

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING WITH BUDGET PRESENTATION

Virtual via Zoom:

<https://zoom.us/j/92738802509?pwd=SFFoc3BtM3UzL2lqQ11KZ211Uk1Edz09>

Meeting ID: 927 3880 2509

Passcode: 06612

January 12, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Stinson, Goldstein, Chieda, Hicks, Parker, Wible

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Zachery, Del Conte

Others: 84 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary

CALL TO ORDER

J. Stinson called the Easton Board of Education Regular Meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of the December 2, 2020 Special meeting as submitted. (Hicks, Goldstein). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of the December 8, 2020 Regular meeting as submitted. (Parker, Hicks). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of the December 16, 2020 Special meeting as submitted. (Parker, Chieda). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lise Fleurette, Beers Road, thanked the BOE for the work they are doing and thanked Dr. Harrison for his courage to speak out. She said not to get distracted from the good work that he's doing.

Julianne Licamele, Wells Hill Road, said that as an Easton and JBHS alum, she is proud to see the way Dr. Harrison responded to the incident in Washington, D.C.

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, thanked Dr. Harrison, and said that she is happy and proud to have seen the letter he wrote. She also said that she is interested to hear that the District is proceeding with all-in schooling as it seems a little premature to her, but that she looks forward to hearing from the administration. She is hoping protocols are adjusted so that entire grades are not quarantining unnecessarily.

Hilary Desmond, North Park Avenue, thanked Dr. Harrison for the letter he sent out following the events of last Wednesday, especially his addressing the appearance of the Confederate flag.



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Robin Abramowicz, Morehouse Road, said that she feels we need to be more mindful of the numbers; she said in-school transmission is not a big issue, it's an issue, but not a big one. She said that we need to think ahead and think outside the box for different strategies, and hoped quarantining of whole grades will be reduced. She also thanked everyone for their work.

Jazmin Jinnah, Algonquin Road, thanked Dr. Harrison for his letter that he put out. She also thanked him for denouncing white supremacy and anti-Semitism, and for encouraging our teachers.

Roshanak Ghavami, Stones Hill Road, thanked Dr. Harrison for his letter and said that she is thankful to live in a town where teachers are directed to address issues like this. She also thanked Dr. Harrison for his leadership.

Nikki Kaldawy, Staples Road, thanked Dr. Harrison, and said that she appreciates him sending the letter and articles. She said that she'd like to see masks at recess, and that she would like to form a community panel to help educate people about COVID issues as they relate to keeping schools open and with contact tracing.

Deirdra Preis, Cedar Hill Road, said that she thinks it's important to share feelings about what happened last Wednesday, and that students are looking to adults and educators for answers. She said that she commends Dr. Harrison for leading us and supports teachers' ability to address it.

Suzanne Chiaramonte, Virginia Drive questioned the decision to go all-in given our dashboard numbers. She stated that the back and forth between models is the most detrimental.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Parker said that he's heard some say the event of last Wednesday shows how fragile our democracy is, but that he disagrees. He said that the event proves how strong and resilient our democracy is.

D. Wible thanked Dr. Harrison, and shared an anecdote about her first day of teaching on 9/11 when she spent that day listening to the frightened students. She said that she is thankful that we have a team that puts the social and emotional concerns of our students first, and is grateful that she has you for her kids and her community.

J. Stinson suggested that the Agenda be changed to have the Assistant Superintendent's report take place after the Superintendent's report. There were no comments or objections to this suggestion.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Rydell Harrison, thanked the public for their comments and said that he will maintain his focus on the students, not himself. He said that there is consistent care for our students, especially their social and emotional needs, and he has a huge thank you to teachers for this. Dr. Harrison said that within the district's different learning models, a great deal has been learned about this virus, including in-school spread and mitigation strategies. He said that the plan is to continue to look at the CDC data and guideposts and to work with our community health directors. R. Hicks asked about the numbers on the district's COVID-19 Dashboard; Dr. Harrison replied with clarification on the numbers.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Stephanie Pierson Ugol, said that she was following up from a discussion at the last Easton BOE meeting about Easton student benchmarks. She presented a chart of results from student assessments, but added that not all students had been assessed at this point in time. Dr. Pierson Ugol explained the different assessments used and how they differed slightly from previous years. A conversation followed about the rigor of the different assessments, the percentage of students who had been assessed so far and when the assessments will be completed.

Director of Finance & Operations, Clarence Zachery, reported that the Budget Object Summary is progressing as he expected at this point in time. He said that this would be the last Phoenix-generated report as the financials have been completely switched over to the E-Finance Plus system. J. Parker asked about any transportation funds that were not being used. C. Zachery replied that he is in negotiations with the bus company. C. Zachery also said that it is noteworthy that the health insurance claims jumped from \$188K in November 2020 to \$318K in December 2020.

Director of Special Services, Jennifer Del Conte, reported that this is the time when her department starts talking about and planning for transitions, especially the transitions to new school buildings. She also said that the preschool lottery will most likely occur in late January.

Samuel Staples Elementary School Principal, Kimberly Fox Santora, reported that there are eight new students since the last BOE meeting and an additional new student starting school on January 20. She said that one section of 4th grade will be moved to a large unused art room to accommodate the 23 students in that class. K. Fox Santora said that the number of students choosing to learn completely from home has risen slightly from 58 to 71 students and that she would give the BOE a breakdown of the grades of these students. She also said that they are currently seeking to hire a PT math paraprofessional, substitutes and lunch/recess monitors.

Helen Keller Middle School Principal, Susan Kaplan, reported that it was wonderful to see the students back in the building last week, and that year-to-date, there are 27 new students. She thanked the parents who are keeping their children home and reporting illness and quarantine, saying that it is very helpful. S. Kaplan said that the number of students choosing to learn completely from home has risen slightly, from 22 to 48 students, across all three grades, and that this number amounts to 15% of the student body. She thanked Tim Sather and Annie Mohr for their presentation and said that this presentation is now on the school website.

Board Committee Reports:

Curriculum Committee member Gretchen Goldstein explained that the current K-5 math curriculum, "Math in Focus," in its current form is expiring, and so a new curriculum needs to be selected. She reported that district math specialists first reviewed 12 resources, then narrowed it down to three and then interviewed representatives from these three resources. G. Goldstein said that the final choice from the math specialists is called "enVision" and that the Curriculum Committee voted to approve this selection. She said that it's a student-centered, digital platform with printable consumables and paper resources; Dr. Pierson Ugol clarified that parents will not need to print out the resources.

Policy Committee Member, J. Stinson reported that they continue to meet on most Friday mornings and that they have been working through the "3000 Series" of policy. He said that they have come across a number of items dealing with transportation and goods and services, and that they feel it is best to engage

with those subcommittees on these issues. J. Stinson said that at the upcoming Tri-Board Meeting, the Committee will have more on which to report.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: K-5 MATH TEXTBOOK RECOMMENDATION

Dr. Pierson Ugol reported that the Easton and Redding Curriculum Committees had met and, after considerable discussion, had voted to approve the selection of a new K-5 math curriculum called, "enVision." She said that her report tonight was for notification purposes, and that the BOE will need to act on this notification at a future date. A brief discussion followed about the cost and time commitment of enVision; Dr. Pierson Ugol replied that the terms are still being finalized.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: APPROVAL OF CHANGE IN AUTHORIZED SIGNER FOR ED-099 AGREEMENT FOR CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR CLARENCE ZACHERY

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the change in authorized signer for ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Program for Clarence Zachery. (Hicks, Parker). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: BUDGET PRESENTATION: PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Dr. Harrison first reminded everyone of the 2021-2022 budget process and said that at the December meeting, the contract and health care category was presented. He said that tonight's presentation will be about projects and programs, including the three areas of: 1) School & District Goals: specific goals for 2021-2022, three-year strategic goals, professional development, curriculum development and programming; 2) Enrollment Projections; and, 3) Special Education & Junior Bridges. Dr. Harrison said at the budget workshop meeting on January 21, the details of the budget will be discussed; he said BOE members have the option of choosing an email or a hardcopy version of the budget. Dr. Harrison said that he thinks it is helpful to start a budget process with a theory of action, with the district's being "if we employ responsible financial practices to develop transparent budgets, then we will gain and increase the support of taxpayers to continue to offer valuable learning experiences and programs to our students." He said this helps with the transparency process and keeps our students at the center of the process.

Dr. Pierson Ugol then reported that the ER9 Technology Advisory Committee had considered how to stay true to the ABC goals of the Tri-District, as well as the process of learning, when deciding upon long-term technology goals for students, teachers, coaches and educational leaders. She said the Committee determined that, systemically, there are some pieces missing in order to achieve these goals and that there is a need to enhance leadership in the area of technology. Dr. Harrison added that the new position of an ER9 Director of Digital Learning & Technology and the restored position of Library/Media Specialist at HKMS will enable the District to work toward and achieve the technology goals.

Dr. Harrison said that within the area of Professional Development & Curriculum Development, they are proposing: K-5 new math program with PD at SSES; 6-8 math curriculum development at HKMS; K-8 DEI curriculum development with PD at SSES and HKMS; and, K-8 digital learning with technology PD at SSES and HKMS. He reiterated that the details of these programs and budget implications will be discussed at the upcoming budget workshop meeting.

Dr. Harrison reviewed the enrollment projections as provided by Dr. Prowda, but said he and K. Fox Santora were not confident in the kindergarten projection, saying that they thought it was too high. He

said that the 4th grade projection was enough to recommend an additional 4th grade teacher and the restored position of a .5 FTE paraprofessional for physical education. Dr. Harrison added that, currently, there is much volatility in enrollment numbers. C. Zachery said that he has found Prowda projections to be not as reliable as other sources, and accordingly, he had spoken to another enrollment projection firm about contracting with ER9. BOE members agreed that he should pursue negotiations with this firm.

In terms of the Special Education Department, Dr. Harrison said that changes include: shifting a 1 FTE behavioral therapist from SSES to HKMS, and an increase from .5 to 1 FTE for the HKMS social worker. In closing, Dr. Harrison shared a breakdown of the overall 2021-2022 budget as: salaries at 61.57%; benefits at 15.84%; transportation at 5.8%; central office at 3.78%; professional services at 3.24%; supplies & equipment at 2.66%; purchased services at 2.66%; property services at 2.24%; utilities at 2.06%; and, dues & fees at .15%.

Before Public Comment began, J. Stinson said that throughout the meeting there had been a series of attempts to disrupt from a number of sources, which seemed to be concentrated on five individuals. He said that these individuals had either left on their own or had been removed from the meeting. J. Stinson said that they were going to be careful during Public Comment to make sure that we're actually hearing from members of the community, and that we're having a civil conversation. He also asked that people use real, recognizable names.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Stephen Costantino, Morehouse Road, said that he thinks that trivializing other people's points of view is part of the problem. In regard to the communication that Dr. Harrison sent out last week about the riot enacted upon the nation's Capitol building, he said that he expects that from him as a leader in our community. S. Costantino also said that Dr. Harrison owes the community an apology for his inflammatory post.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Chieda said that she wanted to express her appreciation to the teachers for their having to, and ability to, shift in the learning models.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education Regular meeting be adjourned. (Parker, Hicks).
Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 p.m.

Submitted by Gretchen Goldstein
Secretary, Easton Board of Education

Recorded by
Sarah Ota