



## **LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION AND LIVINGSTON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL FIVE-ON-FIVE MEETING MINUTES**

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom and Facebook Live – 7:00 p.m.

A **Five-on-Five Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education and Livingston Township Council was held on this date via Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting was called to order at 7:06 p.m. by the Board President, Ronnie Konner, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 7, 2020 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

Mayor Fernandez announced that notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the "Open Public Meetings Law." "Annual Notice" was faxed to the West Essex Tribune and the Star-Ledger on January 2, 2020. "48-hr. Notice" was faxed to the West Essex Tribune and the Star-Ledger on December 14, 2020 and posted on the Livingston Township website ([livingstonnj.org](http://livingstonnj.org)). At the public meeting, the public may attend telephonically or via the internet by visiting the Board of Education website at [livingston.org](http://livingston.org).

Township Council: Alfred Anthony, Rudy Fernandez, Shawn Klein, Edward Meinhardt and Michael Vieira

Members Present: Charles "Buddy" August, Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Ronnie Konner and Samantha Messer

Also in Attendance:

From the Township: Lou Anello, Barry Lewis Jr., Russ Jones and Glenn Turtletaub  
From LPS: Dr. Matthew Block, Steven Robinson and Joann Goldberg

There were approximately 81 members of the public and staff watching remotely through the webinar and via a Facebook Live Stream.

The meeting began by sharing a Public Service Announcement that the Board of Education and Township Council participated in making together.

### **Workshop Items**

#### 1. Recognition

Mrs. Konner honored Buddy August and shared photos of his 18 years of service as a board member and member of the Township Council.

Mayor Fernandez, on behalf of the council, recognized Mr. August for this commitment to the community.

The remaining board members and Dr. Block thanked Mr. August for his service and wished him all the best in his retirement.

## 2. NJSBA Building a Foundation of Hope, Vince DeLucia

Vince DeLucia from New Jersey School Boards Association participated in a task force on mental health services in public schools to study the impact of the effective delivery of mental health services and early intervention strategies on student health and wellness, school climate and school security. Mr. DeLucia put this information into a report entitled, *Building a Foundation of Hope*. Mr. DeLucia shared a PowerPoint with highlights from the report that he encouraged everyone to read and use as a resource. The PowerPoint will be shared on the district's website.

Mayor Fernandez and Mrs. Konner asked what the next steps look like and what we could do to help people during the pandemic.

Mr. DeLucia suggested the group review some of the items in the PowerPoint, publicize and share them with the community and bring together the individuals that work with mental health to see specifically what we are doing and what we can be doing. Mr. DeLucia added if we know what the challenges are, provide parent and community training. Mr. DeLucia suggested Dylan's Wingman as a professional development source for teachers.

Mr. Cohen asked how we can reach more people and more kids and Mr. DeLucia responded we need to train those people that kids seek out in school, which can also include custodians, food service workers and support staff.

Mrs. Konner asked those in the community with additional questions on this topic to submit them in writing.

## 3. COVID Update

Dr. Block explained that in June, we were provided with *The Road Back* document, which laid out how we should handle the reopening of schools. Our school physician played a role in training our nurses. Dr. Block continued that he and Mr. Anello began working together on quarantine procedures for people who were traveling just prior to COVID really hitting. Dr. Block continued the district consults with Mr. Anello on each individual case and all decisions about quarantining and contact tracing are made in coordination with the local health department.

Mr. Anello added the majority of cases stem from gatherings and participation in activities of people aged 19 and under. Mr. Anello added in early December, the State changed the guidelines to be a little less stringent and that we won't have to be as aggressive as we were in the past. Mr. Anello added our goal is not to be punitive but to be as vigilant as possible and protect the public.

Ms. Messer asked where Mr. Anello gets his information and guidelines on quarantining and Mr. Anello responded he has daily communication with the State Department of Health and receives his direction from State and County epidemiologists who send him correspondence and updates whenever changes are made. He, in turn, shares them with the Board of Education and other health agencies that need to be informed.

Mr. Cohen asked if we consult with any experts at the local hospital and Mr. Anello responded he has had some communication with St. Barnabas but it is more about how they can assist us with the vaccine.

Mrs. Chirls asked what extent conditions in the community have to do with decisions he makes about the schools.

Mr. Anello responded he works directly with the Board of Education and if there is an outbreak of two different cases within the school that are unrelated, we would determine that as possible closure.

Mayor Fernandez asked if that is based on certain criteria and Mr. Anello responded it is based on state guidelines. Mr. Anello added he follows all state guidelines and decisions are based on the criteria they provide to him.

Mr. Klein asked if those are firm guidelines or does he have any leeway to make judgment calls and Mr. Anello responded that the guidelines he follows are pretty clear, with no grey areas.

Mr. Lewis added the public needs to understand there are uniform and detailed guidelines that come down from the state to the many boards of education across New Jersey and those are the ones that Mr. Anello has indicated we are obligated to follow. Mr. Lewis continued the state is getting their information on these protocols from the federal government and CDC. Mr. Lewis added he will place those documents on the Township's website. Dr. Block added we have already placed *The Road Back* and updates from the State Department of Health on the COVID area of our website.

Dr. Eric Handler, Interim Chair and attending physician in the emergency room at St. Barnabas Medical Center, joined the Zoom meeting.

Dr. Handler strongly recommends that everyone continue to do what they are currently doing to stop the spread of the virus because although the hospital is seeing an uptick in cases, it is nothing like what happened in the spring. Dr. Handler continued we still need to be wary of indoor gatherings and social events such as bar mitzvahs and weddings.

Dr. Handler was asked a few questions about the vaccine and explained first line workers will begin being vaccinated on December 21, there is no COVID virus in the vaccine, you cannot get COVID from taking the vaccine and that some people will have an immune response after the second dose that may make them feel pretty lousy, but that this is normal. Dr. Handler added it is important to receive the second dose on the date you are told to come back to do so.

Dr. Handler continued that on December 11, the NJ Department of Health and the CDC changed some of their quarantine rules which is what has caused parents to question whether or not we can end them earlier than the 14 days.

Mr. Anello stated we are still recommending the 14 day quarantine because, although rare, we have seen positive cases on the 13th day. Mr. Anello added a negative test from someone placed under quarantine does not trump the 14 day quarantine period.

Mr. Anello added the guidelines say the shorter quarantine period is for those with an essential need, without specifically stating to whom that would apply. Mr. Anello is not interpreting that to mean a student.

Dr. Handler asked if we continue to see lower rates of attendance, can the district review diminishing the number of cohorts.

Dr. Block responded we just sent out a survey asking families about their intentions to return on January 19. Dr. Block continued that over the two weeks students are remote in January, once we see how many students plan to come back in person, we could consider reducing the number of cohorts as long as we can adhere to the six foot distance rule in classrooms.

Mrs. Chirls asked how we would make the decision to change our guidelines and who we would coordinate with and Dr. Block reiterated that he works collaboratively with the Department of Health so as their guidance changes, we would adjust our processes accordingly.

### **Public Comment ~ up to 15 minutes**

Stefanie Cohen, 20 Stonewall Drive, asked for clarification if a student is in a class with seven or eight other students who are masked and socially distanced on a Monday and we find out Tuesday or Wednesday that one of them tested positive, does the entire class need to be quarantined?

Mr. Anello responded that if they are within six feet of one another and are masked, they should not be quarantined under the new guidelines that came out last week.

Dr. Block added he recently put a letter out to parents outlining the new guidelines which specifically said if we can confirm students are six feet apart, they will not be quarantined.

Mrs. Cohen asked if someone is coughing or sneezing or showing level 1 symptoms, is that class going to be quarantined?

Sharon Apple, 73 Rockledge Drive, asked in addition to the survey asking if students plan on returning to school in person in January, if we intend on gathering information on the reason for the decline in their coming back. Mrs. Apple suggests addressing the reason for the decline and encouraging attendance in person.

Dr. Block responded we are holding feedback groups with students and are looking at all of the aspects of our program, particularly at the secondary level, to see if we can make some adjustments to make the hybrid environment more conducive to students feeling there is a value to attending school in person.

Mr. Cohen requested that we get feedback from parents as well.

Anna Wesley, 52 West Drive, asked why Kwanzaa was excluded from the Religions of the World event on Saturday.

Mayor Fernandez explained the event will be postponed and the Council will discuss it at their meeting on Monday.

Alyse Heilpern, 4 Highland Drive, asked if there is a way to make testing more accessible to students.

Mr. Anello responded he isn't aware of any local towns providing testing independently but there are pharmacies, City MD and Summit Medical that are local where people can go and get tested. In addition, people can go on the NJ COVID State Dashboard and type in your municipality and zip code to find out available testing locations.

Jamison Tomeo, 47 North Ridge Road, asked why elementary students can't stay in school for a full day rather than a half day in school and a half day in day care which exposes them to two cohorts rather than one.

Dr. Block responded logistics for a full day are difficult to overcome right now. These include feeding an entire school and having students and staff wear their masks for 7 or 8 hours a day. Dr. Block added that as the parameters on the Department of Health risk matrix change downward, we will look at the option of getting all of our students in for more time.

Dee Dee Pulver, 47 Winchester Road, thanked everyone for meeting together on the subject of mental health and suggested we review and attend webinars through Cultures of Dignity as an additional resource.

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 9:46 p.m., Mr. August made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Klein seconded the motion.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Mr. August, Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Ms. Messer, Mrs. Konner  
Nayes - None

**ROLL CALL VOTE** - Ayes - Council Member Anthony, Council Member Vieria, Council Member  
Meinhardt, Deputy Mayor Klein, Mayor Fernandez  
Nayes - None

**Respectfully submitted,**

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**Steven K. Robinson**  
**Board Secretary**