

CLOSTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Closter, New Jersey

MINUTES

WORK SESSION MEETING

Tenakill Middle School

March 11, 2021 - 7:30 PM

The Board meeting was called to order by Ms. Finkelstein at 7:31 PM

The following Board members were present:

Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms. Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Ms. Puttannah, Ms. Cross, Ms. Finkelstein

The following Board members were absent:

None

Also present:

Mr. McHale and Mr. Villanueva

NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT - Read by the President:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meeting of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, the Secretary to the Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting by having the date, time, remote access information, and place thereof, posted at each school building within the district, district website, the Board of Education office, the Office of the Borough Clerk, and transmitted to *The Record* and *Northern Valley Suburbanite* newspapers.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Mr. McHale shared with the Board and the community his report:

- *It was one year ago that the Bergen County Executive, James Tedesco, announced that Bergen County Schools would pivot to a fully virtual model for two weeks due to COVID-19. He didn't think that one year later we would still be living in a pandemic. He asked for a moment of silence to remember the 2.62 million lives lost worldwide to COVID-19. Thankfully, there have been 66.9 million people who have recovered from the virus. With the news of vaccinations being more widely available, there is light at the end of the tunnel and he looks forward to the day this pandemic is behind us.*
- *He shared some good news about four of our middle school students. Dhyan Sankar, Jiyun Park, Laura Liu, and Sophie Chen qualified for the chapter invitational round of MathCounts, which took place on February 25, 2021. MathCounts is a competition with four levels of official competition-chapter, chapter invitational, state and national. At the chapter invitational, Dhyan Sankar qualified for the state level competition on March 25, 2021. We are so proud of our students and offer our congratulations! Best wishes to Dhyan at the state level!*

- *Our District Diversity Council met on Thursday, March 4, 2021. The 20 members of the council, including four middle school students, began to identify important issues related to diversity and equity within the district and to identify an action plan for addressing issues. The council worked on identifying what we do exceptionally well to support diversity and inclusion and what we could do better to support it. The council will meet again on Thursday, March 18, 2021, to continue their work by identifying opportunities and resources we should consider that may be helpful to our diversity and inclusion work as well as roadblocks that could prevent our progress. The council will create sub-committees that will continue this work into next school year, and beyond, as this will be an ongoing process.*
- *Our administrators and parent committees have been working on planning our Fourth Grade Moving Up and Eighth Grade graduation ceremonies and events. We are planning for the ceremonies to take place outdoors, with a limited number of tickets for family members to attend. We want these events to take place in person, since they are significant events in our students' lives. As the plans become more finalized, we will share that information with parents.*
- *Parents have chosen their children's learning model for the third trimester. There were about 50 students who will make changes between hybrid and fully virtual learning. The Board and the administration are aware that parents of hybrid students want them to be in school five days. We are profoundly aware that this is a difficult situation. However, we are not going to move to increase the number of students in a classroom if we don't believe that is in the best interest of the health and safety of our students and staff. The Mid-Bergen Health Department directs six feet of social distance in the classroom, and that is stated in our district plan. Please know that we are working daily to move our district to a full opening and we understand and share your frustration with not having hybrid students in school every day. This isn't the way we want to deliver instruction and we want the same thing as parents. It would be best if we could make this happen with your cooperation and not by having an adversarial situation. Your cooperation and understanding will allow us the time to work on making it happen. I would like to share some of the work we are currently doing ahead of any changes in the COVID-19 case rate or the reduction of the six-foot social distance requirement:*
 - *We have been determining ways to have elementary hybrid students attend school three days every week, as one way to increase their in-school learning time. This still needs input from teachers but we want to ensure that hybrid students would still have their same teacher.*
 - *We are working on a solution to have all middle school students have core subjects every day.*
 - *He has been communicating with Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi's chief of staff to urge the New Jersey Department of Health and the New Jersey Department of Education to provide clearer guidance about expanding school openings. He also reached out to other state legislators, but have not yet received a response.*
 - *We have arranged onsite vaccinations for our faculty, staff and administrators. In addition, the Bergen County Executive arranged for eight employees from our district to be vaccinated this weekend and we are working with Englewood Health to arrange vaccination appointments, as well. This will be helpful in having a full return of staff for September 2021.*
- *If you are interested in the variables at play in our decision making, please visit the Superintendent Report from February 25, 2021, which can be accessed via the main page of the Closter Schools website, in a banner on the right-hand side entitled, Superintendent's Report – February 25, 2021.*
- *In the many letters we have received in the past weeks, parents are informing us that other*

school districts are being more aggressive in increasing to five days of in-person learning. He has spoken with those district's administrators. They are certainly increasing the amount of time in school, but it is not entirely in the classroom with the teacher. On some days, students will be in a different classroom watching a live stream of the teacher. He would rather have our work focus on increasing facetime with the teacher and we are doing that since we now know how many people have chosen hybrid learning for the third trimester.

- *Once the third trimester is underway, we will begin planning for the opening of school in September 2021. As we plan, we will reconvene our Reopening Committee to determine how best to welcome back all students. Our goal is to be back to the more customary model of delivering instruction in classrooms. However, we will still prepare a plan B for any scenarios that would prevent a full return to school.*
- *Lastly, he wants to remind our whole community to work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In the NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Activity Level reports for the last three weeks, the Northeast region has shown an increase in case rates. Further, our Closter case numbers have increased dramatically in two weeks. As of our last board meeting, there were a cumulative total of 480 cases in Closter. As of Tuesday, March 9, 2021, there were 31 more cases bringing the total to 511. These 31 cases included students in our district, which prompted an eighth grade quarantine. Please remember, wear a mask, practice social distancing, wash or sanitize hands, and avoid large group gatherings. We have 66 days left of school and if we can avoid quarantine during that time, it would be best for all!*

SY 2021-2022 Preliminary Budget Presentation

Mr. Villanueva, School Business Administrator provided a presentation of the SY 2021-2022 preliminary budget as recommended by the Finance Committee.

- *The current expense and capital outlay budget is \$23,374,754*
- *The tax levy to support the current expense is \$21,041,740 represents an increase of 2.56%*
- *The budget includes the use of a banked cap in the amount of \$114,119.*
- *The preliminary budget maintains all staffing and programs, shared services and a slight increase on budgeted Special Education out of district placement.*
- *Various capital projects are identified and included in this budget.*
- *Health benefits are increased by 11% for the second half of the year, dental premiums at 0% increase and general insurance increased by 12%*
- *All other areas of the budget remain at current levels of funding.*

The budget is submitted to the County for review and approval prior to advertising. The public hearing and adoption of the SY 21-22 budget is scheduled for the April 29, 2021 meeting.

Mr. Villanueva thanked the Board's Finance Committee, Mr. McHale, Administrators and Supervisors for their work.

Ms. Finkelstein thanked Mr. Villanueva and the staff for their hard work and diligence. She also thanked them for finding grants that will help our students and our community.

Ms. Finkelstein also thanked Mr. McHale for sharing positive developments within our community. She stated that we are proud of our students and thanked everyone who is participating with the Diversity Committee and advancing our efforts. The Board continues to hear from the community and want to thank them for the input. The Board receives all ideas, information and feedback with an open mind

and reviews with the Administrators as well as a network of others to investigate how we can improve our education model in various ways. The Board echos and supports Mr. McHale and the Administrators efforts in advancing the causes for our schools.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON AGENDA ITEMS

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Bhagat to open the meeting to the public.

Statements made by individual participants are limited to a duration of three (3) minutes unless otherwise announced at the beginning of the discussion. A maximum of 15 minutes for public input is scheduled as per policy 1120. The Board urges large groups to select one person to represent them. The Board reminds those individuals who take the opportunity to speak to please step up, identify themselves by name and address, and to limit their comments to items listed on the agenda.

No Public Comments

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Bhagat to resume the regular order of business.

BOARD OPERATIONS

Moved by Ms. Lee, seconded by Ms. Bhagat to approve Motion A.

Motion was approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms. Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Cross,
Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

A. APPROVAL - Minutes

Motion to approve the February 25, 2021 minutes.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

Chairperson Ms. Lee, Ms. Cross, Dr. Puttannah

Moved by Ms. Kwon seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motion A.

Motion was approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms. Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Cross,
Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

A. APPROVAL - Field Trips

Motion to approve the following **virtual** field trip:

School: Hillside Elementary

Group: Mrs. Kennedy's 2nd Grade Class
 Month: March 2021
 Destination: Challenge Island via Zoom
 Location: Classroom

FINANCE AND PHYSICAL PLANT COMMITTEE

Chairperson Ms. Kwon, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Kothari

Ms. Finkelstein asked what was being renovated in the fourth grade wing. Mr. Villanueva informed the board it will be a full renovation of all the rooms. Mr. McHale also added this will be the last section of the building which will be renovated as the other sections were renovated over in previous years.

Moved by Ms. Kwon, seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motions A - J.

Motions were approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms. Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Cross, Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

A. APPROVAL - Monthly Bills

Motion to approve payment of bills from February 26, 2021 to March 11, 2021 in the amount of:

General Fund (Fund 10)	\$562,781.45
Special Revenue (Fund 20)	\$ 2,380.00
Total	\$565,161.45

B. APPROVAL – Related Services Contract

Motion to approve contracts with the State of New Jersey, Department of Human Services, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired for students #361002, #9597653741 and #1595602128 in accordance with their IEPs, in the amount of \$5,066.00 for the 2020-2021 school year.

C. APPROVAL - Purchase of 25 MacBook Air

Motion to approve the purchase of 25 MacBook Air from Apple in the amount of \$33,694.75 through the Ed Services Commission of NJ 18/19-67 - Apple Contract #1062153. These devices are replacements for HES STEM Lab.

D. APPROVAL - Purchase of 25 Promethean Boards

Motion to approve the purchase of 25 Promethean Boards from Keyboard Consultants in the amount of \$132,610 through the Educational Data Services (EDS) Bid #10437 MSRP Tech/AV/Computer/Interactive Whiteboards.

E. **APPROVAL OF THE PRELIMINARY BUDGET FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR**
 BE IT RESOLVED, that the Closter Board of Education, County of Bergen, approves the preliminary 2021-2022 school year budget as follows:

	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Local Tax Levy</i>
General Current Expense (Fund 11)	\$ 22,823,813	\$ 21,041,740
Capital Outlay (Fund 12)	\$ 550,941	
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	\$ 23,374,754	\$ 21,041,740
Special Revenue Fund (Fund 20)	\$ 278,091	\$ 0
Debt Service Fund (Fund 40)	\$ 289,035	\$ 289,035
Total Base Budget	\$ 23,941,880	\$ 21,330,775

And

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the General Fund tax levy of **\$21,041,740** is approved to support Current General Expense that includes the use of **\$114,119** Banked Cap. The total budget tax levy including Debt Service Fund is **\$ 21,330,775.**

And

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education accepts the State School Aid for the 2021-22 school year as follows:

Transportation Aid	93,632
Special Education Aid	839,510
Security Aid	91,347
Less: SDA Assessment	<u>-14,941</u>
Total Aid	\$ 1,009,548

And

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education withdraws **\$510,000** from the Board of Education's approved Capital Reserve Account to fund Other Capital Projects:

Hillside Elementary School

- 4th Grade Classrooms and Art Room Renovation - \$468,000

Tenakill Middle School

- Old Wing - Door Replacements - \$42,000

F. APPROVAL OF THE SY 2021-2022 PRELIMINARY BUDGET – Use of Banked Cap

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education approves the use of Banked Cap adjustment permitting the tax levy to increase above 2% in the amount of **\$114,119**. The Banked Cap is to help support the purchase of Go Math! Series for K-5 in the amount of \$28,900, Big Ideas Math for Grades 6-8 in the amount of \$9,100 and the purchase of new Chromebooks and Promethean Boards for Hillside Elementary School and Tenakill Middle School in the amount of \$76,119.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the needs identified in the use of Banked Cap must be completed by the end of the 2021-22 budget year and will not be deferred or incrementally completed over a longer period of time; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Business Administrator/Board Secretary is authorized to submit the preliminary budget with the inclusion of the use of banked cap as noted above.

G. APPROVAL OF MAXIMUM TRAVEL EXPENDITURES FOR THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12, in each pre-budget year, the Closter Board of Education is required to establish a maximum travel expenditure amount for the budget year which may not be exceeded; and

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education has determined that the maximum travel expenditure amount includes all travel that is supported by state and local funds; and

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education had previously established a maximum amount for the pre-budget year 2020-2021 as \$25,000.00

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education has expended \$3,233.40 of the maximum amount for the pre-budget year to date; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, that the Closter Board of Education hereby establishes the maximum travel expenditure amount of the 2021-22 school year as \$25,000.00.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Business Administrator/Board Secretary is authorized to track and record these costs to ensure that the maximum amount is not exceeded.

H. APPROVAL - Classroom Renovations at Hillside Elementary School

Whereas, The Board of Education of Closter in the County of Bergen, New Jersey (the "Board"), desires to proceed with a school facilities project consisting generally of:

CLASSROOM RENOVATIONS AT HILLSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Whereas, the Board now seeks to take the initial steps in order to proceed with the Project:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF CLOSTER IN THE COUNTY OF BERGEN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, as follows:

Section 1. In accordance with the requirements of Section 6A:26-3 of the New Jersey Administrative Code, the Board hereby approves the Schematic Plans prepared in connection with the Project and the Board further authorizes the submission of same to the Bergen County Superintendent of Schools and the New Jersey Department of Education for approval. This project is designated "Other Capital" and the Board is not seeking state funding.

Section 2. The Board hereby authorizes the amendment to its Long-Range Facilities Plan in order to reflect the proposed Project.

Section 3. The School Administration and such other officers and agents of the Board as are necessary, including the Board attorney, bond counsel and architect, are hereby authorized to perform such other acts, to execute such other documents and to do such other things as are necessary to implement the determinations of the Board set forth in this resolution. Including the submission of Information to the New Jersey Department of Education as applicable to the proposed Project.

Section 4. This resolution shall take effect immediately.

I. **APPROVAL - Disposal of Outdated Smart Boards**

Motion to approve the disposal of seven (7), outdated Smart Boards from Hillside Elementary School; tag numbers 10093, 10094, 10098, 10099, 10110, 10173 and 10102.

J. **APPROVAL - Tuition Contracts for Received Students**

Motion to approve tuition contracts for received students as outlined below for the 2020-2021 school year:

<u>NJSMART#</u>	<u>Tuition</u>	<u>Program</u>	<u>District</u>
7574534238	\$9,445.66	LLD	Tenafly

PERSONNEL AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chairperson Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Finkelstein, Mr. Linn

Mr. McHale spoke about replacements and long term leave replacements due to medical emergencies, maternity leaves and life events. This year has been difficult in finding substitutes. He asked if anyone in the community is interested to please contact him by email.

Moved by Ms. Bhagat , seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motions A - F.

Motions were approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms.Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttannah, Ms. Cross, Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

- A. **APPROVAL - Long-Term Leave Replacement Extension**
 Motion to approve Amanda Eastman's continuation in the same position as Long-Term Leave Replacement - Elementary School Teacher - through 6/22/21; salary remains MA Step 0.
- B. **APPROVAL - Resignation of Teacher**
 Motion to approve, with regrets, the resignation of Alexandra Meril as Tenakill Middle School Language Arts Teacher, effective immediately.
- C. **APPROVAL - Paraprofessional**
 Motion to approve Ankita Patel as paraprofessional for the 2020-2021 school year at a salary of \$18.83 per hour, 5 hours per day, starting immediately, pending criminal history background check.
- D. **APPROVAL - Substitute Teacher**
 Motion to approve Katie Batchelor as a Substitute Teacher, pending criminal history review.
- E. **APPROVAL - Settlement Agreement**
 BE IT RESOLVED, by the Closter Board of Education (hereinafter referred to as the "Board") that the terms, stipulations and conditions as established in the Settlement Agreement, between the Board and an employee whose name is on file in the Superintendent's Office, are hereby adopted and approved by the Board of Education. The Board President and School Business Administrator/Board Secretary are hereby authorized and directed to execute the Settlement Agreement and any other documents necessary to effect the same.
- F. **APPROVAL - Leave of Absence**
 Motion to approve the leave of absence for Jeffrey Roem, effective immediately, with an anticipated return date of March 29, 2021.

BOARD COMMITTEES

Ms. Bhagat spoke on behalf of the Personnel Committee. This week, the committee met to discuss salaries in the budget for the upcoming school year and how the administrators will be meeting with the virtual staff regarding coming back to school in person for September or potentially sooner. The principals are planning a transitional program for those teachers who are virtual from March through June to discuss what to expect in terms of protocols such as procedures regarding student arrival and dismissal, along with the new daily operations.

Mr. McHale shared one of our board goals this year was to have our policy manual, by laws and regulations updated. We are currently in the process and we have a finalized version with the updates. Our Policy Committee, Ms. Kothari and Ms. Micera are reviewing it and once they have completed it will be presented to the board for full approval.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. McHale shared with the Board the three (3) versions of the SY 21-22 Calendar. The Board discussed the different versions of the calendars and what would be the best start date for the 21-22 school year. An informal vote was taken on all three calendars. Version 1 with a start date of September 2, 2021 will be submitted for board approval on March 25, 2021.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Bhagat to open the meeting to public discussion.

Ms. Wagner thanked the Board Members for their time and commitment. Ms. Wagner asked the board two (2) questions; (1) Will the board approve the learning plan for the students at Tenakill Middle School and Hillside Elementary for the upcoming school year starting September 2021? (2) Did the board have any participation in and/or approval of the survey sent to families on February 21?

Mr. Villanueva read the following comments:

- *Mr. Desai would like to know if the teachers contract reads they have summer break until August 31, can we approach the teachers union leadership for an exception to start on August 31 for the 21/22 school year?*
- *A Parent thanked Mr. McHale for not taking off on Columbus Day.*

Mr. McHale responded to Ms Wagner's questions as follows:

1. *The board did approve the learning plan last year and if our plan is a normal opening typically that is not something the board does approve. Schedules and operating schedule of the school day is not something the board needs to approve. The Board as well as the public have asked questions if they have any concerns which we have made adjustments to.*
2. *The board did not approve the survey that went out to families. This is part of the administrative operation of the school. It is not typical of what the Board would be approving.*

Mr. McHale responded to Mr. Desai's question:

Regarding the teachers giving an amendment to the teachers contract to start on August 31, Mr. McHale spoke with the leadership of the Closter Education Association and they expressed they had concerns that it would set a precedent for them. He can revisit with them again, but in his initial discussion, it was not something they were entertaining.

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Kothari to close the meeting to public discussion.

CLOSED SESSION MOTION (If required)

Moved by Dr. Puttanniah, seconded by Ms. Bhagat to approve the following Closed Session Motion.
Motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board:

YEAS: Ms. Bhagat, Ms. Kothari, Ms. Kwon, Ms. Lee, Mr. Linn, Ms. Micera, Dr. Puttanniah, Ms. Cross,
Ms. Finkelstein

NAYS: None

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education will adjourn to a Closed Session to discuss the following:

***HIB
Legal Matters***

The matters so discussed will be disclosed to the public as soon as and to the extent that such disclosure can be made without adversely affecting the public.

The Board went into Closed Session at 8:47 PM.
The Board reconvened from Closed Session at 9:25 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Ms. Micera, seconded by Ms. Kwon to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Floro M. Villanueva, Jr.
Business Administrator/Board Secretary