

RIVER EDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

RIVER EDGE, NEW JERSEY 07661

"Building Bright Futures Together"

Minutes of the Regular Public Meeting – February 24, 2021

7:30 PM Public Meeting

The Board of Education, Borough of River Edge, County of Bergen, State of New Jersey conducted this meeting through a Zoom Meeting.

CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE

Ms. Kang called the meeting to order at 7:33 PM.

A moment of silence took place for the 500,000 lives lost to Covid-19.

MISSION STATEMENT

Mr. Herbst read the Mission Statement.

ROLL CALL

Present on roll call were: Ms. Brown, Ms. Dansky, Ms. Doyle, Mr. Herbst, Ms. Juskeliene, Mr. Sim, and Ms. Kang. Also present Dr. Ben-Dov, Mrs. Napolitano, Mrs. Heitman, and approximately 158 members of the public.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS NOTICE

Mrs. Napolitano read the Open Public Meeting Act Notice.

SPECIAL/DISCUSSION ITEMS

Public Comment on Agenda Items – None

Review 2019-2020 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) Lerch, Vinci & Higgins, LLP

Gary Higgins of Lerch, Vinci and Higgins presented the district's audit report to the Board Members. He spoke about three areas 1). Auditor's opinion on the Financial Statement groupings. 2). Audit Recommendations. There are no recommendations that meet the level of being reported in the report as of June 30, 2020. 3). The status of the Fund balances in the general fund as of year-end. He commended the Board office for their great record keeping. He answered all questions that were asked by the board members.

2021-2022 Initial Budget Presentation – Dr. Tova Ben-Dov and Louise Napolitano

Dr. Ben-Dov commended Mrs. Napolitano and the Business Office for the excellent audit and said that staying with the financial theme this brings us directly to the budget discussion. She stated that this is the first time the 2021-2022 budget is being presented publicly even though it is not a balanced budget at this point. State Aid is missing, but should be announced later this week. We are basing our budget on our district needs and we keep in mind the tax payers of the community. We are always very mindful of River Edge residents and their financial difficulties. We never want to increase the tax levy more than we have to. This year's budget is more of an unknown than ever. The reason is that we usually can make a good prediction about needs from one year to the next. We are still trying to do this for the 2021-2022 year's budget but there are too many unknowns. Many of the items are based on our projected needs. Dr. Ben-Dov and Mrs. Napolitano reviewed the proposed 2021-2022 budget. All questions were answered that were asked by the board members.

REPORTS

SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Ben-Dov reported on the following:

- Dr. Ben-Dov stated Dr. Brockel has spent much time with her and she introduced him to various constituencies and issues in the district. She believes that on Monday, when he begins his official role he will be as prepared as one can be because of all the time he has invested in learning our district.
- Dr. Ben-Dov stated the 2021-2022 kindergarten registration is unusual this year. The registration in February is generally lower than the actual numbers in September. This year people may have decided not to enroll their child in kindergarten due to the pandemic. We did not have a big jump last year between January and February registration and the actual number, most likely because people kept their children at home for another year. At this time the numbers are very low for kindergarten registration for the 2021-2022 school year. Roosevelt School has 43 students registered and we budgeted for three classes at this point. Cherry Hill School has 80 students registered and we budgeted for five classes at this point. Dr. Ben-Dov believes these numbers will increase during the remainder of the year.
- Governor Murphy put in a waiver to the Federal Government to eliminate State Assessments for this year. The request was denied. At this point there will be State Assessments taking place starting after April 5th. Teacher evaluations will not reflect the results of these Assessments but they will be reported by the State as the district's achievement. Grades 3-6 will have to engage in Assessments in Language Arts and Math. There are still efforts to appeal that with the Federal Government as most people do not feel that these assessments will be relevant.
- There was a declaration from the Department of Education that the results of the Student Growth Objectives (SGO's) will not be counted in the teacher evaluation formula this year. The Department of Education stated however, that SGO's must be completed in their usual forms. Our staff will receive more information about this on Monday. Mid-year evaluations of students have already taken place. There may have to be some adjustments to the goals that were set earlier this year. We should hear about this in March.
- At the County meeting Mr. Louis DeLisio has spoken to the superintendents about vaccinations and the request for prioritizing vaccines for school staff. He shared that he offered schools as central locations for vaccinations but there is no final word on this from the State. There was a lot of talk of the lack of consistency about health guidelines. Superintendents all over the county are asked to make decisions about more in-person instruction without much guidance. The local Health Departments give them their recommendations but don't necessarily stand behind them.
- Planning for the 2021-22 school year is hindered. The reason is that the Department of Education is refusing, at this point in the year, to offer information on whether they will permit parents to have an option next year for virtual or in person learning. Districts need to know how to staff their schools. Hopefully this will come to us soon.
- Teachers will need to write new curriculum standards for next school year. Ms. Moran and the Curriculum Team have begun to taken steps for this. The Department of Education is demanding that four areas of the curriculum be implemented with their new standards starting in September: Science, Visual and Performing Arts, World Language, and 21st Century Life and Career. There will be curriculum writing over the summer and implementation early in the year.

- Last year we could not honor a teacher for Teacher of the Year because of the closure of schools due to Covid-19 for which we were not prepared. The County has cancelled it for this school year as well. To make up for last year the River Edge School District would like to recognize two teachers per building this year. We are encouraging all to recommend teachers for this process. The letter is ready to be sent out and the selection process will happen as the Administrative Team arranges it.
- Dr. Ben-Dov shared a document “The Timeline, Current Status, and Future of Hybrid Learning in River Edge. She wanted everyone to have the broader framework of everything that has been done, where we are, and what the recommendations are for moving forward. Our goal was always to bring as many in-person students as we could while keeping students and staff safe. She gave a short summary of our quest to provide River Edge students and staff a safe in-person learning environment during the pandemic. It doesn’t include all the equipment, cleaning and other mitigations. (Addendum). Dr. Ben-Dov proposed the following to get more students back into school for more in-person learning: 1. Virtual Wednesdays will be eliminated starting on March 10th and 2. Combining Grade 2-6 Cohorts to attend five days a week with a social distance of 5’ apart. The benchmark she offered, following a discussion with the nurses and the Public Health Nurse to start this was that the Northeastern Region stays in the Yellow Zone for three consecutive weeks. This proposal would necessitate for six students at RS to change classes to less populated ones. She was hoping for volunteers to do this. The board members discuss the proposals. They all agreed with eliminating virtual Wednesday as of 3/10/21. As to the second proposal, a few agreed with the benchmark while a couple of others wanted the combining of cohorts to start sooner than the “three weeks of Yellow Zone rating” she proposed. It was agreed that the discussion about the second proposal should continue at the March 3, Board Meeting.
- Dr. Ben-Dov thanked the board for trusting her decisions, her leadership of the district, and for their help and support for the past almost 11 years of her tenure as superintendent of River Edge.

PRINCIPAL

Mrs. Heitman reported on the following:

- Last Night, Mrs. Hafers hosted the River Edge Spontaneous Problem-Solving Competition. It was a fun and exciting evening. Mrs. Heitman thanked Mrs. Hafers for putting this together.
- Mrs. Sagala welcomed a baby boy this month
- We have had a lot of lessons in Black History this month. Next month we are doing Read Across America. We are excited for that.

BOARD SECRETARY

Mrs. Napolitano reported on the following:

- The ESSER II money has been released. This is additional grant money that was given to districts. Districts received varied amounts based on Title I. The River Edge school district will receive \$229,546 in ESSER II allocation. We will receive \$25,000 for Learning Acceleration. We will receive \$45,000 for Mental Health Supports. Guidance is coming out daily. There will be a Bergen County Meeting this month to go over the spending rules regarding Federal Monies.
- There is a new document out called The Road Forward. We are looking at that document for guidance. We will have a better understanding were we can spend these monies to enhance the district and help our students and our staff.

PRESIDENT

Ms. Kang did not have a report for this meeting

COMMITTEES

- Ms. Dansky stated there was a Finance and Facilities Meeting on February 12th. They spoke about a contractual matter, Region V update regarding financial matters, and the budget. Ms. Dansky would like to schedule Finance and Facilities meeting, ASAP.
- Ms. Dansky attended a New Jersey School Board Association Special Education Committee. They discussed Bill S 3434.
- Ms. Dansky attended a Board of Directors Meeting on February 5th. There are new Officers that will be voted on at the Delegate Assembly in May.
- Ms. Dansky attended two CAL (County Association Leadership) Meetings. Issues of vaccinations were presented at one of the meetings and a lot of conversations of athletics were spoken about at the other meeting. Discussions regarding what districts are doing and how they are moving forward took place.

MOTIONS TO BE ACTED UPON

A. ADMINISTRATION/POLICY

1. That the Board of Education approve the Minutes and Confidential Minutes of February 3, 2021.

Motion by: Mr. Sim Seconded by: Ms. Doyle

Ayes: Ms. Brown, Ms. Dansky, Ms. Doyle, Mr. Herbst, Ms. Juskeleiene, Mr. Sim, Ms. Kang
Nays: None

2. **WHEREAS**, public schools have a profound impact on millions of students, families and staff and are charged with the care, education, nourishment of their students and are an integral part of the health and safety of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 Vaccination Plan published by the State of New Jersey Department of Health (December 15, 2020, pgs. 36-37) prioritizes the availability of vaccines to “essential workers” in Phase 1B of the vaccine protocol; and

WHEREAS, school district staff at all levels are essential to the day-to-day operations of this district, responsible for the thorough and efficient education of all students and their social and emotional wellbeing, are critical for virtual and in-class instruction and are “essential workers;”

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the River Edge Board of Education finds a substantial public purpose exists to request that Governor Murphy give appropriate priority in the statewide administration of the COVID-19 vaccine to all public school district personnel.

Motion by: Ms. Dansky Seconded by: Mr. Sim

Ayes: Ms. Brown, Ms. Dansky, Ms. Doyle, Mr. Herbst, Ms. Juskeleiene, Mr. Sim, Ms. Kang
Nays: None

3. That the Board of Education approve the First Reading of the following policy:

Policy #	Title
6171.2	Gifted and Talented

B. CURRICULUM/EDUCATION – None

C. BUILDING & GROUNDS - None

D. FINANCE/GRANTS/GIFTS

1. That the Board of Education approve the bills & claims dated February 2021 totaling \$1,012,535.68 including checks #44141 through #44218 (Addendum). Payrolls dated January 15, 2021 and January 29, 2021 totaling \$1,224,487.26 issued therefore, a copy of such warrants list be attached as part of these minutes. (Addendum)
2. That the Board of Education approve the Budget Transfers for the school year 2020-2021 as of January 31, 2021. (Addendum)
3. That the River Edge Board of Education approve the Secretary's and Treasurer's Reports for the period ending January 31, 2021.

Further, we certify that as of January 31, 2021 after review of the secretary's monthly financial reports (appropriations section) and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials, to the best of our knowledge no major account or fund has been over expended in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11 and that sufficient funds are available to meet the districts financial obligation for the remainder of the fiscal year. (Addendum)

4. That the Board of Education approve the 2019-2020 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).
5. That the Board of Education establish May 5, 2021 as the date for the official Public Hearing of the 2021-2022 School Year Budget.

E. PERSONNEL

1. That the Board of Education, with the recommendation of the Superintendent, approve Denise Beck, Teacher, effective on or about April 21, 2021 through June 30, 2021, MA, Step 12.

F. RIVER EDGE SPECIAL EDUCATION - None

G. REGION V ADMINISTRATION & TRANSPORTATION

1. That the Board of Education approve the bills & claims dated February 2021 totaling \$733,302.22 including checks #74328 through #74423.
2. That the Board of Education approve the following Bid Results from the February 11, 2021 bid.

Route #	Transporter	Per Diem	Per Aide
2903	All Points Transportation	\$250.00	\$40.00
2932	John Leckie, Inc.	\$293.99	\$45.00
2939	All Points Transportation	\$210.00	\$40.00
2940	All Points Transportation	\$168.00	\$30.00
2943	Destiny 23	\$149.00	\$35.00
2944	All Points Transportation	\$250.00	\$40.00

2945	Pro Trans Transportation	\$165.00	\$50.00
2946	Destiny 23	\$162.00	\$35.00
2947	Prime Transportation	\$152.00	\$50.00
2948	Pro Trans Transportation	\$169.00	\$50.00
2950	Morgan Transportation	\$196.00	\$66.00
2951	Morgan Transportation	\$196.00	\$71.00
2952	Destiny 23	\$152.00	\$40.00
2953	John Leckie, Inc.	\$258.99	\$45.00
2954	John Leckie, Inc.	\$157.99	\$65.00
2955	Morgan Transportation	\$196.00	\$66.00
2957	Destiny 23	\$179.00	\$40.00
2958	John Leckie, Inc.	\$252.99	\$45.00
2961	John Leckie, Inc.	\$324.99	\$45.00
2962	John Leckie, Inc.	\$324.99	\$45.00
2963	All Points Transportation	\$150.00	\$25.00
2967	John Leckie, Inc.	\$231.99	\$45.00
2968	John Leckie, Inc.	\$536.96	\$45.00
2969	Destiny 23	\$146.00	\$35.00

3. That the Board of Education post approve the following Quote Contract for the 2020-2021 school year.

Route #	Transporter	Per Diem Total
Q967	First Care Medical Transport	\$289.00

4. WHEREAS, the River Edge Board of Education (the “Board”) is the lead education agency (“LEA”) for the Bergen County Region V Council for Special Education (“Region V”); and

WHEREAS, Region V provides shared services for its member districts such as evaluations, direct services, and consultation; and

WHEREAS, as the LEA, the Board must approve the consultant agreements of the providers that Region V utilizes to deliver shared services to its member districts.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board, upon recommendation of the Superintendent, approves the consultant agreement of the following Region V Shared Services Speech Language Specialist to provide evaluations, direct services, and consultation, to non-public and public schools for member districts upon request for the 2020-2021 school year:

BHaber Enterprises LLC (Barbara Haber)	Speech and Language Specialist	Nonpublic
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Motion by: Mr. Herbst Seconded by: Mr. Sim

Ayes: Ms. Brown, Ms. Dansky, Ms. Doyle, Mr. Herbst, Ms. Juskeliene, Mr. Sim, Ms. Kang
Nays: None

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Kang thanked Dr. Ben-Dov for her time and dedication to the district over the last 10+ years. Ms. Kang asked the audience to please join us on March 3rd at 6:00 PM as we honor Dr. Ben-Dov on her retirement.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Beth Chinigo (445 Windsor Road): discussed a request to the River Edge Board of Education to hang two temporary banners surrounding the Roosevelt School field for the River Edge Girls Athletic League (REGAL). Ms. Chinigo stated the request was denied and asked to take the request under further consideration. She stated in addition to the banners they made a request to install new wind screens with the REGAL logo. Ms. Dansky responded she spent a good amount of the day researching this. She stated her first communication from REGAL was at 9:59 PM last night. Monday they received an eight line request from Ms. Baldanza to the Board of Education to hang two banners. Ms. Dansky stated the request was not denied and it was stated the banners could be hung for two weeks and there was no mention of a policy. We have done a lot within the 24 hours of hearing about this. We have gathered a lot of documentation and have set up a Finance and Facilities Committee Meeting. We will further discuss this at this meeting. We will reconsider your request. We will let you know as soon as possible.

Lauren Cerullo (162 Valley Road): has there been any look into possibly swapping classrooms or moving to the larger spaces classrooms? Mr. Henzel responded we do not have any large spaces left. We have utilized all of them. We do not have anything much larger than the spaces we currently have.

Sebastian Muscarella (781 5th Avenue): stated we want to abolish the cohorts as soon as possible, we want to see a plan for increased in-person learning and bringing back some of the services and activities we lost, we want to know what the plan is for 100% in person learning for next year, and there is no reason we cannot work with the 6 foot rule. Ms. Kang responded these are all things we are working on. Dr. Ben-Dov responded there are a few of these requests that are complex and would require more thought (like lunch). We have planned a lot for next year already: we have the calendar, we have the budget, there are personnel in place, and there are spaces being designated. Dr. Brockel can start working with the staff on taking additional steps of implementation that were outlined, in April.

Rob Berninger (205 Madison Avenue): how did the board reach the discussion to deny the requests of the batting cages and the building for REGAL that would improve this property at no cost to the Board of Education. Mr. Herbst responded we offered to have this meeting to Mayor and Council on the field to see what they were proposing and there was no single member of the Mayor or Council there. There may have been a miscommunication along the way. Dr. Ben-Dov responded the board never denied the batting cages. The board fully agreed to everything except having a snack stand out of a shed. She communicated this to the Mayor who initially hoped that it could work but then called her back to say that the shed for food preparation was a deal breaker for REGAL and no improvements to the RS field would be made.

Kirsten Apa (175 Voorhis Avenue): thank you to the four board members who spoke up in support of getting the students back to school as soon as possible.

Lauren Thiffault (159 Greenway Terrace): thank you to the four board members who spoke up on getting the students back to school. That was valuable and it's great to hear you speak up.

Christine O'Keefe (River Edge Teacher): The teachers are working very hard and expected to do a lot of things they have never done before. They were willing to do all of them as long as they stay within the health guidelines. Moving a classroom from building to building or moving a student from one room to another looks good on paper but moving children can affect the child.

CLOSED SESSION

Motion made by Mr. Sim, seconded by Ms. Doyle to convene into closed session at 10:33 PM.
All Ayes

RECONVENE

Motion made by Ms. Dansky, seconded by Mr. Sim to reconvene and adjourn the regular public meeting
at 11:06 PM.
All Ayes

Louise Napolitano
Board Secretary/Business Administrator