

Board of Education Highlights: 4/21/20 Meeting

The following are highlights of discussions and actions from the April 21 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. This meeting was held via teleconference in light of COVID-19 concerns and in accordance with Executive Order 202.1 from the Governor, suspending certain requirements of the Open Meetings Law to allow for remote attendance.

The public was invited to attend the meeting in a virtual setting. A web link and phone number to dial in were posted on the district website and communicated to the public via an e-blast and Twitter.

The public participation portion of the meeting was suspended. The public was invited to email any comments and/or concerns to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kusum Sinha: sinhak@gcufsd.net.

- Dr. Sinha gave an overview of the superintendent’s proposed 2020-2021 school district budget, including a presentation on the Instruction Component-Part II. (Residents had an opportunity to review this budget presentation on the district website in advance of the meeting at www.gardencity.k12.ny.us). Dr. Sinha noted that reductions in New York State Education aid, changes in interest earning projections and changes in student needs resulting from the COVID-19 impact have prompted adjustments to the working budget. This includes an increase in the use of reserves to offset revenue losses.
- Dr. Sinha highlighted areas of the technology, athletics and special education budgets. In response to a resident’s email, Dr. Sinha said the district awaits a decision from the State on a revised budget vote and Board of Education trustee election, which had been postponed to at least June 1. She urged residents to review the budget presentations on the district website and email her any questions at sinhak@gcufsd.net.
- Board President Angela Heineman inquired if there was sufficient funding in the proposed budget for health services and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Sinha said funding is sufficient, including additional cleaning that may be required. She also inquired if the technology budget and network capability were sufficient to accommodate remote learning needs that have arisen during the crisis, to which Dr. Sinha and District Director for Educational Technology Dr. Rita Melikian both gave assurance. Trustee Stefanie Granville also inquired about the state of the district’s technology program based on recent events, including use of software applications. Dr. Sinha described the current software platforms as “robust” and indicated that there would be some additional technology instruction in the primary grades in the future.

- Vice President Tom Pinou inquired about the frequency and effectiveness of the district's cybersecurity/data privacy training relevant to safeguarding against phishing activities. Dr. Melikian said staff training sessions are held every two months with ongoing training assessment and weekly online follow-up exercises for staff.
- Trustee William Holub asked how the district would handle a potential midyear reduction in state aid during the 2020-2021 school year. Dr. Sinha said the district has identified approximately \$500,000 in material and supply purchases as well as planned professional development activities that are considered enhancements and could be eliminated without impact to current programs and services. She also indicated the ability to apply additional reserves and fund balance if needed.
- Mr. Holub also inquired how the COVID-19 crisis might affect LIPA PILOT payments to the district. Assistant Superintendent for Business and Finance Dana DiCapua said that there has been no impact on assessments (that determine PILOTs). The district continues to monitor the situation to ensure the district receives PILOT payments in a timely fashion.
- Trustee Granville also inquired about the implementation of the district's Special Education Strategic Plan in 2020-2021. Dr. Sinha said the Special Education Committee's final recommendations will be reviewed by the incoming special education director, and strategies will be implemented over the course of this multiyear plan.
- Trustee Michael Cassaro inquired if any of the scheduled summer capital projects would be impacted as a result of the current health crisis. Dr. Sinha indicated that at this time projects were slated for approval and moving forward as planned.
- President Heineman indicated that the Board will adopt the proposed budget at its next virtual meeting scheduled for May 5. A complete presentation of the budget will be made available to the public on the website in advance.
- Dr. Sinha praised students, parents, faculty and staff for adjusting to the switch to remote learning. She also praised three high school students who were honored in this

year's Long Island Science and Engineering Fair: Ian Bailey, Farah Kabir and James Zheng. Additionally, she commended the 60 Garden City High School students who won awards of excellence on the National Latin Examination. She also announced that the district was named one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation for the eighth time.

- Dr. Sinha also updated the Board and community on several other developments related to school closure:
 - Schools will remain closed through May 15. The district will keep the community apprised of guidance and updates from the state.
 - Nassau County Section VIII Athletics has canceled the remainder of the high school sports season.
 - District athletic fields and outdoor facilities remain closed.
 - The Grab-and Go meal program is ongoing. Pickup dates have been reduced to Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays to limit trips for residents; however, breakfast and lunch are still being offered for every day of the week to eligible residents. Pickup at the high school is from 9-11 a.m.
 - The district continues its emergency extended child care for school-age children available to medical workers and first responders who reside in the district. The program is run by SCOPE at Stewart Elementary School.
 - The administration will continue to discuss ways to conduct traditional end-of-the-year celebrations for students in a remote fashion.

- Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Leadership Development Nanine McLaughlin said interviews for multiple open administration positions are proceeding virtually.

- The Board accepted bids regarding four capital projects as part of the current school district budget: high school tennis court renovation, middle school radiators, Stewart School hot water heater and bus garage lighting.

- On behalf of the Board, President Heineman acknowledged the efforts of faculty, principals, administrators, the technology team, the facilities department, the food services department, food distribution volunteers and members of the central administrative team for their hard work during the crisis. She also thanked parents and students for all their resiliency and fine efforts during the remote learning period and wished everyone good health and safety.