

The Randolph Township Board of Education held a Special Meeting on Monday, June 04, 2018 at 06:00 p.m. Randolph High School Library, 511 Millbrook Avenue Randolph, New Jersey.

Board President Ronald Conti called the meeting to order and read the following statement:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Law was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meetings of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, the Randolph Township Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be published by having the date, time and place thereof posted in The Daily Record. It is also posted in all district schools as well as the Randolph Township Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL

The following Board members were present: Ms. Susan DeVito, Mr. Joseph Faranetta, Ms. Tammy MacKay, Ms. Anne Standridge, Mr. Christopher C. Treston, Ms. Stacy White and Mr. Ronald Conti.

Board member Sheldon Epstein and Mr. Alfredo Z. Matos were absent.

The following administrators were present: Miss Jennifer Fano, Superintendent, Mr. Gerald M. Eckert, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Mr. Eric Burnside, Assistant School Business Administrator/Assistant Board Secretary and Board Counsel Marc H. Zitomer was also present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Allison Freeman, Communications Coordinator / Community School Supervisor was also present.

Board President Ronald Conti read the following statement:

Our district is at a tense moment in time. Many rumors, allegations and false claims are swirling about propelled across the district through social media and the usual rumor mill. In some ways, I am proud that our district cares so much about the school system that people are voicing their opinion, but please remember the parable of the blind men and the elephant. For those who do not know, this is the parable:

A group of blind men heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So they sought it out, and

when they found it they groped about it. In the case of the first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said: "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg said, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The blind man who placed his hand upon its side said, "elephant is a wall". Another who felt its tail described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.

What each man experienced was true and correct, but no one person had all the information. By not having all the facts, they did not get the full and complete story. All of us, board members, residents, district administration and staff, must do their best to see the full picture. It is easy to see a series of unrelated "facts" draw a false relationship and then jump to an incorrect conclusion.

It has been stated that Board of Education does not listen to the community's comments. Let me state as clearly as possible—we do listen to you. We hear you loud and clear. Board members often have information that cannot be disclosed, so although we hear you, we may have a different perspective, but we do listen.

The Board may seem slow to communicate or when it does, it communicates too little too late. I, personally, understand and appreciate that sentiment, however, there are laws, policies and procedures that govern when and what the Board of Education can say. As you can imagine, this makes communication very slow and limits what can happen between meetings. In order to take any action that requires a vote, the Board of Education must have a full meeting, which requires 48 hours' notice and advertising the meeting in the Daily Record and posting in district buildings. In our "always on", "constantly connected" "24-hour news cycle", 48 hours is a long time. The easiest and fastest way to learn the latest facts and information about the school district is to attend Board of Education and open committee meetings.

So to reiterate, yes the Board doesn't communicate as quickly as people would like, but the Board of Education has requirements that hinder quick communication. The Board of Education does value what the community says and listens to the input of the public. Lastly, spreading rumors and jumping to conclusions does not help anything, it hurts the school district's reputation and impacts students. Communication is a two-way street that needs improvement on all levels, Board of Education, administration, teachers, students, public, REA, RTAA, athletics, and visual and performing arts. Improving communication is crucial to improving the district. We do not have to see eye-to-eye on everything. Respectfully, listening to other points of view gives everyone a bigger picture and allows us all to understand where we are today and where the district will be in the future.

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Randolph Education Association (REA) President Eric Schaberg thanked the Board for extending the meeting one hour to accommodate the large crowd. Mr. Schaberg outlined the reasons the REA held a vote of no confidence. The REA does not support the actions or leadership in Miss Fano. He stated there is no input from stakeholders, spike in grievances and unhealthy culture of fear for tenured and non-tenured members. The REA will not be intimidated by threats from the district leadership.

Board member Alfredo Z. Matos arrived at 06:08 p.m.

A concerned Randolph resident stated she is a supporter of Miss Fano and recognizes that Miss Fano has served the district in great adversity. She believes Miss Fano is a professional and held the district together doing three jobs at once. She has seen Miss Fano be unfairly criticized by parents. Randolph is fast becoming a district that no superintendent would want to go.

Board member Sheldon Epstein arrived at 06:10 p.m.

A concerned Randolph resident knew that she wanted a hometown and it to be Randolph, the choice was because of the schools. She is so grateful. Recent decisions by leadership has her fearful of the future because of the vote of no confidence by the REA. She has been losing sleep for weeks. She has people reaching out to her but are fearful of retaliation. She knows the Board members are all volunteers and it is time to put politics aside. She asks the Board to listen to their neighbors and do what is right for the Township of Randolph.

A concerned Randolph student, a sophomore at RHS is not entirely clear what is going on and her mother is a teacher. She wants to be a teacher but does not want to come teach in Randolph. She gives the teachers credit for shielding the students from the drama that has been going on. She believes the teachers and children deserve better than the current leadership.

A concerned Randolph staff member has been a teacher for forty-three years and a resident for 30 years. She is appalled that the Board cannot see the truths. She claims the district can no longer live on the laurels of the past. She asks the Board to take action before they fall further. The Board was elected and needs to do their job. She has a hard time retiring and stands at the podium on their behalf. She is tired of relatives asking her what is going on in Randolph. It is time for every one of the Board members to protect the future. She guarantees her colleagues will find other jobs.

A concerned Randolph resident felt that she needs to stand up and say something.

She has been part of the Randolph community for twenty years and moved here because of the schools high quality education and programs. She has three children still in the district. She has great concerns of the trends and trajectory of the district. Now sees anger by the public and an administration that is shutting down and becoming reactive. Success must come through collaboration as all parties taking into consideration of each other's goals. Her observations are that the current state is not sustainable and administration needs to be collaborative.

A concerned Randolph resident wanted to ask the question of what happened to our principal. She is not sure why she had to be told by her daughter that the principal is leaving. She has not received any communication from the Board or the Superintendent. There is constant administrative turnover. She has seen numerous Athletic Director and Superintendent turnover. The teachers are leaving in droves. When it is time to vote for the referendum, will there be stability? Who is to call when there is no one in the office when she has a problem? Just make a decision that sticks. She will vote 'no' for the referendum.

A concerned longtime Randolph resident has lived in Randolph since 1977. Her daughter passed away in the last six months and she is in mourning. She has been to ninety-nine percent of the Board meetings. The Board always does a top-notch job. Good people serve on the Board and for no compensation. She thinks that this school district is one of the best in the State. She moved to Randolph originally because she could not afford Chatham. Randolph was a relatively unknown district. She believes the Board tries very hard for the children.

A concerned Randolph student and President of the senior class was not planning on speaking but thinks that one more voice is good. He believes he is seen as a student leader and representative. He knows a lot of information and many people were asking him questions. He does not know the answer and believes that is a problem. Randolph has many great staff and they all care. He always talks about his teachers at his job. Great students and a wonderful community that is unified. Communication has always been a big thing and needs to be improved. Randolph went into the year with somewhat of a scandal let us not leave with one. He loves the school and the teachers.

Board President Ronald Conti closed the public statement portion of the meeting further stating that no action has been taken against the principal and the Board cannot comment on personnel matters.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion to enter into Executive Session made by Mr. Faranetta seconded by Ms. MacKay.

The motion was approved 9-0-0 and the Board entered into Executive session at 06:34 p.m.

BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 10:4-13 that the Board of Education of the Township of Randolph will hold a Closed Session regarding matters of Attorney-Client privilege. It is not yet possible to determine when the matters discussed in Closed Session will be made public.

The Board reconvened to public session at 07:38 p.m.

ROLL CALL

The following Board members were present: Ms. Susan DeVito, Mr. Sheldon Epstein, Mr. Joseph Faranetta, Ms. Tammy MacKay, Mr. Alfredo Z. Matos, Ms. Anne Standridge, Mr. Christopher C. Treston, Ms. Stacy White and Mr. Ronald Conti.

Board President Ronald Conti read a statement in response to the no vote of confidence from the REA.

The Board of Education was advised on May 30, 2018 by REA Union President Eric Schaberg that the Randolph Education Association at the High School adopted a vote of no confidence in our Superintendent of Schools, Jennifer Fano. This is extremely troubling given that the Association leadership has never come before the Board of Education or a committee thereof, to express its concerns with Ms. Fano's leadership. We also believe that many of the statements in Ms. Fano's leadership cited by the REA leadership are false or misleading.

For instance, Mr. Schaberg cites the first alleged "questionable action" taken by Ms. Fano as being a "dramatic shift in educational vision". The Board finds this statement concerning because it is not clear what this statement means and, to date, no one from the Association leadership has been able to clearly explain it. The Board and Ms. Fano share the same educational vision. This vision, which has been in place for several years, is to inspire and empower students to reach their full potential as unique, responsible and educated members of a global society. We strongly believe that our educators share this same vision and this is one of the many reasons that we still attract such wonderful talent when we advertise for an open position in Randolph. We want to be clear, no dramatic shift in educational vision has occurred.

Mr. Schaberg also cites the adoption of "punitive HR policies" as one of the reasons for the High School vote. The Board takes strong exception to any claims that the District's human resources policies are punitive. Being "well liked" is not a reason in and of itself to retain a staff member; the

Administration and the Board are holding staff members accountable for performance in the classroom, conduct and attendance, all of which directly affect student learning. This is what the taxpayers elected us to do and Ms. Fano is carrying out the goals and objectives set for her by the Board. We are aware that staff morale is an issue in the District. However, it was an issue before Ms. Fano was the Superintendent. Since becoming Superintendent, Ms. Fano and our District have implemented a variety of mechanisms to help support and improve our staff. The Board hired a Human Resources Officer several years ago with that very goal in mind. The work to improve morale is not finished and the Board expects Ms. Fano to continually work to improve staff morale.

In no uncertain terms, the Randolph Board of Education wishes for the staff of the Randolph schools, the REA leadership, and the community at large, to know that we stand behind Ms. Fano and support her leadership. Change is inevitable, often difficult for people to accept and, on occasion, change is unpopular. Without it, our schools will never progress. We fully understand that when a leader makes tough decisions for the betterment of a school district, it can often cause consternation among the staff, particularly those who are directly affected by the outcome of those decisions. However, the Board has great confidence that Ms. Fano's decisions are always made after extensive due diligence and with the best interests of our students, our valued Educators, and our entire school community at heart. This is the reason that the Board hired Ms. Fano. We continue to fully support her efforts to move our District forward.

The Board leadership recently met with the REA leadership to discuss the concerns raised by the vote of no confidence. It is unfortunate that this meeting did not occur prior to the vote. We believe that open and honest communication is the first step towards improving relations between both sides. Making unfounded allegations fragments the District and ultimately hurts the people that we are all here to serve—the students. We are hopeful that the REA leadership will accept our invitation to continue an open dialogue so that we can move our District forward for the betterment our school community.

The Board invites the community to attend our board meetings and open monthly committee meetings to share their input as well. Each of these meetings includes a public statement section where anyone can address the Board. The anonymously posted online Petition, that is similar to the REA letter to the board, is counterproductive because of its numerous factual

inaccuracies. Furthermore, many of the comments which are being hurled at our Superintendent are malicious, hateful and are completely unfounded. Our community is better than that. We simply do not believe that those comments represent the sentiments of the vast majority of our constituents. Again, we invite any member of the community to attend our meetings and share their comments in person so that we can be fully informed. Our goals are the same – to make the Randolph School District the best that it can be so that our students can obtain a high-quality education and become productive members of society. This Board and its Superintendent will accept nothing less.

NEW BUSINESS

Board President read a resolution to be voted on by the Board:

WHEREAS, on or about May 24, 2018, the Randolph Education Association at the High School adopted a “vote of no confidence” in Superintendent of Schools Jennifer Fano; and

WHEREAS, on May 30, 2018, Association President Eric Schaberg provided the Board of Education with the reasons for that vote; and

WHEREAS, many of the reasons offered by Mr. Schaberg were vague generalizations, inaccurate and/or gross exaggerations of the truth; and

WHEREAS, prior to the Association’s vote, the Association leadership never came to the Board of Education to express its concerns; and

WHEREAS, the Board believes that the Association’s actions were counterproductive and unnecessarily divisive because of this lack of open and honest communication with the Board prior to its vote; and

WHEREAS, the Board believes that the attacks which are being levied against the Superintendent by certain members of the Association and members of the community through its anonymously posted online Petition are completely unjustified and based upon erroneous information; and

WHEREAS, the Board strongly condemns these personal attacks on Ms. Fano’s character and ethics;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board wishes to reaffirm its support for Ms. Fano and express that it has confidence in her leadership and drive to move our District forward; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board invites the REA Leadership to meet with the Board leadership and Ms. Fano, as it has done this past week, on a

consistent and ongoing basis to resolve our differences and work towards the betterment of the school community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution shall be provided to Mr. Schaberg by the Board Secretary with the request that Mr. Schaberg disseminate it to the entire Randolph Education Association; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution and the accompanying statement shall be prominently posted on the Board's website and transmitted to the local media outlets.

Board Vice President Joseph Faranetta made a motion to accept the resolution, seconded by Ms. Standridge.

Board member Christopher Treston made a statement. He does not believe the resolution fixes the problem. Believes that the Board can improve communication, transparency, and involvement with the public.

Unanimous roll call vote 9-0-0.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A motion to enter into Executive Session made by Mr. Faranetta seconded by Ms. MacKay.

The motion was approved 9-0-0 and the Board entered into Executive session at 07:51 p.m.

BE IT RESOLVED, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 and 10:4-13 that the Board of Education of the Township of Randolph will hold a Closed Session regarding matters of Attorney-Client privilege. It is not yet possible to determine when the matters discussed in Closed Session will be made public.

The Board reconvened to public session at 09:23 p.m.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Ms. Standridge seconded by Mr. Epstein.

The motion was approved 9-0-0 and the Board adjourned the meeting at 09:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald M. Eckert, Board Secretary