

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING
BOARD OF EDUCATION
MIDLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY
MARCH 2, 2021**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The meeting was called to order by Peter Triolo at 8:00 p.m. and Ms. Garvey read the following statement:

“Both adequate and electronic notice of this meeting were provided as specified in the Open Meeting Act. Notices of this meeting were sent to The Record, Ridgewood News and to the Midland Park Borough Clerk for the 2021 elective year. A notice was also posted inside the office of the Midland Park Board of Education in a place reserved for such announcements. The Board announces that under its long-standing policy, it will not discuss in public any comments made by members of the public concerning individual staff members or students.”

Roll Call

Present:	James Canellas	Sandra Criscenzo
	Christine Dell’Aglia	Nabil Eliya
	Patricia Fantulin	Richard Formicola
	Brian McCourt	Maryalice Thomas

Peter Triolo

OTHERS PRESENT

Staff:	Marie Cirasella, Superintendent of Schools
	Stacy Garvey, Business Administrator/Board Secretary

BOARD PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Midland Park Public School District Mission Statement

The Midland Park School District as part of a strong, dedicated community, provides its students with a comprehensive, adaptive education aligned to 21st century knowledge and skills needed for success in college and career. The district maximizes all resources to empower students to realize their individual worth and responsibility, with the expectation they achieve the New Jersey state standards at all grade levels.

- On February 23 in closed session, we began discussing how best to hold in person meetings. The main question is where to hold the meeting, we need to choose a meeting location that can adequately hold as many people as possible, while ensuring the minimum impact on the school building. Can the location be accessed from outside the building to limit any traffic into and out

of the building. This will ensure the maintenance staff can prepare the building for the next day. The space has to be large enough to maintain social distancing. Boards desire to make sure there is not impact on the building for instruction the next day. We will give an update at the next board meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT *Dr. Marie Cirasella*

- The eblast went out today regarding the Phase II Re-Opening Plan for students in grades 9-12. The first stage is for students in grades 11-12 on Monday, March 15 and for students in grades 9-10 on Monday, March 22.
- The week of March 8 we will still use the pilot 7-8 grade program and are confident we have identified and resolved any obstacles to success, which enabled us to move the start date up one week.
- We are pleased this plan accomplishes our goal to increasing in-person learning hours for all students. Families may elect to opt-out of in-person instruction at any time. A form is available on the website.
- The eblast sent today has a great deal of information in it. Principal Nick Capuano will be sharing more school and grade-level specific information in days to come. Review this information carefully and contact us immediately with questions or concerns.
- It needs to be acknowledged the hard work of Mr. Capuano and the Admin team, which includes Mr. Collins, our Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds and the MPEA Leadership. The building walkthroughs are to reassure everyone with regard to HVAC concerns and other matters and it all went very well.
- Mr. Triolo shared that Governor Murphy has expanded vaccine eligibility as of March 15, PK-12 educators and support staff are now eligible for a COVID vaccine. This is very good news for all public school districts and we are hopeful that the numbers are all moving in the right direction.
- We are pleased to announce that we have given approval for a high school musical to be presented at the end of May and in early June. Mrs. Halliwell selected Stephen Sondheim's musical *Into the Woods*. We are excited to see our students back on the boards this year. Mr. Capuano and Mrs. Halliwell have collaborated to identify safety precautions and will continue to do so as we move into the production phase of this event.
- Please continue to contact me, or any member of the administrative team, with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your ongoing cooperation and support.

Open to Public – COMMENTS only for action items on the March 2, 2021 agenda.

BOARD MOTIONS

Action Items:

B. Finance- (J. Canellas, Chairperson)

Mr. Canellas and Ms. Garvey reviewed the budget with the Board.

2.54% increase on tax levy with use of banked cap. This enabled us to keep our programs and activities the same as last year.

Administration has done a great job finding efficiencies and savings. Came forward with a lean but effective budget.

Included is the final phase of the door project.

There will be a \$15.16 increase on the average home.

We will speak in more detail at the public hearing.

Correction to resolution, Total General fund- last number should be 8. Will be reflected in minutes.

State aid increased \$84,000.

We are maintaining all current programs- More information from Dr. Cirasella at public hearing.

The only addition to budget being presented in the increase of a part time aide necessary for special education program.

Motion – Mr. Canellas, seconded – Mr. McCourt...

1. Resolution to Approve the Tentative 2021-2022 School Year Budget

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Midland Park Board of Education, County of Bergen, approves the Tentative 2021-2022 School Year Budget, as follows:

Current General Expense (Funds 11)	\$ 23,475,753
Capital Outlay (Fund 12)	\$ 318,275
Special Schools (Fund 13)	\$ 817,700
TOTAL GENERAL FUND	\$ 24,611,728
SPECIAL REVENUE (Fund 20)	\$ 605,763
DEBT SERVICE FUND	\$ 939,125
 TOTAL EXPENDITURES/APPROPRIATIONS	 \$ 26,156,616

Included in budget line 620, Budgeted Withdrawal from Capital Reserve- Excess Costs & Other Capital Projects is \$295,000 for other capital project costs to complete Phase 3 of the Door Replacement Project and a Partial Roof Replacement at Godwin School. The total costs of these projects represent expenditures for renovation elements or projects that are in addition to the facilities efficiency standards determined by the Commissioner as necessary to achieve the CCCS;

and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the GENERAL FUND tax levy \$21,516,844 is approved to support Current General Expense and \$939,125 to support Debt Service, for the 2021-2022 school year budget. Included in the General Fund Tax Levy is the need for a Banked Cap Adjustment in the amount of \$113,698 to be included in the base budget and used to support current programs as well as funding for curriculum writing and support materials for Science, World Language, and Visual and Performing Arts at both the elementary and secondary levels to align with the new state standards. These purchases will be completed in the 2021-2022 budget year.

Roll Call: All Yes

Motion – Mr. Canellas, seconded – Mr. McCourt...

2. Establish the following Travel Allowances and related expenses for district employees and trustees in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6:A-7.3:

<u>2019-2020</u>		<u>2020-2021</u>		<u>2021-2022</u>
Maximum	Actual	Maximum	Current	Maximum
\$40,000	\$ 8,196	\$30,000	\$22,040	\$30,000

Roll Call: All Yes

- C. Curriculum Committee – (S. Criscenzo, Chairperson)

Motion – Ms. Criscenzo, seconded – Dr. Thomas...

- S-1. Approve the Phase II District Reopening Plan for grades 9-12, implementation to begin on Monday, March 15, 2021.

Roll Call: All Yes

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS/Review of March 16, 2021 agenda items

- B. Finance Committee- (J. Canellas, Chairperson)

No Report

- C. Curriculum Committee- (S. Criscenzo, Chairperson)

No Report

- D. Policy Committee- (P. Fantulin, Chairperson)

No Report

- E. Legislative Committee- (Administration)

- Governor has approved legislation that provides districts with relief from the NJQSAC review. Districts that were designated as high performing will automatically have this year's review postponed until their next scheduled review in 2023-24
- Senate has advanced eight diversity bills aimed at increasing the diversity of the state's education workforce, preventing teacher shortages and cultivating inclusive learning environments. The bills include:
 1. Loan redemption program for teachers who teach ESL or bilingual programs;
 2. Creation of limited certificates of eligibility for certain teacher candidates;
 3. Requires teachers to complete two hours of professional development related to cultural competency every two years;
 4. Establish a three-year Male Teachers of Color Mentorship Program, which selects ten male students of color from higher Education programs to work with ten male teachers of color in a Mentorship capacity;
 5. Mandate all candidates for teaching certificates complete a course on culturally responsive teaching, starting in 2021-22.

F. Buildings and Grounds Committee- (C. Dell'Aglia, Chairperson)

- Preliminary conversations on turf fields

G. Negotiations Committee- (N. Eliya, Chairperson)

No Report

H. Technology & Public Relations Committee- (R. Formicola, Chairperson)

No Report

I. Town Council- (P. Triolo, B. McCourt)

- A meeting will be scheduled for the end of the month

J. Student Representative- (Samantha Padovano)

No Report

OLD BUSINESS

No Report

NEW BUSINESS

Motion – Ms. Criscenzo, seconded – Dr. Thomas...

Motion to go into closed session before the meeting of March 16, 2021, for the purpose of reviewing the hiring of personnel, legal updates and confidential student HIB case reviews.

Roll Call: All Yes

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC- general **COMMENTS** only at this time are to be directed to the Board President.

There were two comments submitted to the Superintendent and Board President.

Cheryl Biswurm – *First I want to thank you for the work you do for our schools. I know this is an unprecedented time for all of us. I am thankful that a Phase II plan is underway as I, along with many parents have wanted that for quite some time now. However, I don't quite understand why it is being rolled out in piece-meal.*

In some email responses to parents, Dr. Cirasella has questioned the faith that some of the parents in Midland Park have in the Board of Ed and this is part of the reason why. Statements are made but then not adhered to, and dates are set then retracted. On February 19th we received a letter stating "Phase II will not be implemented at this time". Then on February 22nd we received a letter stating "Phase II may happen as early as March 1st". Then a letter on February 23rd just 5 hours before the Board of Ed meeting stating Phase II plans for K-8 will begin on March 8th but not for grades 9-12. We were told at

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last week's Board of Ed meeting that you would be trying Phase II for grades 7 and 8 first to see how it works for them and then roll it out for grades 9-12. But per today's email, you have announced the starting dates for grades 9-12 before Phase II for grades 7-8 has begun yet. Forgive me but none of this makes sense and this is why parents are losing faith.

Question #1: Can you please give specific information as to why 9-12th grades can't enter Phase II on March 8th at the same time as all of the other grades? I understand that 60% of the children in Midland Park High School have opted for full virtual which allows plenty of room to social distance in the classrooms. My son has some classes with only 2 children. Dr. Cirasella stated we are in a completely turbulent situation, and things fluctuate almost on an hour by hour basis. Our goal is to bring students back for more in person learning hours and we want to do that as soon as we possibly can. Dr. Cirasella responded to the 60% that have opted for fully virtual and that this information is incorrect, it is closer to just under 30%. You ask why we chose this two-step approach. Mr. Capuano provided information that it takes four days for the high school to run a full cycle. By doing it in two steps it gives the administration some time to remediate issues as problems are revealed. If you have specific questions about your child's schedule, Mr. Capuano would be delighted to speak to you as would I.

Question #2: Why has Cohort D - which is 5 half days in person per week - been offered to some kids since September and not all? And, it has not been offered to all of the kids with an IEP either. It seems discriminatory and I am wondering what the qualifications are of those kids who have been offered Cohort D? Dr. Cirasella responded that the first group of children that were offered five half days a week were identified as any Special Education student. Others that were offered Cohort D were students who are struggling.

Question #3: Why can't the Board of Ed meetings happen in person with limited attendance? According to the New Jersey School Boards Association Open Public Meetings Act, "public meetings may be held in-person or by means of communication equipment". While I appreciate that you televise your meetings, I don't understand why they can't be held in person at this point, giving parents the option to attend and ask questions in real time. The meetings could be held in the school auditorium or gymnasium and adhere to limits on attendance by having someone monitor the door or an online sign up in advance of the meeting. Mr. Triolo responded that the Board started discussions last week and have continued discussions. We are trying to move forward with in person meetings as fast as possible. We do not want to impact the operations of the school, ex. auditorium, media center, and gymnasium. We need to make sure we have very limited access to in and out of the building so areas that need to be cleaned can be done.

Finally, I want you all to be aware of the concerns that I, and many people in this town have. I mean no disrespect by anything I say but am speaking out of a real concern for Midland Park. By not opening our schools in a timely manner, you are failing our children.

For almost one year now our children have been receiving only half-days of school...whether hybrid or virtual. At 12:30 our children are done for the day except for some labs and other office hour meets. My 6th grader has not seen her specials teachers for a year now and my 10th grader has no classes in the afternoon. When speaking to parents and teachers from other districts, they are shocked when they hear that we don't offer anything to our children in the afternoon. There is absolutely no structure for these kids in the afternoon and by the time the 2020-2021 school year ends our children will have had a half-year of school.

Many parents have, or are planning to, pull their kids out of Midland Park schools for private schools which are full day, or they are moving out of town. My son's high school class is down to 52 kids with more leaving. This does not look good for our schools and in turn, for our town. I truly believe this is eventually going to bring the value of our schools and our town down considerably and I hate to see that happen. My husband grew up here and I have lived here 19 years and we love this town.

I would ask you to please consider all of this when making your decisions. Parents are not happy. We feel we are not being heard and we are being walked all over. I ask that you please allow our children to get back into school, together, grades K through 12, and that in the future you consider the feelings and comments from all of the parents in Midland Park prior to making decisions. Thanks again so much for all you do.

Cheryl Biswurm submitted another comment that pertains to her family directly. Ms. Garvey stated she did not want to read that comment at the Board meeting due to the nature of the comment and she will send her comment to Dr. Cirasella and Mr. Triolo. Dr. Cirasella responded that someone will get back to her regarding her family.

Nadia Stern – *Regarding the email that was just sent about the 2nd part of phase 2, does anyone happen to know what the 9th and 10th graders do the week of the 15th? Are they virtual the whole week while the 11th and 12th graders go into school? Or do they still go on their cohort day?* Dr. Cirasella responded that Mr. Capuano will be sending out more information tomorrow. The 9th and 10th graders will continue with the hybrid schedule. Reach out to him or me if you have any more questions.

The Superintendent and Board thanks you for sending in your comments/questions.

Motion – Mr. McCourt, seconded – Ms. Criscenzo...
To adjourn the meeting

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Stacy Garvey
School Business Administrator/Board Secretary