



**NORTH BELLMORE UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MINUTES – JANUARY 13, 2022**

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Business Meeting	Martin Avenue School 2616 Martin Avenue, Bellmore, NY 11710	8:00 PM
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The Business meeting of the North Bellmore Union Free School District Board of Education was held on Thursday evening, January 13, 2022, in the All Purpose Room of the Martin Avenue School at 2616 Martin Avenue, Bellmore, New York, and via livestream.

The following members of the Board of Education were present:

Rosemarie Corless, President  
Jo-Ann Erhard, Vice President  
Melissa Cmar-Grote  
Nina Lanci  
Christine Malloy

Also present:

Marie Testa, Superintendent of Schools  
Jacqueline Rehak, Assistant Superintendent for Business  
Jason Fischetti, Executive Director of Technology, Data and Information Services  
Leyna Malone, Executive Director of Pupil Personnel Services and Special Education  
Christopher Powers, District Counsel  
Laurice Gunnels, District Clerk

Absent: Janet Pollitt, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>	The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m. Motion was made by Mrs. Erhard at 6:39 p.m., seconded by Mrs. Cmar-Grote to move into an executive session. Motion was carried 5-0. The meeting reconvened at 8:08 p.m.
<b>PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE</b>	Mrs. Corless led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.  Mrs. Erhard read the District’s Mission Statement.
<b>APPROVAL OF MINUTES</b>	Mrs. Lanci moved that the Board of Education approve the minutes of the Business meeting of December 9, 2021. Mrs. Erhard seconded and the motion was carried 5-0.
<b>PUBLIC COMMENTS</b>	None.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Mrs. Corless advised that the Board received correspondence and it was discussed in Executive Session. A majority of the correspondence concerned the masking mandate and Mrs. Corless requested that Mr. Powers clarify for the Board the recent events and rules governing the BOE.

Mr. Powers stated that pursuant to New York State Public Health Law and the implementing regulations there is currently a mask mandate which is universal and applicable to all NYS schools. This mandate he explained, though challenged by two Nassau County school districts in a venue in Albany County, was upheld. Continuing on with recent events, Mr. Powers indicated that on January 6<sup>th</sup>, Nassau County Executive, Mr. Blakeman, issued an executive order directing Nassau County Boards of Education to vote on parental consent regarding mask mandates. On that same day, he stated, Ms. Betty Rosa, the Commissioner of Education in New York State, issued a statement in response to that executive order that Counties do not carry the legal authority allowing school districts to vote on such issues and School Officers (this District's BOE) take an oath to follow all legal requirements and the State Education Department expects school boards to follow those requirements including the face covering regulation.

In conclusion, Mr. Powers stressed that the Governor and the Commissioner of Education indicated quite clearly any compliance of the County Executive's order would be a direct defiance of the Governor and the State Education Department and such conduct would be subject to repercussions including the possibility of diminished state aid, fines imposed upon the School District, and/or the removal of elected Board members. Mr. Powers explained that the North Bellmore School District is a Municipal Corporation of the State of New York and oversight therein is to be provided by the Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents, and this Board has no authority to do what the County Executive is directing them to do.

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

Mrs. Lanci moved that the Board of Education approve the Treasurer's report for the month ended November 30, 2021. Mrs. Malloy seconded and the motion was carried 5-0.

**BOARD COMMITTEE /  
HIGH SCHOOL REPORTS**

Mrs. Lanci reported the BMCHSD meeting was held last evening. She indicated Mr. Harrington, the Superintendent, spoke to the resiliency of administrators, students, faculty, and staff during COVID, and commended them for their efforts and performance in continual learning, and participation in club and athletic events. On that note, Mrs. Lanci was happy to share that six students from JFK High School were named Regeneron Semi Finalists this year, and she described a student presentation of robotics conducted by the Stem Program. Mrs. Lanci was excited to announce that Calhoun was approved to administer the NYS Cosmetology Exam affording students the opportunity to become qualified in the field at the completion of the program. In the normal course of business, second read policies were adopted, equipment excised and disposed, and donations were accepted for the community cupboard. She reported the high schools will be closed January 25-28 for regent exams. Mrs. Lanci said the Board will meet again in February.

**FINANCE**

The Board of Education acknowledged the review of the warrants that have been approved by the Claims Auditor for the month of December 2021.

Mrs. Erhard moved that the Board of Education approve the Budgetary Transfers dated January 13, 2022. Mrs. Malloy seconded and the motion was carried 5-0.

The Superintendent of Schools recommends approval of all resolutions included in 10.1 through 15.4.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Mrs. Testa began her report by thanking Mr. Powers for detailing and clarifying for the community and the Board issues surrounding the masking mandate. She indicated she received many correspondences and can understand the confusion among the families, and can appreciate the various viewpoints surrounding it.

Mrs. Testa then spoke to the following key points:

- The District received KN95 masks from the Nassau County Executor's Office, Mr. Blakeman. Mr. Russo and his team picked up the masks and distribution was made to the buildings for interested faculty/staff members.
- North Bellmore received from the Governor's office over 1,600 test kits donated to the District strictly for the families. Mrs. Testa offered her appreciation to the Principals and secretaries who assisted in the distribution to those interested. She offered her apologies for the confusion regarding the expiration date, but after further clarification by the Governor's office they do expire at the end of January. Therefore, any remaining kits she indicated were offered in a lottery to the interested faculty/staff members.

The District did receive further communication from NYS regarding receipt of additional test kits (40 percent of the original number) that will expire at the end of June and those have now arrived on the premises. Mrs. Testa spoke to the discretionary distribution of these and recommendations will be made to the Board regarding that.

Mrs. Testa was then excited to report on programs and events occurring Districtwide for the direct benefit of the North Bellmore students and families, and the development of our faculty:

- The application process for the 2022-2023 UPK program is actively underway. Information regarding the program is posted on the website under *What's New*, postcards were recently mailed to all the families, and a press release was sent to the local newspapers. The deadline to submit an application is Friday, March 11, and thus far, the District is in receipt of 175 applications. The lottery will take place at the end of March and all applicants will be notified thereafter whether they received placement or are on the waiting list.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S  
REPORT  
(continued)**

- With respect to Professional Development, Mrs. Testa was excited to report on the services provided by MTSS and RTI areas. The leadership team including building and central administrators participated in a Branching Minds session last week socially distanced at the North Bellmore Public Library. She offered her appreciation to Ms. Tymecki, the Director of the North Bellmore Public Library, for allowing the District to utilize the community room for this meeting.

In furtherance of this, Mrs. Testa informed the Board that Dr. Williams, the RTI Coordinator, is meeting over the next couple of weeks with the classroom teachers to provide support options available to them and introduce them to the Branching Minds platform pre-empting the PD to be held on January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>.

- Mrs. Pollitt and Mrs. Malone are planning for the upcoming work to be conducted with the sixth grade classes by our school counselor, Ms. DiOrio, and the newly appointed counselor this evening, Ms. McNamara.

In closing, Mrs. Testa, echoing the sentiments of Mr. Harrington expressed by Ms. Lanci earlier, proudly professed her appreciation for North Bellmore's administrators, faculty, staff, and students, and described the positivity exhibited among them while continuing to strive to make the best of the best during these challenging times. Mrs. Testa offered her gratitude for the parental support, and while stressing the appreciation for the varying viewpoints, reiterated what Mr. Powers stated earlier that certain things remain beyond the District's control during these unprecedented times.

**PERSONNEL REPORT**

Motion was made by Mrs. Lanci to approve the Personnel Report dated January 13, 2022. Mrs. Erhard seconded and the motion was carried 5-0.

- A. Appointments
- B. Leave Requests
- C. Resignation
- D. Termination

**BUSINESS REPORT**

Mrs. Rehak spoke to the preparation of the 2022-2023 budget and provided the Board the following information:

- The tax base growth factor for North Bellmore is 1.0037 which is higher in contrast to last year which was 1.0018 which effects the overall tax cap calculation. The allowable tax levy growth factor is 2 percent, and the CPI-U is 4.7 percent. Based on this the rate of inflation has significantly passed 2 percent.
- Projected tax levy increase is 2 to 2.3 percent. Mrs. Rehak stressed this is only preliminary as the District is still waiting upon the State Aid budget and the BOCES Aid for capital expenditures.

**BUSINESS REPORT  
(continued)**

- Expenditures disbursed by the District have been directly impacted by cost increases. Due to the significant rate increase of the CPI-U, the cost of transportation will be directly impacted as the CPI governs the increase of transportation extension contracts. In addition to transportation, the District just received the health insurance expenditures which is renewable on the calendar year. The health insurance increase this year is in excess of 13 percent.
- Scheduled meetings have begun with building principals and department heads to discuss budgetary planning and staffing for the next fiscal year.
- Kindergarten Enrollment - Kindergarten Registration is underway and based on the ratio of students registered, appointments scheduled, and those pre-registered, the Kindergarten class of 2022-2023 has the potential of 256 students which is less than the current year of 289. As new registrants may still come in later in the year or over the summer months, Mrs. Rehak indicated enrollment will continue to be closely monitored and, if necessary, adjustments will be made to the proposed 2022-2023 budget.

Mrs. Rehak indicated she will keep the Board apprised as more information becomes available and will provide an update at the February Board meeting. In closing, she announced the ESSA annual reporting was finalized and is now available on the website under the Business Department.

**CURRICULUM &  
INSTRUCTION REPORT**

Mrs. Testa spoke on Mrs. Pollitt's behalf in her absence this evening. She began by reminding the Board of her report she provided previously on the Universal Pre-K Program and RTI coordination of services.

Mrs. Testa then expressed her concerns on the national staffing shortage especially in the field of education and the negative impact this shortage is having across the country. As an educator and administrator Mrs. Testa shared that nationally less students are entering into the educational field compounding the situation. She commended Mrs. Fisher, Mrs. Pollitt, and the Principals for their continued diligence in the recruitment process of personnel and spoke to their ongoing efforts.

Mrs. Testa described also the absences that have plagued the district over the last couple of weeks due to COVID. She reported absences by staff on certain days to be as high as 30-40, and the students were averaging 340 per day. Mrs. Testa applauded the efforts of Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Veneroni in securing coverage for the classes, and with pride recognized and offered her gratitude to the North Bellmore administrators, faculty, and staff for stepping in and assisting their colleagues under these unprecedented circumstances to ensure the academic growth, safety, and wellbeing of the students.

**TECHNOLOGY REPORT**

Mr. Fischetti informed the Board that he attended the BMCHSD meeting last evening and witnessed firsthand the presentation of coding and robotics by students of the Stem Program. He shared the excitement of the students in their demonstration which exhibited the growth and changes that have occurred in the program over the years. He was happy to say that he and his Technology Team witness that same level of enthusiasm illustrated by the students here in North Bellmore since the onset of the new computer science program.

Mr. Fischetti detailed and compared the similar platforms utilized at both the elementary and middle/high school levels. It was exciting to see what students at the elementary level are learning on a broader level put into fruition at the higher level. In furtherance of this, he informed the Board a meeting was scheduled for Friday, January 21, with the Computer Science team of the BMCHSD to discuss the program and share ideas on points of focus to ensure a knowledgeable transition.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION REPORT**

Mrs. Malone began her report by providing the following updates:

- Preparation for the Annual Reviews has begun. The School Psychologists are meeting with their student teams to discuss student progress in preparation for the annual CSE meetings which will be occurring over the next couple of months.
- The Special Education Department is currently working on budgetary planning. Mrs. Malone expressed her gratitude to the Special Education team that work directly with her, i.e. Ms. Harnett, Ms. Danz, and Mrs. Cavanagh who have been working closely with herself, Mrs. Rehak, and the Business Office in this endeavor. The draft projection will continue to be updated and impacted by the upcoming CSE meetings based on the needs of the students.
- Mrs. Malone welcomed the following pupil personnel specialists to the North Bellmore team and thanked the Board for their approval and support.
  - Ms. Ashley Martin, Social Worker
  - Ms. Olivia Gentilucci, Social Worker
  - Ms. Keara McNamara, School Counselor

In closing, Mrs. Malone reiterated Mrs. Testa's report of the unprecedented number of absences over the past two weeks among students, faculty, and staff. She expressed gratitude and appreciation to the school building nurses who have been endlessly working in conjunction with the building principals on quarantine/isolation procedures, the extensive paperwork that ensues, and communicating with and supporting the North Bellmore families who have been impacted.

**CPSE/CSE REPORTS**

Mrs. Erhard moved that the Board of Education approve the CPSE and CSE reports dated January 6, 2022. Mrs. Cmar-Grote seconded and the motion was carried 5-0.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Motion was made by Mrs. Lanci, seconded by Mrs. Erhard, and carried 5-0 for the following consent agenda items: 15.1-15.4.

**NEW BUSINESS CONTRACTS**

15.1 **BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Education approve the following contracts for the 2021-22 school year:

- Brookville Center for Children's Services, Inc.
- Donna Geffner, Ph.D.
- New Designs Consulting, Inc.
- Uniondale UFSD

**DONATIONS**

15.2 **BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Education accept a donation from Mark Verdi (son of former JGD Principal, John Verdi) of a donation of books which will be used as replacements for the borrowed library books that have by "lost" by students of our school (approximate value \$100).

15.3 **BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Education accept a donation from Box Tops for Education in the amount of \$31.70 to be used for school beautification and decorations at Saw Mill Road School.

15.4 **BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Education accept a donation from Coca-Cola Give! In the amount of \$42.50 to be used for School beautification and decorations at Saw Mill Road School.

**OLD BUSINESS**

None.

**BOARD QUESTIONS**

Mrs. Malloy posed a question in reference to the RTI Program - for clarification purposes does the program focus strictly on student's reading and writing abilities or does it also address phonics, spelling, and delay issues? Mrs. Testa responded that the program covers all the content and skill areas (including mathematics) where a child is exhibiting difficulties which would impede their growth academically.

Mrs. Malloy then inquired of Mr. Powers the specific laws and/or mandates giving the Commissioner of the BOE or the Governor the authority to impede the District from following the Executive Order put forth by the County. Mr. Powers began by citing New York Public Health Law. He then reiterated as he spoke to previously that the school district is a Municipal Corporation, and North Bellmore takes its guidance from the NYS Education Department and other affiliated state agencies including the Department of Health. In New York State there is a public health law indicating that you have to wear masks which is a non-discretionary matter and, therefore, as a school district, a municipal corporation of New York State, cannot be done on a county by county basis.

**BOARD QUESTIONS  
(continued)**

Mrs. Malloy lastly inquired about the pushbacks in terms of the mask mandates, it originally was August to November and then it was pushed to December, and now February. What can we do as Board members and/or members of the community to address the issue of guidance regarding numbers or percentages needed to have the mandates changed? Mr. Powers responded you can communicate with the State Education Department or the Department of Health as a voting member of the community and/or prominent member of the Board of Education and voice your concerns in reference to guidelines. Ultimately guidance must come from New York State on those issues.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Ms. Fiore (Locust Avenue) - *Why have we still not found a better option for our children who are at home on quarantine? We keep hearing how we are in the exploratory stage yet nothing ever moves forward. Other districts have accommodations in place whether it be one hour of teacher time per day or live streaming into the class. The fact that we have absolutely nothing in place for our students is extremely disappointing.* Mrs. Testa in response indicated she received similar inquiry over the last couple of weeks and the District has been monitoring closely the quarantine situation and related issues. Meetings were held with District Administrators and the Superintendent team, and she spoke to the negative feedback and difficulties therefrom encountered by other districts utilizing livestreaming at this level. After deliberation, Mrs. Testa indicated that while North Bellmore does have the capability of livestreaming the District does feel it is not appropriate or conducive at the elementary level at this time and our teachers will continue as they have been to provide work to those students. She did report that the quarantine period has now been reduced to five days.

Ms. Zukowski (Oak Street) - *Math AIS services have not been occurring - AIS teacher is acting like a sub?* Mrs. Testa agreed that the staffing shortage has become a real problem. Unfortunately she explained the District therefore has had to utilize the AIS and other teachers to cover for grade level classes and/or mandated services. Mrs. Testa assures that the District has been diligent in the recruitment process and will continue to be. In furtherance she indicated this is not a situation isolated to North Bellmore as she spoke to conversations with colleagues from the surrounding Districts currently facing the same challenges.

Ms. Lee (Beltagh Avenue) - *Due to COVID restrictions and social distancing there is much less small group work/differentiated instruction and support that individual students need. How can this be addressed better so students are getting what they need in the classroom? There is just too much whole classroom instruction and not enough small group instruction happening.* Mrs. Testa responded that unfortunately she was forced to move the classrooms back to rows due to the current spike, and as soon as the numbers go back down, we will be able to move back to small group formations in the classrooms. She did ensure that the District will continue to monitor this, and until it becomes possible, Mrs. Testa described that the teachers are conferencing at desks and the children are working in small controlled groups.



**PUBLIC COMMENTS  
(continued)**

Ms. Frasca (Rosemont Street) - *The North Bellmore School District was sending weekly COVID tally for all schools in the district but we did not receive it last week. Is there a reason why? It is a critical time to have this information.* Mrs. Testa responded that she will look into how the oversight occurred. She did report though that there were 21 positive students and 10 staff members last week, and those will be included in this week's numbers.

Ms. DiRubbio (Natta Boulevard) - *Has anyone reached out to Blakeman's office to see how he intends to help school districts get parents their right to decide on masks since DOH and our non-elected Governor are not budging on this and not listening to the science? Prior to the break the emails regarding illness in the school were only surrounding COVID when doctors' offices around the County were also seeing flu. Why do we continue to perpetuate the fear by only emailing about COVID? Also, I don't understand why we were emailed prior to the break that our kids stop going to sport outings, parties, etc.? That should be a parent's decision. Thank you for your time.* In regard to the question regarding reaching out to Mr. Blakeman with respect to parental rights and masking, Mrs. Testa indicated a representative from the Superintendent Association did reach out and the response received now was the control lies within the state not within the County, and parents' voices writing to the state is how to achieve it at this point. With reference to the e-mails regarding COVID, Mrs. Testa explained that as part of the reopening plan and the survey which was distributed last spring to our community, faculty, and staff, there was a request to the District by the public to continue only with weekly reports while the District is required to report to the State daily on those figures. In terms of other communicable illnesses, Mrs. Testa indicated the District is required to report to the State and the Department of Health spikes in flu and/or any other diseases. If there was, for instance, a severe outbreak of the flu or any other illness, the District would of course send out the appropriate notices to the community. With respect to attending parties, sport outings, etc., Mrs. Testa indicated the District shares with parents situational findings provided to the District through contact tracing of what's occurring strictly to assist and afford parents the ability to make an informed decision regarding such events if necessary for your children.

Ms. Ciancarelli (Mona Court) – *If both vaccinated and unvaccinated people catch and spread COVID why are we choosing to have vaccinated children not have to quarantine after an exposure but still making unvaccinated kids quarantine? Shouldn't all kids still need to quarantine?* Mrs. Testa in response said that several parents had written to her as well regarding the regulations and, she, therefore, reached out to the Department of Health for clarification. Mrs. Testa explained that while the information may seem contradictory, these are the regulations or guidelines that the District must follow and the BOE can only choose to make those regulations stricter if they deemed necessary but not relinquish them.

Ms. Pascalli (Briggs Street) – *Comment/question on masks and parental choice.* Ms. Pascalli made a statement regarding masks, the mask mandate, parental consent regarding this, the recent executive order issued by the Nassau County Executor, Mr. Blakeman, and questioned the ramifications if it was followed.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**  
*(continued)*

Mr. Powers in response reiterated the Commissioner of Education's statement of January 6<sup>th</sup>, where school officers take an oath to obey the legal requirements including face covering regulations and the provision in the State Education Law which allows removal of such officers if regulations are not followed. The State of New York sends the districts money through state aid and the Governor made it quite clear there would be implications. Mr. Powers did say that if there was a legal challenge and decision through the Court System in favor of the removal, that decision would be implemented. Ms. Pascalli followed up with the State Education Department does not make laws, just regulations, and laws have to be passed in the NYS Assembly and signed by the Governor. Mr. Powers responded that Public Health Law 206, and State Education Law 306, authorizing the removal of the BOE, gives clear statutory authority to do this and further repercussions include the possible loss of state aid funding and proposed fines which ultimately could cost the District a substantial amount of money. Ms. Pascalli then requested that the Board write letters on behalf of the District regarding masks. Mr. Powers responded that the State is controlling the mask mandate and the BOE is required to follow that regulation. If a voting member of the community disagrees with that you absolutely have the right to communicate to the Governor or the State Education Department your concerns.

Ms. Zukowski (Oak Street ) – *I would like to know if we will be able to add foreign language to the school day for our elementary schools. Per prior meetings setting up future curriculum starts in January.* Mrs. Testa indicated planning has begun and the administrative team will be sharing the information with the BOE and more detailed information will be shared publicly over the next two months.

Ms. Zukowski (Oak Street) – *Has any surveys or research been done to see the effectiveness of health and wellness? I think our schools can focus more on the basic school topics.* Mrs. Testa responded that currently she does not have a student survey in relationship to this topic. The District every year reviews and assesses the programs offered for improvement and growth, and this too will be part of our discussions with the BOE.

Ms. Zukowski (Oak Street) – *Why are there classes that do not have textbooks for social studies?* Mrs. Testa expressed social studies has been an ongoing topic. She explained since the new standards were released the District has been researching the resources available. In regard to feedback received, other Districts were disappointed with the new resources purchased at the onset. Mrs. Pollitt and Ms. McNamara are meeting with textbook publishers regarding this. At the present time, Mrs. Testa indicated the District currently utilizes the Social Studies ELA Curriculum by BOCES online in conjunction with some of the older textbooks which still contain valuable and relevant resources of information to supplement. The District is convening a committee to review the new social studies text resources available and there will updates regarding this in the future.

**POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE  
SESSION**

Motion was made to return into Executive Session by Mrs. Lanci at 9:14 p.m., seconded by Mrs. Cmar-Grote. Motion was carried 5-0. The meeting reconvened at 11:03 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Mrs. Erhard, seconded by Mrs. Cmar-Grote, and carried 5-0, the Board of Education meeting was adjourned at 11:05 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, February 10, 2022.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurice Gunnels  
District Clerk