

**BERKELEY HEIGHTS BOARD OF EDUCATION
COMBINED CONFERENCE AND REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
DECEMBER 21, 2020**

CALL TO ORDER

The Combined Conference and Regular Meeting of the Berkeley Heights Board of Education was called to order on Thursday, December 3, 2020 at 7:00 PM via the media platform Zoom by the Board President, Mr. Reinstein.

ROLL CALL

A roll call indicated the presence of the following members:

Mrs. Penna, Mr. D'Aquila, Mr. Gioia, Ms. Reilly, Mr. Cassano, Dr. Crisonino, Mrs. Kirsch and Mr. Reinstein. Also present were Dr. Varley, Mr. McKinney and Mrs. Felezzola.

STATEMENT

On December 18, 2020, this notice was provided to all schools, all PTO Presidents, the BHEA President and posted at the Administration Building. On the same date a copy was emailed to the Public Library, TAP into Berkeley Heights, the Courier News and filed with the Municipal Clerk to file and post at Town Hall. The meeting will also be announced on the District Sign at Columbia School.

FLAG SALUTE

Mr. Reinstein led the board and the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

CORRESPONDENCE

The correspondence as listed on the agenda had been provided to the Board for their review and information:

-Email from Mr. M. LeBlond; BHPS COVID Dashboard

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Varley began her report by stating that, while the purpose of tonight's Board of Education meeting is the timetable for the return to in-person learning in January, she would be remiss not to address the recent Instagram post, and subsequent posts, and the [change.org](https://www.change.org) petition that it generated, which has received over 1500 signatures.

She continued that she was deeply saddened to read the Instagram posts from students past and present that detailed a culture of hatred and bias in the Berkeley Heights Public Schools that targeted students for abuse because of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender. This is against everything she believes in, not only as an educator, but as a person. Dr. Varley added that she sincerely apologizes for the way these students were treated and felt. Her mission is to make sure it will never happen to any of our students again.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (continued)

For the posts that we can determine who the individual is who posted them, Dr. Varley and the building principals have launched investigations into the claims to determine how we can hold those involved accountable and provide support to the students. She encourages anyone who has a formal complaint to file it officially or through the anonymous reporting system so that we can investigate it accordingly. Dr. Varley stated that anyone can also reach out to her directly, stating that her door is open.

Dr. Varley continued, stating that she does disagree with one statement in the petition that states that the district has “shown no sign of doing anything regarding the discriminations students face.” While she cannot speak to what was done in the past, she feels that it is very important to set this record straight as to the actions the district has taken during her tenure over the past year and a half.

Dr. Varley stated that since she was appointed Superintendent of Berkeley Heights Public Schools in July of 2019, and over the course of the summer and first semester she began evaluating the district. As part of that process, and after meeting with parents who expressed concerns regarding the treatment of students of color at GLHS, in January of 2020, she tasked a group of administrators and teachers to start holding roundtable discussions with students, hoping to begin an open conversation regarding bias, targeting, climate and culture at GLHS. There were two follow up roundtables in the spring with students at GLHS and at CMS.

In the Spring of 2020, Dr. Varley continued, she rebranded the district mission as *Include, Inspire, Empower* - with the first and most important of these being to Include - to make sure that all students felt safe and included when they came to school. These are not simple words, they strike at the heart of everything that the district does, and she has committed significant resources in a multifaceted approach to make this a reality. She has also made it one of her personal merit goals for the district, as has the administrative team.

Over the summer of 2020, a survey was provided to students and staff regarding Diversity and Social & Emotional awareness and needs. Based on the quantitative and qualitative results of both surveys, the school district initiated a world-renowned expert in multicultural awareness and the founder of ADCOLOR, Marc Strachan <https://foundation.aaaa.org/marc-strachan.html>, who presented to the entire district staff and provided a follow-up training for administration. This specific training and survey results guided the building and district level diversity and inclusion committees.

Additionally, over the summer of 2020, as the district created an educational program for the 2020-2021 school year in the face of the pandemic, we also created Diversity Committees at each grade band, as well as one at the district level. Each committee is composed of teachers, parents, BOE members and students where applicable. These committees have honest and open conversations about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) issues in the buildings, coordinate activities, discuss curriculum and instruction, and celebrate our diversity. Underneath these committees are individual action teams that are taking on special activities related to Diversity.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (continued)

All of these people have committed a great deal of time and energy to making our schools a more inclusive place.

Curricularly, we are adding a course on Race at GLHS; our Elementary schools are currently working on an LGBTQ+ curriculum that starts at 5th grade; and we are evaluating all curriculum so as to make diversity an integral part of all instructional areas. Finally, we are working to make our special education students feel more included in the regular school day.

Dr. Varley continued that the district has also committed to DEI training for the staff. At the start of the school year, the teaching staff received Implicit Bias training, and Elementary Principals have attended additional bias training. At GLHS, Mr. Nixon is partnering with a teacher to devote February to anti-bias workshops for our staff and he has met with the Student Advisory Council to work on a Handbook for Biased incidents that will also affect those members of the staff who exhibit biased behaviors.

The Board of Education has a policy #3211 which explicitly denounces bias interactions on the part of our teaching staff, and any incidents are thoroughly investigated. As we understand that students may be reticent in coming forward, Mr. Nixon has also repeatedly distributed the anonymous reporting link to the student population so that they may report any incidents within the building without fear of repercussion.

Finally, because we know that the schools do not exist in a vacuum, we have partnered with the Berkeley Heights Township Diversity Council and participated in several listening sessions. We look forward to continuing working with them to make the town a better place. We are also partnering with them in their community Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event.

All of the above would normally take multiple years to get off the ground and in place. That it was done in the past year, during which much of the time navigating a global pandemic, is an incredible accomplishment and is a testament to the dedication and professionalism of our Administrative team and teachers, and the support and hard work of the Board of Education, the community and our students. While she is proud of what has been accomplished, by no means is she satisfied. There is still much for us to do. To create change within a district it takes four things - 1- Change of hiring practices -2- Professional development -3- Strict accountability -4- Time. As frustrating as it might be, it takes time to change a culture that has been fostered for years - but we are committed to it, and with your help we hope to make BHPS a place that truly Includes, Inspires, and Empowers all of its students.

Dr. Varley concluded, stating that she wants to say, open and honestly, Hate has no home here. Berkeley Heights Public Schools is a place of Inclusion.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (continued)

Mr. Robert Nixon, Principal of GLHS, and Matthew Chin, Student Executive Board President, spoke to the changes that have been made and are ongoing at the high school. Mr. Nixon began acknowledging that it has been a challenging year. He is upset hearing the negative experiences that students have at GLHS, both past and present. He stressed that he wants students to feel safe and welcome at school; this is why they greet students as they enter the school each day. They have provided a wellness center, complete with programming, for students. We recognize the need to do more, and we need to work together as a school community and share in the responsibility of ending the hate.

Mr. Nixon added that he has had a lot of meaningful conversations with students, parents, and colleagues over the past year all with the same goal... to make things better. He has engaged the administrative team in this process, and they are working diligently to be supportive leaders and active partners in the process of change as we work to find solutions. The goal is simple while the challenge is great. We must listen, reflect, improve and be relentless in the process of providing our students with the safest possible environment while at school. He believes we have made important strides both recently, as well as over the past few years while being well aware that change doesn't happen overnight.

Not all that we are doing is evident to the community. An example is the Diversity committee at the high school, which meets monthly specifically to foster inclusion and acceptance through celebration, communication and education. This committee is made up of staff, students and community members. Additionally, student organizations that have been developed include SAGA (Sexuality and Gender Acceptance), GL Unfiltered, and Understanding Asian Cultures. SAGA provided safe zone training to staff to educate, as well as lunch and learn workshops to learn more about inclusive language and activities while providing safe zone training. The school safety teams on a monthly basis specifically on diversity training. There will be more staff and student training in February.

Mr. Nixon went on to note that known incidents have always been addressed prior to the inception of these programs; due to student privacy, what has been done to address and educate specific students that have demonstrated or been involved in activities of hate cannot be shared publicly or even with other parties involved. However, he noted that specific training modules on different aspects of diversity or hate have been used in order to educate students that have been found to be involved in negative activities. Mr. Nixon added that if ignorance, racism and discrimination is a learned behavior, then it is up to our educational institutions to work together to educate and teach our students and the entire community to be inclusive and accepting of differences.

Matthew began by sharing that he is currently a senior at GL, and the Student Council executive board president and captain of the soccer and lacrosse teams. He has also been a member of the GL student advisory board for four years.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (continued)

Matthew went on to explain that the role of the student advisory board is to represent the student body to the administration, and during their monthly meetings, they often discuss important issues within the school and work to create solutions. For example, when GL went all remote last spring, they contributed ideas as to how our schedules should be structured and discussed how classes were being adapted to the new learning environment.

The student advisory board's most recent project began in November when Mr. Nixon and the administration asked them to help draft an update to the student handbook in order to address the instances of racism and bias within GL that gained further attention because of a recent Instagram post. Matthew added that last month they were given the opportunity to suggest how the administration should go about constructing the update, and just this Friday they were able to read the first draft and give feedback. The group ensured that the update contained provisions specifically addressing incidents that occur online and on social media, where so many believe they can hide behind their screens and say whatever they want with impunity. They plan to share the update with the GL Diversity Committee in January and officially add the changes to the student handbook at the beginning of the second semester.

Matthew went on to share his personal thoughts on the issue as a student. During his four years at GL, he has seen how some students simply aren't tolerant towards the beliefs of others and aren't empathetic towards their classmates. Having said that, he added that he personally knows that most students truly are caring people and probably weren't even aware that intolerance is such a large issue at the school they attend every day. He believes that the administration is taking an important step in acknowledging that bias, racism, homophobia, and sexism are more prevalent than any of us would like to believe, and by outlining a clear procedure for dealing with those incidents he believes that the administration is moving in a positive direction.

He added that he would be lying if he said that a handbook update or simple policy changes were going to put an end to that type of behavior. He believes that some students who enter GL have preconceived notions about things like race and gender identity that are extremely difficult to change and in fact are only further reinforced by a general culture of intolerance that exists in our school and in our town. Instead of just defining expectations for students who aren't understanding of others, he'd like to think that as a school district and as a community we can work towards making sure that all of our students are empathetic and caring individuals who don't need to be reminded to behave by an update to the student handbook. Whether that comes from beginning to educate students about things like implicit bias and gender identity in elementary or middle school, or maybe from a broader shift towards a more tolerant culture in our schools and in our community, he is not sure. Matthew added that instead of focusing on only policy updates, we need to additionally ensure that our students learn to respect others without being told.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT (continued)

Mr. Nixon added that a reminder was shared with the students on Friday, reminding them that GL staff and administration are here to support them, and to please let them know how they can help. He encouraged students to reach out to a trusted teacher, counselor or administrator, and if they don't feel comfortable reporting something, to use the Hibster Anonymous Reporting System, for which he included the link in his email. He concluded stating that by working together and being kind to each other, we can all do our part to make GL a more inclusive place for all.

Return to school January 2021

Dr. Varley presented her recommendation for returning to school after the winter break. Her decisions were made based on the number of students who are currently remote at each school level, and the teachers working remotely. Based on the numbers, her recommendation is that all students will remain remote the first week of school returning from break. Students in grades 1 through 5 (including full day kindergarten) will return as per Hybrid Plan A on January 11th. Grades 6-8 will return as per Hybrid Plan B, with cohort B returning to school on January 11th. GLHS will remain remote until January 25th, at which time they will return as per Hybrid Plan B. Children in the PreK and Kindergarten programs will continue to follow the schedule they are currently using. Mrs. Gardner is looking into bringing special education students at GLHS back to school the week of June 11th as well.

CITIZENS HEARING

Mr. Reinstein opened the citizens hearing to anyone who had questions regarding the return to school recommendation.

Ms. Tina Scorzafaza, Berkeley Heights, asked the rationale for starting with cohort A, and not cohort B when returning to school, a change from the original schedule. Dr. Varley replied that because cohort B is in school this week, it would be too long from cohort A to have not been in school.

Mr. Dennis O'Connor, Berkeley Heights, asked if the return to school was metrics based. Dr. Varley replied that there has been no in-school transmission. We are trying to get our youngest students in school. We are following the CDC 10-day quarantine recommendation.

Mr. Dan McGovern, Bridgewater, teacher at GLHS and President of the BHEA, read a statement applauding the decision to move to remote learning after the break. He recommended a return date of January 19 for all schools, as the region is still in the Orange zone.

Mr. Nicholas O'Sullivan, Bridgewater, teacher at GLHS and Vice President of the BHEA, thanked the board for all of their efforts. He thanked Mr. Cassano, Dr. Crisonino and Mr. Gioia for their service to the district. He then read a statement from the elementary school teachers asking why they are returning to Hybrid Plan A as COVID cases are increasing, and the region is in the Orange zone. Plan A mixes two large groups of students together. He asked the board to come see how the rooms are set up, and the concerns the teachers have with having that many children in the classroom. He asked on the elementary school teachers' behalf that Plan B remain in effect until the COVID numbers begin to decline again.

Ms. Sai Bhargari, Berkeley Heights, asked, if the region were to go to Red Zone and schools had to close, would the school be open for special needs students to come and use the gyms. Dr. Varley replied that if the schools need to close, no students would be allowed in the building.

Mr. Michael LeBlond, Berkeley Heights, thanked the board for releasing the dashboard data. The information shows that schools are safe, and he advocates moving to Plan A as soon as possible.

Mr. Reinstein then opened up the citizens hearing to members of the public who wished to discuss other issues.

Miss Brianna Cagan, Berkeley Heights and student at GLHS, shared her experiences in school and stated that complacency is not acceptable. She has seen change at GLHS, but she begged parents to teach children kindness.

Miss Nicole Emma, Berkeley Heights and student at GLHS, is the president of SAGA, and presented ideas from the club on how the district can be more supportive. They asked the administration to connect more with the club. They have requested a gender neutral bathroom at the high school. They have asked that administration follow-up with club activities. Behavior is not reported because the students don't trust administration to handle complaints appropriately. The students feel that administrators need sensitivity training.

Miss Elizabeth Connelly, Berkeley Heights and student at GLHS, reviewed the policy regarding transgender bathrooms, and noted that nothing has been done to create gender neutral bathrooms.

Ms. Shree Mehrotra, Mountainside and a former GLHS student. She stated that we need to accept responsibility and accountability. There needs to be transparency in results of bullying incidents. Changes and education has to start at a younger age. We need community input. She asked for on-going communication.

Ms. Nirit Rottenberg, Berkeley Heights and a former GLHS student, commented that she began discussing that sex education with administration two years ago. The curriculum is a five-year cycle, but it does not seem that anything has changed. Wants to see change but has met resistance.

Mr. Tim Bitici, a former GLHS student, said he went to GL in the 1990s. There was no social media. He felt that the school back then was racist and homophobic. He has spoken to the mayor that there is no place for this in our community. Clubs and courses won't change behavior; what is the action plan? He wants a public and transparent forum.

Dr. Varley reiterated what has been done in the district, specifically training for teachers.

Mr. Jared Weisfeld, Berkeley Heights, asked when the school plans to go back to full days. Dr. Varley responded that the issue is working through lunch and individuals not having masks on while eating. Mr. Weisfeld asked if teachers will be required to get vaccinated. Dr. Varley said she will be checking with the attorney on mandating the vaccination.

Mrs. Tracy Procaccini, Berkeley Heights, staff member at GLHS and advisor to SAGA, thanked former and current students for sharing their experiences. The GLHS staff has been very supportive of SAGA events. Kids are afraid of joining the club, fearing they will be targeted. There is a need for gender neutral bathrooms and locker rooms are a concern. Senior health classes are a concern. They would like to reach out to the middle school to start a SAGA chapter at that level.

Ms. Stephanie Spano, Wharton, and elementary school teacher in the district, is concerned with moving to Plan A. Cases are increasing in the region and would like to postpone moving to Plan A.

Ms. Alyssa Giannone, Mountainside, and a former GLHS student, asked what follow-up will there be regarding changes. Dr. Varley responded that the board reports about diversity changes. We will continue to report regularly. She reiterated that she is a firm believer of inclusion, staff members will be held accountable.

Mr. Shaun Procaccini, Berkeley Heights, and former GLHS student, thanked the administration for opening up the board meeting to discuss these issues. Staff should be diversified, put marginalized people in a more prominent position. The curriculum should be changed. The district should not take credit for what the students are doing. He does not believe police belong in school. He asked for long-time commitments and regular updates. There needs to be transparency. Trust has been broken, and administrators need to rebuild that trust. They de-emphasize the role of the victim. He also thinks schools should delay re-opening.

Mr. Zach Kohn, a former GLHS student, was a teacher and is now a technology manager, said he would ask himself what culture has been allowed to develop. He noticed a lack of reflection regarding what has led to this. Dr. Varley responded that when she realized there was an issue, she immediately began working on it. She knows we need to do better.

Mr. Jace Etterman, Berkeley Heights and a former GLHS student, was SAGA president. He initiated the wellness zones. He didn't feel safe at school-he is Jewish and transgender. He felt that he was ignored. What can be done for students who were wronged in the past. Dr. Varley believes that she has apologized in her emails. She is committed to doing better. She again apologized to students, parents and the community. Ms. Reilly added that we are committed to improving the culture, and she is sorry that any student had to go through this.

Mr. LeBlond said that he has had a positive experience with administration regarding follow-up and responses. Bureaucracy is hard to change and believes the district is working hard to address issues.

Mrs. Anjali Mehrotra, Mountainside, was the former GL PTO president. Senior class is too late to address some sex education issues. The curriculum has to change to be more inclusive. We need a consent and respect based curriculum.

Ms. Allie Silverman, Berkeley Heights and a former GLHS student, is the head of inclusion and diversity at a financial institution. The district needs a top down approach. This is life altering; we need a severe plan to deal with staff.

Ms. Isha Mehrotra, Mountainside and a former GLHS student, shared there is a pattern of toxic behavior. We need accountability and transparency, and a continued focus on training. She asked for community input.

Ms. Amy Sherman, Berkeley Heights and former GLHS student, said there needs to be a mental health focus. There should be free counseling services, more than a guidance counselor.

Miss Andrea Cifelli, Berkeley Heights and student at GLHS, asked how the board plans to address the issues discussed tonight. Dr. Varley reiterated that intolerance won't be tolerated; behaviors won't be allowed to continue. We will be partnering with the town and the community. Mr. Reinstein added that we will work to provide resources to staff to deal with this. Every complaint will be acted on and investigated.

Ms. Niska Abraham, Berkeley Heights and a former GLHS student, emphasized the importance of starting programs at younger grades. Dr. Varley commented that Mrs. Kopacz is working on LGBTQ+ curriculum in the fifth grade.

Mr. Imad Haddad, Berkeley Heights, is a father to a second grader at Mountain Park. He is concerned with Plan A for the elementary schools. We haven't hit the peak yet. We saw spikes after Halloween and Thanksgiving. The hybrid option is more favorable. There have been 428 cases of in-school transmission in the state.

Miss Kailyn Escott, Berkeley Heights and a former GLHS student, commented that there are mental health issues at Columbia. She needed more help than the guidance counselors can give. All students need mental health resources.

Miss Isabelle Dimen-White, Berkeley Heights and current student at GLHS, said the environment is homophobic. The staff is not reporting incidents. Students are afraid to report incidents to staff. She agrees that these are life and death situations for students. How will students know there will be changes? Dr. Varley responded that there will be regular updates at board meetings; she reiterated that she is committed to this. Ms. Reilly added that it should be a standard agenda item, and that we should look at changing our hiring practices.

Ms. Yili Wu, Murray Hill, and a former GLHS student, said she encountered many racist remarks, and that was worse than at other places. Student newspaper articles about different topics were discouraged. We should create zero tolerance for staff for racism.

Miss Zoya To, Berkeley Heights, and a former GLHS student, thanked Dr. Varley and the board for listening. The board can't take credit for student efforts. Berkeley Heights is a homogeneous town. The schools can educate students about racism, etc., but biased training should be issued for students and staff. Increased mental health resources should be available to students.

Mr. David Urbanke, a former GLHS student, wanted to hear everyone out. He thanked everyone for listening. He started at GLHS in 2009 and left in 2011. He addressed Mr. McKinney and the administration that was there at that time. What went on at GLHS at that time is still continuing. There are life and death situations; six current faculty had horrifying stories. Mr. McKinney thanked David for sharing his story and bringing this to light. He welcomes the opportunity to speak to David one to one. We need to educate people-we can't go back. We all need to do better, including himself. He takes responsibility for his actions. Mr. Urbanke replied that he looks forward to seeing changes. He has received messages from the community, and encourages everyone to be better people. Mr. Reinstein added that suggestions are helpful. Mr. Urbanke's comments and posts will help us to do better. He truly apologizes for the actions of the district. Mr. Urbanke added that stories are still coming in. Mr. Reinstein said it is a long-term, culture-based problem, in the schools, in the community, in homes. Mr. Urbanke closed with the comment that many of the stories are about faculty.

Ms. Lucy Dawson, a former GLHS student, said it is heartening to hear about initiatives and asked if the entire curriculum is being changed. Dr. Varley reiterated that we are working on the curriculum and the entire curriculum will be changed. Training will be on-going and consistent.

Ms. Chrissy Henze, Berkeley Heights, is on the MKM PTO; she thanked Dr. Varley and the board. She thanked the students for sharing. She moved to Berkeley Heights four years ago and is appalled by the incidents. Children should not be afraid to go to school. We need more concrete plans to address these issues.

Miss Peyton Buckley, Berkeley Heights and current GLHS student added that parents and the community also need to change.

Mrs. Toya Facey and Mr. Damien Facey, Berkeley Heights, apologized to students who shared their stories. They have dealt with their own biases. She applauded the Board and Dr. Varley about meaningful progress that has been made. We need measurable goals. We are holding the Board responsible. They suggested an annual survey, change must be sustainable. And they agreed that it is a community issue, and that school is one part of it. We need to engage, have hope and trust with each other.. Mr. Reinstein stated that we have been working with the Berkeley Heights Diversity Committee. Everyone has to be held accountable-it is a community-wide challenge.

Ms. Emily Smith, Berkeley Heights, and former GLHS student, thanked everyone. She transferred out of GLHS her junior year and went to boarding school. There were incidents she recalls at CMS and GLHS. Berkeley Heights does not go outside the bubble; we have to be proactive and start early. There needs to be a concrete plan.

Miss Olga Brazhnikova, Mountainside and a current student at GLHS, commented that students and staff need to be trained differently about bullying. Changes have to be made now.

Miss Arden Zhou, Berkeley Heights and current CMS student, stated that the teacher's role is important, and shared that a teacher commented that their voices aren't always heard. Children should be taught inclusion starting at an early age, beginning in elementary school.

Mr. John Miguez, Berkeley Heights is impressed that students have shared their stories. We need to reflect and not react too quickly. We need to advocate for a 360. We need input from parents, students and community members; the culture should be open.

Mrs. Erin Biddle, Berkeley Heights, has 14, 11 and 5 year olds. On the CMS diversity committee. The principals and staff need information on what can go out to parents. Parents are not always understanding of all issues. She is a Sandy Hook Promise volunteer/employee. We need to follow through at all schools. Dr. Varley is onboard, everything is on pause due to COVID, but we need to look forward to what we can do.

Mr. Jimmy Pitingolo, Berkeley Heights and former GLHS student, we need to focus on the future. For marginalized students, we don't have resources to share stories. Administration has to foster an environment where these stories will be heard. If instances are not showing up on metrics, we are not addressing all of the things happening at school. Find homophobia, racism, xenophobia and bullying and attack it. These groups don't feel that they have a voice.

Mr. Procaccini added that for true change, we need to hand over the keys to the kingdom; we need to share the power with marginalized people. We will continue to follow this.

Ms. Liz Guzman, Berkeley Heights, shared that the teachers have been doing an amazing job. Students are doing so much in this unique environment. The first thing of this action plan that needs to be taken is a strong statement saying HIB will be investigated, and that there is zero tolerance. Incidents have to be reported, teachers have a legal obligation to report any HIB that is witnessed. A speaker who spoke to some of the clubs and students, Mr. David D'Amico, was impressive. Should be open to the entire student body. If there is any criminal activity, it should go to the police.

Mrs. Nancy Imbalzano, Berkeley Heights, thanked those who wrote letters and apologized to students that we didn't do more. We need more than healing and reconciliation, we need acknowledgement and apologies so that we can move forward. She thanked everyone for coming forward.

Mr. LeBlond added that he strongly urges the district to investigate zero tolerance if they plan to revisit it; suggested restorative justice rather than zero tolerance.

Mr. Sander Raaijmakers, Berkeley Heights, referred to Dr. Varley's remark about the vaccine. None of the vaccines have been tested on students under 12; none are approved for children under 17. It is false hope that the vaccine will be approved for children.

Mr. Reinstein commented that 44 people address the board. Students displayed a lot of courage; he is alarmed by what he read and is encouraged by what has been suggested. He is encouraged by Dr. Varley's commitment to make improvements. We need to take action.

Mrs. Penna added that as a parent, former member and PTO president, she was horrified by the posts. She was unaware of what was happening. She is committed to making change and making this a priority.

Dr. Crisonino added that he is confident with Dr. Varley, the administration and the board, this will be addressed. We need to look at ourselves-we have all engaged in hurtful behavior. We each have to own our own actions.

Mr. D'Aquila thanked everyone; it was eye-opening. He commits to keeping the conversation going. We need smart, measurable goals. We have a lot of work to do.

Mr. Gioia said he was shocked and horrified by the stories. There is a lot of work ahead of us. He apologized for missing this.

Mr. Cassano stated there are patterns in the stories-distrust of the system, futility to acting on it. The behavior of the staff and adults is surprising.

Mrs. Kirsch added that we have to move forward-each child is important. There is a commitment from the board to improve.

Ms. Reilly added that she saw and heard everyone; there is a lot of work to do.

Mr. Reinstein concluded stating that this situation should be uncomfortable for the board and administration. It is not acceptable what everyone who shared tonight had to go through.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Dr. Crisonino and seconded by Mr. Gioia that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Donna A. Felezzola
Business Administrator/Board Secretary