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

September 14, 2026

Minutes of the Ridgewood Board of Education Special Public Meeting held on Monday, September 14, 2026 at 7:00 pm.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

At 6:01 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
Ms. Mary Louise Handy *(arrived during executive session)*
Ms. Mary Micale

Also Present:
Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Michelle Fenwick, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Absent: Mr. Richard Matthews, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary

II. MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION

Whereas the Ridgewood Board of Education seeks to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 to discuss matters pertaining to Legal Matters**.** The minutes of this closed session will be released when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

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

RECONVENED PUBLIC MEETING
At 7:08 p.m. Ms. Brogan called the meeting to order and moved the resolution to appoint Dr. Schwarz the Pro Tempore Board Secretary in Mr. Matthews absence.

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

Roll Call
Present:
Ms. Sheila Brogan, President
Mr. Muhammad Mahmoud, Vice President
Mr. Saurabh Dani

Ms. Mary Louise Handy
Ms. Mary Micale

Also Present:
Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Michelle Fenwick, Assistant Superintendent
Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Absent: Mr. Richard Matthews, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary

Visitors: Approximately 6 community members were present in-person and/or virtually.

III. FLAG SALUTE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

IV. OPENING STATEMENT BY PRESIDING OFFICER

Ms. Brogan announced that the Ridgewood Board of Education has been meeting in Executive Session pursuant to NJSA:12. The minutes from this meeting will be released when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

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.

Ms. Brogan announced that the meeting order will be slightly changed, the discussion item listed on the agenda will be moved before the presentations. After the comments from the public presentation B. 2025 Testing Results will be first and then the State of the Schools.

V. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

John Frye, it is a challenging period of time with the fields and appreciates that you are trying to resolve that as quickly as we can for the fall. He is looking at a long term story, we have a lot of issues with flooding which none of us can control with Mother Nature, if somebody can figure that out, please step forward. He understands there are a lot of restrictions as far as how the river can be adjusted, as far as dredging and those types of things. He has lived here in town and went to the school in the 0970's, his parents went to the schools in the 1920's and this was their auditorium at that time. One of the things he has seen is that the field has flooded forever, this is not something new. Our houses have been flooding on Irving Street at different times, usually from major storms. It is more frequent than it has been in the past and concerned how we can make this work for everybody. As neighbors, that's an aspect of it. The students, that's an aspect of it - they are there for a short time. His home, his family has been in it for over 100 years, so he's seen the progression of things. Ask sincerely to engage the neighbors, environmental engineers, it is critical as it moves forward. The weather pattern has changed and documented and officially accepted. He would like to see community groups being able to come together, all of us come into the room with the engineers, with the people and make some real thoughts about this. We always invite you to come walk our yards and see first hand what's happening. He knows that the cameras are there, it is a daily problem for them and it is affecting the fields during prime season. We need to work closely with the town, there seems to

be an interesting challenge. When he talks to the town they say it's the board of education and he hasn't talked to you before. He accepts the fact that you're willing to talk to the town and the engineers, but we really all have to come together and figure out a solution. It is not a short term solution, we have to be thinking about next year, 5 years, 10 years and 30 years out.

Cynthia Fitzgerald, lifelong Ridgewood resident, lives over on North Irving where it floods continually and it has been worsened by the turf fields. In 2008 when the turf fields were first suggested, the neighborhoods got together and explained to the Board of Education that it was a bad idea. The fields flood all the time and it will not be an inexpensive solution to the flooding there. She has played on the grass fields, four varsity letters, never been a problem, never had the fields closed down. At some point from 2008 to 2026 there is a consensus that turf fields od not belong in a flood zone, and as her neighbor John said we have to come up with a solution for that and it may be a hybrid. It may be that we recognize Stadium field has to remain turf because it is iconic now. There are lights there and we do something different for Stevens. What she would like is that the Board of Education starts listening to the neighbors who've lived there for 40 years plus and listen about the problems the artificial turf has caused to their homes, their neighbors, their quality of life. We have spent $35,000 in flood remediation that really didn't work. That's how serious it is. Rather than having sports people and the Board of Education coming up with this wonderful idea of a beautiful turf field, she's like engineers to be involved, not municipal engineers. Engineers who actually understand how to build in a flood zone, along with the neighbors who have watched this for over 40 years. She's been keeping records since Floyd of the flooding and it's changing. The amount of rain that it takes to flood their yards has decreased significantly, especially over the last five years. According to her records and maybe she is not correct, it takes 1.79 inches of rain to flood. She has that information available. You have enormous resources in this town, you have engineers, people who have lived by the brook, by the Saddle River. Go to them and ask for their help and input.

Pam Welch, lives on Marshal street. Reinforcing what has been said by John and Cynthia. She's been rescued from her house in at least four hurricanes where she has water up to her knees in the front of her house. She has flood insurance and has had to replace washer, dryer, hot water heater, any of the electrical stuff in the basement. During those times she has had to rip out the dry wall, the wood molding and sterilize all of the concrete in the basement. We keep talking about the gmax testing and the shock for the students, she is wondering if there
Are issues with mold and bacteria that is underneath the soil because the flood waters that come into her house, there is sewer water and it is quite a task to leech the whole basement. She has sent a couple of notes to Dr. Schwarz and Christine, she has not gotten a response on that, she thinks it depends on the turf. She would like to be sure for the students we are safe, because we have seen with Schindler we've had soil remediation, town garage we've had soil remediation. She is a little worried, we've had at least 4-5 years of flooding on our turf. Four of seven years, it is a pretty bad failure to have to rebuild the turf, clean. It is a costly business. She recommended whatever engineering we can do, the town has started with the two million dollar grant with other towns that we are hoping to get. But again it is a two year project. So nothing will go fast. At least we are making progress. She is hoping that we are leaning towards grass, but there may be some other options. Since we had meetings before with the Army Corp of Engineers, we can't move the bridge up, we can't change the river, we have to be concerned about our neighbors down stream and this last rain she can't even imagine what is happening down stream, For her house did not receive anything and it does not make sense. She is looking forward to being kept in the loop. There are about 50 houses where you can contact

some key people. She is retired and can help in gathering people and ideas.

Sean Sweeney, thank you for holding this meeting tonight. We were told the insurance deductible from the previous field remediation has been met. Does the damage from this recent storm reset the clock on that? Or will it fall under the same insurance claim and deductible. Glen Rock has experienced about the same rainfall that we did at about the same rate that we did, it was 4.5 to 5 inches of rain in a short period of time but somehow they were playing soccer Sunday afternoon and getting clarity on how that happened. Before this storm there were numerous bags of what looked like infill staged along the field near HoHoKus Brook, was there any damage to those bags during the flooding? Did any of that run into the Brook? Has the district inspected them and determined whether the material is still suitable for installation? If not, what's the plan for that? We are now at the point where we can stop calling them 50 year, 100 year generational floods, this was just a Sunday basically. We keep flooding, cleaning it up, we keep fixing the fields and talking about insurance claims and deductibles, but we are not talking about the remedy. As the first speaker mentioned, we can't control nature. We can only hope to keep up, but we are not keeping up. We are falling behind and throwing money down the drain over and over again, while cutting clubs, cutting AP classes, cutting educators, cutting staff members, cut, cut, cut but dump money into a field that has to be replaced every time it rains. On Sunday he was out there walking in the area in the pouring rain trying to document what was happening in real time. He was also there on Saturday, a beautiful afternoon everything was nice and calm. Got some really nice pictures there too. Subsequently put that information into a package to the Village council and the Board of Ed. It was not just an email complaining about the flooding. He took the time to document the conditions, organize what he put together, he ran it through Chatgpt because he's not a genius, he put forward the information and potential responses for consideration. He's asking the Board and the Village council to please respond that you got that email. It took the entire weekend to do it. Even if you Disagree with some of what he proposes, let's have the conversation. Tell him what is feasible, what's not feasible, what's already been studied, what deserves further investigation. He wants to be clear about accountability. While most will blame you, he doesn't blame you for the decisions made by past boards of ed. The decisions aren't yours, but the decisions you've made since are. You inherited this problem, what you choose to do with it now is your responsibility. We're the ones footing the bill. We don't just want to get talking points and bullet points from the Board on a monthly basis. They want engagement. They want to know the nitty gritty of the discussions that are being held in the short term and the long term. We can't keep doing this. Whether it's installing a better draining system or a safer drainage system, getting rid of turf, or putting grass down or just playing in the mud, something has to happen and it's not just the board of ed that's going to be responsible for this. The village council's got to take a brunt of this project to find out what we can do to stop this from happening. It's not a 100 year flood anymore, these are happening eight and ten times per year, it is unsustainable.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 9/14/26 starting at 00:17:56.

Dr. Schwarz responded to public comments.

- View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 9/14/26 starting at 00:36:47.

Additional Public Comments
Bill Pilla, in terms of the Board of Education, he's glad that the other caller did say that there some responsibility with you guys, we appreciate you and know that this is a position that is not a paid position, you are a volunteer, but there are things that you are bound to do, and one of those is to hold the school system accountable. We have a lot of residents that go back and forth with the Village Council and what is the Village doing, to him it is a school District issues. He knows that we work together but it is a responsibility of the school district. What is the big picture direction? That's something that has to come from you guys to Dr. Schwarz and his team. You know what your responsibilities are when you were sworn in. You have oversight of our budget, the Superintendent answers to the board of education. He is accountable to you guys. What is going to be the big picture plan? He keeps hearing about all fo this stuff within the floodplain. What's the definition of insanity at this point, if you keep doing the same thing over an over and the same results keep happening. The fact that we are not talking more about some of our other properties that could hold these fields, you will be heroes to this community. We will have what the sports people want where they have their stadium, their games where their children play and they don't lose their games in their senior years, which is so vital to them and so important to them. You will not have the people who speak on behalf of the community who keep continuously getting flooded and they're thinking it's because of the turf fields. Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Somerville, they are nice big flat properties. I know people are saying - we have sources within the school district. Is he not to believe that we have not done any construction in the school district? He knows you did GW. We did a very big construction project at GW a few years back, we had engineers and all these different groups that we pay. His thought is that we should be planning something for the next budget so that we can have a referendum and put it to the school district vote. We can have a referendum to have these fields to be here and we don't have to worry about what we do with the stadium and Stevens anymore. Why aren't we talking about that more? Why aren't they talking about it more and that's vitally important?

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 9/14/26 starting at 00:43:39.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- ➢ Discussion and Possible Action: AP Self- Study Amendment

Ms. Jennifer Perry, K12 District Director of School Counseling and Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum and Instruction provided information and answered board questions regarding the decision to discontinue the option for students to participate in self-study and be assessed on the AP exam that they've self-selected into at the end of the school year.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 9/14/26 starting at 00:49:18.

Mr. Dani made the following motion:
Approval: Be it resolved that the Ridgewood Board of Education for the 2026-27 school year has determined that the Ridgewood Public Schools through Ridgewood High School would offer AP self-study in accordance with the offering provided in the 2024-25 school year.
MOTION by: Mr. Dani **SECOND** by: Mr. Mahmoud
ROLL CALL
AYES: Mr. Dani, Ms. Handy, Ms. Micale, Mr. Mahmoud, Ms. Brogan
NAYS: none

The discussion regarding the limit of five AP courses will be continued at a Curriculum Committee meeting.

Eli Dela Torre provided comments regarding donations to support Ridgewood High School clubs.

- Dr. Schwarz responded to the comments and stated on the record that when they agreed to the proposed cuts, because everyone had to come up with ways to cut, that there was not going to be any kind of removal of clubs that were healthy and well attended. As long as the end of year club reports are strong, we will fund the clubs next year.

- View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE Meeting 9/14/26 starting at 02:21:19.

VI. PRESENTATIONS

A. 2025 Testing Results: NJ Graduation Proficiency Assessment (GPA)

➢ Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
➢ Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Mr. Ross provided an overview of the NJGPA testing results.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE meeting 9/14/26 starting at 02:27:35.

B. State of the Schools

➢ Dr. Mark Schwarz, Superintendent of Schools
➢ Mr. Brian Ross, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Schwarz and Mr. Ross presented the State of the Schools and answered Board questions.

View this portion of the Ridgewood BOE meeting 9/14/26 starting at 02:47:12.

VII. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT

No Superintendent report was provided.

VIII. BOARD MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

No Board member announcements.

IX. DISCUSSION ITEMS

~~➢ Discussion and Possible Action: AP Self- Study Amendment~~

This portion of the meeting was moved before the presentations.

X. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

XI. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No public comments.

XII. MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION
N/A

XIII. RECONVENED PUBLIC MEETING
N/A

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

- The Regular Public Meeting was adjourned at 10:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Mark Schwarz
Superintendent of Schools
Pro Tempore Board Secretary