

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Workshop Meeting/School Budget Public Hearing remotely on May 6, 2020. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Kris Huegel, at 7:31 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 on January 7, 2020. Agendas were mailed to the Clerk of the Borough of Essex Fells, the Progress, the Star Ledger, and posted on the district web-site.

I. Call to Order –7:31 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. Theodore Skopak – present
OPEN

Also present: Mrs. Michelle V. Gadaleta, Superintendent/Principal and Mr. Steven J. Lella, Business Administrator/Board Secretary, 2 staff members and 26 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. Superintendent's Report

- Mrs. Gadaleta noted that due to COVID-19 the Governor has reported that all schools in New Jersey will remain physically closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. Remote learning will continue in order to meet the 180 day requirement. Mrs. Gadaleta also noted that she will be working together with the staff to put a plan in place to close out the school year. The PTA and Foundation have also offered to help.
- All field trips and activities are also canceled.
- Mrs. Gadaleta will be preparing ideas for graduation and move up day, trying to close out the school year on a positive note.
- Mrs. Gadaleta will also prepare a plan on how to navigate returning materials safely to staff and students and cleaning out of classrooms and lockers. Mrs. Gadaleta noted this will take some time to organize.
- Mrs. Gadaleta reported, although not ideal, ESY will be done virtually. Mrs. Gadaleta also noted that Summer Rec could not begin prior to June 30th, and we will be awaiting further guidance from the Governor if it can take place.
- Mrs. Gadaleta noted that the district has 2 emergency/snow days remaining. Mrs. Gadaleta would prefer to return the days during Memorial Day Weekend rather than the end of the school year.
- Mrs. Gadaleta informed the Board that there has been no update to the status of State Aid for the 2020-21 school year. The State Treasurer is providing a report on May 22nd. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that cuts to the district's state aid could result in staff cuts.

VI. Superintendent's Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Business Resolution #01.

I. WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor has declared a state of emergency and a public health emergency, and ordered all schools closed for in-person instruction; and

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature has revised N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9 to permit the use of virtual [or remote] instruction to establish

compliance with the 180 school day requirement during a public health emergency, subject to Board approval of a virtual [or remote] instruction program;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board hereby approves the District's program of virtual [or remote] instruction to meet the 180 school day requirement, which was previously submitted to the Department of Education on March 12, 2020 and implemented since the District's closure on March 16, 2020.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mr. Skopak

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

VII. Business Administrator Report

- Mrs. Gadaleta and Mr. Lella presented the 2020-21 School Budget.
- Dr. LoCascio thanked Mrs. Gadaleta and Mr. Lella for their presentation of the 2020-21 Budget. Dr. LoCascio noted that each year Essex Fells continues to excel with our test scores and other data used by the state. Families move into town and sometimes have children performing below our levels and we've been able to bring them up to our levels. Dr. LoCascio noted that the district has a fantastic teaching model and results which speak for themselves.
- Mayor Davis asked about the status of the OOD placements. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that they are confirmed.
- Mayor Davis asked how the district's capital reserve is utilized. Mr. Lella noted only for capital projects listed on the district's long range facility plan.
- Mayor Davis spoke about the current COVID-19 situation and how it could impact the employment of Essex Fells residents. Mayor Davis noted the county expects a 1% tax increase and also noted if cuts could be made, potentially to buildings and grounds projects to get closer to a 2% tax increase.
- Mrs. Huegel asked Mr. Lella to explain Capital Reserve funds and how they are used.
- Dr. LoCascio asked if we are required to make cuts, what is the impact to our current programming. Mrs. Gadaleta noted we'd have to cut related services.
- Mrs. Hochkeppel commented on CARES Act funding
- Mr. D'Avella commented about towns and their tax levy percentage increase. Mrs. Gadaleta provided the information, noting that others were exceeding the 2%.
- Mrs. Haber commented on what she felt was a well-developed budget. She also noted the very high standards of the Essex Fells School. Mrs. Haber also asked about the CARES Act funding and being based on Title 1 funding, which was noted that EFS turns down. Mrs. Haber noted that we are all in a very difficult situation and felt we put together a very good budget and excellent presentation.
- The Board of Education members discussed the impact of reducing the tax levy from 4.99%, or 253k. Mrs. Gadaleta explained the team teaching model and a reduction would lead to changes to the model, which would impact grades 4, 5 and 6. Staff and programs would be cut.
- Dr. LoCascio noted this was a very difficult situation but did not feel comfortable making cuts.

Commented [ET1]: The legislation uses both terms, but boards ought to pick the one that better characterizes their setup. There's no definition, but I would consider a video instruction-centric program to be "virtual" and a program that doesn't rely on video conferences to be "remote."

- Mrs. Buccino did not feel comfortable with making cuts and the impact it would have.
- Mr. Skopak agreed he would not be comfortable with cutting staff and programs which would impact the children.
- Dr. LoCascio noted that we don't know yet how some of the students may have fallen behind during remote learning, however the staff is doing a fantastic job. Cutting staff could have a big impact on bringing the students back up to speed.
- Mrs. Gadaleta noted that as always, the proposed budget is tight and there really are no places to cut other than staff. Mrs. Gadaleta thanked the PTA and Foundation for always offering to help.
- Dr. LoCascio stated the BOE and administration have planned this budget in good faith. We are probably going to need more help and doesn't feel right cutting staff and or programs. It would be hard to make cuts that we know would impact the children. We don't want to sacrifice what makes Essex Fells School great. The Board agreed.
- Mr. Lella informed the Board that he had received 4 inquiries and 3 resumes for the open BOE position. Resumes are due May 14th, the Board will conduct interviews on May 20th and appoint a member at the June 17th meeting.
- Mrs. Buccino will assume the position of Vice President for the remainder of the year.

VIII. Business Resolutions

RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves Business Resolution #01.

1. **RESOLVED** that the Board of Education, after conducting a public hearing, adopts a school district budget for the FY 2020-2021 School Year as follows:

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Local Tax Levy</u>
General Fund	\$5,804,009.00	\$5,331,304.00
Special Revenue	60,234.00	0.00
Debt Service Fund	<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
 Total Budget	 \$5,864,243.00	 \$5,331,304.00

The Tax Levy includes Banked Cap utilization of \$152,000.00 to address Special Education Costs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that there should be raised for General Funds \$5,331,304.00 for the ensuing school year (2020-2021).

Moved by: Dr. Locasio

Seconded by: Mrs. Buccino

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

IX. Meeting Open for Public Comment

- Mrs. Skopak said the PTA would like to be able to assist with the funding for the 6th Grade graduation with money that had been raised.
- Mrs. Hochkeppel also noted that the PTA would like to assist with the kindergarten graduation. She also asked Mrs. Gadaleta about what a return to school might look like. Mrs. Gadaleta said she is looking at many possible scenarios for a return in September, however we do not have any guidelines or information from the state at this time, as they are still focused on the current year school close out. Nurse Renz has been working on scenarios with Mrs. Gadaleta to prepare for a September return.

X. Adjournment

At 9:30 P.M. the Board of Education made a motion to adjourn. Please be advised the next meeting of the Board of Education will take place Wednesday, May 20th at 7:30 pm in the Media Center or via Remote Access.

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Buccino

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Steven J. Lella
Board Administrator/Secretary