

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Regular Public Meeting held in the Media Center on October 19, 2022. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Amanda Haber, at 7:30 P.M. Mrs. Haber read the following Statement of Compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act: "In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Laws of 1975, a notice for this meeting was posted at the respective offices of the Essex Fells School as of January 5, 2022. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, and the Star Ledger.

**I. Call to Order – 7:30 P.M.**

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President.

**II. Roll Call**

Mrs. Amanda Haber, President-Present  
Mr. John Toth, Vice-President-Present  
Mrs. Kris Huegel-Present  
Mr. Raj Mehta-Present  
Mr. Theodore Skopak-Present

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal; Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary; 6 Staff Members, and 8 Members of the Public

**III. Flag Salute**

- The Board President led the salute to the flag.

**IV. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only**

- Mr. Steiner noted that he is an advocate of live streaming the BOE meetings.
- Dr. Nitti noted BOE transparency and also was in favor of live streaming. Dr. Nitti also noted that Executive Sessions are held for the Board to discuss matters that require a certain level of privacy.

**V. Superintendent's Report**

- Dr. Gadaleta reported that the 6<sup>th</sup> grade had a very successful Cultural Festival and thanked the staff. Dr. Gadaleta noted that she had received positive feedback from parents.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that this week is Violence & Vandalism week.
- TREP\$ will take place tomorrow evening from 6 – 8 pm in the gymnasium.
- This month is Fire Prevention Month and the EFFD will visit with the pre-school through first grade students.
- The PTA pumpkin hunt will be Monday October 21<sup>st</sup> in the Glen.
- Parent / Teacher conferences will be held next week in both the AM and PM.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted the Halloween parade and class parties would take place on 10/31.
- Dr. Gadaleta shared with the Board the NJSLA scores from the spring of 2022. The Board discussed. Mrs. Haber noted what unbelievable scores we were able to attain considering the last 2 years. Mr. Skopak congratulated the district, and Mrs. Huegel noted a job well done.
- Mr. Toth asked about the resolution regarding committees, Dr. Gadaleta noted that they are renewed annually.

**VI. Superintendents Resolutions**

**RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01 –13.

- 1. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the payment of the following travel related expenses in accordance with the travel policy 6471 for Professional Development:

Staff Member(s): Michelle Brown  
 Event: 101 Strategies for Strengthening Your PE Program (Grades K-8)  
 Location: Virtual  
 Date: 11/29/22  
 Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Molly Fornini  
 Event: Decrease Attention-Getting and Tantrum Behaviors: Practical Solutions  
 Location: Virtual  
 Date: TBD  
 Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Susan Hacker  
 Event: Grade 4 Interdisciplinary Lessons  
 Location: Conquer Math  
 Date: 11/4/22 & 1/13/22  
 Cost: \$340.00

Staff Member(s): Deana Hromoko  
 Event: Increasing your Students' Mastery of Math Facts and Mental Math Skills  
 Location: Virtual  
 Date: TBD  
 Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Katie McNish  
 Event: Creating Projects for the Planet: Project Based Learning  
 Location: Virtual  
 Date: 1/18/23  
 Cost: \$115.00

Staff Member(s): Katie McNish  
 Event: NAEA23  
 Location: Virtual (Available 4/13-8/31)  
 Date: TBD (2-3 days)  
 Cost: \$195.00

Staff Member(s): Patricia Pakonis  
 Event: ACTFL Convention 2022  
 Location: Boston Convention Center  
 Date: 11/17/22-11/20/22  
 Cost: \$505.90

Staff Member(s): Kimberly Trafford  
 Event: NJASL Conference  
 Location: Atlantic City, NJ

Date: 12/5/22-12/6/22  
Cost: \$369.38

Staff Member(s): Tracie Wieczorek  
Event: Celebrating Best Practices in Support Dual Language Learners  
Location: Virtual  
Date: 10/21/23  
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Laura Brutman  
Event: BER: Increasing Student Learning Using Tech Tools Ideal for Grades K-2  
Location: Virtual  
Date: TBD  
Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Kristen Kowalski  
Event: Dealing Effectively with Disruptive Students  
Location: Virtual  
Date: 12/6/22  
Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Stefania Focarino  
Event: Public Foundations Level K Virtual Launch Workshop  
Location: Virtual  
Date: 11/7/22  
Cost: \$299.00

Staff Member(s): Stefania Focarino  
Event: Decreasing Defiant and Argumentative Behaviors: Practical Strategies  
Location: Virtual  
Date: TBD  
Cost: \$279.00

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request extension for the following:

EFRD – Youth Basketball Program Grades 3-6  
EFRD – Youth Grades K-2 Clinic  
11/1/22 – 3/20/23  
Gymnasium

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Statement of Assurance Regarding the Use of Paraprofessional Staff.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**4. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the School Safety and Security Plan Annual Review Statement of Assurance.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**5. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the School Self-Assessment for Determining Grades under the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**6. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2022-2023 School Improvement Panel (ScIP)/District Evaluation Advisory Committee/Professional Development:

Michelle Gadaleta	Superintendent/Principal
Marisa Burger	Teacher Representative
Michelle Barshay	Teacher Representative
Candice Fitzgerald	Teacher Representative
Judi Reynolds	Teacher Representative
Amanda Haber	BOE Representative
Ed Lavezzo/Belinda O'Donnell	Parent Representatives

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**7. RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2022-2023 Safety Team/Culture Climate Committee:

Michelle Gadaleta	Superintendent/Principal
Rebecca Santin	HIB Representative
Laura Quinn	Teacher Representative
Katie MacKenzie	Teacher Representative
Sue Hacker	Teacher Representative
Lisa Massaro	Teacher Representative
Dorotea Banek	Teacher Representative
Tracie Wiczorek	Teacher Representative
Michelle Brown	Teacher Representative
PeggyAnne Reinhardt	Teacher Representative
Mary Renz	Nurse/Teacher Representative
Ed Lavezzo/Belinda O'Donnell	PTA Representatives
Paige Daniels	Foundation Representative

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0





- The School Board Election date is November 8<sup>th</sup>. 4 individuals are running for 2 open seats beginning January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

**IX. Business Resolutions**

**RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves Business Resolutions #01-07.

1. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts the minutes of the following meeting(s):

Regular Meeting Minutes	September 7th, 2022
Executive Session Minutes	September 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2022
Regular Meeting Minutes	September 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022
Executive Session Minutes	September 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022
Regular Meeting Minutes	October 6th, 2022
Executive Session Minutes	October 6th, 2022

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for October in the amount of \$204,902.52 as certified by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for September as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$358,998.33 including \$335,234.60 for the gross payroll, \$6,197.50 for the Board’s share of FICA/Medicare and \$17,566.23 for the State’s share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

3. **WHEREAS**, the Board of Education has received the Reports of the Board Secretary (Secretary) and the Custodian of School Monies (Treasurer) for the Month of July;

**WHEREAS**, in compliance with N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.11(c)3, the Secretary has certified that as of the date of the reports, no budgetary line-item account, in accordance with the minimum chart of accounts as established by the New Jersey Department of Education, has obligations and payments which in total exceed the amount appropriated by the Board of Education;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that in compliance with N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.11(c)4, the Board of Education certifies that, after review of the Secretary’s monthly financial report, and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials, to the best of its N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.11(c)4, and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district’s financial obligations for the remainder of the year; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that pursuant to P.L. 2004 C73, the Board certifies that after review of the Secretary’s monthly financial report and certification, that there are no budgetary transfers that cumulatively exceed 10% that would require the approval of the Commissioner of Education; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the financial reports for the months be accepted

and shall become a part of the official minutes of this meeting.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of August & September as certified by the Business Administrator and authorized by the Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the M1 & Comprehensive Maintenance Plan for the period FY '22 through FY '24 and authorizes the Business Administrator/Board Secretary to submit the Plan to the Essex County Executive Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approve appropriating additional fiscal year 2022 Nonpublic School Transportation funding to the 2022-23 school budget in the amount of \$2,610 to line account 11-000-270-518; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Essex Fells Board of Education acknowledges that it did not include an estimated Nonpublic School Transportation payment in the 2021-22 school budget and received a reimbursement of Nonpublic School Transportation costs in the amount of \$2,610; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that NJAC 6A:23A2.13.3(d)6 provides that a district Board of Education may, at any time without commissioner approval, appropriate surplus generated from state revenue such as Nonpublic School Transportation, that has been excluded from the excess surplus calculation in the prior year.

7. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approve New Jersey Schools Development Authority (SDA) funding for projects related to emergent and capital maintenance needs in the amount of \$5,100.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**X. Old Business / Board Discussion**

- Dr. Gadaleta provided an update on the roof project. A second walk thru was last Monday to prepare the punch list.
- Dr. Gadaleta will be attending a meeting on School Safety and will meet tomorrow with the Mayor and the Police Chief to further discuss the Class III Officer.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the teachers have been busy working on curriculum revisions, and grading will be reviewed along with the consortium.
- Dr. Gadaleta addressed the comments regarding the BOE live streaming meetings. The annual cost for OT for the streaming would be about 3k. Mrs. Haber noted that we had seen a decrease in viewership, and also noted the equipment funding for live streaming, approximately 10k, was allocated in the 2022-23 budget for resources for the children. Mr. Toth agreed with Mrs. Haber and noted the Board continues to be as transparent as possible and agreed the funds were better appropriated for the children. Mrs. Huegel noted a



possible survey to the community. Mr. Skopak noted that even at its peak, viewership was low. Mr. Mehta agreed. The BOE noted that 10k went to materials for the children. The Board agreed for now not to return to live streaming.

- Dr. Gadaleta provided a health update, noting that there have been some covid cases but also noted there are other illness besides covid. Dr. Gadaleta will continue to update the WAAG and keep the community informed.
- Dr. Gadaleta referenced the Communication policy, noting that emails being sent to the staff have not been respectfully written. The policy will be updated.

#### **XI. New Business / Board Discussion**

- Dr. Gadaleta noted she will be looking into Link It Score Reporting.
- Dr. Gadaleta provided photos of the new playground the PTA is purchasing. Installation could be in the next few weeks.

#### **XII. Public Comment**

- Mrs. Criscione read the following statement on behalf of the EFTA:
  - Good evening to the community, fellow teaching staff, Dr. Gadaleta, Mrs. Haber, Mrs. Huegel, Mr. Lella, Mr. Mehta, Mr. Skopak & Mr. Toth. My name is Nicole Criscione and I am currently a co-president of the Essex Fells Teacher Association. This is my 10th year as an educator at this school and I currently teach 6th grade language arts and 5th grade social studies. Tonight, I have come to speak with you on behalf of the teachers and educators of our school. • The teachers, who so diligently pour their hearts into “fostering an optimal educational environment for all students.” AND • The professional educators, who remain steadfast in their dedication towards “cultivating collaborative, child-centered learning environments” each day. It is OUR hope that through transparency and the creation of open dialogue, we can identify a way of ensuring the key components of our school’s mission statement... • “effective communication” • “value of oneself and others” • “building of character” • “and a commitment to lifelong learning” CAN BE, and SHOULD BE, equally attainable for all members of the school community, including parents. Over the past few weeks, many of our beloved teachers have been on the receiving end of verbal attacks and unwarranted accusations from some of the parents of the Essex Fells community. And while we do not believe these individuals reflect the greater whole, we strongly believe that the frequency of these communications warrants notification to both the public and also to you, our board of education, in an effort to find a resolution. Some examples of the communications our staff members have been subjected to include: • Being accused of lying and deceiving parents • Being spoken down to in front of students and colleagues • Receiving multiple aggressive communications in a single day AND • Skeptic commentary questioning the validity of educational practices. Behavior such as this is inappropriate and wholeheartedly reflects a lack of acknowledgement for a “continued commitment to professionalism” which we pride ourselves on at Essex Fells School. It devalues our esteemed educators who hold themselves to the highest of standards in academic performance and instructional practices. It should not be tolerated any longer and requires clear and formal policy. Policy which is founded with the intention to remediate and maintain “mutual respect and cultivation of a safe and effective learning environment”. In our open communicative efforts to inform Dr. Gadaleta of these instances, she has since suggested that teachers must protect themselves by refraining from holding meetings or conducting conversations with parents without the attendance of another staff member. This may seem like a start, yet it is simply not enough. I am here this evening to say each of you, that your teaching staff needs your help. We need your support in seeking and maintaining a sense of unified respect throughout Essex Fells School on a daily basis. Respect that is upheld regardless of any tolerance for such behaviors that may exist in varying platforms around the community. We are in support of Dr. Gadaleta’s recommendation that the existing Policy #9205 be formally amended to ensure that the protection

and safety of educators becomes an integral part of our mission, and so that we are ALL be held accountable in the application of respect and empathy when communicating with others. On behalf of all of the teachers at Essex Fells School, I thank you for your time and future efforts in this matter. We appreciate each and every one of you in your ability to continually represent the needs of ALL members in the Essex Fells School community.

- The Board thanked Mrs. Criscione for her statement.
- Mr. Steiner thanked the Board for the explanation and clarification regarding the live streaming.

**XIII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session**

At 8:26 P.M. the Board made a motion to enter into Executive Session discuss legal matters. The items discussed in Executive Session will be disclosed to the public when the need to maintain their confidentiality no longer exists.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**XIV. Adjournment**

At 9:01 P. M. the Board made a motion to adjourn. The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held on **Wednesday, November 29, 2022, at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mr.Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Huegel

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella  
Business Administrator/