

President's Report
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BOARD STRUCTURE

I am excited to announce a new structure for board meetings that the board and administration feel will increase transparency and community participation and input. If you look at the new Board Calendar, you'll notice two changes.

First, over the course of the coming year we will hold meetings in each of the four schools in the district. The respective principals and selected staff will kick off these meetings with student performances and recognitions. We look forward to celebrating the accomplishments of our students, and hope that parents will come out to meetings and will be inspired to engage in the board's process.

Second, on months when the board has two scheduled meetings, the first meeting will be a Workshop Session, where the board discusses upcoming items that will be voted on at the second meeting of the month. The second meeting will be a Voting Session, where the board votes on the items discussed at the previous meetings. Both meetings will follow the same structure, with committee reports and two public comment sessions.

In this way, the community will have greater opportunity to participate in the board's process, and greater ability to comment on items before the board votes on them. This also gives the board more time to deliberate before voting.

For those that can not make it out to meetings, our technology department, including Brian Humphrey and Chris Brzozowski, have been working diligently to begin live streaming board meetings. We hope to start live streaming in the next month or so. Board meetings will also continue to be available on our website, and on HPTV for both Cablevision and FIOS subscribers.

We are confident that with increased opportunities for participation and transparency, the Board will be more responsive to and reflective of the needs and wants of the community we are here to serve.

HATIKVAH EXPANSION

I wanted to take a few minutes to update the board and community on the latest expansion request the Hatikvah International Academy Charter School has submitted to New Jersey Commissioner of Education, David Hespe, as well as the ongoing opposition efforts here in Highland Park and elsewhere.

This is the third year in a row Hatikvah has asked to expand. Two years ago their expansion request was denied, but last year they were granted an expansion to add grades 6-8 to their K-5 charter. This added 150 seats to their existing charter of 300 for a total enrollment of 450. It is the grade 6-8 expansion that Highland Park, Edison, and East Brunswick are currently appealing.

If Hatikvah is granted their current request, which seeks to add an additional class of 25 students to each grade in Kindergarten to 8th grade, another 225 seats will be added for a total enrollment of 675 students. ***This is almost double Hatikvah's current enrollment of 350 students.***

If the number of Highland Park students attending Hatikvah continues to increase at this same pace, the total Highland Park is forced to pay Hatikvah would likely double as well. This could result in a potential cost to the district of almost \$650,000 annually. ***This is clearly unsustainable.***

I testified at the State Board of Education meeting in Trenton on January 11th. East Brunswick Business Administrator Bernardo Giuliana also testified in opposition to the expansion, as did the Education Association Presidents from East Brunswick and Piscataway.

We testified before State Board President Biedron and Board Member Edith Fulton, and both were very receptive to our testimonies. I contacted Mr. Biedron and Ms. Fulton afterward and asked to schedule a meeting to discuss the impact of the proposed expansion on our district. They have agreed to meet with me, Dr. Taylor, and East Brunswick Superintendent Victor Valeski and BA Bernardo Giuliana, and we are working to set a date. I will continue to update the community, and I am hopeful that we will have a productive meeting.

In addition, on January 11th, the Busch Law Group submitted a legal response to the expansion on behalf of both Highland Park and Edison. This document will soon be available on the website for the public, as will my testimony before the State Board.

It is also important to note that opposition to the expansion is also coming from sources other than the districts of Highland Park, Edison and East Brunswick. Assemblyman Diegnan, who is not only our Assemblyman but also serves as the Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, sent a letter to Commissioner Hespe on January 8th voicing his strong opposition. On January 13th the Monroe Board of Education adopted a resolution against the expansion, and several other districts are considering resolutions not only in opposition to the expansion, but also in support of our appeal of last year's expansion.

There is community opposition as well, and a petition against the expansion has collected almost 600 signatures.

As the board and administration have done in the past, Dr. Taylor and I will work on a letter home to the community explaining the potential impact of the continued expansion. As a board and as a district we cannot ignore the financial strain of these continued expansions.