

In Board Briefs, we summarize key agenda items and discussion topics from previous Board of Education meetings. Full meeting minutes are usually not available until approved by the Board at a subsequent meeting. The community is encouraged to attend each meeting, and the Board welcomes questions and comments. Previous Board Briefs can be found on the district website [here](#).

### **May 13, 2019 Board of Education Meeting**

After the Pledge of Allegiance, the Budget Information Hearing was held. Assistant Superintendent for Business Dr. Patricia Rufo provided a high-level summary of the Board-approved proposed budget of \$236,977,020 for the 2019-20 school year, which represents a 2.88% budget-to-budget increase with a 2.49% increase in the tax levy over the prior year, which is less than this year's allowable tax levy cap of 3.34% for Syosset Central School District. During the presentation, Dr. Rufo reviewed the proposed expenditures and revenues, including the use of reserves and fund balance in support of the budget. She also reviewed Proposition No. 2 on this year's ballot, which seeks voter approval to authorize the District to use a combination of existing reserves and State Smart Bond funds for the purchase of upgraded replacement classroom doors that offer firearm resistance and a "one-button lockdown" remotely-controlled locking mechanism.

Dr. Rufo stated budget information and presentations are available on the District website at [www.syossetschools.org](http://www.syossetschools.org) and reminded the community the District Election and Budget Vote will take place on May 21, 2019.

- A resident asked if the allowable tax levy cap would be exceeded if reserve fund monies were not available to use for the purchase of the classroom doors and inquired if the doors were designed as exterior doors.
  - Dr. Rogers explained that a Reserve Fund is created so that funds are available for one-time expenditures. As part of a 4-point security plan outlined by the District a year ago, the creation of a Security Reserve was proposed to the Board and subsequently approved by the public, allowing the District to place up to \$5 million in reserves into the fund for future security-related projects. Last year, \$2 million was put into the Security Reserve by the District. Only the public can approve the withdrawal of funds from the Reserve. Dr. Rogers further explained that in addition to utilizing the money in the Security Reserve, State Smart Bond funds would be used as well as the remaining balance in the 2014 Capital Reserve, the majority of which was used for the Phase 1 and 2 facilities upgrades taking place throughout the District. The use of Reserves is in keeping with the Board's directive to minimize the amount of borrowing by the District as well as the impact to the tax levy.
  - Dr. Rogers clarified that the doors, which have been reviewed by the District's architects and engineers, are in fact appropriate for interior classroom doors. Detailed specifications on the doors cannot be provided to the public in the interest of not disclosing too much security information. The resident asked how the District knew the price of the doors if the District has not yet gone out to bid on the doors.

- Dr. Rogers explained that the District has not gone through a procurement process yet as public approval is required first, but rather received an estimate which is required for the public to vote on. He further explained that this is the process the District uses for every capital project.
  - The resident asked if a “No” vote would stop the purchase of these classroom doors.
    - Dr. Rogers stated the District will not purchase these doors if the public votes No. Instead, the original classroom doors approved as part of the Phase I projects will be purchased, which are intruder-resistant but not firearm-resistant.
  - The resident asked if the walls of the classrooms provide the same intruder and firearm resistance as the doors.
    - Dr. Rogers explained the District completed a Phase 1 Capital project to remove glass from interior corridors walls but declined to share more specifics in the interest of maintaining a confidential security plan.

The regular monthly public meeting was then called to order. The Board approved the minutes from the April 16, 2019 meeting. The Treasurer’s Report was delivered and approved.

*The Superintendent’s Report and Other Monthly Items:*

- Dr. Rogers introduced South Woods Middle School Student Council representatives, Jenny Majoy and Neil Fernandes, who reported on special student-led activities that took place at the school this year. The Action Awareness Club, Business Club and 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Student Council planned and presented Laughs for Leukemia, a show inspired by a classmate who battled the disease. The show featured comedy, music, dance and magic performances by students and staff and proceeds were donated to the Memorial Sloan Kettering Childhood Cancer Research program. The students also reported on the South Woods Connections Museum, a day during which regular classes were cancelled and students were given opportunities to connect with each other and their teachers to raise awareness of the importance of acceptance, inclusion, diversity and positive self-esteem. Students collaborated and used leadership skills to plan the day, which included workshops, lunch activities and an opening assembly, for which Dr. Rogers was the keynote speaker. The students were very impressed by his juggling performance and the workshop he taught. The day allowed for students to develop natural connections with others and inspired new student activities, such as the creation of a Garden Club, a pajama drive for Jake’s Jammies, and a drive for children in foster care.
- Dr. Rogers presented information on student achievement data to help evaluate recent District initiatives. Dr. Rogers reviewed the four key pillars that drive the District-wide focus for the curriculum, including:
  - Cross cutting concepts (an inter-disciplinary, project-based approach to the curriculum which drives higher engagement).
  - K-12 alignment (addressing curriculum gaps/overlaps and aligning the curriculum).
  - Technology to amplify instruction (coding, Chromebooks, robotics).
  - Support for all students (a new Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) model for early intervention and additional mental wellness staff).

Some recent initiatives implemented in support of the key areas of focus include:

- Increased elementary day time for the four core subjects: English, Math, Science and Social Studies.
- Re-initiation of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Program and the extension of the program to middle schools.
- 1:1 Chromebook rollout at secondary schools.
- Professional development for faculty.

Dr. Rogers presented the Math Proficiency levels for grades 3 through 8 over the last six years. Overall, the proficiency rate increased from 66% in 2013 to 85% in 2018, demonstrating a consistent pattern of overall improvement at every grade level. Math proficiency scores were also presented by graduating class. The data shows that each third-grade cohort is starting at a slightly higher level than the class the year before and those gains are maintained and increased as they grow.

Dr. Rogers reported on English-Language Arts (ELA) proficiency for grades 3 through 8 over the last six years, which followed the same pattern as Math. Overall, the proficiency rate increased from 60% in 2013 to 77% in 2018. And when looked at by graduating class, the data shows that each cohort is starting out at a higher level than the year before.

Dr. Rogers noted the challenge is to find ways for an already high-performing district to attain additional levels of performance, but as shown in the data, the Syosset staff has met this challenge to find additional ways to excel.

Data was also presented on the opt-out rate over the last three years, which shows that student participation rate has been increasing. Dr. Rogers explained that there were some limitations to the student achievement data since not all students participated, but the increasing performance during a period of increasing participation is indicative that the conclusion that our performance is steadily increasing is likely reflective of the population as a whole.

An update was given on secondary-level goals set by the Board:

- Reducing course-drops: data presented demonstrates that 9<sup>th</sup> grade course drops have declined significantly since the 2015-16 school year, and that trend is expected to continue as a result of the redesigned 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition process. The improvements are aimed at providing a much better understanding for both parents and students of the courses offered and course progressions.
- Transition to Common Core: data was presented on Regents exam scores for Math, Humanities and Science, which indicated a universally high level of passing scores and high rates of Level 5 scores (the highest level of achievement for the new Common Core assessments), suggesting a very successful transition.
- Improve AP outcomes: an AP exam score summary was presented, which demonstrated that the number of Level 1 scores has declined, and the number of Level 4 and 5 scores has increased dramatically. The total amount of Level 4 and 5 scores has increased from 41.3% in 2015 to 47.9% in 2018.

The next steps for the District include implementing Next Generation Science Standards at the elementary-level, implementing new social studies frameworks, continuing to improve the 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition process, continuing support for MTSS interventions and support for students who struggle, and evaluating the new elementary-level standards-based report card implemented this school year.

- Additionally, Dr. Rogers presented data on average class size, which demonstrates a high level of consistency over the last three years between the elementary buildings. Dr. Rogers noted there will always be outliers, but over the course of time they cancel out, resulting in remarkable consistency between buildings.
- Dr. Rogers provided an update on elementary school lunch. Before the District was aware that a bidding process would be necessary, an opportunity for outreach between the food service provider and parents and students was being planned for the spring. During the bidding process we were advised to wait until the new contract term commences; once the bid is awarded the District will work on scheduling opportunities for outreach.
- Dr. Rogers stated the District is continuing its research on the use of the Woodbury school for Administrative offices and is currently looking at how much parking would be needed for this purpose.
- At the Board's request, the District had sent a letter to the Town of Oyster Bay requesting independent testing at the former Cerro Wire and former landfill site, no matter what the use of the property will be. The District received an acknowledgement of this letter but no formal reply yet.
- In response to some questions he had previously received from community members, Dr. Rogers provided some additional information on the remote locking capability of the classroom doors proposed in Proposition 2. Although the doors can be locked centrally, it is still possible to unlock the door if there is a need to flee the classroom or pull a student in from the hallway. The doors have a viewing panel so teachers can see out into the hallway. The classroom windows must remain operable by law and by code. Lastly, the doors would be used for classroom spaces only, not common areas, as per the District's security consultant's recommendation.
- Dr. Rogers stated the District received notice that the IDA is considering another extension of a PILOT. Since he previously written a letter to the IDA in opposition of extension of PILOTS, Dr. Rogers proposed asking if the Board wishes to give administration standing direction to oppose any future requests for extensions of PILOTs for commercial businesses. This would mean that after 10 years the property returns to the tax roll and is no longer subsidized by residential taxpayers.
- Dr. Rogers announced Ms. Kim Pritchard, Syosset High School physics teacher and STA President, is retiring from her roles and expressed his gratitude for her service and dedication to the community. Dr. Rogers also offered his congratulations to Mr. Michael Callahan, the newly elected STA president, and to Ms. Jody Braun, newly elected STA treasurer.

### *Audience to the public*

- A resident inquired about the elementary-level lunch program and what considerations had been given for students with allergies.
  - Dr. Rogers explained that bidding is a very formal and State-regulated process, and there was only one bidder for the program which was Aramark. Accommodations for students with allergies were included in the bid specifications, including online menus with ingredient and food allergens listed. There will be more than one option available for students, and the Nutrakids system used by the District will flag students with allergies so that at the register, a picture of the student and any allergies will be displayed for the attendant.
  
- A resident raised an issue regarding class size at Baylis. The resident believed there was inconsistency among buildings in class size and requested four sections next year for the fourth-grade level at Baylis. The resident asked how State aid is allocated among the buildings. The resident also expressed concerns about ample instructional space for students at Baylis and the size of music instructional groups.
  - Board President Tracy Frankel replied that the State is in the process of requiring school districts to report spending on a building and per pupil basis but cautioned that much of the data will be difficult to interpret correctly, because of anomalies like special education classes. Dr. Rogers explained that much of a District's expenses, such as facilities, insurance, busing, utility payments, etc. are centralized and it is unclear how they will be allocated. Ms. Frankel indicated that the District would make these figures available once the State finalizes the regulations.
  - Regarding class size, Dr. Rogers reiterated that though there are outliers, there is a lot of consistency among buildings. The resident requested the Board review class size and the possibility of redistricting.
    - Board President Tracy Frankel replied that redistricting is challenging and could present complications for families. The Board always takes the community's feedback to heart and evaluates the procedures in place with data. She further explained the Board gives the Administration a lot of flexibility in planning classes because a lot of factors go into splitting a class such as individual student needs.
  
- A resident expressed disappointment at the level of attendance at the Know Your Candidate night hosted by the PTA and criticized the PTA's notification efforts. He also stated the Board meetings should be live-streamed and the District should utilize a neon road sign to inform community members of upcoming meetings. (Note: at the January Board of Education meeting the Board directed administration to begin streaming Board meetings. The installation of the new equipment will take place in July once student use of the auditorium has ended.)
  - The resident also criticized the Town of Oyster Bay for the lack of progress on independent testing and requested the Board of Education discuss the matter. The resident stated the DEC conducted testing of 10 groundwater wells adjacent to South Grove school, but the results have not been released.
    - Dr. Rogers read a sentence from a letter to the District from the NYS DEC dated March 22, 2019 regarding radiological sampling: "Preliminary results do not show any cause for concern." [The letter can be found on the District website here.](#)
    - Dr. Rogers also stated the District has gone to great lengths to ensure the safety of its students and staff. The District has conducted extensive testing at the

South Grove site, encompassing soil, air, and water and drilled permanent monitoring wells so that testing can continue in the future. The District's environmental consultant indicated that based on the test results, there is no cause for concern. The District results are consistent with DEC letter which was read and the USEPA annual report (which was released in March 2019 and [can be found here](#)) which do not show any cause for concern. The Board called for independent testing in May 2018 and reiterated their position in April 2019. Also, within its extensive 190-page response to the Syosset Park DEIS the District, under its environmental consultant's guidance, outlined its expectations for the independent testing on pages 99 and 100. It is the Town's responsibility and function to perform the testing if they so choose.

- The resident claimed the AC unit at South Grove that recently malfunctioned had service calls prior to the incident and did not have a service contract.
  - Dr. Rogers explained that there is a 3-tiered structure for service on equipment: District custodians and maintainers are allowed by Civil Service rules and qualified to perform preventative maintenance; open purchase orders are permitted so that outside companies can be called as needed; and in August of 2018, the District hired a dedicated HVAC technician to upgrade the skills in the Maintenance Department. Recently, the District switched from using purchase orders to using a service contract for the same purpose. The physical buildings are getting older and require investment, which is why the District is doing extensive work this summer and next.
- A resident who identified herself as the Syosset Council of PTAs Treasurer addressed the comments regarding notification of the Know Your Candidate night. She stated the PTA meetings are open to all residents and invited the community to attend to learn about the extensive work the PTA does. The PTA promoted the Know Your Candidate event in multiple ways and even translated the candidate bios into the top 5 languages spoken in the community.
  - At the request of a Board member, the PTA representative explained to the public how officers are elected to the PTA Council leadership. The Board is not involved in selecting who serves in leadership roles of the PTA.
  - A Trustee stated that the Know Your Candidate event always takes place in May, the PTA did notify its members, and the date is included on the District calendar that is mailed to every community member.
  - A Trustee asked that the event be publicized on the District website.

#### *Discussion Items*

- The Board discussed the recent request sent to the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) for an extension of a PILOT by a commercial enterprise in Syosset. Trustees agreed it is troubling that the IDA grants PILOT extensions without ample time for the public and Board to research the request. At the request of the Board, the District has already written a letter to IDA indicating their process does not include sufficient time. The Board approved a resolution that if there is a renewal application for a PILOT that is ending, the Board will oppose that application unless there are unique circumstances.
  - A Trustee referenced a previous presentation given by the District's attorneys on the many developments in progress in the area. The trustee asked for a second resolution

asking the administration to remain proactive in identifying potential developments in the area.

*New Business*

- Various resolutions were approved relating to Certified Staff Changes; Coaching Recommendations – 2019; Appointment to Tenure; Deletion of Continuing Education Staff; Appointment of Pool Staff; Approval of Student Club Charters; Approval of Committee Meetings and Minutes; Approval of a Settlement Agreement and Release; Policies - Second Reading; Authorization for Service Contracts; Authorization for Special Education and/or Nursing Contracts; Disposal of Broken, Surplus and/or Obsolete Equipment and Books; Emergency Resolution to Perform Repairs to South Grove Gym; Award of Bids.
  - Board President Tracy Frankel welcomed new staff to the District and together with Dr. Rogers congratulated staff who received tenure on their accomplishments.

*Next Meeting*

- **The Budget Vote will take place on Tuesday, May 21, 2019.** The next meeting of the Board of Education is Monday, June 10, 2019 at South Woods Middle School, beginning at 8 p.m.