

**NORTH HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORK SESSION - LEGISLATIVE MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2020 ~ 7:15 P.M.
DIGITAL MEETING – VIA ZOOM**
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CALL TO ORDER

The meeting which was held via Zoom due to the Covid 19 closures, was called to order at 7:15 p.m. Mrs. Mathis held a roll call for attendees, and then opened the meeting with a moment of silence and salute to the flag.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sandra Kozera, Phil Little, Allison Mathis, Deanna Philpott, Kathryn Poniatowski, Kathy Reid, Rachael Rennebeck and Helen Spade.

BOARD MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Annette Giovengo Nolish

ALSO PRESENT

Dr. Patrick Mannarino, Dr. Beth Williams, Amy Mathieu, Gerard Muth, Heather Pelat, Michael J. Witherel, Esq., Kris Kaufmann and student representatives Ellie Fleischer and Hannah Sciulli.

Board Member Comments

Mrs. Mathis announced that the Board met in Executive Session Conference Calls and/or Zoom sessions on the following dates to discuss personnel and legal matters:

Friday, March 13, 2020

Monday, March 16, 2020

Thursday, March 19, 2020 – 2 meetings

Thursday, April 2, 2020

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Mrs. Reid thanked Dr. Mannarino, Katie Grzybowski and Lori Rieger for assisting her with technology difficulties, so as to enable her to attend this evening's board meeting. Mrs. Reid asked about Dr. Nolish's absence and thought she should be in attendance because she is the chair of the Finance Committee. Mrs. Mathis stated that Dr. Nolish had a work commitment that she could not reschedule.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

None

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Mrs. Mathis, seconded by Mrs. Spade, and unanimously passed by a roll call vote to approve the minutes of the April 15, 2020 Committee Meeting with Action.

Student Representatives' Report

Ellie Fleischer and Hannah Sciulli, both 11th graders, provided an update to the Board on their experience with virtual learning due to the Covid-related school closure.

Superintendent's Report

"Today marks seven weeks since our students and teachers were last in a traditional classroom. It's incredible to think about what we've accomplished in those seven weeks. Again, I want to thank our students, our families, our teachers, and our administrative team. What we've done in less than two months' time is remarkable, and we could not have done it without each and every one of you.

We know it's been tough. It hasn't been ideal but we can do this, North Hills. We ARE doing it.

The good news is tomorrow is May. Already. And there are just 20 school days until the end of the year. We have just four weeks to go.

We know that students are anxious to get back into their building to retrieve personal items that might have been left in lockers. We are working to formulate a plan to allow this when it's safe to do so. We're aiming for the first week in June. In the meantime, we assure you that your items are safe and all lockers will remain as they were on March 12.

We'll also be collecting all district-issued iPads, textbooks and library books during the first week of June. As you'll hear in a few minutes when we discuss next year's budget, we're trading in all current district iPads for a new fleet of iPads to distribute to all students in grades K-12 next year. Because we are trading in the iPad Fleet, we need to be certain that the iPads are returned in full working condition. In lieu of returning the iPad, families will have the option to purchase the district issued iPad for \$100. Stay tuned for future communications about iPad Purchase opportunities in the coming weeks.

As for end-of-the-year celebrations and graduation, I'm sure you've seen the communication about the things we're planning on our website and social media starting tomorrow for our seniors. We are also planning a cap and gown and yearbook distribution, and we'll be releasing details as soon as possible.

We also have some additional, exciting things we're hoping to firm up next week including a variation of graduation that could take place at Martorelli Stadium on Saturday, May 30."

So Class of 2020, please hold this date. We'll be sure to let you know as soon as we finalize details.

We've also been working with our parent organizations and have begun discussing ways we can honor our fifth-, sixth- and eighth-graders this summer, assuming it's safe to do so.

The bottom line is we don't know what the future holds, we don't know what we'll be able to do and what we won't, but we're doing the best we can with the information we have, and we thank you for your continued patience and support.

FINANCE

Introductory Remarks by Mrs. Mathis on behalf of Dr. Nolish

This is the time of year that we normally focus on setting the budget for the upcoming year. Dr. Nolish, our finance liaison is unable to attend this evening, so she asked me to read these introductory remarks on her behalf.

Tonight we are presenting and taking action on the "Proposed Final Budget", which we are required to submit to the State.

This budget will be the basis for discussion and public comments tonight, as well as during the May and June board meetings.

Changes may be made to this proposed budget, if new financial information emerges during the next month, as we work to develop the "Final budget."

We typically vote to put the "Final Budget" on the legislative agenda at our first workshop meeting in June, which this year will be June 4. We will then vote on the "Final Budget" on June 11.

We have known all along that 2020-21 would be a tight budget year, as this is the year which will complete the shift of moving 6th grade from the elementary schools to the middle school, and as we continue to manage our enrollment growth.

But, no matter how difficult it might be, we believe that a zero-tax increase budget with no furloughs is the right thing to do for our community at this time, when all of our North Hills families and residents are coping with the economic impacts of Covid-19.

So, with that in mind, I will pass it over to Mr. Muth to present tonight's Preliminary Final Budget.

Mr. Jerry Muth then provided an overview of the Proposed Final Budget.

Mrs. Mathis provided the following remarks on the Proposed Final Budget

Thank you Mr. Muth. Before we proceed, I'd like to outline some key items that are and are not included in the budget for next year. I want to be as transparent with everyone as possible as I know some of these choices are challenging.

We are committed to supporting our schools, while at the same time committed to the overall well-being of the entire North Hills community. Due to the extreme financial difficulties faced by many at this time because of COVID-19 we are supporting a budget without a tax increase.

I want to say, before I go any further, that it is very difficult to make budget decisions when we really don't know what education is going to look like next year because of COVID-19 and when we don't have any information from the state on when we might have that information. We are forced to make these decisions with limited information about what next year holds. If some information becomes available from the state between now and June 30th when the final budget is due, we might have to make adjustments.

As Board President I am committed to doing the best we can for the entire North Hills community, for our schools and for the residents of West View and Ross.

We are not cutting any programs nor are we cutting any curriculum. However, there are some areas where we were hoping to fill vacancies or add positions due to growth where we will be taking a pause for next year with the intention of resuming growth once we are through this crisis.

Next year, a few elementary classrooms will see a one-year temporary increase in allowed class size by 2 students per class in certain rooms in grades k-3.

It is currently projected that this would impact 2 classrooms based on current enrollment with the potential to impact up to 8 depending on enrollment for next year. FYI there are 97 classrooms k-5 for next year so this would impact less than 10% of the elementary classes.

A full enrollment and elementary class size report will be provided closer to the start of the school year.

I'd like to clarify that board is committed to NOT altering or raising our size policy. We all recognize and value the importance of maintaining small classrooms and the benefits to both students and teachers.

Policy 205, which is our class size policy, states that "the Superintendent shall have discretion in adjusting class sizes, and assignment of grade level support personnel based upon class composition or the nature of other extenuating circumstances."

I would define this an extenuating circumstance.

I understand that this is upsetting to some people, and I want to say with all sincerity that it is a difficult decision and one that is upsetting to me as a parent and as a board member as well. This has the possibility to impact directly several of the board members who have children in these grades.

In addition, we will be relocating the elementary assistant principal, Dr. Jessica Sapsara, to the Middle School. She will be replacing Mrs. Mary Grimm who has elected to return to the classroom as a 6th grade teacher next year. This decision by Mrs. Grimm was made prior to the COVID-19 crisis. We will not be hiring a 2nd assistant principal at the Middle School level, and we will not be hiring an elementary assistant principal for next year.

Again, I am hoping that this is a temporary pause and we can get back on track next year. I realize this is going to place an increased burden on our hardworking elementary principals and I thank them for their understanding.

I am confident that we will be able to make these adjustments work, but I realize that in a perfect world we would have more administrative support at the elementary level and the middle school level. Again, I have a child entering the middle school next year as I know other board members do as well, so our children are also directly impacted by this.

We had hoped to hire another school social worker or psychologist, but will also be putting this on hold. While I don't love outlining things that we will not be able to do, I think it is important to mention things that we would have liked to be able to include in this budget and hope to include in future budgets.

Because budgeting is always about future planning, we are also trying to include adjustments in the budget to improve the healthy and safety of our entire population particularly in regards to COVID-19.

We will be expanding our 1:1 iPad initiative to grades K-12. This is critical to ensure all students have access to a device if we need to undertake some form of virtual learning next year. This does not mean that we know if we are going to have to have virtual learning next year, but it would be irresponsible to not plan for that possibility. We do not know what next year is going to look like, but we need to be prepared to be adaptive and responsive. If we are able to use these in the classroom, going 1:1 will minimize germ-sharing so that each child has their own device and is not taking turns sharing a classroom set. Additional details on how these will be used in the younger grades will be forthcoming. If we are back in the buildings, we do not anticipate younger children carrying the iPads back and forth from school every day, they would remain in the classrooms.

Along these lines, we will also be replacing water fountains in all buildings and at the stadium with water bottle refill stations. Students will all be allowed to carry water bottles at school. We are rethinking all areas of facilities, buildings and operations in this manner with an increased focus on health, hygiene, safety and germ reduction.

There are other areas of the budget that have been cut, including all items from the school board's minimal budget. We are asking all in our district to make sacrifices and I firmly believe that this change starts with our leadership.

This is a unique challenge for our district, but I have every confidence that we will rise above this as long as we continue to support each other and our community and provide a high quality education.

If you have additional specific questions or concerns about the budget I have not addressed I would invite you to attend our virtual Public Budget Committee meeting on May 14 or Look for registration details soon. You may also always contact the board via email, we have a contact form on our website.

FINANCE – ACTION ITEMS

A motion was made by Mrs. Mathis, seconded by Mrs. Spade and **passed by a roll call vote of 6 yea and 2 nay to approve the Proposed Final Budget for 2020-2021**, as per document 1, as recommended by the Superintendent. Voting yes was Ms. Kozera, Mr. Little, Mrs. Mathis, Mrs. Poniatowski, Mrs. Rennebeck and Mrs. Spade. Voting no was Ms. Philpott and Mrs. Reid.

A motion was made by Mrs. Mathis, seconded by Mrs. Spade, and unanimously passed to approve or ratify the following Finance Items, as recommended by the Superintendent:

1. Ratify General Fund Bills – these include checks numbered 59680 through 59703; 59705 through 59744; 59749 through 60081; 60086 through 60091; 60093 through 60120; and 60123 through 60146.
2. Ratify Capital Project Fund Bills – these include checks numbered 59704; 59745 through 59748; and 60121.
3. Ratify Food Service Fund Bills – these include checks numbered 60082 through 60085; 60092; and 60122.
4. Approve Budget Transfers
5. Approve Payroll for the month of April 2020 in the amount of \$3,027,319.58.
6. Ratify Awarding of Bid for E-Rate UPS, Switches and Cabling Services to Dagostino Electronics, Inc. in the amount of \$67,647.

POLICY

1. Informational Item – Policy 310 – Abolishing a Position was reviewed and there were no revisions; only format changes.
2. First Reading – Policy 410 – Abolishing a Position – Professional Employees – Revisions
3. First Reading – Policy 224 – Care of School Property – Revisions
4. First Reading – Policy 412 – Evaluation of Professional Employees – Revisions
5. First Reading – Policy 504 – Employment of Classified Personnel – Revisions
6. First Reading – Policy 708 – Lending of School Owned Equipment and Books – Revisions
7. First Reading – Policy 904 – Public Attendance at School Events – Revisions
8. First Reading – Policy 838 – Professional Development

Dr. Mannarino stated that he will re-word certain language in Policy 904 because some school events are held on properties not owned by the district. Mr. Witherel stated that this minor change does not require a new first reading.

A motion was made by Ms. Kozera, and seconded by Mrs. Spade to add Policy Items 2 through 9 to the Legislative Meeting Agenda for second reading and approval.

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mrs. Mathis announced that there will be a Public Budget Committee Meeting via Zoom on Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

The next meeting of the Board of Education is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2020 at 7:15 p.m. via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Mathis adjourned the meeting at 7:56 p.m.

Loretta J. Rieger
Board Secretary