

**SECAUCUS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
BOARD MEETING REGULAR MINUTES  
DATED: JANUARY 18, 2016**

President Gerbasio called the meeting to order at 7:05PM and roll call taken as follows:

**PRESENT:** Messrs. Bartletta, Gerbasio, Giele, Lewis, McStowe, Ms. Cali, Mrs. Hanley, Ms. O'Connell, and Mrs. Pantoliano

President Gerbasio declared a quorum present

Also present: Kenneth J. Knops, Interim CSA  
Edward J. Appleton, Interim BA/BS

Vice President McStowe, asked everyone to rise and join in the salute to the flag. In accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meeting Act, Vice President Lewis, announced that the Board Secretary had forwarded notice of this meeting for advertising by having the date, time and place thereof posted in the Secaucus Town Hall, on the bulletin board in the hallway of the Board of Education Administration Building, as well as being provided to the Secaucus Home News, Jersey Journal, and the Bergen Record.

Mr. Gerbasio called for a motion to the board to abandon the usual format of the board meeting to hold an open forum of questions from the audience to the board.

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Mr. Bartletta, and unanimously adopted by a roll call vote as follows, to abandon the usual format of the meeting

	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
Lance Bartletta	X			
Joan Cali	X			
John Gerbasio	X			
Louis Giele	X			
Norma Hanley	X			
Joseph Lewis	X			
John McStowe	X			
Kathy O'Connell	X			
Ruby Pantoliano	X			

Mr. Gerbasio announced that a new committee has been established by the Board. The committee is the Community Relations Committee and is chaired by Mrs. Norma Hanley. Anyone interested serving on this committee can email and/or write a letter and send to the Board Office attention of Mrs. Ann Marie Grecco or Ms. Fran Bialkowski. Mr. Gerbasio then introduced Mr. Kenneth Knops, Interim Superintendent. Mr. Knops explained how the meeting would be conducted and requested that each question be limited to one minute. In order to provide everyone with a chance to speak if you have an additional question, please wait until everyone has had the chance to speak.

Note: Many of the audience who spoke, did not provide their name; therefore, in order to be consistent, we will not indicate any names in these minutes.

First of many questions from the audience concerned the "playground rumor" that there were plans to redistrict the elementary schools. Mr. Knops stressed that there was not a plan, but there was some discussion. Mr. Gerbasio explained that the Administrators approached the Board, but no action has been taken or plans made. Mr. Knops, having served as Superintendent in districts that chose to redistrict, stressed to the public there is no right or wrong way to undertake this issue, but felt that having an open discussion with the public was in the best interest of all concerned.

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Having said this, the questions concerning the re-districting revolved around transportation, overcrowding of classes, hiring of additional teachers etc. It was discussed as to why and how two elementary schools could differ in curriculum, and are we looking to make this fix rather than redistrict. Mr. Knops responded that there are advantages to re-districting not only involving curriculum, but there are various programs which would avail itself to this situation. As far as differences in curriculum, the Director of Curriculum, Supervisors and Coaches within the district are monitoring and evaluating the curriculum within the district and continue to strive to ensure both schools are on the "same page". The question of utilizing the additional classrooms for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade moving to the middle school was approached to ease some of the overcrowding. Mrs. Wilhelm, Principal of Huber Street, responded since her ESL teacher is conducting classes in the cafeteria (while children are eating lunch), and her music teacher is conducting classes on a cart, those classrooms have already by accounted for. Ms. Linda Diemer also responded to questions concerning the curriculum indicating that there are intervention programs for the lower grades to pinpoint what needs to be strengthened and that all of this is being looked at. Mr. Knops stressed that no action will be taken. Additional meetings will be held in each of the elementary schools to further discuss the possibility of the redistricting.

The question who decides if the elementary schools are redistricted was asked. Mr. Gerbasio responded that the educators; namely the Administrators will discuss with the Superintendent, the Superintendent will then bring it before the Board. The Board will then discuss and if it decided that this is the best course of action for the district a resolution will be adopted at a public meeting. The same parent questioned as to why it is the Board's decision and why it is not placed on a ballot for the voters to decide. Mr. Gerbasio responded that you (the voters) elected the board, many of whom are retired educators to entrust that as a Board we would make the correct decisions for the children of the district.

Mr. Knops assured those in attendance that any decision will be thoroughly researched. A parent wanted to know who would be doing the research. Mr. Knops responded that a committee consisting of the Director of Curriculum, Principals and other educators would be researching the program advantages/disadvantages. Mr. Knops also encouraged parents to do their own research so that when we conduct the meeting at your school, you can fully participate.

Questions concerning the six graders (as well as the current fifth graders) moving up to the Middle School and how it will take place. Mr. Valente, Principal, of the Middle School assured the parents that an orientation will be held for the children as well as the parents. The orientation will be held late spring. The question as to what will be done to acknowledge the fifth grade students in the future. Mrs. Wilhelm assured parents that there will be something held within their schools. Many ideas are being discussed at this time, and decisions will be made and parents properly notified.

Blue Ribbon Schools – has any thought as to becoming a Blue Ribbon School. Mr. Knops responded that this is a long term goal we would have to strive for, and that a Committee would have to be assembled to explore possibilities.

Why do parents take their children out of Middle School/High School to attend private parochial schools? Mr. Gerbasio responded that parents feel that their child will get into a better college, or will be recognized for an outstanding sports program. Truth be told, this may or may not ascertain if the child will get into a better college, or be recognized for outstanding sportsmanship.

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Speaking of rumors a parent inquired if there was any truth that the existing pre-k program would be relocated to a new location. Mr. Knops responded that there might be an opportunity to allow for the program to relocate and expand. However, he could not elaborate at this time.

Mr. Knops and Mr. Gerbasio thanked everyone for coming and for participating in the forum. Both hoped to meet with as many parents as possible in the future and invited all to attend the Board of Education meetings to become aware of all the good things which are transpiring in the schools and to meet the students and staff who will be “showcased” at future meetings. Mr. Gerbasio invited all to join the Superintendent and Board in refreshments which are being served at the back of the gym.

Motion by Mr. McStowe, seconded by Mr. Lewis, and unanimously adopted by Board Members present to adjourn the meeting at 8:44PM

Respectfully submitted,

Edward J. Appleton,  
Interim Board Secretary