May 30 at 11:30am Marching Band in Upper Saddle River \*

Wednesday June 1 at 6:00pm Jazz Night

\* All middle school band students are invited to join the Highlands Marching Band on Memorial Day

For those with children who are interested in joining the Highlands Marching Band next year, the summer camp has been scheduled for the week of August 15.

We are also looking for new Board Members and hope to host an Open House in May to meet all prospective members and board members.

HASA President - Lisa Kulick:

Lisa thanked everyone in attendance, announced our next Zoom meeting scheduled for Wednesday May 11, 2022, then adjourned the meeting at 10:05am.

