

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 February 19, 2025. The meeting was called to order by the Board Vice President, Mrs. Jacquelyn Burke, at 7:31 P.M. Mrs. Burke 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, 2025. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, and the Star Ledger.

I. Call to Order – 7:31 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Amanda Haber, President-Absent
 Mrs. Jacquelyn Burke, Vice-President-Present
 Mr. Raj Mehta-Present
 Mrs. Caragh Lavoie-Present
 Mr. Christopher Pisacane-Present

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal; Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary, one member of the public & one staff member.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

V. President's Report

- None

VI. Superintendent's Report

- Dr. Gadaleta thanked the Foundation for promoting a Nutrition Program Assembly. A parent portion will be offered virtually in the evening.
- Dr. Gadaleta thanked the PTA and the Foundation for their generous grants in the amount of 40k each, respectively, to help fund the technology budget for new computers in 2025-26.
- The staff took part in a very successful PD day on the 18th. Topics covered were: Legal update; Suicide awareness training; 2 staff members on IXL; Amplify Science; Dr. Lanza and the National Writing Project; articulation for specials. It was a great day overall and the staff was very engaged.
- Mrs. Burke asked about the staffing for Resolution #8 and the 6th grade camping trip. Dr. Gadaleta noted that this is the normal number of staff attending.

VII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–09.

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): Stefania Focarino
Event: NJCIE CST Training Series
Location: Virtual
Date: 2/3/25, 2/24/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Katie MacKenzie
Event: NJCIE CST Training Series
Location: Virtual
Date: 2/3/25, 2/24/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Nicole Axentiou
Event: Early Literacy, Print Awareness, Phonological Awareness
Location: Virtual
Date: 2/19/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): LeeAnn Smith
Event: Utilizing PCAST to Improve IEP Meetings
Location: William Paterson University
Date: 2/27/25, 2/28/25
Cost: \$20.50

Staff Member(s): Rebecca Fogarty
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Dorotea Banek
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Christine Albano
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Danielle Jaworski
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/25
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Deana Hromoko
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/12/25
Cost: \$0.00

WEFC – Soccer Practice and Games
3/1/25 – 6/30/25
Saturday's and Sundays
Fields

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

8. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of the following stipend positions for the 6th grade camp trip for the 2024-2025 school year at the contractual rate:

Dorotea Banek	Camp - \$800
Erica Santalla	Camp - \$800
Pamela Banta	Camp - \$800
Susan Hacker	Camp - \$800
Mary Renz	Camp - \$800
Erika Pilato	Camp - \$800
George Alexandris	Camp - \$800
Marco Pannullo	Camp - \$800
John Trogani	Camp - \$800
EFPD Officer	Camp - \$0

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

9. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the salary guide movement of Rory Duarte, Teacher, from BA +30 Step 7, \$67,935, to MA Step 7, \$68,935, effective February 1st, 2025.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

VIII. Business Administrator Report

- Mr. Lella provided an update on the 2025-26 budget. We are proposing a tax levy of 3.49%, which is an additional 87k over the 1.99%, which is needed in order to balance the budget. Mr. Lella also noted the donations from the PTA and Foundation of 40k for the technology budget which allowed us to have a balanced budget. That changed yesterday however after the state sent notification that no district will see more than a 3% decrease in state aid for 2025-26. We will take into account that shortage of 9k, and he and Dr. Gadaleta will review further to have a balanced preliminary budget for submission on March 19th. The Governor will have his budget presentation next Tuesday and state aid figures are released within 48 hours after the presentation. The preschool program will be discussed further to help offset the shortage.
- Mr. Lella reported that beginning with the November 2025 School Board Election, those wishing to run for a Board of Education seat will now need to obtain 25 names on their petition from 10.
- Mr. Lella referenced resolution #7 and the application he is submitting to the NJ Department of Community Affairs for a Recreational Facility Improvement Grant in the amount of \$43,000 to offset costs incurred over the summer to improve the facilities for the community, such as a lift for the handrail, paving of ADA walkways and sidewalks, the gymnasium floor and safety and security improvements. The Board was pleased with the submission to help offset some of the costs to provide the facility to the community.
- We will reschedule the NJSBA BOE Member Training for the April 16th meeting.

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	January 8 th , 2025
Executive Meeting Minutes	January 8 th , 2025
Regular Meeting Minutes	January 22 nd , 2025

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for December in the amount of \$288,592.38; as certified by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for January as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$409,125.10, including \$381,103.90 for the gross payroll, \$7,166.44 for the Board's share of FICA/Medicare and \$20,237.12 for the State's share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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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 December;

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: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane
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Ayes: 4	Nays: 0
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4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of December (additional) and January as certified by the Business Administrator and authorized by the Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie	Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane
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Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education acknowledge receipt of and accepts the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) of the Essex Fells School District and the Auditors' Management Report, prepared by the auditing firm of Samuel Klein and Company for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Essex Fells Board of Education approves the submission of the following Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI) Program Waiver to the Essex County Office of Education:

WHEREAS, NJAC 6A:23A-5.3 provides that a school district may request a waiver of compliance with respect to the district's participation in the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI) program for the 2025-2026 school year, and

WHEREAS, the Essex Fells Board of Education desires to apply for this waiver due to the fact that it projects having fewer than 40 Medicaid eligible classified students,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Essex Fells Board of Education hereby authorizes the Chief School Administrator to submit to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools in the County of Essex an appropriate waiver of the requirements of NJAC 6A23A-5.3 for the 2025-2026 school year.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

7. **WHEREAS**, the Essex Fells Board of Education desires to apply for and obtain a grant from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs for approximately \$43,000 to carry out projects related to updating the district playgrounds, fields, walking or bicycle trails, multi-sport courts and recreational facilities providing quality recreational space to the community.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, That the Essex Fells Board of Education does hereby authorize the application for such a grant; and, Recognizes and accepts that the Department may offer a lesser or greater amount and therefore, upon receipt of the grant agreement from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, does further authorize the execution of any such grant agreement; and also, upon receipt of the fully executed agreement from the Department, does further authorize the expenditure of funds pursuant to the terms of the agreement between

The Essex Fells Board of Education and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the persons whose names, titles, and signatures appear below are authorized to sign the application, and that they or their successors in said titles are authorized to sign the agreement, and any other documents necessary in connection therewith.

Steven J. Lella – School Business Administrator/Board Secretary

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

X. Old Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta discussed the large response she received regarding a full day pre-school program and the Board discussed. The Board agreed to help offset the low turnout for 2025-26, we will offer the full day program at an increased rate, and still honor those who only preferred the ½ day program. We will offer the full day program for the 2026-27 school year.
- Dr. Gadaleta and the Board discussed and reviewed policy.

XI. New Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta expressed her concern regarding the student attendance for this week and the long President's Day weekend. Thursday saw 27 absences for vacation, 60 for the half day on Friday and then 38 for today, Wednesday. These absences affect not only the children for being out but those in the classroom too, as the teachers do not want to get too far ahead of what they are teaching. The Board discussed.
- We are obtaining quotes to repair floor damage due to a leak in classroom 103. Water leaked from a sink under the floor tiles and the plywood beneath. This will be submitted to our insurance carrier as well.
- Dr. Gadaleta wanted to make the public aware that we will take online student safety and the safety and security of the school very seriously. If we receive an alert from our gaggle software, we are going to address immediately and take every action necessary. We want the parents to be on the same page to keep the best interests and safety of the children and staff in mind.
- Dr. Gadaleta wanted to reiterate to the public that if your child is sick, or sent home sick, you need to keep them home until they have 24 hours of no symptoms. Too many times children are going home sick and coming back the next day and are still sick. This gets other children sick and the staff as well. This has been seen recently in the pre-school and kindergarten. Please keep your children home if they are sick.

XII. Public Comment

- Mrs. Daniels commented on the absences on the long holiday weekends, and apologized for being an offender this week, but noted that when planning these trips there is a significant difference in the prices, so that is probably a driving factor for families. She does agree that school comes first for their family and is most important and tries not to make a habit of taking the extra day. However not all families feel that missing a day or two of school is as important, however they should be.

XIII. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

BE IT RESOLVED that in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Act ("Act"), the Essex Fells Board of Education shall conduct a closed executive session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 for the purpose of discussing: **Legal Matters**.

It is anticipated that the length of time of this executive session will be 30 minutes and that action will not be taken in public after the executive session.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the minutes of the executive session will be released when the need for confidentiality in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 no longer applies.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

XIV. Adjournment

RESOLVED that this public meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 9:12P.M. The next Board meeting of the Board of Education will be held on **Wednesday, March 19, 2025 at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mr. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mr.Mehta

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary