

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 December 17, 2025. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Amanda Haber at 7:33 P.M. Mrs. Haber 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 8, 2025. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, and the Star Ledger.

I. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President at 7:33 P.M.

II. Roll Call

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

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal, Mr. Steven J. Lella, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary, one staff member and five members of the public (fifth member came at 7:37 P.M).

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. President's Report

Good evening and thank you for joining us.

Before recognizing our outgoing Board members, I would like to thank our student representative this evening, Alex Spellman, for joining us and sharing school updates. Serving in this role takes time and preparation, and it is a wonderful opportunity for the Board to hear directly from students. We appreciate Alex being here tonight and offering his perspective.

As this is our final meeting of the year and as a board, we take this opportunity to recognize two outgoing members of the Essex Fells Board of Education, Mrs. Jacqueline Burke and Mrs. Caragh Lavoie, who are completing their three-year terms of service. Throughout their time, Mrs. Burke and Mrs. Lavoie brought thoughtful perspectives, professionalism, and care to Board discussions and decision-making. Their contributions supported meaningful progress for the district. We implemented a full-day preschool program, made several important staff hires, and thoughtfully addressed district policies, always with a focus on what is best for our students.

I would also like to recognize Mrs. Burke for her service as Vice President this year, where she provided steady leadership and support when needed. In addition, Mrs. Lavoie represented the Board at the sixth-grade graduation, helping to mark an important milestone for our students and families. Your overall service made an impact allowing us to become a very productive and healthy board. Thank you for your dedication and commitment.

As we look ahead, we are confident that the incoming members will continue this important work. Mr. Kessler and Mrs. Maffucci have been attending meetings, are well informed, and eager to begin their service, and we look forward to onboarding them and moving forward together.

I have truly enjoyed another year serving as Board President and working alongside dedicated colleagues in support of our students, staff, and school community.

As we bring 2025 to a close, we wish the entire Essex Fells community a happy, healthy, and safe holiday season spent with loved ones.

V. Student Liaison to the BOE Report

- 6th Grade student Alex Spellman provided the Board of Education and the public a report on what is covered in the classrooms at EFS. Dr. Gadaleta and Mrs. Haber thanked him for his report.

VI. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

VII. Superintendent's Report

- Report Cards are live for parent review.
- Kindergarten and Pre-school registration will begin on 1/20 and go through 1/26. The tuition rate for pre-school will increase to \$9,000 for 2026-27.
- The all school concert will be on Friday at 9 am, in the gymnasium. Dr. Gadaleta wishes everyone a happy holiday break.
- Dr. Gadaleta thanked Mrs. Burke and Mrs. Lavoie for their service as Board of Education Members.
- It is such an honor to be invited by Judge Cecchi for the mock trial. Thank you to Mr. Bobroff and Mr. Deni for their help preparing the students. And thank you to former Mayor Abbot for assisting. The mock trial is such a positive event.

VIII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–10.

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): Steve Lella
 Event: K-12 Behavioral Threat Assessment & Management
 Location: Lyndhurst, NJ
 Date: 12/11/25
 Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Gabriella Day
 Event: Art Therapy-Creative Interventions for Kids with Trauma, Anxiety, ADHD, and More
 Location: Virtual
 Date: 12/18/25
 Cost: \$124.99

Staff Member(s): Michelle Barshay
 Event: Winter Synergy Meeting
 Location: Verona, NJ
 Date: 12/22/25
 Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Rebecca Fogarty
 Event: Strengthening the Executive Function Skills of Your Students with Special Needs
 Location: Virtual
 Date: 1/26/26
 Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): Marco Pannullo
 Event: Techspo 26
 Location: Atlantic City, NJ
 Date: 1/28/26-1/30/26
 Cost: \$1,248.26

Staff Member(s): Michelle Barshay
 Event: Motivating the Unmotivated
 Location: Virtual
 Date: 1/30/26
 Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): Lauren Brzostowski
 Event: NJCEC 2026 Spring Conference
 Location: Mahwah, NJ
 Date: 3/16/26
 Cost: \$199.14

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of Innovative Therapy Group, for the 2025-2026 school year, at the following rate:

Special Education Teacher	\$70 per hour/35 hours per week
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Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of Belinda O'Donnell, Substitute Teacher, for the 2025-2026 school year.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request for the following:

EFFE – Winter 2026 Enrichment Programs
 1/20/26 – 3/19/26
 Gymnasium & Classrooms

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of Facilities Request for the following:

EFFE – Musical - Peter Pan Jr.
 1/05/26 – 3/14/26

Rehearsals Tuesday's and Wednesday's
Gymnasium

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the submission of the updated 2025-2026 QSAC – DPRs to the New Jersey Department of Education.

Notes: Completed DPR's in Superintendent's Office

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

7. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2026-2027 Essex Fells School Calendar.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

8. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of Susan Hacker, Mentor to Donna Phillips, Mentee beginning January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2026.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

9. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the following contracts with the Essex Regional Educational Services Commission for the 2025-2026 School Year:

1. Transportation of Special Education and / or specific destinations of school Students (370784)

NOTE: Contracts with BA

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

10. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Out-of-District Program Costs at The Deron School (Student 370784) for the 2025-2026 school year, at the following daily/yearly rates:

Estimated 109 days at \$433.24/day for:

- January 5, 2026 through June 30, 2026

\$47,223.16

Total school year cost not to exceed:

\$47,223.16

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

IX. Business Administrator's Report

- Mr. Lella provided a report on the 2024-25 audit. The district generated less of a surplus than prior years, but the audit had no recommendations and the district is financially healthy.
- Mr. Lella and Dr. Gadaleta provided some bullet points regarding the preparation of the 2026-27 budget, which will be very challenging. Last year EFS lost 3%, 9k, in state aid and there is no guidance as of yet what will happen with the new Governor. We are anticipating an enrollment and health care adjustment, which we will need to incorporate into the budget, and we also have 92k in banked cap if needed. Mr. Lella noted the challenges of a 2% (112k) tax levy cap when our expenses do not have a cap.
- Mr. Lella reminded the Board to complete their annual NJSBA training if they had not done so already.

X. Business Administrator's Resolutions

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

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

Regular Meeting Minutes November 12th, 2025

Regular Workshop Minutes December 3rd, 2025

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 5 Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for December in the amount of \$241,364.83, as certified by the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for November as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$402,953.81 including \$376,463.97 for the gross payroll, \$5,510.44 for the Board's share of FICA/Medicare and \$20,979.40 for the State's share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mrs. Burke Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 5 Nays: 0

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 October.

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. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves the transfer of funds for the month of November as certified by the School Business Administrator and authorized by the Superintendent of Schools.

Moved by: Mrs. Burke

Seconded by: Mrs. Lavoie

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

XI. Old Business / Board Discussion

- A new President and Vice President will be appointed at the January 7th reorganization meeting.

XII. New Business / Board Discussion

- Dr. Gadaleta shared some of the comments from the survey regarding the PTA Egg Hunt, some of which were unfavorable. Dr. Gadaleta reminded the Board that this is not a school event, but hosted by the PTA. Mr. Mehta asked how we could perhaps improve on the event and not do away with it, as traditions at EFS are important to hold on to. The Board discussed.
- The workshop meeting will be moved back to the Superintendent's office.

XIII. Public Comment

- None

XIV. Adjournment

RESOLVED that this public meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 8:37 P.M. The Reorganizational/workshop meeting of the Board of Education will be held on **Wednesday, January 7th, 2026, at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mrs. Lavoie

Seconded by: Mrs. Burke

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
School Business Administrator/
Board Secretary