



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP/VOTING MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 4, 2024

Executive Session - Administration Building - 6:30 p.m.

Public Session - Administration Building - 7:00 p.m.

A **Workshop/Voting Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education was held on this date in the large conference room in the Administration Building and via a Facebook Livestream. The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Pamela Chirls, Board President, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 3, 2024 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

Members Present: Jenissa Arnette, Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Fang Gong and Parul Khemka

Members Absent: Jake Ferrans

Also in Attendance: Dr. Matthew Block, Thomas Lambe, Lisa Capone-Steiger, Susan Burman, Attorney Matthew Giacobbe and Joann Goldberg

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

Executive Session

Whereas, the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-11, permits the Board of Education to meet in closed session to discuss certain matters; now, therefore be it

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education adjourns to closed session to discuss:

- personnel and student matters

Action may be taken upon return to the public session. The full length of the meeting is anticipated to be approximately 30 minutes; and be it

Further Resolved, the minutes of this closed session be made public when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

Ms. Arnette seconded the motion.

Vote all in favor.

At 7:00 p.m. Mrs. Chirls reconvened the meeting. There were approximately 30 members of the public and staff watching in person and remotely through the webinar and a Facebook Live Stream.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Block congratulated the LHS Varsity Chess Team and Coach Peklo for winning the State Championship in chess for a second year in a row.

1. Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Mr. Scott Clelland and Mr. John Farina from PFK O'Connor Davies were present to review the results of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the year ending June 30, 2023.

Mr. Clelland explained the district has received an unmodified opinion on their financial statements and is in a good financial position with a fund balance in excess of 2% lower than in the prior year, a capital reserve of \$9,987,624 and emergency reserve of \$1,000,000. Mr. Clelland continued they saw no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies, that the district was in compliance on all Federal and State grants and that there were no findings in the 2023 audit that require corrective action because when Mr. Lambe came into the position and realized there were financial items that needed to be addressed, action was taken to find and make adjustments and corrections at that time.

When asked why the process took longer than in the past, Mr. Clelland explained it was the lack of consistency in having a full-time administrator for several months in the Business Office processing the financial records that caused them to have to go back, review, find and make the proper adjustments to correct the issues. This process took some time.

2. Budget Presentation Featuring Student Services and Facilities

Mr. Thomas Lambe, Business Administrator, began by explaining State Aid will increase in the 2024-2025 budget by \$1.04 million, which reduces our shortfall to about \$300,000 before prioritizing what needs to be added and removed so we can submit a balanced budget on March 19.

Mrs. Lisa Steiger, Assistant Superintendent, reviewed the counseling, nursing, intervention, student assistance counseling, equity and special education supports that currently exist in the district. For the 2024-2025 budget year, Mrs. Steiger would like to continue with what she is currently working with as well as have the funds to continue support in those areas that are no longer funded through ESSER grant money and anything related to IEPs.

Under Facilities, Mr. Lambe explained our goal with capital projects in the next budget cycle is to maintain buildings for a safe and efficient learning and working environment for our students and staff. Mr. Lambe continued that some capital projects will be funded by our capital reserve, which is outside of our operating budget, and that some projects will be 40% funded through ROD Grants.

Mrs. Chirls asked what would need to be included in this budget if we obtain ownership of the Monmouth Court Campus and Mr. Lambe responded we would need to hire one custodian because we currently share one with the Township.

Mr. James Perrette, Manager of Buildings and Grounds, reviewed the capital projects included in the budget for all of the schools as well as the ROD grant funding for our roof and boiler replacements.

When Mr. Perrette was asked which capital projects are priorities he responded that the roofs, parking lots and boilers are all important for the 2024-2025 budget cycle. Mr. Lambe confirmed that most of these items can be paid through our capital reserve.

Mr. Lambe also confirmed that we have some items that will be paid for out of school security grant funding.

Mrs. Chirls asked for a pie chart to show a visual representation of where the money is going.

Mrs. Chirls announced that on April 16, a public forum on the budget will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. to give the community another opportunity to come out and ask questions about the budget.

3. Budget Discussion

Mr. Cohen suggested the board provide direction to the district as to whether or not they agree on utilizing all of our banked cap.

Mrs. Chirls asked what the process is in prioritizing what the budget reductions might be in the event that they don't want to utilize all of the banked cap.

Mr. Lambe explained they constantly look internally at large expenditure lines to see if we can make a small or large reduction without putting the district at risk. In addition to this, he will look at the different departments with the administrative team to see if there are areas where we can possibly purchase items this year but not use them until next year and to see where there may be other areas to save.

The Board asked to see what reductions would be needed to offset each requested addition, the impact of using banked cap and/or expiring banked cap, the impact of tax levy for different amounts and the cost of adding programs previously funded through ESSER into the budget.

Mr. Lambe will bring this information to the March 11 meeting for additional discussion.

Board Reports

Mr. Cohen participated in Read Across America at Collins today and attended the MPE Equity Committee Meeting on Thursday night. Mr. Cohen gave kudos to the engaged staff and parents who were holding productive conversations on real ideas of how to advance things in their school.

Mrs. Khemka participated in Read Across America at Collins and Riker Hill.

Mrs. Khemka asked about adding her role as the Essex County Representative to the NJSBA Special Education Committee to the board's committee list.

Mrs. Khemka participated in NJSBA's training on understanding AI where they talked about a blueprint for administrators to develop policy and coursework about what AI would look like in education. Mrs. Khemka offered to share the information with her board colleagues and the administration.

Mrs. Gong participated in Read Across America at Collins and Riker Hill and is looking forward to reading at Burnet Hill. Prior to that she attended the winter music session at Burnet Hill, Collins third grade dancing cymbals and Lunar New Year celebrations at Hillside.

Mrs. Chirls participated in Read Across America at Collins and Riker Hill.

Mrs. Chirls read the statement that is attached to the minutes.

Student Representative's Report

There was no student representative's report.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

BUSINESS

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

3.1 Approval of Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education accepts the June 30, 2023 audit report.

3.2 Revised 2023-2024 Academic Calendar

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education approves the revised 2023-2024 academic calendar as shown on ***Attachment A***.

Mrs. Khemka seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Ms. Arnette, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Gong, Mrs. Khemka, Mrs. Chirls
Nayes - None

MISCELLANEOUS

Mrs. Khemka moved the following:

5.1 HIB Report

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education accepts the findings of HIB cases.

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Gong, Mrs. Khemka, Mrs. Chirls
Abstain - Ms. Arnette
Nayes - None

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

There was no new business.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:33 p.m., Mrs. Chirls announced the board will adjourn to Executive Session to discuss the superintendent's evaluation, no action will be taken and they will not be returning to public session.

Mrs. Khemka moved the following:

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Whereas, N.J.S.A. 10:4-1 et seq., also known as the "Sunshine Law," authorizes a public body to meet in executive or private session under certain limited circumstances, and

Whereas, said law requires the Board to adopt a resolution at a public hearing before it can meet in such an executive or private session, now, therefore, be it


Resolved, by the Livingston Board of Education that:

- (A) It does hereby determine that it is necessary to meet in executive session on March 4, 2024 to discuss the matters stipulated, in conformance with the subsections of said act which are indicated.
1. Matter rendered confidential by federal law, state statute or rule of court.
 2. Matter in which the release of information would impair a right to receive federal funds.
 3. Matter, the disclosure of which would constitute an unwarranted invasion of individual privacy unless the individual concerned shall request in writing that the same be disclosed publicly.
 4. Collective bargaining matters.
 5. Matter involving the purchase, lease or acquisition of real property with public funds, the setting of banking rates, etc. where it would adversely affect the public interest if discussion were disclosed.
 6. Tactics and techniques utilized in protecting public property where disclosure could impair protection.
 7. Investigation of violations or possible violations of law.
 8. Pending or anticipated litigation or contract negotiation other than collective bargaining agreement.
 9. Personnel matters unless the individual employees or appointees affected requested that such matter be discussed at a public meeting.
 10. Deliberations occurring after a public hearing that may result in the imposition of a specific civil penalty.
- (B) The matters discussed will be made public when confidentiality is no longer required and formal action pursuant to said discussion shall take place only at a meeting to which the public has been invited.
- (C) No action will be taken.

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

Vote all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas J. Lambe
Board Secretary

BOE President Statement

I have experienced Livingston Public Schools for many years as a dedicated parent of three Livingston High School graduates and an engaged volunteer in district, township, and temple activities. One thing I have always appreciated is how engaged our community members are, and this engagement is essential to supporting each of our students, “empowering all to learn, create, contribute, and grow.”

The October 7th attack by Hamas on Israel and the Israel-Hamas War that has followed are painful for so many members of our community. We are thinking of those whose family and friends have been directly affected in Israel and Gaza, and we are also thinking of those around the world and at home who have personally experienced the rise in both antisemitism and Islamophobia. In our own community, we are feeling the tensions that the war has prompted in Livingston Public Schools.

We have been listening to our community, working on issues we have already identified that need our attention. These are strategic priorities, like working on curriculum plans that are responsive to the needs of each student; helping to build the capacity of graduates to be real change makers and leaders in a 21st century that is increasingly diverse and global; and, creating a long-range facilities plan based on enrollment increases.

As difficult as last week’s Board meeting was, I want to acknowledge the progress in Livingston Public Schools we got to hear about as well. We heard the Livingston High School Class of 2023 Report on Graduates and the counseling department’s study of the college outcomes, the support they offer for students, and the developments in their program based on stakeholder input. We heard about the important budget priorities for Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology, and based on their careful study of student growth, the Math Department updated us on plans to roll out Math in Focus to sixth-grade students. We heard Dr. Block’s reflections on his trip to Israel, including his experience with Hand in Hand School, an institution that is “dedicated to the proposition that Israelis and Palestinians can learn and live together in peace.”

A respectful, meaningful dialogue among stakeholders is a critical ingredient to enabling a strong school community where students see themselves in their learning and discover their own academic success and personal growth. In collaboration, the Board’s Equity Committee and the District’s administrators, teachers, and staff are continuing to take stock of the Equity Audit, which was the culmination of the consultant’s collection and analysis of data.

While we address the pressing challenge of how best to combat antisemitism, Islamophobia, and hatred based on national origin or ethnicity in Livingston Public Schools, we need to talk honestly about practical ways to advance community, civility, and mutual respect in our schools; and find ways, person to person, to foster respectful, informed dialogue. We appreciate:

- Each professional who maintains our facilities so students can learn, supports our students in the classroom, and provides an environment that welcomes each student as they walk through our doors each morning.
- Each teacher who educates each student, by seeing who they are, understanding what they carry, and helping them grow as students and people, while they create a community in their classroom.
- Each administrator and supervisor, guiding curriculum design & instructional practice; managing facilities and grounds; and building a community of connection.
- Central office leaders who advocate, enact, and communicate a shared mission, vision, and core values of a high quality education that promotes each student's academic success and well-being.

In school, our goal should never be to teach children what to think, but how to think. Before the October 7th Survivors were introduced at last week's event, they met with the students and told them they only wanted to share their stories – not to tell them what to think. With support from educators who teach, nurture, and guide them, students will ask thoughtful questions, engage in respectful dialogue, and reach their own well-considered conclusions.

As we continue to navigate the experience of the Israel-Hamas War in the U.S., I hope we can do so with empathy and generosity, and hold that our common goal is to create an environment where all our students can learn safely. Let's trust that our kids have the skills to engage in conversation together with the support of their teachers. The war is bigger than our own community, but our community is also bigger than any one of us.