

The Randolph Township Board of Education held a Special Meeting on Tuesday, July 24, 2018 at 06:30 p.m. Randolph High School Library, 511 Millbrook Avenue Randolph, New Jersey.

Board President Ronald Conti called the meeting to order and read the following statement:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Law was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meetings of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, the Randolph Township Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be published by having the date, time and place thereof posted in The Daily Record. It is also posted in all district schools as well as the Randolph Township Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL

The following Board members were present: Ms. Susan DeVito, Mr. Sheldon Epstein, Mr. Joseph Faranetta, Ms. Tammy MacKay, Ms. Anne Standridge, Mr. Christopher C. Treston, Ms. Stacy White and Mr. Ronald Conti.

The following administrators were present: Miss Jennifer Fano, Superintendent, Mr. Gerald M. Eckert, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Mr. Eric Burnside, Assistant School Business Administrator/Assistant Board Secretary and Board Counsel Joseph L. Roselle was also present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Allison Freeman, Communications Coordinator / Community School Supervisor was also present.

EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION – 06:35 p.m.

Board Vice President Joseph Faranetta moved a motion to go into Closed Executive Session. Board members present all in favor.

BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 10:4-13 that the Board of Education of the Township of Randolph will hold a Closed Session regarding matters of Attorney-Client privilege. It is not yet possible to determine when the matters discussed in Closed Session will be made public.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ms. Fano gave a presentation of updates and recapped accomplishments in the last couple of years stating:

“Keeping Randolph Township Schools at the top of the list of high performing schools in the state and the national is an ongoing challenge, but it’s one that I have continued to embrace wholeheartedly and passionately since joining the district as vice principal of Ionia Elementary School in 2005.

I believe that to be successful, an organization, and the individuals that make up the organization, must be accountable for their actions, accept responsibility for the results of their actions, and be transparent in sharing those results. This is particularly true when you are responsible for taxpayer money, as we are.

The concept of “accountability” is my guiding management philosophy, and it has been since long before I began serving as the Superintendent of the Randolph Township Schools. Much of what I’ll be talking about this evening are initiatives that I launched or shepherded, when I was approved as a district administrator about a decade ago.

When the Board officially appointed me as Superintendent more than two years ago, I laid out my overarching goals.

I said three pillars were necessary to support a superior school system:

- *Academic Excellence*
- *Student Achievement, and*
- *Attracting and Supporting the Best Staff*

At the time, I made sure to draw attention to the fact that the ways we teach now are not the ways we taught a decade ago and were unlikely to be the ways we would teach ten years later. I said I was dedicated to pursuing best practices supported by educational research.

That’s what I’ve done.

I have made both personnel and program decisions that were a departure from the “traditional ways things were always done here”. Happily, the Randolph Board of Education recognizes that in order to move forward, to properly prepare our children, and to continually improve the reputation of our schools, not every change will be embraced by every student, faculty member, or parent.

I promised data-driven recommendations to programs, policies, and instructional practices, because I believe that educational research can reveal what sometimes our own biases blind us to.

Two years ago, I said that academic excellence is not just a good grade on a report card. Academic excellence means that we have taught our students to achieve, to be curious, to persevere, and to feel successful.

I promised:

- *More student-centered learning opportunities greater focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math)*
- *A continued commitment and emphasis to literacy across all areas of the curriculum, including educating students about healthy life choices - and*
- *To remain committed to educating the whole child*

Let's start with our high school students.

The New Jersey Department of Education considers the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses a high school makes available, and how well students do on AP exams, as one indication that a district is delivering a superior education.

AP courses are important because students who do well on them and achieve passing scores — typically a “3” or higher out of “5” — can often bypass remedial courses and potentially even get credit for similar coursework at college. That means colleges recognize an entering freshman’s subject mastery and may allow them to take more advanced classes without having to re-take more basic coursework.

Since 2014, we have significantly increased the number of AP courses available to our high school students. Not only have we increased our AP offerings, we have seen a tremendous increase in the number of students taking these courses and succeeding on AP exams.

To reiterate what I shared last week,

In 2014 254 students took 486 AP exams of which 443 scored a 3 or higher.

In 2015 288 students took 586 AP exams of which 508 scored a 3 or higher.

In 2016 333 students took 578 AP exams of which 528 scored a 3 or higher.

In 2017 373 students took 802 AP exams of which 659 scored a 3 or higher.

In 2018 430 students took 916 AP exams of which 788 scored a 3 or higher.

As a result of these advances, Randolph Township High School was one of the first schools in New Jersey authorized by The College Board to offer its prestigious AP Capstone diploma program. Student success rate in the program has been phenomenal and we recently received notification that one of our graduating students' work will be published in a medical journal.

Students who take AP courses are among our strongest academically, but, of course, we are committed to educating all students. Over the past couple of years, I have helped to lead our partnership with the County College of Morris ensuring all students are college and career ready. CCM professors work with Randolph students in both English and math to prepare for college-level work to potentially avoid the requirement of remedial classes as college freshmen. This same partnership provides for full tuition support for Randolph students who do need to take summer remedial courses before officially starting their secondary education.

Of course, the process of establishing a strong educational foundation begins long before high school and research shows that factors other than instruction itself shape outcomes. For example, a basic principle of student-centered learning is helping students achieve academic success by recognizing the strengths and weakness of each child. Research supports this principle.

In response, we have expanded our efforts to gather more specific learning readiness information about our elementary and middle school students than ever before. We employ a diagnostic assessment tool known as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), which gives teachers of students in grades 2-8 real-time feedback about student achievement. This has allowed teachers to differentiate and provide more targeted academic supports and levels, helping to make for equitable learning environments for all.

Educational research has also shown that learning in later years starts with great kindergarten and pre-K programs. In response, we have doubled down on our commitment to academic achievement that includes even our youngest students. Under my leadership, our full day kindergarten and preschool programs have focused on academics and play, both of which are vital to the development of young learners. Our success with implementing "Play in K" was recently highlighted on a NJEA Classroom Close Up segment. We have also expanded our preschool program. Enrollment in the preschool program has doubled since 2014 and we now educate 90 or more 3- and 4-year-olds each year.

I mentioned STEAM earlier, and my stated goal two years ago of placing greater emphasis in our Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math programs.

We've done just that.

Across the curriculum, I have led a shift in educational emphasis to focus on STEAM. In just a few short years we have completely and successfully revised programs to provide students with the skills and knowledge we know will be in demand during the coming decades. With the transition to what the State Department of Education calls the Next Generation Science Standards and NJ Student Learning Standards, our science curricula has been redesigned to encourage exploration and application of skills.

Within the STEAM framework, shifting our mathematical mindset continues to be a top priority. Research shows that failure in math is one reason students leave STEM programs. To address this, I have sought to strengthened articulation and collaboration among teachers with consistent and effective professional development on research-based teaching methods to support math instruction. That effort is paying off. Last year we saw a year-over-year increase of 120 students in our 8th-grade Algebra I program, making it the most successful year ever. We also introduced Algebra I Honors for the first-time last year, and through the use of MAP data I mentioned earlier, we are able to predetermine a successful transition based upon skill mastery.

The district also continues to expand summer STEAM offerings for elementary and middle school students. The elementary summer STEAM program was originally funded by a grant through the Randolph Education Foundation. The success of the original program led me to seek a stable source of funding to expand summer offerings and maintain the mission of the program. Recently, the REF alerted us to a corporate grant opportunity that we jumped on and next year we are excited to use the funding from this grant to enhance our STEAM initiatives and include sustainability education for all students.

STEAM includes computer science and we have significantly grown our computer science program since I became Assistant Superintendent and now Superintendent. We recently introduced "academic pathways" that are available to high school students, regardless of GPA. All you need to take

advantage of a pathway is a desire to focus on programming or interactive media.

When I was appointed Superintendent, I reported that educators saw computer coding as one of the most important languages our children can learn. We are now engaged in a district-wide effort to incorporate instruction on coding into our programs across the curriculum and at virtually every grade level. We recently initiated new computer science and computer-based electives for RHS students and expanded our middle school STEM cycle offerings. Moreover, we enhanced computer science exploration as part of our elementary library/media curricula. We can see the impact this focus has had most acutely in a course offered at the high school called AP Computer Science Principals. In 2016, we had 12 students enrolled in this course. In September, we will have 137 students enrolled demonstrating tremendous growth and how we continually strive to meet our students' needs. As I said when I accepted the position, "It is our role to prepare students for the future, even if we do not know exactly what the future holds."

That's why a major focus of mine has been on educating the whole child. That means focusing on children with a variety of strengths and weaknesses and providing each and every one a multitude of experiences. I am committed to Randolph Township Schools becoming a leader in the educational Makerspace movement, a national effort to provide students with opportunities and places to tinker, create, and make things from scratch.

We have incorporated Makerspaces in all schools to provide the optimal environment for students to explore, become innovators, practice critical thinking skills, and exercise engineering concepts. This initiative has been so successful that two Randolph teachers were invited to share their experience at this past spring's National Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) conference in Boston, MA.

It is well known that the quality of the environment in which students are taught has a significant impact on learning. That's why I have been working closely with staff for the past three years to create more engaging learning environments that are safe, student centered, inclusive, and flexible. The transformation has been inspiring. As you walk through the hallways of any of our six school buildings you will see students collaborating, problem solving, and creating in ways that were not possible before. We are not alone in recognizing the impact these changes have had. The New Jersey Education Association's Classroom Closeup program also recently featured one of our elementary classrooms in a segment on student-centered learning environments.

Speaking of our learning environments, it has been a long-standing goal to create spaces and programs to support students with special needs, who in prior years would have been sent out of the district, and can now be educated right here Randolph. We have made great progress. In just three years, we have been able to reduce our out-of-district placements from 68 students in 2015 to just 24 for the coming school year. This phenomenal achievement is a testament to the commitment and dedication of the teachers, specialist, and administrators in the special education department.

Just this month we officially expanded our transition program which serves students with special needs in grades 9-12 and continues to teach life skills to students ages 18-21. Through a partnership with our township, the district leased a home located on Millbrook Ave, adjacent to the high school. This home will provide an authentic learning experience and is the first of its kind for a public school in Morris County. This collaborative effort will allow us to bring even more students back to the district and continue to reduce expenditures, but most importantly, it will benefit our students.

The “A” in STEAM stands for the arts, and our Visual and Performing Arts programs are flourishing. Many of our middle and high school students, about 60%, participate in one or more of these programs, with band, choir, and orchestra being among the most popular. Our talented students and staff regularly receive accolades for their extraordinary work. I am proud that Randolph has again been recognized as one of the Best Communities for Music Education in America by the National Association of Music Merchants. I say “again,” because we’ve achieved that recognition for the 10th consecutive year. That’s quite an accomplishment and I appreciate the efforts of the students and teachers involved.

I am also so inspired by the dedication and commitment of the students who participate in our Visual and Performing Arts programs. In addition to accomplishing amazing things, they continue to advocate for the teachers of this department. We are committed to resolving outstanding issues with teachers so our students may focus all of their efforts on their passion for the arts.

Our prestigious athletic programs and myriad of clubs our students can choose to take part in outside of the school day complement our rich academic base. The dedication of our athletic coaches and club advisors and outstanding accomplishments of our students further emphasizes the true value of these extracurricular programs. Year after year, we have continued to have a multitude of championships and awards to celebrate.

I mentioned at the outset my commitment to attracting and supporting the best faculty. That is why I am extremely appreciative of the support from the Board in our effort to provide professional learning opportunities. We continue to engage our staff with experts throughout each school year and support attendance at local and national conferences. To that end, we have also grown our instructional coaching model to include 8 coaches in district who work to ensure staff have access to cutting-edge instructional strategies and we continue to develop our instructional leaders to better guide and support teachers and educational specialists.

I want to digress for a moment to address turnover. In our profession, people leave jobs for many reasons. Some seek more compensation. Some want to work closer to home. Some move on to advance their career, and others find the need to change too hard. As elsewhere, turnover here has always been a combination of all of these factors.

The truth is, the reputation of the Randolph Township School District among educators is that of a highly desirable place to work. That stellar reputation has enabled us to attract professionals of an unparalleled caliber. Two recent job postings tell the story. We received 111 applications for the position of High School Humanities Supervisor and approximately 700 applications for a single elementary teacher position. This is a tribute to the achievements of our students, the dedication of our staff, the professionalism of our leaders, and the unwavering support of our Board of Education. And I don't see any of that changing.

I pledged myself to certain goals when the Board appointed me, and we have accomplished, or are on the way to accomplishing them all. What we have done is truly the result of enthusiastic collaboration among many partners, including those I have previously mentioned in addition to our passionate parents, who must be praised for holding us to the same high standards we try and set for ourselves.

That's the recent past, but it's still the past.

It's said that "A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit." [Greek Proverb] A school district grows greatly when its leaders plant the seeds of change they know may not become evident for years, or perhaps even decades.

Two years ago, I observed that we all share a common goal: To prepare students for the next phase of their educational journey.

There are many facets to such an aspirational goal, and to those I've already detailed, I add one more. In the coming school year my entire administrative team will enhance our focus on social and emotional learning. Collectively we will focus on the relationships we build with our students and professional staff so we may ensure everyone knows they are truly a valued member of this learning community.

First and foremost, we will be looking for students who may not have an obvious connection, or who are falling through the cracks. Through relationship mapping we will look to ensure every child feels connected. We will strive to do the same with each staff member. This is not something new, but in a district of our size it is a particularly challenging goal. Nevertheless, we continue to ask ourselves, are we doing enough? What can we do better?

This is not just important because it enhances the well-being of the children in our care, and frankly, the well-being of our professional staff, support staff and administration, it is a mainstay of our commitment to addressing the challenge of school safety more broadly.

My role in achieving that goal and all the goals I've spoken of tonight is clear. I pledge that as we move forward, academic excellence, student achievement, attracting and supporting the best staff, and safety will continue to be my focus. Accountability and collaboration will continue to drive my philosophy of management, my performance and my commitment to our students, teachers, staff, the Board, and our community.

Thank you for the opportunity, and the honor, of serving as Randolph's Superintendent."

PUBLIC HEARING ON SUPERINDENDENT'S CONTRACT

The Board President opened the public hearing portion of the meeting inviting the public to direct their statements solely on the amended contract.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON SUPERINTENDENT'S CONTRACT

No public statements from the public.

BOARD MOTION

Board President Ronald Conti made a motion, seconded by Board Vice President Joseph Faranetta and carried by a roll call vote to approve the following motion with exceptions:

Board member Susan DeVito abstained and Board member Christopher Treston voted No. Motion passed.

RESOLVED, that the Randolph Township Board Education hereby approves the contract addendum extending the term of Ms. Fano's current employment contract by two (2) years, until June 30, 2021.

Ms. MacKay read the following statement in support of Ms. Fano.

I have been part of the Board of Education for almost ten years and have had the pleasure of directly working with Jenn Fano for over half of that time. I am confident that Ms. Fano is a perfect fit for the Randolph School District. I have been privileged to have had a front row seat to witness her work on behalf of our district. As she has mentioned in her statement, she has served our district in a variety of leadership roles as Assistant Superintendent, Interim Superintendent, and Superintendent. During her tenure, she has spearheaded many programs, policies and instructional practices to achieve success within our district.

I know that we are very fortunate to have Ms. Fano as our Superintendent. She is approachable and a strong team player who collaborates and makes data-driven decisions. She works tirelessly to pursue academic excellence and to promote student achievement by building and maintaining a staff of highly qualified teachers, administrators, and support personnel. Being the Superintendent of a high performing district requires sacrifice, determination, and a willingness to put our students and staff first. She has always done that without hesitation.

Ms. Fano is also a consummate professional. Recently, she has faced some comments at Board meetings that were, in my opinion, both unwarranted and inappropriate. Fortunately, for all of us, she never let those comments distract her from her focus on leading and improving our district. Her poise and professionalism under these trying circumstances was admirable and a further indication that she is the right person for this job. We are very lucky to have her working on our behalf.

In closing, I would like to say to Ms. Fano that I am proud to have had a role in extending your contract. You are an exceptional leader and educational innovator who will continue to make our district the best that it can be. To my fellow Board members and the public, I also would like to say that I am very happy to have played a role in extending Ms. Fano's contract. We were able

to keep the best person for the job. Thank you.”

BOARD CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS

The candidates were - Ms. Eliza Schleifstein, Lavina Sequeira, Ed.D. and Robert A. Soni Ph.D.

The three candidate read opening statements.

Mr. Conti conducted a question/answer session with the three candidates.

Closing statements from all three candidates.

PUBLIC STATEMENT

A concerned Randolph resident asked a question about Mr. Conti being labeled the Board secretary on a piece of correspondence. It was a letter from the County Superintendent.

REA President made a statement - the teachers have been without a contract for the last school year and union members have been very professional. The MOA was complete in April and nothing has been finalized. The Board has taken upon itself to fix a salary guide bubble. The last proposal from the Board and the Board lawyer has taken very long to respond with the union. If the Board does not understand the last union proposal they would be happy to explain it. Not every contract issue can be addressed in one contract.

A concerned sophomore stated the district is not a business and the students are not pawns.

A concerned Randolph resident and a recent graduate stated this is the last time he will speak before he starts college. He believes the three-minute limit is not good for communication. He believes talking about mental health is a great thing. He posted on the Randolph Facebook group and many people approved of it. He hopes he hears about the good achievements when he comes back for a college break.

A concerned Randolph resident asked if there is a candidate for Athletic Director. Also asked; did the budget cut impact the school budget/referendum.

EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION – 08:41 p.m.

Board member Christopher moved a motion seconded by Board Vice President Joseph Faranetta to go into Closed Executive Session. Board members present all in favor.

BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 10:4-13 that the Board of Education of the Township of Randolph will hold a Closed Session to discuss the candidates. It is not yet possible to determine when the matters discussed in Closed Session will be made public. No action will be taken.

The Board reconvened to public session at 09:10 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Faranetta thanked the three candidates. He also addressed the progress made in negotiations. Mr. Faranetta continued and read in the following motion:

BOARD MOTION:

RESOLVED, that the Randolph Township Board Education hereby appoints Robert A. Soni effective upon completion of mandatory criminal background check to the Board of Education to fill Board member seat left vacant by Mr. Alfredo Z. Matos.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Robert A. Soni shall serve to organizational meeting scheduled for January 8, 2019.

The motion seconded by Board member Christopher Treston and unanimously carried by a roll call vote to appoint Robert A. Soni to fill the Board vacancy effective upon completion of mandatory criminal background check.

EXECUTIVE CLOSED SESSION – 09:23 p.m.

Board Vice President Joseph Faranetta moved a motion seconded by Board member Sheldon Epstein to go into Closed Executive Session. Board members present all in favor.

BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 10:4-13 that the Board of Education of the Township of Randolph will hold a Closed Session to discuss the candidates. It is not yet possible to determine when the matters discussed in Closed Session will be made public. No action will be taken.

The Board reconvened to public session at 09:38 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Board member Anne Standridge made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 09:39 p.m. Board member present all present in favor.

The Board adjourned the meeting at 09:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald M. Eckert
Board Secretary