

The Randolph Township Board of Education held a Virtual Special Meeting in the district on Thursday, April 2, 2020 at 6:00 pm, Randolph New Jersey

CALL TO ORDER

Board President Joseph Faranetta called the meeting to order and read the following statement:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Law was enacted to insure 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: Mr. Ronald Conti, Ms. Susan DeVito, Ms. Tammy MacKay, Ms. Allison Manfred, Ms. Christine Petrat, Ms. Dorene Roche, Dr. Robert A. Soni, Ms. Jeanne Stifelman, and Mr. Joseph Faranetta.

The following administrators were present: Miss Jennifer Fano, Superintendent, Mr. Gerald M. Eckert, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary, Mr. Stephen Frost, Assistant Business Administrator/Assistant Board Secretary, Board Counsel Marc H Zitomer.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The following were also present: Director of Special Services Walter Curioni, Director of Technology Peter Emmel, Director of Communications and Digital Media Matthew Pfouts, Director of Secondary Education Jonathan Olsen, and Director of Elementary Education Danielle Soldivieri.

Mr. Faranetta read the following statement:

Welcome to our 2nd virtual BoE meeting. This is a special meeting largely to focus on our progress in the “Home Instruction” environment we are now living with. The majority of the next hour will be focused on a readout from our administrative team related to how things are working out. In addition, however, we do have a few other items to cover.

First, we do need to, unfortunately, prepare for at least a few more virtual meetings. To that end, let me propose the following motion.

Motion:

Board President Mr. Joseph Faranetta moved a motion seconded by Board Member Ronald Conti and unanimously carried by a roll call vote to amend policy 0164.2 on an emergent basis to allow all Board members to participate in our Board meetings remotely effective immediately until further notice. Motion passed.

CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Faranetta reviewed correspondence received by the Board, as follows:

3/17/2020	Abigail Alexander	Whole Board	BOE meeting 3/10	email	name correction on OPRA log
3/17/2020	Abigail Alexander	Whole Board	BOE meeting 3/17	email	Would like answers to all questions raised in 3/17 meeting
3/17/2020	Cheryl Thomas	Allison Manfred	Randolph, a Laggard School Community	email	Questions about the plans of the district to move to more virtual learning
3/17/2020	Eliza Schleifstein	Whole Board	BOE Meeting 3/17	email	Expected a live Q/A session. Disappointed about it.
3/18/2020	Adam Zyto	Whole Board	Communications: 2 Issues Closed	email	Thanking the district for efforts on improving external communication and on being transparent with email
3/18/2020	Randolph BOE Meet-up Admins	Whole Board	BOE meeting 3/17	email	Feedback on email communication to parents directed towards Ms. Fano

3/18/2020	Deep Badlani	Rob Soni	"Fwd: Taking care of your Mental Health in the Face of Uncertainty"	email	Shared a responsive email from MCST regarding mental health & wellness. Requested to be shared with the board.
3/31/2020	Chris Graham	Whole Board	Question for Thursday's virtual BOE meeting	email	Request for teaching references
3/31/2020	Anthony Bucco	Rob Soni	A-3902	email	Response to rob's email regarding the status of A-3902
3/31/2020	Randolph BOE Meet-up Admins	Whole Board	April 2 Special Board of Education meeting	email	Concerns/questions about agenda, notice for April 2nd meeting. Consolidated list of parent questions about virtual learning program.
4/1/2020	Chris Welch	Whole Board	Re: I/We and You/Yours and Planning / Today ... (Re: My Personal Recommendations Throughout the Computerized Online Approach to Training/Teaching)	email	Feedback on on-line learning and suggestions regarding tools environments
4/1/2020	Allison Winslow	Whole Board	Q&A for Board of Education Meeting	email	Feedback on how Q&A for board meeting should be managed
4/2/2020	Stacey Bolnick	Whole Board	Re: Please help, College essay speaker	email	Add college essay coaching to PE/Gym class
4/2/2020	Stacy Greenhut	Whole Board	Special Education - update requested for this evening	email	Request about support for para-professional support for children on IEPs

UPDATES, REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

Mr. Faranetta read the following statement about tonight's agenda:

As mentioned, the focus tonight is an update from our administrative team regarding our remote instruction. After that we will have an opportunity for public statement. We will again leverage the virtual

capability of TEAMS using the Q&A function as we did last meeting. While the function is termed "Q&A" we are not actually entering a question and answer session. As with our typical BoE meetings, this Public Statement section of the meeting is intended to be just that – Public Statement.

We have had two unique meetings in the past 6 weeks that were intentionally opened to Q&A for the public, but that is not the norm. Normally, the questions that are direct and have truly district wide generic answers may be cared for if we have the appropriate expert at the meeting to answer. For an admittedly simple example, a question about our school calendar and what we may do about the left over snow days could possibly be answered if, in fact, the answer is at hand.

Answers to questions that are what I would characterize as "district wide" questions most often need input from multiple persons in the district to get appropriate answers. As an example, if there is a question about technology being used in the district, it will often require an answer from not only our tech team, but also from our educational supervisors to understand the impact on curriculum, teachers and children. Getting accurate and thoughtful answers to questions like these requires time and collaboration and just don't lend themselves to Q&A during a BoE meeting.

Answers to questions about a school, or a program, or a student are also typically best answered by the experts in that area. Typically those folks are not even in attendance at a BoE meeting (save for a special presentation). So a question that any person or even group of folks may have about Shongum, for example, is likely best answered by Dr. Burns.

As for "group questions" in general they often include the need for some insight and input regarding the specific situation of a family or child which is, again, best answered by the expert directly with each family directly.

The unfortunate situation we are working through with Covid 19 is only proving even more that direct communication between and parent and the appropriate expert is the most effective way to provide meaningful answers. I am sure that it appears that grouping questions and sending them into the BoE or Superintendent would be beneficial, but it is actually just the opposite. We wind up taking the questions to the administration who then has to work backward to find the child (children) of the people asking, understand their unique situation and then have the appropriate experts reach out to have the conversation to answer the question. It would be a much more effective and efficient process to have the parent with the question communicate directly with the teacher, principal, supervisor or other expert in the district.

I will also share a thought we have seen on TV recently. Our world is changing very rapidly. Those changes often drive adjustments all the way down to not only our school district, but to our teachers directly. This highlights the need for frequent and direct communication between parents and teachers in the district. Today's answers may change tomorrow, making answers shared among parents or found on social media simply being incorrect by virtue of the rapid change. Anyone who needs a question answered needs to be sure they connect with an expert directly. Do not rely on second hand answers.

You can find more information as to who the experts are on the School Website under District and then "how to contact us" in the left navigation bar.

As of 2pm this afternoon, our Frequently Asked Questions page on the RTNJ website, under Support Services, Health Services, Coronavirus has been updated to include answers to the questions that have been received by the experts in our district along with their answers.

Last point before I turn this over to Allison. We are going through a truly unique time. Hopefully one we never see again. With situations like this

there are often insights and learnings to be had. Being a member of this board I just want to say how excited I am to see some of what is under the hood in learning how our District is operating. I know that Jenn remains in contact with her peers from around the county so they can compare notes on everything from calling delayed openings to what is a best practice for home schooling. We have seen the results of the information sharing between teachers and the administration in “Thought Exchange” about both concerns and opportunities. When we are operating in normal circumstances with day to day activity being routine, these forms of communication do still happen. However, it is only when we need to work through these difficult times and we inspect very deeply and broadly as to why and how decisions are being made that we are reminded that decisions are not made in a vacuum. All of the members of our school district are the key resource that makes our district as great as it is.....and to see how they form the decisions that impact our kids is one of the great benefits of being on the Board.

Ms. Fano and members of the district’s leadership team led a presentation about the district’s continued closure and remote instruction. Ms. Manfred introduced the presentation and read the following statement:

I hope everyone is staying healthy. My heart goes out to the families affected by this pandemic.

As the district finishes up its first week of phase 2 of the Extended Closure Plan, we focus and reflect on the best way to utilize our new virtual way of learning. This is an adapting work-in progress, and we all want what is best for the students in Randolph.

Synchronous learning is currently implemented across K-12 classes. In the elementary schools, some teachers are leading small instruction or whole class morning meetings. In the middle school and high school, synchronous learning is also taking place, while allowing asynchronous time offline for students to absorb and apply what they have learned.

The social and emotional well-being of the students is crucial. Elementary school counselors are encouraging their students this week to participate in Spirit Week Challenges. Students have been encouraged to write positive messages in chalk on driveways and to practice mindfulness using yoga and deep breathing. One of the activities is to “fill a bucket” by doing a kind act for another. On a personal note, my son who is in elementary school has taken part by writing notes to family members who live nearby but who we cannot see because of social distancing. I’ve seen on social media that many other elementary school families are participating in these Spirit Week Challenges, and it really great to see. For the older students, the middle school and high school have shared the email addresses of their school counselors, child study members and school nurses for students who may need emotional support.

Teachers are receiving surveys and supplying feedback on the at-home learning process. The open-ended survey results show an abundance of positivity and success stories. The teacher feedback also gives administrators items to follow up on to ensure the virtual experience is as seamless and engaging as possible.

Both administrators and teachers have received positive feedback from parents about Teams, teachers’ posts and videos, and more. Thank you to the parents who have reached out to their children’s teachers with any questions: the teachers are readily available during the school hours to assist parents and students both. Personally, I had a question regarding TEAMS for my son, and I received a response from his teacher within two minutes, which was extremely helpful. I encourage parents to reach out to the teachers, or if needed, the principal at their child’s school.

The current new way of learning for our students is a continual reflection. The administrators and teachers have done a tremendous job during this difficult time for us all. I encourage everyone to attend our next open

Education Committee meeting, held on Tuesday, April 28, to hear firsthand the incredible work and commitment of our school professionals.

That being said, Ms. Fano, the floor is all yours.

Ms. Fano led a presentation from the administration with an update for the community on virtual learning.

Dr. Soni thanked Ms. Fano for the presentation and asked about the low participation in the meal pickup program. Mr. Frost provided that there have been multiple means of attempted communication, including automated and two personal phone calls, emails, text messages, and a physical letter. He also provided that some families declined meals, and others were accommodated with deliveries. He also asked what advice Ms. Fano had about assisting those with young children get through the day. Ms. Fano noted that “brain breaks” are a fantastic way to assist, and she recommended that parents also ask their children’s teachers for advice.

Ms. Stifelman asked about technology, and specifically about families with multiple children, but without enough devices for the entire family. Mr. Emmel provided that the district has been proactively working to provide devices to every family in need. Ms. Fano noted that there is a scheduled approach to pickups.

Ms. MacKay noted the FAQ page on the website. Ms. DeVito asked if it can be added on the main page.

Ms. DeVito asked about families with a paraprofessional for their child and to contact about utilizing the paraprofessional. Mr. Curioni advised to reach out to the classroom teacher, who is including the paraprofessional in the planning. She also asked how parents not attending the session would receive information. Mr. Curioni provided that Ms. Falcon-Duran met with all paraprofessionals, and noted that the expectation is that all paraprofessionals will meet with their classroom teachers in the next few days.

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Mr. Faranetta opened the Q&A function for public comment. During the public statement portion of the meeting, the following questions were asked:

A resident commented: “I would like to compliment the district’s faculty for the resilience and flexibility they have shown, as we have moved over the course of

three weeks to transform a traditional, in-person classroom education into a district-wide distance learning program. Once upon a time I had the privilege to work with the GW School of Education and Human Development as they designed graduate degree and continuing ed. curricula in a new department for "Educational Technology Leadership." Graduate students in their programs spend two to three years learning how to design lesson plans, tailor instructional techniques, and master computer technology simultaneously, in order to become effective leaders in distance learning. However, our teachers, without the advantage of that kind of training, are now doing the same work "on the fly," and by all accounts are handling it with aplomb. Certainly, there will be lessons we will take from this experience, whether they are processes that could have been better executed or unrecognized alternatives that passed us by. I am confident we will recognize them and build on them for the future. But on the balance, the transformation of the district in these short weeks has been nothing short of remarkable, and our teachers deserve commendation and appreciation."

A resident asked: "1. Feedback: Other Districts are reaching to their communities looking for feedback regarding the online learning environment. Will such a survey be distributed to ours? 2. College Essay Speaker (see email string below): On April 14, the District is hosting a College Essay Presentation, however it is only available to 100 participants and capacity was full as of last evening. As I stated in my email below, there are over 400 students in the 11th grade alone. The current 11th grade class has already had the SAT's cancelled on two occasions and may only have pass/fail grades for the remainder of the year. The essay writing portion of the college application will become paramount in the college acceptance process. If capacity was a concern, why was the program opened up to the entire high school community? The current 11th grade students should have been given the option of registering first. Regardless of the virtual platform that the speaker would prefer, why wouldn't the District recommend a platform that would allow for more participants? 3. Share the Keys: What is the status of the Share the Keys Program? The Randolph BOE mandates that a student and parent must attend the program prior to submitting an application for a senior parking permit. The event scheduled for March 9 was cancelled due to the NJ State Hockey Championship and the next event is scheduled for April 27. Since it is highly unlikely that the April date will happen, when will the presentation be offered next and in what capacity? Must the presentation be in person or will you offer a virtual environment? 4. Special Education: A portion of the student population is in special learning classrooms, have co-teaching classrooms, receive assistance from Sage Behavioral and/or require paraprofessionals. How are the unique

needs of our Special Education students being met? These are the most vulnerable of the student population and their needs are not being met.

A resident asked: "What is the definition of synchronous learning?"

A resident asked: "The initial distance learning plan needed to be approved at the County Level. As district plays evolve significantly, is the County still involved, at all?"

A resident commented: "I wanted to say that Miss Moore (1st grade teacher, Fernbrook) has done a great job at doing a daily work session with the children and to help parents with the work. She has been available at all times to help along this uncertain time. I also wanted to give a shout out to Dr. Bernal and Mr. Scott for being on a meeting this week, my son really appreciated it. Finally I wanted to thank Ms. Renee Moran for checking in on how we were doing. I can not say enough wonderful things about the Fernbrook staff during this time! In these uncertain times it's nice to know they are there for us. I just hope that this style of learning doesn't delay the academics my son needs to proceed forward for next year. Thank you! :) Stay safe everyone"

A resident asked: "Will there be more interactive classroom experience planned for when we returned from spring break? While I am very appreciative of the hard work our teachers are doing, there is only so much us as parents can do to help our kids understand concepts"

A resident asked: "Has a Pass/Fail grade been considered for the final marking period to ease the burden of online grading for the teachers?"

OLD BUSINESS

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Stifelman read the following statement:

On Thursday, March 26, the administration opened 9 bids for the Field House project. The base bids for this project ranged from a low of \$9,174,000 to a high of \$9,667,777. Although these bids are lower than the bids received on September 12, 2019, they still exceed our cost estimates for this project. With the uncertainty of the current situation with the coronavirus pandemic, we have decided to reject all bids and re bid in an effort to make sure that we get the best possible bids from

interested contractors. As a result, the FFT Motion on tonight's agenda is to reject all bids and authorize administration to re bid the project. We look forward to opening a new set of bids in the coming weeks with the intent to take action at our April 28th Board meeting.

Motion:

Finance, Facilities and Transportation Motion 1

On behalf of Finance/Facilities and Transportation Committee, Board member Jeanne Stifelman moved a motion seconded by Board member Ronald Conti and unanimously carried by a roll call vote to approve Finance/Facilities and Transportation Motion 1. Motion passed.

On behalf of the Finance, Facilities and Transportation Committee, I hereby move the following resolution 1

1. RESOLUTION REJECTING BIDS FOR FIELD HOUSE PROJECT

WHEREAS, the Randolph Board of Education recently advertised for bids from interested contractors for the construction of the High School Field House ("the Project"); and

WHEREAS, nine (9) bids were received in response to the request for bids, which were publicly opened and read aloud in the District Business Office on March 26, 2020; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-22 and 18A:18A-36, the Board of Education must either award or reject all bids within sixty (60) days of the opening of the bids, subject to certain exceptions; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-22(a), a Board of Education may reject all bids for a given project when the lowest bid substantially exceeds the Board's cost estimates for the project and/or the Board wishes to revise the project specifications, among other reasons; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has determined that the bids received from the interested contractors are far in excess of the Board's initial and revised cost estimates for the Project;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby rejects all bids received for the Project because the amounts bid on the Project substantially exceed the Board's cost estimates for same and directs the

Administration and Architect to return the bid bonds of all prospective bidders;
and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby authorizes the immediate rebid of the Project in order to solicit lower priced proposals in accordance with the Board's initial and revised cost estimates for same.

BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. DeVito-thanked parents for their support during this process.

Dr. Soni-thanked parents for their quick evolution and encouraged them to keep open the lines of communication.

Ms. Roche-echoed the earlier statements, acknowledged the work of the teachers, who are going above and beyond.

Ms. Petrat-her children have had great experiences thus far and appreciates everyone's collaboration.

Ms. Stifelman-noted her own family situation and being quarantined, and thanked Ms. Sandy Kessel for her hard work during this time.

Ms. Manfred-discussed her personal experience working through remote instruction.

Mr. Conti-echoed earlier statements. Is very proud of the community on how they've come together.

Ms. MacKay-the administration has been proactive in trying to predict what is next, while the team is waiting for guidance from other sources.

Mr. Faranetta-asked Ms. Fano if she was able to answer any questions from public comment.

Ms. Fano, Mr. Olsen, and Ms. Soldivieri provided answers to a number of questions presented during public comment.

Ms. Fano provided that the county remains involved in providing guidance, but there has not been significant guidance.

Mr. Olsen provided the definition of asynchronous (not happening in real-time) vs. synchronous (happening in real-time) learning.

Mr. Olsen provided that pass/fail grades at RMS is on the table, but there are discussions and the district continues to wait for guidance. Changing transcripts at RHS is not being considered.

Ms. Soldivieri provided that there would be more interactive classroom experiences when returning from Spring Break. The staff continues to work through initial challenges with virtual learning.

Mr. Olsen provided information on the supports for the OASIS classroom. He has been in regular contact with SAGE, and every student has been consulted with on multiple occasions and that will continue. Any parents who have seen struggles were encouraged to reach out to him.

Ms. Fano noted two positive comments received.

Mr. Faranetta shared difficulties even within the business world using virtual platforms.

ADJOURNMENT

Board Member Robert Soni moved a motion seconded by Board member Ronald Conti to adjourn the meeting. Board members present all in favor.

The Board adjourned the meeting at 7:18 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald M. Eckert
Board Secretary