

CLOSTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Closter, New Jersey

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Tenakill Middle School

February 5, 2025 - 7:30 PM

The Board meeting was called to order by Ms. Salamea-Cross at 7:31 PM.

The following Board Members were present:

Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee

The following Board Members were absent:

Ms. Li, Ms. Finkelstein

Also present:

Mr. McHale and Mr. Villanueva

NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT - Read by the President:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to ensure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meeting of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is discussed or acted upon. In accordance with the provisions of this Act, the Secretary to the Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting by having the date, time, and place thereof, posted at each school building within the district, district website, the Board of Education office, the Office of the Borough Clerk, and transmitted to *The Record* and *Northern Valley Suburbanite* newspapers.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRINCIPALS' REPORTS

Ms. Dianne Smith, Principal of Hillside Elementary School, shared her report with the Board and the community:

- Enrollment
 - We currently have 601 students enrolled.
- School Counselor's Week
 - This week, we celebrated National School Counselor's Week! Students have been creating posters and cards to show their appreciation for our counselors. This morning, administrators and main office staff prepared baked goods to recognize their contributions to the Hillside community.

- Black History Month
 - Students are learning about African Americans who have made significant contributions to American history. Our third graders are actively researching these historical figures to deepen their understanding.
- School Climate Survey
 - The Hillside community—students and parents— are participating in the School Climate Survey. Staff members completed the survey during Monday's meeting. Parents are reminded that the survey remains open through February 14.
- Scheduling
 - We are reviewing the master schedule for the 2025-2026 school year. This week, staff members are completing a form to provide their feedback and insights.
- Academic Assistance Program
 - The Academic Assistance Program began on Tuesday, with 62 students participating.
- February Fresh Start Assemblies
 - Ms. Zanin, the counselors, and Ms. Smith held assemblies this morning to review expectations with students. Topics included their role and responsibilities as respectful students, potential consequences, and an ICARE Shout-Out recognizing positive behaviors and choices. The assemblies were structured by grade level: Kindergarten, followed by Grades 1-2, and concluding with Grades 3-4 to ensure content was age-appropriate.
- Groundhog Day Assembly
 - Pre-K through 2nd grade students attended a Groundhog Day assembly on Monday featuring Mayor Glidden, Councilwoman Amatai, and Ruth Rando from the Closter Library. Closter Chuckie did not see his shadow, so we are hopeful that spring is on its way!
- Jersey Day
 - Student Council has planned Jersey Day for Friday, February 7
- 100th Day of School
 - We are excited to celebrate the 100th Day of School on February 10! A highlight of the day is seeing our Kindergarten students dressed as grandparents.
- Kindergarten Registration
 - Kindergarten registration is now open! Please share this information with friends, family, and neighbors who may have a child turning five on or before October 1, 2025. Registration is available at clsterschools.org. Looking ahead, Parent Orientation will be held on April 2 at 7:00 p.m. Residents will receive additional information in the mail this week—register early!
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
 - Information regarding Parent-Teacher Conferences scheduled for the week of March 3 will be included in Friday's edition of Hillside Happenings.

Ms. Christine Cipollini, Principal of Tenakill Middle School, shared with the Board and the community her report:

- TMS enrollment currently stands at 598 students.
- Congratulations to the Boys' Basketball team who defeated Old Tappan in the Northern Valley Championships on Monday evening. Closter won 51-41. Thank you to Mr. Lewis for coaching and supporting the student-athletes this season.
- Great News from the Math Counts Chapter Competition! TMS got 2nd Place in the Bergen-Hudson Chapter and will advance to the State Competition! Congratulations to everyone who participated in the Chapter Competition and a special shoutout to Jacob Lee, Jisoo Kim, Aiden Kim, and Akshat Mishra, who got perfect scores in the Team Round!
- Students in Algebra have been working on their Shark Tank Projects in which they worked collaboratively in groups to prepare a 5-10 minute presentation in hopes of earning an investment from the Sharks (Ms. Kim, Mr. John, additional teachers, and administrators). Through the project, students applied knowledge of linear equation systems and applied graphing, substitution, and elimination methods. The projects were a huge success, and many groups successfully earned investments.
- Students in grade 5 just completed their literary essay unit, in which they utilized their knowledge of thesis writing, introductions, and conclusions alongside text evidence to analyze theme and character traits. 5th grade classes held writing celebrations to share their work with peers.
- She encourages all families to continue to review the monthly editions of the Tenakill Times Newsletter which contains important upcoming information regarding TMS activities, upcoming important dates, information regarding the transition to high school, along with some additional discussion topics.
- This month we continue with our initiatives to foster a positive school culture and climate. The NJSci survey is live and our staff completed the survey on Monday, students will complete the survey this week, and families were emailed the link with an opportunity to complete the survey as well. We thank you for providing your feedback!
- This week in advisory, students in grade 7 are working on activities centralized around creating caring environments, while students in grade 6 are working on understanding other's perspectives. Our grade 5 students will be participating in a sense of belonging workshop this month, led by myself and the TMS counselors. We are excited to celebrate Random Act of Kindness Week at Tenakill during the week of February 10-14. This week leads up to Random Act of Kindness (RAK) Day on February 17 – a worldwide celebration of the power of kindness and the ripple effect it can create in the world. While we aim to support making kindness the norm year round, this week allows a focused time of spreading positivity and teaching our students to notice the power and impact of kindness. Students will be engaging in activities during advisory next week around this theme.
- The Closter Shade Tree Commission is sponsoring the Arbor Day Poster Contest. Students are invited to create a poster for submission as part of the contest. Various awards and recognition

will be granted. The permission slip and flier details are located in the February Tenakill times. All submissions are due by March 31st. Ms. Lee-Ein is working with students in creating posters in which students show their creativity around the theme: why trees are important.

- Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support and collaboration.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Mr. Vincent McHale, Superintendent of Schools, provided the SSDS (Student Safety Data System) Reporting Period 1 for SY 2024-2025 data. All trustees received a copy of the report.

- We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the parents of the Korean Parents Group, the Lunar New Year Assembly Committee, and the dedicated teachers who supported our students in preparing for the exceptional assemblies held on Friday, January 24, 2025! The Lunar New Year assemblies featured a variety of performances, including singing, instrumental music, drumming, and dancing, while also providing important insights into the Lunar New Year and the Year of the Snake. Both schools had the pleasure of showcasing a performance by the Top Mixed Martial Arts from Northvale. It was a thrilling day that was both entertaining and informative. The assemblies celebrated the richness of Closter's diverse cultures, reinforcing what makes Closter a wonderful place for living and learning.
- The *ThoughtExchange* connected to our district goal of creating a Profile of a Closter Learner is now closed. Thank you to the 478 people who participated and for your 541 thoughts. Here is a summary of the highest-rated thoughts on what students will need to be successful:
 - *Eighth-grade graduates need strong written and verbal communication skills to express ideas and engage in discussions. They should be independent yet able to collaborate, take pride in their work, and strive for excellence. Social-emotional skills are crucial, including empathy, conflict resolution, and resilience. They must be organized, capable of problem-solving, and self-advocating. A solid foundation in core academics, critical thinking, and digital literacy is essential. Additionally, they should possess time management, adaptability, cultural awareness, and a strong sense of responsibility and integrity to navigate high school and future challenges successfully.*
- A committee will be meeting later this month to begin analyzing the survey results and to begin working on creating the Profile of a Closter Learner. The completed profile document will be an essential guidepost as our district moves forward in the next few years. It will help our administrators and Board of Education make decisions about curriculum development, resource allocation, budget decisions, and overall school improvement initiatives to support all students and ensure they reach their full potential - based on the input of stakeholders. Again, thank you to everyone who participated in the *ThoughtExchange*!
- Save the date!! The Closter PTO will host their annual gala on Friday, March 21, 2025, from 7:00 to 11 pm at the Edgewood Country Club in River Vale. The theme is Viva Las Vegas. More information will follow soon. Check out the [Closter PTO webpage](#) for information on this event, the Me & My Guy Dance, the My Girl & I Dance, and more.
- The school district will be closed from Monday, February 17, 2025, through Friday, February 21, 2025, for winter break. Schools will reopen on Monday, Monday, February 24, 2025. Please enjoy the time off and be safe!

BOARD COMMITTEES

Mr. Choi, Chairperson of the Finance Committee, shared that the committee met and discussed several important topics. The main focus of the meeting was to discuss the 2025-2026 school year budget. Mr. Villanueva and Mr. McHale explained the various needs suggested by their administrators and their needs. These included resources, facility improvements, technology, and other essential items to support the students and the staff. Mr. Villanueva shared his concerns about the budget, just like every other school faces this coming year, and some of those items include rising healthcare costs, higher utility costs, and the state's 2% tax levy cap, which limits how much revenue can be raised through taxes. Another important topic of discussion was capital projects. The committee reviewed the upcoming capital projects and looked ahead at larger projects. Mr. Villanueva also gave an update on all the referendum projects. State aid figures will be available in late February, and until then Mr. Villanueva will continue to update the committee as budget is finalized.

Ms. Micera, Chairperson of the Policy Committee, shared that the committee discussed the updates from Strauss Esmay as four policies and three regulations require revision. These updates result from the Memorandum of Agreement between the district and law enforcement officials. Once the committee finishes reviewing the policies and regulations, they will be on upcoming agendas for approval.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Mr. Choi ▾ to open the meeting to the public.

Statements made by individual participants are limited to a duration of three (3) minutes unless otherwise announced at the beginning of the discussion. A maximum of 15 minutes for public input is scheduled as per bylaw 0167. The Board urges large groups to select one person to represent them. The Board reminds those individuals who take the opportunity to speak to please step up, identify themselves by name and address, and to limit their comments to items listed on the agenda.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Mr. Paldi ▾ to resume the regular order of business.

BOARD OPERATIONS

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Mr. Paldi ▾ to approve Motions A - C (**Item D was tabled**).

Ms. Salamea-Cross explained that during their leadership meeting, clarifications were needed for item D, which is the after-school program. She suggests that the item be tabled for a future vote as Mr. McHale gathers the information.

*With a motion from Ms. Micera and seconded by Mr. Choi, **Item D** was tabled, and all present members voted Yes.*

Mr. Paldi asked for clarification on the HIB case # that is being approved, as the executive session minutes have a different number than what is on the agenda. Mr. McHale responded that the incident numbers on the agenda were correct. Mr. Villanueva confirmed that the executive session minutes were a typo and would be revised to reflect the correct incident number.

Motions were approved ▾ by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee
NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - Board of Education Meeting Minutes**

Motion to approve the January 22, 2025, Board of Education meeting minutes.

B. **APPROVAL - Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying (HIB)**

Motion to affirm the decision of the Superintendent of Schools regarding Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying (HIB) incidents TMS-2425-12, TMS-2425-13, and HES-2425-03, as reported to the Board in Executive Session at the January 22, 2025, meeting.

C. **APPROVAL - Use of Facilities by the Englewood Hospitals' Training Center**

Motion to approve the Englewood Hospitals' Training Center to use Hillside Elementary School Gymnasium on February 11, 2025, and February 25, 2025, for CPR Heartsaver training.

(Item D was tabled)

D. **APPROVAL - After School Program - HNN Roving Reporters**

Motion to approve the HNN Roving Reporters After School Program (previously under the PTO ASEP) with Ms. Iyo and Ms. Jost.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Ms. Finkelstein; Members: Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Lee

Moved by Ms. Argenziano ▾ , seconded by Ms. Micera ▾ to approve Motions A - D.

Motions were approved ▾ by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee
NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - Staff Coursework**

Motion to approve the following courses for the 2024-2025 school year as recommended to the Superintendent by the Principals:

Staff Member: Joseph Calabria
Course No./Title: EDUC-7191 AI: Transforming the K-12 Classroom
Institution: University of LaVerne
Credits: 3

Staff Member: Margaret Tahtabrounian
Course No./Title: Phonics First Level I
Institution: Ashland University
Credits: 2

B. **APPROVAL - Staff Conferences**

Motion to approve the following staff conferences for the 2024-2025 school year:

Staff Member(s): Claire Pidi
Conference: Elementary Music Round Table K-6
Location: P.M. Villano Elementary School, Emerson, NJ
Date: 3/13/25
Cost to Board: \$129.51 (Substitute & mileage)

Staff Member(s): Christine Cipollini
Conference: BCPSA Seminar - Standards-Based Grading & Collecting Student Growth Data
Location: Maggiano's, Hackensack, NJ
Date: 3/12/25
Cost to Board: \$7.71 (Mileage)

Staff Member(s): Daniella Riecken
Conference: Elementary Music Round Table K-6
Location: Patrick M. Villano Elementary School, Emerson, NJ
Date: 3/13/25
Cost to Board: \$128.29 (Substitute & mileage)

Staff Member(s): Dianne Smith
Conference: Legal One: Understanding Evolving Legal Obligations for Schools & Law Enforcement
Location: Virtual
Date: 2/13/25
Cost to Board: \$0

Staff Member(s): Joseph Calabria
Conference: NJECC Annual Workshop
Location: Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ
Date: 3/11/25
Cost to Board: \$153.42 (Registration & mileage)

C. **APPROVAL - Field Trips**

Motion to approve the following field trips for the 2024-2025 school year:

School: Tenakill Middle School
Group: Debate Team
Month: February 2025
Destination: NVRHS-D
Location: Demarest, NJ

School: Tenakill Middle School
Group: Science Olympiad
Month: March 2025
Destination: Middlesex College
Location: Edison, NJ

D. **APPROVAL - Adoption of Big Ideas (Math and You) Series for Hillside Elementary School**

Motion to approve the adoption of the *Big Ideas (Math and You)* series for grades K through 4 at Hillside Elementary School, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year.

FINANCE AND PHYSICAL PLANT COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Mr. Choi; Members: Ms. Estrems, Ms. Finkelstein

Moved by Mr. Choi , seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motions A - E.

Mr. Paldi requested clarification on item D and what the membership means. Mr. Villanueva responded that the Northeast Bergen School Board Insurance Group is a joint insurance fund comprising 45 Bergen County school districts. The districts receive a better rate through the JIF on various insurances – property, legal, and workers' compensation. Since the start of the group in 1985, districts have saved over 125 Million dollars.

Mr. Paldi asked why the bill list was blank. Mr. McHale explained that the draft agenda the board members receive in advance does not contain that information. It is finalized when the agenda is released to the public.

Mr. Paldi also asked what is the process to sell our stuff. Mr. Villanueva responded that when we try to dispose of fixed assets that are obsolete or excess in inventory, we either list them on gov deals or send an email blast to all various email groups – mainly through the Business Administrator Group.

Motions were approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee

NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - Payment of Bills**

Motion to approve the payment of bills from January 23, 2025, to January 31, 2025, in the amount of:

General Fund (Fund 10)	\$782,688.93
Special Revenue (Fund 20)	\$ 3,206.50
Total	\$785,895.43

B. **APPROVAL - Payment of Bills**

Motion to approve the payment of bills from February 1, 2025, to February 5, 2025, in the amount of:

General Fund (Fund 10)	\$451,631.98
Special Revenue (Fund 20)	\$ 712.80
Enterprise (Milk – Fund 60)	\$ 1,107.57
Debt Service (Fund 40)	\$110,475.00
Capital Fund (Fund 30)	\$245,000.00
Total	\$808,927.35

C. **APPROVAL - Submission of Waiver of Requirements (SEMI Program)**

Whereas, NJAC 6A:23A-5.3 provides that a school district may request a waiver of compliance with respect to the district's participation in the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI) Program for the 2025-2026 school year; and

Whereas, the Closter Board of Education desires to apply for this waiver because it projects having fewer than 40 Medicaid-eligible classified students and participation in SEMI would not provide a cost benefit to the district based on the projection of the district's available SEMI reimbursement for the 2025-2026 budget year;

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Closter Board of Education hereby authorizes the Chief School Administrator to submit to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools in the County of Bergen an appropriate waiver of the requirements of NJAC 6A:23A-5.3 for the 2025 - 2026 school year.

D. **APPROVAL - Continued Membership in the Northeast Bergen County School Board Insurance Group (NESBIG)**

WHEREAS, several Boards of Education in Bergen County have joined together to form a Joint Insurance Group as permitted by N.J. Title 18A-.18B and;

WHEREAS, said Group was approved effective July 1, 1985, by the New Jersey Commissioner of Insurance and has been in operation since that date and;

WHEREAS, the Bylaws and regulations governing the creation and operation of this Insurance Group contains elaborate restrictions and safeguards concerning the safety and efficient administration of the public interest entrusted to such a Group, and;

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education has determined that membership in the Northeast Bergen County School Board Insurance Group is in the best interest of the District;

NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Closter Board of Education does hereby agree to renew membership in the Northeast Bergen County School Board Insurance Group and hereby accept the Bylaws as approved and adopted. The renewal term is from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2028.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board Secretary/Business Administrator is authorized to execute the application for membership and the accompanying certification on behalf of the District and;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board Secretary/Business Administrator is authorized and directed to execute the Indemnity and Trust Agreement and such other documents signifying membership in the Group as required by the Group's Bylaws and to deliver the same to the Executive Director.

E. **APPROVAL - Disposal through Sale of Toro Power Broom**

Motion to approve the disposal through sale of a Toro Power Broom, fixed asset tag #10350, to North Caldwell Public Schools for \$1,700.

PERSONNEL AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Ms. Salamea-Cross; Member: Mr. Paldi

Moved by Mr. Paldi , seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motions A - C.

Mr. McHale explained item B and read Jessica Stinsons resignation letter.

Motions were approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee

NAYS: None

- A. **APPROVAL - Appointment of Brianna Kehoe as Academic Assistance Substitute**
Motion to approve the appointment of Brianna Kehoe as Academic Assistance Program substitute for Wednesdays only for the 2024-2025 school year at a rate of \$50.00 per hour.
- B. **APPROVAL - Resignation of Jessica Stinson as School Psychologist**
Motion to accept the resignation of Jessica Stinson as School Psychologist effective March 30, 2025.
- C. **APPROVAL - Substitute Teachers/Paraprofessionals/Custodians**
Motion to approve the following substitute teachers/paraprofessionals/custodians for the 2024-2025 school Year:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Certification</u>
Shweta Malhotra	Substitute Certificate

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Villanueva thanked the trustees for their quick response in completing the SEC Financial Disclosure. He will send another reminder to the remaining trustees who have yet to complete the disclosure statement.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Mr. Paldi ▾ to open the meeting for public comments.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Mr. Paldi ▾ , seconded by Ms. Micera ▾ to close the meeting to public comments.

CLOSED SESSION MOTION (If required)

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Mr. Paldi ▾ to approve the following Closed Session Motion.
Motion was approved ▾ by a voice vote of the Board:

YEAS: Ms. Salamea-Cross, Mr. Choi, Ms. Micera, Ms. Argenziano, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Lee
NAYS: None

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education will adjourn to a Closed Session to discuss the following:

HIB

The matters so discussed will be disclosed to the public as soon as and to the extent that such disclosure can be made without adversely affecting the public.

The Board went into a Closed Session at 8:05 PM.

The Board reconvened from the Closed Session at 8:08 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Ms. Argenziano ▾ , seconded by Ms. Micera ▾ to adjourn the meeting at 8:09 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Floro M. Villanueva, Jr.
Business Administrator/Board Secretary