

More information on Dec. 14 school vote promised in Wall

BOE VP says data on bond referendum will come next month

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THE COAST STAR

WALL TOWNSHIP — The planned Dec. 14 school improvement referendum was addressed by Wall Board of Education vice president Adam Nasr on Tuesday night with a promise that details will be issued to the public sometime in October.

“I know there are many people in the community that are chomping at the bit to find out what we’re actually going to include in the projects,” Mr. Nasr said.

Mr. Nasr explained that the reason so little information has been shared is that the district awaits a response from the

New Jersey Department of Education on its request for a bond, as large projects that are funded through a voter referendum have 40 percent of the cost recouped through the state’s Debt Service Aid [DSA] program.

“We have certain requirements through the bonding process that requires us to share information in its final form. In order to do that, we need our approvals from the state back so that we know what type of offsetting funds we’re going to get. So right now, we don’t have the final amounts. We are still waiting

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for them from the state,” said Mr. Nasr.

Mr. Nasr also brought up a contract the BOE signed at its Aug. 23 meeting with the Cherry Hill-based public-relations firm Laura Bishop.

“I’d like to note that the contract was not to exceed [\$50,000]. We had to give ourselves a budget for our public relations. We set that number at \$50,000. That doesn’t mean we’re going to go that high, but it is fair to say that with a lot of the comments that are out there in public, this is something that we felt was of value to the community, and getting accurate information out there,” said Mr. Nasr.

The BOE has discussed the referendum for over a year, indicating that it would be around \$40 million. It previously tried to sign a contract with Laura Bishop in Dec. 2021 when it passed a resolution to award a contract to the firm “for communications services” in an amount not to exceed \$25,000, at the rate of \$125 per hour.

Laura Bishop indicated to The Coast Star at that time that the district was solely interested in assistance with a referendum. However, WTPS and Laura Bishop never signed the contract.

PRINCIPAL APPLICATIONS

Superintendent Tracy Handerman announced that the district is accepting applications for two administrative positions, the principal of the Central Elementary School

and the acting principal of Wall High School.

Applications for the Central Elementary School principal position are being accepted through Oct. 1, and Ms. Handerman also stated that she hopes to make an announcement on the acting principal of the high school at the Oct. 11 BOE meeting.

Ms. Handerman has been serving as acting principal this school year, but in an email sent to parents on Sept. 14, she indicated the two roles of the high school principal and superintendent roles are not sustainable.

“Serving in the dual roles of WHS Principal and WTPS Superintendent of Schools are not a sustainable, longer-term solution. As such, I wanted to share with you that the District will be posting for an acting high school principal shortly. Until this acting position is filled, I will remain acting principal. That said, I did want to make it clear that I will still remain quite involved, both educationally and operationally, at WHS after a person is appointed to this acting role,” Ms. Handerman stated.

WHS Principal Rose Sirchio was placed on administrative leave on April 12, the district did not disclose the reason for the leave of absence, and Ms. Sirchio, who has tenure with the WTEA, is still on paid leave. WHS Vice Principal Kevin Davis, served as acting principal for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year in Ms. Sirchio’s stead.

The BOE provided no more information regard-

ing Ms. Sirchio’s status at the meeting. Ms. Handerman would not disclose why they were accepting applications for an acting principal of the high school instead of a permanent position.

Rita Spader, Wall Township resident, addressed Ms. Sirchio’s leave in her public comment during the meeting.

“I think a lot of people are very confused on where [Ms. Sirchio] stands and I don’t think there’s an answer. There’s a lot of people that miss her. There’s a lot of people that need that foundation back in the school. And I know you guys probably can’t disclose whatever you guys are going through on the back end, but there are people that support her and want her back and think that the school really needs her, her dedication here has been very important,” said Ms. Spader.

The Central School vacancy arose after the school’s former principal Jill Antonello was transferred to the position of principal of Old Mill School on June 14, replacing Eric Laughlin, who was transferred to Wall Intermediate School following then-Principal Erin Embon being put on administrative leave.

Ms. Embon was named principal of Wall Primary School and director of curriculum for grades K-5, at a total annual salary of \$173,261 at the June 14 BOE meeting.

Efstratios Monafis, the district supervisor of World Language, ESL, and Visual and Performing Arts, served as acting principal of Central

School for the remainder of the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Embon had been placed on paid administrative leave on April 13, a day after Ms. Sirchio was also put on paid administrative leave.

HEALTH CURRICULUM CHANGES

Jennifer McCann, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, updated the community on the changes to Health and Physical Education [PE] instructions to be enacted in the second marking period of this year and provided a timeline for each school.

The changes to the curriculum follow Wall BOE Policy 2422, which the district approved at a Dec. 15, 2021, board meeting, bringing the district into compliance with laws enacted in recent years by the state legislature and subsequent guidance issued by the New Jersey Department of Education in 2020. All public school districts in New Jersey are required to adopt similar policies.

According to Ms. McCann, in June, WTPS teachers received formal training on the comprehensive health and PE standards. An outside consultant went over all of the standards with the teachers who wrote the curriculum in July. Then Ms. McCann and Tiffany Steiner, the director of student wellness and intervention, reviewed and approved it.

“I reviewed the curricula and made a couple of revisions here and there where we felt it was necessary. On Sept. 1, Ms. Steiner and I met with all of the health and PE

teachers to go over the curriculum and explain our district expectations are moving forward. Then on Sept. 13, I met with the principals to do the same. We went over the curriculum and discussed how we were going to roll it out within this district,” said Ms. McCann.

Ms. McCann added that it’s important to note that the state only provides standards, and it’s up to the health and PE teachers to formulate the curriculum.

Ms. McCann and Ms. Steiner will go to each school in the district to inform parents at public meetings, highlighting the specific changes to the health and PE classes and answering any questions from the community.

The meetings will include copies of the curriculum, an explanation of standards vs. curriculum, new/revised standards by grade level and the activities the district will use to teach them, elementary unit rotation and potential dates the units will occur.

The dates for the parent health presentations are as follows: Allenwood Elementary School on Oct. 4; Old Mill Elementary School on

Oct. 6; Central Elementary School on Oct. 10; West Belmar Elementary School on Oct. 12; Intermediate School on Oct. 3; and Wall High School on Oct. 10.

Parents who do not wish to have their children participate in the new health and PE curriculum have the means to withdraw their children from it with a letter to opt-out, which Ms. McCann indicated will likely be provided by the district in December.

“There are some parents who have expressed concerns regarding the health standards that the NJDOE adopted back in June, 2020; if there are any parents that do not want their children to participate with any of the particular units levels of the health curriculum, we will be supplying them in opt-out letter,” said Ms. McCann.

Students who have opted out will be placed in another location in each of the schools and will participate in social-and-emotional-learning activities, according to Ms. McCann.

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