

# Allamuchy Board of Education

## Special Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2020

The special meeting of the Allamuchy Township Board of Education held on December 10, 2020 is called to order at 7:30 p.m. *via teleconference* by Lisa Strutin. In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, adequate notice of the meeting was provided and, to the extent known at the time of advance publication, the agenda items to be considered. Written advance notification of the time, date and location was sent on December 7, 2020 to the New Jersey Herald and Township Clerk. Notice was posted in the school office.

### I. ROLL CALL

	<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Stephen Bienko	7:35	
Abigail Christmann	X	
Giovanni Cusmano	X	
Harriett Gaddy	X	
Craig Green	X	
Venita Prudenti	X	
Mary Renaud	X	
Lisa Strutin, President	X	

ALSO PRESENT: Joseph Flynn, Superintendent  
James Schlessinger, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary

### II. PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

### III. COMMUNICATIONS

- Letter from the Executive County Superintendent (Appendix 1), read aloud by Ms. Strutin along with the following statement: *“We have received a letter from the Interim Executive County Superintendent, dated December 3, 2020 which she has directed the secretary of the board to read to the public. Although, she has no authority to compel this board to read this letter, in order to be transparent with the public, I have chosen to include this letter with tonight’s agenda for public inspection and I will read the letter.”*
- Dr. Flynn brought up the following:
  - Acknowledged the first night of Hannukah and wished well to all who celebrate
  - Commended the work of the Pandemic team and informed the public of the decision to remain in virtual instruction due to the data trends related to positivity rates in and around the area.

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Ms. Strutin recused herself from the Executive Session citing potential conflict of interest.  
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### IV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Enter Executive Session at 7:43pm:

Moved by Ms. Christmann and seconded by Mr. Green,

BE IT RESOLVED, WHEREAS, the Board of Education must discuss subjects concerning legal, personnel, and negotiation issues

- Acting Superintendent Contract
- Attorney Client Privilege

and WHEREAS, the aforesaid subjects are not appropriate subjects to be discussed in public meeting; and WHEREAS, the aforesaid subjects to be discussed are within the exemptions pursuant to P.L.1975 Chapter 231, it is; therefore, RESOLVED, that the aforesaid subjects shall be discussed in private session by this board and administrative staff and information pertaining thereto will be made available to the public as soon thereafter as possible and once the reasons for nondisclosure no longer exists.

CARRIED: 6-0-1 (LS)

#### *Executive Session*

Exit Executive Session at 8:21pm:

Moved by Dr. Gaddy and seconded by Mr. Green,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education has been in executive session for the past 38 minutes. The matters that were discussed will be disclosed to the public as soon as possible once the reasons for nondisclosure no longer exist.

CARRIED: 6-0

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Board member statements:

- Ms. Renaud read the following statement:  
*This board has always acted in good faith for the benefit of this district. Appointing Mrs. Strutin to the vacancy left by Mr. Cramer was in the best interest of this district as a whole. There is nothing illegal or irregular when a board member resigns their current board seat to take another vacant seat. This has occurred many times throughout the state. The Interim Executive County Superintendent has explained in her letter that she only rescinded her extension to the Allamuchy Board of Education to choose a person of our choosing because it was her opinion that Mrs. Strutin should not apply for the vacancy. This is a direct prejudice against Mrs. Strutin. Mrs. Strutin was very transparent about her intentions*

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*to apply for the vacancy and I would have supported any of the current Board Members had they decided to do the same.*

*I find it remarkable that the county has interjected itself into the actions of this board of education by demanding that this board rescind its decision and read her letter to the public. If the Executive County Superintendent considered what was in the best interest of our district- she would have affirmed the will of this board and agreed with the appointment of Mrs. Strutin to the vacancy.*

*Again, this board relied on the extension granted by the Interim Executive County Superintendent to allow this board to appoint the vacancy and I stand with my fellow board members in support of the actions taken by this board.*

- Ms. Prudenti read the following statement:

*I take great pride in being an Allamuchy Board Member. Our decisions are always based on the best interest of our school for the benefit of the children and our community. Appointing Mrs. Strutin to the vacancy left by Mr. Cramer was in the best interest of our district. I relied on Executive County Superintendent's extension to allow this board to appoint the vacancy left by Mr. Cramer. Throughout all of her previous correspondence she stated that she preferred that the Board appoint the vacancy and granted the extension. I am troubled that she now states that upon learning of Mrs. Strutin's intentions to apply for the vacancy that she rescinded her extension. I support the actions taken by this board and stand with my fellow board members in support of Mrs. Strutin's appointment to the vacancy. This board must and will act in the best interest of our district.*

- Ms. Christmann read the following statement:

*In the short time that I have been a member of this Board, one thing has struck me - that the members of the Allamuchy Board of Education always strive to make decisions that are in the best interest of this district. And that is exactly what we did when appointing Mrs. Strutin to fill the seat vacated by Mr. Cramer.*

*Our decision to delay an appointment to this seat was made as a direct result of an extension granted by the Interim Executive County Superintendent. The fact that she should not have issued that extension is irrelevant. We acted in good faith, and would expect the same from her. I find it unconscionable that she would now rescind her decision based on nothing more than her perception of Mrs. Strutin's intentions regarding the vacancy, as indicated in her letter. My concern, however, goes beyond this one particular situation. By her actions, the Interim Executive County Superintendent has implied that she would be more suited to make a decision about what is best for our district than the local Board of Education. As a result, we are now forced to unnecessarily spend time, energy, and money on this matter rather than focusing on other things that deserve our attention.*

*I stand with my fellow Board members in our decision and hope to continue our work together on behalf of the district.*

- Dr. Cusmano mentioned that the members of the Board are not unanimous in their opinions regarding the appointment of Ms. Strutin and the subsequent instructions of the Executive County Superintendent.

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- Ms. Strutin read the following statement:

*In my efforts to be totally transparent with the public, I stated my intentions to apply for the board seat vacated by Mr. Cramer when I resigned my board seat on November 23rd. The resignation of a current board member to apply for a vacancy is not illegal or uncommon within the state.*

*I find it terribly troubling that the Executive County Superintendent, after I discussed my intentions with her, would move to rescind her extension to this board because it was her opinion that I not apply for the vacancy. Her prejudice against me personally should not interfere with our district's ability to choose a person for the vacancy.*

*Appointing a person to a vacancy on the board of education and the election of a board member are two separate issues. The board of education has acted in the best interest of the district. It was in no way a means to circumvent the results of the election. And I take personal offense that she should infer that I or this board lacked transparency or violated the public trust.*

*With respect to Mr. Gavin's application for the vacancy, I as Board President chose not to call a roll call vote. As a past Board Member and the President of the Rutherford Hall Foundation, I felt that it was not in the best interest of our community to publicly humiliate him. I thought that I was being gracious and considerate.*

### V. PUBLIC COMMENT - AGENDA ITEMS

- None

### VI. COMMITTEE ACTION ITEMS

#### A. Operations

None.

#### B. Human Resources

Moved by Ms. Prudenti and seconded by Mr. Green, to approve the following resolution:

1. Personnel

BE IT RESOLVED, to approve the contract for and appointment of Dr. Melissa Sabol as the Acting Superintendent, effective January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021 (Appendix 2).

CARRIED: 8-0

#### C. Education

None.

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### **D. Governance**

None.

### **VII. PUBLIC COMMENT - NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

- Ms. Putz: Disagreed with content of Dr. Lamonte's letter and supports the Board's appointment of Ms. Strutin at its 11/23/2020 meeting.
- Ms Moyer: Disagreed with content of Dr. Lamonte's letter and the conduct of Dr. Lamonte.
- Ms. Scafati: Inquired of Ms. Strutin as to why she waited to apply for the open seat after the results of the general election; expressed disappointment with Ms. Strutin's conduct at the 11/23 meeting as well as the Board's actions taken
- Dr. Strutin: Supported procedure conducted at the 11/23 meeting and stated that the letter from Dr. Lamonte was uncalled for.

### **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Ms. Prudenti and seconded by Mr. Bienko, to adjourn the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

CARRIED: 8-0