

SOMERS POINT SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING August 25, 2020

Staci Endicott, President, called the Somers Point Board of Education Meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. as a remote/virtual meeting, in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., and as amended by P.L.2020, c. 11.

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided to two newspapers, posted on the bulletin board of City Hall and on the doors of the three schools as required in the Open Public Meeting Act, Chapter 231, and P.L.1975.

Ms. Endicott. led the Board of Education and the members of the public present in the salute to the flag.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jenna DeCicco, John Conover, Kathleen Dolton, Alice Myers, Sarah Platt, Heather Samuelson, Courtney Laut, Staci Endicott

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mike Sweeder

OTHERS PRESENT: Michelle CarneyRay-Yoder, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools
Michele D. Roemer, Ed. D., Interim Business Administrator/Board Secretary
Louis Greco, School Solicitor

Communications-Superintendent's Report

Superintendents Statement

8/25/2020

To Our Somers Point School Community,

As Superintendent my job is to make sure we provide the students of Somers Point with a thorough and efficient education while being fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of Somers Point. It is a fact that our enrollment numbers are declining and we are not receiving the state aid numbers that we did in previous years, which leave us with many uncertainties. In addition, we are now faced with a global pandemic, COVID-19, which has caused us to buy additional technology, health and safety supplies and other items to prepare for the return of instruction in a combination hybrid and virtual manner.

Recently, the Board of Education supported my Recommendation to start the 2020-2021 school year in a two prong manner, grades prek-3 will be hybrid in person, pending receipt of the rest of our technology whereby they will transition to remote instruction, and grades 4-8 will begin the year in remote instruction. It is my anticipation that all students that chose in-person instruction will tentatively be back in our District in a hybrid schedule around October 23, 2020. Once we receive outstanding data from approximately 195 students, we will be able to verify if it will be 2 days a week or if we can accommodate ALL in-person students 4 days a week upon return after remote instruction.

While the District is functioning on a primarily remote basis, I am making the difficult, yet responsible decision for the District to temporarily layoff through a reduction in force, certain staff members listed on the agenda tonight, specifically some of our paraprofessionals and part-time secretaries. I do not make this recommendation lightly,

rather I make it as the Educational Leader of our District, taking into consideration the roles of the staff members while the District is educating remotely, including reviewing educational efficiency coupled with the fiscal obligations of the District.

Whether our students are learning in a hybrid or virtual environment, their education is certainly our priority. My recommendation takes into consideration the educational needs of all students, making sure that no student is denied any service they are rightfully entitled to. As a former Principal and Director of Special Education, I understand the monumental role our paraprofessionals and secretaries have in our District. Paraprofessionals and secretarial staff are an integral part of our school community, they help our students along with our families and support teachers and administrators.

My recommendation does not diminish the role of paraprofessionals in our District, rather it emphasizes just one of the many hard decisions we are forced to make during these difficult times. The recommendations I am making tonight are not made easily, rather they are decisive steps necessary based on the educational and fiscal responsibilities of our District, while balancing the needs of our students and responsibility of the Board to the Somers Point Community. Please know that these reductions are temporary in nature and we anticipate bringing staff members back based upon the transition back to in-person instruction coupled with the needs of our District.

I want to thank our Board, my administrative team and all staff for working in the best interest of the District and supporting our District during these unprecedented times.

Public Forum – Agenda Items Only

Mrs. Endicott called the meeting open to the public at 4:07 P.M. Public participation will be in accordance with District Policy #0167. Public participation will include, but not be limited to the following rules: a participant of the public will present his/her name, place of residence, and group affiliation if appropriate. Each participant will be limited to three (3) minutes per statement and the overall duration of the public comments shall not exceed 30 minutes. Mrs. Endicott indicated that the first 15 minutes will be from emails received and the last 15 minutes will be used to allow those attending the meeting to make comments.

Dr. Roemer and Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder read statements from the following individuals into the record (see attached):

Dana Loefflad, Paraprofessional
Darcy Broglin, Teacher
Patrick and Erin Deely, Parents
Nancy Mensch, Teacher
Katie Foreman,
Suzanne Christopher, Paraprofessional
Samantha. Melzark, Parent
Tiffany Unsworth, Parent & Teacher
Kristie Unsworth
Erin Albrect,
Karen Stanks, Teacher
Katie O'Brien
Kathy Swift

At this time Mrs. Endicott opened the meeting to person's in-person

Please Note: Due to the fact that members of the public chose not to use the microphone provided that many of the comments were at times, inaudible, and identified below.

Lisa Ireland, parent, read a statement into the record regarding her support of keeping the paraprofessionals (see attached letter)

Mario Montenaro stated his concern about the conduct of the meeting with regards to socially distancing. He further addressed the board with regards to the Governor's Executive order and the number of persons allowed in the gymnasium.

Lisa Ireland read a statement into the record regarding her support of keeping the paraprofessionals (see attached)

S. Garrett addressed the board (inaudible)

Dawn Booth, Secretary Dawes Avenue School echoed opinions about aides and the affect of the loss of 2 part time secretaries on her ability to perform her job.

Public Member (inaudible)

Public Member – name inaudible, comment in support of the paraprofessionals and part time secretaries.

Public Member – (inaudible)

Mrs. Endicott indicated that Mario Montenaro addressed the board and asked him to sit down.

Mrs. Endicott called the meeting closed to the public at 4:45pm.

Mr. Montanero continued and Mrs. Endicott banged him out of order and was escorted out of the meeting.

Mrs. Endicott indicated that there would be a second portion for public comment at the end of the meeting.

Agreements/Applications/Contracts

Bus Contracts

Motion was made by Mrs. Laut, second by Mrs. Samuelson to approve the bus contracts within the Greater Egg Regional jointure. The only responding vendor was Integrity.

SPT - \$325 per diem & \$100 per diem for aide

SPT-1 \$300 per diem

Motion carried unanimously on roll call vote 9-0-0.

Mrs. Endicott gave Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder the opportunity to answer some of the questions that were asked during the public portion of the meeting.

1. Why was the 23rd chosen? It was chosen to give us time to evaluate flu session and covid-19. It would be irresponsible of me to put us all the way through the end of November or the new year.
2. Accommodation of IEP requirements – This was addressed by our Supervisor of Special Services and all IEP's will be followed. She further addressed the paraprofessionals and the reduction in staffing

3. Thought given for the work for the paraprofessionals? Yes, but not making any additional recommendations for remote learning at this time.
4. Change about staff working in the building? Yes, the entire staffulty will be working. If ADA accommodations are needed the staff members need to send the request to the Superintendent's office.
5. If positions are eliminated how will the district use the money budgeted? Dr. Roemer indicated that the Superintendent and BOE would be making those decisions; however, there were additional resources needed to go 1:1, including technology. The CARES and Digital Divide funds covered only a portion of the needs.
6. Impact of the unemployment payment? Somers Point has a reimbursable account and the funds are kept in a separate account and we are billed accordingly. It could impact us for up to 39 weeks.
7. Dawes Avenue School going from 3 secretary to 1. Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder indicated that there is 1 full time and 2 part time.
8. How many secretaries will be in the district? Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder responded 2 at Jordan Road, 1 at Dawes Avenue, 1 at New York Avenue, and 1 in Special Services. The 2 part time secretaries will be available during the month of September. The staffing can be reallocated based upon need.
9. How were the reductions of paraprofessionals and the hours made? Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder directed Supervisor of Special Services to review all students' IEP's to insure that requirements are being met. When the district is fully remote, the paraprofessional positions for PreK-K are the positions that are being temporarily eliminated.

Personnel

Temporary Elimination of Part-time Secretarial staff and various Paraprofessional Positions

Motion was made by Mrs. Samuelson, second by Mr. Conover to approve the following:

Whereas, due to COVID-19 complications and issues impacting school operations resulting in changes to the school calendar and ongoing adjustments to instruction delivery, and

Whereas, based on current instructional plans heretofore approve the temporary elimination and reduction in force with the anticipated reinstatement of these positions when hybrid instruction resumes for two part-time secretaries and 12 paraprofessional positions,

Now, Therefore, be it resolved by the Somers Point Board of Education that the following positions of employment are eliminated and that termination notices to be effective immediately be issued to the holders of those positions as may be necessary:

1. Two-part time secretaries
2. 12 various Paraprofessionals positions as per Seniority - effective end of the workday on September 25, 2020.

PART-TIME SECRETARIES

- Isabel Iannuzzelli
- Tina Loder

PARAPROFESSIONALS

- Meghann Generosi
- Martel Harper
- Kathleen Renda
- Laura Brown

- Maria Fernandez Mora
- Carole Kirchmeyer
- Carly Decker
- Neil Melville
- Chelsi Johnson
- Kathy Swift
- Kayla McDevitt
- Suzanne Ancharski

Motion carried on roll call vote 7-1-1 (Mrs. Laut voting no; Mr. Sweeder abstained)

Reduction in hours of Paraprofessionals as of September 28, 2020

Motion was made by Mrs. Samuelson, second by Dr. Dolton to approve the reduction of hours of the following paraprofessional staff for the 2020-2021 school year as of September 28, 2020:

- Dawn DePlato - 25 hours
- Jane Berry - 26.25 hours
- Arlene Frambes - 21.3 hours
- Intan Runte - 21.30 hours
- Suzanne Kepner - 21.3 hours
- Liz Pullan - 26.6 hours
- Stacey Gross - 21.3 hours
- Stacy Jacob - 20 hours
- Armaine Jennings - 21.3 hours
- Sheila Altomare - 21.3 hours
- Brittany Sutherland - 21.3 hours
- Ken Jensen - 21.3 hours
- Beth Buffa - 26.6 hours
- Nancy Garrett - 20 hours
- Dana Loefflad - 20 hours

Motion carried on roll call vote 7-1-1 (Mrs. Laut voting no; Mr. Sweeder abstained)

Public Forum

Mrs. Endicott called the meeting open at 5:50 PM for public.

Josh Tostevin, teacher, stated he felt that the board does not listen and that Mrs. Endicott had the ability to increase the amount of time for the public hearing in the beginning and chose not to.

Mrs. Endicott indicated to the next person that she had time to address the board during the first portion and would like those who did not get a chance to address the board to have a chance at this time.

Person speaking inaudible

Person speaking inaudible

Special Education Aide (name inaudible) addressed the fact that some of the paraprofessionals that are being kept are not special education aides and that lines are being disrupted.

Person speaking (no name provided) spoke about this being temporary for only until October 23, 2020 and questioned about how they will be brought back and will it be fully.

Mrs. Endicott indicated that at this time we would give the public who sent emails read into the minutes and attached.

Amy Horan-Smith sent for Jill Bisciotti statement was read (see attached)

Margie Smock, teacher, statement read wellness of facilities

Devon Forrestel – on-line petition with regards to keeping the paraprofessionals.

Statement (no name provided) Why working from home is no longer an option.

LouAnn Bennett, teacher– statement in support of re: paraprofessionals.

Jennifer Rowe, teacher – asked how district will be spending the monies saved.

Mrs. Endicott returned to public comments for those attending the meeting.

Public member asked regarding the paraprofessional hours and notified

Public member – in audible

Josh Tostevin, teacher, asked if Mr. Montenaro would be allowed back into the meeting.

Mrs. DiCiccio, Board Member, stated that it is very hard to hear those members who are not using the microphone.

Jeanette Cellucci, teacher, statement re athletics reactive per NJSIAA protocols at September meeting.

Mario Montenaro, teacher, apologized for behavior but stated he is concerned about the health and safety of our children and stated that the BOE fired teachers that help the children. Also referenced P.L. 2020, c. 27.

Jamie Douglas, Somers Point Resident, statement re opening of the school and concern of staff who doesn't live in Somers Point being introduced into community.

Mrs. Endicott closed public hearing .

Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder stated that the Department of Health information conflicts with the Road Back from the DOE.

Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder and Dr. Roemer responded below to questions asked during public comment portion of the meeting.

- Teachers self reporting.
- Any two, non-related Covid-19 cases must shut down school
- County Board of Health indicated that districts do not notify; however, it will be done without names
-

- HVAC info provided to Mr. Tostevin. Jordan Road coil needs to be replaced, the district rented a chiller until the coil can be replaced. BOE will be authorizing bid specifications for replacement in December.
- Filters are being replaced every 3 months. Our system has MERV 8 filters. Anything higher will compromise the system.
- Mold info/report provided to Mr. Tostevin and Dr. Roemer provided information as to the removal process and that it was not due to humidity as in past, but by water intrusion.
- Dr. Lynch, hired to take air samplings to ensure classrooms are safe.
- Hybrid due to the fact that waiting for technology for Pre-K through 3
- Exposure limited by following universal precautions and social distancing
- Staff members who may have ADA accommodations contact Superintendent's office
- District has enough bandwidth to have staff work from building
- No reallocation plans yet for savings district will receive
- Self screening are required, as well as our nurses will become involved if procedures are not followed. Tracing is the responsibility of the County Board of Health

Board Forum

- Mr. Conover responded to Mr. Montenaro taking personal offense to Mr. Montenaro statement about always agreeing with the Superintendent. That I disagree with Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder and staff and administrators not here should be here to help answer questions. For BOE members who voted for remote I would have voted no, but was unable due to remote status, because we knew the temporary reduction in force was going to happen.
- Dr. Dolton stated that there are no good situations during covid-19, it is not perfect, but this is where we find ourselves.
- Dr. CarneyRay-Yoder to the comment of “darned if you do and darned if you don’t”. As superintendent I have difficult decisions to make. I am doing what I believe is the best for the school and community. Mr. Conover stated that with all of this, there is little support from the state and board of health, and she is doing her best.
- Mrs. Endicott stated that we have a duty to our staff, students, we represent the community and taxpayers and it is important to address all of these components, and as Dr. Dolton said there are no good situations but it is where we find ourselves.
- Dr. Myers thanked everyone who came out and know that we can't please everyone, trying to do is the best and safest education for our students while being fiscally responsible. We do not know what is going to be happening in the future. Thanked the staff for their dedication.

Adjournment

Motion was made at 6:15 PM by Mr. Conover, second by Mrs. Laut that there being no further business to present the Somers Point Board of Education Special Meeting be adjourned. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Michele D. Roemer, Ed. D.,
Business Administrator/Board Secretary

Somers Point School District Board of Education

121 W. New York Avenue

Somers Point, NJ 08244

August 25, 2020

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

Good afternoon. My name is Lisa Ireland. My husband is Andrew Ireland. We are the parents of two Dawes Avenue students.

It has come to our attention that the board will be discussing employment of support staff within the school district. We wanted to take a moment tonight to share with you the profound impact paraprofessionals have for families like ours to help you make the most educated decision regarding this topic.

We first wanted to acknowledge that these are unprecedented times and the school district is doing its best to follow the sometimes confusing guidelines set forth by multiple authorities. As the parents of a child with a compromised immune system, we are forever grateful for your efforts to help keep all the children and “staffulty” and their loved ones safe and healthy.

When we enrolled our 3 and 4-year-old boys to start Pre K in 2016, we were expectedly nervous, but greeted by not only outstanding teachers, but also an out-of-this-world group of classroom aides. Over the last four years,

we witnessed our sons build trusting rapport with these aides, who they could count on being there from school year to school year. One relationship that was particularly special, was that bond between my son and his one-on-one aide, Jane Berry. This bond that our son developed with his aide over the three years she was by his side was like no other connection we have ever witnessed him form. There were many mornings we listened to our mostly nonverbal son wake up and ask for Mrs. Berry by name before anyone else, including us. One day, after she was no longer his aide, she got to say hi to him during the school day. That evening, he kept saying, "Berry," over and over again as he played. We found out the following day about her visit with him. That was the first time my child ever did something so simple as to tell me about his day – a skill so many of us take for granted.

As the parents of a child who cannot speak complete thoughts or sentences, we count on the school to be his voice and help him learn to use his voice; to know him; to contribute to an environment that fosters a love for learning and independence. In order to do that, there needs to be consistency in personnel, regardless of whether the lessons are held virtually or in-person. This cannot be accomplished without classroom paraprofessionals.

Aides are necessary because everything in a self-contained classroom takes more effort and more time. Chemistry, a trusting relationship, and understanding between these aides and our children are not instantaneous. I have personally witnessed the aides participating in Zoom sessions to help

encourage our children to participate through these virtual lessons. We mustn't forget that parents are often juggling multiple lessons for multiple children at home and sometimes that extra help from aides is just the support that is needed. They have also spent so much time collecting data to assist our teachers in tracking progress, which is crucial for adhering to IEPs.

Paraprofessionals also provide an alternative perspective, a different personality, and a different voice. Those who are familiar with working with people with special needs will tell you that this can be the difference between accomplishing a goal and not achieving the task set before you. My son will always view us as our most important roles: Mom and Dad. We will do everything in our power to assist in his education, as we always have. Having said that, a child's response is not always the same when reacting to a parent and reacting to an educator.

Combining their response to instructors with the understanding that teaching students like our son takes additional time, we cannot forego the benefits paraprofessionals provide us.

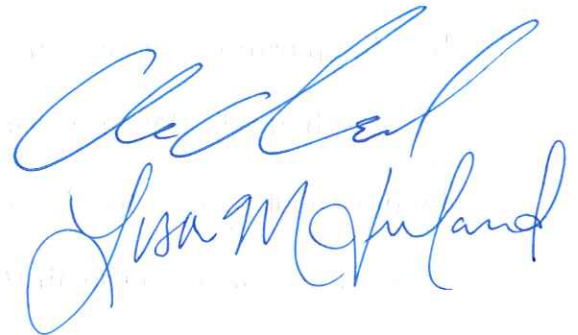
When school went virtual this past school year, I lauded the Somers Point School District for the seamless transition, even though it felt like everything was up in the air. I believe wholeheartedly that it was executed gracefully, despite the lack of time afforded to us all. Forward thinking also dictates a need for smooth transition once we are able to return to hybrid or in-person schooling for these students at such a crucial point in their

development. They need consistency from the video sessions to the classroom to minimize regression, an issue many are already facing due to the sudden and drastic changes to our lives and schedules.

We are very well aware that a balanced budget is necessary. We cannot afford to forgo our students' needs that are fulfilled by the work, love, and support of paraprofessionals. Somers Point School District has a fiduciary responsibility to the students to provide as much consistency when so much is uncertain. When a child trusts, a child is more open to learning. When a child knows what to expect, frustration is less for all parties involved. This is exponentially true in a self-contained classroom. When we cannot answer the difficult questions, such as when things will return to normal, we MUST do everything in our power so that children can count on us. We cannot let them down.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew & Lisa Ireland". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, sweeping loops.

Andrew & Lisa Ireland