

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 March 18, 2026. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Amanda Haber at 7:31 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 – 7:31 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President at 7:31 P.M.

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Amanda Haber, President- Present
Mr. Raj Mehta, Vice-President- Present
Mrs. Jenna Maffucci-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 additional members of the public arrived at 7:36 P.M. three left at 7:39 P.M.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the flag salute.

IV. President's Report

- Good Evening,

Thank you for joining us tonight.

I'd like to begin by recognizing the truly outstanding production of Peter Pan. It was an incredible showcase of talent, creativity, and heart. The energy on stage and the pride throughout the audience made it clear that this was something very special for our students and our community.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to Mr. Trogani, Ms. Banek, Ms. Trafford, and Mr. Wallace for their dedication and diligence. The time and care you invested created an experience that went far beyond the performances. One comment in particular stood out to me—a student shared that they felt, throughout this experience, they were truly allowed to be themselves. That is incredibly powerful, and exactly the kind of environment we strive to create for all of our students. I'd also like to thank the Foundation for their generous support in funding this production. Opportunities like this are possible because of your continued investment in our students.

Additionally, I want to recognize our student representative, Mr. Spellman. Thank you for your thoughtful work in helping us better understand what's happening in our schools and for being a strong voice for your peers. We know that it takes a lot of work to get your report together and it is really important for us to hear from you.

As we move through tonight's meeting, we know we are facing very tight budget challenges. Please know that this Board remains deeply committed to being fiscally responsible while continuing to prioritize the programs and experiences that matter most to our students.

Thank you.

V. Student Liaison to the BOE Report

- Robert Spellman 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

- The Safety Team Meeting and SCIP Meeting recently took place, of which the district is to have 2 of per year. Topics addressed were HIB and Social and Emotional Events in the STM, and PD and Evaluation Discussion in the SCIP Meeting. Also discussed was the new Library and Media Center Resource Policy.
- The District is completing MAP Testing.
- Parent / Teacher Conferences will be next week and we ask that parents be mindful of the 15 minute time slots.
- We are preparing for NJSLA.
- The Peter Pan Jr. event was lovely. The presentation has such an impact on the children and kudos to the children and the staff. It's such a great experience for those involved, and thank you to EFFEE.
- Mr. Kessler asked about the Kindergarten sub resolution. Dr. Gadaleta explained that it's just for the remainder of the school year.

VIII. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Superintendent Resolutions #01–08.

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): Judi Reynolds
Event: 2026 NJAGC Conference
Location: Somerset, NJ
Date: 4/17/26
Cost: \$339.65

Staff Member(s): Deana Hromoko
Event: Restorative Practices in the Classroom – Build Better Relationships and More Effectively Manage Student Behavior
Location: Virtual
Date: 4/30/26
Cost: \$295.00

Staff Member(s): LeeAnn Smith
Event: All In for Inclusive Education Summer Leadership Conference
Location: Union, NJ
Date: 5/28/26
Cost: \$190.88

Staff Member(s): Steve Lella
Event: NJASBO
Location: Atlantic City, NJ
Date: 6/3/26-6/5/26
Cost: \$1,295.63

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

2. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the Use of

Facilities Request for the following:

EFPD – Police Exam
4/6/26 - 9am-1pm
Gymnasium

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

3. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the appointment of Susan FitzGibbon, Kindergarten Teacher, BA, Step 1, for the 2025-2026 school year, beginning March 19, 2026, through June 30, 2026, at the pro-rated salary of \$21,267.52.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

4. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the approval of the SLP contract for the 2025-2026 school year beginning March 23, 2026.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

5. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the addition of Ort Farms to the 2025-2026 Field Trip List.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

6. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education accepts and approves, as recommended by the Superintendent, the donation to the Student Council of 16 water bottles from the Scolnick and Mazzara families from the TREP\$ program to be used as future prizes.

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

EFFEF – Spring 2026 Enrichment Programs
4/21/26 – 6/10/26
Gymnasium & Classrooms

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

EFFEF – Musical Cast Party
3/20/26 – 3:00pm – 3:45pm

Nays: 0

- Mr. Lella reported that EFS will be receiving an increase of 6%, or \$17,337 in State Aid funding for the 2026-27 School Year. This after the district lost 3% in the 2025-26 school year. He also explained the resolution to submit the preliminary 2026-27 school year budget to the Executive County Office. The district will be utilizing the Health Benefits adjustment and Enrollment adjustment permitted by the State to exceed the 2% Tax Levy Cap without requiring voter approval. Health Care costs are increasing by 18% and Out Of District Costs by 36%. It's impossible to keep to a 2% cap with no limits on these costs. Mr. Lella shared an article that had come out earlier in the day regarding how other districts are dealing with these skyrocketing costs, as well as sharing, by percentage increase only, not district name, the tax levy increases of the other districts in the County, that ranged from 2.5% to 7%, averaging out at 5.22%. EFS will be increasing by 5.49%, or 331k, reducing budget lines and staff by 1, and he shared the tax impact for the average valued home in Essex Fells.
- The gate where the dumpster is stored has been damaged. Mr. Lella will reach out to the vendor who provides our garbage pick up, and then possibly NJSIG.
- Mr. Lella explained the timeline of the Gymnasium Air Conditioning Control Panel, which was damaged on December 18th, 2025 due to a power outage/surge, the day before the EFS Holiday concert in the Gymnasium. It took until February 12th for AirGroup to determine from the manufacturer the screen was dead and needed to be replaced. March 12th, he received a quote for replacement. He was hoping to have the panel by spring break, but does not feel confident we will have it by then. He will submit to NJSIG.

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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. Kessler

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

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

Moved by: Mr. Mehta

Seconded by: Mr. Kessler

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

5. **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Essex Fells Board of Education in the County of Essex, New Jersey, approves the 2026-2027 preliminary school district budget for submission to the Executive County Superintendent as follows:

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Local Tax Levy</u>
General Fund:	\$7,142,506.00	\$6,390,937.00
Special Revenue:	\$101,371.60	0.00
Debt Service:	\$96156.95	\$63,462.95
TOTAL:	\$7,340,034.55	\$6,454,399.95

RESOLVED that the Essex Fells Board of Education approves the total travel expenditures for the District at a maximum of \$20,000.00 for the 2026-27 school year; and

RESOLVED that the Business Administrator keep an accounting of all expenditures to ensure compliance with the approved amount; and

BE IT RESOLVED that included in the preliminary budget is the use of the adjustment for increased costs of health benefits in the amount of \$85,302. The funds will be utilized to address the additional increase in health benefit premiums.

BE IT RESOLVED that included in the preliminary budget is the use of the adjustment for enrollment in the amount of \$126,256. The funds will be utilized for supplies and materials necessary for the additional students.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Essex Fells Board of Education accepts a donation from the Essex Fells PTA and the Essex Fells Foundation for Educational Excellence in the amount of \$35,000 and \$20,000 (for a total of \$55,000) to be used for the purchase of school devices on the district's 5-year technology replacement plan.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the following budget line be increased and that the Business Administrator be authorized to administer it:

20-190-100-610 Essex Fells PTA & Foundation Technology Grant \$55,000

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board authorizes the Superintendent and Business Administrator/Board Secretary to submit the preliminary budget to the Essex County Executive Superintendent of Schools for review and approval, to advertise the preliminary budget in the district's official newspaper, and establish a public presentation and adoption of the final budget for the 2026-2027 school year on May 6th, 2026, at 7:30 P.M.

XI. Old Business / Board Discussion

- Barring any weather, it appears that we will have 1 unused snow day to return. We are preparing for the last day of school, June 22nd. The Board agreed.
- We still have items to address for the Curriculum section of the NJQSAC. Curriculum revisions that will need to be done are not budgeted for. We should have scores by May.
- EFS has spent about 4k of the 7k received at the beginning of the year for technology device repairs. New Mac Books are cheaper in some cases than the repairs, so that's how we will proceed with the broken devices being used for parts.

XII. New Business / Board Discussion

- West Essex has opened up the Senior Service program and we are just awaiting applications.
- Mr. Alexandris wrote a grant to the NJFW Archery Program, and the district will receive the award. Dr. Gadaleta explained the installation process.
- Mr. Lella explained the recent Workers Compensation submission and accident reports that recently occurred in the District. It does not appear they will be processed through the district's insurance coverage.

XIII. Public Comment

- None

XIV. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

At 8:21 P.M. the Board made a motion to enter into 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 and HIB report**. 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. Pisacane

Seconded by: Mr. Mehta

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

XV. Adjournment

RESOLVED that this public meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 8:30 P.M. The next regular meeting of the Board of Education will be held on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, at 7:30 P.M. in the Media Center.

Moved by: Mrs. Maffucci

Seconded by: Mr. Pisacane

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

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