

**FORT LEE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FORT LEE, NEW JERSEY**

**MINUTES**

**SPECIAL PUBLIC BUSINESS MEETING  
December 07, 2020  
Zoom Meeting**

**CALL TO ORDER BY THE PRESIDENT**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by, Board President, Mrs. Han Silver.

**FLAG SALUTE**

The Flag Salute was led by Mrs. Tuck.

**PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Public Announcement was read by Mrs. Han Silver.

**ROLL CALL**

**Present:** Ms. Elisa Cho (7:07 pm), Ms. Paula K. Colbath, Mr. Ralph DiMeglio, Mrs. Holly Morell, Mrs. Kristen Richter, Mrs. Candace Romba, Mr. Michael Rubino, Mrs. Luran Tuck, Mrs. Esther Han Silver

**Also Present:** Mr. Kenneth Rota, Ms. Haquisha Q. Taylor, Mrs. Diane Collazo-Baker, Dennis McKeever, Board Attorney, Ms. Jill Scarpa, Fort Lee Health Official (Executive meeting only).

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

MOTION by Mrs. Tuck, seconded by Mrs. Morell, at 7:03 p.m., to move into Executive Session.

MOTION carried unanimously upon voice vote, 9-0.

The Board reconvened into the Public Meeting at 7:29 p.m.

**REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

Mr. Rota shared his appreciation and sincere thanks to Mr. DiMeglio and Mrs. Tuck for their dedication while serving on the Fort Lee Board of Education.

Mr. Rota shared each of the Fort Lee schools' instructional status based on the most recently reported COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI).

**PUBLIC WORK SESSION**

Mrs. Han Silver shared the purpose of the Special Meeting is to keep the public informed of the District status as it relates to COVID-19. Mrs. Han Silver reminded the public of the mandate for all Bergen County schools to pivot to 100% remote instruction if the CALI for the Northeast region's increases to "High" [red].

Mr. Rota shared there are 11 staff members who have tested positively for COVID and 50 staff members quarantined. Mr. Rota further shared the advice of the Department of Health not to combine the cohorts to maintain the integrity of the students and staff's safety.

Board conversation ensued discussing topics including the district's plans to increase in-person instruction, lengthening the school day for each cohort, lunch service in classrooms or cafeterias, updated CDC quarantine guidelines and Ms. Scarpa's recommendation to maintain the 14-day quarantine.

**HEARING OF CITIZENS - QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON ITEMS LISTED ON TONIGHT'S AGENDA AND ANY OTHER TOPIC OF CONCERN**

MOTION by Ms. Colbath, seconded by Mrs. Morell, to open the floor to the public, 7:47 p.m.

MOTION carried unanimously upon voice vote, 9-0.

Howard Lipoff, representative of the Fort Lee Education Association, strongly recommended going fully remote.

Jessica Pamalas commented on the amazing job the teachers are doing, understands the focus on COVID-19 but recommends an ongoing dialog of when in-person instruction can be increased.

Erin McCoy commented that going 100% remote adds consistency to the learning experience and further shared that if the school day is extended, the impact of drastically increased screen time on remote learners will be needed.

Randy Schwartz clarified Ms. Colbath's previous comments regarding Ramsey's Phase II reopening strategy including that Ramsey has not increased in-person learning and that Ramsey closed schools ahead of completing the COVID-19 investigation of infected cases.

Philippe Vantage shared his displeasure with the low number of students in each class and recommended increasing the number of in-person days.

Kyle Sanford thanked the Board Members for all their hard work and efforts during these unrepresented times and further shared that, although his children are 100% remote, he is in full agreement that in-person learning is the most effective form of teaching.

Tanya Byers-Kang thanked the Board Members for adhering to the guidelines established by Governor Murphy and the Fort Lee Health Department, expressed her gratitude for elementary schools remaining open, and inquired about increased instruction time, how teachers can apply for accommodations, shared that the government provides monies to cover substitute pay, asked for additional details regarding School 4 COVID cases, and expressed concern with continuous shifting from hybrid to remote.

Mr. Ahn shared that he strongly believes schools are very safe as long as the district maintains

strict sanitizing, social distancing and wearing masks protocols and the Fort Lee Schools are doing a great job to ensure the safety of the students following these protocols.

Jodi Etra, Fort Lee teacher, shared that she advocates for in-person instruction, is passionate about interacting with the students, is concerned about students removing their masks when they leave school property, and expressed the negative impact extended days will have on 100% remote learners due to increased screen time.

Judy expressed her gratitude towards the teachers for doing an amazing job keeping students up to speed with their academics and shared her belief that in-person instruction benefits students even if the number of students is low.

Andrey thanked the entire district for their tireless, daily, hard work, making very difficult decisions, and doing a fantastic job supporting the students. Andrey further concurred with others to close the schools until the beginning of the 2021 year.

Margarita shared that it is not a good time to extend the school days, and the necessity to effectively and safely balance the number of cohorts that would provide more student peer interaction.

Julene Stassou shared these are extremely stressful times for parents, teachers and more importantly the students, and commends all their enduring efforts during these difficult times. Ms. Stassou further expressed concern for students' isolation and screen time.

MOTION by Mrs. Richter, seconded by Mrs. Romba, to close the floor to the public, 8:28 p.m.

MOTION carried unanimously upon voice vote, 9-0.

Mr. Rota responded to all community member questions and comments.

Mr. Rota shared the administration wholeheartedly agrees that not only the teachers, staff and parents deserve kudos but most importantly the students for their dedicated efforts and resiliency while they persevere during these difficult times. Mr. Rota further shared that all of the above-mentioned logistics are factored in while decisions are made regarding the next course of action.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Mr. Rubino, seconded by Mrs. Tuck, to adjourn, 8:41 p.m.

MOTION carried unanimously upon voice vote, 9-0.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

*Haquisha Q. Taylor*

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**HAQUISHA Q. TAYLOR**  
SCHOOL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR/BOARD SECRETARY