

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Regular Public Meeting held on October 20, 2021. The meeting was called to order by the Board Administrator/Board Secretary, Mr. Steven Lella, at 7:33 P.M. Mr. Lella 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 – 7:33 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board Administrator/Board Secretary.

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Kris Huegel, President-Absent
 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; 15 Members of the Public and 2 Staff Members.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board Administrator/Board Secretary led the salute to the flag.

**Mrs. Huegel arrived at 7:35 P.M.

IV. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

V. President’s Report

- None

VI. Superintendent’s Report

- Dr. Gadaleta reported there would be a Safe Return Committee Meeting on 10/25/21. Dr. Gadaleta addressed a question that was emailed regarding travel. Dr. Gadaleta explained the current protocols that were in place, and that the SRC will discuss further at it’s meeting.
- The District had its lead testing performed earlier this week. Lead testing is to be every 3 years and EFS is due March 2022. The district is also testing for drinking water containments as a result of the notification sent by the borough. Water filters have been installed in the past and will continue to be installed and replaced as needed.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted the state mandate regarding submitting an emergency remote instruction plan. The DOE is still reviewing instances when districts can go remote, i.e. snow days.

- Dr. Gadaleta reported that the first day of Parent / Teacher conferences had gone very well.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that the EFFD would be visiting the school on 10/22/21 for fire prevention week.
- The third week of the month is designated by statute as violence and vandalism week.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted that Halloween festivities are back this year.

VII. Superintendents Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01 –3.

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): Lisa Massaro
Event: Enhancing Reading Workshop: Make the Best of Explicit,
Systematic Phonics, Small Group Strategy Lessons and Word
Work Activities to Boost Early Reading Success (K-2)
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$259.00

Staff Member(s): Kristin Gann
Event: Enhancing Reading Workshop: Make the Best of Explicit,
Systematic Phonics, Small Group Strategy Lessons and Word
Work Activities to Boost Early Reading Success (K-2)
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$259.00

Staff Member(s): Laura Brutman
Event: Enhancing Reading Workshop: Make the Best of Explicit,
Systematic Phonics, Small Group Strategy Lessons and Word
Work Activities to Boost Early Reading Success (K-2)
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$259.00

Staff Member(s): Laura Quinn
Event: Enhancing Reading Workshop: Make the Best of Explicit,
Systematic Phonics, Small Group Strategy Lessons and Word
Work Activities to Boost Early Reading Success (K-2)
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$259.00

Staff Member(s): LeeAnn Smith
Event: Maximizing Effectiveness as Instructional Coach

Location: Wilshire Grand Hotel, West Orange, NJ
Date: 12/8/21 & 12/9/21
Cost: \$619.34

Staff Member(s): Rosalie Takkel
Event: Increasing Engagement and Mindfulness for Distracted Students
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Steven Lella
Event: NJASBO - Pensions
Location: Birchwood Manor, Whippany, NJ
Date: 10/19/21
Cost: \$108.19
Staff Member(s): Steven Lella
Event: NJASBO - ESSER
Location: Virtual
Date: 10/20/21
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Molly Livio
Event: Strengthen Phonics Instruction in any K-12 Reading Program
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Kimberly Trafford
Event: NJASL Conference (New Jersey Association of School Librarians)
Location: Atlantic City, NJ
Date: TBD
Cost: \$290.03

Staff Member(s): Deana Hromoko
Event: Maximize Positive Outcomes for Your Students with Special
Needs: The Best High Leverage Practices
Location: Virtual
Date: TBD
Cost: \$279.00

Staff Member(s): Allison Myers
Event: Co-Teaching: Working Together to Help Students Catch Up
Location: West Orange, NJ
Date: 11/15/21 & 11/16/21
Cost: \$489.00

Staff Member(s): Enrique Manlapid
Event: Co-Teaching: Working Together to Help Students Catch Up
Location: West Orange, NJ
Date: 11/15/21 & 11/16/21

Cost: \$489.00

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the submission of the EFS Remote Instruction Plan Attestation for the 2021-2022 school year:

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

- P 2422 Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (M) (Revised)
- P 2467 Surrogate Parents and Resource Family Parents (M) (Revised)
- P 5111 Eligibility of Resident/Nonresident Students (M) (Revised)
- P 5114 Children Displaced by Domestic Violence (Abolished)
- P 5116 Education of Homeless Children (Revised)
- P & R 7432 Eye Protection (M) (Revised)
- P 8420 Emergency and Crisis Situations (M) (Revised)
- R 8420.1 Fire and Fire Drills (M) (Revised)
- P 8540 School Nutrition Programs (M) (Revised)
- P 8550 Meal Charges/Outstanding Food Service Bill (M) (Revised)
- P 8600 Student Transportation (M) (Revised)
- P 8810 Religious Holidays (Abolished)
- P 6115.01 Federal Awards/Funds Internal Controls–Allowability of Costs (New)
- P 6115.02 Federal Awards/Funds Internal Controls–Mandatory Disclosures (New)
- P 6115.03 Federal Awards/Funds Internal Controls – Conflict of Interest (M) (New)
- P 6311 Contracts for Goods or Services Funded by Federal Grants (M) (Revised)
- P 1648 Restart and Recovery Plan (M) (Abolished)
- P 1648.02 Remote Learning Options for Families (M) (Abolished)
- P 1648.03 Restart and Recovery Plan – Full-Time Remote Instruction (M) (Abolished)
- P 1648.11 The Road Forward COVID-19 – Health and Safety (M) (New)
- P 1648.13 School Employee Vaccination Requirements (M) (New)
- P 1648.14 Safety Plan for Healthcare Settings in School Buildings–COVID-19(New)
- P 2425 Emergency Virtual or Remote Instruction Program (M) (New)
- P & R 5751 Sexual Harassment of Students (M) (Revised)

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

VIII. Business Administrator’s Report

- Mr. Lella noted that the ASSA snap shot date is was October 15th, 2021. Enrollment information is used for 2022-23 State Aid.
- Mr. Lella informed the Board that the M1-CMP was included in their packets and was due November 15th, 2021 and that the schedule shows the district spends and budgets funds for building maintenance.
- Mr. Lella reported that the DRTRS report is due November 15th, 2021, and reports children that are being bussed by the district.
- Mr. Lella noted an update to the B&C number. The correct report was included in the Board packets.

IX. Business Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Business Resolutions #01-04.

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

Regular Meeting Minutes	October 6 th , 2021
Executive Session Minutes	October 6 th , 2021
Moved by: Dr. LoCascio	Seconded by: Mrs. Haber
Ayes: 5	Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for October in the amount of \$187,778.28 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 \$349,484.17, including \$325,695.30 for the gross payroll, \$4,507.10 for the Board’s share of FICA/Medicare and \$19,281.77 for the State’s share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio	Seconded by: Mrs. Haber
Ayes: 5	Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of September 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

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the M1 & Comprehensive Maintenance Plan for the period FY ’21 through FY ’23, and authorizes the Business Administrator/Board Secretary to submit the Plan to the Essex County Executive Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

X. Old Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta provided a recap on the ADL assembly that was provided to the staff, the parents via zoom and the children in school. Dr. Gadaleta had spoken with the ADL presenters to further develop the program. The staff training was well received and the attending parents went from 10 to 5. The 4th, 5th and 6th graders had separate programs, and Dr. Gadaleta explained the activities. Dr. Gadaleta also noted that 6 families chose to remove their children from the program.
- Mr. Mehta read the following statement:

Good Evening Parents & Fellow Board Members-

Few of us are blind to the fissures that are appearing in broader American society, as much of the focus these days is on what divides us; rather than what binds us together. In Essex Fells, we have done an exceptional job maintaining the traditions that have made this such a welcoming place for people from all backgrounds. We teach our children to judge people by who they are; not by immutable characteristics like skin color. At EFS, our message has always been that we are Americans (not black, brown, yellow or white people) and we should be proud of our nation that acts as a beacon of freedom around the world. National unity begins at the local level and percolates upwards

With respect to this past Friday's assembly, we have begun to stray away from that message and the values that have made our community special. This Board & our community were assured by Mrs. Gadaleta that the focus of the ADL assembly was to be on anti-bullying & that all content would meet local standards and be age appropriate. That is not what unfolded

As a Board member and father of 2 young boys, I am not comfortable with the school talking about sexual orientation and/or sexual behaviors with my 9 year-old. This is a topic best left for parents to introduce & discuss at home if they wish. I also do not want the school introducing complicated, nuanced filled topics such as race relations to 4th graders; these children do not view skin color as a defining characteristic of their peers so why are we introducing it at such a young age? The superintendent is making an issue where no problem exists Who we select to deliver programming on sensitive topics matters greatly.

A cursory search of the Anti-Defamation league reveals a partisan political organization promoting its own brand of social justice. They use fashionable buzzwords like equity and inclusion as cover for political programming. At the younger grades it is subtle programming; but make no mistake, it is present. The ADL is run by Jonathan Greenblatt who is a partisan that worked in the Obama administration. Most of the organization's critiques are with those whom they politically disagree. I have no issues with the ADL as they have a role to fill in our vibrant democracy, but they have absolutely no role in educating our children here at Essex Fells.

As a parent to 2 boys who are of Chinese and Indian heritage, I do not want them to view themselves as **victims** of their white classmates. At EFS, we have historically performed a day of service to honor Dr. King who advocated for a color-blind society where we would judge one another by the content of our character not by the color of one's skin. I am hard pressed to see how injecting thoughts of 'otherness' in the minds of an 8-year-old makes our community stronger and works to further Dr. King's vision.

Mrs. Gadaleta- My boys, Alexander and Jackson, are not victims of the white man. They are fortunate to be born in this exceptional nation where opportunities are boundless. My boys and their friends don't see skin color, but rather they judge one another by who can throw the football the furthest, who has the highest score in Fortnite or who can solve math problems the fastest. They don't see race as an important attribute so let's not start injecting that poison into their minds.

And let me be very clear about something: There is no crisis of bullying, hate or discrimination at EFS. The real danger to this community are paternalistic white people who want to ‘help’ turn our children into little social justice warriors. You, Mrs. Gadaleta, have a solution in search of a problem. By bringing the culture wars into this community, you are doing a disservice to our children and creating tension in a community where no conflict exists.

I STRONGLY urge you to keep political, controversial programming out of this school.

- Dr. LoCascio added that we at Essex Fells School have done a fantastic job with cultural education, and we at EFS do address HIB incidents as they occur. Dr. LoCascio did note that the presentation did cause an outcry in the community.
- Mrs. Huegel read the following statement:

I am speaking for myself, and not the entire Board. I am committed to working with the administration and fellow board members to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for the students and staff at our school. I fully support character education for our students. I am confident that our administration and teachers have the best interests of every one of our students at heart in all the curriculum and programming at EFS. I support the teaching of respect, inclusion, and acceptance. Last spring the Anti-Defamation League was alerted by a member of the Essex Fells community that there was a situation at the school. Dr. Gadaleta discussed the events that led to that call with the Board in Executive Session, and we agreed to further sensitivity training. The assembly that the children in grades 4-6 attended last Friday was a result of a socially and culturally insensitive game being played on the playground. During the assembly there were no political statements or influences pressed upon the students. The students were trained separately at each grade level, with age-appropriate content. The assembly was directly aligned with the Board’s Code of Conduct and HIB policies. I think we can all agree that every student at our school deserves to feel accepted and safe. If there are any more questions, please feel free to ask them during the public comment session or email Dr. Gadaleta or myself at my board email.

- Mrs. Haber appreciated Mr. Mehta’s comments and that of the other Board members. Mrs. Haber noted that the Board did discuss and address an incident that had occurred and also noted that she trusts the judgement of administration in keeping everyone safe.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted the October 18th deadline for school staff to be vaccinated or subject to testing. EFS chose option 1 from the state, which would have a vendor come in to administer the testing, however at this time the state is not ready and will grant an extension to begin the testing. Nurse Renz and Dr. Gadaleta will assist when the state and vendor are ready to begin.
- Dr. Gadaleta was pleased to report that we have a signed Memorandum of Agreement with the EFTA, and we will be waiting on the final contract.

XI. New Business / Board Discussion

- Mr. Lella reported that he had discussion with the borough regarding a small dumpster on the EFS property. He will obtain quotes for the dumpster, a cement platform and fencing. A permit request will need to be filed each year.
- Dr. Gadaleta reported on a request for a school crossing guard at the corner of Hilltop and Essex, since the EFPD will no longer be able to provide coverage for drop off and pick up. Mr. Skopak asked what has become the issue and Dr. Gadaleta explained the situation, and also noted that the borough had done a traffic study, but not for the school. Mrs. Haber noted that it is a concern because children are trying to get home and said she would be ok with a crossing guard, but perhaps it could be a volunteer before potential BOE cost. Mrs. Haber felt this was a good topic to

discuss. Mr. Mehta asked what had changed, and Dr. Gadaleta noted that we just seem to have more children walking in that area. Dr. LoCascio noted the 2 other crossing guards provided by the borough and perhaps we could confirm the cost.

- Dr. Gadaleta provided a first draft of the 2022-23 school calendar for Board review and noted the start dates of September 5th for staff and September 8th for students. The draft will be shared with the consortium districts. Mr. Mehta asked if October 10th was known as Indigenous Peoples Day, and if it was recognized as a state or federal holiday. Dr. Gadaleta noted that it's not and is to be changed on the next draft. Mrs. Haber asked how the dates fell.

XII. Public Comment

- Mr. Michael Candido stated that his children attended EFS. His grandchildren are bi-racial, and they would not attend school at EFS if this current situation remained.
- Mrs. Skopak spoke about the crossing guard and noted she would not feel comfortable asking a PTA member to volunteer and that it would also be difficult as a parent. Mrs. Skopak noted she was in favor of the EFPD at the spot and appreciates their support. Mrs. Haber appreciates her perspective.
- Mrs. Lisa Massaroni noted that she had her children opt out of the ADL presentation, and if this could also take place with other programs. Dr. Gadaleta noted typically no, however these requests occurred late in the evening and there was not enough time to speak with the parents. An alternate option was presented to those who opted out.
- Mrs. Vivian Bronstein noted that she respects everyone's perspective regarding the ADL presentation and noted that the ADL might not have been the best option but was thankful that the situation was addressed. With her background she does understand the concern and is appreciative.
- Mr. John Toth noted there are a lot of different views, and that dialogue is healthy. He also noted that the BOE can't say there wasn't an issue that needed to be addressed. He feels that the discussion should be continued and that actions should be taken to address, and that he didn't agree with Mr. Mehta or Dr. LoCascio's opinion.
- Mr. Mehta stated that he doesn't necessarily feel that ADL is the right group for Character Education but agrees that there should be corrective action. There are no issues of hate at EFS but there are incidents that happen. He just questions the group and topic.
- Mrs. Huegel addressed the parent training on Thursday night, that the presentation slides were adjusted, per grade level, and were not political.
- Mr. Mehta noted that 3 of the 5 BOE members chose not to participate.
- Dr. LoCascio felt we do a fantastic job with Character Education and Anti-bullying at EFS and that any issues that come up are addressed.
- Mr. Skopak noted he feels that we conduct Character Education very well at EFS and noted we need to discuss and revise and align our message to keep everyone on the same page.
- Mrs. Haber appreciated the public comments. Mrs. Haber pointed out this BOE acts as a community of the whole and do make sure that every issue is addressed properly even if it is a difficult conversation. Everyone's opinion is valued and matters. Regarding the ADL programming, Mrs. Haber noted that perhaps it wasn't perfect, but the BOE needed to address and agreed something needed to be done, and to be responsive. Other programs can be looked into with the intention of making everyone as comfortable as possible.
- Mr. Steiner thanked the BOE for all their efforts. Mr. Steiner noted that he sees both sides of the discussion, and that he feels it's the parent's role to teach the children at home and agrees the school should get involved if they see something. He felt this was the right decision and had the

best interest of the community in mind. Mr. Steiner noted what a great town and community we have in EF.

- Mrs. Woods noted that she was the parent who approached Dr. Gadaleta regarding the crossing guard, as the location is across the street from her home. She noted that the crossing is very dangerous as it is a busy intersection and needs to be addressed. Mr. Skopak asked about the district's responsibility, and Dr. Gadaleta noted that it is the school's responsibility door to door, or door to parent.

XIII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

At 8:35 P.M. the Board made a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss negotiations and 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: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Haber

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

XIV. Adjournment

At 8:46 P.M. the Board of Education made a motion to adjourn. The next meeting of The Board of Education will held on **Wednesday, November 17, 2021, at 7:30 PM** in the Gymnasium.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 5

Nays:0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary