



## **LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES**

Monday, January 4, 2021

Public Session – Virtual Meeting via Zoom and Facebook Live – 7:00 p.m.

A **Reorganization Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education was held on this date in the large conference room in the Administration Building and via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary, Steven K. Robinson, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 7, 2020 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

Members Present: Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Vineeta Khanna, Ronnie Konner, Samantha Messer and Aditya Desai

Also in Attendance: Dr. Matthew Block, Steven Robinson, Lisa Capone-Steiger, Mark Stern, Susan Burman and Joann Goldberg

There were approximately 140 members of the public and staff watching remotely through the webinar and via a Facebook Live Stream.

Mr. Aditya Desai led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Robinson read the election results:

### **Election Results – November 3, 2020**

(Officially certified by the Board of Elections)

For three year term (vote for one) on the Board of Education

Vineeta Khanna - 4401  
Jenissa Arnette - 3621  
Bridgette Nevola - 3013  
James Calderon - 2277

### **Swearing in of New Board Member**

Mr. Robinson administered the oath of office to Vineeta Khanna for a three-year term as a Board Member.

Mrs. Khanna made the following statement:

"2020 has been a blur, a wash out, an anomaly. We explored new skills, we learnt new lessons, and we prevailed. Today is a very special day for me, a milestone of sorts, and I wish that my

mom was not thousands of miles away, and that my father was still in my world, and not in the celestial one. If 2020 has taught us one thing, that is, to appreciate the little things, and to count our blessings. On that note, I'm thankful for the virtual presence of many members of my extended family, friends, and of course my husband and children.

I have been actively engaged in the community for the 21 years that I've been a Livingstonian. Today I have been sworn in as the representative of the community, stakeholders, and most importantly, our kids. I take this position, my first as an elected servant of the public, with immense humility and gratitude, and I hope to continue to serve to the best of my ability like I've done in the past in other roles. I am grateful to my family that inspires my vision and encourages me to serve beyond my own cause; I am grateful to the community for their vote and their trust in my abilities; I am grateful to the current board members who patiently answered my curious questions during the campaign, Ronnie, Pam, Sam & Seth - I thank you all for your warm welcome and look forward to serving the community with you. Last, but not the least, I am grateful to Mr. Buddy August for his years of service on the Board of Education. Mr. August, you leave behind a great legacy that we strive to follow.

Thanks Dr. Block, Mr. Robinson, Ms. Steiger, Sue Burman, and many others, for your warm welcome. I look forward to working with you towards the LPS motto of LEARN CREATE CONTRIBUTE & GROW."

### **Election of President**

Mr. Robinson called for nominations for the position of President of the Board.

Mrs. Konner nominated Ms. Messer.

Mrs. Khanna seconded the nomination.

There being no further nominations for the position of President, nominations were closed.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer  
Nayes - None

### **Board President Takes Chair**

Ms. Messer took the chair as President.

### **Election of Vice President**

Ms. Messer made a motion for the the Livingston Board of Education to temporarily suspend Bylaw #152 for the period January 4, 2021 through December 31, 2021 and that the Office of the Vice President be divided into two six-month terms for this year only. The first term being January 4, 2021 through June 30, 2021 and the second term being July 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021.

Ms. Messer further moved that Mrs. Chirls be appointed as Vice President for the first six month term and Mr. Cohen be appointed as Vice President for the second six month term.

Mrs. Chirls seconded the motion.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer  
Nayes - None

## **President/Vice President Comments**

Mrs. Chirls and Mr. Cohen each read a statement explaining the sharing of the Vice President role for this year was born of collaboration and will enable a smoother leadership transition than has sometimes occurred in the past.

Ms. Messer read the statement that is attached to the end of the minutes.

## **Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Block thanked Mrs. Konner for her past year as President of the board, congratulated Ms. Messer on becoming the current President and welcomed Mrs. Khanna as our newest board member.

## **Board Member Code of Ethics**

The board members each took a turn reading through the ten items listed in the Code of Ethics. It is a requirement of the board to review and sign an acknowledgement of The Code of Ethics each year.

Mrs. Konner thanked everyone for their cooperation in working to serve the district during this difficult year. Mrs. Konner added the leadership change the board is instituting this year can serve as a model that there are many creative ways to solve problems and looks forward to working together with the rest of the board.

## **Public Input on Agenda Items ~ up to 15 minutes**

Ketan Bhuptani, 47 Billingsley Drive, stated he is looking forward to more creative ideas from the board and wished everyone luck in the new year.

Alan Glazer, 77 Falcon Road, congratulated Mrs. Khanna on her election to the board and Ms. Messer on her election as President. Mr. Glazer added Ms. Messer's success in life is due to working hard, putting in the effort and never giving up despite the odds. Mr. Glazer also stated that he and their children are proud of her accomplishments.

Justin Alpert, 56 Amherst, offered congratulations all around and suggested the board consider moving the election back to the spring and growing the board to seven members.

Keith Hines, 156 East Cedar Street, congratulated Mrs. Khanna and the rest of the board.

Mrs. Konner made a motion for a consent agenda for items M to R.

## **Rules for School Governance**

**Resolved**, the Livingston Board of Education adopts all bylaws, policies and regulations in effect on January 4, 2021 in compliance with N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1.

## **Curricula and Textbooks**

**Resolved**, that the Livingston Board of Education adopts all curricula and textbooks of record on January 4, 2021 in compliance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-1 and 34.1.

## **Bylaws, Policies & Regulations**

**Resolved**, that the Livingston Board of Education approves all bylaws, policies and regulations previously adopted by the Board to date.

**Job Descriptions**

**Resolved**, that the Livingston Board of Education approves all job descriptions previously adopted by the Board to date.

**Official Newspapers/Media Outlets**

**Resolved**, that the Livingston Board of Education designates *The Star Ledger*, *The West Essex Tribune* and *TAPinto Livingston* as official newspapers and media outlets for legal notices and other obligations.

**Financial Depositories and Signatures**

**Whereas**, Samantha Messer has been elected president and Pamela Chirls (1/4/21-6/30/21) and Seth Cohen (7/1/21-12/31/21) have been elected vice president of the Board of Education; and

**Whereas**, Steven K. Robinson has been appointed Secretary of the Board; and

**Whereas**, Steven K. Robinson has been appointed Treasurer of School Monies; and now therefore be it

**Resolved**, the Livingston Board of Education establish the following bank accounts at Regal Bank, Livingston, New Jersey and that Regal Bank is hereby requested, authorized and directed to honor all checks, draft and other orders for the payment of money drawn in the name of the Board of Education in the following accounts when bearing the true or approved facsimile signature(s) indicated:

<b>Regal Bank</b>		
<b>Account Title and Number</b>	<b>Signature(s)</b>	
BOE School District of Livingston General Account 0108010471	Board President <b>and</b> Steven K. Robinson <b>and</b> Dr. Matthew Block	
BOE School District of Livingston Referendum 0108010505	Board President <b>and</b> Steven K. Robinson <b>and</b> Dr. Matthew Block	
Livingston Board of Education Payroll Account 0108010463	Board President <b>and</b> Steven K. Robinson	
Livingston Board of Education Payroll Agency Account 0108010414	Board President <b>and</b> Steven K. Robinson	
Burnet Hill Elementary School School Account 0108010547	Sara Bright Jessica Byrne Steven K. Robinson	Any 2
Collins Elementary School School Account 0108010562	Michelle Cebula Stefanie Lichtstein Steven K. Robinson	Any 2
Harrison Elementary School School Account 0108010539	Daniel Garcia Patricia Fernandez Steven K. Robinson	Any 2
Hillside Elementary School School Account 0108010570	Carlos Gramata Gina Ioviero Steven K. Robinson	Any 2

Mount Pleasant Elementary School School Account 0108010521	Lorena Dolan Gail Witt Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Riker Hill Elementary School School Account 0108010612	Justin Toomey Deborah Paoella Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Mount Pleasant Middle School School Account 0108010554	Bronawyn O'Leary Gina Covello Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Heritage Middle School School Account 0108010513	Shawn Kelly Andrew Espinoza Kristen Fullam Christina Woytas Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston High School Activity Account 0108010588	Mark Stern Michael Kay Dr. Mary K. Pretto Danielle Rosenzweig Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston High School Activity Account 0108010588	Mark Stern Michael Kay Dr. Mary K. Pretto Danielle Rosenzweig Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston High School Athletic Account 0108010604	Mark Stern Michael Kay Dr. Mary K. Pretto Danielle Rosenzweig Richard Porfido Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston High School Special Account 0108010596	Mark Stern Michael Kay Dr. Mary K. Pretto Danielle Rosenzweig Steven K. Robinson	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston Board of Education Board Secretary's Petty Cash 0108010489	Dr. Matthew Block Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos	<i>Any 2</i>
Livingston Board of Education Capital Reserve Fund Account 0108010448	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos	
Livingston Board of Education Unemployment Trust Fund Account 0108010455	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos	
Livingston Board of Education Cafeteria 0108010430	Steven K. Robinson or Patricia Ramos	
Livingston Board of Education FSA 0108010422	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos	

<b>State of New Jersey - Cash Management Fund</b>	
<b>Account Title and Number</b>	<b>Signature(s)</b>
Livingston Board of Education Regular Account 171-000068497	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos
Livingston Board of Education Capital Reserve Fund 171-000091480	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos
Livingston Board of Education Unemployment Trust Fund 171-000030538	Wire Transfers to other Board of Education Accounts Only  Steven K. Robinson Patricia Ramos

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer  
Nays - None

Mrs. Chirls moved the following:

**Establishment of Annual Public Meeting Calendar**

**Resolved**, the Livingston Board of Education approves the following annual public meeting calendar and executive session meeting calendar for 2021:

<b>January, 2021</b>		<b>July, 2021</b>	
4 (Mon)	<i>Reorganization</i>	14 (Wed)	<i>Voting</i>
11 (Mon)	<i>Workshop</i>		
25 (Mon)	<i>Voting</i>	<b>August, 2021</b>	
		11 (Wed)	<i>Voting</i>
<b>February, 2021</b>			
8 (Mon)	<i>Workshop</i>	<b>September, 2021</b>	
22 (Mon)	<i>Voting</i>	9 (Thurs)	<i>Workshop</i>
		23 (Thurs)	<i>Voting</i>
<b>March, 2021</b>			
8 (Mon)	<i>Workshop</i>	<b>October, 2021</b>	
15 (Mon)	<i>Voting</i>	7 (Thurs)	<i>Workshop</i>
		14 (Thurs)	<i>Voting</i>
<b>April, 2021</b>			
5 (Mon)	<i>Workshop</i>	<b>November, 2021</b>	
26 (Mon)	<i>Public Hearing/Voting</i>	11 (Thurs)	<i>Workshop</i>
		18 (Thurs)	<i>Voting</i>
<b>May, 2021</b>			
13 (Thurs)	<i>Workshop/Voting</i>	<b>December, 2021</b>	
24 (Mon)	<i>Voting</i>	9 (Thurs)	<i>Voting</i>
<b>June, 2021</b>		<b>January, 2022</b>	

14 (Mon)	Workshop	6 (Thurs)	Reorganization
21 (Mon)	Voting		

**Executive Session Meeting Calendar**

January 20, 2021 (Wed)	Board Retreat
February 1, 2021 (Mon)	CSA Evaluation Mid Year Check
May 11, 2021 (Tues)	Personnel
May 18, 2021 (Tues)	CSA Evaluation

Until further notice, all meetings are to commence at 7:00 p.m. in a virtual format. When in-person meetings resume, all meetings are to commence at 7:00 p.m. in the large conference room at the Administration Building at 11 Foxcroft Drive, unless otherwise indicated.

Mrs. Konner seconded the motion.

Ms. Messer explained that beginning in September of 2021, the board are moving their meetings from Monday to Thursday nights to eliminate the conflict with the Township. This will allow the community the opportunity to attend both meetings if they wish to do so.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer  
 Nays - None

**Public Comment ~ up to 15 minutes**

Falguni Pandya, 12 Yale Court, expressed gratitude to the entire school district and congratulated everyone for all the achievements and great work.

Anthony Rosamilia, President of the LEA, congratulated Ms. Messer, welcomed Mrs. Khanna, and thanked Buddy August for all his work as a board member. Mr. Rosamilia added the LEA looks forward to their continued partnership working with the board.

**Adjournment**

At 8:00 p.m., Mr. Cohen made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Konner seconded the motion.

Vote all in favor.

**Respectfully submitted,**

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**Steven K. Robinson**  
**Board Secretary**

Samantha Messer, President of the Board of Education, Opening Statement

"Happy New Year! I want to start by welcoming our newest board member, Vineeta Khanna. Vinetta is a longtime resident of Livingston who has volunteered on various committees here and we look forward to having her expertise on the board.

I'd also like to congratulate Mayor Shawn Klein and Deputy Mayor Ed Meinhart. We look forward to working together with you and the rest of the council. I'd like to thank and congratulate Ronnie Konner and Rudy Fernandez for serving as the board president and mayor during an unprecedented year. At least Shawn and I know what we are signing up for. And, to Al Anthony and Michael Vierra congrats on your re-elections. And, I'd like to congratulate our newly elected Vice Presidents, Pam and Seth. I look forward to working with you.

While we are on the topic of congratulations, the board would like to take this opportunity to recognize Aditya, our student representative to the board. Aditya was accepted to the University of Pennsylvania Early Decision. Aditya will one day join the ranks of notable Penn alums such as Andrea Mitchell, Tory Burch, Elon Musk, John Legend, Warren Buffet, Supreme Justice William Brennan Jr., as well as some lesser known alumni, Mayor Shawn Klein and newly elected board president, Sam Messer. In the words of Penn's founder Benjamin Franklin, "An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." I think what Franklin was trying to say is to make the most of your time at Penn taking time both in and outside of the classroom to build your knowledge. We know we will see great things from you. Franklin also said, "'Lost Time is never found again.'" So make sure you have some fun while you are there.

With that in mind, we ask you to hold up the second gift in the bag. A loaf of bread. Aditya, do you know why a loaf of bread? College football teams and football fans have all sorts of different game day traditions. Penn's is pretty unique. In order to "toast" the team, fans literally bring pieces of toast to the games and throw them on the field.

When your mascot is The Quaker, a character who looks like the guy on the Quaker Oatmeal box, it explains a lot about your traditions. Congratulations to you and your whole family!

My final congratulations goes out to our entire community. We managed to get through perhaps one of the most challenging years in the history of the world, and we did it together.

I am sure I am not the only one who is relieved to see 2020 in the rearview mirror. 2020 knocked us all down. It humbled us, it tested us, it brought us unexpected joys in the little things, it brought us great pain, and it solidified that human beings are social creatures who rely on relationships with others in order to survive. I know I even miss waiting in a jam packed Seymours on a Saturday morning awaiting a table or waiting online for a treadmill at the JCC because it always provided an opportunity to connect with others. I will never take these things for granted again.

As we look forward to 2021, I'd like you to pause with me for a moment and listen to this piece by the philharmonic orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vizURicqNAo>

Now, if you were to ask various musicians which is the most vital part in the orchestra, you will get several different answers. The first answer you will likely get is the violin, and then some will extrapolate to say it is the entire string section. You'll get others who say it is the percussion section because if played too loudly it will overshadow the rest of the music. Others will argue the

triangle is the least important, yet others contend it produces the most unique sound. Still others will say it is the conductor that brings it all together.

Why am I talking about orchestras? Well, as many of you know, I have spent my career, over two decades, in education. I have read a total nerdy amount of research about what makes an excellent school system. Researchers try to parse out what single factor or factors have the biggest impact on the quality of the education a child receives. Some will argue it is the quality of the teacher, some will say leadership, others will argue it is the cohort effect, meaning the other children in the classroom, some will argue that it has to do with the socio-economic status of the community. After two decades of lived experience in this field as a teacher, a parent, a school administrator, a district administrator and a board member, I now give little weight to research that seeks to isolate the impact of any one factor. Much like the orchestra, I have learned that it is the confluence of all of these factors, working in concert, that make for an outstanding school system.

- It is our Special Education team, who serve as first violin, that pioneered hybrid learning last summer during extended school year, which made us know that the model was possible and that our staff and students could rise to the challenge.
- It is our teachers, who have all had to relearn how to teach in a hybrid paradigm.
- It is our counseling staff and nursing staff, whose jobs have expanded as they care for both students and staff.
- It is our supervisors, who rewrote curriculum to adjust to a new way of teaching and stepped up to cover classes for teachers needing to quarantine.

These groups rounded out our string section and set the foundation for beautiful music.

- It is our school principals, who up until last week, have not taken a day off since March, not because they had to work, but because they wanted to work.
- It is our central office team that works pretty much around the clock since COVID and contact tracing doesn't allow for nights and weekends off. Their days start before the sun comes when they hear about staff members who have had to quarantine overnight and they work against the clock to arrange coverage so as not to interrupt in-person learning.

These groups have been like our woodwind section. Members of the woodwind section often have to play more than one instrument. Our principals and central office teams have learned to play expertly instruments they had never picked prior to March.

- It is our custodial staff, buildings and grounds, secretarial staff and our bus drivers who have all had to learn new procedures and new ways of doing their jobs.
- It is our town council and town management, who reached out in the spring when we worried that we might not be able to collect taxes to keep our schools operational and said, "Don't worry. We are going to work together to ensure funding for our schools."
- It is our board members, who give up time with family and friends to volunteer. This group will drop anything they are doing to try to come up with solutions.

These groups often take a backstage role like the orchestra librarian and stage crew. Though these roles are often backstage, they are far from backseat roles. These roles ensure that the orchestra has all the tools the musicians needs to create a beautiful sound.

- It's all of you, our Livingston community at large, who continue to play it safe when it comes to COVID to keep the community spread low.

- It is our parent community that thanklessly volunteers time and effort to ensure our schools and our teachers have the support they need to do their jobs and who constantly demand more for our students. The demand and the pressure, while challenging at times, helps us grow and get better. While I'll admit, I don't love being yelled at, we have a saying where I work, "iron sharpens iron" meaning you only get better if other smart and talented people are challenging you to do better. I'm asking you to keep calling in and to offer us suggestions for what we can be doing better.

You are our percussion section, keeping the rhythm, always knowing when to beat the drum louder and when to let other sections lead.

- And finally, it is our students, our brass section, who constantly inspire the community. The brass section often plays the loudest and is the most exciting part of the orchestra. Always shining bright, this year they taught us something about resiliency and adaptability and have used their voices to tell us just how important and valuable school is to them.

Like the orchestra, it is impossible to isolate any one component of a great school system. We are fortunate that we have all the parts, and on behalf of the entire board, we want to thank all of you who ensure our kids have the best education possible.

I think we're all relieved that 2020 is in the rearview mirror. I certainly am. And I think we're all excited to look ahead to 2021 and the possibilities that await us. I don't know what 2021 will look like globally, but I think it is fair to assume that 2020 has forever changed the manner in which we think about schooling. Starting in March 2020, all students prek-12 began learning with a device in hand. Starting in March 2020, we expected students to become more self-directed learners than we ever have before. 2020 underscored for us the importance of peer to peer relationships and of student-teacher relationships. We saw students from elementary, middle and high school engage in self-directed community service projects, which signals to us how motivated our students are when they feel passionate about the work they are engaged in.

We will have to incorporate all of these positive takeaways, along with the constructive feedback we have received, as we enter the second half of the 2020-2021 school year and plan for the 2021-2022 school year. I look forward to working with the board, the staff, and the community because as they say, the comeback is always stronger than the setback. And make no mistake about it, we're coming back strong. We owe that to our kids and our staff.

But, we can't do it alone from our seats at the board table and our administration cannot do it alone from their offices at Foxcroft. We need to hear from all of you. Most importantly, we need to hear from the people on the ground right now, which includes the teachers and the students. We're going to come back, but I can't promise schools will be fully open in a month or even three months. So, we need your feedback about what we can do to improve both the in-person and the remote experience. To that end, Aditya, I'd like to put you to work. I hear every second semester senior who has already been accepted to college loves taking on new work. We need to better understand why attendance and engagement is declining for our secondary students and what realistic solutions we can put in place to remedy this. I know that Dr. Block, Mrs. Steiger and Mr. Stern are working to gather these ideas from teachers and students as well. In the elementary schools, we have to build upon the success we have seen to increase the amount of in-person learning that is happening and continue to refine the remote experience.

Getting down to brass tacks, we have added a meeting to the calendar next Monday, January 11 to talk to the public about our reopening plans. Given that we are still in the middle of a pandemic,

with cases on the rise, we need to ensure we have an accurate count of how many students intend to come in person and how many teachers will return. If the numbers allow it and we can do it safely, I know our administration and the board want to increase the amount of time students spend in person. You are certainly welcome to call in at the next meeting and provide suggestions, but the input is most helpful in advance of sharing a plan. To that end, students, Aditya is your representative, so I implore you to reach out to him with your ideas and feedback. Community members please reach out to the board and the administration as soon as possible with ideas.

Together, we'll play beautiful music and ensure the comeback is stronger than the setback."