



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION VOTING MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Public Session - Virtual Meeting Via Zoom and Facebook Live – 7:00 p.m.

A **Voting Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education was held on this date in the large conference room in the Administration Building and via Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by the Board President, Samantha Messer, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 4, 2021 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: Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Vineeta Khanna, Ronnie Konner, Samantha Messer and Ethan Hirsch

Also in Attendance: Dr. Matthew Block, Steven Robinson, Lisa Capone-Steiger, Mark Stern, Susan Burman and Joann Goldberg

There were approximately 65 members of the public and staff watching remotely through the webinar and a Facebook Live Stream.

Ms. Messer asked for a moment of silence to recognize the losses our community has experienced over this past summer.

Public Input on Agenda Items ~ up to 15 minutes

James Calderon, 130 Hobart Gap Road, requested the board vote to increase to nine members to show they are leading by example and are interested in adding diversity, transparency and inclusivity to the board.

Mike Ramer, 22 Mohawk Drive, asked if each board member could let the community know their individual decision about allowing a public vote on increasing the size of the board and to provide their reasoning.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

BUSINESS

3.1 Resolution to Add Question Regarding Board Size

Mr. Cohen moved the following:

3.1a Resolved, upon the recommendation of the Livingston Board of Education to not place a resolution on the November 2021 ballot and to keep the number of school board members at five.

Mrs. Konner seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer
Nayes - Mrs. Khanna

Mrs. Chirls cast a yes vote for a few reasons. The first is because she spoke to a former superintendent of two high performing districts who said there was no correlation between board size and student achievement. The second is that before expanding by four additional board members in a 2020 election, this board should engage in self-assessment work while remaining open to the idea of expanding at a later date if it makes sense from an operational perspective and the third is that they are in the process of developing a strategic plan that will move the district forward.

Mr. Cohen cast a yes vote after assessing our own governance and looking at how the board can improve or change. When speaking to another district about increasing their size, he was told if the issues you identify don't warrant a change, then stay the size you are. Mr. Cohen also expressed that a larger board doesn't necessarily mean less work for everyone.

Mrs. Khanna cast a no vote because that is the platform she ran on and wants to stay true to her word to the community; however, after sitting and participating on this board, she sees that the five members are working effectively together and engage in healthy and knowledgeable discussions. Mrs. Khanna also noted there were no new candidates running for the two open seats this year.

Mrs. Konner cast a yes vote because at this time, she doesn't believe it is in the best interest of the district to increase their size. Mrs. Konner expressed that working as a board of the whole allows them to be more transparent as all decisions made are discussed at the table and not behind closed doors in committee meetings, each member has an equal voice and responsibility and receives the same information. Mrs. Konner also was not in favor of electing a majority of a larger board in one year.

Ms. Messer cast a yes vote because one of their goals is to be as transparent as possible with the community and a larger board would decrease that transparency as more work would take place in committee meetings, not at the table. Ms. Messer continued she feels like she would be abdicating the responsibility the community placed in her by not taking part in all board discussions. Ms. Messer also saw a lack of interest in people running for the board this year.

Mrs. Konner moved the following:

3.2 Bylaws, Policies & Regulations

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education abolishes the following policies:

Policy #1648 - Restart & Recovery Plan (M)

Policy #1648.02 - Remote Learning Options for Families (M)

Policy #1648.03 - Restart & Recovery Plan - Full-Time Remote Instruction (M)

Resolved, that the Livingston Board of Education suspends Bylaw #0131 for this meeting and adopts the following policies in one reading:

Policy #1648.11 - The Road Forward COVID-19 – Health and Safety (M)

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

Mrs. Chirls asked if they can hear more about the protocols that supplement the policy at the next board meeting.

Mrs. Konner asked how we handle changes that occur if we are abolishing the policies and Dr. Block responded we will still pivot as new guidance comes out or if the state of the pandemic changes. Dr. Block added Policy #1648 is linked to the Road Back while Policy #1648.11 links to the Road Forward.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer
Nayes - None

MISCELLANEOUS

Resolution 5.1 was pulled from the agenda as there was no HIB Report to approve.

Public Comment ~ up to 15 minutes

Mike Ramer, 22 Mohawk Drive, expressed disappointment in the board's vote not to allow the community a chance to vote on increasing the board size.

Brian Bradley, 46 Ashwood Drive, stated we should no longer have remote board meetings but should all be in person to discuss the issues and doesn't agree with the mask mandate for students.

Ms. Messer responded we are going to have in person meetings and are currently working with our attorney to ensure our policies allow us to accommodate everyone who wants to attend an in-person meeting while also maintaining social distancing.

James Calderon, 130 Hobart Gap Road, thanked Mrs. Khanna for keeping her word and others for doing the research. Mr. Calderon expressed that we should offer a choice of hybrid learning since the COVID numbers are superseding those from 2020 and there is a large increase in the number of children getting sick.

Michele Cohen, 15 Woodland Terrace, stated there need to be more areas at the high school open to accommodate all the students eating lunch inside on inclement weather days.

Namrata Agarwal, 13 Norman Court, expressed the growing COVID numbers in New Jersey are a big concern for many parents and asked the board to take a leadership role in asking the Governor to allow a remote option this school year.

Parul Khemka, 70 Elmwood Drive, asked with many people traveling over the long weekend, what the plan is if a student has to quarantine and there is no more remote option. Mrs. Khema also asked what type of mask students should wear and if desks can be put under tents for outdoor classroom instruction.

Dr. Block responded that The Road Forward provides for limited cases where a remote option will be available for students who are quarantined by the district and that physicians recommend wearing cloth masks. Dr. Block added we will be utilizing the tents as much as possible.

In response to the lunch comment, Dr. Block responded that the high school will be opening more spaces around the building for students to eat lunch.

Old Business

Mrs. Chirls expressed concern about class size numbers approaching 30 in Algebra 1 in Grade 8 and in Algebra 2 Honors.

Dr. Block responded he will look into the numbers and get back to her.

Mrs. Konner asked if those classes are being held in larger spaces to encourage social distancing.

Dr. Block responded the principals are putting them in larger spaces when available.

Mrs. Khanna asked if there is a screening process in place for Tuesday after Labor Day and Dr. Block responded we don't have a screening process but do have on-site testing available and encourage all to use it. Dr. Block added we are recommending folks who travel follow the CDC guidelines. Vaccinated students and staff do not need to quarantine except if they are symptomatic or have a positive test.

New Business

There was no new business.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:07 p.m., Mr. Cohen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mrs. Chirls seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer
Nays - None

Respectfully submitted,

Steven K. Robinson
Board Secretary