

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 Gymnasium of the Essex Fells School on November 17, 2021. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Kris Huegel, at 7:31 P.M. Mrs. Huegel 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 8th, 2021. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress and the Star Ledger, and posted on the district's website."

**I. Call to Order – 7:31 P.M.**

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

**II. Roll Call**

Mrs. Kris Huegel, President-Present  
 Dr. Steven LoCascio, Vice-President-Present  
 Mrs. Amanda Haber-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; Board Attorney, Mr. Stephen Fogarty; and approximately 70 Members of the Public.

**III. Flag Salute**

- The Board President led the salute to the flag.

**IV. President's Report**

Hello Everyone-

Thank you for coming tonight. It is a pleasure to have all of you here in person and watching on youtube.

I am happy to report that we have not had any positive COVID cases so far this school year. We appreciate everyone's continued compliance with the health and safety restrictions that EFS has in place. The guidelines have proven successful for EFS throughout the pandemic and have made it possible for our students to attend school in person without disruption to the educational process.

As board members, it is our responsibility to put our personal feelings aside, read the supporting documents that affect our school and listen to the voices of our community members. In the summer and fall of 2020 we worked together with each other, the administration, the teacher's association, and families to find solutions to problems caused by the pandemic and EFS accomplished great things. I am optimistic that we can serve our school to the best of our abilities if we keep the wishes of our community at the forefront. Please speak up during the public comment portions of the meeting so we know what matters to you.

**V. Superintendent's Report**

- Dr. Gadaleta thanked all the parents who have been part of American Education Week. Dr. Gadaleta also recognized staff in 5-year increments, beginning with those of 5 + years of service, through 30 + years of service, and thanked the staff for their impact on the children of EFS.

- Dr. Gadaleta reported that we have been dealing with shortages and restrictions in regard to field trips. At this point we are attempting for 1 trip per grade level. Transportation issues have also been a major issue once a location is secured.
- Dr. Gadaleta informed the Board of notification by January 31<sup>st</sup> of intent to negotiate a new contract. The matter will be discussed further in Executive Session.
- Dr. Gadaleta was proud to announce that we are approving the fully ratified contract with the EFTA beginning July 1, 2021, for a period of 3 years, and how happy she was to have reached an agreement.
- Mrs. Huegel read the following:

Dr. Gadaleta has spent over 12 years as our school leader. During her tenure she has turned Essex Fells School into one of the finest K-6 programs in the state. Our children succeed academically, and their social and emotional needs are also supported. No one is a bigger advocate for the children and staff of Essex Fells school. Dr. Gadaleta's vision, commitment and drive are vital to EFS' success.

I am happy to share the news that the Board has unanimously requested the renewal of Dr. Gadaleta's contract, which is expiring at the end of this school year. Our community is extremely fortunate to have such a strong dedicated educational leader.

#### **VI. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only**

- Mr. Lella read a comment on behalf of Mrs. Angela Vega expressing her support for the renewal of Dr. Gadaleta's contract and reminded the BOE members that they are elected officials of the community.
- Mrs. Stefanczyk read a statement in support of Dr. Gadaleta and all of her efforts. She also thanked the BOE for their efforts during the last 2 years and reminded them of their duties as BOE members elected to be the voice of the school community.
- Mrs. J. Davis thanked all the staff at EFS as well as the BOE for all their efforts during these difficult times.
- Mrs. D. Pinto stated she is in support of Dr. Gadaleta and the entire EFS staff.
- Former Board of Education Member Mrs. Shani Drogin read a comment in support of Dr. Gadaleta and addressed BOE expectations as a member of the community.
- Mrs. Vickie Kaplan read a statement in support of Dr. Gadaleta.
- Dr. LoCascio asked about a Superintendent resolution regarding policy.
- Mrs. Haber recognized the EFTA ratification resolution.

#### **VII. Superintendents Resolutions**

**RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01 –6

- 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): Susan Hacker  
 Event: Using Guided Math to Accelerate Student Progress  
 Location: West Orange, NJ  
 Date: 11/30/21  
 Cost: \$289.00

Staff Member(s): Danielle Butler  
 Event: NJSLS Grade 4 – Number & Operations – Fractions Part 1  
 Location: Conquer Math  
 Date: 11/30/21  
 Cost: \$160.00



4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent the appointment of, Kelly King, Substitute Teacher for the school year 2021-2022.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5 Nays: 0

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

3rd Grade Girl Scouts Meeting
11/19/21, 12/17/21, 1/14/22, 2/11/22, 3/11/22
3:05pm to 4:15pm
Outside Picnic Tables

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5 Nays: 0

6. **WHEREAS**, the Essex Fells Board of Education (hereinafter referred to as the "Board") and the Essex Fells Teachers' Association (hereinafter referred to as "the Association") have negotiated a successor Collective Negotiations Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the "CNA") for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years; and

**WHEREAS**, the Association has, by a majority vote of its membership, ratified the CNA.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board hereby ratifies and approves of the terms of the CNA for the 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, which is attached to this Resolution and made a part hereof; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Board hereby authorizes the Board President and the Business Administrator/Board Secretary to execute, on behalf of the Board, the CNA by and between the Board and the Association.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5 Nays: 0

VIII. Buildings & Grounds

- Dr. Gadaleta reported that we are currently testing our water system for lead and other containments as noted in a letter from the EF Town Hall. Water filters are in place and will be checked and added as necessary.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the Roof project application had been submitted to the NJDOE.

IX. Curriculum & Instruction

- Dr. Gadaleta reported that Essex Fells School had been selected as a NJSLA Spring Field Testing district.
- Dr. Gadaleta reported on the results of the NJ Start Strong testing. Dr. Gadaleta noted that EFS had fared very well.
  - Mrs. Haber noted what a remarkable feat this was due to the fact that children are physically in school.



Secretary (Secretary) and the Custodian of School Monies (Treasurer) for the Month of July, August, September;

**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 knowledge, no major account or fund has been over expended in violation of 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: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**XIV. Old Business / Board Discussion**

- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the Safe Return Committee will meet on December 1<sup>st</sup> to revisit travel quarantine guidelines, as well as the distance of separation of the children and what other efforts can be in place to keep everyone safe.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the 2022-23 school calendar was presented to the BOE at the last meeting and there will be a resolution at a future meeting for approval.
  - Mr. Skopak asked about alignment with W. Essex
  - Mrs. Huegel asked about keeping Indigenous People Day on the calendar.
  - Dr. LoCascio commented on Columbus Day.
- Dr. Gadaleta provided on update on the school crossing guard and costs associated. At this time the borough cannot provide coverage. Mrs. Haber, Mrs. Huegel and Mr. Skopak agreed on the BOE supporting the cost. The matter will be reviewed and discussed further with the EFPD.
- Dr. Gadaleta reported on a residency case. The family has not yet taken up domicile and will be charged the per pupil cost.
- Dr. Gadaleta reported on the No Place for Hate Initiative, which came about with the ADL. Dr. Gadaleta opened the discussion for the BOE.
  - Mrs. Haber is in support of the program
  - Mr. Mehta does not feel a 3<sup>rd</sup> party is needed at this time
  - Mr. Skopak asked of the origin of the program, and Dr. Gadaleta noted the program began based on an incident in the spring.
  - Mr. Skopak was in support of what is being taught.

- Mrs. Haber feels these activities align with what is being taught at EFS.
- Mrs. Huegel is in support as well.
- Dr. LoCascio noted that we at EFS do the best job we possibly can.
- Mr. Skopak noted that we do embrace character education very well at EFS and supports the character education program
  - Mrs. Haber and Mrs. Huegel agree, Dr. LoCascio and Mr. Mehta do not agree.
- Dr. Gadaleta explained Superintendent Qualitative Goal #2 which ties into the No Place for Hate program.
  - Board Attorney Stephen Fogarty explained the origin of Superintendent Merit goals. The BOE discussed the program.

**XV. New Business / Board Discussion**

- Mr. Lella will contact the BOE as to their availability for the December 16<sup>th</sup> BOE meeting and possibly rescheduling.

**XVI. Public Comment**

- Dr. Nitti thanked everyone for their effort to get through these difficult times. Dr. Nitti encouraged the BOE to continue to be a fully transparent Board to the community. She noted that she understands that with her time served on the BOE the position could be a thankless job.
- Dr. Nitti noted that overall the vaccine is safe, and has seen the first hand the impact of taking the vaccine verse those who have not.
- Mr. Ash Davis noted that his family has been in town for 2 years and respects that everyone has different perspectives. He wanted to be clear that we want Dr. Gadaleta here and we better hope that she still wants us and will stay here.
- Mrs. Megan Farrell noted that of all her children, the one who attended EFS was the most successful and happy child in her family. She is so grateful for the efforts of keeping the school open for in person learning.
- Mr. Toth thanked Dr. LoCascio for his time serving on the Board and noted that he is looking forward to joining the EFS Board of Education and looks forward to open discussion regarding topics and will be professional to all.
- Mrs. Judi Reynolds noted that she serves on the No Place for Hate committee and noted that our uniqueness is special and we operate at a high level as an EFS program.
- A member of the public noted that children make mistakes and that the program is important, that the program will help stop these mistakes and we all need to be open minded.
- Mrs. Jackie Burke, a 20-year resident of EF, thanked Dr. Gadaleta for being here and all she has done. Mrs. Burke also noted that the supports Dr. LoCascio and any rumors of him not wanting Dr. Gadaleta were false and thanked him for his years of service.
- Mrs. Megan Storz noted that she has 2 children at EFS, and that she is so happy to be part of EFS and with Dr. Gadaleta for all her efforts, noting she supports Dr. Gadaleta the school and the community.

**XVII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session**

At 9:12 P.M. the Board made a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss the Superintendent’s Evaluation, the Superintendent’s Contract, and Legal Matters. The items discussed in Executive Session will be disclosed to the public when the need to maintain their confidentiality no longer

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

**XVIII. Adjournment**

At 10:29 P.M. the Board of Education made a motion to adjourn. The next meeting of The Board of Education, **Wednesday, December 1, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.** in the Gymnasium.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella  
Business Administrator/  
Board Secretary