

The Board of Education of the Borough of Essex Fells, in the County of Essex, New Jersey, convened in a Special Meeting held remotely on August 7, 2020. The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Mrs. Kris Huegel, at 8:33 A.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 August 5, 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 – 8:33 A.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-Absent
 Mr. Raj Mehta-Present
 Mr. Theodore Skopak-Present

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

III. Flag Salute

- The Board President led the salute to the flag.

IV. Resolution to Enter Executive Session

At 8:34 A.M. the Board made a motion to enter into executive session to discuss contract negotiations and legal matters. The items discussed in Executive Session will be disclosed to the public when the need to maintain their confidentiality no longer exists. The Board will exit executive session and return to public session at 9:30 A.M.

Moved by: Mr. Skopak

Seconded by: Mrs. Buccino

Ayes: 4

Nays: 0

*The Board returned to Public Session at 9:30 A.M.

*65 member of the Public signed in.

V. President's Report

- None

VI. Superintendent's Report

- None

VI. Business Administrator's Report

- None

VIII. Meeting Open for Public Comment

- Mrs. Autret gave her thanks and appreciation for all the hard work and updates. She noted she is not comfortable with a 100% return to EFS and asked about alternative options being offered. Mrs. Gadaleta noted she has spoken with the EFTA. She also noted that those who opt for Educere are still EFS students while those who elect to homeschool are not.
- Mrs. Bezmen considers herself on the other side of Mrs. Autret's concerns and she appreciates her concerns. She also asked why there was no town hall to discuss the concerns/science of the situation. She also understands it is very difficult to make everyone happy. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that the school district is a public entity and decisions are being based on The Road Back. There is also a 28-person committee that has been formed in order to keep all informed. We are amending our plan as we need to and we have received a lot of community feedback that is being used to make the best decision for everyone.
- Mr. Gough thanked Mrs. Gadaleta for her handling of a very difficult situation. He noted each scenario will have risk, and we are all trying to do the best that we can.
- Dr. LoCascio noted that the Board appreciates everyone's comments and responses. He informed the public that the Board must work within the EFTA and NJEA contract parameters. It would be great to bring in more staff to provide for remote learning options but it is just not feasible at this time. He noted that the BOE does hear all sides and concerns of the public, with that said we want our children in school but we have fiscal and legal matters to consider. Dr. LoCascio assured the public that the Board is hearing all of your ideas and concerns.
- Mrs. Huegel let the public know that there are certain guidelines and ethics the Board is required to follow. The Board along with Administration are trying to make everyone happy while keeping everyone safe. The EFS staff is going above and beyond to prepare for the opening of school. We all need to be aware that we need to change how things were being done in the past. Thank you to all of the public for their comments.
- Mrs. Autret understands how hard everyone is working to reopen. She asked why there isn't an option for remote learning as West Essex is doing. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that W. Essex is a middle and high school and it is easier for them to offer the remote. She also noted that the NJEA is not in favor of in class streaming.
- Mrs. Davis asked why in class streaming was not an option. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that there are legal and student confidentiality concerns. And it would also be difficult for staff to split instruction and manage both home and in class students.
- Mrs. Content asked about teacher packets being sent home as well as providing separate staff to teach online. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that the teacher packets don't cover the tangibility of what is being taught in person. Mrs. Gadaleta also noted that our teacher population is needed to teach our in class students and keep the EFS teaching model as best we can.
- Dr. Orsini noted that the district is doing a great job and recognizes how difficult it is to meet everyone's needs. He noted that hospital cases in the area have decreased to single digits. He is not minimizing the impact of the virus but assured that the risk has been lowered significantly. Dr. Orsini noted that the NJ strain is still contagious but not as severe as it once was and that state numbers are decreasing. We can't make everyone happy but we are all doing our best to get our children back in school safely to learn.
- Mr. Milano thanked Mrs. Gadaleta and the BOE for all their hard work. He was very impressed and thankful.
- Mrs. Hoffman noted that temperature checks and wearing masks are simple for us to do and keep everyone safe. We can do it if not for ourselves but for others.

- Mrs. Bezmen asked whose responsibility is it to take temperatures. She doesn't agree with the EFS temperature guideline and asked to reconsider the threshold. She also doesn't agree with the protocols in place to return. She has concern about everyone wearing masks.
- Mrs. Reynolds noted all concerns are challenging. As teachers, we are all trying to do our best to prepare for the children. Mrs. Reynolds asked about cleaning and the remote learning schedule. Mrs. Gadaleta noted we will be flexible with additional cleaning and we are planning for half of September for remote learning.
- Mrs. Vega thanked Mrs. Gadaleta and the Board. She asked about how information is received from the Governor. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that there was a call with the Governor for Superintendents in March but nothing since. We are being informed at the same time the public is being informed. Mrs. Gadaleta has had numerous conversations with other Superintendents.
- Mrs. Steiner thanked everyone for all their hard work. We are in the best set up as we can be. Thank you.
- Mrs. Hidalgo asked about the temperature guideline and if we would consider the CDC limit. We could revisit the guideline however the reopening committee consulted and decided on what we felt was the safest.
- Mrs. Nelson thanked everyone for their hard work. She had concern about the virus spreading again in the fall and asked Dr. Orsini for his opinion. Dr. Orsini stated we will always see an increase in the flu each year when returning to school and being indoors, that this is normal. He noted that we should continue what we are planning to do to decrease the risk.
- Mrs. Bronstein asked about the 5th and 6th grade classes being combined and if there were any other options. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that this was the only way without hiring more staff and meeting the state guidelines. We are utilizing our space the best we can.
- Mrs. Stefanczyk asked if Mrs. Gadaleta could provide more information regarding Educere to families that may be interested.
- Mr. Davis thanked everyone for their hard work and asked about our plan for virtual learning. Mrs. Gadaleta noted that it is located at the bottom of the re-opening plan.
- Mrs. Bezmen asked about the protocol for home schooling. Mrs. Gadaleta will provide a letter.
- Mrs. Marsh thanked everyone for all their hard work and asked how we envision PE and lunch supervision. Mrs. Gadaleta explained that children will remain in their classroom with the specials and would go outside if the weather permitted. Staff will be assigned for lunch and we will go outdoors if possible.
- Mrs. Farrell asked if you chose remote learning could you return to in person. Mrs. Gadaleta noted initially no, however if the governor closes school you can.
- Mrs. Skopak noted that the PTA has met with vendors regarding chairs for parents to purchase for lunch time.
- Mrs. Haber thanked everyone for all their hard work. She is happy with the option to return to school and again thanked Mrs. Gadaleta and the Board for putting everything together.
- Mrs. Vega asked about class lists.
- Mayor Davis thanked the Board of Education and the Administration for their efforts. He also thanked Dr. Orsini for his comments and noted that Essex Fells had about 25 cases in March and April and noted their currently may only be 2. As Mayor and parent, he feels it is very important that we have the 5-day school option. Mayor Davis noted that is important to stay informed and realize we are all in this together and that we need to stay responsible and flexible as facts change. Thank you to all, the BOE and Administration is doing a great job to prepare our community.

**Mr. Skopak left at 11:00 A.M.

IX. Adjournment

At 11:15 A.M. the Board of Education made a motion to adjourn.. The next **Regular Meeting** will Held **remotely** on **Wednesday, August 19, 2020 at 7:30 P.M.**

Moved by: Dr. LoCascio

Seconded by: Mrs. Buccino

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Steven J. Lella
Business Administrator/
Board Secretary