

**FLEMINGTON-RARITAN REGIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION****VIRTUAL SPECIAL MEETING**

August 18, 2020

**MINUTES**

The **Virtual** Regular Meeting of the Flemington-Raritan Regional Board of Education was called to order in conformance with the "Sunshine Law" by the Board President **via Zoom** at 7:01 p.m.

**Member(s) Present Virtually**

Jessica Abbott	Laurie Markowski
Valerie Bart	Susan Mitcheltree
Jeffrey Cain	Edward Morgan
Marianne Kenny	Tim Bart

**Attorney Present Virtually**

Alicia D'Anella

Mr. Bart logged off and logged back in to rectify the sound issue.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Dr. McGann and Mr. Bart invited Principals, Dr. Hamblin and Ms. Vala to join the panelists of the Board this evening. Dr. McGann shared a brief presentation, as attached. She noted that she understands that tonight's topic is an emotional one. She began her presentation by giving an explanation of the return to school ladder. Dr. McGann noted that we are currently at Tier One. Ms. Voorhees shared the few items of PPE we have received to date. She noted we expect to receive more within the week but not all. She expressed concern that we are still waiting for many items. Mr. Bart also thanked our Principals and Dr. Hamblin for joining us tonight. He shared that we will accept questions and answers during the Citizens Address the Board. He noted, Citizens Address the Board will be 30 minutes with a 3 minute rule per speaker.

Mr. Bart read the following statement:

On behalf of the Board of Education, we would like to thank the community for joining tonight's meeting. The Board understands the strong feelings and opinions around in-person versus virtual education. For many, many months now, our Superintendent, administration, staff, community members and Board Members have been reviewing and considering COVID data, recommendations and plans to best educate children during the pandemic. This work started in March and continues forward. The Board of Education has spent countless hours in meetings, listening, reading, and having conversations with each other and experts. Every single one of us voting today has children. As individuals and as a Board, we care about this district and the education and well being of children and staff. Otherwise, we would not be here.

We also understand how frustrating it is when plans change and how difficult this is for families. School districts are governed by a myriad of laws and mandates that dictate exactly what we can do when. This backdrop has changed at a breakneck pace throughout the past six weeks with the ebbs and flows of the virus and our State's response. Today's vote is not based on a flaw in the district's initial restart plan. The plan approved on August 6 was developed in full compliance with the directives issued by the Governor and Department of Education at that time. However, since then, the State's requirements have changed--along with factors including a statewide reduction on indoor gathering limits, recent fluctuation in the State's rate of virus transmission, and delays in testing and test results. On the district level, we have concerns over the timely arrival of PPE, air quality and mask compliance in buildings without air conditioning during the hotter months, and making our staff and families feel safe.

We understand some community members believe this shifting plan to move to fully virtual was pre-planned. This is not the case. There are no political or personal agendas behind the shift. The referendum investment has been questioned. The referendum represents a long term investment into our community's schools and we thank you for supporting the investments. Unfortunately, the air conditioning will not be installed into Robert Hunter, Demares, Barley Sheaf and RFIS until next summer. We set out July 1 mandated to put all students back in schools. In mid-July the mandate shifted to require a virtual option. The dual hybrid and virtual system was developed. The plan was not perfect, but at the heart of each move was care and empathy for students and staff, along with a State mandate.

Knowing our district's limitations and with the Governor's announcement last week, tonight's agenda includes a motion to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to shift to all virtual learning through October 30. Please know that while our opinions may differ on this issue, as a community we will open schools virtually with the goal to get students back into buildings as soon as possible. We do not have all of the answers, but we do ask for support in the decision we will take this evening in protecting all students, staff and the community at large.

We know that children and teachers all want nothing more than to be in school. It's where they belong. And we want to get them there. But we also feel very responsible for keeping our community safe.

#### CITIZENS ADDRESS THE BOARD

Mr. Bart read the following statement regarding public comment pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(a), the Open Public Meetings Act. Members of the public are invited to address the Board according to the Board's policy and bylaws. Please be aware that this portion is your opportunity to comment, and is not a forum for the Board to respond to your comments. However, the Board will certainly give all comments appropriate consideration.

Ira Rosenheim, Township resident, appreciates the difficult decision the Board has to make. He prefers we return to school. He asked what the specific criteria makeup is to move us through the Tiers. He also expressed concerns that children are going to fall behind. He has doubts that we are going to move to in class instruction.

Latasha Scruggs, asked what will be different virtually for students with IEP's? She shared concerns that he is going to fall behind.

Danche Haralampiera, Township resident, shared that she will be attending every Board meeting and will vote for moving forward. She expressed concern that we are not opening. She doesn't know how the high school can open and other schools can, but we can't. It upsets her to see students upset. She requested a clear answer as to how soon we can go back to school.

Peter Dykes, Township resident, shared that he appreciates all the work and the difficult decisions we have to make. He will be ok with remote learning but noted it's not the greatest. He thinks it is extremely important that children have person to person contact. He asked the school to plan field days to allow classes and students to get together with proper protocols in place.

Lauren Bielski, Township resident, feels some of her comments have been already expressed. She asked for instruction as to how the virtual academy looks like. She also asked what the Special Education plan will look like. She offered a suggestion about teaching outside and also suggested the community support providing supplies and come together.

Dr. McGann noted that she will provide details on Monday, August 24th about how to move through the Tiers and what the virtual academy will look like.

Carolyn Tomasko, shared that her children did not have a good experience with virtual learning. She wants her children to return to in school learning. She wants to be sure there is going to be additional support for students who are struggling. She also asked if Kindergarten will be getting chromebooks.

Michelle Turnbull, wants to reiterate what the other speakers have shared. She expressed concern for the lack of data. She asked about HVAC and how will that be rectified since it will not be fixed until next summer. She asked the Board to be more transparent. She is upset that emails were not answered and also wants updated emails.

Jennifer Wester, sent an email and received a response, but did not get an answer. She noted the data in Hunterdon and wants to know what will move us through the levels. She noted technical issues and has concerns for children as well. She wants to know why PPE is still a problem and wants to understand the staff concerns. She has the right to know what percentage put in for FMLA.

Vitaliy Yurkiv, Township resident, expressed concern that the ladder structure does not address Special Education. Noted virtual time is not enough for Special Education. Shared they spend money on therapy and now it is wasted. Also suggested getting students together to support each other. Shared sent several emails and none were addressed. Believes most parents have masks and hand sanitizer already. Suggested we do not need as much PPE as suggested.

Prameela Nagaraj, asked what parents should expect to see for a virtual structure. Would happily contribute PPE as well.

Mr. Bart asked if the Board agreed to extend the Citizens Address to the Board by 15 minutes. The Board agreed.

Dr. McGann took a few minutes to explain a few items. She noted we are in Tier 1. She also answered a few questions about masks and shield requirements. She then elaborated on HVAC concerns.

Andrew Assisni, Teacher, thanked the Superintendent and the Board for making the right decision for children, staff and the community. He stated as a Teacher and a parent he shares concerns but also expressed concern if we ignore the past. He spoke about the impact if we do not protect our children and staff.

Keith Townsend, shared appreciation for the Board and Teachers. He asked if the situation is going to be resolved by the Teachers union or the public.

Rahul Bansal, appreciates the Board's time. He noted humans need to learn to adapt. He agreed about public health, but also noted we can go to Costco and the beach. He stated we need to figure this out soon. He is concerned with mental and physical health. He asked who will drive this decision. He suggested the tiered approach is based on age and that we need to address this together.

Nicole Ramao wasn't able to connect, we moved onto the next citizen.

Jennifer Monaco, understands the trials and tribulations and gives the Board a lot of credit. She appreciates the open dialogue. She looks forward to hearing about the schedule on Monday and expressed concern with going hybrid during flu season.

Lena Jimenez, appreciates all of the work and understands how difficult it is. She asked about Special Education and noted the virtual experience was not good for her child. She asked what specific extra support will be provided for Special Education. She would like to know additional information and data as to how school will provide additional support.

Karen Finnerty, noted that Dr. McGann mentioned numbers in her letter and wanted to know what numbers she is speaking about because the Hunterdon County numbers are low. She expressed concern for her only child and asked how do working families support the children. She wants to know what is driving Dr. McGann's decision.

The Board agreed to extend another 15 minutes.

Dr. McGann noted that she did not speak about cases in Hunterdon County. She stated, yes, Hunterdon County is doing well. She gave statistics. She spoke about lack of PPE, insuring air quality and accommodation requests for staff. Dr. McGann also addressed Special Education issues. She noted she understands the concerns. She expressed concern with no air conditioning in schools and students wearing masks. She wants to get the students back in school as soon as possible.

Frank Lentine, Township resident, shared statistics for the Township. He stated that testing and transmission rates are not the Boards issues to handle. He shared the suicide statistics and expressed concern that there is not a concrete reason to not open. He stated efforts to get PPE is laughable. He stated the school Board and the Administration are not listening and asked everyone to consider withholding school tax funds.

Jessica Alonso, noted her son has a learning disability and did not do well with virtual learning. She requested more tools and maybe one on one attention. She noted she will need to stop working to assist her child with virtual learning. She noted many parents do not speak english and her heart goes out to them because they can't help their students. She wants to know how we are helping those parents.

Donna Stumm, Teacher, asked if a limited number of staff could be allowed into labs to teach science, because she is aware of the positive results in Hunterdon County graduates. She noted that cases can rapidly spin out of control.

Kelly Flannigan, Teacher and parent, thanked the Board for their hard work on this topic. She noted she spoke on behalf of both sides. She stated it's not a good situation. She stated children are beginning to test positive and also noted we need to protect the staff as well. She feels virtual is not the best way to deliver instruction but they have learned a lot. She understands it is hard for working parents and that the intent is to keep everyone safe which is the community goal.

The Board did not agree to extend another 15 minutes.

MISCELLANEOUS(INFORMATION/ACTION)

All Miscellaneous/Action items were approved under one motion made by Ms. Abbott, seconded by Dr. Kenny.

Action Items

- 1. Approval was given to authorize the Superintendent to revise *Returning with Confidence: A School Reopening Preparedness Plan* to reflect that the District will operate all virtually from September 8, 2020 through October 30, 2020.

Mr. Bart thanked the district for their work. He noted that Board policy is not to answer questions. Dr. McGann will answer questions.

<b>Aye:</b>	<b>Ms. Abbott</b>	<b>Ms. Markowski</b>	<b>Nay: 0</b>	<b>Abstain: 0</b>
	<b>Mrs. Bart</b>	<b>Ms. Mitcheltree</b>		
	<b>Mr. Cain</b>	<b>Mr. Morgan</b>		
	<b>Dr. Kenny</b>	<b>Mr. Bart</b>		

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Kim Mitter, could not unmute.

S. McMahon, thanked everyone for their work. Truly believes that data for children is skewed because we keep them home. Doesn’t feel students will be able to social distance. Stated it is difficult for all of us, but this pandemic is temporary and supports that children and staff stay home and stay safe.

Jennifer Montes, noted that the problem with the community is because other events are still occurring. She noted teachers are offering in-home tutoring. She noted inconsistencies are frustrating.

Sarah Milheim, Township resident, noted that virtual learning did not work for her child. She stated parents need answer keys to help their students. She asked how are parents going to get school materials needed. She noted as parents we need to know how to help.

Nydia Peake, Teacher and parent, has been listening and hears the pain, frustration and anguish. She noted we need to come together. She doesn’t want children to suffer. She stated as a parent she thanked all the teachers, the Board, Dr. McGann and Administration. She shared that this is hard and we are all in this together. She stated it is not a time to blame each other. She noted we can come together. She noted she took notes as a teacher and is listening and noted as teachers, administrators and the Board we all need support and urged everyone to come together and not find blame.

Lisa Petino, asked if we are the only school in Hunterdon County not opening on hybrid? She wants to know why we can’t get our act together and noted Central is opening. She is concerned that teachers wanting to stay home won’t change. She is extremely frustrated and shared that others are also working, doctors, workers at ShopRite. She shared virtual instruction needs to be much better.

Prameela Nagaraj, asked what is the Board doing to communicate their plans to the State? She expressed concern that parents need to work and is hoping the State offers leave plans for parents to stay home. She asked when we can expect to see schedules.

Jenn Temple, thanked the Board for taking the health and safety of everyone seriously. She feels the Board is making a good decision.

Nydia Peake, Teacher, stated this is a no win situation and has seen responsiveness from the Board and Dr. McGann. She shared that we have to follow State guidelines and stated everyone is doing their best. She noted she has never seen this level of transparency in the last 12 years. She asked for patience and flexibility. She noted the main goal is to come together for the children and let's be kind and compassionate. She noted the focus is on the children.

Peter Dykes, feels that we may be the only ones not going in but if you look at it nationally, in school has failed. He shared better to start out virtually versus having to switch.

Mr. Bart thanked all the panelists again as well as the public for joining us. He reminded everyone, there will be another Board Meeting on August 24th at 7:00 p.m.

ADJOURN

**On the motion of Ms. Abbott, seconded by Ms. Morgan the meeting was adjourned at 8:59 p.m. viva voce.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Voorhees  
Business Administrator/Board Secretary

2020 Board Meetings

August 24  
September 14 & 29  
October 12 & 26  
November 9 & 23  
December 14