MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING OF THE RIDGEWOOD BOARD OF EDUCATION

Minutes of the Ridgewood Board of Education Regular Public Meeting held on Monday, May 4, 2026 at 7:00 pm.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 7:00 p.m. Ms. Brogan called the meeting to order with a roll call.

Present:
Ms. Sheila Brogan, President
Mr. Muhammad Mahmoud, Vice President
Mr. Saurabh Dani *(arrived after roll call)*
Ms. Mary Micale
Ms. Mary Louise Handy

Also Present:
Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Michelle Fenwick, Assistant Superintendent
Ms. Jaime Cangialosi-Murphy, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Richard Matthews, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

II. FLAG SALUTE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Brogan led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance**.**

III. OPENING STATEMENT BY PRESIDING OFFICER

Ms. Brogan announced that pursuant to the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA), advance notice of this meeting had been given to The Star Ledger, The Record, and the Clerk of the Village of Ridgewood. In addition, notices were posted in the office of the Board Secretary and in all school buildings.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no public comments.

V. PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2026-2027 BUDGET

A. FINAL BUDGET UPDATE

- Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
- Richard Matthews, Business Administrator/Board Secretary

- Dr. Schwarz and Mr. Matthews presented the final budget presentation.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 5/4/2026 starting at 00:17:47.

B. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON THE 2026-2027 BUDGET

Danny Tomay, commended the ladies of ITDC, when his three year old starting going to ITDC she had anxiety from a previous center, to the point she would hold her breath and faint, it was the scariest moments of his life. Since she came to ITDC for a year, she wants to go to school. I never thought I would see that, we value them very much. The W-9 bus route is hazardous, he bikes it, walks it. Just two days ago, there was a power outage and the lights were off and we were driving home from a party and it was pandemonium for a little bit. You have to cross Glen ave to oak, doing that is dangerous. There are cars zipping up and down, no one is paying attention. Going towards the train to hohokus, it is a busy station, 60 miles per hour that you can pass through, to stay on the sidewalk you have to cross the tracks on the let and the hill gets very steep. Commented on money for branding and social media, our enrollment numbers are down and it seems a little short sided. Tennis courts for asbestos, these things are coming at a cost of safety and it feels dangerous. We are asking that you provide safe access to quality education.

Matt Misella, w-9 route currently being considered to be discontinued. Stating that although they are in the 2 miles they have received this status for 27 years due to the hazards that walking would expose the children to, he has made the board aware in emails about the routes, all of the families north of maple ave will be affected. One route involves crossing an active train track. The other route is a bit longer and requires crossing Glen twice. You are required by state law to take hazardous routes into account, not just mileage and to determine a safe, diligent way. THe stretch of glen Ave had provided testimony to the Ridgewood Police in September of 2024. THis was based off of a traffic study by the county because Glenn Ave is a county road, as is Maple. Both major arteries and they detailed the hazards including high accident rates, high volumes of cars, speeds over 40 miles per avenue, this is a hazardous route as stated by the Ridgewood PD. This is the exact intent and the purpose of the walking route laws by the state to take into account distance and hazardous. Our children should not be expected to take these routes to school. This is not about my family and kids, it is about my neighbors current and in the future. Here for the safety of the kids. Once the bus service is gone, it is not coming back. Wants to make sure that you look at the big picture and prioritizing safety. A single pedestrian accident outweighs the budget.

Susan Madison, Echo the concerns about having children walk from the undercliff area to Willard School. Glen Ave is a very dangerous road and is not a road that elementary school children should be crossing two times, it is not just distance it is hazardous conditions. It is not right. We talk about being an equitable district, to put the burden on 300 kids is not right, you either put it across all the taxpayers or you put it across all the students. If you are looking at creative ways to raise money you could increase what you charge the football team or the band. Ask yourselves, would you want your children to do that? If not, you have to change this. It is not safe and it is the most important thing we can do for our kids.

Vanessa Misella, talking about the plan that you are proposing, when did our kids courtesy busing related to safety and hazardous. On one of the slides, you refer to it as complimentary, and she felt that you are almost making it as a favor to us instead of for safety when this was initially implemented 30 years ago due to being a hazardous route. When did their courtesy busing along Glen Ave in Hohokus Station become a non-essential item for the budget discussions? She gets renegotiating vendor contracts from 25 years ago, but you can't negotiate the kids safety into the budget when no mitigations have been placed on these routes. What you call a subscription plan and what she is currently hearing will be $1,600 per

kid. What if a family has 4 kids? That's $6,400 just for their kids to go to school. Moving to a subscription busing model is not a solution, it is a fundamental portrayal of the district's duty to ur children. By offering a subscription payment plan for a known hazardous route, the district effectively acknowledges that the walk is dangerous while refusing to protect the safety. This is an unacceptable pay to play system for child safety. If the district is clearly shown that a route is hazardous, but only provides bus for those who can afford it, the district is also knowingly placing students in harm's way based on a family's income. She encourages the board to maintain a non-subscription hazardous route courtesy busing for the children of neighborhood. Safety is a right of every child in Ridgewood not a subscription service.

Kevin Iula, if you speak amongst yourself and think about what kind of legacy you want to leave, if it is having children walk around hazardous streets, where people are in a mad rush. Do you want to leave a legacy of having kids, years after you are gone, scattered around the most dangerous streets while people are not paying attention? God forbid, anything happens to those children, they will look at this board and say this is the board of education that allowed children to be on the streets where people are not paying attention and barreling down hills, Are you going to vote on that? Even just having this as an open vote is an insult and abhorrent to the people who live on that street. We are all here and can't believe that this is even being raised as a decision to raise money, it makes no sense, there have to be other ways to do it. Why would you want to put children on the street? It is an abominable decision that can only lead to disaster. There are no children that should be running and scattered around on the roads trying to get to school. There are blind spots, cars that are skipping over , we see it every day trying to get to Glen from the side streets and they can't even turn.

Esther Kim, it has been 50 days since Dr. Schwarz presented the IDC's classroom closures as a bullet point in the budget presentation, 50 days since ITDS staff and families found out through word of mouth that teachers would be losing jobs, families would be losing child care despite having paid deposits. As we await possible relocation, pending and collaborative are words being thrown around and held over our heads, creating false hope and putting teachers jobs at risk and families with young infants in limbo. Timeline is critical as enrollment for fall is around the corner. There is no clear intended timeline to share. We were so encouraged to see the incredible Ridgewood wrestling community speak about Coach Franklin last time. If 75 infants and toddlers could come and speak on behalf of protecting their school and teachers, the public comment would be five hours long. We have over 500 si signatures on a public petition urging the district to reevaluate classroom allocations at the Glen School to find a phased approach to the fall 26 school year that protects IEP students, generates future revenue as well as maintain our current profitable ITDC infrastructure. The devil is in the details and throughout this process there have been a lack of command of the details. What defines hazardous bus routes? What constitutes a redundant teaching position? What is the average revenue of a classroom you're planning to shut down? These are objective definitions and calculations that can be shared and are being gatekept by the Superintendent's office. She publicly holds the board to hold the superintendent's office accountable for the details of these decisions. For her communications with Dr. Fenwick and Dr. Schwarz, ITDC as we know it will cease to exist unless the Board can step in to preserve this 43 year old institution for one more school year. The power is in your hands. Given that it is teacher appreciation week and our ITDC staff have been faced with uncertainty and an unclear future, she would like to take this time to honor their incredible contributions to the RIdgewood Community. To the teachers, thank you for caring for the littlest ones in

Ridgewood, sometimes as young as four weeks old, as parents returning to the workforce the first days are daunting, but you provide peace of mind, guidance and grace as young families grow into their own rhythm. To the toddler class teachers, Miss Carrie, Jennifer, Brandy, Shelly and Chrissy. Thank you for embracing our toddler's big feelings as they explore. Thank you for turning the terrible twos into terrific twos. We're thankful for the patience and enthusiasm you show each child as they develop communication and social skills that will last beyond the classroom. To the three;s teachers Miss Don, Anna, Jessica and Stephanie, thank you for letting our three year olds build curiosity and community. You've created a space Where learning happens through talk, play and shared experiences. These tiny friends are four years into their friendships and they navigate conflict and resolution with a kindness first mentality. To the four teachers Ms. Marian, Maya and Cheryl, thank your or guiding our children to be confident, independent as they prepare for the big world of kindergarten. Your dedication sets them up for success with a sense of responsibility and love for learning that carries them into their future schooling years. To all of our high school staff, thank you for investing your time to give back to the community's littlest ones. To our director, Lisa Kontos, Admin, Linda Pisani and all the aids and custodians, you built ITDC into this community of educators, family and friends. Behind the scenes you kept the ship going, empowered parents and our tiny voices. To the ITDC staff thank you for the handprint you have left on these children's hears for the past 40 years. The ITDC legacy that this current list of educators has built will not disappear with a building change or classroom cuts but will live on in our children and our families. Thank you for giving so selflessly, hopes that these four minutes have given you the dignity your deserve in this moment of uncertainty. She trusts the board will influence a mutually beneficial, fiscally responsible way forward and do right by all families in this upcoming school year.

Monica Iula, Any of you will pay $1,600 to bus your children to school? If I have 3, 2, 1 children, we are medium class families and don't have $1,600 to pay per child. Will you send your children walking up North maple and Glen or crossing the train tracks in HoHOKus? I want to see each of you in your eyes and see with those questions in your heart, will you do it? I guarantee you will not, and you will not pay $1,600 either. I hear talking about tennis courts, about concealed floors with asbestos, She works in an old hospital with asbestos everywhere and she gets to say nothing because there are priorities. You're priorities are the safety of our children not the tennis courts, the asbestos. It is the safety of our children, this is not excellence. If you're caught in busing and charging and passing the bucket to the rest of us, this is not excellence. Let's not pat ourselves on the back and say we are a tradition of excellence, if we cannot balance the budget and provide the families of Ridgewood. Excellence is when you provide the budget and are able to balance it. It has been provided in the last 20 years. What has happened? What is different? Nothing has changed. THe only thing changed is you have cars running 50, 60, 80 miles per hour. It has changed that there are more cars than we had 20 years ago, it has changed that now we have four cars, that my neighbors have more children than they used to have. That has changed. How is it that the road was hazardous 20 years ago and not it is not all of a sudden. This is not rocket science, we are playing with the safety of our children.

Bonita Shimppfky, it is $19,000 for the rebranding, she does not care if it is 1% or 9% of the rebranding. If we have to pay a third party vendor to create a social awareness to drive attractiveness of our district hire employees, then she calls that a failure of our personnel and head of HR. There was somebody who was speaking and you can't see who was speaking

and saying something about needing a captain driving and steering the ship. She completely agrees with that, we need administrative position but there's a difference between having one captain and having one captain with multiple co-captains. She was looking at the headcount analysis slides, on the second bullet point it says instructional personnel. Some curricular personnel have offices at the Ed Center due to space limitations at the schools, but not generally considered central office personnel. What are those personnels? Is that inclusive of the new assistant superintendent roles that you've added, since you've taken on the role of Superintendent? Is that inclusive of their confidential administrative assistants that started of which, one started in August of 2024 and another started in October 2024 and we had the latest one who started in December 2024. When she looks at the headcount analysis of going from 30 to 31 to 32. The percentage of headcount goes from 3.92% down to 3.86% of your total headcount, for some reason your salary upticks 400 grand. It goes from 4.47% to 4.9%. What accounts for that? If you are taking that 400 grand and dividing that by 30, let's just assume that it's some sort of promotion, it's $13,000 per person. The number is not matching for her. Of the 17 FTE, 88% is teaching staff of which 2 are admin positions. When you look at the boxes of your org chart that you presented in October 2024, which you stated specifically at the Board of Ed meeting that you were honored that your previous predecessors wanted to do a lot of the work and you certainly were not up for the job, so you decided to put more boxes under you, we went from seven boxes to ten boxes of direct reports to you,. S he is not understanding the headcount analysis, the numbers don't add up, neither does the salary. What fall under the instructional personnel bullet point? You had specified what the teaching staff impact is, but you have disclosed what the impact is to class sizes. Is that something that you ever plan to share with the community that you represent? Or do you plan to bypass that question?

Natalia, agrees with Bonita and every point she made, on the position efficiency and reduction side we are looking at 17 total reductions with two at the education center, while over 9 of them are coming from the high school alone. At the same time, the district's own staffing report which she pulled separately last week shows general administration increasing from two to six positions. The central services at 38 positions, both part of administrative structure and even now as we are cutting classroom roles, instructional staff has been flat over time. She was pulling data separately because this did not make sense, it was fitting your message, it wasn't making sense. The classrooms are where the cuts are concentrated. In at least one case, we are seeing a subject area position is eliminated while a similar role is being posted for next year, which is difficult to reconcile from both the staffing and process standpoint. This is a teacher who has been highly regarded by both students in the classroom and student athletes he coaches. When she looks at the headcount analysis presented it shows about 3 0 education center administrative roles, that specifically excludes other administrative categories and areas like community school and certain central management positions which she thinks is essential to look at the whole picture, not taking certain items out of context to fit your agenda,. Are decisions about reductions being made on the full administrative structure including general administration, central services and related functions or only the narrower education center subset shown here? It does not appear to be about efficiencies, its about where we are choosing to make reductions. Why are the classrooms are absorbing most of the impact while administrative roles have been grown, especially while asking the community to absorb a 4% tax increase? She is looking forward to hearing the answers. What are the students going to feel. They feel since the new Superintendent joined, we've seen an increase in the number of his direct reports and

administrative staff that come with it. Are we shifting the responsibilities assigned to a superintendent to his multiple assistants that coming at a significant cost. That's probably where the half a million is heading, some of the extra help we are hiring to shift the responsibilities to other people.

Jen Williams, resides in the Ridge area and will likely be losing courtesy busing, they have collectively put forth research, data and reference to state laws and safety considerations that we possibly can, we have given you all the logical please that they can, ask that you honor that they are looking into the faces of the youngest and most vulnerable children and we really can't promise them safe passage to school. It may be just semantics and have only hit her in the heart, but tonight to hear busing reframed not as a reduction in cost but to hear it pulled over as a line item to consider it as a revenue stream is appalling and distasteful. Agrees with the gentleman who said that this makes it seem like you are putting aside the safety of the children for profit. That was a disappointing way to hear that framed up. It is additionally frustrating that while you are hearing these pleas for safety and for our children to be able to have that access to public education, what we are not hearing is any additional consideration for ways to make the routes safer. This is the moment for the ultimate yes and we should have busing at a cost that does not hit individual households and the routes should be safer for walking. In their case, they have to cross the entire central business district and do not hit a crossing guard until 1.1 miles into their 1.4 mile walk. They want to be responsible citizens and community members and asking that the safety of the children not be put for sale.

Cynthia O'Keefe, the world is aware that health care costs have gone up. The other considerations are quite disappointing. When she listens to the people who have spoken, she is in shock that busing is a consideration, given that the roads are not safe. During parts of the year there is daylight savings when it is dark out when children are walking home, there is the e-bike situation where parents may be looking to give their children e=bikes to get back and forth to school, another danger that we don't want to go down that road. These are uncomfortable situations for people who care about their children and their livelihood. The fact that there are still so many unanswered questions is concerning. She does not hear a lot of tires being kicked by the board, there is usually one or two people who are asking the critical questions, maybe this is done behind the scenes. Is there benchmarking done in terms of staff size and the admin positions. Maybe you can benchmark with other municipalities and how they are using roles given how many children there are in the school system. Last year, $80,000 was given to the village, and Ms. Brogan you referenced that you may be looking at the Village for help, but a lot of these maintenance issues like the tennis courts and other things is not new. Giving the Village $80,000 for lights on Vets field, while some people thought that was a great idea and important, it seemed like a heck of a lot of money that could have been spent on other things that could have been fixed. Going back to the drawing board and when thinking of a decision to give the Village money, there may be other ways to spend it that are more effective and essential than lights on a field. The Glen school makes her sad and hopes there could be better solutions.

Peter Maltin, For administration and the board to discuss and decide directionality and where we are going as a district. In terms of the busing, maybe the expectation is that the parents will drive the children, this is an high financial increase for a specific group of people in an area and would not be surprised if that community doesn't come after things and say this is

not something we should be charged since it is hazardous. This is a tax on those people and it will affect their property values, Instead of the tax increase going from 3.4% to 4% and it will cost you another $50, to the community that is the right thing so kids are safe. We don't want a blemish on our town.

Dmitri Lechtchinski, deep concerns about the elimination of the courtesy busing on the W9 routes. As you've heard, the RPD traffic study shows traffic extremely high, traffic comes down the hill at 40 miles per hour and the intersection of Glenn and Oak has crashes on a regular basis. He lives half a block from there and hears them from his house. 40 miles per hour is a number we've grown accustomed to, but it's not a trivial number, if you look at the actual pedestrian safety statistics, a person hit by a car at 20 miles per hour has a 95% survival rate and someone hit a 40 miles as a 9% survival rate. This is dangerous for kids to cross the street twice. Urges the board to find another way, the 4% increase seems to be an arbitrary number that was picked and things were then cut to meet that number rather than actually what should be kept in the budget. Please do the right thing for the safety of the children who live in the neighborhood.

Courtney Tomai, God forbid if this gets passed who will be personally liable if one of our kids gets hurt or if something awful happens to them and they don't come back. We should not be making this decision, you are putting us in a bad spot. If you can account for expenses for a future fiscal, and you know there will be a tax increase, why can't you account for busing and address it next year.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 5/4/2026 starting at 01:49:30.

Dr. Schwarz acknowledged and commented on public comments and a discussion with the Board ensued.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 5/4/2026 starting at 02:38:21.

C. CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2026-2027 BUDGET

Ms. Brogan closed the public hearing.

VI. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

There was no superintendent report.

VII. CONSENT ITEMS: REGULAR AND ROUTINE ISSUES

A. ADMINISTRATION

i. Approval: Receipt of Suspensions and Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) Reports

The Ridgewood Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools approves the recommendation of the findings of the suspensions and confidential HIB reports received since the last Board meeting.

MOTION by: Ms. Brogan **SECOND** by: Ms. Micale
ROLL CALL
AYES: Mr. Dani, Ms. Handy, Ms. Micale, Mr. Mahmoud, Ms. Brogan
NAYS: none

VIII. RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS NOT INCLUDED IN CONSENT AGENDA D

A. Approval: Adoption of the 2026-2027 Final Budget as approved by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools

WHEREAS, the Ridgewood Board of Education adopted a Tentative 2026-2027 Budget on **March 23, 2026**, and submitted it to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval, and

WHEREAS, the Tentative Budget was approved by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools on **April 13, 2026**, and

WHEREAS, the Tentative Budget was advertised in *Bergen Record* on **April 19, 2026**, and

WHEREAS, the Final 2026-2027 Budget was presented to the public during a hearing held in the Board of Education Administrative Offices at 49 Cottage Place, Ridgewood, NJ, on **May 4, 2026**, and

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Ridgewood Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approves the Final 2026-2027 Budget with the following fund allocations:

	General Fund	Special Revenue**	Debt Service***	Total
2026-2027 Total Expenditures	$135,550,209	$2,462,081	$3,163,450	$141,175,740
Less: Anticipated Revenues*	($23,862,331)	($2,462,081)	($137,476)	($26,461,888)
Taxes to be Raised	$111,687,878	$0	$3,025,974	$114,713,852

*"Anticipated Revenues" include tuition, fees, interest, reserve withdrawals, federal and state aid, and other revenues
**"Special Revenue" includes student activities, scholarships, and grants
***"Debt Service" relates to payments on facilities improvement bonds that were approved in prior years; anticipated revenues under debt service shows the state's contribution to district debt service.

MOTION by: Ms. Brogan **SECOND** by: Mr. Mahmoud
ROLL CALL
AYES: Mr. Dani, Ms. Handy, Ms. Micale, Mr. Mahmoud, Ms. Brogan
NAYS: none

Mr. Dani requested his comment be added to the minutes:
1. He has some concerns about our ability to generate assumed revenue with the Glen School Program. He's concerned that we are going to increase expenses at Glen School more than our ability to generate revenue there.
2. He is concerned about some of the hazardous routes and how that selection process worked out.
3. He has concerns about the ratio of the recurring expense increase for extracurricular versus the curricular activities.
4. Not voting today for the facilities projects prioritized in this budget and he's hoping that he'll get to vote on them individually when it is time to award the contracts for each of those projects.
His vote today is for setting the tax levy for property taxes which is a 4% increase from last year's property tax levy, and for that he is voting yes.

IX. BOARD MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Dani announced:
- It is very good to be involved in your schools, based on public comments there were changes to the original budget. The next election for the Board is in November, the deadline for filing the applications is the end of July.

Ms. Micale announced:
- We hear all of you and we understand the concerns.

Dr. Schwarz announced:
- Thank you to everyone who came out to the meetings
- Thanked the teachers in the district - it is Teacher Appreciation Week.
- Congratulations to Ms. Jaime Cangialosi-Murphy, who has been named the incoming Superintendent of the Lakeland Regional School District, effective July 1, 2026.
- Congratulations to Assistant Principal Ms. Danielle Wood on her appointment as the incoming Principal of Mahwah High School.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 5/4/2026 starting at 03:10:27 .

X. DISCUSSION ITEMS
None

XI. OTHER BUSINESS
None

XII. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Laura Grasso, thanked the board and Dr. Schwarz for all of the work put into this budget. It is a challenging time and very difficult decisions have to be made, it is refreshing to know that we can continue to work together collectively to try and find solutions and although nobody wants to see the cuts, but she believes that the job that you all did to make it as minimal as possible has to be recognized. It is her hope that just like Bobby was able to come back, she hopes that it can happen to all of the other teachers who were eliminated due to the economy. She hopes it is

something that the board and administration can work towards. Thank you for all of the continued work with the REA.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 5/4/2026 starting at 03:26:41.

XIII. MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION
N/A

XIV. RECONVENED PUBLIC MEETING
N/A

XV. ADJOURNMENT
MOTION by: Ms. Brogan **SECOND** by: Mr. Mahmoud
VOICE VOTE:
Ms. Brogan, Mr. Dani, Ms. Micale, Mr. Dani, Mr, Mahmoud - ALL AYES

- The Regular Public Meeting was adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Richard Matthews
Business Administrator/Board Secretary