

BOARD OF EDUCATION  
(Official)

September 8, 2021  
Elizabeth, New Jersey

A special meeting of the Board of Education was called on September 8, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. using an online platform technology. Voice conferencing technology for the September 8, 2021 meeting was available to the public at <https://www.facebook.com/epsnj> and <https://www.youtube.com/user/epschools>.

Board President Jerry Jacobs presented the following statement at 12:18 p.m.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, good afternoon. This is a special meeting of the Board of Education. Pursuant to New Jersey Statutes and the rules adopted by the Board of Education, notice of this meeting using an online platform was sent to The Star Ledger and Cablevision of Elizabeth on September 6, 2021. In addition, this notice is posted on the Bulletin Board in the lobby of 500 North Broad Street, and pursuant to this act, a copy has been filed with the City Clerk of Elizabeth, New Jersey.

There will be an online public portion for citizens to address the Board. Participants for the public portion must register online up to the start of the meeting so that they may have the opportunity to speak. The public participation form states the name and email of the person who wants to comment. Members of the public who prefer not to or do not have the means to participate using the online platform may continue to participate by emailing statements relative to agenda items and/or educational matters to the Secretary of the Board at [kennedha@epsnj.org](mailto:kennedha@epsnj.org). All statements received will be read into the record during the Meeting’s Public Comment Portion. All emails must be submitted and received by the Secretary of the Board up to the start of the meeting and, as is always the case must include the public member’s full name for the record. Each statement submitted by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration. The total time public comment shall be limited to 60 minutes. Emails received but not read after the 60 minute duration will be spread in full in the Official Board Minutes of this meeting.”

Present via online platform technology: Diane Barbosa, Charlene Bathelus, Maria Carvalho, Iliana Chevres, Stephanie Goncalves, Rosa Moreno-Ortega, Jerry Jacobs – 7

Absent: Nathalie Alcaide-Hernandez, Stanley Neron – 2

Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Harold E. Kennedy, Jr., Chief of Operations Francisco Cuesta, and Co-General Counsel Jonathan Williams, Esq. of DeCotiis, Fitzpatrick & Cole, LLP were present via online platform technology.

Mr. Jacobs welcomed everyone. Mr. Jacobs stated that Co-General Counsel Jonathan Williams would present a statement.

Mr. Williams stated that following our last emergency meeting of the Board of Education and at the direction of the Board, our office communicated to the Benedictine Sisters an offer for the purchase of the former Benedictine Academy on North Broad Street in Elizabeth for a purchase price of \$5.5 million based on an appraisal which was conducted

by Ard Appraisal. Mr. Williams stated that the offer has now been accepted. Mr. Williams stated that the Benedictine Sisters met with their community last evening and approved the Board of Education proposal and terms. Mr. Williams stated that we have been working with the attorneys for the Benedictine Sisters and we have a draft contract which has been circulated to each Board member this morning. Mr. Williams stated that the recommendation is well within the fair market value and the property is being conveyed in an “as is” condition which means that the District will be taking title without the obligation part of the Sisters to correct any problems that might exist with the property. Mr. Williams stated that we have an extended period of time built into the contract for all inspections and for approvals from the NJ DOE before we are actually obligated to go to closing. Mr. Williams stated that summarizes the transaction. Mr. Williams stated that the Board members have talked before about the opportunity this presents to the district to have this much property in Elizabeth for current and future use. Mr. Williams stated that the Superintendent has identified an immediate use which might be appropriate for the property which she may want to elaborate on before you vote. Mr. Williams stated that we have a resolution for the Board members to consider with respect to moving this one step forward.

Mr. Jacobs thanked Mr. Williams and stated that this is a great day for the City of Elizabeth for us being able to acquire this property in our North end neighborhood. Mr. Jacobs stated that this property is 4.3 acres and has an existing school on it. Mr. Jacobs stated that we look to work with our State officials and the SDA, hopefully, in the future to build a new school to service over 1,000 students. Mr. Jacobs stated that this has been a great job by our Superintendent, administration, legal team, staff members, and his Board colleagues. Mr. Jacobs stated that he appreciates everyone being able to take the time to sit here through these important things today.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we are going to be sharing with the parents of School Nos. 26 and 27 that we are hosting two webinars during the day and also in the evening and again on Saturday during the day and evening. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we want our families to understand the services that we will be providing as early as tomorrow for our families, in terms of laptops being replaced, uniforms, and any and all needs our families may have.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that with regard to this important announcement of Benedictine Academy, it is her recommendation to our Board of Education that we utilize Benedictine Academy immediately for the purpose of serving our special needs children that are in self-contained classrooms. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we have a total of eight self-contained classrooms between School Nos. 26 and 27 and we will be able to serve our children in-person. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we also have a bilingual magnet program, Port of Entry Program, for our newly arrived children that we will also be moving to Benedictine Academy as soon as our counsel advises that we are able to do so.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated all of this information will be explained to our families tomorrow in our webinars. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that our guidance counselors and social workers will be assisting her in reaching out to our families with regard to the start of the school year on Tuesday. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that our School Nos. 26 and 27 will start with virtual instruction. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we plan on distributing our laptops for our children that have been displaced and assisting them with all other resources. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that many of our displaced families from School Nos. 26 and 26 are at the Dunn Sports Center today availing themselves of all the State, County, and City resources. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we are helping our displaced families and we will

be communicating with them directly to ensure that they are provided with all the services needed and that their instruction is not interrupted.

Mr. Jacobs thanked Mrs. Hugelmeyer. Mr. Jacobs thanked Board members Chevres, Carvalho, Neron and all the other Board members that have been integrally involved helping our displaced families. Mr. Jacobs stated that there is a considerable amount of people that need assistance at the Dunn Sports Center. Mr. Jacobs stated that it is not just Oakwood Plaza but the entire City that has been affected. Mr. Jacobs stated that we are trying to do whatever we can to support our children and our community.

Mr. Jacobs requested that Mr. Williams present the resolution.

Mr. Williams stated that General Counsel recommends for consideration by the Board of Education the following:

Resolution of the Elizabeth Board of Education approving and authorizing an agreement for the purchase of the Benedictine Academy, 824-864 North Broad Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey for the purchase price of \$5,500,000.00 subject to satisfaction of all conditions proceeding set forth in the agreement which is attached to the Resolution and which has been circulated to the Board members.

Mr. Jacobs requested a motion and second to adopt the above Resolution.

A motion was made by Mrs. Carvalho, seconded by Mrs. Goncalves, that the above resolution be adopted.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Mrs. Barbosa, Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Goncalves, Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Jacobs – 7

Negative: None

Mr. Jacobs stated that he is so excited about what this opportunity will bring our district in servicing our children. Mr. Jacobs stated that we now have over 30,000 students in our district. Mr. Jacobs stated that we had approximately 1,500 new students registered over the summer and our district is growing by leaps and bounds.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we now have 30,400 students in Elizabeth and that does not include the newly registered families from this week. Mrs. Hugelmeyer thanked our Board of Education because this is an incredible year with the acquisition of Our Lady of Fatima, the acquisition of St. Genevieve's, and now the acquisition of Benedictine Academy. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that this will help our community greatly and help our children. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that it is a very exciting 2021-2022 school year.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that we are working very diligently to help our community to meet the needs of the devastating storm. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that our commitment is to our families and to ensure that all of our children are ready to start the school year on Tuesday, September 14<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Jacobs thanked the Superintendent, administration, staff, and his Board colleagues who are here at the Dunn Sports Center trying to serve our community.

Board President Jerry Jacobs presented the following public participation statement.

“At this time, the meeting is open for public comment online to those who have registered with the online participation form prior to this session. I shall call individuals to participate based on the order of the sign-in. Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration. The total time of public comment shall be limited to 60 minutes. No individual is able to yield their time to another individual. All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no participant may address or question Board members individually. The following rules for public participation shall apply: time limits will be strictly enforced; no personal attacks on individuals; no vulgar or indecent language; a person may address the Board no more than once during a single meeting; speakers should refrain from naming individuals; comments or questions posed during public participation will not be debated. As a reminder, this is a meeting of the Board in public, not a meeting of the public. If the 60 minute public comment period expires before all registered online participants have been called, remaining participants can email their statements to the Secretary of the Board at [kennedha@epsnj.org](mailto:kennedha@epsnj.org) and they will be spread in full in the Official Board Minutes of this meeting.”

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the first public online participant, Karla Puebla, to address the Board. Karla Puebla did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the next public online participant, Olga Tejada, to address the Board. Olga Tejada did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy called upon the next public online participant, Maria Lorenz, to address the Board.

Maria Lorenz spoke about the constituent service policy and special education.

Mr. Jacobs thanked her for her comments.

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the next public online participant, Solange Gutierrez, to address the Board. Solange Gutierrez did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy called upon the next public online participant, Jennifer Huarcaya, to address the Board.

Jennifer Huarcaya spoke about a problem with her son.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that the case manager will contact her to discuss her concern.

Mr. Jacobs thanked her for her comments.

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the next public online participant, Claribel Reyes, to address the Board. Claribel Reyes did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the next public online participant, Rebecca Okpych, to address the Board. Rebecca Okpych did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy called twice upon the next public online participant, Shannon Lynn, to address the Board. Shannon Lynn did not respond.

Mr. Kennedy read into the record all the emails that have been submitted up to the start of the meeting.

Mr. Kennedy read the following email received from Ivy Lam:

“Good afternoon,

I have currently 2 sons who attend school 16. One will be in the fourth grade the other in second grade. I have questions that concern me about entering school again. Although I have tried to reach the principal numerous of times and have had no response. I wish to ask the board to please answer my following questions:

1) will the children be given sneeze guards during class and lunch. The reopening plan mentions nothing on how these children will be having lunch.

2) if sneeze guards are not provided may we as parents give our children one to bring to school?

3) seeing that the buildings have old boilers and the temperature of the schools are unbearable where the teachers have to literally open windows during the winter to cool the room. What is being done to address this issue. Although it is known that the classrooms cannot exceed more than 85 degrees the classrooms due. I have had my son sent home for having head aches and even once from a nose bleed from the heat.

4) when are the agendas posted as they should be for public knowledge prior to the meeting and I have seen that this meeting has not been posted before this meeting.

I appreciate the time that you take to address this concern and hope that although I could not attend that I may see that these questions were addressed or at least answered thank you.”

Mr. Kennedy read the following email received from Andrea Rojas:

“Good morning.

My name is Andrea Rojas. I am a new parent to the Elizabeth School District. It’s very unfortunate that my daughter will have to start at her new school on a virtual basis but as much as I would like her to have in-person learning, I would like the board and school officials to really take their time cleaning up the schools in a safe manner.

I would like to petition to the Board to please assess not only the mechanical issues that are visible but also to do a structural assessment. How long were these buildings under water? Are the classrooms really water free without a possible trace of mold or mildew building up? Are these buildings safe to reopen even after they have been cleaned and cleared of water?

Please really take the time to assess all possible damage.

Thank you.”

Mrs. Hugelmeyer responded to the parent trying to reach the principal at School No. 16 that we are going to make sure that the principal reaches out today. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that all of our administrators are at the Dunn Sports Center today assisting our community at our resource fair to be sure that everyone has a very personalized approach to meeting their needs. Mrs. Hugelmeyer responded to the parent’s question and stated that we will not be providing sneeze guards to the children. Mrs. Hugelmeyer explained that the children will be going into the cafeteria for a relatively short amount of time to have their lunch and then at School No. 16 going outside for their recess.

Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that with regard to the temperatures in the classroom, we have been observing the forecast and the temperatures are going to be mild and we are not expected to have temperatures in the 90s. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that our principals are always working with our division of plant and property ensuring that the temperature is monitored.

Since there were no other public participants signed in to address the Board, Mr. Jacobs closed this portion of the meeting.

Mr. Jacobs recognized the more than 70 volunteers who were here yesterday and organized things for the resource fair that we are holding here at the Dunn Sports Center for all the displaced families. Mr. Jacobs stated that the administrators and staff came in and were essential in helping us get prepared for today's event.

Mr. Jacobs stated that he had the opportunity to visit our damaged schools with our Superintendent and our County Superintendent Daryl Palmieri. Mr. Jacobs stated that School Nos. 26 and 27 have suffered significant damage especially to the mechanical works. Mr. Jacobs recognized our custodians and staff out there in the field because everyone was hard at work and trying to get the schools back up and ready as soon as possible. Mr. Jacobs stated that you don't realize all the steps that are involved in this process. Mr. Jacobs stated that the day after the storm the majority of the custodians cleaned the areas that were affected. Mr. Jacobs stated that because of the amount of water that we received the next day and the day after there was still water coming up beneath the ground into our buildings and schools and they had to be recleaned. Mr. Jacobs stated that the cleaning has to be done first, then dried, and then the professional cleaning company comes in to sanitize all our school buildings. Mr. Jacobs stated that this has to be done before we can do any repair work in our buildings. Mr. Jacobs stated that is one of the reasons why it was so necessary for us to delay the school opening so that we will be properly prepared to welcome our children back.

Mr. Jacobs asked if there were any Board comments.

On a motion by Mrs. Carvalho, seconded by Mrs. Chevres, the meeting was adjourned at 12:50 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Mrs. Barbosa, Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Goncalves, Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Jacobs – 7

Negative: None

Harold E. Kennedy, Jr.  
School Business Administrator/Board Secretary