

FLEMINGTON-RARITAN REGIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION
BOARD REORGANIZATION/REGULAR MEETING
January 6, 2025
MINUTES

The In-Person Regular Meeting of the Flemington-Raritan Regional Board of Education was called to order in conformance with the “Sunshine Law” by the Board Secretary, Ms. Tanya Dawson at 7:00 p.m.

In accordance with the State's Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by sending a notice of the time, date, location, and, to the extent known, the agenda of this meeting on December 26, 2024, to the Hunterdon County Democrat and The Courier-News. Copies of the notice also have been placed in the Board Office, posted on the District website, and filed with the Flemington Borough Clerk and the Raritan Township Clerk.

Ms. Dawson presented the November 2024 election results: Mr. Ryan Cirillo, Mr. Michael Owen each elected for a 3 year term representing Raritan Township and Ms. Julia Whitley elected for a 3 year term representing Flemington Borough.

Ms. Dawson issued the Oath of Office to new Board members, Mr. Ryan Cirillo and Ms. Julia Whitley.

Ms. Dawson took Roll Call

Members Present

Jaclyn Arce
William Bentley
Ryan Birkenstock
Warren Buckleitner
Ryan Cirillo
Lilian Colpas
Gina Criscitiello
Julia Whitley

Members Absent

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Attorney Present

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Ms. Dawson advised that in accordance with Board Policy 0135 and 0152, the following Board member submitted a letter of intent to the Board Secretary by December 19th for the position of Board President: Mr. Birkenstock. The letter of intent was shared with the full Board and copies were included in board packets. Ms. Dawson invited Mr. Birkenstock to read his letter aloud.

Dear Board members,

I am asking for your consideration to serve as Board President in 2025. I am supplying the information outlined in Policy 0135 to be nominated for election at the January 6th reorganization meeting.

I am deeply committed to supporting our district and ensuring its continued success. Through my involvement on the Finance and Facilities/Operations Committee, I have worked to oversee and improve financial and facilities planning, ensuring effective management of district resources. I also chaired the Transportation Committee, where we collaborated with the high school to secure transportation for our preschool students this year. I am always willing to attend meetings, collaborate with fellow board members, and make myself available to address any issues that arise. My community involvement, including coaching local sports leagues through my daughters' activities, deepens my connections and enhances my understanding of the community's concerns.

My goals for leadership in the upcoming year are as follows:

- 1) Guide our district through the financial challenges we are currently facing with transparency and strategic planning. I am committed to working closely with the administration, my fellow board members, and community stakeholders to make informed decisions that prioritize our students' education while maintaining fiscal responsibility.
- 2) Help set and define clear, measurable goals that commit to a vision of high expectations for administration and student achievement.
- 3) With almost half of our board being new, I will aim to build strong, collaborative relationships with our new board members, ensuring they feel welcomed and supported from the start. I will prioritize bringing them up to speed quickly on district matters and board procedures, helping to create a cohesive and unified Board that can effectively oversee our district and represent the community.
- 4) Help drive achievement of previous Board and District goals and involve our newest members in developing an action plan to ensure a seamless transition.

I look forward to continuing to build relationships with each and every member and hope to maintain a board where all members feel their voices are heard and respected. I thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with everyone this year!

Ms. Dawson declared the nominations for Board President open.

Ms. Criscitiello nominated Mr. Birkenstock for Board President.

Ms. Dawson requested each board member's vote via paper ballot and read the votes aloud for President:

Ms. Arce, vote for Birkenstock
Dr. Bentley, vote for Birkenstock
Mr. Birkenstock, vote for Birkenstock
Mr. Buckleitner, vote for Birkenstock
Mr. Cirillo, vote for Birkenstock
Ms. Colpas, vote for Birkenstock
Ms. Criscitiello, vote for Birkenstock
Ms. Whitley, vote for Birkenstock

Ms. Dawson declared Mr. Birkenstock the Board President with a unanimous vote. Mr. Birkenstock thanked fellow Board members for their support.

Ms. Dawson advised that in accordance with Board Policy 0135 and 0152, the following Board member submitted a letter of intent to the Board Secretary by December 19th for the position of Board Vice President: Ms. Arce. The letter of intent was shared with the full Board and copies were included in board packets. Ms. Dawson invited Ms. Arce to read her letter aloud.

Dear Members of the Board,

I respectfully request your support for my candidacy to serve as Vice President of the Board of Education in 2025. As a dedicated board member, I currently serve as Chair of Policy, and sit on both Instruction & Program, and the Personnel Committees. My two and a half years on the board, including two years as Vice President, have equipped me with a deep understanding of our district's needs and priorities. I remain committed to working collaboratively with our leadership team and fellow board members to serve our community. I will continue to prioritize open communication, making sure all voices are heard and everyone stays well-informed.

My goals as Vice President include:

1. Promoting and fostering teamwork among board members.
2. Enhancing board efficiency and effectiveness through clear processes and focus.
3. Furthering transparency and maintain meaningful communication with the community.

While challenges lie ahead, I am hopeful that we can build upon the unity within the board and foster common ground with our community and district, enabling us to collaborate and strengthen our district for the future.

Serving on this board has been a meaningful way for me to serve and participate with my community. I'm proud of the progress we have made together and look forward to continuing our work to support our students, staff, and families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ms. Dawson declared the nominations for Board Vice President open.

Dr. Bentley nominated Ms. Arce for Board Vice President.

Ms. Dawson requested each board member's vote via paper ballot and read the votes aloud for Vice President:

Ms. Arce, vote for Arce
Dr. Bentley, vote for Arce
Mr. Birkenstock, vote for Arce
Mr. Buckleitner, vote for Arce
Mr. Cirillo, vote for Arce
Ms. Colpas, vote for Arce
Ms. Criscitiello, vote for Arce
Ms. Whitley, vote for Arce

Ms. Dawson declared Ms. Arce the Board Vice President with a unanimous vote. Ms. Arce thanked fellow Board members for their support.

Ms. Whitley read the District Mission Statement.

As a Community of One, WE:

Foster social, emotional, and academic growth within a connected learning community
 Respect, honor, and embrace diverse family and community values by building collaborative partnerships
 Strengthen opportunities that nurture creative and critical thinkers
 Develop and inspire personal excellence.

Every Student - Every Day - Every Opportunity

Mr. Birkenstock asked for a motion to affirm the New Jersey School Board Association Code of Ethics.

Motion by Ms. Criscitiello, seconded by Ms. Arce.

Aye:	Ms. Arce	Mr. Cirillo	Nay:	-	Abstain:	-
	Dr. Bentley	Ms. Colpas				
	Mr. Birkenstock	Ms. Criscitiello				
	Dr. Buckleitner	Ms. Whitley				

Mr. Birkenstock asked for a motion to authorize, if necessary, the past Board President to sign all legal documents, payrolls and warrants until signatures can be obtained and processed.

Motion by Ms. Criscitiello, seconded by Dr. Bentley.

Aye:	Ms. Arce	Mr. Cirillo	Nay:	-	Abstain:	-
	Dr. Bentley	Ms. Colpas				
	Mr. Birkenstock	Ms. Criscitiello				
	Dr. Buckleitner	Ms. Whitley				

Mr. Birkenstock read the following resolution into the record:

WHEREAS, The New Jersey School Boards Association has declared January 2025 to be School Board Recognition Month, a time when all residents can acknowledge the contributions made by our local school board members; and

WHEREAS, The Flemington-Raritan Board of Education is one of more than 581 local boards of education in New Jersey, which sets policies and oversees operations for public school districts; and

WHEREAS, The Flemington-Raritan Board of Education embraces the goal of high-quality education for all New Jersey public school students; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey's local school boards help determine the educational goals for approximately 1.4 million children in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey's 5,000 local school board members, who receive no remuneration for their services, act as advocates for public school students as they work with administrators, teachers, and parents for the betterment of public education; and

WHEREAS, School boards strive to provide the resources necessary to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs; and

WHEREAS, Boards of education provide accountability to the public; they communicate the needs of the school district to the public; and they convey to school administrators the public's expectations for the schools; and

WHEREAS, New Jersey can take pride in its schools, which rank among the nation's best in key achievement indicators such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, and the preparation for college through advanced placement offerings and SAT assessments; Now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Flemington-Raritan Board of Education, does hereby recognize the services of local school board members throughout New Jersey as we join communities statewide in observing January 2025 as SCHOOL BOARD RECOGNITION MONTH; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Flemington-Raritan Board of Education urges all New Jersey citizens to work with their local boards of education and public school staff toward the advancement of our children's education.

On the motion of Mr. Birkenstock, seconded by Ms. Arce, the aforementioned resolution was affirmed viva voce.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. McGann offered congratulations to Mr. Birkenstock and Ms. Arce and welcomed new Board members, Mr. Cirillo and Ms. Whitley.

Dr. McGann recommended seeking approval from the voters to raise the District's tax levy and outlined specifically what the additional funding would provide for, including teaching staff to maintain small class sizes, a Class III officer in each school, continuing to have gifted and talented/STEM teachers, and extracurricular athletics. Dr. McGann noted that one town hall meeting on the budget had already taken place in December but two more would take place in January and February and that further information could be found on the District website.

Dr. McGann advised that using the most recent data from the Department of Education, Flemington-Raritan School District is ranked 30 out of 76 for per pupil spending state-wide for K-8 districts, noting one is the lowest and 76 is the highest. Furthermore, Flemington-Raritan School District has one of the lowest per pupil costs for Hunterdon County and offered the following comparisons in per pupil spending from neighboring Districts:

Flemington-Raritan - \$19,310 per pupil

HCRHS - \$24,653 per pupil

Readington - \$24,497 per pupil

Clinton Township- \$24,553 per pupil

Delaware - \$22,955 per pupil

Kingwood - \$22,005 per pupil

East Amwell - \$23,510 per pupil

Mr. Birkenstock solicited questions from Board members. General discussion took place on the specifics of the special voter question, about the importance of small class sizes and safety and security in school. Mr. Birkenstock encouraged the community to attend public forums like the town halls for factual information and to avoid misinformation.

Dr. McGann gave an overview of class sizes for Kindergarten, noting there are currently between 15-17 students per class which cannot be maintained if the question fails. Small class sizes along with a great teacher and superb administrators are the top three factors in improving test scores. Dr. McGann reiterated the importance of the Class III officers, which started as a Board initiative to have Class III officers in every school. For the 2022-2023 school year, Dr. McGann met with Raritan Township about the high cost of funding the officers, at which point Raritan Township agreed to cover the cost of two officers for one year. Dr. McGann noted that the District cannot continue to fund this cost without raising the tax levy. Finally, Dr. McGann shared that she continues to speak with legislators along with other Hunterdon County Superintendents advocating for changes to the school funding formula.

The Resolution for the approval of a Special Voter Question was approved under one motion made by Mr. Cirillo, seconded by Ms. Colpas.

Aye: Ms. Arce
Dr. Bentley
Mr. Birkenstock
Dr. Buckleitner

Mr. Cirillo
Ms. Colpas
Ms. Criscitiello
Ms. Whitley

Nay: -

Abstain: -

Whereas, the Flemington-Raritan Regional Board of Education ("Board") has determined the need to seek voter approval for additional funds resulting in a permanent increase to the local tax levy beginning with the 2025-26 school year budget; and

Whereas, in accordance with P.L. 2024, c.60, N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-5 and -39, the Board is permitted to seek voter approval at a special election for such an increase to the tax levy in order to fund expenditures beyond those required to meet New Jersey Student Learning Standard; and

Whereas, the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District certifies the school district has made efforts to enter into shared arrangements per N.J.S.A. 18A:7-8; and

Whereas, the Board has reviewed and discussed a proposal to increase the local tax levy by an additional 4% above the statutory 2% cap, for a total additional increase of \$2,388,749 beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, and seeks to approve the attached wording for the special voter question and interpretive statement to be submitted to the voters on March 11, 2025;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED as follows:

1. The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District hereby approves the attached special voter question and interpretive statement.
2. A special election will be held on March 11, 2025, with polling hours from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
3. A certified copy of this resolution shall be forwarded to the New Jersey Department of Education and the Hunterdon County Clerk's Office.
4. The Board's Officers and Administration are hereby authorized to take any and all steps necessary to carry out this action of the Board.

The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Board of Education is seeking approval from the district's legal voters to raise an additional \$2,388,749 for the 2025-2026 school year as permitted under P.L. 2024, c.60, N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-5 and -39 to keep thirty (30) teachers and staff, and a Class III Security Officer for each school in the District, specifically for the following purposes:

- Twenty-five (25) teaching staff needed to maintain small class sizes in the elementary schools including teachers to support specialized reading programs such as the reading recovery program in elementary schools and reading & mathematics support classes at the intermediate and middle school levels and instruction in all support class programs;
- Hire a Class III Security Officer for every school;
- Five (5) Gifted and Talented and/or STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) supplemental teachers;
- Avoid the elimination of junior varsity (JV) extracurricular athletics and co-curricular activities for softball, volleyball, field hockey, cross-country, soccer, lacrosse, wrestling, basketball, cheerleading, and baseball.

Interpretive Statement:

The Flemington Raritan Regional School District was impacted significantly by the state funding formula which has reduced school aid by over a million dollars cumulatively over the past 6 years. The district made significant reductions in the 2024-2025 and for the 2025-2026 school year.

Despite these reductions, the district again faces a significant shortfall for the 2025-26 budget year. If the district has to make reductions again to teaching staff and programs, the reductions will impact our students. Therefore, the district is seeking additional funding in the 2025-26 budget to support the maintenance of small class sizes in elementary classrooms of approximately 17 to 24 students per grade level. Class sizes, without the approval of the public question, will be over 25 students in most homerooms in grades K through 8.

Approval of the question will support evidence-based reading instruction, and supplemental academic programs such as gifted and talented programs and courses in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). The question approval will also fund safety and security personnel, specifically Class III Officers in each school. After-school programming, which includes extracurricular sports, will be affected without the approval of the public question. Approval of this public question will result in a permanent increase in the district's tax levy.

CITIZENS ADDRESS THE BOARD

The public is invited to respectfully share their concerns, comments, and suggestions according to the Board's policy and by-laws. Please be aware that this portion is your opportunity to comment on items of concern regarding the agenda only. The second public comment is for comment on any issue. Each speaker will have 3 minutes and the total session will be 30 minutes. The public is requested to sign the register and to state their name, municipality of residence, and group affiliation, if applicable. While all comments will be considered, Board Members will not respond to speakers at this time.

Mr. Birkenstock set the session to 30 minutes with 3 minutes for each person.

Victor Sloan, Raritan Township - Shared comments on per pupil costs and concerns on the increase to the tax levy.

Jana Olsavska, Raritan Township - Shared concerns regarding cuts to teaching staff and asked if cuts could be made elsewhere.

Mr. Birkenstock offered clarifying comments regarding transportation, grants and PILOT programs pertaining to new developments.

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS FOR APPROVAL:

PERSONNEL – Chairperson, TBA, Next Meeting – January 9, 2025

INSTRUCTION AND PROGRAM – Chairperson, TBA, Next Meeting – TBA

OPERATIONS/TRANSPORTATION – Chairperson, TBA, Next Meeting – TBA

POLICY– Chairperson, TBA, Next Meeting – TBA

MISCELLANEOUS (INFORMATION/ACTION)

Miscellaneous Action Item 1 was approved under motion made by Ms. Criscitiello, seconded by Ms. Arce.

Aye: Ms. Arce Dr. Bentley Mr. Birkenstock Dr. Buckleitner	Mr. Cirillo Ms. Colpas Ms. Criscitiello Ms. Whitley	Nay: -	Abstain: -
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1. Approval was given of the 2025 Board Calendar

CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Arce reported that correspondence was received regarding Board meetings on Mondays and conflicts with HCRHS.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Birkenstock noted that the Board will continue to move forward with work on Board goals and he will reach out to new Board members to establish which goals they would like to work on.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Birkenstock noted that committee assignments will be forthcoming and asked that Board members reach out to him with availability for committee meetings. Mr. Birkenstock also noted he will forward information to the new Board members regarding NJSBA training opportunities.

CITIZENS ADDRESS THE BOARD

The public is invited to respectfully share their concerns, comments, and suggestions according to the Board's policy and by-laws. Each speaker will have 3 minutes, and the total session will be 30 minutes. The public is requested to sign the register and to state their name, municipality of residence, and group affiliation, if applicable. While all comments will be considered, Board Members will not respond to speakers at this time.

Mr. Birkenstock set the session to 30 minutes with 3 minutes for each person.

No comment.

On the motion of Ms. Criscitiello seconded by Ms. Arce the meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m. viva voce.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Tanya Dawson
Business Administrator/Board Secretary