

The business meeting of the Board of Education of the Borough of New Providence was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on March 13, 2025, at the New Providence High School/Middle School Media Center, 35 Pioneer Drive, by Mrs. Cuccaro, Board President.

Present on the roll call were Bernadette Cuccaro, Dr. Kristen Empson Hayden, Stacey Gunderman, Amanda Marano, Joseph Walsh, and Donna Zane. Also present were Dr. Lauren Zirpoli, Superintendent of Schools, Joseph Ugialoro, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, Jonathan Keaney, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Supervision, James Testa, School Business Administrator/Board, and twenty (20) members of the public.

Mrs. Cuccaro led in the salute to the flag.

Mrs. Cuccaro read the following statement:

This is a public meeting of the Board of Education of the Borough of New Providence. Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with PL 1975, Chapter 231, in that a notice was made in conformance with Section 13 of the Act.

Whenever the business of the Board requires it to convene to a Closed Session, the session will begin no later than 9:30 p.m. At the conclusion of the need for a Closed Session, the Board will reconvene for the public portion of the meeting. At that time the Board will complete any other business that may be before it and the public will then be given an opportunity to be heard before the meeting is adjourned.

BOARD PRESIDENT COMMENTS

Mrs. Cuccaro greeted the public, and her comments are as follows:

Good Evening. We have a relatively short agenda this evening.

Over the past few weeks, we have heard from many community members, some of whom expressed frustration with the Board's delay in providing answers regarding redistricting. When I sat down to write my opening statement for tonight, my thoughts circled back to the question, "What are the main responsibilities of a Board Member?" The New Jersey School Board Association publishes an FAQ for candidates interested in running for a board seat that answers this question.

- The board of education adopts policies under which the school district operates;
- Oversees the budget;
- approves the curriculum;
- hires and evaluates the superintendent;
- represents the public during contract negotiations;
- and serves as a communications link between the community and the school system.

It goes on to say that school board members have no authority except that which results from participation in decisions of the board during an official meeting. Actions, promises, or commitments made by individual board members are without legal basis and have no binding commitment upon the district. Board members are elected to represent the entire district in all matters pertaining to education, and not any one segment.

While many of you may have felt that we were not moving fast enough, we were diligently working in small committees behind the scenes to ensure that we were doing what was best for the entire district, not just a handful of students, and not just for next year, but for many years to come.

I thank the Board for the countless hours they spent over the last few months bringing us to tonight's agenda resolution. The community should know that a more caring group couldn't represent you if you hand-picked each of them yourself. Every one of them sitting up here has the best interest of every student in the district in mind with every decision we make - big or small.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mrs. Cuccaro opened the meeting to the public at 7:03 p.m.

Ben Wolfe, 76 South Street

Mr. Wolfe thanked the Board for their hard work on coming up with tonight's resolution. He stated that he assumes that they are keeping students in mind.

Kyle Innes, 13 Murray Hill Square

Mr. Innes commented his concerns of how the resolution can be perceived by the public and how there is a clear assumption that Allen W. Roberts is going to have a larger class size than Salt Brook. He also commented on the New Jersey requirement on class size, stating that the New Jersey maximum is twenty-five students, but the maximum that the resolution states is twenty students. Mr. Innes' main concern was the wording and how the resolution was written.

Montana Cheal, 89 Woodland Road

Mrs. Cheal thanked the Board for the tremendous amount of time and effort they have put into this plan. Her only request was to get more clarity on the collapsing of Zones A through D. She is concerned that other families will be put in a situation where their kids might be split, where they weren't anticipating it. She wants to make sure that additional families won't be negatively impacted families.

Rebecca Nichols, 38 Charnwood Road

Mrs. Nichols thanked the Board for the tremendous hard work done to create this plan. She commented that after reading the resolution, she appreciates it and thinks it's great.

There being no comments. Mrs. Cuccaro declared the public portion of the meeting closed at 7:12 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS **FINANCE ACTIONS**

Mr. Walsh, Finance Chairperson, moved to approve Items 1 through 7 as listed below:

2025/2026 TENTATIVE BUDGET APPROVED

1. Approve the tentative budget for the 2025/2026 school year using the 2025/2026 state aid figures and authorize the Board Secretary to submit the following tentative budget to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-5 and 18A:7F-6:

<u>2025/2026 School Year</u>	<u>General Fund</u>	<u>Special Revenues</u>	<u>Debt Service</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total Expenditures	\$51,322,758.00	\$1,074,548.00	\$3,503,983.00	\$55,901,289.00
Less:				
<u>Anticipated Revenues</u>	<u>\$ 6,130,458.00</u>	<u>\$1,074,548.00</u>	<u>\$ 979,945.00</u>	<u>\$ 8,184,951.00</u>
Taxes to be Raised	\$45,192,300.00	\$0.00	\$2,524,038.00	\$47,716,338.00

After approval by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools, advertise said tentative budget in the Courier News in accordance with the form suggested by the New Jersey Department of Education and according to law. A public hearing will be held at New Providence High/Middle School Media Center, New Providence, New Jersey, on April 24, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the budget for the 2025/2026 School Year.

2025/2026 TENTATIVE BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS APPROVED

2. Approve that the following adjustments are included in the tentative 2025/2026 annual school budget, which will be submitted to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for technical review:

- Adjustment for enrollment: \$0.00
- Adjustment for health care costs: \$980,578.00

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education includes in the tentative budget the adjustment for increased costs of health benefits in the amount of \$980,578.00. The additional funds will be used to pay for the additional increases in health benefit premiums.

- Adjustment for deferred PERS pension contribution: \$0.00
- Adjustment for responsibility transferred: \$0.00
- Adjustment for banked cap: \$16.00

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education includes in the tentative budget the adjustment for the banked cap in the amount of \$16.00. In accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23a-10.3(b), the District has fully exhausted all eligible statutory spending authority. The adjustment will be used to fund the operating expenses for educational programs of the District. The Board of Education will complete this by June 30, 2025 and acknowledges that it cannot be deferred or incrementally completed over a longer period of time.

TRAVEL EXPENSES RESOLUTION APPROVED

3. Approve the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the New Providence Board of Education recognizes school staff and Board members will incur travel expenses related to and within the scope of their current responsibilities and for travel that promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district; and

WHEREAS, Policy #6471, School District Travel Procedures covers the reimbursement process for travel expenses in accordance with New Jersey Statutes;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of Education approves travel and related expense reimbursements in accordance with Policy #6471.

AUTHORIZATION TO PUBLISH 2025/2026 TENTATIVE SCHOOL BUDGET APPROVED

4. After the Board and Executive County Superintendent of Schools approval of the tentative 2025/2026 budget, authorize the Board Secretary to publish said budget.

MAXIMUM TRAVEL EXPENDITURE AMOUNT APPROVED

5. Approve the following resolution:

The Board of Education approves establishing a maximum travel expenditure amount of \$70,200.00 for the 2025/2026 school year. The maximum travel expenditure amount for the 2024/2025 school year is \$70,200.00 of which \$33,304.66 has been spent and \$7,417.72 encumbered to date.

ANNUAL MAXIMUM EXPENDITURE FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES APPROVED

6. Approve an annual maximum expenditure for the professional services for the 2025/2026 school year. As defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.2(a)1, upon notification if it becomes necessary to exceed the maximum amount, as indicated below, the Board of Education may adopt an increase in said dollar amount through formal Board action.

Account /Auditing Services:	\$42,000.00
Architectural/Engineering:	\$ 5,000.00
Legal Services:	\$50,000.00
Public Relations Services:	\$56,966.00
School Physician Services:	\$38,000.00

APPROPRIATION OF SURPLUS IN 2025/2026 TENTATIVE SCHOOL BUDGET APPROVED

7. Approve the appropriation of surplus in the amount of \$2,120,000.00 in the 2025/2026 tentative school budget.

Mr. Walsh commented that tonight's agenda, the board was approving the draft school budget that is within the two percent cap, and that will be sent to the county for approval. He thanked Mr. Testa and Dr. Zirpoli for all their work in finalizing the draft budget.

Mr. Testa added that what is being approved tonight is the request to submit the budget to the county. He explained that the draft budget will go to the county for review. At the end of the month, when the county responds to the District and the District receives approval, the finance committee will present the budget at the next board meeting, and final adoption will be on the agenda for approval.

Ms. Gunderman seconded the motion.

It was carried on the following vote.

Roll call vote:

<u>Absent</u>	Mrs. Castellano
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Cuccaro
<u>Yea</u>	Dr. Empson Hayden
<u>Yea</u>	Ms. Gunderman
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Marano
<u>Yea</u>	Mr. Walsh
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Zane

FACILITIES ACTIONS

No facilities items for approval.

EDUCATION ACTIONS

Dr. Empson Hayden, Education Chairperson, moved to approve Item 1 as listed below:

1. Approve the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the Board of Education and District administration have reviewed and discussed the Redistricting Plan approved in August 2022, which shifted the District boundary line from Livingston Avenue to South Street for Salt Brook School (Salt Brook) and Allen W. Roberts School (AWR); and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education and District administration follow Board of Education Policy 2312, Class Size; and

WHEREAS, the Redistricting Plan was implemented in the 2024/2025 school year, and it has become evident that many families have questions and concerns regarding the changes; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education is committed to transparent communication with the District community and to addressing the concerns raised by families in relation to the redistricting process; and

WHEREAS, the Redistricting Plan is based on two key factors:

1. The change in the local housing market, with future housing developments on the AWR side of town;
2. The enrollment imbalance identified by Dr. Richard Grip, the District's demographer, between AWR and Salt Brook, with Salt Brook projected to have significantly fewer students based on current and future enrollment projections;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education formally approves the updated Redistricting Plan as outlined below, which includes the immediate changes and continued objectives of the redistricting process:

Redistricting and Moving the District Line

- The District boundary line for elementary schools shifted from Livingston Avenue to South Street, in order to achieve a more balanced student population between AWR and Salt Brook, now and into the future.

Immediate Changes to the Redistricting Plan

- The District will combine the current A-D zones into one zone.
- Starting in September 2025, all new registrants not currently enrolled in the New Providence School District who reside in the redistricted zone will attend Salt Brook.

- A map and street listing for the redistricting zone will be provided to the community for reference.

Key Elements That Will Remain Consistent

- Students currently residing in the redistricted zone and attending AWR through the 2024/2025 school year will be permitted to remain at AWR through their 6th grade year.
- Beginning with the 2025/2026 school year, kindergarten students in the redistricted zone attending Salt Brook with an older sibling at AWR may request to transfer the older child from AWR to Salt Brook to keep siblings together. This request will be honored in accordance with Board of Education Policy 2312, Class Size.

Redistricting Plan for Families with Siblings at AWR

- The District acknowledges that splitting siblings between schools may be a concern for some families. However, in light of the expected future growth due to local housing developments, the District will work to accommodate growth while making reasonable efforts to keep siblings together at AWR.
- To balance these factors and ensure optimal class sizes as per Board of Education Policy 2312, Class Size, the following process will be followed for kindergarten registration:
 - All incoming kindergarten students in the redistricted zone will be registered to attend Salt Brook starting with the 2025/2026 school year.
 - Families with an older child at AWR may request to keep their kindergarten student at AWR by opting onto an exception list during the registration process.
 - The exception list will be reviewed by June 1st each year.
 - If the AWR kindergarten class size is under the Board's optimal class size as per Board of Education Policy 2312, Class Size, (20 students per class), the kindergarten student on the exception list will be allowed to remain at AWR through their 6th grade year.
 - If there are more students on the exception list than available spots, a lottery will be conducted to determine which students will be able to remain at AWR. Those not selected will attend Salt Brook.
 - If the optimal class size is reached, as per Board of Education Policy 2312, Class Size, all kindergarten students on the exception list will attend Salt Brook.
 - Parents of kindergarten students on the exception list will be notified in writing by June 1st each year.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this updated Redistricting Plan, as described above, be implemented by the District administration in accordance with the guidelines and policies set forth, and that the Board of Education will continue to monitor the plan's effectiveness and communicate with the community regarding any necessary adjustments.

Mrs. Zane seconded the motion.

Dr. Empson Hayden read the resolution into the record.

Dr. Zirpoli thanked the entire board for their time and their diligence in collaborating around the updated redistricting plan. She then went on to elaborate on key points in the plan. There will be one redistricting zone beginning in the 2025/2026 school year. The Board has decided to collapse zones A, B, C, and D into one zone. Dr. Zirpoli stated that tomorrow morning, all parents, staff, and faculty will receive a detailed explanation of the plan, along with a list of frequently asked questions that will also be posted on the district website. Attached to Dr. Zirpoli's letter will be a community map, which will show the zones of A, B, C, and D as one zone along with the street listings.

If parents have already pre-registered a kindergartner or first-grade child, they will receive an email tomorrow morning that will ask parents questions about opting onto the exception list; this is only if those families live in the redistricting zone and have a current AWR student in grades kindergarten through five.

Dr. Zirpoli stated that next week on Tuesday, March 18th, she would be hosting two Q&A sessions; the first session will be at Allen W. Roberts at 10:00 am and the second session will be at 6:30 pm in the High/Middle school cafeteria. She expressed that she hopes that parents who attend the 6:30 pm session will follow them back into the media center for the 7:30 p.m. strategic planning session.

If some families have questions about the updated redistricting plan once they have read the letter and attended the Q&A sessions; she asked that families direct those questions to her.

The Board this evening is approving the plan, which is within the Board's scope of responsibilities. She emphasized that her responsibility is now to execute, lead, and manage the plan.

Dr. Zirpoli thanked again the entire Board for working together to update the redistricting plan, which will continue to focus on the District's original goal of planning for future growth and balancing the overall enrollment at the elementary schools, while doing our best to meet the needs of parents who live in the redistricting zone.

It was carried on the following vote.

Roll call vote:

<u>Absent</u>	Mrs. Castellano
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Cuccaro
<u>Yea</u>	Dr. Empson Hayden
<u>Yea</u>	Ms. Gunderman
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Marano
<u>Yea</u>	Mr. Walsh
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Zane

PERSONNEL ACTIONS

Ms. Gunderman moved to approve Item 1 as listed below:

2024/2025 APPOINTMENTS APPROVED

1. Approve the appointment of the following person with the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools subject to the requirements of Chapter 116 of P.L. 1986 for the 2024/2025 school year:
 - a. Kevin Sousa, long term substitute school psychologist, \$22,994.00 (base \$63,872.00), effective 3/14/25 through 6/30/25

Dr. Empson Hayden seconded the motion and it was carried on the following vote.

Roll call vote:

<u>Absent</u>	Mrs. Castellano
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Cuccaro
<u>Yea</u>	Dr. Empson Hayden
<u>Yea</u>	Ms. Gunderman
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Marano
<u>Yea</u>	Mr. Walsh
<u>Yea</u>	Mrs. Zane

BOARD POLICY

No board policy items for approval.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mrs. Cuccaro opened the meeting to the public at 7:23 p.m.

Allison Caravano, 20 Edward Court

Mrs. Caravano thanked the Board and Dr. Zirpoli for taking the time to truly hear and listen and make adjustments accordingly in response to families' requests. Mrs. Caravano specifically thanked Mrs. Zane, Mrs. Morano, and Dr. Empson Hayden for taking the time to speak with her on the phone and responding to many of her questions, and for asking her questions as well.

She had a few questions regarding the class size numbers at both schools. She understands that the policy states that twenty is the optimal size for a classroom size however, she is curious whether or not the Board and the Administration have discussed whether the class size is already over at Salt Brook before sending students to Salt Brook.

She wants to make sure that the best interest of the entire District is the priority, and she wants to make sure that decisions being made are in the best interest of the current people who live in New Providence, not future people who will move into New Providence. So if the class size numbers are going to be significantly higher on one side of town, she doesn't believe that it is in the best interest of students, teachers, or families who would be inconvenienced by having kids across town.

She then asked how families will be notified about the updated redistricting plan. She is concerned that families who had not planned to be redistricted just yet are now going to be in the situation where they are being redistricted and need to make arrangements with far less time to plan.

Dr. Ziproli responded by reiterating her previous comments about a detailed letter that will be sent out tomorrow. The letter will include a multitude of information that will be helpful to the redistricted families. Currently, there are one hundred and ten students who are pre-registered for kindergarten, however, this does not mean that the kindergarten classes in Salt Brook and Allen W. Roberts are equal. The District will continue receiving registrations through August.

The District will be sending, to those families who have already pre-registered a form, which will ask them if they would like to opt onto the exception list if they meet the criteria. Moving forward, for families who have not yet pre-registered, it will be a part of the online registration process in PowerSchool.

Dr. Zirpoli urged families to read the letter that will be sent out tomorrow because it will answer many of the questions they may have.

Mrs. Castellano entered at 7:27 p.m.

Kyle Innes, 13 Murray Hill Square

Mr. Innes wanted to clarify a few things about what the Board had said.

He stated that the community has raised the issue about the policy, stating a classroom size of 20 students versus a classroom size of 25 students. He asked if Salt Brook has a change in enrollment numbers, would this require an additional board action, or does the Board intend to include in the resolution that the Board will continue to work with the community to provide additional flexibility in those situations.

Mrs. Cuccaro asked for some clarification on Mr. Innes' question. She asked him if he was asking if, hypothetically, Salt Brook is at 25 children in a classroom, what would then happen if families were still zoned for Salt Brook.

Mr. Innes responded yes.

Mrs. Cuccaro explained that the District already has an existing practice that states that when the maximum number of students per classroom is reached and a new registration comes into the District, if there's room at the other school, that student is then placed as a new student in the other school.

Mr. Innes asked if the existing policy would have control over the newly adopted policy in that situation.

Dr. Zirpoli firmly stated that the resolution that was approved today is not a policy. It is a resolution outlining a plan that the Board is approving that she is going to execute. What is a policy is Policy 2312, and there is another policy that explains what Mrs. Cuccaro just expressed.

Dr. Zipoli gave the following hypothetical example:

If at any time, the District receives a new fifth grade registrant that lives on the on the Allen W. Roberts side of town and fifth grade class is at one hundred and eight, which is the maximum number of students of the total sections, then that one child is going to go over Salt Brook if there's room. She reiterated that that is what is stated in the Board policy.

Dr. Zirpoli then asked Mr. Innes to clarify his question.

Mr. Innes asked if this is just a redistricting plan and the policy will have controlling effort, does that mean that Policy 5120, regarding the placement of students, would give Dr. Zirpoli the ability to make a case-by-case exception. Even if Salt Brook isn't at maximum, but is still equal to or greater than Allen W. Roberts. Could Dr. Zirpoli still place a sibling at Allen W. Roberts? For example, if Allen W. Roberts hits 20 students and Salt Brook is at 22 students, neither school is at the maximum number of students per classroom. Would then Policy 5120 take over and allow Dr. Zirpoli to look at case-by-case exemptions?

Dr. Zirpoli commented that that would be contingent upon how many students are on the exception list. I would have the ability to decide as the Superintendent; however, she would have to speak with the Board about making that exception. It would be contingent upon whether there's one student on that exception list or ten students on that exception list. At this time, that question can not be answered definitively because it is a hypothetical question. If there were a situation like that in a given year, she would be speaking to the Board about that.

Mr. Innes then wanted to clarify that at the beginning, Mrs. Cuccaro had read out the board's obligations. He then stated that he thinks that Dr. Zirpoli mentioned that she would execute the redistricting plan, and if there were any questions that they should be directed towards her, and that the Board was not going to oversee the day-to-day of that. He commented that he is asking this question for clarity. He then asked Dr. Zipoli if part of the Board's purview was the evaluation and oversight of the superintendent, and asked if this was correct.

Mrs. Cuccaro responded that that is correct.

Melanie Katz, 101 Woodland Road

Mrs. Katz commented that she has two older students currently attending Allen W. Roberts, however, she has one young child who will not be attending Allen W. Roberts until two years from now. She asked if there would be a consideration to have her youngest child stay at Allen W. Roberts starting in kindergarten, and have any other new incoming students living in the new Bard properties to be moved to Salt Brook. She would hope that there is a consideration for her family as they are an existing family and not a new family.

Mrs. Cuccaro commented that the way the policy is written as of now is that if a family has a current student attending Allen W. Roberts at the time that her kindergarten student is coming into the school, then yes, the kindergarten student would be able to stay at Allen W. Roberts. If the kindergarten student is coming into the school but they do not have any siblings at the school, then no, they can not go to Allen W. Roberts; the student would go to Salt Brook.

Mrs. Katz then asked if her child is automatically going to attend Salt Brook.

Dr. Zirpoli responded that if Mrs. Katz chooses, then he would be put on the exemption list.

Mrs. Katz asked if it would then be seen as a case-by-case situation, since other new families coming to New Providence are causing the change in enrollment numbers, then the other families could be moved to Salt Brook, even if those new families are living right next to Allen W. Roberts.

Dr. Zirpoli responded that she understands that this response might not be what Mrs. Katz wants to hear, however, the answer is no. The reason is that there is a boundary line; every school district exists with boundary lines. A new family from the Bard properties will not be taken out of their boundary line and go to Salt Brook School. This is why the Board worked hard on this plan to accommodate current families.

Ben Wolfe, 76 South Street

Mr. Wolfe thanked the Board for their hard work and is glad to see a resolution passed, and is excited to see all of the communication coming out tomorrow.

He wanted clarification about notification and writing, since that is what broke his trust with Dr. Zirpoli and the Board. He states that he had no notification of writing, which in 2022, there was a resolution that said he wasn't going to be impacted by the redistricting plan, and now he is going to get new direction tomorrow stating he will be affected by the redistricting plan. He states that his trust is a bit shaken at the moment.

Dr. Zirpoli responded that it will be answered in the letter that will be sent out tomorrow; however, at the second May board meeting, will be discuss publicly what the incoming kindergarten numbers are and what the numbers of students are on the exception list, and what the decision is for the next school year. After that board meeting, the District will send out a written notification to all parents who are on the exception list via email.

Mr. Wolfe then commented that the last time the notification was sent via mail.

Mrs. Cuccaro declared the public portion of the meeting closed at 7:38 p.m.

CLOSED SESSION

Mr. Walsh moved to adopt the following resolution:

This body shall on March 13, 2025, in the New Providence High/Middle School Media Center, 35 Pioneer Drive, discuss in closed session, pursuant to Section 7 of the Open Public Meetings Act, specific matters which may generally be described as follows:

- Student Matters related to HIB
- Litigation

The minutes of the discussion in closed session of the aforementioned matters may be disclosed to the public after the final determination of action has been reached.

Mrs. Marano seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

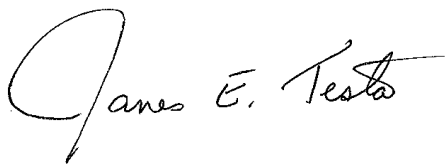
RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

The Board reconvened to public session at 8:49 p.m.

Mrs. Cuccaro called the Board to order. Board members present were Mrs. Castellano, Mrs. Cuccaro, Dr. Empson Hayden, Ms. Gunderman, Mrs. Marano, Mr. Walsh, and Mrs. Zane.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business before the Board, on a motion by Mr. Walsh, seconded by Dr. Empson Hayden, and carried unanimously, Mrs. Cuccaro declared the meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James E. Testa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

James Testa, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary