

MINUTES OF THE BELLMORE-MERRICK CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING SEPTEMBER 1, 2021

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A regular meeting of the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District Board of Education was held on Wednesday evening, September 1, 2021, in the Auditorium of the Administrative Offices at the Brookside Educational Center at 1260 Meadowbrook Road, North Merrick, New York.

The following members of the Board of Education were present:

Edward Corona, President  
Nina Lanci, Vice President  
Melissa Cmar-Grote  
Janet Goller  
Dr. Nancy Kaplan  
Tracey Miller  
Gina Piskin

The following member of the Board of Education was not present:

Marion Blane

Also present:

Michael Harrington, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Mara Bollettieri, Deputy Superintendent of Personnel  
Mikaela Coni, Assistant Superintendent for Business  
Scott Bersin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment  
Eric Arlin, Executive Director of Alternative Education  
Emily Paluseo, Director of Special Education and Pupil Services  
Eric Caballero, Director of Physical Education/Health Ed/Athletics/Driver Education  
Cheryl Fontana, Director of Music/Fine and Performing Arts and Adult Education  
Joseph Innaco, Director of Administrative & Instructional Technology and Data Protection/Security  
Maura Kempton, Assistant Director of Special Education and Pupil Services  
Jon Simpkins, Director of School Facilities and Operations  
Tom Volpe, Supervisor of Transportation  
Christopher Powers, School Attorney  
Pattianne Guccione, District Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Corona at 6:37 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corona led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

On a **MOTION** by Dr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Miller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education moved into Executive Session to discuss pending litigation.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Cmar-Grote, seconded by Ms. Goller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education reconvened to Public Session at 8:11 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Corona led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Corona asked for a moment of silence to remember the victims of 9/11 attacks and for the troops and citizens that lost their lives in Afghanistan last week.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a **MOTION** Dr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Lanci and carried 7-0 the Board of Education approved the minutes from the August 4, 2021 and August 26, 2021 meetings.

IV. TREASURER'S REPORT

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Goller, seconded by Dr. Kaplan and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved the Treasurer's Report dated July 31, 2021.

V. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. Opening day of School

Mr. Harrington said we welcomed kids back to school today and it was a tremendous first day. He said the excitement in the building was a reminder of why we are all here. He thanked Mr. Caballero and the coaching staff for being prepared to get things underway and the district is looking forward to games and competitions. He also stated that nine students were named all-state musicians with NYSSMA. Mr. Harrington is happy we are getting kids back to achievements, success and normalcy in their lives.

Mr. Harrington said that we also welcomed back staff and have recognized over the last few months that although we did an amazing job last year, the reality is that there were opportunities lost. He said that this year the top priority is the wellness of kids. Mr. Harrington announced the theme for the year: "Being Present to Create a Culture of Belonging". Mr. Harrington explained that last year was very difficult to be present for kids so we are asking our teachers to find opportunities to connect with students so a meaningful relationship can develop allowing students to feel cared for. He said that going forward we will continue with our rigorous academics and extra-curricular activities while we focus on the social and emotional well-being of our students.

Mr. Innaco gave a video presentation focusing on the success stories of six prior Bellmore-Merrick CHSD students, highlighting their success and connection with their schools.

Mr. Harrington said that the students had a great first day, they used their lockers and when they got into their rooms, they said that it felt so much more normal than last year. Mr. Harrington stated that the district's priority is to give the best and most consistent education possible. He announced that there were two COVID-19 cases but nobody has to quarantine from those cases. He explained that prior to the Governor's order, the district made the decision to start the school year with masks and that we would continue to evaluate the situation so that kids are not scared to come to school and fear being quarantined. He thanked the Principals and asked them to talk about the first day back in school.

Ms. Hollings said that Calhoun High School had a fantastic first day. She said that kids were happy to be in the classroom, to see their friends and meet their teachers. They were also excited to be working with other students and to be creating a classroom environment where everyone knows each other as they take the next step in finding their path and passion. She also said that the cafeterias had a different atmosphere from last year with more of an opportunity for kids to socialize and they are looking forward to accomplishing things they couldn't last year.

Ms. Dunn said that Merrick Avenue Middle School had a great first day. She said that kids were really excited and their focus was on locker use, lunch and navigating the hallways. She said that the staff dressed in the school's colors of black and gold and that although the kids were nervous they were very excited. Ms. Dunn thanked the Board of Education and parents for their support.

Mr. Arlin said that the Meadowbrook Alternative Program students returned to school and were happy to be back. He said during lunch the kids played games and had fun. Mr. Arlin also said that the Prep Academy students also returned and introduced themselves to the staff. He said today was a great reminder of why we are here, doing what we do, every day.

Mr. Conte said that Grand Avenue Middle School had an amazing day. He said in middle school, all kids are concerned about the first few days is lockers, lunch and navigating the hallways. He said the connection of just helping a kid use a locker gives them a feeling of love and care. Mr. Conte thanked the community for their support.

Mr. Gomez said that Mephram High School had a great first day back. He said that the seniors took many photos to commemorate the day. Mr. Gomez met with the student government earlier today. He also said that teachers are carrying out the vision of a positive outlook and are already making connections.

Mr. Owenburg said that Kennedy High School also had an exciting day. He said that seniors started celebrating the night before by decorating their cars. Seniors also took pictures outside and in the auditorium. Mr. Owenburg said it was great for the younger students to see the seniors so they can think about loving their high school. He also said that the school has moved away from going over procedures on the first day and focused more on starting relationships between the teachers and kids. He said he also had a meeting with the student government and he is very excited about the school year.

Mr. Harrington thanked the Principals and teams. He said that we didn't have a lot of these things last year and we are bringing back these opportunities is very exciting. Mr. Harrington thanked the directors, Mr. Simpkins and the custodial staff for working hard and removing the barriers, the food service workers, athletic staff, the entire staff and Board of Education for their support. He also thanked Dr. Bollettieri, Ms. Coni and Mr. Bersin adding that this is not a one-person job and he appreciates everyone's hard work.

Dr. Bollettieri gave an update on personnel, stating that the district has filled 14 non-instructional positions and has 22 positions remaining open. The district has filled 29 instructional positions and has 5 positions remaining open. Ms. Bollettieri added that for the 2021-2022 school year a total of 26 non-instructional will be filled and 34 instructional for a total of 70 positions will have been filled.

#### Curriculum, Instruction and Technology

Mr. Bersin gave a presentation on the academic year in review. He said that the graduation rate is at 97% making us very competitive with all other school districts. He also mentioned that in Bellmore-Merrick CHSD, 95% of students are attending two and four year colleges. Mr. Bersin also mentioned that of the students that go on to work, half of them are in positions thanks to the community and Board of Education's support of programs like CHAMP, BMB and the electrical program. Mr. Bersin discussed the Advanced Placement (AP) exams and the associated statistics that show that Bellmore-Merrick CHSD has increased participation in the exams, which has a direct correlation with success in college. Mr. Bersin discussed the plans going forward such as building enrichment programs and focusing on social and emotional support, being together and the partnership Northwell Health. He thanked the Board of Education and the community for their support.

Mr. Innaco discussed the 1:1 Chromebook initiative and thanked the Board of Education for their support and leadership. He also thanked Mr. Harrington and the community for their support. Mr. Innaco said the original plan for this initiative was to procure Chromebooks for each student, grade by grade over the course of five years but funding became available to provide the Chromebooks for all students in just one year so we expedited the initiative. He explained that over the summer, the technology infrastructure was upgraded and the district will start to distribute Chromebooks to the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students first. Once we determine that the infrastructure is able to support the additional devices, Chromebooks will be distributed to the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Mr. Innaco explained the Blended Learning Resources and ongoing professional development. He thanked the Principals and building staff, the community, Board of Education and Mr. Harrington for the accelerated plan.

Mr. Harrington thanked Mr. Innaco and his team and looks forward to the rollout and the opportunities for our kids.

B. Future Dates

September 3-6	Labor Day Weekend – Schools Closed
September 7-8	Rosh Hashanah – Schools Closed
September 16	Yom Kippur – Schools Closed
September 23	High School Back to School Night
September 30	Middle School Back to School Night
October 6	Board of Education Meeting

VI. PUBLIC COMMENTS – *Agenda Items Only*

Mr. Corona stated the Board of Education encourages public participation on school related matters at Board meetings. To allow for public participation, a period not to exceed 30 minutes shall be set aside during each Board meeting. Any person wishing to make comments or raise questions shall complete an information card. Questions are to be addressed to the Board President, not to individual board members. Personal attacks on individual board members, administrators and staff will not be tolerated and may be cause to adjourn the meeting. There will be no back and forth dialogue. Out of courtesy and fairness to the rest of the audience, it would be appreciated if each visitor would limit his/her remarks to not more than three minutes or ask only one question. Public discussion on matters relating to staff and students, by which their reputation, privacy, or rights to due process, or those of others could be in some way violated, is prohibited.

Kimberly Stahl asked why board policy number 1230 is being adopted on the first reading. Mr. Powers explained that the board has the ability to set reasonable conditions on who can address the Board President and to adopt an amended policy on the first reading by a majority vote of the Board of Education.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Piskin, seconded by Ms. Miller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved item VII.A.

VII. SUPERINTENDENT’S RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Policy

WHEREAS, the Board of Education of the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District has made modifications to Board Policy 1230 – Public Participation; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has the revised Board Policy 1230 – Public Participation on the agenda for the Board of Education to consider; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education does not have any further comment on the revised Board Policy 1230 – Public Participation and deems it acceptable without the need for a second reading.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education waives the second reading of Board Policy 1230- Public Participation as set forth in Board Policy 2410; and,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District adopts the revised Board Policy 1230 – Public Participation and directs the District Clerk to update the Board Policy Manual to include this revised policy for implementation by the Superintendent of Schools.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Piskin, seconded by Ms. Miller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved item VII.B.

B. Donation

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education accept a donation of \$3,150.00 from the Grand Avenue Middle School PTSA to purchase planners for Grand Avenue Middle School for the 2021-2022 school year, and increase the appropriations budget by the same amount.

Mr. Corona thanked the Grand Avenue Middle School PTSA for their donation and their continued commitment to our students.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Lanci, seconded by Dr. Kaplan and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved items VII.C through VIII.I.

C. Special Education

1. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approve the revised recommended Special Education vendors for the 2021-2022 school year.
2. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approve the following Committee on Special Education recommended placements: 000512136, 131261297, 131261969, 131263295, 181910109, 201900061, 202000040, 202100024, 202100031 and 999011419.

VIII. PERSONNEL REPORT dated September 1, 2021

- A. Resignations
- B. Appointments
- C. Recommendation for Continued Employment
- D. Salary Reclassification
- E. Leave Requests
- F. Assigned Services – Athletics – Cancellation
- G. Assigned Services – Athletics
- H. Assigned Services – Non-Athletics – Cancellation
- I. Assigned Services – Non-Athletics

IX. BUSINESS AND FINANCE

A. Bills and Corresponding Warrant dated September 1, 2021

The Board of Education reviewed the bills and corresponding warrant.

B. Bids

On a **MOTION** by Dr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Lanci and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved the bids as stated in the agenda.

C. Budget Summary dated August 31, 2021

The Board of Education reviewed the budget summary.

On a **MOTION** by Dr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Lanci and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved items IX.D through IX.G.

D. Budget Transfers

1. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Bellmore-Merrick CHSD approves the following budget transfers to cover 2020-2021 school year expenses:

From:	A9060.800-00-0000 (Employee Benefits Health Ins)	\$ 83,990.00
To:	A2110.134-04-0000 (Café Duty)	\$ 83,990.00

From:	A2110.471-00-0000 (Public School Tuition)	\$ 47,000.00
To:	A2110.140-00-0000 (Substitutes)	\$ 47,000.00

From:	A9060.800-00-0000 (Employee Benefits Health Ins)	\$ 98,000.00
To:	A2110.130-00-0000 (Teachers Salary)	\$ 98,000.00

To cover costs for salaries.

2. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the Bellmore-Merrick CHSD approves the following budget transfer to cover 2021-2022 school year expenses:

From:	A9060.800-00-0000 (Employee Benefits Health Ins)	\$115,382.00
To:	A1910.400-00-0000 (Insurance)	\$115,382.00

To cover costs for workers compensation insurance.

E. Special Counsel – Lewis Brisbois, LLP.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby authorizes the Board President to execute an Engagement Letter with Lewis Brisbois, LLP, subject to final review by Ingerman Smith, LLP, wherein Lewis Brisbois is appointed as Special Counsel to the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District (“School District”) at the rate of \$250 per hour for the purpose of representing and defending the School District in connection with a lawsuit captioned as *Mieczyslaw Szozda v. Bellmore Merrick et al.*, New York County Index No. 190325/2020; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby authorizes the Board President to execute a Disclosure and Consent Agreement with Ingerman Smith, L.L.P. agreeing to joint representation as to counsel and guidance of the School District with other school districts named in the lawsuit in the form attached hereto on behalf of the Board of Education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby authorizes the Board President to execute a Consent to Joint Representation with Lewis Brisbois, LLP agreeing to joint representation in the defense of the School District with other school districts named in the lawsuit, subject to final review by Ingerman Smith, LLP.

- F. APTS – AP Test Service Agreement  
BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approve an agreement with Achievement Point Test Service, LLC. for registration and scheduling services for Advanced Placement exams for the 2021-2022 school year at the rates specified in the contract.
- G. Surf for All Corporation Agreement  
BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approve and agreement with Surf for All Corporation, to provide Surf Therapy Services from September 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022 at a cost of \$49/student for each session.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Lanci, seconded by Ms. Goller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved to add a settlement agreement to the agenda as item IX.H.

On a **MOTION** by Ms. Lanci, seconded by Ms. Goller and carried 7-0, the Board of Education approved the following resolution, item IX.H

- IX. H. Settlement Agreement  
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education authorizes the District to enter into an agreement resolving a contemplated due process complaint for the term of September 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, subject to the terms and conditions of a mutually acceptable written agreement, and further authorizes the President of the Board of Education to execute said agreement on behalf of the Board of Education.

X. OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Piskin asked if we will be bringing back student representatives to the Board of Education meetings. Mr. Harrington said that students will be back for the October 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.

XI. CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Corona stated the Board of Education did not receive correspondence.

XII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Corona stated that the Board of Education encourages public participation on school related matters at Board meetings. To allow for public participation, a period not to exceed 30 minutes shall be set aside during each Board meeting. Any person wishing to make comments or raise questions shall complete an information card. Questions are to be addressed to the Board President, not to individual board members. Personal attacks on individual board members, administrators and staff will not be tolerated and may be cause to adjourn the meeting. There will be no back and forth dialogue. Out of courtesy and fairness to the rest of the audience, it would be appreciated if each visitor would limit his/her remarks to not more than three minutes or ask only one question. Public discussion on matters relating to staff and students, by which their reputation, privacy, or rights to due process, or those of others could be in some way violated, is prohibited.

Mr. Harrington stated regarding the opening guidelines and vaccines that it remains a family choice. He also explained that partnership with Walgreens is to make the vaccine available to students and parents and that the District will not vaccinate a student without parental approval. He said that the vaccines are not being given in any of our buildings, it is not a mandate and it is being made available to assist those that are interested in our community.

Frank Pulizzi spoke about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) and he is against CRT.

Wendy Yao questioned the diversity training that was given to the staff and feels it is a conflict for Dr. Kaplan.

Mr. Harrington stated that the district does not pay Dr. Kaplan for her diversity training of the staff and that Dr. Kaplan volunteers her time. He said that she is the best at this job and travels across the county doing this and it is completely appropriate for her to train our staff.

Dr. Kaplan responded by saying that she is very proud of her work and is not paid by the district. She said she comes from a family of police officers and she remains proud of her work in this district and across the country.

Russell Schneider thanked the Board of Education for the moment of silence in recognition of 9/11 and Afghanistan. He spoke about the mask mandate and feels it should be a family choice

Richard Soleymanzadeh spoke about the mask mandate and CRT and feels they should be a family decision.

Stephany Margaronis feels that her rights and choices are being taken away.

Tara Casimano asked about the cameras on the fields and Mr. Caballero informed her that they are installed and working. She also feels that there should be access to guidance counselors over the summer.

Mr. Harrington thanked her for the suggestion and said that this has already been discussed. The district is also considering a summer counseling and wellness program.

Caroline Cho spoke about the mask mandate and feels it should be a family choice.

John Nistico requested to address the Board President and when he refused to provide his address Mr. Powers explained that he was not permitted under the new policy requirements to make a public comment.

Barbara Steinberg spoke about mask mandates and feels it should be a family choice.

Sara Lobato spoke about mask mandates and feels it should be a family choice.

Chris Mitkish spoke about mask mandates and said that the anger directed to the Board of Education is misdirected. She understands that the district must follow the law. She asked if the district has a plan to achieve going mask optional.

Mr. Harrington explained that the district's original plan was to start with masks and see what the infection rate was in our classrooms. He reminded everyone that the district did have masks optional during summer school, which led to five kids missing their opportunity to be in school due to quarantine requirements from a positive case. Mr. Harrington is happy that the district didn't originally decide to start the school year with masks optional, to later disappoint everyone by going back to a mask mandate as imposed by NYS. He explained that there were two positive COVID-19 cases today and that if kids were not masked that would have resulted in many kids being taken out of school to quarantine. Mr. Harrington stated that the Governor has issued a mandate and the district will follow the mandate.



Mr. Corona asked for a **MOTION** to extend the Public Comment section of the agenda for an additional thirty minutes. There being **NO MOTION** made, the Public Comment section closed for further comments.

XIII. POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board of Education did not enter into executive session.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

On a **MOTION** by Dr. Kaplan, seconded by Ms. Lanci and carried 7-0, the Board of Education meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pattianne Guccione  
District Clerk