

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Regular Meeting held in the Media Center on December 13, 2023. 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 4th 2023. 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
 Mr. Raj Mehta-Absent
 Mrs. Caragh Lavoie-Present
 Mrs. Jacquelyn Burke- Absent

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal; and Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. President’s Report

Good Evening and thank you for joining us this evening.

At our January reorganization meeting I shared that I was “excited to see what we (meaning the Board) would accomplish together and was confident that, with the addition of our new members, we would be able to achieve great things for the students of Essex Fells.” I am very proud of all that our board has been able to accomplish over the course of the year. As this meeting concludes our year as a Board of Education I wanted to take the time to review some of the success of 2023. We have approved curricula that are properly aligned with the state standards. We have put into place an innovative school security program inclusive of a safety vestibule and Class III officer. We have worked to improve the communications between the staff and the families of the school to better serve both parties. We have supported the innovative professional development and programs that have sharpened the saw of our educators. We have carefully and thoughtfully reviewed and approved a budget that is conservative yet keeps Essex Fells on the cutting edge. We have prioritized student mental health and safety by improving the services that are available to our students. We have been dedicated to supporting the Superintendent’s decisions for staffing ensuring that our students are in the hands of hard-working professionals. We have ensured that the school grounds are well-maintained and in my humble opinion, exceptional with notable additions like the resurfaced rotunda, Kelly’s Corner, and our track. These were just some examples of how the Board has really come together and ensured that we are achieving our goals providing the students with an incredible elementary experience.

On behalf of the Board of Education I want to thank Dr. Gadaleta and Mr. Lella for your patience and guidance as we navigate these decisions. Thank you for your dedication to Essex Fells School. We also would like to thank the staff, the PTA, the Foundation, the Essex Fells Police Department, the Essex Fells Borough Council, families and friends - all of whom have contributed to another successful year. We wish you and yours a very happy and healthy holiday season and New Year.

V. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

VI. Superintendent's Report

- Dr. Gadaleta explained the Emergency Response that had taken place yesterday at EFS, as the EFPD put the school in a shelter in place due to police activity close to the campus. The event took about 45 minutes and ran into the first lunch/recess. Dr. Gadaleta noted that it was extremely helpful to have our Class III Officer, Officer Tedesco, onsite with his ability to be in contact with the EFPD and provide updates to Dr. Gadaleta. Dr. Gadaleta noted that the Share 911 application had worked well also. Dr. Gadaleta felt the response went seamlessly and everyone adapted very well. Dr. Gadaleta thanked the staff, students, EFPD and Officer Tedesco.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted the resolution to approve the 2024-25 school calendar.
- Dr. Gadaleta reiterated that the first grading trimester was complete on the 8th and that report cards will be available on the 15th. Parents will be able to see teacher comments.
- Kindergarten and Preschool registration will be January 22nd – January 26th.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the All School Holiday Concert will be on December 20th, at 2 pm, with the full student body on the bleachers. All are welcome to attend and Dr. Gadaleta wished everyone a happy holiday.
- Dr. Gadaleta explained the maternity leave, custodial substitute and BCBA resolutions. Also a resolution for CST Evaluation to be done in a child's native language.

VII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–15.

- 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): LeeAnn Smith
 Event: Increase Essex County Special Ed Director's Roundtable
 Location: West Orange, NJ
 Date: 12/19/23
 Cost: \$4.79

Staff Member(s): Erika Pilato
 Event: Increase Essex County Special Ed Director's Roundtable
 Location: West Orange, NJ
 Date: 12/19/23
 Cost: \$4.79

Staff Member(s): Marco Pannullo
 Event: TECHSPO 2024
 Location: Atlantic City, NJ
 Date: 1/24/24-1/26/24
 Cost: \$983.20

Staff Member(s): Stefania Focarino
 Event: Strengthen PHONICS Instruction in Any K-2 Reading Program
 Location: Virtual
 Date: 12/14/23
 Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Steven Lella
 Event: NJASBO Pensions

Location: Whippany, NJ
 Date: 12/12/23
 Cost: \$135.81

Staff Member(s): Katie MacKenzie
 Event: Practical Behavior Management Strategies for the Inclusion Classroom, Grades K-6
 Location: Virtual
 Date: 1/19/24
 Cost: \$159.00

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the extension of Maternity/Disability Leave of Absence for Molly Fornini from January 2, 2024, through August 31, 2024.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the extension of Nicole Axentiou as Kindergarten Maternity Leave Teacher, through June 30th, 2024.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Maternity/Disability Leave of Absence for Marisa DeRites from January 24, 2024, through June 19, 2024 , using the following days:

January 24, 2024 – March 25, 2024 = 42 sick days
 March 26, 2024 – March 28, 2024 = 3 personal days
 April 1, 2024 – June 19, 2024 = FMLA
 September 1, 2024 = Return date

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of the following staff members as after school dismissal supervisors for pupil supervision as needed at the teachers contracted rate of \$65.00 per hour paid in 30 minute increments with parent reimbursement to the Essex Fells Board of Education:

Patricia Pakonis Teacher
 Rebecca Alpert Art Therapist

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the following stipend positions for the 2023-2024 school year at the contractual rate:

Rebecca Katsios	Camp - \$800
Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Toth
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

7. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, contracting with Hillmar, LLC for Bilingual Specialty Language Evaluations for the 2023-2024 school year, at the following hours and rates:

Bilingual Specialty Language Evaluation:	<u>\$900.00</u>
Evaluation with Cognitive and Adaptive Testing	<u>\$1,200.00 each</u>
Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Toth
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

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

EFFEE - Winter 2024 Enrichment Programs
 1/9/24 – 3/14/24
 Gymnasium & Classrooms

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Toth
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

9. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2024-2025 School Calendar.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Toth
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

10. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the contracted services of Miriam Skydell & Associates for BCBA at the rate of \$110 per hour.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Toth
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

11. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the first reading and of the following policies/regulations/bylaws:

P 5200	Attendance
R 5200	Attendance

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie Seconded by: Mr. Toth
 Ayes: 3 Nays: 0

VIII. Business Administrator’s Report

- Mr. Lella reminded the BOE members that a President and VP will need to be elected at the January 3rd, 2024 Reorganizational Meeting.
- Mr. Lella noted that the 2022-23 audit is finishing up and that new dates for future audits have been announced. EFS will continue to complete the audit prior to the December break.
- Mr. Lella reported that staff are working on their 2024-25 budget requests and he and Dr. Gadaleta have had some preliminary discussion. Mr. Lella also reminded the BOE members of the challenges with the 2% tax levy cap, as out of district placements, transportation, health benefits, and inflation, do not adhere to a 2% cap.
- Mr. Lella asked to table Business Resolution #3 as he was not able to complete and provide reports to the Board as the software was closed out for updates. They will be approved at the next meeting.

IX. Business Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Business Resolutions #01-03.

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

Regular Workshop Minutes	November 1 st , 2023
Executive Workshop Minutes	November 1 st , 2023
Regular Meeting Minutes	November 15 th , 2023
Executive Meeting Minutes	November 15 th , 2023
Moved by: Mr. Toth	Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for December in the amount of \$214,965.29, as certified by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for November as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$382,997.49 including \$357,935.28 for the gross payroll, \$6,362.73 for the Board’s share of FICA/Medicare and \$16,699.48 for the State’s share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mr. Toth	Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie
Ayes: 3	Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of November as certified by the Business Administrator and authorized by the Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by:	Seconded by:
Ayes:	Nays:

****TABLED**

X. Old Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta confirmed that the 6th grade camp trip will be moved to a new location. Dates will be slightly altered.
- We are waiting on the permit from the town for the gates replacement.
- Dr. Gadaleta will have vendors out to address the condition of the new gym floor finishing.

XI. New Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta explained the AI Professional Development for the staff and policy.

XII. Public Comment

- None

XIII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

The following Resolution was called at approximately 7:55 P.M.

WHEREAS the following subject is not appropriate to be discussed in a public meeting and is within the exemptions which may be discussed and acted upon and,

WHEREAS only the following subject(s) shall be discussed in private recess by the Board and the minutes made available to the public as soon as the reason for exemption no longer exists, it is therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED at the Public Meeting of the Essex Fells Board of Education on this day Wednesday, December 13th, 2023, pursuant to Sections 7 & 8 of the Open Public Meetings Act, the following subject(s) shall be discussed in a session of the Board closed to the public:

Please be advised that the Board will be going into executive session for approximately thirty minutes for the purpose of discussing litigation regarding special education and negotiations. Action will not be taken in public after the executive session.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr. Toth

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

XIV. Adjournment

At 8 :07 P.M. the Board made a motion to adjourn. The next reorganizational meeting of the Board of Education will be held on **Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Toth

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary