

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Workshop Meeting held remotely on October 7, 2020. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Kris Huegel, at 7:32 P.M. Mrs. Huegel 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, 2020. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress and the Star Ledger, and posted on the district's web-site".

I. Call to Order -7:32 P.M.

- The meeting was called to order by the Board President.

II. Roll Call

Mrs. Kris Huegel, President- Present
Mrs. Bethany Buccino, Vice-President- Present
Dr. Steven LoCascio-Present
Mr. Raj Mehta- Present
Mr. Theodore Skopak-Present

Also present: Mrs. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal; Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary; and 33 members of the public.

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the salute to the flag.

IV. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

- None

V. President's Report

Good Evening Everyone-

I would like to take a moment to recognize the incredible work which has been done here at Essex Fells School. Essex Fells School is the only public school in Essex County that was able to start this school year fully in-person from day one with all available health and safety protocols in place. There are many reasons for this, but the main reason is because our administrative leadership and teachers are outstanding and have not only met the challenges that they have been faced with but risen above them.

We are now nearly 7 months into this health crisis, and 1 month into the new school year. The administration has worked hard to get the school open safely, support the teachers, staff and in-person students, and also work with the remote families to ensure that their needs are being met. The teachers have been working on their professional development, welcomed the students back into school both in-person and virtually and have adapted to the new school atmosphere and protocols. They have also set up Google classrooms and have been uploading all assignments and practicing with the students. This gives the children the opportunity to become comfortable with remote learning from the beginning of the year, so the transition will be seamless if there is a need to switch. We will not be using a hybrid model in the future, as it poses its own set of challenges, and will be either fully in-person or remote. The teachers are not only adapting to the new normal, teaching the children inside and outside of the building, setting up virtual classrooms, helping the children understand the new health and safety protocols, and conducting assessments, they are also providing curriculum, support and assessments to the remote students.

Essex Fells is lucky to have these incredible teachers, administrators and staff members working so hard for our students and school. We want each and every one of them to know that their efforts do not go unrecognized.

The Board would also like to recognize the unwavering support from the Essex Fells Police Department and thank them for their assistance with rolling drop off and pick up, and their commitment to watching over the school throughout the day.

We are excited that we have switched into full days this week. We can comfortably move forward because of the health and safety measures put in place by the administration, the hard work of the maintenance staff, the children listening to the teachers and following the guidelines, and the efforts all of you have made to keep your children healthy. Please remember when the holidays come up next month to follow the travel restrictions and continue your social distancing, so we can keep our school healthy and safe. Thank you all for your understanding during these constantly changing and challenging times and for your continued support of our special school.

VI. Superintendent's Report

- Mrs. Gadaleta thanked the parents for understanding the restrictions and protocols that have been put in place. We will continue to adhere to such protocols in an effort to keep everyone safe.

VII. Buildings & Grounds

- Mr. Lella reported that we had the playground equipment tested by New Wave Engineering for SARS-CoV-2 and the reports came back negative. Mr. Lella also noted that after the summer and before school began, we also had the playground equipment cleaned, sanitized and sealed with an EPA approved protective coating that could be reliable for up to 90 days to inhibit virus, bacteria, fungus and algae growth. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that she felt this additional preventive action would be beneficial and that we would revisit additional cleaning in the spring.

VIII. Curriculum & Instruction

- Mrs. Gadaleta provided a Reopening Full Day update. The teachers have done very well and she thanked them for the ½ day preparation. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that the students have adapted well to the new lunch and recess process. Plenty of space and seating has been available for everyone and the bagged lunches has gone well, allowing for time to eat and relax while the other half of the group has recess. Mrs. Gadaleta asked for parents to be aware of the staggered arrival and departure times. Mrs. Gadaleta also thanked the EFPD for addressing any drop off / pick up safety issues.

IX. Personnel

- Mrs. Gadaleta sadly reported that she had accepted Mrs. Leggett's notification of retirement. Mrs. Gadaleta has begun the interview process and hopes to have someone in as soon as possible to train with Mrs. Leggett before her December 31st retirement.

X. Finance

- Mr. Lella reported that there would be additional State Aid Grant Allocations as part of the Coronavirus Relief Fund in the amount of \$5,625 to defray costs associated with the reopening of schools. The district spent approximately 8k in 2019-20 to prepare to re-open and has spent 37k in 2020-21. The district has already utilized 13k in funding as part of the Care Act to assist with re-opening costs. He also thanked the PTA and Foundation for their assistance.
- Mr. Lella noted that the 2019-20 audit would begin shortly, and that due to health concerns items will be picked up by and emailed to the auditors and will not take place in the office.

XI. Policy

- Mrs. Gadaleta noted that she would be contacting Strauss Esmay regarding Communication and Virtual Learning Policies

XII. Old Business / Board Discussion

- The Board discussed the current school calendar in relation to staff members college student upcoming breaks. 10 staff members have children in college who will be returning home. The Board trusts that individuals will practice due diligence and best judgement. Mrs. Gadaleta asked that everyone be as careful as possible when outside of school.
- Mrs. Gadaleta thanked the EFPD for their assistance with the new drop off and pick up procedures.

XIII. New Business / Board Discussion

- Mrs. Gadaleta noted that families need to resubmit the recertification agreement after the long break. We cannot stress the importance of quarantining if you travel out of state for a period of 14 days, regardless of a negative test.
- Mrs. Gadaleta reported that she had hoped to implement the Cultural/Social Awareness and Equity Team in the spring of 2020, which would be an internal audit of the district's own instruction. Our current curriculum and books address the entire student population. The BOE discussed and agreed to wait.
- Mrs. Huegel and Dr. LoCascio are interested in attending the virtual NJSBA negotiations workshop on 10/16/20. Mr. Lella will register them.

XIV. Meeting Open for Public Comment

- Mrs. Downes asked about international travel restrictions. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that information can be found on the CDC's website.
- Mrs. Haber noted how thankful and proud she was for everyone's continued efforts to keep the school open for in person instruction and the positive affect it has had on the children. She thanked the community, BOE and staff, noting the children are so happy and so much better off being in school. Mrs. Haber also noted she felt the Equity Community sounds great and will be another great initiative.

XV. Adjournment

At 8:13 P.M. the Board of Education made a motion to adjourn. The next meeting of the Board of Education will be held remotely on Wednesday, October 21, 2020, at 7:30 P.M.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Buccino

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary