



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP/VOTING MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 8, 2021

Executive Session - Virtual Meeting Via Zoom - 6:15 p. m.

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

A **Workshop/Voting Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education was held on this date in the large conference room in the Administration Building and via Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting was called to order at 6:15 p.m. by the Board President, Samantha Messer, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 4, 2021 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

Mrs. Konner moved the following:

Executive Session

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-11, permits the Board of Education to meet in closed session to discuss certain matters; now, therefore be it

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education adjourns to closed session to discuss:

- Personnel and Legal Issue

Action may be taken upon return to public session. The full length of the meeting is anticipated to be approximately 45 minutes and be it

Further Resolved, the minutes of this closed session be made public when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

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

At 7:03 p.m., Ms. Messer reconvened the public meeting.

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 250 members of the public and staff watching remotely through the webinar and a Facebook Live Stream.

Ms. Messer asked for a moment of silence for Wendell Slater, a recently retired member of our custodial staff.

Ms. Messer wished a Happy Lunar New Year to all who will be celebrating. This year is the Year of the Ox.

Ms. Messer thanked everyone at the secondary schools for moving to two cohorts on Monday.

Ms. Messer announced that she and Mrs. Chirls attended a PT Council meeting and were made aware of their "Adopt the Class of 2021" campaign, whose goal is to ensure our seniors have a special spring. Streets will be decorated and local businesses will show their support for our senior class.

Ms. Messer explained that the decision to have a remote day today was due to the fact that the Township ran out of salt to properly salt the roadways and sidewalks. Ms. Messer added that the administration is working on what we might be able to do to mitigate shutting our buildings in the event of extreme weather in the future.

Ms. Messer continued that she looks forward to hearing the next steps on how to get the kids back in school for longer periods of time while still maintaining safety protocols.

Workshop Items

1. District Goals Status Update

Dr. Block provided a mid-year update on the district goals for the 2020-2021 school year. Dr. Block went through each of the four focus areas, their action steps, intended outcomes and provided an update of what has been achieved so far. The full presentation has been posted on our website.

Under Focus Area #1, Mr. Cohen asked about the process from establishing to implementing change and Dr. Block responded that Great Schools Partnerships build the changes with us and then we implement them.

Mrs. Khanna asked if equity teams with 150 members will rotate and Mrs. Steiger responded that each equity team has 10 to 15 members and she hopes to have the core group stay on for at least two years. They do plan to add to the team over time.

Mrs. Khanna added rotation is a good way to get different perspectives.

Mrs. Chirls asked how we will establish consistency across equity teams and Mrs. Steiger responded we accomplish this by using supervisors who work across all of the schools.

Mrs. Konner asked if there are any plans to have information shared about Great Schools Partnership with the Township Committee on Diversity and Inclusion so they have an idea of what we are doing and to see if there are areas that overlap and Mrs. Steiger responded it is number four under our Action Steps.

Under Focus Area #2, Mrs. Khanna asked how math nights work and how often they are held.

Dr. Block responded they are held periodically via Zoom and that family math nights will come after the winter break.

Under *Math in Focus*, Ms. Messer asked how we know if the second grade averages are normal growth or larger than normal growth that can be attributed to the curriculum and Mrs. Steiger responded we need more years of data; however, what we have shows the curriculum is meeting the end of year standards.

Ms. Messer requested an update or analysis to understand what takeaways the board can get from this data on *Math in Focus* so they could better understand the impact for K-2.

Mrs. Chirls asked based on the start of this program and the data gathered so far, is this something we will continue to roll out next year to third grade and Dr. Block responded yes, the plan is to roll up a year each subsequent year.

Under Focus Area #3, Mr. Cohen asked if the survey is standardized or something we are developing in house.

Mrs. Steiger responded that the survey will be created by us to gather more anecdotal information that will assist us in affirming directions and the work as we plan for our two to three year process. Mrs. Steiger added the information is not meant to be statistical rather it is meant to guide the direction of the work, similar to a formative assessment.

Mrs. Khanna asked what Parent Academy is and Mrs. Steiger responded it is a group of pre-planned nights led by staff on a wide variety of topics to guide parents.

Mrs. Chirls asked if depression screening is part of this goal or how it is being addressed and Mrs. Steiger responded it is being treated separately.

Mrs. Konner suggested making students and parents aware of some of the instances where bullying activities might be avoided.

Under Focus Area #4, Mr. Cohen asked if technology professional development is focused on the applications or it is to help staff create a balance when they are in the classroom.

Dr. Block responded that professional development is not only focused on the technology and applications but also on how to balance them with other ways of engaging students simultaneously.

Mrs. Khanna asked how many tech coaches we have and Dr. Block responded we have four.

2. Calendar Discussion 2022-2023

Dr. Block explained this calendar includes three professional development days for staff, two in August and one in the beginning of September, has students returning the day after Labor Day and that we added Diwali as a day off for students. In addition, fall conferences have been moved a little later based on parent feedback, spring break is in April and graduation has stayed on a Thursday. Dr. Block added we have not put spring elementary conferences on this calendar but will add those as we get closer to that school year.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Block explained that whenever we change our schedule due to weather, the decision is made from consulting a weather service and in discussions with Mr. Robinson, our facilities manager, area superintendents and the Township Department of Public Works, who plow and salt our parking lots.

Yesterday, as our custodians were shoveling our walkways and grounds, Mr. Robinson received a text from the Department of Public Works that they were uncertain they could plow in time for

school opening and were dangerously low on salt. They indicated they were getting a salt shipment on Monday. Dr. Block continued that when he saw that it could likely freeze overnight and that the grounds would not be properly plowed and salted, he made a decision to call a remote learning day. Dr. Block added there was not a lack of desire to get kids into school but that this was a safety decision and if he feels conditions are unsafe for buses, staff and students, he will always air on the side of safety.

Dr. Block continued he believes we need to get kids back into school as much as possible but refuses to throw safety measures out the window and put others at risk to get that done without careful, deliberative planning that is based on reliable information.

Dr. Block offered congratulations to the Quiz Bowl team at MPMS.

Mr. Cohen asked if Dr. Block has given any thought on how we can create a delayed opening schedule within our current schedule so that students don't have to miss a day in school when the weather is bad and Dr. Block responded they are working on it.

Board Reports

Mrs. Chirls attended the Peter Pan high school production on Saturday and appreciates all the creativity being used to put on performances around the district.

Mr. Cohen and Mrs. Khanna attended the Black Lives Matter banner ceremony and encouraged everyone to stop or drive by.

Mrs. Khanna shared that the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion are holding different activities throughout the month and they can be found by looking them up on Facebook.

Ms. Messer gave thanks to the work of the parent community for holding events such as bingo and school supply drives.

Mrs. Konner announced plans are being made for the Safety Committee to meet at the end of this month.

Mrs. Konner announced New Jersey School Boards is offering some webinar training for board members.

Mrs. Konner announced the Garden State Coalition of Schools next meeting is on February 23 and their guest speaker will be Senator Ruiz, the chair of the Senate Education Committee.

Ms. Messer explained that the board has been discussing putting a question on the ballot to increase the board size to seven or nine. Mr. Cohen volunteered to craft a survey/questionnaire to help them conduct interviews to gather the pros and cons of working with a five, seven or nine member board. Ms. Messer added that Charlene Petersen from NJSBA will come to one of the March board meetings so they can hear how a board of five versus seven versus nine functions to gain a better understanding of the logistics. Ms. Messer asked the board to provide Mr. Cohen with questions and they confirmed they want to speak with other superintendents, former and current board members and members of the community.

Questions to be asked include:

- Do more board members lead to a feeling of greater transparency?
- How do you ensure transparency when there are seven or nine members on a board and most of the work is done in committee, not in public?
- Determine what types of committees there are and give examples of what they discuss in committee that they don't do at the table.

- How do non-committee members opine?
- What do their committee reports to the full board and public look like?
- How does the dynamic change with the committee structure in a larger board?
- What is the community hoping to get out of a larger board?
- Are there identifiable things with student achievement that they can attribute to a larger board?
- In a seven or nine member board, are there still representatives to the significant number of township committees?
- Does the community feel there is increased transparency now that meetings are live streamed?
- Are there challenges with larger boards around communication with the superintendent?
- What would the impact of a larger board have on the administration?

Public Input on Agenda Items ~ up to 15 minutes

Tara Abella, 55 Elmwood Drive, asked what the plan is for getting elementary school students in for longer days going forward.

Courtney Tomeo, 47 North Ridge Road, asked if we could consider placing desks at least three feet apart, instead of six, why we are getting different guidance from the local Health Department if he also provides it to Millburn and when can we get the young ones back in school five days a week.

Nora Vickerman, 82 Ridge Drive, asked which Department of Health makes the six feet guideline decision and why is Millburn not doing it.

Boris Grushin, 7 North Drive, asked why six feet is the standard, why we aren't using larger spaces such as gyms in a more constructive manner, if we are prepared with enough tents to get kids in more days and what are the next pivots.

Dr. Block responded we are adhering to the six foot distance that the Department of Education set out as written in *The Road Back* and through guidance with our local health official.

Dr. Block added the possible first pivot can be through getting a sense of how many kids will be coming in each cohort and then looking at the spaces at certain grade levels in the elementary schools. Dr. Block added he is open to bringing kids back in larger spaces with six foot distancing in place. Dr. Block added when the weather gets warmer, kids will be able to get outside for small group work and possibly lunch.

Dr. Block estimated the next pivot could possibly be after spring break when the weather gets warmer.

Ms. Messer added we are not getting different guidance from what Millburn has but we are choosing to follow the guidance.

Phil Forgione, 20 Village Drive, stated the American Academy of Pediatrics is strongly advocating that kids be physically present in school and requested the board provide parents with a detailed plan for a return to school for students.

Deborah Kessler, 217 Beaufort Avenue, asked if specials at the elementary level could be moved to the afternoons.

Melissa Pritsiolas, 26 Coventry Road, asked what makes us a high risk designation.

Brooke Alper, One Shindler Way, asked if Wednesday could be changed to a flex day to allow cohort A to have school three days in a row.

Lauren Perl, 13 Rumson Road, asked if we are not going to pivot until the weather gets warmer and we can be outside.

Dr. Block responded we can take a look at the elementary schedule and since we just had the pivot at the secondary schools last week, we will look for the opportunity when we can do it again.

Dr. Block added we will make up the missed cohort days at the elementary schools once the snow season has passed.

Dr. Block continued the risk matrix is color coded based on the spread and percent of positive cases in the region. We have been advised by the Board of Health how to proceed under the matrix and other districts are making decisions based on what they believe is right for their district.

Mrs. Khanna asked if teachers are comfortable coming back with the safety guidelines we have in place.

Dr. Block responded we have a number of teachers back and are advocating for them to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

Michael Margolis, asked what credentials the Department of Health officer holds, what has the physicians task force said and what are health care professionals telling the board of education.

Jared Schlosser, 46 Westmount Drive, asked if high risk is for the county or Livingston specifically, if we loosen the six foot distance, are we ready to open immediately and why aren't there plans in place to open everything right now.

Lori Rosenbloom, 7 Darby Terrace, asked what the board is doing to help prepare out kids for when they go back to school.

Jason Bauman, 21 Wingate Drive, asked why we are satisfied getting guidance from an unqualified individual when National Safety Guidelines say schools are safe.

Dr. Anya Litvak, 5 Beech Place, stated she is disappointed in the public school system and that the six foot distance rule is not correct, it is three feet for children. Dr. Litvak encouraged teachers to get vaccinated.

Shai Gavi, 85 Shrewsbury Drive, asked if we have visited schools that are open on Long Island to see how they are operating in person.

Dr. Scott Sundick, 15 Morningside Drive, asked why we aren't looking at all these schools that have been open without having outbreaks and death. Dr. Sundick stated he is a local physician and numbers are going down so we need to make some changes.

Anthony Rosamilia, President of Livingston Education Association, thanked the custodial and maintenance staff for getting the buildings ready when we had the large snowstorm last week.

Mr. Rosamilia agreed he would like to see staff get priority to be vaccinated and encouraged everyone to take a deep breath because the enemy is the pandemic, not the teachers, the administration or the board.

Dr. Block responded that the Department of Education made it clear that school districts work with their local Health Departments adding when Mr. Anello, who has been a health official for over 20 years, does not know the answer to a question, there are nurses and epidemiologists he consults with in addition to guidance from the State and CDC.

Fran Friedrich, 7 Emerson Drive, stated the problem we need to solve is our operating model because children are not learning.

VOTING ITEMS

BUSINESS

Mrs. Chirls moved the following:

3.1 A RESOLUTION REQUESTING GOVERNOR MURPHY TO INCLUDE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL IN THE OFFICIAL EXPERT VACCINE ALLOTMENT PANEL'S DEFINITION OF FRONTLINE WORKERS

WHEREAS, the Livingston Board of Education recognizes that the United States, the State of New Jersey and local health authorities, as well as the World Health Organization, have declared a public health emergency regarding the Coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the federal and state authorities have put in place guidance detailing the precautionary measures schools must implement to stop its spread of this disease; and

WHEREAS, public schools have a profound impact on millions of students, families and staff and are charged with the care, education, nourishment of their students and are an integral part of the health and safety of our communities; and

WHEREAS, our district has responded to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, providing students and staff members with the technology and resources necessary to ensure the efficient delivery of instruction, virtually and in-person; and

WHEREAS, the board has a substantial public interest in protecting the health and safety of its students, staff, and community and ensuring that the district can provide staff and students with a safe and effective educational environment that supports student achievement; and

WHEREAS, the board recognizes that this health emergency made it necessary to close schools and reinvent and deliver the educational programs in a virtual setting and that this may have an adverse impact on student achievement and the emotional and social wellbeing of students; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 Vaccination Plan published by the State of New Jersey Department of Health (December 15, 2020, pgs. 36-37) prioritizes the availability of vaccines to "essential workers" in Phase 1B of the vaccine protocol; and

WHEREAS, school district staff at all levels are essential to the day-to-day operations of this district, responsible for the thorough and efficient education of all students and their social and emotional wellbeing, are critical for virtual and in-class instruction should be considered "essential workers;"

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Livingston Board of Education finds a substantial public purpose exists to request that Governor Murphy give appropriate priority in the statewide administration of the COVID-19 vaccine to all public school district personnel.

COVID-19 Vaccination Plan published by the State of New Jersey Department of Health, see: <https://nj.gov/health/legal/covid19/NJ%20Interim%20COVID-19%20Vaccination%20Plan%20-%20Revised%2012-15-20.pdf>

RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution shall be forwarded to each member of the 27th legislative district delegation, Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin, Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, Governor Phil Murphy, and to the New Jersey School Boards Association.

Mrs. Khanna seconded the motion.

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

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

5.1 HIB Report

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education accepts the findings of HIB cases.

Mrs. Konner seconded the motion.

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

PREVIEW OF FEBRUARY 22, 2021 VOTING AGENDA

The board reviewed the items coming up on the February 22 agenda.

Mr. Cohen requested information about where we are with this year's budget be included along with next year's budget presentation.

Superintendent's Report

1. First Draft of Budget
 - a. Budget Discussion Featuring Curriculum and Student Services

1. PROGRAM/CURRICULUM

1.1 Student Teacher

2. STUDENT SERVICES

2.1 Related Services/Medical Consultants

3. BUSINESS

3.1 Payment of Bills

3.2 Board Secretary Report – December 2020

3.3 Transfers

3.4 Settlement Agreement

3.5 Policies & Regulations

4. PERSONNEL

4.1 Resignations

4.2 Leaves of Absences

4.3 Appointments

4.4 Transfers

4.5 Contract Adjustments

4.6 Lateral Moves

4.7 Stipends

4.8 Mentor Fees

5. MISCELLANEOUS

5.1 HIB Report

5.2 Suspension Report

Public Comment ~ up to 15 minutes

Adam Sutton, 17 Rumson Road, feels the board and administration have failed his children and stated we should make staff get the vaccine and give them a date that they must report back to school or face disciplinary action.

Rena Leeds, 56 Stonewall Drive, asked when a decision will be made as to when students will attend in person, five days a week. Mrs. Leeds asked if kids will be back in school in September.

Dr. Block responded he can't answer today definitively what will happen in September.

Boris Grushin, 7 North Drive, asked about having the Department of Health official come to our next meeting since his decisions are affecting a lot of what we are doing. Mr. Grushin added we should get guidance from local doctors who are more qualified.

Minaz Shirazi-Whang, 94 Sykes Avenue, stated a lot of parents support the decisions the district is making and appreciate what we are doing to keep staff and students safe.

Lauren Bloom, 517 Regal, stated things can be overcome to get everyone back in school and feels like there is a lot of talk and not a lot of action.

Debbie Rosenthal, asked if it is possible to keep the cohorts the same but just have longer days, suggesting we eliminate snacks and let them have lunch so they are in for a full day of school.

Tara Abella, 55 Elmwood Drive, stated it isn't about cohort A or B, it's that everyone is frustrated because the kids aren't getting enough education. Mrs. Abella agrees with keeping the cohorts and extending the day. Mrs. Abella asked when we can expect to hear from Dr. Block with an update on changing things at the elementary level.

Tugce Yalt, 51 Elmwood Drive, thanked everyone and applauded the teachers for making the day valuable for our kids. Mrs. Yalt added everyone is making sacrifices and parents should be more sensitive.

Darren Rovell, 25 Camelot Drive, stated there is no education going on in his house because his kids are young and can't spend that much time on the computer. Mr. Rovell wants to see the kids back in school.

Dr. Block announced we plan to open schools for hybrid learning the first day after February break.

At the close of public comment, Ms. Messer stated it is important to remember that everyone who works at LPS, especially Dr. Block, cares about kids and their school experience. Ms. Messer continued that as we try as hard as we can to get more kids back in school, she hopes we don't start questioning the intentions of Dr. Block or the staff and hopes to avoid attacks on our school leaders.

Mr. Cohen agreed there is more that everyone is aligned with than differs on and that we have to find a way to find that balance.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

There was no new business.

February 8, 2021

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:20 p.m., Mr. Cohen made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Khanna seconded the motion.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Steven K. Robinson
Board Secretary