

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
LEVITTOWN UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT
LEVITTOWN, NY**

DATE: April 24, 2013

SPECIAL MEETING

THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, was duly called and held on Wednesday, April 24, 2013 in the Board Meeting Room of the Levittown Memorial Education Center.

CERTIFICATION:

The District Clerk certified that pursuant to Section 104, Open Meetings Law, notice of meeting was sent to the local newspapers, the Public Library and posted on the district's website. Further, all members of the Board of Education had due notice of said meeting.

PRESENT:

BOARD MEMBERS

Ms. Peggy Marenghi
Mr. James Moran
Mr. Michael Pappas – President
Mr. Peter Porrazzo – Vice President
Mr. Edward Powers
Mr. Kevin Regan – Secretary (excused absence)
Mr. Frank Ward

ADMINISTRATION

Dr. James Grossane – Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Darlene Rhatigan – Assistant Superintendent
Ms. Debbie Rifkin – Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Mark Flower – Assistant Superintendent

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Mr. Pappas, called the Special Meeting to order at 6:30 PM. On a motion by Mr. Porrazzo, seconded by Mr. Moran and approved (6-0) that the Board adjourn to Executive Session to discuss items on the Executive Session Agenda relating to negotiations.
- C. The Board reconvened to Public Session at 7:41 PM at which time Mr. Pappas asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence for those in Boston and our troops fighting overseas.

NOTE: Dr. Grossane addressed the audience regarding the excess letters sent out to some of the staff. He stated that this is something that is not done without great consideration. He wanted to make everyone fully aware of all the information which may answer a lot of their questions. Dr. Grossane reported that as we are a K-12 District, a lot of what happens on the elementary level affects the secondary level and visa a versa. He noted that we are down about 75 to 80 students in kindergarten. The Board has decided that classes will not be run under the enrollment of 17 at the secondary level unless there are circumstances such as space limitations or are IEP driven. Dr. Grossane shared that the majority of the excess letters that went out are due to this tightening of the schedule on the secondary level. He remarked that there might be changes as teachers announce their retirement. Additionally, many notices went out to part time employees since their jobs are contingent upon enrollment and course selection every year. Regarding music specifically, all requested music courses and performing groups will be offered next year with some constriction on the elementary level. Presently, there are two administrators in the music dept, a chairperson at the elementary level and one at the secondary level which equals more than

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one full time administrator. Therefore, we are switching to one full time administrator and both those chair people will return to the classroom full time. Dr. Grossane explained that the lesson periods will be affected. He pointed out that we have had the luxury of having lessons with as few as one or two children in them. Unfortunately, the district can no longer support that. The lesson size will increase but still be manageable. Dr. Grossane commented that in analyzing everything, these were the best decisions for the district. He remarked that while these decisions are unfortunate, they have to occur. He said that as the schedules are finalized, there might be a need to increase some of the sections which would bring back some of those let go. Dr. Grossane shared that it is heartfelt when beloved teachers are let go but it is our responsibility to make sure we present the public with an efficient budget, efficient schedule, that offers the complete program.

II. PUBLIC BE HEARD

(See attached)

III. ACTION ITEMS: NEW BUSINESS.

1. **MOTION:** Mr. Porrazzo moved, "RESOLVED, that the Levittown Board of Education does, hereby, adopt a school district budget authorizing a total expenditure of \$ 195,590,207 and an associated tax levy of \$ 131,161,870 for the 2013-2014 school year, said budget to be presented to the voters of the District on May 21, 2013; and

RESOLUTION # 12-13-198
Adoption of 2013-2014
Budget for May 21, 2013
Annual Vote

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that at least fourteen days before the 21st day of May, 2013, copies of the aforesaid mentioned budget shall be prepared and made available, upon request, at the office of the Superintendent, and at offices of the Principals in all the schools of the District."

Seconded: Mr. Ward

NOTE: Mr. Flower gave a brief summary of the budget he was proposing for adoption. He explained that this was a 2.94% budget to budget increase over last year's budget. In terms of developing the budget, there were certain limitations and mandates that had to be kept in mind, such as the tax levy cap. Mr. Flower noted that we had no control over some of the major cost impacts to the budget such as the significant increase, to the teacher's retirement contribution, the employees retirement system, health care cost and BOCES costs. He stressed that one of his goals was to try to maintain all of the current programs in the district. Mr. Flower presented a pie chart that showed the cost drivers in the budget and went on to explain these. He remarked that another way to look at this chart is to see where all of the costs are going. Mr. Flower went on explain about the tax levy cap and our other source of revenue, state aid. He shared that the two decisions the Board has to make tonight is if the budget number is acceptable and what is the tax levy that needs to be adopted. He discussed the Board's option and its ramifications. He noted that next year, because of increases in expenses due primarily to the pension contribution and health care costs, the district will not be operating in a surplus. Depending upon what the levy is, will have a direct impact on how big of a deficit we will be operating in next year. The Board asked questions regarding the levy and expressed their opinions. The Board would like to see more community involvement to better gauge what the residents would support.

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III. **ACTION ITEMS: NEW BUSINESS.**

Mr. Flower explained that there are three propositions on the budget this year. Proposition #1 is for the actual school budget. The second proposition (#2) is for a Capital Reserve Fund. He explained that a Capital Reserve is a way for the district over the next ten years, to be able to put money aside, if's its available, to be able to fund future capital projects. The benefit of doing this, is that it is not funded through the tax levy so there is no increase to anyone's taxes. The third proposition (#3) is for the library budget vote. Mr. Flower remarked that historically, the library election has been on a separate date but in an effort to save money, they are piggybacking on our school district budget vote. Also on the ballot is the election of Board candidates for the School Board of Education and the library Board.

Mr. Porrizzo reported that there are three ways to fund a capital project. One is to issue more debt, two is to build it into the budget every year which would increase the budget, both of these ways would come out of the taxpayers pocket, or three is to create a Capital Reserve and reallocate monies that are in other reserves. Mr. Porrizzo asked if this proposition was just to established the reserve. Mr. Flower stated that in order to spend the money, we would have to go back to the community.

MOTION CARRIED. Six members present voting yes.

APPROVED 6-0.

2. **MOTION:** Mr. Powers moved, "RESOLVED, that the Levittown Board of Education does, hereby, adopt the attached calendar of meeting dates for the Levittown Public Schools for the 2013-2014 school year."

RESOLUTION # 12-13-199
Board Meeting Dates -
2013-2014 School Year

Seconded: Ms. Marenghi

MOTION CARRIED. Six members present voting yes.

APPROVED 6-0.

MOTION: Mr. Powers moved "That the Board of Education go into Executive Session at 9:50 PM.

Seconded: Mr. Porrizzo

NOTE: The Board reconvened in public session at 9:56 PM.

3. **MOTION:** Mr. Moran moved, "RESOLVED, that the Levittown Board of Education approve the following schedules:

RESOLUTION # 12-13-199

Schedule 12-J-5 1001
(Tenure)

Schedule 12-T-1 1002
(Textbooks)."

Seconded: Mr. Powers

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NOTE: Ms. Rifkin reported that the textbooks on the schedule were for the adoption of the Journeys Program. She reported that a committee had reviewed three different programs and decided to pilot this one which is in each of the elementary schools in one grade level by two teachers. She explained that the committee feels this is a positive direction for the district on go in with a consistent program across all the schools aligned with the Common Core.

MOTION CARRIED. Six members present voting yes.

APPROVED 6-0.

IV. ADJOURN

A **MOTION** was made by Mr. Ward and seconded by Mr. Powers that the meeting be adjourned at 9:59 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted

Elizabeth Appelbaum
District Clerk

NOTE: TAPES OF THE MEETING ARE AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW AT THE LEVITTOWN LIBRARY.

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V. PUBLIC BE HEARD

PLEASE NOTE: COPIES OF ATTACHMENTS SUBMITTED ARE GIVEN TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THEN KEPT WITH THE OFFICIAL MINUTES IN THE DISTRICT CLERK OFFICE.

The guidelines pertaining to Public Be Heard were read. Dr. Grossane and/or Board members will respond to questions, after the last speaker is heard.

Jay Jones 15 Return Lane, Levittown

Mr. Jones, a parent of three children presently attending school, a teacher in the district for 25 years and a representative of the Levittown United Teachers, was concerned about the recent staff cuts. He noted that in the past five years, more that 110 teachers have been let go. He has watched as program after program was eliminated, course after course cut and other courses filled to the maximum levels the law allows. Mr. Jones acknowledged that the Board has been under unique pressures by the collapsing economy to the 2% tax cap. He stated that like most residents he fully supports the school Board and recognizes that they have had to make tough decision. As a Levittown tax payer, he is fully aware of the difficult tax burdens the residents are under. Mr. Jones commented that after 5 years of cutting, he cannot stress enough that any further cuts is threatening the integrity and strength of our school system. He went on to address the cuts in mathematics and music. He remarked that he knows the members of the school Board care deeply about our students and the school system, which is why he is asking them to reconsider these cuts and restore these programs that greatly benefit our Levittown students.

Tom Kohlman 806 Brent Drive, Wantagh, NY

Mr. Kohlman asked about the parents who had refused the Common Core tests for their children. He noted that this concern was raised at another meeting and no answer was given. He wanted to know what the cost was for the Common Core for books, tests, teacher training, subs and other related items. He noted that two years ago, a pilot program called Springboard, was purchased and only used for one year. Mr. Kohlman feels this was a waste of money. He would like a break down of costs for both programs.

Liz Genzale 18 Perwinkle Rd, Levittown, NY

Ms. Genzale, President of the Division Avenue Marching Band Association and a parent of a student at Division, spoke about the excessing of teachers and cuts to the lesson times. She noted that the Music Department is important to students, especially to those who want to pursue a career in music. Ms. Genzale wanted to know if the music program will remain intact with all of the reductions.

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MacArthur High School Students

Alex Dempsey 3117 Ward Lane, Wantagh, NY
Tom Pallini 3291 Bernice Rd., Seaford, NY
Alex McGuiness 182 Willowood Dr., Wantagh, NY
Jessica Kiedaisch 32 Wedgewood Lane, Wantagh, NY
Cassidy King 5 Spoke Lane, Levittown, NY

The students listed above addressed the Board on the proposed cuts to the Music Department. They spoke passionately about how their teachers inspired them and their concern for the future of the music program. Several students felt that the district should be encouraging students to take part in the arts programs, not take the opportunities away. Music is a huge part of these students’ lives and several of them are pursuing music careers.

Division Avenue High School Students

Stephanie Wagner 99 Bayberry Lane, Levittown, NY
Kara Burke 46 Azalea Rd., Levittown, NY

The two students listed above spoke to the Board regarding the cuts to lesson times and its impact on future music students. The girls shared their opinion that more lesson time was needed to learn techniques to help the students improve on their instruments and vocal assignments. They were compassionate towards their teachers and fellow students.

Lori Burke 46 Azalea Rd., Levittown, NY

Ms. Burke was concerned about the cuts to the music program and what effect it will have for the Music Department. She stated that the children in the Music Department don’t always find niches for themselves.

Laurie Levorone 3610 Bernard Dr., Wantagh, NY
Sheryl Tribble 26 Russet Lane, Wantagh, NY

Both of these residents are past Presidents of the MacArthur Music Parents Association and came to address the Board on the excessing of the music teachers and cuts to the lessons. They felt strongly about the importance of the music program and how the dedicated music students will suffer. Ms. Livron does not want the music program to be the one that always has to take a hit when the budget deficient has to be made up. They asked the Board to reconsider their position.

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Jane Finkelstein

Ms. Finkelstein wanted to address the curriculum and development portion of budget. She noted that 84% of the budget is for salaries and benefits which leaves only 16% for all the rest. She questioned whether the curriculum associates are cost effective. Ms. Finkelstein reported that the district has four curriculum associates for seven buildings. She wanted to know if they are cost effective due to their salaries and benefits in terms of the students achievements and if there is any data to back this up. Additionally, she wanted to know how much money was spent on testing materials, Pearson products and the parent portal. Ms. Finkelstein reported that there is a rally in Albany to support public education and she asked that the district provide a bus.

James A. Moran

2 Shield Lane, Levittown

Mr. Moran joined the Citizens Advisory Committee for Budget to get involved in the community. He was sad to say that only two people are on the committee. He remarked that the committee needs more residents to participate and show support for the district. He discussed parts of the budget with the Board.

RESPONSE:

In response to the questions on the budget concerns:

Dr. Grossane stated that he would provide the information requested and report on it at the next public meeting.

In response to the concerns regarding the Music Department:

Dr. Grossane responded that the cuts to the music program are necessary in order for the Board and Administration to be responsible to the community. He noted that all the speakers tonight were impassioned and spoke from the heart. He was pleased to see how these teachers had such a profound effect on their students. Dr. Grossane reported that all the classes and programs are still in effect. He remarked that all comments made tonight will be taken to heart. He was proud that everyone felt comfortable enough to speak which is a testament to all that Levittown has taught you. He commented that his goal has always been to maintain the integrity of the programs for as long as we possibly can and for as long as we are financially able.

Ms. Marengi remarked how wonderful it is to see so many students and residents here tonight and hear their voices. She noted that the Board of Education represents the community of Levittown but it is important that the residents get involved and come to more meetings especially those regarding the budget and voice their opinions.

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Mr. Porrazzo spoke briefly about the budget process. He noted that it is important to understand that the district's expenses went up about ten million dollars this year. He reported that it is made up of three different categories: pension, salaries and health insurance. He remarked that under the 2% tax cap, our maximum tax levy this year is 3 ½ % which translates to four point two million dollars with our state aid going up about a million. This does not make up half of what our expenses went up. Mr. Porrazzo feels that we will have a similar situation next year. Until these costs come down, the only thing we can do is use the money in reserves. He noted that this problem has to be attacked from both the revenue and expense side, in order to move forward. Mr. Porrazzo stated that the Board takes no cuts lightly, they are all heartfelt.

Mr. Pappas talked about our budget and how our expenses are going up but our revenues are not matching it. Therefore, we have to go into our piggybank which is our reserves. This money will run out in about three to four budget cycles. We are hoping that through the use of reserves and prudent expenditures, we can get through a few more years until things turn around. He noted that the Board wants all students to have the same educational opportunities that students had in previous years. Mr. Pappas commented that the teachers affected are excellent and do much with the talent in the district.

Mr. Powers discussed the budget with the audience. He reported that the district is looking at a five million dollar negative funding next year. If you monetize that in human beings, it translates to 45 to 60 individuals. He stated that the tweaks that are being done now, such as consolidating lessons, represent a continued evolvement of changes. Our neighboring districts are in similar situations. Mr. Powers remarked that there is only a grim forecast for education in New York. He stated that the only way to change what the landscape of education of Long Island is going to look like, is to change what is coming out of Albany. Mr. Powers stressed that students will be the voice of the next generation to make changes.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Appelbaum,
District Clerk