

WEST ORANGE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting - 7:05 p.m. – July 10, 2019
West Orange High School
51 Conforti Avenue

Minutes

I. ROLL CALL OF THE MEMBERS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Present: President Alper, Mrs. Mordecai, Mr. Robertson, Mrs. Merklinger, Mrs. Trigg-Scales

II. NOTICE OF MEETING: Please take notice that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in the following manner:

- A. That a written notice was sent from the Office of the Secretary of the Board at 4:00 p.m. on July 1, 2019.
- B. That said notice was sent by regular mail to the West Orange Township Clerk and the Editors of the West Orange Chronicle and the Star-Ledger.
- C. That said notice was posted in the lobby of the Administration Building of the Board of Education.

III. BOARD PRESIDENT STATEMENT

Ken Alper addressed the Board, District Staff and the members of the community:

“Before we get to public comment, I just want to spend a minute or two talking about the process we followed to get to tonight’s vote.

It was 6 months ago, right after our new members were seated & I was elected President, that we began discussing the superintendent search process. 5 months ago, in February, we issued an RFP for search firms. We received a half-dozen, which we narrowed to 3, interviewed those, & we hired R-Pat Solutions. Can’t say enough about the great job they did – Drs. Patterson and Rosado helped us write the ad, made sure it was well-placed, screened the resumes, recommended candidates to advance, and also facilitated our public forums and ran the survey that drew almost 1,900 responses from parents, staff, students, and community members. That survey was incredibly valuable to our decision making process, and led us straight to Dr. Cascone, who really checked off all the boxes of what our collective community was looking for, starting with teaching experience and job stability – so I thank R-Pat, again, for their tremendous help, and I also thank everyone here & in the community who took part in that process, plus all of you who emailed us, who came to meetings and forums, who stalked us in Shop Rite & at the gym – we could not have done this without your input, so, thank you.

Back to the process ... we hired R-Pat in March, and advertised the position throughout April, which is also when the survey was conducted, and then the forums were held in early May, as the posting closed. R-Pat received more than 60 resumes, all from outside the district – we had no internal applicants. Resumes came from all over New Jersey and from outside the state – it was about a 60/40 split. Using the survey and input from the forums, R-Pat recommended 7 people for initial interviews by the Board, which

we conducted in mid-May. We advanced 3 candidates to a 2nd-round interview a week later, which led to the selection of Dr. Cascone as our finalist. Board members checked references, while an outside investigative firm (Baker-Eubanks) conducted a thorough background check; then, as the process advanced, we had dinner with Dr. Cascone, visited his district in Old Bridge to see first-hand what he'd accomplished and what his colleagues had to say about him, and finally set up meetings for him with the acting superintendent and cabinet, with the whole administrative team, with the elected representatives of the administrator union and teacher union, with PTA presidents, with teachers, and with the community – leading us all, finally, six months after we as a Board first met to discuss the process, here tonight.

I want to also thank my fellow Board members for the amount of work they put in on this incredibly thorough process, including Mark and Cheryl on the PR committee, along with Perry Bashkoff and Cynthia Cummings, for everything they've done to publicize each part of this process and get the word out now about Dr. Cascone.

And last, but certainly not least, I really want to thank the staff members who stepped up to help over the past 9 months, taking on acting roles to let us keep moving forward with a minimum of disruption, including Liz Veneziano &, of course, Ms. de Mendez. Every really stepped up to the plate when we asked her to last fall, & I can't thank her enough for everything she's done. We were able to make significant progress this year on a number of longstanding initiatives, & while she was learning how to succeed in the often thankless job of acting superintendent, 2 of us were first time board members learning the ropes, and I was learning how to lead the process as president – so it was not the easiest environment to step into in an acting role. Despite that, I think we got quite a lot done in the first half of this year, and I know Ms. de Mendez is excited to be returning to her role in curriculum & instruction, and to seeing her husband again, and so I thank her again.

Welcome aboard, and I think I can say we all look forward to the beginning of the Cascone era here in West Orange. Mrs. Cascone, girls – I promise we'll do our best to still let you see him, at least on weekends."

IV. PETITIONS AND HEARINGS OF CITIZENS

VI. REPORTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. PERSONNEL

1. Resolution to approve contract for Superintendent of Schools: (Att. #1)

RESOLVED, that the Board approve a contract of employment for Dr. J. Scott Cascone, commencing July 11, 2019 through June 30, 2023, which has been reviewed and approved by the County Executive Superintendent on July 3, 2019, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7-8(j) and in compliance with the standards adopted by the Commissioner of Education at N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-3.1.

MOTION: Mr. Robertson

SECOND: Mrs. Mordecai

VOTE: 5-0 (RC)

Yes
Merklinger

Yes
Robertson

Yes
Trigg-Scales

Yes
Mordecai

Yes
Alper

VII. SUPERINTENDENT STATEMENT

Dr. J. Scott Cascone addressed the Board, District Staff and the members of the community:

"Good evening everyone, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Board of Education and

by proxy to the community of West Orange for the honor and opportunity to serve the almost 7,000 children of the West Orange School District, staff that work with them, and the families who support them at home. I can honestly say that everything about this process has impressed me. The people with whom I have interacted including the board, members of the community, faculty, and members of the administrative team have been so positive, so optimistic which gives me a sense of confidence, that this is a community that is truly looking to move forward. I have also seen in the process, a board that fully understood the gravity and the critical nature of the task that they were managing. It is always a critical task but particularly so at this time in West Orange's path and I recognize the gravity, I recognize what is at stake in this Administration. So one might think, what gives one the will, the confidence to step into a situation with so much at stake, and I think it is exactly that, it is exactly the nature of this community. Ultimately, there are 7000 children and probably close to 1,000 staff members who need a leader. In the public sessions, we talked about the idea of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s words, "ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." I think that we need to rediscover that idea of service and we have to stop living in fear. There's a lot of fear nowadays, what are we afraid of? If we come together as a community, we can overcome anything.

I would also like to thank Mrs. de Mendez, she's been wonderful in the last several weeks in working with me through some of these preliminary meetings and providing valuable information. I have to thank my family who are here tonight, my Mom and Dad, Norma and John Cascone, my wife Diana and daughters Gabriella, Nora, and Sofia. This will certainly stand out in my life as a milestone, and I am thrilled and blessed to have them here tonight to experience it. Their presence tonight is also symbolic and is really a message to the community that behind every successful person there is a support network of people who are helping them and sometimes even having difficult conversations or disciplining them. This community is certainly no different and I honestly believe that parents are doing their level best. We as a school district certainly can continue to do more to support parents to be that support at home that their children need as well as supporting our teachers.

Finally, there is the symbolism of bringing families together, this idea of bringing Dr. Cascone the educator, the educational leader; but also Dr. Cascone the father, the son, the brother. We also talked about this idea of bringing back the human element of our interactions. Surely, when one looks at the larger national discourse, it's easy to see that perhaps humanity has been lost, let's bring it back. Let's realize that at the end of the day, we may have jobs to do, but we are people, and have to interact as human beings with feelings and emotions and backgrounds of which to be aware. So once again, thank you, and I look forward to the days ahead."

VIII. ADJOURNMENT AT 7:20 p.m.

MOTION: Mrs. Trigg-Scales

SECOND: Mr. Robertson

VOTE: 5-0 (VV)

Respectfully submitted,

John Calavano, Board Secretary