

Transcript of Board of Education Meeting May 4, 2021

Mr. Buono:

I want to call the East Greenbush Central School District Board meeting to order at 7:00 PM. For attendance tonight, we have 8 of our board members here at the Columbia High School library. Mr. Dunn, Ms. Muth, Myself, Mr. Mann, Ms. Curtin, Ms. Taylor, Mr. Yeboah, Ms. Skumurski. Ms. Massey is virtual. Good evening, everybody. And the first note business will be to please rise and join me for the pledge of allegiance.

Group:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you everyone. This is the public period portion of the budget. And the first order of business is to call the meeting. I need a motion to waive the reading of public hearing document. A motion from Mark. Second, Kathleen. All those in favor. So, that reading is waived.

Mr. Buono:

We have a special presentation tonight and I'll turn over to Mr. Simons to introduce our guest.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you very much Mr. Buono. We are very grateful that County Executive, Steve McLaughlin is joining us for our board meeting tonight for a special commendation related to the New York Public High School Athletic Association's designation of our athletic department's efforts to receive the Winter Community Service Award. Without further ado, I ask County Executive McLaughlin, Mike Leonard our athletic director, his secretary Natalie Young, and Audra DiBacco just have forward to the area in front of where Mr. Buono typically sits for a special acknowledgement from our county executive, Mr. McLaughlin.

County Executive Steve McLaughlin:

Thank you, Superintendent Simons. It's a pleasure to be with everyone tonight. Thank you for having me here. I appreciate that very much. It's a great setup by the way. Good job with this. Yeah, come on up. I just wanted to make sure that we acknowledge and recognize what a great job the kids did and you all did in keeping the kids on track, which I know is sometimes tough with two boys of my own. It's sometimes tough to keep high schoolers on track. But you did it. The kids obviously stepped up as they always do around here. Columbia High is a very special place and you show it all the time.

County Executive Steve McLaughlin:

So, I just wanted to stop by and recognize all of you and the kids upon winning the High School Athletics Winter 2021 Community Service Challenge. And that is, as I have said I what, 57 families were helped and over 200 children. So, tough year as we all know. Hopefully we are now coming out of this and getting back to normal. So, there was a lot of folks and a lot of kids in need. And I know you know this as a social worker and as coaches, the athletic field is great, but it's a lot about what happens and what

you're teaching them not on the athletic field is what carries forward into life. So, I wanted to make sure that we took the time to recognize the achievement and thank you for everything that you did. We really appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

One, two, three. And one more.

County Executive Steve McLaughlin:

Thank you. Thank you.

County Executive Steve McLaughlin:

I appreciate it. Thank you, everybody. Talk to you soon.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you for that, County Executive McLaughlin, we appreciate your time here this evening at our Board meeting to recognize the staff in the athletic department and the work they did, so we appreciate it. Next we will go onto the primary role of our public hearing tonight is the proposed '21- '22 school budget meeting and it will be presented by Superintendent Simons.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you Mr. Buono. Can everyone hear me virtually? Good. I'm going to move over to this area because I think that's what Mr. Goodwin has planned, I'll move the camera. My eyes are not as young as they once were. So, I'm very privileged to present the public hearing regarding the proposed '21- '22 budget. We've have a number of meetings to share the budget information with our community. We have just completed a round of all of our school faculty and staff meetings. Finishing up with our high school at the beginning of this week.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we have met with our elementary parent teacher organizations. Our middle school and high school parent teacher organizations together virtually. I want to thank the administrative team and the board members who have been joining me with these sessions, along with Wayne Pratt who is the chair of our budget review and advisory committee.

Mr. Simons:

Those meetings have gone very well. The other meeting that we had was thanks to Town Supervisor Jack Conway, we were able to present our budget to the Town of East Greenbush board and it was very well received by the town board.

Mr. Simons:

This presentation fulfills the requirement for the public hearing notice that the board opened the meeting with waiving the reading. During this presentation, we share with our community the location of the hearing, all the required notifications.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we have available for the community, budget documents provided line by line accounting of our expenses and our revenues. Those are available online. We will talk later on in the presentation about where you can obtain a hard copy of those budget documents should you wish to review those. And we will talk this evening about the voting date and the various propositions including the budget that community members will have an opportunity to vote on May 18th.

Mr. Simons:

We have an election of our board of education candidates. This year we have four available seats and four candidates. Additionally, we will make sure that the community is aware of the voting districts and polling locations as well as the process to ensure that you are registered to vote and some of the timeline considerations regarding making sure that you are registered in time for us meet the legal requirements to view the rolls.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we'll talk about the qualifications and the ability for voting and also the ability to fill out and application for an absentee ballot. All of those areas are required as public disclosures and we will fulfill that requirement this evening.

Mr. Simons:

We've identified during the beginning of the school year, official publications of newspapers for release of formal notices. In our case, in East Greenbush that is the Albany Times Union and the Troy Record. We've fulfilled the requirement to make sure that we have two newspapers and that we published the notice four times. We've also taken the additional steps since we've moved the date of this meeting to today to re-provide those notifications to those newspaper outlets.

Mr. Simons:

The website also contains a lot of information related to the public notice. The budget packets are available online. You can obtain those also at our central administration building located next to the Genet Elementary School. And each and every one of our school buildings. So, if a member of the community would like a copy of the budget packet, you can pick one up at any of the locations or you can simply contact our business office, ask for the clerk and we will provide you with a copy.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we provide budget documents in each East Greenbush, North Greenbush, Sand Lake and Nassau libraries, for your convenience. And on the district's website, or again, upon request.

Mr. Simons:

The budget packets include a summary of the districts projected revenues for next year that includes the state aid, local tax levy as well as a payment in lieu of taxes agreements which are approved by the Rensselaer County Industrial Development Agency.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we include all of our expenditures, each of the categories and budget for your review. Additionally, the district has filed property tax report card is available for you to look at. That contains a summary of various budget information including the proposed tax levy this year compared to next year

and information regarding the district's tax cap, the amount of monies that the board has currently in our reserves and our appropriated fund balance.

Mr. Simons:

We have a three part budget requirement in New York State, that is the administrative budget, the capital budget, and the program budget. We are required to present that information and have that available for public review. And there is also a requirement for administrative salary disclosure of administrators that earn, I believe, it is more than \$100,000 and will have certain titles. Mine will be one of those. Superintendent's salary and the costs are disclosed as required by public requirements.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, the budget packet includes the required enrollment data, how many students are we serving,, number of English language learners, which has been growing as the population of students within our community, which we talked about in the past. The New York State report card that includes academic achievement data as we emphasize we have a higher than the state average. We compare our schools across the state and we also have very high four year graduate rate including a high graduation rate for our students with disabilities.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we are required to meet the Every Child to Succeed Act, the transparency report that provides more information at a school level how are we allocating our budget to each individual school. we have a property tax exemption report, which includes properties within the jurisdiction of East Greenbush Central School District that are exempt from property taxes. And we have the various ballot positions. All that information's available in detail for members of the community to review. The vote will be on Tuesday, May 18. Polls will be open for 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM. The methodology of voting will be by electronic voting this year. We'll not be having a large mail out ballot vote as we did last year. However, absentee ballot applications will be available. Well talk about that in a bit. And we have the vacancies for four board seats, which we will also speak to in just a little while.

Mr. Simons:

The polling locations include Donald P. Sutherland Elementary School in Nassau, for residents of the towns of Sand Lake, Chatham, and also residents of Nassau. Additionally, we have Green Meadow, for those residents of the district that reside within the Town of Schodack, who do not have a Nassau mailing address..

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, Howard L. Goff is the primary location for residents of the Town of East Greenbush, that's our largest polling place, generally. You vote at Howard L. Goff if you are a resident of East Greenbush, and residents of North Greenbush vote at Bell Top Elementary School. So, four polling places. All very accessible for our community to vote.

Mr. Simons:

Voter registration for our school budget and board election is required. Registration can occur through Rensselaer County board of elections or our districts clerk office which is located in the central administration portion of the Genet building. If you need to register to vote, you can come between the

hours of 8:00 and 4:00. And you can ask for Jeanne Pangburn and she will guide you in the appropriate process, during our regular business days.

Mr. Simons:

You are registered if you have voted in a school election in the past four years. So, there is no need to register. Is that correct? If you have been registered for a school election and voted in a school election in the past four years. Folks should make sure that they register by the end of May 11th, because during the period of May 12 to May 17th, the vote rolls have to be sealed for inspection. We have to look at them and review them to make sure that everything is in order. And then our business hours are 8:00 to 4:00. You can come to the clerk's office any time during that period if you wish to review the rolls of our voters.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, in order to vote the school board election, budget vote, you need to be a citizen of the United States, 18 years of age, reside in the district for at least 30 days prior to the vote and registered to vote. Absentee ballots are available through an application process. The application is required, it's available again at your district office or on our website. Those ballots, applications for an absentee ballot need to be filed in by May 11th by mail or by May 17th if you plan to deliver those applications in person. The ballot will be issued upon receipt and review of the application.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, the ballots are due back in order to be counted by May 18th before 5:00 PM to the office of the district clerk, which again, is located in the central administration portion of the Genet building.

Mr. Simons:

There are many legal reasons for an absentee ballot. One would include vacation if you could tell from the image. Mr. Buono pointed that out to me, I didn't notice that, but very clever, Ms. Wager. If you are hospitalized certainly, or anticipate to be hospitalized, you can apply for an absentee ballot if you got a disability or an illness.

Mr. Simons:

This year, the requirement has changed. If you have a concern about COVID-19, that falls under the category of illness. You may be eligible for an absentee ballot. If you're away on business, vacation, if you are incarcerated or detained, and also if you have any questions about this, you can contact our district clerk for more information.

Mr. Simons:

As we have been presenting the budget for our community, we continue to emphasize that our spending plan for next year is aligned with our board's goals and areas of academic excellence. We continue to emphasize the importance of achievement, also ensuring that we have an enriched curriculum for students who have all kinds of interest. We want to make sure that our budget is fiscally coordinated and make sure that we have the human resources to provide programs and services to the kids. That includes reviews and class sizes, enrollments across each of our elementary schools, making sure that our staff has professional development and training.

Mr. Simons:

Additionally, we foster positive relationships with our families, with our community, with our businesses, with our local colleges, and we want to make sure those partnerships continue to enhance learning opportunities for our students. And we want to always maintain an innovative and safe environment.

Mr. Simons:

So, on May 18th, there will be three propositions for the community to vote. We're proposing the budget of \$103.5 million. That is the general fund budget that we propose for next year. Additionally, the second proposition will include use of a legally authorized reserve that is dedicated to the purchase of replacement of older higher mileage buses with new more efficient and safe buses. We plan to purchase eight buses that will cost of \$757,670. And this year, we have an election of four board members. We have four seats available because of partial term was included. A former board member vacated during her term and Mr. Yeboah, Frank Yeboah is filling the remainder of that term and is up for re-election.

Mr. Simons:

So, we have three vacancies for three year terms and one vacancy for a one year term, and we have four candidates. I mentioned the buses. Eight buses that we'll be purchasing.

Mr. Simons:

Some of the things that we look at are the mileage of the bus, the operating maintenance costs, the fuel efficiency. It's important for the community to realize that for every dollar we spend out of the reserve to purchase a new bus, we receive back approximately 67 cents on the dollar to transportation aid. That money goes right back into the reserve to fund future purchases of newer buses with in our ... approximately 102 bus fleet. And to make sure that our reserve funds are available and approved every year to make sure that this is done in a very cost effective manner.

Mr. Simons:

The board candidates have met the requirement to ensure their petitions have been submitted and received by the district by April 19th. So, everyone is in good shape. Our four candidates who are here this evening include John Dunn, the incumbent board member, Frank Yeboah, incumbent board member, JoAnn Taylor, incumbent board member, and we have a new person, who may not be new to all of us, but Cheryl Kennedy who is a parent of two. Two?

Ms. Kennedy:

Three.

Mr. Simons:

Three former students in the district, has stepped forward to run for the board of education, we appreciate all of our board members and our new, candidate stepping forward to serve the community.

Mr. Simons:

The budget to be voted on May 18, the passes we will continue to plan for next year. We do have under the law an opportunity to submit a second budget for a vote. We also hope that the budget will pass and we won't have to do that. And we can also implement a contingency budget, but under a contingency

budget we are limited in the amount of money that we can spend on equipment. And we are not able to let community groups use our facility by state law.

Mr. Simons:

One of the things that we want to continue to emphasize to our community is we know that this has been a challenging period of time for our schools but also for the community. We're very proud that we have worked very closely with our business office, our board, and our administrative team to offer the community a budget that preserves all of our programs and actually add some programs and services to students in areas such as academic intervention. We also are offering the community a budget that has a 0% tax levy increase to the amount of money that we propose to raise for the tax levy next year with the same amount of money that we are raising this year to the tax levy. And that is due to a couple of things. We've cut budget areas on expenditure side. And we have received a very good increase in state aid and some federal assistance. So, that concludes the formal requirements of the budget hearing. All the information, again, is available on the website for anyone to review. You certainly can contact my office if you have any questions or concerns about the budget.

Mr. Simons:

Mr. Adam has put together the budget newsletter. We reviewed that today. And that is scheduled to be sent out to all registered residents, voters, within our East Greenbush School District. Thank you very much and hopefully everyone will come out on May 18th to vote on the budget and the board election. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, Mr. Simons. At this point, Mr. Simons did do the introduction of the board candidates. Those candidates again, Mr. Dunn, Mr. Yeboah, Ms. Taylor, and Ms. Kennedy, who is here. Thank you, Cheryl. Thank you for coming this evening.

Mr. Buono:

The next part of our meeting, public hearing is the public comments. And this portion of the board meeting is reserved for the public comments regarding the budget and any comments folks might have about that. So, I will read our public comment.

Mr. Buono:

Residents, students, employees, and business representatives of the East Greenbush Central School District may address the Board on matters concerning programs and/or operations of the district, other than matters involving personnel. Members of the Board do not directly respond to citizen concerns during the Public Forum. If a response is appropriate either the President or Superintendent will contact the individual in the near future. Those persons wishing to address the Board will be recognized by the chair of the meeting and should state for the record their name and address, or affiliation with the District or business. While the Board does not wish to infringe upon free speech protections, it must be stressed that the "Visitors' Forum" is not deemed to be an "open forum". The Board president will conduct the forum for the orderly and efficient operation of Board business. In addition, any remarks which may be considered defamatory or stigmatizing are prohibited and will be declared out of order.

Mr. Buono:

So, as we have done for the past several months, we do have a public comment email set up for our community to email in, and I will turn to Ms. Wager to see if there are any comments regarding the budget.

Ms. Wager:

They're on the public comments.

Mr. Buono:

No public comments. Very good. Thank you. During the other board meeting, I'll also have opportunities for folks to listen to the discussion during the Board meeting and make comments as well.

Mr. Buono:

With that, I will also now go to the board of education comments and I will start on my left with Mr. Dunn. Anything?, John, No Mr. Mann? no?. Deanna, Kathleen, JoAnn, good? , Frank? Good. Michele? Good, And Jennifer, any comments? Good, thumbs up. Thank you. That will then conclude our public hearing, so I need a motion to close the public hearing. Michelle. Second, JoAnn. All's in favor? All right, the public hearing is closed.

Mr. Buono:

Switching over to our ... Oops too far. We will now move to the opening of the board meeting for regular business at 7:23. The meeting is now open while attendees, board members are still here. And I would waive the reading of the pledge for a second time. And I'm hoping that our student council is here. Katie and perhaps, Ryan. I just see Katie so far. Oh, there's Ryan, he just came in. A little blurry right here. Ryan, but we can see you. We need to wipe off that camera lens.

Mr. Buono:

Go ahead. Hold on, Katie. Can't hear you. Try again. I think you're still muted. There you go. No, you're not muted. We can't hear you. Hold on a second. Anything we can do, Peter? Mr. Goodwin is working his magic.

Katie Asenbauer:

So, we just have a quick few updates as always. As they're the senior, this week was a really exciting week because Saturday was the official college signing day. So, on Monday and today, everyone, all the seniors at school were wearing their college apparel, so we got to see everybody and where they were going. So, that was my really like positive point in our year.

Katie Asenbauer:

And then on next Wednesday, we're having the senior breakfast. So, those are just a couple things that are really good for the seniors this spring. So, we just wanted to mention those. And then Ryan will explain the rest.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Katie. Go ahead, Ryan.

Ryan Seely:

Hi, guys. So, we'll be filming the Columbia award ceremony and we're planning to do that on June 2nd. So, we're getting that together, like last year where we're going to have a couple of juniors and seniors and those who won the award and then we're going to edit that together and release it in the following weeks. And we're also going to setup a new food drive. And that's it for us.

Mr. Buono:

Awesome. Thanks, Katie. Thanks, Ryan. Good to hear that things are going up. Keep it up.

Katie Asenbauer:

Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Goodbye. So, I just wanted to mention the board members we talked about, communications around the order of the board agenda and how it looks to streamline a bit. We may notice some things in some different order. We thought this process, in meeting with Mr. Simons, myself, and vice president Mr. Mann, and we're reviewing the agenda to see if this would flow a little nicer for us as we go through and have deep discussions about what's happening in the district in the regular business.

Mr. Buono:

So, we'll see it answer a little earlier in the agenda. With that, the agenda minutes, the draft minutes of April 14th. All were present. And JoAnn, you joined a little bit late. Did you have any questions, or comments, or revisions for April 14th? Anyone? No? A motion to approve? Kathleen, second, John. All those in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

Going to the draft minutes for April 20th. Board members present, there were six and then a couple came in a little bit later. Was anyone not there I didn't catch? Any questions or revisions to the minutes? No? All right. Seeing none. Can I get a motion to approve the minutes April 20th? Diana, second, Kathleen. All's in favor? Anybody abstaining? Two, JoAnn and Michele. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

So, our first board forum is tonight. We went through and had an opportunity for comments for the public hearing. Is there any regular business board rather than going around just to see if anyone wants to say anything? No? Okay.

Mr. Buono:

I'll move to the public forum. I'm going to waive the reading of the public forum is just let folks know that the email is still available. And do we have anything regarding regular business that might be on the agenda?

Ms. Wager:

Yes, we do.

Mr. Buono:

We do, okay.

Ms. Wager:

We have one email. Mr. Michael Seney. My name is Michael R. Seney I am the father of Grace, nine; and John Michael Seney, seven. I currently have my children remote. They're enrolled at Red Mill. I wanted to know what the status of remote learning is going to be for next year. Also, I'm not trying to be a problem, however, please help me understand what social distancing has to do with asking questions?

Ms. Wager:

I believe many parents have the same questions as myself. It seems odd to have this conversation in a private chat. See you all at the meeting.

Mr. Buono:

So, just to expressing some concerns, it sounds like I think that Mr. Simons had addressed directly in email to Mr. Seney, we appreciate the comments. We understand what our parents are going through and we do have some more discussion items shortly regarding the reopening. And then one of the things that is happening for the future is, Mr. Simons can probably comment on that, as well as we're still waiting guidance from SED on what the full reopening may look like, but we have seen a lot of things happen in terms of announcements from the governor regarding things reopening more. So, that's encouraging. And my opinion is that well be open, fully open for September and then SED will guide us regarding any kind of remote option for families.

Mr. Buono:

We'll now move to the reports and presentations of the superintendent.

Mr. Simons:

I have no other reports.

Mr. Buono:

Okay, thank you Mr. Simons. So, we have four discussion items. The first one is the EGTA special grants. Does anyone want to kick that off? Marissa will-

Ms. Cannon:

Can I have the microphone?.

Mr. Buono:

When Marissa gets the microphone, she will talk about that.

Ms. Cannon:

Thank you Mr. Buono. The special grants committee met on Tuesday, April 13th to review the five special grants proposals that we have received from our EGTA members. Each year, the special grants committee needs to review proposals for conferences such as national conferences or other opportunities professionally that would enhance the teacher's content knowledge within their specified subject area.

Ms. Cannon:

So, the five that were submitted, we would like to move forward with the recommending their approval. And on the attached memo, you'll notice the amount requested and then the amount that our committee is recommending to the Board of Education.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Marissa. Any questions for Marissa regards EGTA special grants? Is this down quite a bit from the past?

Ms. Cannon:

It is actually. The special grants used to have a cap of \$18,000. And more recently we had increased that cap to 40,000 in our last negotiations with our EGTA. But due to the pandemic however, just some hesitancy of traveling out of state to the national conferences, many of which have been canceled and have gone virtual. So, we anticipate that the following year for 2022, we might see an increase. And a little bit, more opportunities for our EGTA members to do some traveling.

Mr. Buono:

It does look like some very engaging conferences and programs that they're doing. So, okay. Thanks, Marissa. Moving onto the next item, is the Pre- K and our discussion about that. As we talk about the budget, Mr. Simons, there were Pre-k funds the first time in the East Greenbush budget, at least since I've been here, so I don't know how it's been in the past but it's been some time. This is maybe a first, so. Mr. Simons?

Mr. Simons:

Yes, thank you, Mr. Buono. In prior budget presentations, we shared with the board and the community our state aid report. This year, different than any other year, we received an allocation for universal pre-K. And those are funds that are intended by the State to be utilized for development and funding of a pre-K program.

Mr. Simons:

In years past, those funds only went to certain districts based on eligibility through various economic factors. For example, high needs districts tend to receive, and have received universal pre-K funds for many years. This year, we received an allocation of I believe 568 or so thousand dollars, what's the exact amount, Linda?

Ms. Wager:

583,600.

Mr. Simons:

I diminished it a little bit, so I apologize. \$583,000. And we wanted to give you a preliminary review of how those monies are to be spent under the state regulations. Before I turn it over to Linda Wager who has been briefed by the Association of School Business Officials and other organizations regarding these monies, you may recall a few years ago we applied for a competitive grant with CEO out of Troy to try to see if we can get funding for UPK class at DPS Elementary School.

Mr. Simons:

At the time because of income and economic eligibility, property value eligibility and those kinds of factors, we were not qualified. This is money that we are receiving to put together a pre-K program and we want to see if the board is interested in having us move forward and involving a couple of different options for you to review.

Mr. Simons:

So, Linda is current on how those monies are to be spent, some of the program requirements, so I'm going to turn it over to Linda.

Ms. Wager:

Okay. Thank you Mr. Simons. I have some very preliminary information for you on this. Last week, I attended a webinar which was presented by Jason Breslin who is the Director of the Office of Early Learning for New York State. We went through what are described to be new funds, new universal pre-K funds. As Mr. Simons said, our district has been allocated \$583,000. This money is to be used for a full-time pre-K program, that is for children who are four years old. And they have to be turn four years old by December 1st. And the program has to be five days a week, five hours a day for 180 days.

Ms. Wager:

The other information I have on it, we're going to have to review Ed law 3602E. Those are the requirements that we need to follow. We talked about what the maximum allocation is, what the allowable expenses are. And our maximum allocation is 583,000, but it is a per student. So, if we don't have the maximum amount of students enrolled, we will receive the per student allocation for the amount of students that we have.

Ms. Wager:

I am attending another webinar next week actually, presented by the state aid planners at Questar.

Ms. Wager:

They usually provide us with a lot of information. But this is, it is a voluntary program. And we must, if we're going to have a program, we have to submit an application by July 31st. That is the due date. However, Mr. Breslin indicated to us that they are extending the deadline on those applications just because there's a lot of money out there this year.

Ms. Wager:

Also, he indicated to us that they don't expect that the approval will take place until sometime into September. So, while we will be submitting our application in July and possibility looking to start a program in September, we don't have to wait for the approval before we start to recruit students and staffing for that program.

Ms. Wager:

That's very preliminary. And I will get information after next week's meeting. But I'll try to answer any questions.

Mr. Buono:

Linda, you had said something about a max number of students. Do we have that number?

Ms. Wager:

I do not have that number. I will get that number for you. I don't have what that number is.

Mr. Buono:

We're not sure about if it was a targeted pre-K or the UPK, this is ...

Mr. Simons:

I've read that document. It cannot be targeted.

Mr. Buono:

It cannot be targeted.

Ms. Wager:

No, it cannot be targeted. It's a random selection.

Mr. Buono:

Oh, so it's a lottery-

Ms. Wager:

Random lottery selection.

Mr. Buono:

The district our size, a pre-K program, we could probably do maybe a couple classes.

Mr. Simons:

Well, preliminarily, we were thinking that we would look at possibility two sites, we just have ... we haven't really done an extensive analysis of this at all. DPS makes sense to us because of its location and Red Mill has space. So, we thought if we could development a program for two sites within the resources that are being provided, typically the expenses include the hiring of the teachers, the teaching assistants required if you have 18 students, you have 20 students, you need two teaching assistants. So, those are parameters that are established by the State.

Mr. Simons:

You need furniture for those rooms that are pre-K sized. Even a little smaller than kindergarten tables or chairs that are smaller. You need materials. All those things are some of the expenses.

Mr. Simons:

But there're also options to establish your own program, which means hire your own teachers, your own teaching assistants. There's also options where you can, we have to look at this a little further, have a community agency come into the school and run a program that's within your school. For example, Rensselaer School District has some of its own programs but also has CEO operating at least one class.

Mr. Simons:

There, there're also some local providers who have reached out to us. You can have a program that enables East Greenbush students to have slots at a site operated in a building that's run by one of those private agencies. So, it's three or four different options that you can utilize. We wanted to develop some programs and look at the cost analysis, and the curriculum, and bring some ideas back.

Ms. Wager:

And one final thing I forgot to mention. The Education Law 3602E requires that the district uses 10% of our UPK funds to contract with one of these eligible agencies.

Ms. Skumurski:

So, just a quick question. So, we don't know if we're getting enough for students to cover all the costs involved?

Mr. Simons:

We don't know our cost yet for one class. What we would probably do is figure out the cost for one class, for two classes, and then compare it to our maximum amount. And then we divide it into that to figure out what your tuition reimbursement will be.

Ms. Skumurski:

And do we know if we will get money next year, or is it a one-time event?

Mr. Simons:

We have no commitments beyond the current allocation. That's one of the questions and concerns. The sustainability of these funds. We hate the lead monies that are dedicated for pre-K program on the table and not spend them, but we don't know how long they're going to last and we have concerns about the cost within a particular program going up each year and maybe the level of funding either remain flat or be reduced and then we start to encroach into the general fund to fund some of those expenses.

Mr. Simons:

So, those are some questions we really have to explore. We may be in a position to create a program to see what happens because the kids will be moving into... The cohort of kids will be moving into kindergarten anyways, and it doesn't necessarily mean you have a commitment to another group of students coming in.

Mr. Buono:

And I'm generally supportive of pre-K. We never had this money to do that. Again, I think if we can move forward and find out what the options are if that's okay, and then if the board agrees, then we can evaluate those options and then see where we can go with some potential pre-K offerings in the fall or whatever timeframe we think is appropriate.

Mr. Buono:

I agree, sustainability is a critical piece of it. But if we can offer it for at least a year and our children go into kindergarten, we'd have that much for those students, I'd love at least that ability to be ...

Mr. Mann:

So that means we would only hire staff and they would know when they're hired it's only for one year period.

Mr. Simons:

It would have to be structured in such a way that they understand a long-term financial commitment to the program isn't made. One of the advantages of having another agency provide the program in our building is you don't incur that cost and you don't incur that long-term obligation. You're paying the agency who pays their employees to run the program on your facility. And it maybe actually less expensive. Some of those salaries and benefits may be less than ours.

Mr. Buono:

Very good. Any other questions? So, we'll wait to hear some more information in future board meetings.

Mr. Simons:

Yes. We'll bring it back with more detail for discussion.

Mr. Buono:

Okay, excellent. Jennifer, I can't tell. Did you want to say something or no? You're good?

Jennifer:

No, I'm good. Thank you.

Mr. Buono:

Great. Our next discussion item is proposed changes to grades six to 12 reopening plans.

Mr. Simons:

Okay. I want to just give an update to the Board and the community regarding some of the changes that we have made and some of the changes we anticipate thinking to increase the in-person learning and or direct instruction to the students. Just give a report on what we have done and the success of our K through five, real briefly.

Mr. Simons:

We have completed all of our K=5 children receiving in-person instruction five days per week as of April 26th when we moved our third, fourth, and fifth graders into our buildings. That transition went remarkably smoothly on all fronts including classroom instruction, transportation, lunch services to the children. And I want to thank the principals, the teachers, and all of the support staff, and the families for making that work successfully. The grade 6th through 12 program, we spent last several weeks planning some changes to that program.

Mr. Simons:

You may recall that the New York State Department of Health guidelines that were issues on April 9th were tied to community transmission rates in each of the counties across the country. At the time we started planning these changes, cohorting of students at the middle school and high school level was required based on the classification of Rensselaer County by the CDC.

Mr. Simons:

So, we went forward and we planned an option that would involve bringing all of our 6th grade students whose parents wanted to participate in four days of in-person instruction. That planning is completed. It will be utilizing a learning pod model for situations in which the number of students in each class per period exceeds the capacity, remembering that we're using six feet social distancing in the 6th grade. I spoke with the administrative teams of the middle school today. There are very small numbers in most classes of students having to be in that arrangement ranging from two to three with the exception of one art class that has seven. That just happens to be there are a lot of kids who happened to take that art course who are currently participating in-person.

Mr. Simons:

There is a full plan in place to accommodate all of those students to track those students and to manage that virtual instruction that will occur within the building. We see the benefits of that because the kids are coming back into transition and scheduling more of a predictable schedule having to come to school four days per week.

Mr. Simons:

We do maintain the full remote option at 6th grade. We'll maintain that as long as we are continued and required to do that. At the grade seven through 12 level, we had discussions with our teacher's union and our administrators and through faculty and staff meetings that we felt that it was important to transition our middle school and high school students back to a more regular schedule. We feel that as we prepare for September for full in-person learning as Mr. Buono said, we hope that that will happen and we anticipate that we'll have guidance to enable us to do that.

Mr. Simons:

We feel that following their 8th period or their 9th period schedule, even on remote days is an important transitional step to make sure that kids get back in the groove. So we've asked and required that all of our teachers, regardless of courses, permit kids on their scheduled remote days to virtually live stream into the class and all those communications have occurred with our families and with our teachers.

Mr. Simons:

We expect that as we move to complete the year, again, there will be a gradual restoration of some of the normal expectations. However, we recognize that we have the scaffold support for our students. We know that in some cases, our students are going to be experiencing transitions both this year and next year. So, an area such as attendance, while we maintain expectations of good attendance, we're going to be coaching those students into meeting those expectations, and we're encouraging teachers to communicate with our parents and directly with our students if there's an issue where students are late for class, a remote class, or missing classes. And so, we're going to gradually build up to more of a normal expectation.

Mr. Simons:

On Friday of last week through informal communications from another superintendent, we learned in our region that the CDC reclassified Rensselaer County and some other counties as no longer being at risk of high risk community transmission to down to substantial risk.

Mr. Simons:

We talked about that among districts on Monday within our region. And over the course of the last couple of days, the suburban council superintendents have shared what their plans would be regarding this change.

Mr. Simons:

One of the difficulties is that the downgrading, so to speak, of the risk level by the CDC is predicated on a formula that is used by the CDC that doesn't necessarily match the formulas that New York State uses to consider the community infection rate. Based on the data that we had available in Rensselaer County on Monday, we were about 26 positive cases short of being reclassified into the higher risk transmission rate. Makes it very difficult for a school district to plan right now and move all our kids in in-person learning. We could be in a situation where we're putting more furniture in classrooms, we're asking more kids to come in on buses, we're asking kids to come, we're asking for the lunchroom arrangements to be changed only to find out that once we do that with only 35 days left in the school year, we are required to cohort because the infection rate changes, community transmission rate goes up slightly and we are back in a situation where we are not in compliance.

Mr. Simons:

And we felt that for the rest of this year, and we are being consistent with Rensselaer County, and all of the districts that we work with in the suburban council, at the middle school and the high school level, our recommendation is we keep the current program in place at the grade seven through 12 with the virtual live instruction and we work with the data that we have available to move to the full in-person model in September.

Mr. Simons:

But to change now, and have to change back, we think would be significantly disruptive of students, of families, and of our staffs delivery of the program. We have heard from some parents concerns about this short transition that we're making to the virtual live instruction. We've got some parents contacting us that they'd prefer the asynchronous remote. We've had many more parents through our faculty and staff meetings indicating that this was the direction they wished we had gone in earlier, but we weren't able to do so.

Mr. Simons:

So, our recommendation right now at grade seven through 12, since it is so late into the year that we feel that making any changes based on the new classification of the CDC regarding Rensselaer County would be more problematic than staying the course.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, Mr. Simons. Any questions for Mr. Simons regarding the communications? So, those communications went out. We have feedback here and there, Board members, any concerns about staying the course for seven to 12 and then moving to the May 10, the move would be to the synchronous learning, right, Mr. McHugh?

Mr. Buono:

Move to the asynchronous learning for those?

Mr. McHugh:

Correct.

Mr. Buono:

It seems appropriate I think given the timing, that's the way we would proceed. In our 6th grade? Seems to be going well?

Mr. Simons:

6th grade will start the 10th.

Mr. Buono:

10th as well.

Mr. Simons:

And that will be full in-person for those families that want their children to come in four days a week. Just maintaining the virtual Wednesday with many kids coming in for extra support. And Wednesdays both the middle school and high school. And the seven and eighth will remain virtual live instruction on their remote days and the two day a week in person.

Mr. Buono:

Yeah, I know we brought in substantial numbers of students who have been struggling as well, right?

Mr. Simons:

It's more than 100 at the high school level, I'm not sure of the exact count at the middle school. But where we could bring students in who met certain academic concerns or social emotional concerns, we brought them in for more additional in-person instruction.

Mr. Buono:

Yeah. Anymore comments on this topic since it's difficult. It's too bad it wasn't a couple months ago we got this information, where we could have been able to transition to it, more in-person learning across the board.

Mr. Simons:

Thank you for saying that Mr. Buono. If we had gotten the regulation changes earlier in the year, and if we're able to anticipate this even four weeks ago, three or four weeks ago, we would've made the shift and done the best we could. In the situation we're in right now, it's just not feasible. And again, I would just emphasize that none of the other districts are anticipating changing their middle school and high school models late in the year.

Mr. Buono:

and they are all pretty much with a hybrid template for learning?

Mr. Simons:

Yes.

Mr. Buono:

Will this open up any opportunities for our seniors to get together more or other students get together more, besides just the-

Mr. Simons:

Well, we've been opening up in sports. We are revising our graduation plans, which you'll hear about in the next meeting. We are revising our prom plans. Any time we get a new set of guidelines, we're following those. We are working on a parade model, but there are concerns about the route and whether or not that can be done from a law enforcement traffic control standpoint. So, there's lots of things we're working on.

Mr. Simons:

5th grade activities, 8th grade activities, and we're having all those discussions. We expect to be able to get a report in the next meeting.

Mr. Buono:

Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Simons. The final discussion item is the summer learning programs. We have talked about this a bit.

Mr. Simons:

We'll turn that one over to Mr. McHugh. Okay, Jim?

Mr. McHugh:

Just to give a current update, we sent a survey out to all of our K-8 parents, just seeking whether or not there was interest in participating in that program. Those surveys are extremely important. We only had about 49% of our parents of K8 students respond. We currently have 278, approximately 278 students that would be interested in participating in that summer school program. That drives staffing and planning. That's the importance of making sure that folks do respond. We have worked with Questar III BOCES There is a possibility that our teachers that participate in that summer school program will be able to collaborate with other teachers throughout Rensselaer County. A little bit of professional development, really identifying the core content areas to teach during that summer school period.

Mr. McHugh:

We are looking at a four week summer school program. Five days a week. And we are looking at a three hour instructional day for students and a four hour work day for our faculty. So, we are waiting. It's a little tricky because we really need to see from New York State what's actually allowable under the expenses and what's not an allowable expense.

Mr. McHugh:

There has been a lot of conversation about transportation. And in an effort to be transparent, we run about 30, I know, Mark Noeth is on this as well. But we run about 38 to 40 buses on a summer school day for a 12 month extended program. It's not necessarily the associated cost with transportation, it's actually being able to run those routes, having the drivers to be able to run the routes for summer school.

Mr. McHugh:

So, a lot of things still being considered. We will look at hardship cases for students that really don't have that transportation to get to and from summer school. It will be housed here at Columbia High School. It'll just be a little bit of a delay start. We'll let our 12 month extended program students get in and get situated. And then the arrival time for our summer enrichment program will be approximately 30 minutes after. And our 12 month extended program will end, those students get on those buses and our regular summer enrichment students will be released after that. So, we're still working on it.

Mr. Buono:

All right. Thanks, Jim. Any questions for Jim? Kathleen?

Ms. Curtin:

I actually heard from a parent whose question was, and you probably can't even answer this, is they're trying to make summer plans for their kids for camps and vacations and stuff like that. And they just weren't sure how this could all fit together. And I think before we really have a plan, I don't know if that even can be answered, but that was a concern. And the concern was, with the questionnaire, is there was no place to vocalize that question. So, that was the one piece of feedback that I got from the community.

Mr. McHugh:

Yeah, people can feel free to email me. I'll answer their questions immediately.

Ms. Curtin:

That is exactly what I told them.

Mr. McHugh:

We are looking at a July 6th start day and a July 30th end date. And we would encourage that students that want to participate in it at least give us three out of the four weeks as a minimum.

Ms. Curtin:

Okay.

Mr. Buono:

Thanks, Jim. And our extended school year program runs a little longer? Our extended school year program?

Mr. McHugh:

Yes.

Mr. Buono:

Any other questions for Jim? And with the financial pieces, maybe some allowable funds for that in the budget All right, those are our discussion items for this evening. Now moving onto our regular business. The first item is the approval program for resident children with disabilities. Questions or comments? I see none. I need a motion to approve that. Michele, second JoAnn. All's in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

The next item is an appeal for tax litigation regarding the tax certiorari; I think I said that right? From Empire Realty and joining with the town to appeal that decision, right, Linda? Any quick comments on that?

Ms. Wager:

Yup, that is correct, Mr. Buono. And I think we spoke about this previously, Empire Realty owns multiple properties on Forrest Point and Rock Rose Drive all in the town of East Greenbush. That this case went to trial and we did issue a refund at the amount of \$433,990. And in a meeting with the town attorneys as well as our attorney, the decision was made to appeal, the town would appeal this decision. And they are asking us to participate in the cost of the appeal which they expect to be between \$3000 and \$5000 to the district.

Ms. Wager:

However, it could result if the opinion was overturned, it could result in us receiving a lot of that refund that we issued returned to us.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you, Linda. Any questions for Linda? All right, need a motion to approve that and move forward? Kathleen? I need a second. Deanna. All those in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

The next item is the approval of the reopening plans six to 12, Mr. Simons Is there anything that has to be on file with the state or county? If there an update?

Mr. Simons:

Yes, once this resolution, if this resolution is approved, we will revise the plan that is currently posted on the website. And that is available through the state education portal We'll update the website to reflect this change. Sixth grade, seven through 12th grade level. And then we'll send another copy to the county.

Mr. Buono:

Okay.

Mr. Simons:

The county does not approve them, the state does not approve them, but they want them to be submitted and they want the public can be able to read them.

Mr. Buono:

Any questions regarding resolution? I have one. The one statement in bullet two in both these is grade six and grade seven-12, social distancing of six feet will be required. Can that be amended in the future if things change?

Mr. Simons:

Yes. Anything within our re-opening plan can be amended at any time.

Mr. Buono:

Very good. Just want to make sure we have that. We do want to be able to adjust and not be locked into something. All right. If there're no questions, I need a motion to approve the reopening plans six to 12. John, I need a second. Jennifer? All those in favor? Any opposed I know we wanted to see something different, but it is the right move I believe for our students and our families at this point in the school year.

Mr. Buono:

The next item is the EGTA retirement incentive MOA. A little more background on this, Linda or Jeff?

Mr. Simons:

I'll let Marissa try. Marissa?

Ms. Cannon:

The memorandum of agreement is between the school district and our teachers association. What it does, it allows for a temporary modification of the eligibility requirements to receive a retirement incentive as laid out with a EGTA contract. It waives the February 1st notification deadline and would provide those individuals who qualify for the benefit the opportunity to submit a letter of resignation for retirement purposes effective June 30th of 2021 no later than 4:00 PM on May 17th. This memorandum of agreement also provides members who were outside of the three year window. So, those individuals who missed their window of eligibility, it provides them the benefit of 50% of that retirement incentive. So, without this MOA they otherwise would not be entitled to this incentive.

Ms. Cannon:

If approved, we need a minimum of eight EGTA members to submit irrevocable letters of resignation for retirement. If we do not receive the eight individual letters, the MOA will be null and void and we will return those letters to the individuals who did submit. Does anyone have any questions?

Mr. Buono:

All right. Thank you, Marissa. If there's no questions, I need a motion to approve the MOA. Jennifer. Second? Kathleen? All those in favor? Approved. Any opposed? Very good. Well, next item on the agenda is committee reports. Marissa, I believe you are the only one this evening.

Ms. Cannon:

The appendix D committee has held two meetings. Does anyone have any questions?

Mr. Buono:

Making progress?

Ms. Cannon:

We are. We're making very good progress. And we have set three additional dates to meet in the month of May. And hopefully we'll have a finalized plan.

Mr. Buono:

By?

Ms. Cannon:

I'd say by end of May.

Mr. Buono:

Excellent. Good to hear. Thank you for all your work on that. And thank you too, the teacher's association for moving forward with that too.

Ms. Cannon:

Thank you, Mr. Buono.

Mr. Buono:

Thank you. Any other committee reports? Ms. Wager? You good?

Ms. Wager:

None at this time.

Mr. Buono:

Mr. McHugh? And Mr. Simons.

Mr. Simons:

None.

Mr. Buono:

No. Very good. Table motions, I have none at this time. Old business, Board members, anything that wasn't brought up? So, the consent agenda A through I, there is an addendum for additional election workers. I would ask if in the addendum, we moved those election workers to Item H. If that's okay with the board members, that'll be inclusive. So, Jeanne when we do the vote, include those folks in the with that appointment of the other election workers so they're all together, okay? Any questions on the consent agenda items? Including the Addendum A? Seeing none, I need a motion to approve the consent agenda. JoAnn. I need a second. Jennifer? All those in favor? Approved.

Mr. Buono:

New business, Board members, anything? I don't see anybody. I had a note here. I'm trying to read it. Oh, I wanted to just talk to the board in terms of a new business about, we're all here in person. There's eight of us, nine of us the governor extended the virtual meetings until end of May. If it's possible, I'd like to start be getting everyone here if it's possible. Again, if the governor extends it again, you still have the option.

Mr. Buono:

One of the things, I guess, as things loosen up, at what point can we go back to more fully engaging the public? I just want to just see how ... Just keep in mind that if there could be more participation like

there is for other events and indoor things, we should think about that. We have a big auditorium, use our big cafeterias, whether we can do some things like that based on any guidance that we have and limitations, it would be nice to start getting on that path and be more in-person ourselves. I think it's really good example for the community as well. Any comments on that? If you do, just call me and touch base with Mr. Simons And we'll make and develop a plan about how we can do stuff like that with some big spaces and still continue the requirements of social distancing, all of that good stuff for that.

Mr. Buono:

Our next item is the public forum. Linda, do you have any comments at all?

Ms. Wager:

There are no public comments.

Mr. Buono:

Okay. We'll go to our second order form, our start out in Virtual Land with Jennifer. Do you have anything? Nothing for Jennifer? Michele?

Ms. Skumurski:

All set.

Mr. Buono:

All set. Frank?

Frank:

All set.

Mr. Buono:

JoAnn?

Ms. Taylor:

All set.

Mr. Buono:

All right. Kathleen?

Ms. Curtin:

I'm good.

Mr. Buono:

Your good. Deanna's good. Mark, you good?.

Mr. Mann:

Good, and John Dunn? Good?

Mr. Buono:

I just want to say that it's teacher appreciation week, right? This week. And appreciate the work that our staff has done over the course of the year. Of course not just our teachers, but all of our staff. But this is teacher appreciation week. I hope we'll be able to celebrate our buildings and throughout our communities, the work that our teachers have done with our students and families over the course of this year. So, thank you very much for that.

Mr. Buono:

We do have need for an executive session for purposes of contractual issues. So, we'll need to set that up. Peter will give Jennifer five minutes to get this up and we'll log on, okay? Thank you. So, with that, I need a motion to move into executive session. Frank? A second? Kathleen? All those in favor? All right. Have a great night everybody. There is no regular business after these discussions, so thank you for joining.