



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP/VOTING MEETING MINUTES

March 11, 2024

Executive Session - Administration Building - 6:15 p.m.

Public Session - Administration Building - 7:15 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 6:15 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, Parul Khemka and Jake Ferrans

Also in Attendance: Dr. Matthew Block, Thomas Lambe, Lisa Capone-Steiger, Mark Stern 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 60 minutes; and be it

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

Mrs. Gong seconded the motion.

Vote all in favor.

At 7:28 p.m. Mrs. Chirls reconvened the meeting. There were approximately 60 members of the public and staff watching in person and remotely through the webinar and a Facebook Live Stream.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Block offered his congratulations to the students and staff at the high school who were involved in putting on the production of *Cinderella* this past weekend.

1. Budget Discussion

Mr. Thomas Lambe, School Business Administrator, provided a budget presentation for the 2024-2025 school year. Mr. Lambe began with a review of the budget constraints as well as the ways we are able to balance the budget. Some 2024-2025 budget highlights include: all programs and staffing currently in place in the 2023-2024 school year, necessary technology upgrades, mandated math curriculum changes, impending changes in health benefits, 3.2% salary increases, as per agreements with the associations, a total of \$561,000 for an additional six (6) full-time employees from various departments for new programs and staffing and no increase to the debt service tax levy. Our budget also includes an increase of \$1.4 million in State Aid.

Mr. Lambe continued by explaining the district's revenue history and how over the past several years, revenues and expenditures increased at a higher rate than the tax levy and we used fund balance to bridge the gap. Mr. Lambe continued that reliance on fund balance is unpredictable and not sustainable so is calling to reduce it by \$2 million with the aim of bringing it back to the historical range of \$1 to \$1.3 million. This necessitates using banked cap to raise the local tax levy back to supporting above 90% of the revenue. A five year look back of our revenue history was shown.

Mr. Lambe provided pie charts to show where the money is appropriated, reviewed the non mandated programs that the district offers and explained enrollment waivers, banked cap and the tax impact. Mr. Lambe provided five different tax increase scenarios to the board using the enrollment waiver and all, some or none of the banked cap. A full explanation of each scenario is available to view in the presentation, which is available on our website.

Mr. Lambe and the administrative team are recommending scenario 1, which uses the enrollment waiver and most of the banked cap to balance the 2024-2025 budget. The tax increase on an average home of \$721,238 would be approximately \$558. He continued that if we approve a tax levy increase lower than what is being recommended, it would make the 2025-2026 budget year even more difficult.

Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 school year budget, Mr. Lambe explained there may still be a shortfall of several million dollars and a special budget question for the voters in the November 2025 ballot, for specific programs for that school year, would be a consideration.

Mrs. Chirls asked what the administration is recommending be put in place so we are not in the position of being in a budget shortfall next year and/or going out for a second question.

Mr. Lambe responded we are reevaluating operations of how we do things; however, he doesn't want to prioritize programs or departments when you have a potential shortfall that is that large and have to be open minded to look at everything and anything. When reevaluating operations, he would consider shopping health benefits again, shopping property casualty insurance, revising transportation routes and possibly cutting staff.

The Board agreed with prioritizing student facing programs, activities and services.

Mrs. Chirls continued that going forward to 2025-2026, we need to start thinking about what they could do now to minimize that financial impact.

Mr. Cohen suggested looking at opportunities to outsource full time staff to contracted staff, where feasible; thinking openly and honestly about salaries and benefits; getting creative with filling vacating positions; looking at positions on extended leave; changing the student and staff device replacement cycle from three to five years and delaying the 1:1 program to being in grade 1 or later.

Other suggestions were to look at the professional development and curriculum writing cycles, the timing of when we make purchases of materials, being aggressive in seeking grants, finding opportunities to bring in additional revenue to offset our costs, looking for more competitive rates for investing our capital reserves, performing an analysis on stipends to see what are not being used and continuing to explore keeping out-of-district placements in house. It was also suggested we grow our educational foundation and seek community support through the PTAs and HSAs.

Ms. Arnette suggested speaking to the teachers to see how they feel about the amount of technology they are using in kindergarten and grade 1.

The Board agreed with adding an additional meeting on Monday, March 18, to continue these discussions.

The Board also agreed to hold a Finance and Facilities Committee Meeting on Thursday, March 14, prior to the Monday meeting. All board members should send their budget questions to Mr. Cohen and Mrs. Chirls in advance of the meeting.

Dr. Block congratulated Dan Kapuscinski, who runs the technology at our board meetings, on being the technology support staff member of the year.

Board Reports

Mrs. Khemka, Mrs. Chirls and Mrs. Gong all attended the high school production of *Cinderella*.

Mrs. Khemka and Mrs. Chirls attended the NJSBA Legislative Committee meeting where they discussed school funding formulas and funding special education. Mrs. Chirls focused on mental health support since ESSER funds are going away. This important programming is still necessary in many districts even though the State funding won't be available so those discussions will continue.

Mrs. Khemka announced the HMS girl's volleyball team came in first and the HMS boy's volleyball team came in second.

Mrs. Khemka wished everyone who is celebrating Ramadan a happy and easy fast. Mrs. Khemka and fellow board members will be attending a community dinner on March 14th.

Mrs. Khemka participated in Read Across America at Burnet Hill.

Mrs. Cohen participated in Read Across America at Burnet Hill.

Mrs. Gong received a beautiful thank you from students in the class where she read.

Student Representative's Report

Mr. Ferrans stated that students at the high school and middle school can be a great tool for feedback on the technology that they use or don't use in school.

Mr. Ferrans congratulated students and staff involved in the production of *Cinderella*, which sold out two nights. Mr. Ferrans added that they opened up their dress rehearsal to senior citizens. Mr. Ferrans followed up that the SGA sponsored students vs. staff volleyball game was a great success.

Mr. Ferrans offered congratulations to one of his fellow DECA members on being the first person to get into a statewide office in the history of their chapter.

Public Comment

Eric Littman, asked for rationale in revising this school year calendar to make April 5 and April 8 half days. With respect to the budget, Mr. Littman offered that cutting salaries and benefits are the only ways to find meaningful savings in a budget.

A parent thanked the board for organizing the Israel event, requested there be an approval process for resources used by students and asked if the title Teacher of the Deaf can be updated to Teacher of the Hearing Impaired. The parent also stated she agrees with not providing devices to students in kindergarten and first grade as an area to save money.

Harsh Raju, asked if we are looking to replace the director position that is on the agenda as a resignation tonight as a way to save money in the budget.

Jonathan Zipkin, agrees with changing the name Teacher of the Deaf to Teacher of the Hearing Impaired, requested we show what the total budget divided by the total number of students is each year, and asked what the concrete deliverables are that will happen in the schools as a result of a tax increase.

Pam Tepper, thanked Mr. Patteson and Mr. Megaro for making it possible for her son to visit the lighting department and stage after he attended the production of *Cinderella*.

Maria Lijola, expressed concern for students who had to make the choice to sacrifice their academics and mental health while participating in the many practices for *Cinderella*.

Anna Kim, thanked whomever made the call to provide the opportunity for children with sensory challenges to be invited to *Cinderella*. Mrs. Kim asked if Mrs. Steiger could share our current inclusion rate and what it would need to be to make us eligible for the Coalition Grant. Mrs. Kim asked for an update on follow up to the equity audit.

Hakyun Lee, expressed dissatisfaction over the slow process for HIB investigations.

Dr. Block responded he understands the frustration with having a couple of half days added to the calendar and that we hope to make the hours students attend as meaningful as possible.

Dr. Block explained we do have a process for approving resources for students but occasionally a teacher may bring something in on their own. If a parent feels a teacher is using a resource that is problematic, they can reach out to the teacher.

Dr. Block stated we can advocate to the State to officially change the title to Teacher of the Hearing Impaired and that we will begin to use that terminology in the district.

Dr. Block responded that the open special education director position is a key position that we will look to fill with the most talented person.

Dr. Block added he appreciates the comments on the budget and that we will work to provide more information next week on the great features that are included.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

PERSONNEL

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

4.1 Resignations & Retirements

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education accepts the resignations of:

Name	Position	Reason	Location	Last Day of Employment
<i>Shanté Middleton</i>	Director of Secondary Special Education	Resignation	CO	April 26, 2024
<i>Jalissa Sbarro</i>	Administrative Assistant	Resignation	CO	May 3, 2024
<i>Leslie Paris</i>	Bus Aide	Retirement	Transportation	June 30, 2024
<i>Kirstie Medina</i>	ABA Discrete Trial TA	Resignation	BHE	March 26, 2024

**as amended from a previous agenda*

Mrs. Khemka seconded the motion.

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

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

5.1 HIB Report

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

Mrs. Khemka seconded the motion.

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

PREVIEW OF MARCH 19, 2024 AGENDA

The Board reviewed the upcoming items. No questions were asked.

Superintendent's Report

1. Budget Discussion

Approval of Minutes

1. Voting/Workshop Meeting Minutes of February 6, 2024
2. Public Portion of Executive Session Meeting Minutes of February 26, 2024
3. Voting Meeting Minutes of February 27, 2024
4. Workshop/Voting Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2024
5. Executive Session Meeting Minutes of December 11, 2023; December 12, 2023; January 3, 2024; January 11, 2024; January 16, 2024; January 18, 2024; January 29, 2024; January 30, 2024; February 6, 2024; February 26, 2024; February 27, 2024 and March 4, 2024

PROGRAM/CURRICULUM

- 1.1 **Textbooks/DVDs**
- 1.2 **Student Teachers**
- 1.3 **Field Trips**

STUDENT SERVICES

- 2.1 **Out of District Placements**

BUSINESS

- 3.1 **Adoption of the Tentative Budget for School Year 2024-2025**
- 3.2 **Payment of Bills**
- 3.3 **Board Secretary Report – January 2024**
- 3.4 **Transfers (Attachment E)**
- 3.5 **Conferences and Overnight Trips**
- 3.6 **Settlement Agreement**
- 3.7 **Bylaws, Policies & Regulations**

PERSONNEL

- 4.1 **Leaves of Absences**
- 4.2 **Appointments**
- 4.3 **Substitutes**
- 4.4 **Stipends**
- 4.5 **Extra Period Assignments**
- 4.6 **Mentor Fees**
- 4.7 **Curriculum Writing**
- 4.8 **Job Description**
- 4.9 **Summer Work**

Old Business / New Business

There was no old or new business.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:15 p.m., Mr. Cohen made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Khemka seconded the motion.

Vote all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas J. Lambe
Board Secretary