

Approved June 18<sup>th</sup>  
Board Meeting

BOARD OF EDUCATION  
(Official)

May 7, 2026  
Elizabeth, New Jersey

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education and a Public Hearing on the Budget was called to order on May 7, 2026, at 5:15 p.m. in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Donald Stewart Center for Early Childhood Education, School No. 51, 544 Pennsylvania Ave, Elizabeth, NJ.

Board President, Maria Z. Carvalho welcomed everyone to the meeting and read the following statement:

“Ladies and Gentlemen good evening. This is a Public Hearing on the Budget for the school year July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027. Pursuant to New Jersey Statutes and the rules adopted by the Board of Education, notice of this meeting was sent to The Star-Ledger and Cablevision of Elizabeth on April 24, 2026. In addition, this notice is posted on the Bulletin Board in the lobby of 500 North Broad Street, and pursuant to this act, a copy has been filed with the City Clerk of Elizabeth, New Jersey.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to everyone present for this May 7, 2026, meeting of the Board of Education. This meeting is being recorded and will become part of the Elizabeth Board of Education permanent record. In order that the recording will adequately reflect the proceedings, please refrain from talking while others are speaking. We ask that you silence the sound on your electronic devices. Since it is legally mandated that these proceedings be accurately recorded, we may have to ask for order periodically should noise begin to interfere with our recording capabilities. We are pleased that you have taken time this evening to join us here for our Board of Education meeting. Thank you for your interest in the Elizabeth Public Schools.

We are here this evening to hear the public express their views regarding the proposed 2026-2027 budget. In accordance with New Jersey Statute 18A:22-13 and I quote, ‘On the date and at the time and place so fixed, the Board of Education shall hold such public hearing at which time taxpayers and other interested persons shall have an opportunity to present objections and be heard with respect to said budget and the amounts of money necessary to be appropriated and the various items and purposes for which the same are to be appropriated for the use of public schools in the District for the ensuing school year’.

There will be a public portion for citizens to address the Board. Participants for the public portion must personally sign in prior to the start of the public participation portion so that they may have the opportunity to speak. The sign-in sheet states the name, address, telephone number, and reason that the person wants to comment, whether it is an agenda item or a general education comment.”

Present: Mmes. Chevres (via a Virtual Platform), Clervoyant- Noel, Mr. Jacobs, Mmes. Moreno-Ortega, Goncalves Pestana, Carvalho -6

Absent: Dr. Barbosa. Ms. Bathelus, Mr. Rivera -3

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Olga Hugelmeyer, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Harold E. Kennedy, Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Schools Judy Finch-Johnson, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Jennifer Cedeno, Assistant School Business Administrator Rajeev Malhotra, and Attorney Edward Kologi Esq. of Kologi Simitz Law Office, Esq., and members of the community were present.

Colors were presented during the Flag Ceremony by members of Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. Health and Public Safety Academy Marine Corps Junior R.O.T.C.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Jerry Jacobs.

The National Anthem was played.

Mrs. Carvalho stated, "I ask Schools Superintendent, Dr. Olga Hugelmeyer to present the 2026/2027 School Budget."

Dr. Hugelmeyer stated "We are here tonight to present the 2026-2027 Elizabeth Board of Education Budget which sustains our recent educational improvements and supports strong academic progress for all our students.

Ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students depends on adequate funding for all of our public schools so that they can offer a challenging curriculum in all subjects taught by skilled educators and supported by dedicated leaders at the school and district level. Adequate resources are crucial for our underserved community. We have carefully developed a budget that focuses on protecting instructional positions in all schools and aligning our spending with our ambitious goals for education. This budget supports our instructional priorities, aligns resources with our district goals, and ensures continued progress for all of our students.

I would like to thank all of our Board of Education Members and all of our administrators for working with me on the 2026-2027 Budget and for your dedication to our children. I would like to express my profound gratitude to a group of remarkable individuals, our Elizabeth Board of Education. These nine dedicated volunteers generously donate countless hours to ensure that every student in our District has the opportunity to thrive academically and personally. To our Finance Committee, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Malhotra, I want to express my gratitude for the careful planning that supports the budget and as a result will serve our community well. "

The Superintendent presented an overview of the Demographics of the School District, which is the second largest school district in the state of New Jersey. The Elizabeth Public Schools currently serve 27,278 students. These students are spread across 37 schools (3

Early Childhood Centers, 20 Neighborhood Schools, 6 Magnet Schools and 8 High Schools). 4,190 amazing and dedicated staff members serve and support these students and our schools. Elizabeth has a high school graduation rate of 88.4%, with a goal of 90%. Steady progress has been made towards reaching that 90% target. 2,008 students graduated in 2026 making it the largest graduating class ever. The student population demographics are 76.7% Hispanic, 15.4% Black, 6.20% White, 1.5% Asian and 0.20% classified as other, while the student educational profile is defined as 52.0% General Education, 34.0% Multilanguage learners, 9.3% Special Education and 4.7% Special Ed/ Multi Language learners. 81.9% of our students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch.

The Superintendent said the District has a promise and a goal for each individual student:

The Promise is to each student, that the Elizabeth Public Schools, is to provide an innovative and personalized learning environment that ensures every child achieves excellence.

The Goal – College preparedness and career readiness for every child.

To meet the aforementioned Promise and Goal the District uses the following:

- Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS).
- Professional Learning Communities.
- Data Consults.

Dr. Hugelmeyer stated that “On Tuesday, March 10, 2026 Governor Mikie Sherill delivered her inaugural budget address to the Legislature. The Governor’s \$60.7 billion proposed FY 27 budget includes \$12.4 billion dollars in K-12 formula aid. This is an increase of \$372.1 million over the current year. The Elizabeth Public Schools has been provided with \$655.4 million in State Aid for the 2026-2027 school year.

The Superintendent showed a slide showing a ten (10) year history of State Aid to Elizabeth Public Schools.

- School Year 17/18 \$419,602,635
- School Year 18/19 \$443,181,394
- School Year 19/20 \$458,509,801
- School Year 20/21 \$483,164,159
- School Year 21/22 \$503,237,026
- School Year 22/23 \$541,068,370
- School Year 23/24 \$590,438,231
- School Year 24/25 \$640,411,477
- School Year 25/26 \$655,560,985
- School Year 26/27 \$655,420,593

Mrs. Hugelmeyer said it is important to share more about our State Aid Revenue and noted that Mr. Kennedy will have the opportunity to speak in depth with regard to the significance of this funding. Our State Aid Funding notice reflects funding that supports what is known as a

maintenance budget. The State Aid that the District received allows us to preserve all our initiatives and all of our programs.

Elizabeth has experienced a challenge like what has occurred in many New Jersey communities: a reduction in the enrollment of children. The District carefully planned in this face of this challenge. Referring to the State Aid Revenue, Dr. Hugelmeyer showed a slide that showed a steady increase over the last ten years, but the 2026/2027 allocation is basically flat to last year. When presenting the prior year budget, Dr. Hugelmeyer had confidently stated that all positions and programs had been preserved.”

A slide was presented showing Student Enrollment data for the past ten school years

- School Year 16/17 26,604
- School Year 17/18 27,219
- School Year 18/19 28,125
- School Year 19/20 29,037
- School Year 20/21 28,064
- School Year 21/22 28,022
- School Year 22/23 28,348
- School Year 23/24 28,378
- School Year 24/25 28,449
- School Year 25/26 27,278

Expanding on the enrollment data, the Superintendent said that based on the October 15<sup>th</sup> report submitted to the State Department of Education where we are now serving 27,728 students which is quite different than the 28,449 students, we educated the year before. Dr. Hugelmeyer wanted to be able to share with the community the enrollment trends from the 2024-2025 school year compared to our current 2025-2026 school year. In General Education category the District experienced a decline of 10.6% and the Special Education category of students also saw a drop of 4.91% However, the District experienced an increase in our multilingual learners of 2.61 % and what was described as a surge was reflected in a 32.06% increase in dual coded Special Education/ Multi-Lingual students. As a result, this required important resources to be reallocated to ensure that all of our children succeed.

The Superintendent explained how the budget must align with our five-year strategic plan commitments through the five Pillars, that form the foundation of the Strategic plan.

Pillar #1 - Teaching and Learning Excellence – Enhance teaching and learning to provide all students with individualized pathways to success.

To support and enhance Teaching and Learning, the Superintendent presented a slide showing the following programs that are in place for 2026/2027 school year.

- Summer//Saturday/Afterschool Academic Programs.
- Summer/Saturday/Afterschool Art & Music Programs.
- Summer/Saturday Recreation Programs.

- Summer ESY Programs.
- Summer Athletic Program.
- Summer/Saturday Athletic Clinics.
- Dual Enrollment Partnerships (Kean/NJIT/NJCU/TCNJ).
- AVID.
- Children’s Literacy Initiative.
- Carnegie Learning.
- National Academy Foundation (Finance, I.T., Engineering, Biomedical).
- Career and Technical Information.
- Content – Based Professional Development.

Pillar #2 - Social and Emotional Wellness –Support the social emotional wellness of all students and staff to promote a safe environment in which all feel a sense of belonging

Superintendent Hugelmeyer highlighted programs that support the social emotional wellness of all students and staff.

- SEI Afterschool Program.
- Positive Behavior Supports in Schools.
- After-school High School Clubs.
- Guidance Counselors.
- Nurses.
- Social Workers.
- Substance Abuse Coordinators.
- College and Career Coordinator.
- Saturday Student Support Service Programs.
- Gaggle Management System.
- Panorama.
- Therapeutic Learning Connections.
- Nurtured Heart Approach.
- RWJ/Trinitas-Youth Enrichment Service.
- American Red Cross CPR Training.

Pillar #3 Workforce Development – Hiring, develop and retain staff to establish a highly effective and diverse workforce.

Dr. Hugelmeyer emphasized Workforce Development and how critical it is to hire, train and retain staff. Included in the 2026-2027 school budget are:

- Fourteen (14) newly funded positions have been directly added to the budget to manage shifting demographics and provide targeted student support.
- Expansion of School 4 Annex with an addition of 10 Temporary Classroom Units (TCU’s), specifically designed to accommodate the new autism program.

Pillar #4 Parent and Community Engagement- Strengthen the engagement of all members of the Elizabeth Public Schools Learning Community to improve outcomes for students and their families.

The Superintendent spoke about the importance of Parent and Community Engagement. Current Initiatives include:

- FAFSA Nights.
- ESEPAC and BEPAC Parent Engagement.
- High School Information sessions which help guide students to their best fit academically and socially.
- Middle and High School Parent Seminars.
- Family-Engagement Bill Colon and Earl Brown Parent Training/Community Outreach
- Academic /Attendance Expectations
- Parent Training

These are all in addition to the work being done collaboratively at the individual school level with the respective PTO's.

Pillar #5 Organizational Effectiveness – Promote a culture of excellent customer service and continuous improvement across the district.

Pillar 5 -Promoting Operational Scale and Effectiveness.

Transportation Fleet.

Proactive \$3.9 M EPA Electric School Plus Grant.

HD interior cameras, AI -powered dash cameras, GPS systems, and exterior cameras to monitor stops and outside activity.

Food and Nutrition.

95K summer meals served.

2.4 million breakfasts and 3.5 million lunches served in the 2025 2026 school year.

Advanced Security.

Expanded security cameras access districtwide.

Increased crisis management professional development for school security personnel to enhance student safety.

Technology.

Sustaining the 1:1 Device Initiative.

Executing high speed fiber connectivity expansion across the District and enhanced cybersecurity protocol to protect student data.

Capital and Maintenance Projects.

- Bathroom remodel (3 schools).
- Carpet Replacement (7 Schools).
- Floor Replacement (19 Schools).
- Fence and Gate Replacements (9 Schools).
- Paint entire school buildings (8 Schools).
- Playground replacement (11 Schools).
- Renovate front entrances, walkways, and parking lots (17 Schools).
- Repave driveways and parking lots (9 Schools).
- Replacements of doors and windows (5 Schools).
- Roof Replacements (3 Schools).
- Sidewalk replacement (4 Schools).
- Shade replacement (11 Schools).

Dr. Hugelmeyer acknowledged and celebrated the Elizabeth Public Schools Academic highlights for the 2025-2026 School Year.

- 4 EPS High Schools made the 2025 AP Honor Roll: Elizabeth High School Frank J Cicarell Academy (EHS-FJC) and Alexander Hamilton Preparatory Academy, achieved Platinum Status, while John E. Dwyer Technology Academy and JVJ STEM Academy earned Bronze status.
- The District had a total of 319 AP Scholars.
- 39% of students earned a 3 or more on AP exams.
- 366 students earned a Seal of Biliteracy last year.
- 34% of Students receive college credit prior to graduation.
- 275 Students were eligible for College Board's National Recognition Program.
- 22 Students earned the AP Capstone Diploma or Research Certificate.
- 805 Students earned Dual Enrollment credits.
- Class of 2025 seniors were accepted to 283 colleges, universities, and technical schools.

Dr. Hugelmeyer then introduced the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Harold E. Kennedy Jr., to present the financials.

Mr. Kennedy thanked Dr. Hugelmeyer and said he was appreciative of the opportunity to present some of the key numbers and data in the 2026-2027 Budget.

Mr. Kennedy began his presentation by showing a PowerPoint slide on the development of a needs-based budget. Although the slide may indicate that it is a speedy process with a race to the finish, those directors who are in attendance this evening know that it was a long progression that began in November and continued on until the submission to the state in March. He thanked all the Administrators and the Board Members because they were along with the Finance Team on this journey. Mr. Kennedy said it was not a short journey but a good journey overall.

He explained that the first phase of the Budget development, is gathering comprehensive input from School Administrators and Department Directors, to identify essential requirements for the upcoming academic year. At the same time the Administrative Cabinet conducts a longitudinal analysis of spending patterns alongside current operational needs. This is a one-on-one interviewing process with every one of our school administrators. This prioritizes capital improvements, student centered upgrades and determining compensation and benefits for our employees. All employees are costed out at the contractual rate, which was complicated because this was done during the midst of bargaining sessions with all of our unions, which required a lot of estimating to determine for benefits to come up with the compensation and benefits number in the budget.

The second phase is determining the needs based on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025, enrollment statistics that Dr. Hugelmeier mentioned earlier. The Finance Staff and the Building administrators conduct a class size analysis based on enrollment reports by Grade and course sections, which drives the number of teachers that are needed to cover all of our students and their educational classes.

The third phase of the process commences after the Governor's March 10<sup>th</sup> Budget address and until our State Aid is revealed, approximately six days later, the District plans under a worst-case scenario basis which would be a 3% decrease in aid per 2026-2027 State guidelines. The loss of 3% of our aid would have been devastating to Elizabeth, but thankfully that was not the case. Also incorporated into this planning stage is the matter of declining student enrollment. Once our State Aid number is given to the District, it is then determined how that money will be spent. The Finance Dept. prepares the Budget that will be presented for review. However, it doesn't end there, as a significant review process begins and the Budget is formatted following instructions published by the New Jersey Department of Education in their Budget Manual. The budget is sent for review by the Union County Executive Superintendent and County Business Administrator.

Mr. Kennedy stated that the next step is the final budget review process, includes a line-by-line departmental budget review, allocation of funds within the school-based budgets based on enrollment, programs, and equitable need, a review by a financial consultant, and collaboration with a comprehensive review by the Elizabeth Board of Education Finance Committee. After these reviews are complete it is submitted to the County Office which upon approval, the District gets permission to advertise the Budget

The fifth and final phase is tonight's Public Hearing on the Budget.

Mr. Kennedy presented a PowerPoint slide showing the 2026-2027 Budget Revenue and stated that most of the revenue will come from New Jersey State Aid, \$655,420,593, which is 85.59% of our revenue. The Business Administrator said that the next largest source of our revenue is from the local levy from the Elizabeth taxpayer which is \$59,813,124 (7.81%) while federal aid is \$23,622,911 (3.09%), the balance appropriation is \$17,663,759 (2.31%), and

miscellaneous revenue is \$9,224,986 (1.2%) for a total budget of \$765,745,283. Unlike most districts in the state, Elizabeth has zero (\$0) debt service.

In contrast to Revenues, Mr. Kennedy presented a PowerPoint slide showing the 2026-2027 Budgeted Expenditures and stated that the budget expenditures include \$565,009,366. for instruction, which is 73.79% of our total budget; \$27,064,390 is allotted for administrative costs, which is 3.53% of the budget; \$82,206,405 will be spent on operations and maintenance of our physical plants which is 10.74% of total spending. Moreover, \$91,465,122 or 11.94 % of the budget is for “other” which includes community services, employee benefits, transportation, and capital outlay. A further breakdown of the \$565,009,366 Instructional Budget shows outlays of \$44,606,651 for regular educational needs, \$62,277,390 is dedicated to Special Services, \$43,805,956 is allocated for Special Education, \$ 4,156,171 is earmarked for Cocurricular Athletics, \$70,072,090 will fund State and Federal Programs, \$338,473,273 is for the contribution to Whole School Reform and \$1,617,925 will be spent for Charter Schools.

Mr. Kennedy stated that the comparative 2026-2027 per pupil cost is \$24,233 per student and includes \$13,793 for classroom instruction, \$4,103 for support services including attendance, health, guidance, child study teams, educational media/ library, and professional development, \$3,874 for cleaning, repair, and maintenance of our schools, plant and property, \$2,151 for central administration, school administration, business services, human resources, telephone, and postage, \$220 for athletics and extracurricular activities and \$92 is classified as other, which is for equipment costs, community services and Charter schools. Mr. Kennedy cited that the State of New Jersey regional administration cost per student in 2026-2027 was \$2,773, and here in Elizabeth the cost of administration is \$2,151 per student.

In conclusion, Mr. Kennedy reiterated that the Board of Education’s Central Office believes in an open and transparent budget process. All Board of Education meetings are open to the public, and agendas and meeting minutes are available at [www.epsnj.org](http://www.epsnj.org). Copies of the 2026-2027 Budget are available and are on file in Mr. Kennedy’s office at the Elizabeth Board of Education’s Mitchell Building, at 500 North Broad Street. In addition, a copy of the proposed budget is posted online at the district’s website. Mr. Kennedy thanked the Board and the audience for the chance to speak about the numbers. He also thanked the Board members, especially members of the Finance Committee as well as the Departmental Directors and School Principals for all their help and contributions to a good budget.

Board President Maria Carvalho asked for a round of applause both for Dr. Hugelmeyer, and Mr. Kennedy for their presentations. She also thanked Mr. Malhotra along with the Finance Committee for their work and was grateful for all the support given by the Directors, Department Heads and School Principals.

President Carvalho stated the following

“At this time, the microphones are open for public comment to those who have signed in prior to this session. I shall call individuals to the microphone based on the order of the sign-in. Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration. The total time of public comment shall be limited to 60 minutes. No individual is able to yield their time to

another individual. All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no participant may address or question Board Members individually. Each speaker shall comply in all respects with Board Policy 9322 (copies were provided next to the sign in sheet).

The following rules shall apply:

1. Time limits will be strictly enforced.
2. No personal attacks on individuals or naming of individuals.
3. No vulgar or indecent language.
4. A person may address the Board no more than once during a single meeting.
5. Comments will not be debated.

“As a reminder this is a meeting of the Board in public, not a meeting of the public.”

Mrs. Carvalho called upon the first participant, Mrs. Maria Lorenz, to address the Board.

Mrs. Lorenz spoke about her disagreement with the way certain areas of 2026-2027 School Budget were prepared.

“Being there were no members of the public signed up to address the Board, Mrs. Carvalho said at this time, I close the public comment portion of the meeting.”

Board President Carvalho asked if any Board Members had any comments or questions regarding the Budget Presentation.

Board Member Mrs. Moreno Ortega thanked all in attendance and expressed her gratitude to all who helped prepare and support the budget. She said the Budget had been prepared using real hard data and wished to draw attention to several articles that were recently published on NJ. Com, the virtual website of the Star Ledger. In these articles, it was shown that many School Districts across the State of New Jersey are facing severe financial challenges which are resulting in school closings, teacher lay-offs and staff positions being eliminated. Mrs. Moreno Ortega specifically mentioned the Paterson School District, which lost 39 teaching positions and 243 other positions were eliminated. This contrasts with the Elizabeth School District where all positions and programs have been retained in the 2026-2027 school year Budget. She congratulated all who were part of the Budget compilation and final presentation at this evening’s meeting.

Finance Committee Chairperson and Board Member Jerry Jacobs also thanked everyone involved in preparing and presenting the 2026-2027 District Budget. He commented that the District’s per pupil cost of \$24 K is very commendable compared to other Districts that are now over \$25K, \$ 30K and in one case over \$40K per year. Mr. Jacobs also pointed out that the district has zero debt service, which means there is no interest being paid on loans, bonds etc. This clearly shows what a good job the Business Office is doing, under the leadership of Mr. Kennedy. Moreover, Mr. Jacobs reiterated the fact that there has not been a local tax increase resulting from School expenditures since the 2014-2015 school year, which means this Board has kept the city’s taxpayer’s contribution flat for eleven years. It was also mentioned by Mr. Jacobs that this was the first time in many years that our district had seen a drop in State Aid. Mr. Kennedy stated that Elizabeth has been treated well by the state in terms of aid and because of this, there was a

philosophy that we should not ask for an increase in local taxpayer contributions. Mr. Kennedy, in response to an inquiry from Mr. Jacobs, explained that the District is required by the State to budget a certain amount in excess surplus which is carried over from the prior year. The state does not allow school districts to keep excess surplus. Mr. Kennedy pointed out that although we received a cut of \$1.4 million dollars in State Aid, the District did receive grants from the School Development Authority which are being used to improve environmental conditions, i.e. air conditioning in our schools. Mr. Jacobs further noted that there was also a decrease in Title 1 funds and that the District had expended our American Recovery Plan (ARP) grants. The fact that the District has been able to retain all staff and have no cuts in programs and services is quite an accomplishment. Although Elizabeth is the second largest school district in the state, the first and third largest districts receive far more aid and have much larger budgets than our District. It is a testament to both the administration and this Board, that we are in such good financial health.

Board President Carvalho thanked Mr. Jacobs for his input. Although she had many sleepless nights during this Budget Development process, and the Board had to meet the largest number of challenges in her eleven years on the Board, this is a great Budget. All this came about because of the work done by the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendents, the Directors, and Principals along with Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Malhotra.

The Board President then asked for a motion to approve the final Budget for the 2026-2027 School Year.

A motion was made by Mrs. Goncalves Pestana and seconded by Mrs. Moreno-Ortega to adopt Resolution 10 approving the final 2026-2027 School Budget.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Mmes. Chevres, Clerevoyant Noel, Mr. Jacobs, Mmes. Moreno-Ortega, Goncalves Pestana, Carvalho -6.

Negative – None.

On a motion made by Mrs. Goncalves Pestana and seconded by Mr. Jacobs, the Budget Hearing meeting was adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

Affirmative: Mmes. Chevres, Clerevoyant Noel, Mr. Jacobs, Mmes. Moreno-Ortega, Goncalves Pestana, Carvalho -6.

Negative – None.

Harold E. Kennedy, Jr.

School Business Administrator/Board Secretary