

CLOSTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Closter, New Jersey

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING

Tenakill Middle School

July 16, 2025 - 7:30 PM

The Board meeting was called to order by Ms. Finkelstein at 7:34 PM.

The following Board Members were present:

Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems,
Mr. Shih

The following Board Members were absent:

Ms. Li

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 Update - As of 1:50 PM on July 15, the enrollment at Hillside Elementary School is 599 students, with the following breakdown by grade: Pre-K – 32, Kindergarten – 102, Grade 1 – 106, Grade 2 – 104, Grade 3 – 125, and Grade 4 – 130.*
- *Professional Learning - Ms. Zanin and Ms. Smith attended the Northern Valley Curriculum Center's workshop on the K-3 Literacy Requirement Initiative, where districts shared their plans on how this initiative will be rolled out. It was helpful to collaborate and share how we can work together to implement the initiative. We are planning ways to communicate with our families and staff members. We established a committee at the year's end and are grateful for the awarded grant, in which we will be working with consultant Patty McGee. NV leaders will meet again in August.*

- *Academic Support Program - Our summer academic support program continues through July 31. We have 18 students currently enrolled.*
- *Gratitude - Thank you to the PTO for the purchase of the apple bollards at the upper loop. This new addition will enhance the safety and security of this busy space. Also, I would like to express our gratitude to all who helped with the installation and purchase, including Mr. Villanueva, Buildings and Grounds Supervisor Mr. Scaglione, and Lieutenant Sarubbi.*
- *2025-26 School Year Update - We are busy preparing for the school year ahead, with plans to ensure our students and staff are supported with our new math text, the Units of Study for Writing in grades 2-4, and the Literacy Initiative. We are planning new ways in our six-day schedule that will allow for peer learning opportunities for our staff.*
- *Upcoming Events*
Hillside Hello: Our program for new-to-district families with students in Grades 1-4 will be held on August 26. Families received a Save the Date this week and will receive more information in mid-August. The committee met last week and is preparing to greet new students and their families.

Kindergarten Kickstart will take place on September 3. Kindergarten students and their families will be invited in to enjoy a visit with their classroom teacher and meet their new classmates!

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

- *As of today, there are 593 students enrolled at TMS.*
- *Our Summer Academic Support Program is underway! There are 27 students enrolled in the program, which began on July 7th and will run until July 31st. We completed both a security drill and a fire drill for the month of July with our summer students and staff.*
- *We are busy planning for the 25-26 school year, and look forward to welcoming seven new staff members at our new staff orientation in August! Our master schedule is nearly complete, and we are working on individualized student schedules.*
- *We are looking forward to the installation of our 700 new evergreen lockers. The project will begin this Friday and carry through the coming weeks. A special thank you to our custodial team, Mr. Scaglione, and Mr. Villanueva, who have been working hard to facilitate the project and prepare the building for the new school year.*
- *5th Grade Re-registration & Chromebook Distribution will take place on August 18, August 19, and August 20, 2025, from 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM.*
- *The fifth-grade orientation will take place on Wednesday, August 20, 2025, from 1:30 PM to 3:00 PM. A special orientation for all students new to the district will begin at 1:00 PM. Orientation will include information regarding class schedules, navigating the building, accessing Realtime, and locker decoration. We look forward to seeing families and students there!*
- *Additional Chromebook Distribution Dates will also be on August 22 and August 25 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Thank you to Ms. Chow, Ms. Ruiz, and Mr. Salvati who have been working hard to prepare student Chromebooks for summer pickup.*
- *A friendly reminder that updated school supply lists, as well as recommendations for summer enrichment activities, can be found on the TMS website.*
- *We are looking forward to a great rest of the summer and are excited for the school year ahead!*

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Mr. Vincent McHale, Superintendent of Schools, shared with the Board and the community his report:

- *Our district's summer programs are in full swing! We have 85 students attending academic support and enrichment classes. The programs will continue through August 1, 2025. Thank you to the teachers, students, staff, and parents for your commitment to ensuring learning continues during the summer. A reminder that summer learning resources are posted on the school webpages for students to keep their academic skills sharp.*
- *Some of our teachers attended professional development in-district during the last week of June. The sessions focused on the implementation of our new math resource, *Big Ideas: Math and You*, at Hillside Elementary School, and *The Writing Revolution* resource that guides teachers to advance writing in all subjects and grades. He sat in on some of the sessions, and our teachers were active participants in this professional learning.*
- *The custodians and maintenance staff are busy with their summer deep cleaning of classrooms and waxing floors. He thanked them for their hard work and especially for working around the summer programs occupying both schools during July. Kudos to Mr. Scaglione, our maintenance staff, and custodians for always keeping our buildings in great order!*
- *This summer, there is work being done to update our facilities. We are installing new lockers at Tenakill Middle School, and the air conditioning will be installed in the Tenakill Middle School gymnasium. We will be repaving the blacktop at Hillside Elementary School in the area of the modular wing and the playground. We have completed the work on upgrading our technology network infrastructure. Thank you to the Board of Education for supporting our long-range facilities plan and ensuring that our facilities are in great condition for our students, staff, and community.*
- *We will be welcoming our new hires for orientation during the week of August 18 – 21, 2025. The new teachers and staff will have sessions at the Northern Valley Curriculum Center and here in the district. Our full staff will return to work on September 2, 2025, to prepare for the students starting school on September 4, 2025!*
- *As we move through the heart of summer, he hopes everyone finds time to relax, recharge, enjoy the sunshine, and the pleasure of a great book!*

BOARD COMMITTEES

Mr. McHale shared that the Policy Committee reviewed the proposed policies and regulations via email. He noted that the policies focus on dress codes are for both staff and students.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Moved by Ms. Micera , seconded by Ms. Argenziano 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 on agenda items.

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

BOARD OPERATIONS

Moved by Ms. Estrems , seconded by Ms. Micera to approve Motions A - F.

Mr. Villanueva provided further explanation on Item D, noting that the bid and quote threshold has increased from \$44,000 to \$53,000.

Mr. McHale added that Item E is related, as it reflects this change in the district's Standard Operating Procedures to align with the new threshold.

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

YEAS: Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Shih

NAYS: None

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

Motion to approve the June 26, 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-2425-24 and TMS-2425-25, as reported to the Board in Executive Session at the June 26, 2025, meeting.

C. **APPROVAL - Virtual or Remote Instruction Programs Plan for the 2025-2026 School Year**

Motion to approve the Virtual or Remote Instruction Programs Plan for SY 2025-2026, as per Appendix A attached.

D. **APPROVAL - Establishment of Updated Bid and Quote Thresholds**

WHEREAS, N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-3(a) permits boards of education to increase their bid threshold to the amount authorized by the Governor and the State Treasurer upon the appointment of a Qualified Purchasing Agent (QPA); and

WHEREAS, Floro M. Villanueva, Jr. possesses the necessary certification as a Qualified Purchasing Agent, as issued by the Director of the Division of Local Government Services; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to P.L. 2021, c. 412 and N.J.S.A. 52:34-7, and in consultation with the Governor, the State Treasurer authorized the Director of the Division of Purchase and Property to increase the bid threshold from \$44,000 to \$53,000 effective July 1, 2025;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education in the County of Bergen, State of New Jersey, hereby:

1. Appoints Floro M. Villanueva, Jr. as the Qualified Purchasing Agent (QPA) for the Closter Board of Education, with the authority, responsibility, and accountability for the district's purchasing activities as defined in N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-2(b);
2. Establishes the district's new bid threshold at \$53,000 effective July 17, 2025;
3. Sets the quote threshold at \$7,950, which is 15% of the updated bid threshold, in accordance with the Public School Contracts Law;
4. Authorizes the Qualified Purchasing Agent to award contracts up to the new bid threshold in compliance with the statutory provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-3(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall remain in effect from the date of adoption until the next Organization Meeting of the Board of Education or until such time the Board acts to revise it.

E. **APPROVAL - Revision of Purchasing and SOP Manuals to Reflect Updated Bid and Quote Thresholds**

Motion to approve the revision to the district's Purchasing Manual and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual to reflect the updated bid threshold of \$53,000 and quote threshold of \$7,950, in accordance with the statutory changes effective July 1, 2025.

F. **APPROVAL - Use of Facilities for Korean School**

Motion to approve the renewal of the Use of Facilities Agreement with the Korean Language and Culture School at the fees established for the 2025-2026 school year, utilizing the Tenakill Middle School auditorium and 17 classrooms.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE

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

Moved by **Ms. Argenziano** , seconded by **Ms. Estrems** to approve Motions A and B.

Mr. Choi asked what BCCC stands for. Mr. McHale responded that BCCC stands for Bergen County Curriculum Consortium.

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

YEAS: Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Shih

NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - Staff Conferences**

Motion to approve the following staff conferences for the 2025-2026 school year:

Staff Member(s): Keith McElroy, Vincent McHale, and Kristen Zanin
Conference: BCCC Meetings
Location: Paramus or Lyndhurst, NJ
Date: 9/26/25, November TBD, 12/5/25, January TBD, 3/13/26, 6/5/26
Cost to Board: \$1,002.29 (\$250 p/p Membership and mileage: McElroy \$85.35; McHale and Zanin \$83.47 each)

Staff Member(s): Christine Cipollini and Dianne Smith
Conference: DCP&P / HIB Training with Stephen Fogarty
Location: NVCC
Date: 7/23/25
Cost to Board: \$3.38 (Transportation as follows: \$1.22 Cipollini; \$2.16 Smith)

Staff Member(s): Christine Cipollini
Conference: Reimagining PLCs: Turning Insight into Instructional Action
Location: Virtual
Date: 8/4/25
Cost to Board: \$100.00 (Registration Fee)

Staff Member(s): Dianne Smith
Conference: K-3 Literacy Requirements
Location: NVCC
Date: 7/15/25
Cost to Board: \$2.16

Staff Member(s): Hailey Gabettie, Jamie Kluft, and Megan McCafferty
Conference: Buehler Challenger & Science Center
Location: Paramus, NJ
Date: 9/24/25
Cost to Board: \$26.79 (\$8.93 per person)

B. **APPROVAL - Field Trips**

Motion to approve the following field trips for the 2025-2026 school year:

School: Tenakill Middle School
Group: Grade 8
Month: April 2026
Destination: Washington, D.C.

School: Tenakill Middle School
Group: Gardening Club and Grade 8 Science
Month: Each Month of the School Year, Starting September 2025
Destination: Tenakill Brook
Location: Closter, NJ

School: Tenakill Middle School
Group: Grade 7
Month: May 2026
Destination: Boston, MA

FINANCE AND PHYSICAL PLANT COMMITTEE

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

Moved by Mr. Choi , seconded by Mr. Paldi to approve Motions A - K.

Mr. McHale commented on Item I, noting that it represents the acceptance of a donation from the 8th-grade graduating class. He expressed his appreciation and thanked the class for their generous contribution, which reflects strong support for literacy in the school community.

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

YEAS: Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Shih

NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - Preliminary Monthly Financials and Certification**

Motion to approve the following items as required, pursuant to NJSA 18A:17-9 and NJAC 6:20-2.13, as per Appendix B attached:

- a. Preliminary Board Secretary and School Treasurer Financial Reports for June 2025.
- b. Board of Education's Monthly Certification of Budgetary Major Account /Fund status for June 2025.
- c. Transfer of funds for June 2025.

B. APPROVAL - Payment of Bills

Motion to approve the payment of bills from June 27, 2025, to June 30, 2025, in the amount of:

General Fund (Fund 10)	\$47,692.62
Special Revenue (Fund 20)	\$ 2,594.57
Total	\$50,287.19

C. APPROVAL - Staff Remuneration

Motion to approve remuneration to staff members as follows:

Staff Member: Grace Park
Courses: 1) Creating a Mindful Environment
2) Motivating Students Who Don't Care
College/University: University of LaVerne
Remuneration: \$840.00

D. APPROVAL – Application & Acceptance of IDEA Grants

Motion to approve the application and acceptance of IDEA Grants for School Year 2025-2026 in the following amounts:

<u>TOTAL IDEA GRANT</u>	<u>\$294,288</u>
IDEA Basic	\$ 282,059
IDEA PreSchool	\$ 12,229

E. APPROVAL - District Share of Region III Consortium

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education hereby approves the SY 2025-2026 portion of the Consortium with Northern Valley Regional High School acting as the LEA (Local Education Agency) for Region III as follows:

<u>Program/Service</u>	<u>25-26 Contribution</u>
Special Education	\$122,144.00
Physical Therapy (Additional Services)	\$ 50,000.00 (estimate)
Occupational Therapy (Additional Services)	\$ 70,000.00 (estimate)

F. APPROVAL - Participation in Region III Transportation Consortium

BE IT RESOLVED that the Closter Board of Education hereby approves participation in the 2025-2026 Region III - Special Education Transportation Consortium with Northern Valley Regional High School acting as the LEA (Local Education Agency) for the District's special education transportation.

G. **APPROVAL - Mental Health Support Services Provider**

WHEREAS, there exists a need for a District Mental Health Support Services provider, and

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education authorized and issued a request for proposal to engage a firm to act as a Mental Health Support Services Provider for the district; and

WHEREAS, the Closter Board of Education received approval from the Division of Local Government Services to use competitive contracting to procure mental health support and counseling services; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that after considering the proposals received, the Board approves West Bergen Mental Health Care, Inc. as the district's mental health support services provider for 184 days for SY 2025-2026 in the amount of \$91,250.00.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board President and the Board's Business Administrator/Board Secretary are authorized and directed to execute an appropriate contract embodying the terms of the Request for Proposal.

H. **APPROVAL - Instructional Programs and Web-based Services**

Motion to approve the purchase of the following proprietary instructional programs and web-based services:

- IXL Learning (Grades K-4) - \$11,250.00
- IXL Learning (Grades 5-8) - \$11,718.75
- Actively Learn - Achieve 3000 (Grades 5-8) - \$14,684.80
- Scholastic (Grades 5-8) - \$7,789.35

I. **APPROVAL - Acceptance of Donation Funds to Tenakill Middle School Library**

Motion to approve the donation of \$1,630.00 to the TMS Library from the 2025 TMS Grade 8 Graduating Class.

J. **APPROVAL - Disposal of Mac Servers at Tenakill Middle School**

Motion to approve the disposal of the Mac server at TMS, fixed asset tags #10149 and #10019.

K. **APPROVAL - Disposal of Old Camera DVR at Hillside Elementary School**

Motion to approve the disposal of an old camera DVR at HES, fixed asset tag #10252.

PERSONNEL AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Mr. Paldi; Member: Mr. Shih

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

Mr. McHale further discussed items B, C, D, E, and F.

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

YEAS: Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Shih
NAYS: None

- A. **APPROVAL - Appointment of Paraprofessionals for the 2025-2026 School Year**
Motion to approve the appointment of the following paraprofessionals for the 2025-2026 school year at a salary of \$21.59 per hour, 5.75 hours per week, pending a criminal history background check:
- Gina Cocca
 - Ajida Desic
 - Jack Halperin
 - Maria Perez
 - Jennifer Varon
- B. **APPROVAL - Nora Khatami - Field Experience for the 2025-2026 School Year**
Motion to approve Nora Khatami, Montclair State University student, to obtain field experience working with Maci DeCarlo, School Psychologist, for the 2025-2026 school year, pending criminal history background check.
- C. **APPROVAL - Dara Weiss for Two Additional Work Days for Summer 2025**
Motion to approve Dara Weiss for two additional days of summer 2025 employment, not to exceed 12 total hours, at a rate of \$50 per hour, to prepare Suzanne Lang's 504 plans for the 2025-2026 school year.
- D. **APPROVAL - Appointment of Rebecca Callahan as School Secretary at Hillside Elementary School for 2025-2026 School Year**
Motion to approve the appointment of Rebecca Callahan as full-time HES School Secretary for the 2025-2026 school year at a salary of \$67,660, Secretary Step 2, effective October 1, 2025. A criminal history background check is on file.
- E. **APPROVAL - Appointment of Ashley Lewis as School Counselor Leave Replacement at Hillside Elementary School**
Motion to approve the appointment of Ashley Lewis as HES School Counselor Leave Replacement, starting September 2, 2025. Salary will be \$200 per day on days 1 through 10; then beginning on day 11, \$65,500, MA Step 0, pro-rated, ending on December 2, 2025. A criminal history background check is on file.

PERSONNEL AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - Walk In Motion

Moved by Ms. Argenziano , seconded by Mr. Paldi to approve Motions F.

- F. **APPROVAL - Allyson Ho as Part-Time Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) for the 2025-2026 School Year**
Motion to approve Allyson Ho as part-time COTA (0.40 FTE) for the 2025-2026 school year at a salary of \$23,836, starting on September 1, 2025, pending criminal history background check.

POLICY COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Ms. Micera; Member: Ms. Li

Moved by Ms. Micera , seconded by Mr. Paldi to approve Motion A.

Mr. McHale discussed a grammatical error in the first reading, and the correction will be made for the second reading. Ms. Finkelstein responds that she made some comments on the draft and that some of them can be removed. There was a discussion about the revisions.

A motion was made by Ms. Argenzino and seconded by Mr. Paldi to accept the revisions.

Motion was approved by a roll call vote of the Board as follows:

YEAS: Mr. Choi, Ms. Argenziano, Mr. Paldi, Ms. Finkelstein, Ms. Lee, Ms. Micera, Ms. Estrems, Mr. Shih

NAYS: None

A. **APPROVAL - First Reading of Policies and Regulations**

Motion to approve the first reading of the following policies and regulations shown as Appendix C:

- Policy 3216 Dress and Grooming
- Policy 4216 Dress and Grooming
- Regulation 5511 Dress Code

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Mr. McHale shared that he sent a survey to administrators and board members requesting feedback as the board develops the district goals for SY 2025-2026.

He then discussed the implications of the recently passed "Big Beautiful Bill." As a result of this legislation, school districts will no longer receive funding under Titles II, III, and IV. However, Title I funding will continue. One of the district's major concerns is the potential impact on the Northern Valley Curriculum Center, which is currently supported through Title II funds.

Mr. McHale also addressed a request regarding the Science Olympiad. Parents of recently graduated 8th-grade students—who will be entering high school next year—have asked that five of these students be allowed to remain on the team for next year's team, which permits participants up to 9th grade. Mr. McHale expressed that while he appreciates the dedication, extracurricular programs are meant to benefit current Closter students. He does not believe it would be appropriate to give team spots to high school students at the expense of current middle school students. Parents also requested additional funding for the program. Mr. McHale clarified that the district already funds two staff advisors, supplies, and partially covers transportation for events.

Ms. Finkelstein suggested that if there are not enough current students to fill the team, then including 9th graders could be considered. A strategy to bring about change in bullying situations where a targeted student is made to feel hopeless (inevitability) is:

Ms. Micera asked whether any 9th grader in Northern Valley could participate, or only Closter graduates. Mr. McHale clarified that only Closter graduates would be eligible if such an exception were made.

Mr. Choi invited Ms. Cippolini to share her opinion. She acknowledged that there are two ways to look at the situation—whether the goal is to win or to provide Closter nbm1m+6students with the experience. She believes there will likely be enough students to fill the team. However, she did appreciate the mentoring role that high school students played during the year.

Mr. Villanueva noted that if 9th graders do participate, they would be required to pay the full cost of their transportation and other related expenses. He added that there are leftover funds from last year that can help support the program this year.

Finally, Mr. McHale informed the board that Governor Murphy is expected to sign legislation requiring school districts to provide full day Kindergarten and free Pre-K to all residents. He noted that this could present significant challenges for the district, as enrollment may increase substantially. Currently, the district serves around 20 Pre-K students annually, and this new mandate could triple that number.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Ms. Jannie Chung, of 20 Vivian Lane, welcomed all the new board members. She asked Mr. McHale to extend her thanks to the faculty for selecting Remus for the Faculty Award. She also expressed interest in recognizing the Science Olympiad students and invited them to be honored at an upcoming Borough Council meeting in the council chambers. Lastly, Ms. Chung mentioned that there will be discussions this fall regarding the borough's affordable housing obligations.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Ms. Micera ▾ , seconded by Ms. Argenziano ▾ to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

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