

PARK RIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Date: December 21, 2021

Public Started: 7:00 P.M.

Private Started: 8:50 P.M.

Private Ended: 9:30 P.M.

Public Ended: 9:35 P.M.

High School Little Theater

I. Roll Call

N. Triano	J. Pierotti	N. Agoos	L. Sum	D. Clare	A. Wagner	D. Bradler
A	X	X	X	X	X	X

Also Present:

R. Gamper R. Wright

II. Pledge of Allegiance – *was led by Board President, David Bradler.*

III. Open Public Meetings Statement – *was read by Board President, David Bradler.*

This is to advise the general public and to instruct that it be recorded in the minutes that in compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, entitled the "Open Public Meetings Act," the Park Ridge Board of Education on December 7, 2021 caused to be posted at the Office of the Board of Education located at 85 Pascack Road, Park Ridge, New Jersey and on December 7, 2021 sent to The Record, 1 Garret Mountain Plaza, P.O. Box 471, Woodland Park, NJ 07424-0471 and The Ridgewood News, 41 Oak Street, Ridgewood, NJ 07450-3805 and on December 7, 2021 delivered to the Office of the Municipal Clerk of Park Ridge and the Park Ridge Public Library a meeting notice setting forth the time, date and location of this meeting.

IV. SPECIAL PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD

- A. Request from the Emerson School District to include Football in our co-op athletic agreement, starting in the 2022-23 school year.

Mr. Bradler reviewed the current co-ops with Emerson. Dr. Gamper and Mr. Brown outlined the current request from Emerson to co-op in football which Dr. Gamper explained came from the Emerson Superintendent. Dr. Gamper mentioned that there was a discussion about this seven years ago. At that time, Park Ridge did not want to create a football co-op. Since then, Emerson has been playing in the Union league which is a league designed for schools with low numbers. Dr. Gamper explained that when the request was originally received, the Park Ridge football team was in the middle of a playoff run and he decided not to say anything until now as he felt it could be a distraction. Dr. Gamper then outlined the timeline for requesting the co-op. He explained that everything would need to be completed by mid-January.

Mr. Brown explained that as a result of the long-standing relationship with Emerson, student athletes have been given an opportunity to play a sport they may have not been able to. Mr. Brown explained how co-ops work, stating that Park Ridge would likely change divisions and be in Group 2.

Dr. Gamper spoke about a stakeholder meeting which was held last week. Representatives from Football, Cheerleading and Band attended. Board members listened to their concerns. On Thursday, the district met with administrators from Emerson. He said the meeting went well.

Dr. Gamper then reviewed the current plan. Their Football team would combine with Park Ridge. They would be play at and be coached by Park Ridge. They would be known as Park Ridge/Emerson OWLS. Cheerleading and Marching Band still need to be worked out but it is thought that they would work similar to football. Their staff merged into ours, and we would be the LEA for all three.

Mr. Brown explained the approval process. First, both boards must approve the co-op. Then it would go to the conference for a vote. After their vote, it would go to the State for final approval. He cautioned that even if approved by both boards, the co-op faces challenges. Many districts are not happy with the current Park Ridge wrestling co-op and as a result, this one could get shot down. He mentioned that all this information needs to be presented to the conference and State by 1/17/22. He did note that if the conference votes it down, there is an appeals process.

V. Hearing of Citizens

Several residents gave their thoughts on the co-op.

One resident indicated that she would like to hear from the coaches. Mr. Brown responded that the coaches were promised they would not be brought into this discussion.

Another resident questioned whether the Emerson students would actually come into the program. He referenced a similar situation he experienced in the rec league. He was concerned that the change in Grouping could hurt Park Ridge.

A resident asked if there were any additional costs that would be incurred. Dr. Gamper responded that while they were not done hammering out the details, the thinking is that Emerson would be charged for any additional costs incurred.

A resident asked why residents were not made aware of this sooner. Dr. Gamper responded that he did not want to disrupt the football team during their season.

A resident, Mr. DeAngelo, asked about the impact new developments could have on Park Ridge. Dr. Gamper responded that it is a consideration but as of now, there are no hard facts.

A resident asked whether the agreement will be in writing. Felt any kinks should be worked out now before the season starts. Dr. Gamper responded that there are currently 7 co-ops and no written agreements. He commented that the Board will be discussing this topic and there may need be a need to put something in writing.

Several other residents concurred that a written agreement needs to be in place.

A resident if the team will still be considered the OWLS? Dr. Gamper said the scoreboards, mascot and announcers will still say OWLS but the official title will be Park Ridge / Emerson OWLS.

A resident asked if the merger was indefinite. Mr. Brown stated that it was not. It will be evaluated after two years and runs for four. Any school can leave a co-op with written notice.

A resident asked if we did not move forward on the football co-op, would Emerson pull out of our other co-ops and co-op with another district. Mr. Brown said it is possible but State would have to review their request.

A resident asked about competitive cheerleading. Dr. Gamper indicated that he did not have an answer at this point in time but it was possible that both teams would have separate winter programs.

A resident asked if we would absorb coaches. Dr. Gamper responded that for football, our coaches would remain and theirs would be eliminated. For Cheer and marching, their coaches would join ours. Regarding pay, we would pay ours, they would pay theirs.

A resident asked about breakdown for teams and practice. Mr. Brown said kids would practice together. May be ability to field a full JV team and a Freshman team.

A resident asked if there could be another meeting when more details are available? Mr. Brown said that Cheerleading and Marching Band have more time. Football has a tight timeline.

A resident expressed concern about Cheer. There are 45-55 girls. She asked if there would be cuts and if anyone has spoken to the kids. Mr. Brown stated that they are still in initial conversations on what would work best.

A resident expressed support for the co-op saying that the younger Emerson kids already work together.

A resident expressed concern that Seniors may not be able to play at the Varsity level. Mr. Brown stated that the Coaches will assess who will play.

A resident asked if there would be enough buses for away games? Dr. Gamper said that between the two schools, there should be enough buses.

A question was asked about insurance. Mr. Wright said that there would be no increase in cost as a result of creating the co-op. The policy looks at claims and experience not a change in numbers playing a sport.

A comment was made that Coaches do it for the love of the sport. The district would be asking them to double their programs. She hoped that the district would increase their stipends due to doubling of workload.

A resident commented that both towns are small and the kids are used to playing all the time. It should be made clear that best players will be playing. Also asked if Boosters were merging. Dr. Gamper said that Emerson only has one booster program for all sports

A resident commented that Park Ridge could be in this position in a few years. Numbers are down at junior program. If we do not do this then Band and cheer will have no one to cheer or play for. Football drives Friday night, so cheer and band can play.

A question was asked as to how it will impact the junior program. Dr. Gamper responded that he did not know what would happen to the Junior program.

A resident was concerned that merging cheerleaders could be a problem. She mentioned that the skill levels may be different and the numbers may exceed the 35 maximum for competition.

Dr. Gamper gave a brief history of previous co-ops. He concluded by saying that the Co-ops have allowed for full teams of boys and girls.

Ben, the student representative, made a comment regarding band. He said that he did not like the idea of combining bands. It was a sense of pride, as Emerson has been a rival over the years.

A resident asked felt it was important to consider the long-term impact of the co-op.

A resident asked what the likelihood the co-op would be approved. Mr. Brown said he honestly did not know. This would be a landmark case. Not everyone is happy with Park Ridge's current wrestling co-op. This one could get shot down.

Danielle Schwartz commented that while football was on a deadline, cheer and band will work out details. She wanted to make sure that they are seen as one. Dr. Gamper stated that the discussion started on Thursday with Emerson will continue.

A resident asked why we are we rushing into this and wanted to work out more details. Dr. Gamper said that Emerson's request was to have this in place for next year. The district needs to answer the request as received.

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A resident commented that if Emerson goes to another district, it could impact our current co-ops.

A resident commented that she currently has a Senior and 8th grader. They played football and lacrosse. She has not seen any issues at the younger age level. She has noticed that the 8th grade numbers are going down. She felt this was only going to get worse.

Mr. Brown commented that Football numbers are going down nationwide.

A resident added that they have never had a problem working with Emerson and should welcome them.

Dr. Gamper thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

Ms. Wagner thanked everyone for their comments and thoughts.

A motion was made to go into executive at 8:50 pm.

M: AW S: LS
NT JP NA LS DC AW DB
A Y Y Y Y Y Y

The Board returned to Public at 9:30 pm

M: LS S: AW
NT JP NA LS DC AW DB
A Y Y Y Y Y Y

VI. Adjournment – 9:35 pm

M:DC S:LS
NT JP NA LS DC AW DB
A Y Y Y Y Y Y

Robert Wright
Business Administrator/Board Secretary