

**Board of Education
Upper Saddle River, New Jersey
Public Hearing and Regular Session
Monday, April 27, 2026 - 7:00 p.m.**

Minutes

This Public Hearing and Regular Session of the Upper Saddle River Board of Education was held in the Auditorium of Cavallini Middle School of the Upper Saddle River Schools beginning at 7:00 p.m. Mrs. Gandara opened the meeting and stated that the meeting was being held in compliance with PL 1975, Chapter 232 and appropriate notice had been provided to the designated newspapers, the Borough Clerk and all interested parties requesting such notification.

Members present: Mrs. Gandara, Mrs. Ginsberg, Mrs. Gray, Ms. McElyea, Mr. Mehegan, Dr. Verducci

Members absent: Mr. Quagliani

Also present: Dr. Schoen, Mrs. Imbasciani, Mr. Kaplan, and Senator Schepisi

REGULAR SESSION

Dr. Verducci made a motion, seconded by Ms. McElyea to convene into Public Hearing/Regular Session at 7:00 p.m.

OPENING STATEMENT:

Mrs. Gandara

Mrs. Gandara welcomed the public and read the following statement:

Good evening, and thank you all for being here.

It's my privilege to welcome our distinguished guest, Senator Holly Schepisi, this evening. Senator Schepisi represents our community with a strong focus on fiscal responsibility, transparency, and practical solutions to the challenges facing New Jersey residents and school districts alike.

At a time when public education is navigating rising costs, state mandates, and increasing expectations, her voice and perspective are especially important. She has been an advocate for thoughtful policy and for ensuring that local communities are heard in Trenton.

We are grateful for her leadership, her accessibility, and her willingness to join us tonight to share her insights and engage in this important conversation about how we best support our students while remaining responsible stewards of taxpayer resources.

Please join me in welcoming our distinguished guest, Senator Schepisi.

DISTINGUISHED GUEST

Senator Schepisi

Senator Holly Schepesi spoke to the Board and public. Highlights of her comments included:

- There's a lot of frustration throughout the state.
- This is not only an Upper Saddle River problem. Districts throughout Bergen County and the State of NJ are facing these same issues.
- Challenge – Growing financial strains caused by unprecedented increases in health insurance costs and rapidly increasing utility costs coupled with an unfair state funding formula.
- Reforms must be made to the State Health Benefits Program.
- Need to revisit the calculation for funding Special Education and Transportation.
- The State must ensure that when they mandate something, they be held accountable and provide funding for it.
- Acknowledged the board members for their dedication to the schools and community.

PUBLIC COMMENT (Questions for Senator Schepesi):

- Mr. Gamsey asked why these conversations did not start earlier and what we can do about them.
- Mr. Schwarz said competition is good. Monopolies are bad. The State only gives us monopolies to work with and it's only going to get worse. There is a disaster on the horizon. What is the reality that any of this will change? He then asked if there are any solutions beyond regionalization.
- A resident asked why monies from new construction don't make it to the schools. Asked what needs to change so the schools can get more money from the town.
- Mr. Haley asked what the community can do to help close the budget gap.
- Mr. Tondi (NJEA) asked if the shutdown of federal level education funding has had an effect on NJ.
- Mr. Koch asked how the Board of Education cuts can be justified.

OPENING STATEMENT FOR PUBLIC HEARING:

Mrs. Gandara

Mrs. Gandara read the following statement:

Good evening, and thank you for being here tonight.

I want to start with something simple and important: every decision in this budget begins and ends with one question: What is best for our students? It is the standard that guided every step of this process.

I also want to acknowledge the emotion in this room. Some of you support these decisions, and some of you strongly disagree. Both reactions come from caring deeply about this district. We respect that, and we ask that everyone engage this evening with the same respect for one another.

When we presented our 2026–2027 tentative budget on March 23, we were clear it was subject to change. Before I share those updates, it's important to briefly ground how we got here.

For several years, our costs, particularly healthcare through the New Jersey State Health Benefits Plan, have been rising faster than our stable revenue. That is not a problem we created, but it is one we are responsible for addressing. Without taking action now, the district risked facing a much larger shortfall later, one that could have required more severe staff and program reductions during the school year, potentially as early as September. We felt strongly that it would be more responsible, and less disruptive to students, to take measured steps now rather than risk more significant cuts later.

Our approach was straightforward: spend what is needed, not simply what we can. We reduced supplies and operational costs where possible and aligned staffing to enrollment. These were difficult decisions, but they were necessary to put the district on more stable, sustainable financial footing.

At the same time, let me be clear: the Upper Saddle River School District's standard of excellence is not changing. We are committed to preserving the rich, high-quality education that defines this district and sets it apart. Our students will continue to experience strong academics, high expectations, and a well-rounded program. Academic offerings remain solid, required supports and services will be fully provided, and while some class sizes may adjust slightly and a few extracurriculars have been reduced, the overall student experience remains rigorous, engaging, and excellent.

Since March 23, there have been a few key updates.

First, due to staff movement, three individuals originally identified for reduction have been reinstated by placing them into existing vacancies created within our remaining staffing structure. We have not added positions or increased overall staffing. We continue to support impacted staff by working with other districts and providing recommendations, and we will look for additional opportunities to place individuals into existing openings where possible. We have also worked collaboratively with the Upper Saddle River Education Association to address individual circumstances and help mitigate financial impact.

Second, the tax levy has increased from 2.75% to 3.83%, driven primarily by updated healthcare projections. We have increased our projected health insurance cost from 30% to 35%, based on guidance from our brokers and New Jersey state actuarial data. In this environment, planning conservatively is the responsible approach.

We also recognize there has been misinformation circulating in the community. The Frequently Asked Question document we shared and is posted on the district's website, was intended to provide greater clarity, transparency, and factual context, and we encourage everyone to review it carefully if you have not already done so.

We value and respect our staff and remain committed to working collaboratively with the Upper Saddle River Education Association. The financial pressure we are addressing is driven largely by external factors beyond local control.

Finally, this is a public hearing, and your voices matter. We ask that this remains respectful and constructive. What matters is that we engage thoughtfully, with our shared responsibility to students and the community in mind.

At this time, the Board will join you in the audience as our Business Administrator presents the 2026–2027 school budget.

Thank you.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2026/27 BUDGET

Mrs. Imbasciani

Mrs. Imbasciani presented the 2026/27 budget to the public. Highlights included:

- Challenges/What drove the costs up this year?
- Review of Revenues and Expenditures for the 2026/27 school year
- Explanation of health benefits/Chapter 44
- 3.83% tax levy increase (2% plus \$478,941 in health waivers)
- \$189 estimated annual tax increase for a home assessed at \$796,936.00
- Looking ahead:
 - The reductions made now help create a more sustainable cost base and that structural improvement carries forward into future years.

PUBLIC COMMENT (Questions pertaining to Public Hearing)

- Mr. Spartan read a statement on behalf of a group of Upper Saddle River parents. He then thanked the Board of Education for sending out the FAQ document and asked what contingency exists if there are enrollment shifts in September.
- Mr. Soloman suggested the board create a joint task force to attack the health benefit problem head on.
- Mr. Schefflan asked if there is anything anyone can say to change the board's mind on this budget. He said the board is choosing not to use available waivers, they should stop blaming the state and a referendum is the absolute solution.
- Mrs. Garcia thanked the board for improving communications with the community. She said there are people there that are willing to help - collaboration is key.
- Mrs. Divergian asked when parents will be told which staff are being cut for next year and how will the information be communicated.
- Mrs. Hazzah thanked the board for their hard work and suggested they use more of the waivers to keep more teachers. She then asked what the district's plan is if there is a spike in enrollment.
- Mrs. Johnston praised the board for the fiscally responsible budget that they created.
- A parent asked how the enrichment program will be impacted next year.
- Mrs. Hazzah asked how basic skills will be impacted next year.

A motion was made by Mrs. Gray and seconded by Ms. McElyea to approve the 2026/27 Budget and was approved by all in attendance.

A. Approve the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE 2026/2027 SCHOOL YEAR BUDGET

WHEREAS, the Upper Saddle River Board of Education adopted a tentative budget on March 16, 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 14, 2026, and

WHEREAS, the tentative budget was advertised in the legal section of The Record on April 19, 2026, and

WHEREAS, the final budget was presented to the public during a public hearing held in the Cavallini Auditorium, 392 West Saddle River Road, Upper Saddle River, NJ on April 27, 2026.

	Total	General Fund	Special Revenue	Debt Service
2026-2027 Total Expenditures	\$32,405,537	\$32,188,537	\$217,000	\$0
Less: Anticipated Revenues	\$5,278,959	\$5,061,959	\$217,000	\$0
Taxes to be Raised	\$27,126,578	27,126,578	\$0	\$0

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education includes in the final budget an appropriation of surplus in the amount of \$2,100,000.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Upper Saddle River Board of Education includes in the final budget the adjustment for increased costs of health benefits in the amount of \$478,941. The additional funds will be used to pay for the additional increases in health benefit premiums.

BE IT RESOLVED, that included in the general fund appropriations, budget line 620 is a withdrawal from Capital Reserve - Other Capital Projects in the amount of \$50,000 for Other Capital Project costs of the Reynolds School generator replacement (\$50,000). The total cost of this project is \$50,000 which represents expenditures for construction elements or projects that are in addition to the facilities efficiency standards determined by the Commissioner as necessary to achieve the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

BE IT RESOLVED, that as per N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-14.2(d) the general fund appropriations include a \$250,000 withdrawal from the Maintenance Reserve Account for use on required maintenance activities for a school facility as reported in the comprehensive maintenance plan pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:26-20.5.

WHEREAS, the Upper Saddle River Board of Education recognizes school staff and Board members will incur travel expenses related to and within the scope of their current responsibilities and for travel that promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district; and

WHEREAS, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A Subchapter 7. requires Board members to receive approval of these expenses by a majority of the full voting membership of the Board and staff members to receive prior approval of those expenses by the Superintendent of Schools and a majority of the full voting membership of the Board; and

WHEREAS, travel and related expenses not in compliance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A Subchapter 7 but deemed by the Upper Saddle River Board of Education to be necessary and unavoidable as noted on the approved Board of Education Out-of-District Travel and Reimbursement Forms;

WHEREAS, the Upper Saddle River Board of Education established \$21,906.43 as the maximum travel amount for the current school year and has expended \$4,670.84 as of this date; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Upper Saddle River Board of Education approves all travel and related expense reimbursements in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.3, to a maximum expenditure of \$20,450 for the 2026-2027 school year.

ADMINISTRATION:

Dr. Schoen

A motion was made by Mrs. Gray and seconded by Mrs. Ginsberg to approve Administration Consent Agenda Items A through C and was approved by all.

- A. Approve the School Bus Emergency Evacuation Drill Reports (in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:27-11.2) as follows:

1. On April 21, 2026, between 9:30 a.m. and 10:15 a.m. all students in the Reynolds Elementary School, 391 West Saddle River Road, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, participated in school bus emergency evacuation drills. The drills took place in front of the school and included Routes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Mrs. Devin Severs, Reynolds School Principal, Mr. John Edwards, Dean of Students, and Mr. Thomas Inzalaco, Scholastic Bus Company Safety Director, supervised the drills.
2. On April 21, 2026, between 10:15 a.m. and 11:00 a.m., all students in the Bogert Elementary School, 391 West Saddle River Road, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, participated in school bus emergency evacuation drills. The drills took place in front of the school and included Routes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Mr. David Kaplan, Assistant Superintendent/Bogert School Principal, Mr. John Edwards, Dean of Students, and Mr. Thomas Inzalaco, Scholastic Bus Company Safety Director, supervised the drills.
3. On April 22, 2026, between 11:30 a.m. and 12:20 p.m., all students in the Cavallini Middle School, 392 West Saddle River Road, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, participated in school bus emergency evacuation drills. The drills took place in front of the school and included Routes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Mr. James McCusker, Cavallini Principal, Mrs. Salliann Ran, Assistant Principal, and Mr. Thomas Inzalaco supervised the drills.

B. Second Reading of the following Policies and Regulations:

Policy 0142.1	Nepotism (M) (Revised)
Policy 1220	Employment of Chief School Administrator (M) (Revised)
Policy 1552	Sexual Harassment – Staff (M) (New)
Policy 3362	Sexual Harassment (M) (Abolished)
Policy 4352	Sexual Harassment (M) (Abolished)
Regulation 1552	Sexual Harassment – Staff (M) (New)

- C. Upon the recommendation of the Superintendent, the Board of Education approves the Memorandum of Agreement with the Upper Saddle River Education Association and Employee No. 0313 and authorizes the Superintendent to execute the Memorandum of Agreement on behalf of the Board of Education.

PERSONNEL

Dr. Schoen

A motion was made by Mrs. Gray and seconded by Mrs. Ginsberg to approve Personnel Consent Agenda Items A through D and was approved by all.

A. Resignations

1. Accept the resignation, for the purpose of retirement, of Eda-Marie Carmilani, Basic Skills Instructor at Reynolds School, effective July 1, 2026.
2. Accept the resignation of Maya Lee, 5th Grade Classroom Teacher, effective July 1, 2026.
3. Accept the resignation of Margaret Maquet, French Teacher at Cavallini Middle School, effective July 1, 2026.
4. Accept the resignation of Clara Peer, Paraprofessional at Bogert School, effective April 20, 2026.
5. Accept the resignation of Alexis Yotka, School Social Worker, effective July 1, 2026.

B. Leaves

1. Terminate contractual child care leave for Employee ID #1321, effective September 1, 2026.

2. Approve a paid medical leave of absence and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA leave of absence for Employee ID #1924, effective approximately September 1, 2026 through January 4, 2027.
3. Approve a paid leave of absence and an unpaid FMLA/NJFLA leave of absence for Employee ID #2350, effective April 27, 2026 through approximately May 22, 2026.
4. Approve a paid medical leave of absence and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA leave of absence for Employee ID #2355, effective approximately May 26, 2026 through November 24, 2026.

C. Appointments

1. Approve the reappointment of non-tenured contractual Bargaining Unit certificated staff for the 2026/27 school year, as per attached.
2. Approve the reappointment of tenured contractual Bargaining Unit certificated staff for the 2026/27 school year.
3. Appoint Elizabeth Kelso to the position of ACE Team Member for the 2025/26 school year. \$20.00/Hour
4. Appoint Tamira Thomas to the position of ACE Team Member for the 2025/26 school year. \$20.00/Hour
5. Appoint Sabina McGuirl to provide home instruction to a Cavallini Middle School student, up to 10 hours per week. \$40.00/Hour

D. Substitutes/Volunteers/Intern

1. Approve a school counseling internship at Reynolds School for Alexandra Alberta for the 2026/2027 school year.
2. Approve Liam Block as a substitute teacher/paraprofessional for the 2025/26 school year. Mr. Block will hold a NJ Substitute Teaching Certificate.
3. Approve Lauren Tattoli as a substitute teacher/paraprofessional for the 2025/26 school year. Ms. Tattoli holds a NJ Substitute Teaching Certificate.
4. Approve Tamira Thomas as a substitute teacher/paraprofessional for the 2025/26 school year. Ms. Thomas will hold a NJ Substitute Teaching Certificate.
5. Approve Linda Vroegindewey as a substitute teacher/paraprofessional for the 2025/26 school year. Ms. Vroegindewey holds a NJ Teaching Certificate.
6. Approve David Kaplan as a volunteer to run the Bird Watching Club at Bogert School for the remainder of the 2025/26 school year.

FINANCE

Mrs. Imbasciani

A motion was made by Mrs. Gray and seconded by Mr. Mehegan to approve Finance Consent Agenda Items A through D and was approved by all.

A. Approve the Minutes of Board Meetings:

March 16, 2026
March 23, 2026 - Special Meeting

B. Approve the Bills List for March 2026 as follows:

10	General Current Expense	\$90,106.56
11	General Current Expense	\$3,170,385.93

20	Special Revenue Funds	\$31,249.29
60	Enterprise Funds	\$34,848.70
	Total	\$3,326,590.48

- C. Approve the Transfers for March 2026.
- D. Approve the Board Secretary and Treasurer's Reports dated March 2026 and to certify that after review of these reports and upon consultation with appropriate district officials, as to the best of our knowledge, no major account or fund has been over expended in violation of NJAC 6A:23-2.11 and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligation for the remainder of the year.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Gandara

A motion to adjourn was made by Mrs. Ginsberg and seconded by Ms. McElyea at 9:08 p.m.

Dana Imbasciani, Board Secretary

Contractual Appointments**April 27, 2026**

Last Name	First Name	Position	Tenured	FTE
Alberta	Alexandra	Teacher	N	
Barrow	Madelyn	Teacher	N	
Biondi	Anthony	Teacher	N	
Bischoff	Nathan	Teacher	N	
Bunting	Mara	Teacher	N	
Casey	Kim	Teacher	N	
Cirone	Paul	Teacher	N	
Clark	Ashley	Teacher	N	
D'Anna	Philip	Teacher	N	
Dolan	Carly	Teacher	N	
Fennell	Nicole	Teacher	N	
Freund	Rebecca	Teacher	N	
Gareffa	Jennifer	Teacher	N	
Griffith	John	Teacher	N	
Haveman	Jennifer	Teacher	N	
Ho	Linda	Teacher	N	
Ibrahim	Krista	Teacher	N	
LaRosa	Angela	Teacher	N	
Liggio	Samantha	Teacher	N	
Marotta	Dyonna	Teacher	N	
Massaro	Anamarie	Teacher	N	
O'Neill	Peter	Teacher	N	
Reilly	Tara	Teacher	N	
Robayo	Donna	Teacher	N	
Smith	James	Teacher	N	
Stearns	Erica	Teacher	N	
Telfer	Maura	Teacher	N	