

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](#).

September 19, 2016 Board of Education Meeting

After an executive session, the regular monthly public meeting was called to order. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, a moment of silence was held in honor of Nassau County Legislator Judy Jacobs, who passed away earlier this month. The minutes from the August 15 Board meeting were approved. The Treasurer's Report was delivered and also approved. Board President Michael Cohen welcomed new Deputy Superintendent Adele Bovard to the district.

The Superintendent's Report and Other Monthly Items

- Syosset High School Principal Dr. Giovanni Durante introduced the school's 14 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists for the 2016-17 school year, awarding them certificates before they were congratulated by the Board.
- Superintendent of Schools Dr. Thomas Rogers announced that 23 Syosset seniors were named Commended Students by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, three students were named Long Island Scholar Artists, 27 students were named to the New York State School Music Association's All-State winter conference – the most of any school in the state, and once again Syosset High School was named a "School of Distinction" by the National Speech and Debate Association based on the success of its Forensics Society.
- Dr. Rogers informed the public that the Board and administration were successful in reducing the amount of testing and its influence through a revamped approach to the Annual Professional Performance Review.
- Several outcomes of the Food Allergy Committee are coming to fruition with additional EpiPens being added to all of school buildings and the subsequent training of staff on their use. Dr. Rogers said he hopes to add a component to the health curriculum for students to become more educated about food allergens. He also discussed some of the proactive measures taken by the district to reduce the risk of exposure, including the establishment of an approved snack list and greater communication and consistency among the buildings.
- Citing an August surge in enrollment, Dr. Rogers urged parents to notify the district of new children entering school as early as possible. New enrollees for the 2016-17 year caused elementary enrollment to increase 8% from July to the beginning of the school year, resulting in the need to conduct unexpected hiring and restructuring of instructional space. Overall elementary enrollment is up 1.2% from last year.
- On September 29, Dr. Rogers and central administration will present research, discuss potential impacts and accept community feedback

regarding changing school start times. The meeting will take place in the South Woods Middle School auditorium from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

- Dr. Rogers shared information about the Board and administration's advocacy role and efforts in critiquing state and federal accountability systems as they relate to classifying schools with high rates of test refusal as "Schools in Need of Improvement." In a letter to the State Education Department commissioner, the Board called the proposal "utterly counterproductive" as it would "Reinforce the perception that the State's assessment and accountability systems have lost credibility." The proposed Federal rules, if adopted, would identify Syosset's elementary and middle schools as "In Need of Improvement" based on an approximate opt-out rate of 50%.
- Dr. Rogers gave a comprehensive presentation of the proposed sale of a 2.4-acre district-owned parcel that abuts the Walt Whitman School campus in Woodbury. He outlined several key points of the sale, including the buyer/developer's cooperation in mitigating any impact that development might have on the school, including its willingness not to seek tax relief through PILOTs. Dr. Rogers also gave an overview of proposed improvements to the Whitman campus to achieve better traffic circulation and offered to meet with the Walt Whitman PTA. (The sale was approved by the Board later in the meeting. Dr. Roger's presentation can be found on this website in the "Announcements" section of the homepage or in the Board of Education section under "Board Discussions").
- In his second comprehensive presentation of the evening, Dr. Rogers discussed several facility challenges identified in the district's building condition survey and outlined key priority projects and potential funding/financing mechanisms. This included the potential use of proceeds from the Woodbury property sale to help offset costs. Proposed projects discussed were: the creation of a new traffic circle at Syosset High School, providing separate driveways for cars and buses, additional parking and other major site improvements to alleviate congestion and improve safety on Southwoods Rd; the construction of security vestibules at every school building; options for installing air conditioning in all district classrooms and secondary auditoriums; and an energy performance contract to replace old, inefficient heating and lighting systems. The administration also discussed a comprehensive master plan for the Syosset High School/South Woods Middle School athletic fields, including the relocation of existing fields and the construction of a new fitness center and possible larger track and turf field with new bleachers/concessions responsive to the work of the Athletic Committee and Board inquiries. (This presentation can also be found on the "Announcements" section of the homepage or in the Board of Education section under "Board Discussions").

Audience to the Public

- A resident asked if bicycle lanes were considered for the proposed new traffic circle traffic reconfiguration at the high school and widening of

Southwoods Rd. Dr. Rogers said that bike lanes had not been discussed by the district architect or the Town of Oyster Bay.

- A resident inquired if Syosset would consider removing Regents exams from a student's final grade calculation. Dr. Rogers said that he shares the concern that the Regents exam scaling process has been flawed. However, he noted that recent volatility in scoring Regents exams has dramatically improved scores for Algebra I. He also illustrated that even a 10% difference in an exam score would only result in shift in final grade of just one point, and said that implementing such a policy could have a negative impact on the curriculum and the district's new APPR plan that reduced testing district-wide. A Board member asked if such a practice creates a double standard.
- A Baylis School parent expressed her concern of overcrowding in the lunchroom and other areas of the building. Dr. Rogers cited enrollment data that projected a decline for Baylis before a late August flurry of registration that increased more than 10% higher from July, underscoring his earlier point about early notification of new students. He said there are no effective short-term options available to alleviate the issue but that he will monitor conditions at the school.
- Another parent inquired about how to communicate with the district on transportation issues, including when a bus route is changed. Dr. Rogers referred the parent to the district calendar for a listing of phone numbers and names to contact. The parent also brought up a concern over the existing field trip policy of assigning students lodging and dressing rooms based on gender. Dr. Rogers said he would take up the discussion with the secondary school principals.
- A community member inquired about the amount of tax revenue generated by the development of the Woodbury property being proposed for sale. Dr. Rogers said the amount is estimated at approximately \$100,000. The resident also asked if projected enrollment would have any impact on the proposed facilities improvements discussed. Dr. Rogers said that enrollment has decreased from 6,700 in 2009/2010 to 6,300 at present, and while this year saw a modest 1.2% increase in elementary enrollments, it isn't clear if that is a one year uptick, or a changing trend that would require facilities expansion or redistricting. He added that the district continues to track development plans for Syosset Park and two other large properties on Jericho Turnpike, all of which have the potential to create some new residential housing.
- Another resident asked if the presidential election would impact federal education policy. Dr. Rogers indicated that regardless of who becomes president, Congress is now playing a more significant role and he urged stakeholders to remain vigilant in their advocacy to state and federal officials on important issues, including testing. The resident also inquired about the timeline and priority order of air conditioning installation in the event such a project would be approved. Dr. Rogers said those classrooms without any source of cooling (such as a window unit) would be addressed first. The

district architect estimated that it would take approximately three and a half years for air conditioning to be installed in every classroom.

Discussion Items

- A Board member pointed out that many schools have reduced or eliminated instruction of script/cursive handwriting and how it has taken a back seat to keyboarding. He cited several benefits of script writing (fine motor skills development, greater expression, greater retention of thoughts). Assistant to the Superintendent for Teaching and Learning V. Dolly Kranz cited early elementary programs and practices utilized by the district, including Foundations and Handwriting Without Tears. She also said that the district continues handwriting instruction into the third grade throughout the curriculum. Dr. Rogers said it has become increasingly more difficult to find time to teach this with so many other curriculum standards to meet, but that he is open to speaking with elementary principals on how handwriting is taught and how to effectively harmonize efforts among the buildings. One Board member suggested possibly utilizing apps or even traditional letter charts to assist in the matter.
- In an effort to provide the most accurate information to avoid putting students with food allergies at risk, a Board member suggested adding a requirement to all future food service contracts that the provider post all ingredients in menu options online for parents and children to review in advance. Assistant Superintendent for Business Dr. Patricia Rufo said that such a requirement can be written into bid specifications and that the district's current food vendor has been proactive in making information available to parents of students with food allergies. Dr. Rogers said that he would reach out to the current provider to see if they would accommodate the request administratively before going through the more extensive route of rebidding.

New Business

- Various resolutions were approved relating to appointments of staff, service providers and service contracts, policy readings, committee assignments and other financial operations of the district.
- The Board appointed David Steinberg to the position of administrative assistant and Raymond Loverso to the position of coordinator of science.
- The Board approved the sale of a 2.4-acre parcel of land in Woodbury to be subdivided from the campus of the Walt Whitman School.

Next Meeting

- The next meeting of the Board of Education is scheduled for Monday, October 17, 2016 at South Woods Middle School, beginning at 8 p.m.