

Toms River, New Jersey, April 30, 2025

A Budget Hearing of the Board of Education of the Toms River Regional Schools took place at High School North Media Center, 1245 Old Freehold Road, Toms River, on Wednesday, April 30, 2025 at 5:30 P.M.

Board President Mrs. Ashley Lamb read the following Opening Statement:

“Good Evening, Welcome to a Budget Hearing of the Board of Education of the Toms River Regional Schools.”

“This meeting was announced to the public through a notice published in The Star Ledger and the Asbury Park Press on April 16, 2025 and April 24, 2025, which constituted at least 48 hours notice as required by law under the Open Public Meetings Act.”

A roll call of attendance indicated the following Board Members were present: Mrs. Maria Matarazzo, Mr. Joseph Jubert, Mrs. Katie Coyne, Mrs. Lisa Contessa, Ms. Kathy Eagan, Mr. Kevin Kidney, Mr. James Capone, and Mrs. Ashley Lamb.

Mrs. Paola Pascarella arrived at 5:52 p.m.

Also in attendance were Superintendent Citta, Assistant Superintendents DiMeo, Thomas, Business Administrator Doering, Board Secretary Saxton, and Board Attorney Burns.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – 5:31 P.M.

A motion was made by Mrs. Contessa, seconded by Mr. Kidney and carried that the following Executive Session Resolution be approved:

Resolved, that the Board of Education, at this time, move to a closed session to be held in High School North Executive Session Meeting Room, 1245 Old Freehold Road, Toms River, New Jersey, for the purpose of:

Executive Session – To *Include* – Personnel; Legal Litigation; Other. Subject to change.

as outlined under the Open public Meetings Act.

RETURN TO REGULAR SESSION – 5:56 P.M.

A motion was made by Ms. Eagan, seconded by Mr. Kidney and carried that the Board return to Regular Session at 5:56 P.M.

All members present voting Aye.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board President Mrs. Ashley Lamb led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

Superintendent Michael Citta welcomed everyone to our Budget Hearing meeting and recapped the last seven years in Toms River. Superintendent Citta advised that Toms River Regional School District is the lowest spending, most efficient school district in the K-12 schools category, with 3,500 students or more, and spend the least amount on education for our students in comparison to districts throughout the State of New Jersey.

Superintendent Citta stated in 2017-2018, S2 was put into place and what was promised to be a \$19 million dollar reallocation for Toms River over seven years, turned into a \$137 million cumulative loss. Through the last seven years, the District endured cuts, program loss and turmoil. Superintendent Citta is proud to be a leader in a community that has come together, figured out how to provide the best that we can for the kids despite our struggles, without pointing fingers. Our predicament is a formula issue and is a legislative problem. We have been fighting through testimony, legal channels and lawsuits.

Superintendent Citta stated the broken formula has not come close to bringing the adequacy any closer. The mandated and imposed tax increases, over last five years have gone from \$33 million dollars a year under adequacy to \$106 million under adequacy all the while our taxpayers who support the most efficient district in the state got slammed with an 18.5% increase in taxes over the last four years and potentially an additional 12.9% this year! When S2 came about, it was to reallocate dollars based on enrollment drops. Our enrollment in 2017-2018 was around 15,600 students and now it's at

approximately 14,700 students. The District had 2,363 employees for 15,623 students and for the 2025-2026 school year, the District will have full time staff of 2,191 employees for 14,700 students. The District cut 304 positions which includes 222 teachers, 72 non-certified staff members, 10 administrative positions which includes 2 directors and 1 assistant superintendent in a district that is the 7th largest in the State of New Jersey.

Superintendent Citta stated when the District's enrollment numbers dropped, the demographics changed. The District's economically disadvantaged population went from 20% to 40%, our English Second Language students went from 100 students to 1,000 students, and our special education budget increased by 43%. During that same time, for those same reasons, our certified Special Education staff has increased by 50, our ESL staff has increased by 16 and our non-certified Special Education staff has grown by 86 positions. Superintendent Citta stated the District sold assets to keep programs intact, what we call survival T&E, which basically says it's enough money to keep the District's doors open and for us to keep loving our kids and doing the right thing by them, but it's not what our children deserve. Superintendent Citta stated he has a legal responsibility to present a balanced budget that presents survival T&E and with the approval of the tax levy incentive grant by the Department of Education, the only way I can do that is by proposing a 12.9% tax increase tonight.

COMMENTS FROM GUESTS AND PRESS – BUDGET HEARING ONLY

(limited to 3 minutes as per Board Policy # 0167 – Public Participation in Board Meetings)

Public comments were heard by Bill Spadea.

Public comments were heard by John Mirrione.

Public comments were heard by Krista Whittaker.

Public comments were heard by Jennifer Howe.

MOTION TO ADOPT THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET RESOLUTION

A motion was made by Mr. Kidney, seconded by Mr. Capone and carries that the Motion to Adopt the 2025-2026 School District Budget Resolution be approved.

On roll call following the vote:

Ayes: None.

Noes: Matarazzo, Jubert, Coyne, Contessa, Eagan, Kidney, Pascarella, Capone, Lamb

Recused: None.

Abstained: None.

Absent: None.

COMMENTS FROM GUESTS AND PRESS *(limited to 5 minutes as per Board Policy # 0167 – Public Participation in Board Meetings)*

Public comments were heard by Krista Whittaker.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

A motion was made by Mrs. Contessa, seconded by Mr. Kidney and carried that the meeting be adjourned at 6:24 P.M.

All members present voting Aye.

Wendy L. Saxton, Board Secretary