

MINUTES

Date of Meeting: February 27, 2024

Type of Meeting: Executive Session

Place of Meeting: Administration Building Conference Room

Members Present: Board President Dennis Ryan, Ph.D.
Board Member Anne Conway
Board Member Alexis Pace
Board Member Nora Bellsey

Absent: Board Vice President Sam Pinto

Others Present: Dr. Jennifer Gallagher, Superintendent of Schools
Michael I. DeVito, Asst. Supt. For Finance and Operations
Dr. Michele Natali, Asst. Supt. for Personnel & Administration
Dr. Janna Ostroff, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction
Mr. Tom Volz, Atty., Volz & Vigliotta, PLLC

Board President Ryan called for a motion to go into executive session at 5:30 PM to discuss district pending legal and personnel matters.

Motion to Go Into
Executive Session

Motion by: Board Member Conway
Seconded by: Board Member Bellsey
Approved: 4-0

Board President Ryan called for a motion to adjourn the executive session at 6:50 PM.

Adjournment

Motion by: Board Member Bellsey
Seconded by: Board Member Conway
Approved: 4-0

MINUTES

Date of Meeting: February 27, 2024

Type of Meeting: Work Session

Place of Meeting: Middle School Auditorium

Members Present: Board President Dennis Ryan, Ph.D.
Board Member Anne Conway
Board Member Alexis Pace
Board Member Nora Bellsey

Absent: Board Vice President Sam Pinto

Others Present: Dr. Jennifer Gallagher, Superintendent of Schools
Michael I. DeVito, Asst. Supt. For Finance and Operations
Dr. Michele Natali, Asst. Supt. for Personnel & Administration
Dr. Janna Ostroff, Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction
Mr. Tom Volz, Atty., Volz & Vigliotta, PLLC

I. Superintendent's Opening Remarks/Call to Order

Board President Ryan called the meeting to order and led everyone in the pledge of allegiance. Dr. Ryan gave a shoutout to those students recognized for all-county and all-state, as well as the NYSSMA musicians, for their accomplishments. He then turned the meeting over to Dr. Gallagher for the Superintendent's Report.

II. Superintendent's Report – Dr. Gallagher

Superintendent's Report

- *Student Showcase: Celebrating Reading*

Dr. Gallagher stated that we are starting tonight's meeting with a presentation that is near and dear to her heart – reading. She then introduced Dr. Radice, who presented a video entitled, "Culture of Reading" and had student representatives from each grade come up on stage to describe what reading means to them.

- *Budget Presentation: Secondary Program and Budget*

Dr. Gallagher then introduced Mr. DeVito to present on the Secondary Program Budget. Mr. DeVito started by reviewing the rollover budget, reminding the public that this is the current program at next year's "rates", based on information so far. He further reviewed proposed cuts needed to close the \$3.8 million gap, such as reducing two districtwide administrators, one districtwide mechanic, one districtwide social worker, reduction in professional development spending and two fewer middle school

teaching positions and two elementary teaching positions based on a decline in enrollment. He added that, in light of those proposed reductions, the Board is asked to consider a 2.5% property tax levy. Mr. DeVito explained that, regardless of the Governor's proposed reduction in aid, there would be staff reductions both at the middle school and high school, based on a decline in enrollment. He then explained that, based on the Governor's proposal to eliminate the hold harmless legislation and reduce the district's foundation aid by 50%, a new compromise option was proposed, whereby East School would remain open for one year to allow for more preparation and transition, some additional instructional reductions, "borrow" \$3-4 million of reserve funds to support current level of programming for one year, adding that, if the proposed foundation aid reduction is restored by the state, the district can replenish the reserve funds used in 2024-25 at the end of the school year. He added that there is a financial risk in doing this, citing the possibility of depleting reserve funds, concern that a prolonged date for closure could be difficult for students and risk of families transferring out of East in anticipation of a closure the following year. He reiterated that the closing of East School is being considered due to a decline in enrollment, the age and size of the building, and the cost to maintain an aging building, adding that the district has spent over \$9 million over the past fifteen years and needs a considerable amount more to upgrade key facilities.

The complete presentation, "Secondary Program and Budget" can be found on the District website and in the office of the District Clerk.

III. President Ryan called for Board of Education Comments

BOE Comments

- Dr. Ryan said that it may be helpful for each Board members to address where they stand in relation to East School, and added that nothing becomes final until the budget is adopted. Dr. Ryan asked Mr. DeVito to explain what would happen if the budget fails. Mr. DeVito replied that the Board has the option to present another budget, either the same or a new budget, that would go up for a re-vote; if that fails, the district would go on an austerity budget, where the tax levy remains the same and we have to take out certain things from the budget that are not contingent, such as equipment. Dr. Ryan asked what the timeline would be for a "re-vote" and Mr. DeVito replied it's usually several weeks. Dr. Ryan then polled the Board: Ms. Bellsey stated that nobody wants a school to close, but if a building must close, she supports the option to postpone closing East School for one year; Ms. Pace also supports postponing the closing of East School for one year; Ms. Conway supports postponing the closure of East School for one year in order to clearly decide on a timeline; Dr. Ryan stated that he does not agree with his fellow Board members, and that, as a financial steward of the district, he opposes postponing the East School closure, adding that it is in the community's best interest to repurpose East School.
- Ms. Pace asked Mr. DeVito to explain how much a 2.5% tax levy translates to in dollars and Mr. DeVito replied it equals approximately \$2.5 million. Mr. DeVito stated that the 2.5% tax levy is to close the \$3.8 million gap for a rollover budget. To ask for anything higher than 2.5% ("piercing the cap") would require a super majority (60%) vote from the public. Ms. Pace asked Mr. DeVito to explain how the reserves would be replenished if borrowed, and Mr. DeVito replied that the only way to replenish it

would be if we had an annual operating surplus, which would be unlikely, unless we do get the restoration of foundation aid. Mr. DeVito further cautioned that, should we not be in a position to replenish the reserves for several years, the reserves would be depleted and there would be no funds for unexpected expenditures; there is also a risk of the NYS Comptroller's office designating the district as one under fiscal stress, which has financial implications, such as a negative impact on our credit rating. Ms. Pace asked if it make sense to do another projected enrollment study and Mr. DeVito replied that the district recently engaged an agency through BOCES to do that. Ms. Pace praised Mr. DeVito for always being able to explain these matters thoroughly and calmly.

- Mrs. Conway concurs with Ms. Pace and asked for clarification regarding our tax base compared to our property value. Mr. DeVito stated that Long Beach's house prices are high based on it being such a desirable place to live, but our tax rate is one of the lowest in Nassau County. Mrs. Conway asked about the free lunch program, and Mr. DeVito replied that the Federal government changed the threshold of free and reduced, so our district has a lower threshold, and everyone is free – it has nothing to do with the budget. Mrs. Conway then asked about the timeline of presenting a compromise option to the public. Dr. Gallagher stated that once we receive a consensus from the Board that they would like to move in that direction, we would communicate with the East School families, giving them the option to transfer, work with a committee to begin to develop transaction and support-type activities to make the transition easier on students and parents. Dr. Gallagher added that we really have not done any work at all in terms of looking into repurposing East; we had reached out to BOCES, but they indicated that East School doesn't appear to be an appropriate location for them.
- Ms. Pace asked what would happen to East, and Dr. Gallagher said that they would look to seek a rental, but added that it is a process, and hopefully it would be used for an educational purpose.
- Dr. Ryan asked about extracurriculars and athletics and Mr. DeVito said that he will have that for the next meeting.
- Ms. Pace wanted to be clear that there are no additional reductions in program with the compromise option and Mr. DeVito stated only those cuts due to a decline in enrollment.

<p>Questions/Comments from Public – Items on Work Session Topic Only</p>
--

IV. President Ryan called for Questions and Comments from the Public – Items on Work Session Topic Only

- A member of the public asked about two sixth grade teachers being reduced, and Dr. Gallagher replied that they are retiring and not replaced due to decline in enrollment, it will not impact class size.
- A member of the public expressed concern about borrowing from reserves and putting more money into a building that we are eventually going to close, and concerned that taxpayers would be asked to replenish the depleted reserve funds in the form of a bond or proposal in addition to the tax levy.
- A member of the public asked about reductions for the remainder of this year, and Dr. Gallagher replied that staff had been told that many of our programs from now until the end of the year might be subject to cuts in an effort to maximize a budget surplus, that could then be "borrowed" for next year. She added that now that we

have direction from the Board in terms of supporting a compromise proposal, we no longer have to do that.

- A member of the public expressed concern about retaining program at the high school and looking out for the best interest of the entire district; huge concern about a potential failed budget and depletion of reserves. Spoke against putting more money into East to keep it open for one more year. Dr. Gallagher stated that any cuts that were proposed at the last meeting are off the table with this new compromise proposal.
- A member of the public asked if BOCES programs are in danger of being cut, and Dr. Gallagher replied not next year.
- A member of the public asked how much could be used in the reserve funds and Mr. DeVito replied that there is about \$17 million in the designated reserve funds, so it would be about a quarter of that (about \$4 million). She also asked what would be cut in a failed austerity budget and Mr. DeVito stated anything that is not contingent, ie, a mechanic's vehicle.
- A member of the public asked if the funding remains intact, will we still be looking to close East in a year, and Dr. Ryan replied that we have reason to believe that there will be a reduction in foundation aid, and speaking for himself personally, he would still support closing East. Dr. Gallagher stated that the state is talking about the entire foundation aid formula.
- A member of the public asked the other Board members if they would still support closing East if aid was restored – Ms. Pace stated that in this compromise proposal, East School remains open for one year, and you are asking whether I can determine whether I will support closing East School next year and my answer is that I cannot answer that at this time, because we don't have all the information. Ms. Pace added that we cannot ignore the fact that there is declining enrollment and we have to consider the entire community and there is the potential to close East based on the decline in enrollment. Mrs. Conway stated that this is an unknown right now, but given the decline in enrollment, we have to look at all of the information as best we can. Ms. Bellsey also stated that we cannot predict the future, we can only prepare for the future, so we are treading lightly; the member of the public stated that there is wide support for upholding the hold harmless; requested public involvement in the development of the budget. She requested that a committee be formed to provide input in the plan moving forward.
- A member of the public asked when we will know if we are closing East next year, and Dr. Gallagher said that we would start the conversation very soon – before next school year.
- A member of the public asked how we can fund the compromise option without cuts to program and Mr. DeVito replied that is money from the reserve fund.
- A member of the public asked about what money has been spent on the other buildings over the last 15 years and Mr. DeVito didn't have that available, but did state that approximately \$100 million in bond funding went towards capital improvements such as a new library at the Lido complex, new Pre-K wing, updated athletic fields, West School also had major improvements after Sandy with FEMA money, Lindell had significant masonry work done (about \$12 million). Mr. DeVito explained that the bulk of the expenditures needed at East is the upgraded HVAC system (about \$6 million).

- A member of the public expressed concern about the possibility of “switching the plan” right before the budget vote if we don’t see these vast cuts from the Governor. Dr. Gallagher reiterated that the compromise option of keeping East open for one year is really keeping the status quo, and we can replenish the reserves should the foundation aid be restored.
- A member of the public asked about cuts in staff; asked about class size in elementary schools. Dr. Gallagher replied that we have a max of 23 students in the elementary schools. If we were to close East, we would have to add three additional sections at each of the elementary schools. Dr. Gallagher also stated that the financial information she requested is available on the district website.
- A member of the public stated that she would be opposed to going to the 2.5% tax levy; she added further that she was part of a community board years ago that provided input in budget planning.
- A member of the public asked about enrollment after Sandy and now, and Mr. DeVito replied that at the elementary level, 1510 in 2014 and 1360 currently; the member of the public asked about the \$3.8 million gap in the rollover budget, and Mr. DeVito pointed out the increase in insurance premiums, increase in pension funding and increase in utilities.
- A member of the public asked if anyone has reached out to the other seven major districts that have been affected, and Dr. Gallagher replied that she had. She encouraged the Board to utilize the public.
- A member of the public asked if East School should close, will reading and music classrooms, etc. be used for classrooms, and art and music would be “carted in”, and Dr. Gallagher replied no. She also asked about additional tax revenue from the new construction, and Dr. Gallagher replied that that doesn’t mean that goes to the district. Mr. DeVito further clarified that the district will still get the same amount of money, it will just be distributed out from more taxpayers. The money received by the district stays the same.
- A member of the public expressed concern regarding cuts to programs that helped her daughter.
- A member of the public expressed concern about pitting community members against each other; putting the option forward that pauses everything feels so much better; expressed concern over the potential of closing East due to decline in enrollment, no mention of this during last year’s budget discussions. Mr. DeVito reiterated the decline in enrollment, an aging population and declining birth rate. He added that the East closure and decline in enrollment has always been lurking.
- A member of the public asked about a bond proposal, and Mr. DeVito replied that the Board decided to pause any discussion of a bond proposal in light of the reduction of foundation aid, so that debt service just “falls off”. It doesn’t get replaced with anything; he hopes it’s something the Board can consider next year.
- A member of the Board spoke in support of the “pause” and the need for a comprehensive plan.
- A member of the public asked which programs are facing cuts if the Board doesn’t wish to seek a 2.5% tax rate, and spoke in support of the LARC program. Dr. Gallagher replied that they don’t anticipate cutting those programs under this proposed compromise.
- A member of the public asked how the student body at the other elementary schools will be affected by the compromise plan and asked about the cost of

operating East. Dr. Gallagher replied that there is a \$4 million savings. Mr. DeVito stated that he could send her the line by line budget showing her what the cost savings are. Dr. Gallagher added that there is sufficient space at the other buildings for all of the East students, and would make sure there were ample transition activities so that all of the students feel included.

- A member of the public asked if the central office can sustain reductions to reduce cuts in program. Dr. Gallagher replied that moving to Lead Teachers replacing Directors does not necessarily save money, we have already looked at that. Dr. Gallagher stated that if you want good programs in schools, those administrators do amazing work, and pointed to tonight's presentation. Dr. Gallagher reiterated that we invite community members to participate in district committees. Dr. Ryan also stated that the move to Directors was to encompass a K-12 program.
- A member of the public spoke in support of closing East School to save programs and more fiscally sound.
- A member of the public urged cuts to upper administration before any cuts are made to student programs and staff.
- A member of the public asked if the district expects to receive any long-term clarity on funding and Mr. DeVito stated that it is not in our control, and really goes from year to year.
- Ms. Pace reiterated that the compromise "pause" option is not just about keeping East open, it also preserves program at the secondary level and preserves jobs; it's about the whole budget.

V. Board of Education – Additional New/Old Business, if any

- None

Board of Ed – Additional
Comments

VI. Questions and Comments from the Public

None

Questions and Comments
from the Public

VII. Announcements

Announcements

1. Long Beach Classroom Teachers' Association – None
2. Administrative, Supervisory and PPS Group –None
3. LBPS Group C Employees Association – None
4. Parent/Teacher Association – None

VIII. Adjournment

Adjournment

President Ryan called for a motion to adjourn at 10:23 PM.

Motion by: Board Member Bellsey
Seconded by: Board Member Pace
Approved: 4-0

Minutes submitted by:

Lori Dolan, District Clerk
February 27, 2024