

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Regular Meeting held in the Media Center on February 25, 2026. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Amanda Haber at 7:30 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 7, 2026. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, and the Star Ledger.

I. Call to Order – 7:30 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President at 7:30 P.M.

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Amanda Haber, President- Present
Mr. Raj Mehta, Vice-President- Present
Mrs. Jenna Maffuci-Present
Mr. Christopher Pisacane-Present
Mr. Shaun Kessler-Present

Also present: Dr. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal, Mr. Steven J. Lella, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary, one staff member and three members of the public (two members left at 7:44 P.M).

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. President's Report

- Good evening,
As we begin tonight's meeting, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge several groups whose dedication and professionalism continue to move our district forward. First, I want to extend our sincere gratitude to our Superintendent and the entire administrative team, faculty, and staff as they continue to navigate the QSAC review process. The level of diligence, organization, and attention to detail required during a review of this magnitude cannot be overstated. The preparation behind the scenes is extensive, and we deeply appreciate the professionalism and care being shown at every step. Your commitment reflects the pride we all have in our district. I would also like to warmly welcome our student representative, Jake Bobroff, and thank him for sharing school updates with the Board. We recognize that gathering that information takes time, coordination, and thoughtfulness. We truly appreciate the effort and perspective you bring to our meetings. Student voice is an important part of our work, and we are grateful for your leadership. Additionally, I want to thank our grounds crew and the DPW for their tremendous efforts during the recent inclement weather. Because of your responsiveness and hard work, we were able to open safely — first with a delay and then resume regular operations — ensuring minimal disruption for our students and families. We are grateful for the partnership and reliability that keeps our schools running smoothly. Finally, I want to acknowledge the continued work of Mr. Lella and Dr. Gadaleta as they guide us through what is undeniably a challenging budget season. Developing a responsible financial plan requires thoughtful analysis, collaboration, and difficult decision-making. As a Board, we remain committed to fiscal responsibility while ensuring that our students continue to receive an exemplary educational program. That balance is our priority, and we appreciate the steady leadership helping us achieve it.

V. Student Liaison to the BOE Report

- Jake Bobroff provided an update as to what the students of EFS are currently learning.

VI. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

VII. Superintendent's Report

- EFS will be revamping the response to student behavior in class. There will be zero tolerance when being disrespectful to staff. Dr. Gadaleta explained the disciplinary procedures that will be taken in order to address lost classroom time.
- The facilities walk through for NJQSAC had been completed. Operations, Curriculum and Instruction and Governance were completed on February 18th. Personnel and Finance had to be rescheduled along with the Mid-Year budget review. The curriculum and instruction review was very particular and we have asked for specific clarification.
- We are very excited about our Library Review Committee. We have contacted Straus Esmay and we can use our "SKIP" Team to be the LRC.
- We are currently interviewing for a Special Education Kindergarten teacher.
- Dr. Gadaleta noted the resolution for the Speech resignation and we will be interviewing for a replacement.
- Dr. Gadaleta will be sitting down with staff to discuss 2026-27 positions and what grade staff would be interested in teaching.

VIII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–07.

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): Rosalie Takkel
Event: Strengthening the Executive Functions Skills of Your Students
Location: Virtual
Date: 2/26/26
Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): Kristin Gann
Event: Enhance Your Reading Instruction-Practical Application of the Science of Reading
Location: Virtual
Date: 3/2/26
Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): Rebecca Fogarty
Event: Buehler Teacher Training – Expedition Mars
Location: Paramus, NJ
Date: 3/2/26
Cost: \$18.80

Staff Member(s): Lauren Brzostowski
Event: Buehler Teacher Training – Expedition Mars
Location: Paramus, NJ
Date: 3/2/26
Cost: \$18.80

Staff Member(s): Jessica Lodato
Event: Amplify Science
Location: Virtual
Date: 3/3/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Candice Fitzgerald

Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/10/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Kristen Kowalski
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/10/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Dorotea Banek
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/10/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Kristin Gann
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Laura Quinn
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Rosalie Takkel
Event: NJECC
Location: Montclair State University
Date: 3/11/26
Cost: \$0.00

Staff Member(s): Erika Pilato
Event: Solution Focused Conversations in Schools-An Integration of Education and Mental Health
Location: Virtual
Date: 3/11/26-3/12/26
Cost: \$450.00

Staff Member(s): Rory Duarte
Event: Strengthening the Executive Function Skills of Students with Special Needs
Location: Virtual
Date: 3/30/26
Cost: \$169.00

Staff Member(s): Laura Brutman
Event: Best, cutting-Edge Strategies for Kindergarten
Location: Virtual
Date: 4/20/26
Cost: \$295.00

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2025-2026 Essex Fells Public School District Nursing Services Plan:

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the 2025-2026 School Improvement Panel/District Evaluation Advisory Committee/Professional Development/Library Review Committee:

Michelle V. Gadaleta
Amanda Haber
Lauren Mastria
Lindsay Farkas
Jaime Wallace
Michelle Barshay
Candice Fitzgerald
Judi Reynolds
Kimberly Trafford

Superintendent
BOE Representative
PTA Representative
EFFEE Representative
Teacher
Teacher
Teacher
Lead Teacher/504 Coordinator
Media Specialist

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

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:

6th Grade Fundraising – Musical Concession Stand
3/13/26 – 3/14/26
Media Center

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the resignation of Laurie Fischer, Speech-Language Pathologist, effective April 20, 2026.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the second Reading and adoption of the following bylaws/policies/regulations:

P 0142.1
P 0142.1C
P 0174C
P 0177C
P 1220
P & R 1570C
P & R 1552
P & R 2530
P & R 2535

Nepotism (M) (Revised)
Nepotism – Charter School (M) (Revised)
Legal Services – Charter School (M) (Revised)
Professional Services – Charter School (M) (Revised)
Employment of Chief School Administrator (M) (Revised)
Internal Controls – Charter School (M) (Revised)
Sexual Harassment – Staff (M) (New)
Resource Materials (Revised)
Library Material (M) (New)

P & R 9130

Public Complaints (Revised)

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

7. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Appointment of Anne Healy, Substitute Teacher, for the 2025 - 2026 school year, pending the usual criminal history and background check for new hires.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

IX. Business Administrator's Report

- Mr. Lella provided an update on the 2026-27 budget. He will be meeting again with Dr. Gadaleta as they work on preparing a balanced budget, as we are currently still 100k short. The rising health insurance costs and out of district placements make it nearly impossible to maintain a 2% tax levy. Mr. Lella noted other districts are all facing the same issues preparing their 26-27 budgets. The new Governor will be giving her address on March 10th. State Aid figures will be released within 48 hours of the address. There has been no news on what the figures will be, but there has been concern regarding the school state aid funding formula.
- EFS was notified that based on preliminary 2024 census information that the district would be ineligible for Title 1 Funding for the 2026-27 school year.

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	January 21 st , 2026
Executive Meeting Minutes	January 21 st , 2026
Regular Workshop Minutes	February 11 th , 2026
Executive Meeting Minutes	February 11 th , 2026

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education approves bills and claims for February in the amount of \$240,786.41 as certified by the Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves the payroll for January as certified by the Business Administrator and approved by the Superintendent and Board President in the total amount of \$408,526.19 including \$380,573.17 for the gross payroll, \$6,205.78 for the Board's share of FICA/Medicare and \$21,313.51 for the State's share of FICA/Medicare.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

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 December.

WHEREAS, in compliance with N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.11(c)3, the Secretary has certified that as of the date of the reports, no budgetary line-item account, in accordance with the minimum chart of accounts as established by the New Jersey Department of Education, has obligations and payments which in total exceed the amount appropriated by the Board of Education;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that in compliance with N.J.A.C.6A:23- 2.11(c)4, the Board of Education certifies that, after review of the Secretary's monthly financial report, and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials, to the best of its N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.11(c)4, and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the year; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that pursuant to P.L. 2004 C73, the Board certifies that after review of the Secretary's monthly financial report and certification, that there are no budgetary transfers that cumulatively exceed 10% that would require the approval of the Commissioner of Education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the financial reports for the months be accepted and shall become a part of the official minutes of this meeting.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

XI. Old Business / Board Discussion

- We have been vigilant with the PTA volunteers and their responsibilities. We have also been addressing food on field trips. There has been improvement since last year and the incidents we were seeing.
- The DPW has all new staff, and we are addressing with them the snow removal procedures. We have stressed that EFS is a priority.

XII. New Business / Board Discussion

- As of February 25th, we have 1 snow day remaining

XIII. Public Comment

- Mrs. Lauren Torjussen asked about the disciplinary process.

XIV. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

BE IT RESOLVED that in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act ("Act"), the Essex Fells Board of Education shall conduct a closed executive session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 for the purpose of discussing: **Legal Issues**. It is anticipated that the length of time of this executive session will be approximately 30 minutes and that action will not be taken in public after the executive session.

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

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Kessler

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

XV. Adjournment

RESOLVED that this public meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 8:31 P.M. The next regular meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Wednesday, **March 18, 2026, at 7:30 P.M.** in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mrs. Maffucci

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

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