

EAST GREENBUSH CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING - PUBLIC HEARING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2026
Central Administration Boardroom

1. A. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: Ms. Turner- 7:02 P.M.

B. ATTENDANCE

	Present	Absent	Arrival
Mr. Buono	X		
Ms. Herron	X		
Mr. Marchiony	X		
Mr. Panasci	X		
Ms. Phillips	X		
Mr. Shane	X		
Mr. Temple	X		
Ms. Turner	X		
Ms. Van Orden	X		

Ex-Officio Student Member

Holly Thorpe	X		
William Bollam		X	

Student Council Representatives

Natalie Krisanda	X		
Matthew Pallone	X		

Also Attending

Dr. Kurtis Kotes	X		
Ms. Lisa Mahar	X		
Mr. Martin Mahar	X		
Ms. Jennifer Mulligan	X		

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. THE CALL OF THE MEETING

RESOLUTION TO WAIVE THE READING OF THE PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE FOR MAY 19, 2026 VOTE

Motion by Mr. Buono, Second by Mr. Panasci

Resolved, the Board of Education of the East Greenbush Central School District hereby waives the reading of the public hearing notice for the May 19, 2026 vote.

Vote: Ayes- 9, Nays- 0

Motion carried

4. PRESENTATIONS

A. Proposed 2026-2027 School Budget - Superintendent, Dr. Kurtis M. Kotes

Dr. Kotes gave an overview of the proposed \$118,872,000 budget, explaining that it features a 3.33% tax levy increase, which remains within the state-mandated cap. He noted that key ballot items include Proposition 1 for the general budget and Proposition 2, which authorizes the purchase of six diesel buses funded entirely by the District's Bus Purchase Reserve. The Superintendent stated that despite a strategic reduction of \$2.06 million through program attrition and administrative role eliminations, the budget preserves core academics, Universal Pre-K, and award-winning arts and athletic programs. Dr. Kotes explained that the District has established four polling sites and offers both absentee and new early mail-in voting options, ensuring continued support for its Good Standing status and Best Public School District recognition.

B. Introduction of Candidates for the Board of Education

Dr. Kotes explained that this year, there are four candidates running for three open seats. He then introduced the candidates:

Mr. Robert Marchiony
Mr. Jesse Temple
Mr. Shay Harrison

Mr. Michael Buono

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Christine Salvatore, a junior at Columbia, urged the school board to reconsider cutting Ms. Amber Smith, citing her vital role as a compassionate advocate and educator on mental health, addiction, and personal safety. He emphasized her unique ability to foster a judgment-free environment for students, noting that her departure would severely limit students' access to trusted adult support. Highlighting her broad impact, Ms. Salvatore mentioned a petition with over 150 signatures as evidence of the community's strong desire to retain her.

Ella Rapant, a junior in the CTAEP program, expressed frustration over recurring budget cuts, arguing that removing mental health services like those provided by Ms. Smith is both absurd and inconsiderate. She stated she felt Ms. Smith genuinely cares and is reliable, while with other counselors prioritize administrative tasks over emotional validation. Ms. Rapant concluded by urging the Board to expand rather than retract mental health resources, as student safety and academic success are directly tied to their emotional well-being.

Emma Withkowski, a junior at Columbia High School, strongly opposed the removal of Ms. Smith, a substance abuse counselor who she credits with saving her life during a period of deep depression and drug use. She highlighted the gravity of the situation by noting that 20% of U.S. teens suffer from major depressive disorder and 9% have attempted suicide, emphasizing that she could have been part of those statistics without Ms. Smith's intervention. She argued that Ms. Smith's roles in health classes and the SADD club provide essential safety and guidance that cannot be measured by a budget. Ms. Withkowski concluded by challenging the district to "practice what they preach" regarding mental health advocacy, stating that losing such a vital resource would betray the district's core values.

Ms. Lindsay Sutton, District parent, said Ms. Smith and the counseling team provide essential guidance for teenagers and expresses deep concern that cutting such roles would be a disservice to future students. She emphasized that these professional connections are indispensable and must be preserved to ensure all children receive equal opportunities for emotional and social growth.

Ms. Ingrid Espinosa, District parent, also spoke in support of Ms. Smith, highlighting the impact she has made on her son's life. She stated that the news of her potential removal has caused significant distress among students and urged the Board to explore creative funding solutions or alternative options to save her position. Ms. Espinosa described Ms. Smith's role as critical and noted her unique ability to inspire young people to find their voices, she pleaded with the Board to recognize her value as an essential resource for the student body.

Jordan Williams, a Columbia junior, spoke for himself and fellow student Brian Bargy about the importance of Ms. Smith's role. He explained that she creates a safe, private space for students to talk and has personally helped him navigate his own life and identity. He stated that removing such a vital mental health resource could have devastating consequences for student well-being, and urged the Board to consider the influence she has on the community before making a final decision.

Mr. Lawrence Elonge, bus driver in the District, advocated for keeping the assistant supervisor position at the bus garage, calling it the best improvement he has seen under four different supervisors. He emphasized that this extra leadership provides essential support for the staff and the demanding daily operations of the transportation department. He urged the Board to negotiate and find the funds, and pleaded for the position to remain to ensure the garage continues to function effectively for the upcoming school year.

6. BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENTS

Mr. Temple acknowledged the strong emotions expressed by the community and said that the Board takes these sentiments seriously. He explained the difficulty of balancing immediate needs, like student support and job security, with the long-term financial health of the District. While he noted that future decisions will inevitably impact students, but expressed a commitment to looking critically at the current year's budget to find a way to move forward together.

Ms. Herron thanked the students for their participation, acknowledging that speaking in such an intimidating environment is difficult. She noted that the Board values the feedback from families and students and clarified that while their budget decisions are challenging, their goal is never to cause harm.

Ms. Thorpe agreed with Ms. Herron, thanking the students for their bravery and eloquence. She noted that their effort to speak up showed how much they truly care about the issue and thanked them for being there.

Mr. Buono thanked the students and community members for their input, saying that school budgets are never easy to manage. He expressed concern regarding student comments about not having other adults to talk to and promised that the Board would follow up to ensure students always have multiple support options.

Ms. Phillips agreed with all the other Board members, and assured the audience that their voices were heard, and encouraged everyone to keep attending meetings and sharing their ideas to help the Board learn.

Mr. Marchiony thanked the attendees for coming, acknowledging that speaking up is not an easy thing to do. He also assured the group that the Board is listening to their concerns and expressed his appreciation for their participation.

Mr. Panasci admitted his concern after hearing that students rely so heavily on the floating nurse for mental health support. He noted that when the Board was reviewing the position, they had not fully realized its impact on student well-being. He acknowledged that this feedback changed his perspective on the role and the potential consequences of cutting it.

7. CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING

Motion by Mr. Buono, Second by Mr. Marchiony to Close the Public Hearing

Vote: Ayes- 9, Nays- 0

Motion carried

Time: 7:56 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Buono
Assistant District Clerk