

Board of Education Highlights: 12/17/19 Meeting

The following are highlights of discussions and actions from the Dec. 17 Board of Education meeting. For the full minutes and audio recordings from the meeting, please refer to “Agendas and Minutes” under the “Board of Education” section.

- Prior to the meeting, the Board of Education took a tour of Stewart School to observe recent facilities improvements. Stewart School was the site of the December meeting.
- Stewart Principal Linda Norton and members of the school faculty gave a presentation on how the school incorporates service learning so that every student can experience the value of helping others. Student and faculty efforts have contributed to helping NYU Winthrop Hospital, the Mary Brennan Inn and many more organizations. Ms. Norton also explained how many of the service efforts are driven by students and their ideas. Student Kaitlyn McDonald shared a video that she created to help raise awareness and funds to protect sea turtles from polluters. Model behavior, respect and an overall culture of kindness are also emphasized at Stewart on a daily basis.
- The Board and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kusum Sinha applauded students and staff members for various accomplishments:
 - First grader Valentina Carr and fourth grader Matias Archer were honored for winning the Shanti Fund Calendar Contest. Art teacher Nicole Leyland was also honored for her guidance.
 - Stewart Avenue School reading teacher Brenda McCarthy was recognized for receiving the Chairman’s Leadership Award from the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s Long Island chapter. Under Ms. McCarthy’s leadership, Stewart has remained the program’s top fundraising school on Long Island, having raised a total of \$161,564 since 2015.
 - Four chorus students from Garden City High School were acknowledged for their acceptance into the prestigious Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall in January: Sarah Fetherston, Emma Gardner, Molly Madigan and Olympia Van Blenis.
- Dr. Sinha also acknowledged the wonderful concerts, plays, performances and festivities that were among the many district highlights of the holiday season. She also reminded families to take advantage of upcoming Family Connect Nights; these are nights when homework is withheld to allow students to engage in activities with parents and siblings organized through the schools. The next Family Connect Night is April 29.
- Board of Education trustee William Holub reported that the Audit Committee recently reviewed the district’s Risk Assessment profile for the upcoming school year. The profile, which evaluates existing internal financial controls, will be presented to the entire Board later in the year with recommendations for the internal auditor on areas to focus on in performing in-depth testing and a more special audit.

- Board of Education President Angela Heineman announced that she would not be seeking reelection to the Board this spring. Her current term expires June 30, 2020.
- The Board conducted second readings of several policy revisions which were later approved during the meeting.
- The Board accepted a donation from SEPTA of various equipment for use in our elementary buildings; a donation from Friends of Music for a trip for vocal students; and a grant from Maspeth Federal Savings for social studies supplies at the middle school.
- The Board entered into an agreement with Google, in compliance with the Education Law 2-D regarding the safeguarding of student data privacy and security. Dr. Sinha said while the district has previously put into place stringent measures to safeguard student data, the district entered into this agreement based on its extensive use of G Suite for Education, including Google Classroom. Google recently entered into an agreement with New York State educational agencies to address the requirements set forth by Education Law 2-D. All third-party contractors who house district student data are restricted in how they can use data and are required to uphold certain standards for data security, privacy storage and disposal under the Parents Bill of Rights agreement.
- Parents expressed concerns regarding a proposed New York State Senate bill that would require students to be vaccinated for the human papillomavirus upon entering the seventh grade, including a provision that allows health care providers to administer the vaccine without parental consent. President Heineman said that while the Board has not taken a formal position (as a Board) on the issue, she urged parents to contact their legislators as a more effective means to be heard on the matter.
- Multiple parents and one fifth grade student praised the elementary gifted and talented Quest program and asked that it be extended to the middle school. President Heineman said that there is no proposal for extending the program and that there are many enrichment and accelerated opportunities available for students upon entering the middle school. She cited multiple programs, including Project Lead the Way.
- A parent inquired about the effectiveness of Teachers College Readers Workshop in meeting the needs of students with dyslexia. Dr. Sinha noted that the district implements various differentiation strategies to meet the needs of all struggling readers. President Heineman also alluded to professional development that was recently approved to address students with dyslexia. Another parent suggested the district pursue the Teachers College Writing Program to piggyback the district's use of Readers Workshop. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Dr. Ted Cannone said the current writing instruction is in alignment with the Readers Workshop but that the district is considering adopting the Teachers College Writing Program in the future.

- A parent inquired about the development of a strategic plan for special education students. Dr. Sinha said that data is being analyzed and professional development in the area is ongoing.
- A parent inquired about current enrollment growth affecting Hemlock School. President Heineman said that the district continues to study building utilization and reiterated that there is no immediate plan for redistricting at this time.