

Tinicum supervisors compromise on event facility

Siobhan Donaldson

The Tinicum Township Board of Supervisors announced that it will allow Tretton Farmstead to have one loading dock over two, reducing the size of the proposed wedding venue, but neighbors of the farmstead are still unsatisfied.

Steve Harris, the township solicitor, explained that the board members felt that they should compromise on the loading dock with a few exceptions; the township would not allow any off-site parking and would require no parking variances if the venue size were reduced.

Harris said that it was best to move in this direction over having the venue go to court against Tinicum.

This unsettled the venue's neighbors who came to the meeting. The

farmstead proposal has been a controversy among the community in recent months. Many community members have been voicing concern about the property's recent conversion into a commercial wedding venue. Though the township has placed limits its operation, some of its neighbors have raised questions about its construction.

"I have a very uncomfortable feeling when you enter into an agreement based on a plan that hasn't gone through the normal channels of scrutiny," said Terry Johnson, who lives in Tinicum, asking the board questions about the settlement.

"I think it's erroneous to cite a source that you don't know with 100% certainty complies with every ordinance in this township," he continued to say. Other neighbors spoke about not being notified about

changes and of a threatening letter from the lawyer of the Farmstead, which many called harassment.

The board explained that if it fails to follow through with enforcing its ordinances, the settlement is voided. The Farmstead has one more building requirement, a holding tank septic system, which it has yet to comply with. The board stressed that it must show compliance with township requirements.

"If they can't get a septic system permit," said Harris, "Then they can't build this thing. Settlement agreement aside, if they can't demonstrate they can satisfy the sewage management ordinance, they don't get land development."

In another issue, Sara Sorbello, surrounded by several of her neighbors, asked the supervisors for help after the zoning hearing board

denied her request to build a new home on her property.

Sorbello is seeking to preserve the original house and use it as additional housing while building a modern home that would be better suited to her family's needs. The zoning board had rejected her appeal.

Neighbors came forward saying they were disappointed in the zoning board and its suggestion that the family knock down the existing historic farmhouse built in 1890 to build a new home.

"It's less than a thousand square feet, it's a 2-1/2 bedroom home, and we are a family of five," Sorbello argued, saying that they needed a more modern home. "We have two kids with asthma, and my husband is a recent immunocompromised cancer survivor. The house is sag-

ging into the stairs, and it's less than 10 feet from the road." She said she testified for over two hours, saying that it was reasonable for them to build a new home at the top of the hill, on their 16-acre property.

Neighbors who were there that night said that the zoning hearing board acted like "bullies" and "interrogated her like a criminal."

Though the supervisors clarified that they couldn't tell the zoning board what to do, they could send representation of their opinion of her case. Some of the homeowner's options are to appeal through the courts or seek a compromise – such as subdivision of the property.

The supervisors recommended to Sorbello that she can seek alternative relief from the board if she can bring her paperwork and make her case again on Jan. 3.

Holly Jolly Express

Siobhan Donaldson

Loud cheers followed Kutz Elementary School teachers and staff as they stopped three times to sing holiday songs in the sobering cold on Tuesday.

Singing with all their gusto, about 30 folks on the "Holly Jolly Express" stopped to collect items for donation to A Woman's Place.

Local police and fire departments and Roxy therapy dogs and their companions followed the group as they sang "Jingle Bells," "I Have a Little Dreidel," and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Kutz Elementary School serves students in grades K-6 in the Central Bucks School District.

"Whose ready to board the Holiday Express?" Zandy Zucchero yelled into a megaphone tied with golden tinsel. She leads the march of singers and is a kindergarten teacher at Kutz Elementary.

Her two kids, James, who is 4, and Ben, 6, dashed to her and gripped her into a big hug. Other children watching ran to their favorite staff member to sing, give hugs, and receive mini candy canes and chocolate coins.

Christina Adelberger, the principal at Kutz, said she loved the Express and was extremely excited to see her students gaggle around her for photos and sing "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Last year, Kutz Elementary put off

the Holly Jolly Express due to COVID-19 restrictions. This year, it's all out for singing in the neighborhoods of local students.

And kids were happy to comply.

Ally Kozloff, 12, and a former Kutz Elementary student, said she was "super excited" for the holiday season, where she could see her grandparents. She said that seeing them was a special occasion and was unable to see them for quite some time due to COVID. Tommy Kozloff, who is 6, was so excited he smiled the entire time – unable to answer what he wanted for Christmas. Other than enthusiastically nodding when asked if he wanted a toy for Christmas, of course.

All donations, brought in totes and plastic bags, will be directly donated to A Woman's Place (AWP), a community-based social change organization committed to the empowerment of women and to ending intimate and domestic violence for all. For nearly 40 years, AWP has served Bucks County by providing free, confidential and comprehensive services and support to victims of domestic violence, their children, and the community.

AWP's hotline (1-800-220-8116) is available 24/7 for victims, community members, donors, or volunteers.

Visit awomansplace.org for more information.

Photographs by Siobhan Donaldson



Santa and his mini-look-alike, a Kutz Elementary student, pose for a picture as adults encourage him behind the camera.



First-grade teacher Kathy Eckenrode poses with students as they take a selfie together.

Kutz Elementary students and staff sing "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."



Kutz Elementary staff get ready to sing.



Donations are loaded onto the Holly Jolly Express.





After a tornado

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Community comes out to rebuke Central Bucks School Board



SIQBHAN DONALDSON

Central Bucks community members stand in the pouring rain; only 70 would be let inside the board room because of the fire code.

Support staff chagrined by board member's health policy motion

Siobhan Donaldson

Dozens braved pouring rain to rebuke an insidious and transphobic comments at the previous Central Bucks School Board meeting, some lining up hours before the meeting started, as new board members were sworn in to take their seats.

The five newest members, Debra T. Cannon, Jim Pepper, Dr. Tabitha Dell'Angelo, Dr. Mariam Mahmud, and Lisa Sciscio, were sworn in after a fierce election season and they took their seats at the beginning of the meeting. After the board's voting to limit public comment to two hours, several students took to the podium to make their voices heard.

Seth Soderquist, a senior at CB South and co-president of the Gay-Straight Alliance said he was "appalled" when he heard the comments made the last meeting. "Transgender people are no more inherently violent than their cisgendered counterparts," he said.

Soderquist, who uses any pronouns, said that as students did not see the board release a statement about any of the comments, it tells students and community members that hate speech and fear-mongering are acceptable.

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CB students want more school board support for safety

Community comes out to rebuke Central Bucks School Board

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“Silence is a choice,” they said.

At the last meeting, a commenter had conflated transgender women with rapists – at which sitting board member Karen Smith shouted “That’s enough!” to interrupt him. Other board members at that meeting shot her down, stating that it was his right to freedom of speech.

At that meeting, Art Larson of Doylestown sent horror through the room as he disparaged the Jewish community and the Anti-Defamation League, saying that they are the “mafia.” When asked how he responded to the community criticism, he did not change his stance.

Emma Strom, president of the Jewish Culture Club and student at CB East, took to the podium to tell of students’ being affected by antisemitism in the district. After moving to the community in 2018, Strom had experienced antisemitism by staff and students that made her feel unsafe and unwelcome.

“When I look to CB and their response to conflict over the past few years,” she said. “I have seen the direct impact of the prejudice in the community show the children and the adults in this district that hateful treatment of others is normalized and acceptable.”



SIOBHAN DONALDSON

Lisa Sciscio, a new board member, being sworn into office

“The prioritization of removing masking mandates and safety precautions over more prevalent issues has involved irrelevant conspiracies that use our families and us as scapegoats of the problems created by the pandemic in this community.”

Dozens of community members followed, including previous board members Jodi Schwartz and Tracey

Suits, to criticize the board for its lack of statement, the environment of the meetings as a whole, and critical issues in the district like staff shortages.

Later on in the meeting, after swearing in the new members, the board voted to have Sharon Collopy be temporary school board president for the rest of the year and Dana Hunter to be their board presi-

dent, and Leigh Vlasblom to be vice president in the coming 2022 year.

Vlasblom then made the motion to change the district health and safety plan, remove the visual charts, and change language in the plan to reflect that removal. She also said that while Central Bucks will continue to report cases to the Bucks County Health Department, the department will contact trace

through nurses.

Deneen Dry, school nurse and president of Central Bucks Education Support Professionals Association, put her head into her hands as support staff and nurses shook their heads in the audience.

“This is ridiculous,” she said. Dry said that even though the board believes it is removing a duty from the medical staff, what it did was remove its ability to report cases.

“Let the medical professionals make the medical decisions,” she said. While Vlasblom has said the plan is a “fluid” document, referring to the recent court stay over Gov. Wolf’s masking mandate, Dry had said that focusing on masking is the least of the nurses’ worries. Dry insisted that what the staff needs right now is consistent guidelines they can refer to without interpreting the plan themselves.

A motion to have a special meeting about the Health and Safety Plan by Dr. Mariam Mahmud, second by Karen Smith, failed. Mahmud said that there had been two primary school classrooms that had to be closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak, affecting both students and staff.

The final board meeting of 2021 set for Dec. 16, has been canceled.

Schools move to optional masks after state order is repealed

Siobhan Donaldson

After the repeal of Gov. Tom Wolf's order, the required masking in all Pennsylvania schools and child care centers, seven school districts have said they will go mask-optional at school.

School districts in Central Bucks, Quakertown, Bensalem, Pennridge, Neshaminy, Palisades and Council Rock have all reportedly moved to an optional masking plan. Some have said they will still require masking on school buses, and others have stressed the importance of testing for COVID-19 and reporting it.

"This past Friday afternoon, Dec. 10, 2021, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that the Acting Secretary of Health's school masking order is no longer in place, effective immediately," said Superintendent Abram M. Lucabaugh in an update on the Central Bucks School District website.

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Schools move to optional masks after state order is repealed

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He continued, "Due to that ruling, and in accordance with the district's Health and Safety Plan, masking is now optional in the Central Bucks School District beginning Monday, Dec. 13, 2021."

Other districts that have announced they will continue to follow CDC recommendations to keep masking required are the Morrisville and Pennsbury school districts.

"Our goal is for students and staff to return to normal as soon as possible," said a memo released to the community by the Pennsbury School District. "However, with the rise in COVID cases in Bucks County, and specifically in Pennsbury, the health and safety plan approved by the school board remains in place. Students and staff are required to wear masks while in school."

On Friday, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court struck down the Wolf administration's school masking mandate, saying that

state officials "lacked the authority to set the blanket requirement for students across the state." This ruling removed a previous order to keep the mandate in place while the administration appealed the same ruling in a lower court.

Originally, Wolf had said that the mandate would end in January 2022. However, the Commonwealth Court had ruled against the mandate after three legal cases challenged Acting Health Secretary Allison Beam's authority to institute such an order. One such case involved a few Bucks County parents who said that since they had the Bucks County Health Department, Beam was "overstepping."

Another case involving Bucks parents alleges their children "could not breathe while wearing a mask" and that another family alleged that "wearing masks interferes with their religious duty to spread the word of God and forces them to participate in a satanic ritual."

Some community members who have commented online about the optional policy, have expressed excitement around the move. Some say they are happy the district is leaving masking to the parents and individuals – a few commenting that they respect folks' decisions to either go masked or unmasked.

Others have expressed disappointment in their districts and said they were concerned about the spread of COVID in classrooms and on buses, a few said they were concerned that this may lead to more resignations and retirements in their districts.

As some districts have moved quickly on their masking decisions, others such as Centennial School District have moved to wait until their school board meetings to announce new masking measures. As the order has been repealed, school districts are now charged with defining how they will approach masking in their schools instead of the state.

New Hope-Solebury announces new STEM and art curriculum and changes to Health and Safety plan

Siobhan Donaldson

New Hope-Solebury School District has announced, with much excitement, a future curriculum focusing on STEM and

the arts.

Board members spoke of “infectious” excitement after a presentation by their newest K-12 STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) Co-

ordinator, Richard Curtis. Curtis examined surrounding districts to learn what the district could improve and what could be to their advantage in the world of STEAM.

Curtis presented new courses focusing on multi-media, manufacturing, engineering and more, saying they would propel students further than their peers. He showed that there is a notable gap at New Hope-Solebury in offering options for those “strands” in the STEAM concept compared to other districts.

As part of their new vision, the district will cut five courses in photography, graphic design and production printing and re-

place them with engineering and multi-media video production. The district hopes to bring in courses that combine these ideas in coming years.

Later, the board unanimously voted to change some of the language in the Health and Safety Plan, adding additional guidance to essential student activities such as masking during athletic activities.

R.C. Massimino, coach of the eighth-grade boys’ basketball team, said during public comment that he wanted the board to look into additional court time and access for his players. He stressed the importance of giving students a safe place to bond after

the COVID-19 lockdown.

The masking order given by acting state Health Secretary Alison Beam, which caused much controversy, was set to be lifted by Gov. Wolf on Jan. 17. However, the Commonwealth Court struck down the order after lawsuits from Bucks parents and Republican lawmakers. The Wolf administration then appealed to the state Supreme Court, meaning the mandate is still in place. Oral arguments are scheduled for Dec. 8.

The board voted unanimously to allow outside organizations to rent their indoor and outdoor facilities while complying with the Health and Safety Plan. The fee structure indicates that the use of the facilities during regular operation hours costs no fee. After-hours groups must pay the district money to rent classrooms, fields and parking lots.

Public comments at the meeting were few. Some attendees asked questions about new administrative positions being approved by the board. One student from New Hope Middle School, Anna Cornwall, voiced support for a book called into question at the last meeting for being “inappropriate.”

“GenderQueer: A Memoir” is a collection of personal representations of LGBTQ people and their relationships is far too valuable to remove,” she said.

The next board meeting will be held on Dec. 6 and is both in-person and virtual.



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John Gamble honored for 12 years of service on Central Bucks Board

Siobhan Donaldson

The Central Bucks School District honored John Gamble for 12 years of service as a school board member, on Oct. 26, in his first public appearance at the board in several weeks.

"I'm humbled," Gamble said, after Dr. Abram Lucabaugh, superintendent, handed him a plaque with a gavel and inscription that read "With Gratitude for Your Leadership and Dedication."

Gamble spoke fondly of his time as a member, and his joy at watching students graduate year after year during his tenure.

Gamble resigned in August because of a death threat and community in-fighting over the district's COVID-19 response.

Following disruptive late summer meetings, the board limited public comments to three minutes or less and allowing only one yield to another commenter. The motion passed with six yeas and three nays.

Jodi Schwartz, Robert Farley, and Karen Smith had voted no on the change. Both Schwartz and Farley openly expressed that they felt the policy would negatively affect the community members who speak at the meetings.

The Nov. 2 general election resulted in new members taking seats on the board. Winners of the election were Lisa Sciscio, Mariam Mahmud, Debra Cannon, Tabitha Dell'Angelo and Jim Pepper.

Public comments on Oct. 26, focused on the Health and Safety plan, the feeling

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John Gamble honored for 12 years of service on Central Bucks Board

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of disconnectedness and bullying between community members, and frustration with the Pennsylvania government itself over vaccine mandates and masking.

Student Zoey Ferrarra, from Lenape Middle School, was recognized for receiving the award

for self-advocacy from The Council for Exceptional Children, for its Yes I Can Award Program. She is one of 12 students in the country to win an award this year.

In a video played to the board, Zoey said that though she struggles with her own disability, she

is happy to lead the change for others like herself. Her teacher, who submitted her for the award, said that she is the most excep-

tional student in her entire teaching career.

The next board meeting is set for Nov. 9, in-person and virtual.

Announcement of the Livestream of the meeting will be on the CBSD website 15 minutes before starting.

Morrisville Borough set to vote on waterfront development plan

New Hope-Solebury answers questions about targeted books

Siobhan Donaldson

Across the country, school boards are being besieged by parents concerned that adult books being stocked in their elementary school libraries, and New Hope Solebury School District wants to set the record straight.

“No.” Stephanie Yoder, community engagement and public relations manager said about “Lawn Boy” by John Evison being in the NH-S Upper Elementary School. “The commenter at our school board meeting suggested this, however, the book in the UES

library is a similar title, “Lawn Boy,” but written by children’s author Gary Paulsen.”

At the previous district meeting, a few parents brought and read aloud explicit passages of the Evison “Lawn Boy,” a book written for adults and older teens, and said that the book was placed at the Upper Elementary School in the district. Some of those parents also brought up “Gender-queer: a memoir by Maia Kobabe,” which is a book aimed at older teens and adults, a graphic novel about the author’s life and discovery that she is

nonbinary and asexual.

Have there been parents’ complaints about these books before? “No,” Yoder said, “however, we have learned that these two books are part of a national conversation and are being shared at board meetings across the country.”

The flashpoint started in Texas, at a Leander Independent School District meeting over a month ago. Brandi Burkman, a parent in the district, read several explicit passages from Lawn Boy, which she says her son checked out from the Leander High School

library. Her public comment was recorded and put onto the popular app, TikTok, and then went viral across the internet.

The Patch from Falls Church, Va., reported that Fairfax County Public Schools pulled the two books from their libraries after community members complained about the sexual content of the books. Speakers at Fairfax School Board meetings told board members the books describe pedophilia, but editors’ reviews of the works showed no such content.

At New Hope-Solebury, in re-

sponse to inquiries for the community, the district will introduce “an objective process by which the contents of our libraries may be reviewed and evaluated for their educational and literary value.”

Yoder said, “However, it is important to emphasize that we will not target books that convey LGBTQ experiences for removal and we are committed to ensuring that students of all ethnicities, cultures, religions, genders, and sexual identities are able to see themselves represented in our library collections.”

Student protests candidate's use of photo in tweet

New Hope-Solebury finance committee defends cost per student

Siobhan Donaldson

Twitter when at the time of this writing.

The New Hope-Solebury School Board meeting erupted Oct. 28 with support for Maice Perry, a student at New Hope High School, who had her image reposted by John Marcus, a write-in candidate for the school board.

"Regardless of your and Marcus's opinion on these matters — I am a minor," she said.

Community members applauded Perry, as she explained that the candidate reposted an image of her and her best friend at a pro-choice protest, which she posted to her personal Instagram, with a sign stating, "My body is not a political playground."

Candidate Marcus posted a screenshot of her Instagram post to his Twitter account and Perry recounted that Marcus had captioned it with "Same kids support mask and vaccine mandates. Wake up, kids, you are supporting everything you stand against." The alleged account was not on

"Marcus took the time [to find my social media account] and used it as ammunition for his campaign," Perry said. She said she found it incredibly uncomfortable that her private post, meant for her friends and older relatives, was used in this way against her will.

Another student offered public comment, criticizing the candidate for his actions and asking the community to vote for other candidates during the election, Nov. 2.

In following up to the previous month's questions about costs per student in the district, Finance Committee Chair John Augenblick and Superintendent Charles Lentz presented data on the subject.

Utilizing data from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Augenblick highlighted that while it spends more per student, the actual student population in the district is very low. Combined with limited state and federal funding



SIOBHAN DONALDSON

The audience applauds Maice Perry after she criticizes a school board candidate for posting her photo online.

given to the district each year, the district pays a higher cumulative cost per student to compensate.

When equalizing the rate of taxation against other school districts, Augenblick said that New Hope-Solebury has the lowest tax rate in Bucks County.

"I think it's pretty disingenuous to anchor to 'we have the highest cost per student in the county,' he

said. "However, on its own, it's true. And we should."

The district has the highest cost per student, Augenblick argued, because most of the money used per student goes to instructional needs — the actual class time between teachers and students.

Later, in a unanimous vote, the board set \$2,000 aside for security around the new stadium track and

field on weekends for this November. The board announced that the final touches were finished that day, evoking loud cheering from the audience. The board stressed that while the New Hope community is not a destructive one, the field was 20 years in the making, and they wanted to be cautious in their initial opening to the public.

The board also approved the appointment of Patrick Sasse to the role of High School principal for New Hope and Dr. Amanda Benolken as the district's director of education.

The next board meeting, Nov. 18, and is both in-person and virtual.

Free tax preparation program saves Bucks residents over \$2.5 million

This tax season, the Bucks County Community Center

CB School Board convenes amid lawsuits, long public comment

Community comes forward to support LGBTQ+ students

Siobhan Donaldson

While Central Bucks School District (CBSD) Board reconvened Oct. 12 to pass several budget items and vote on a new board policy towards public comment, two legal cases against the district gained speed.

After raising over \$40,000 (and still going) on the site Gofundme.com, 35 parents filed suit against the district on Aug. 27 on behalf of their children with disabilities, claiming that the district is refusing to provide accommodations for those students by willingly undermining the state masking order.

Currently, masking exemptions that the district hands out to students require only a parent's signature, not a medical one.

The district was said to direct its staff to remind students who are not wearing masks to do so, but not to require an unmasked student to wear a mask, so as to "limit the amount of disruption to their learning environment."

As shown in the suit, CBSD has received over 1,000 masking exemption requests for students for the school year. In a letter to the



Marlene Pray, director of the Rainbow Room, defended the room's importance in its help for LGBTQ+ students.

parents' defense team, dated Oct. 13, the district has not officially granted any of those 1,000 or more medical exemptions because none of those who submitted medical exemption forms have agreed to undergo further evaluation under regulatory laws.

Under federal and state law, a student who does not qualify for special education services under educational law, still may qualify for services under Section 504 of

the The Rehabilitation Act, which is a civil rights law. According to Pennsylvania Public School Code, "Section 504 and its accompanying regulations protect otherwise qualified handicapped students who have physical, mental or health impairments from discrimination because of those impairments."

In direct opposition to the August suit, on Sept. 30, district parents Shannon Harris, Jamie Walker, Timothy Tressler and Christopher

Doebler filed a civil action lawsuit against the district, saying that mandating their children to be masked in school was against their religious beliefs. Both Walker and Harris have sued the district on this topic before.

The Harris family said in the suit that they identify as Christian and that "it is against God's will to wear masks ..."

Other parents said in the suit that their children suffered from physical and emotional distress wearing a mask during school.

During the meeting, several community members came forward to voice support for the LGBTQ+ community in the district.

Marlene Pray, who runs the Rainbow Room, said the space was a positive one and has saved many lives, giving kids a place to be themselves and have fun.

"I want to make it crystal clear to any LGBTQ+ student who may be feeling overwhelmed, lost, or in need of guidance – or any parent who recognizes those struggles in their children – that I am here," Pray said.

Statements were a response to public comments last week that said the Rainbow Room was dangerous and inappropriate for children.

About public comment at board meetings, a revised policy manual draft states that public comment is

"not intended to engage the board in dialog or respond to questions." The newest revision allows only one yield to another participant and limits time to three minutes at the discretion of the providing officer.

During the past several meetings, community members would use yielded time to gain several minutes of public speaking time themselves, occasionally making the three-minute rule moot. Last week, several speakers yielded over 11 minutes to Shannon Harris from Doylestown, to play an audio clip that questioned the uses of vaccines in children.

After the comment ended, the board approved and accepted quotes from several maintenance contracts across the district, from heating and cooling units to a new public safety vehicle. The total amount was around \$1.04 million on these improvements. They also approved a motion to appoint Dr. Charles Malone as assistant superintendent for secondary education, to much applause.

The board also approved a contract to hire the Pennsylvania School Boards Association Regulations Service, with one nay from Sharon Collopy, which will provide the board details, procedures, forms, and letters to enhance its policy implementation.

The next board meeting is Oct. 26, in-person and virtual.

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New Hope-Solebury Board holds to mask mandate

Siobhan Donaldson

The New-Hope Solebury School Board announced at its Sept. 30 that it has no updates to the Health and Safety Plan at this time. The board also considered expenditures.

“We’ve only had 21 cases,” said Dr. Charles Lentz, superintendent, commenting on COVID-19, “and all have been transmissions from outside of school.”

Lentz said the district is following the governor’s order to mandate masking and will do as the Bucks County Health Department directs regarding protections. He stressed that submitted mask exceptions are being reviewed but require medical documentation to move forward with any allowances.

However, during public comment, a few community members asked the board what information it was using to make masking mandatory. Some made formal requests to see any scientific data the board was using to follow this decision – outside the statewide mandate.

Peter Phillips of Solebury asked the board what data the board was following in its reaction to the

COVID-19 pandemic, and he said he had been asking the board since the last meeting what data it used to make the decision.

“I am asking again what data you are using to arrive at your decision,” he said, “because there are significant bodies of information that there are detrimental effects.” Phillips also said that even though masking can stop the spread of COVID-19, such as if a student sneezes, he suggested that the district “teach them to cover their mouths” over required masking.

Liz Sheehan, board president, responded, “We are, as you know, under a state mandate for masks right now. As far as criteria for making masking optional, that is a moving target, and we will get updated on that from the Bucks County Health Department.”

“We are abiding by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) and the American Academy of Pediatrics,” she said. “It is our hope, of course, that if we get under the high transmission rate in Bucks County, then that might change, but as of now, we are moving on with the masking order in place.”

Board member Dr. Nikhil He-

ble, who heads policy on the board, stressed that those who want to see policy changes or input should attend committee meetings to open dialog with the board. “But,” he said, “the reality is that we don’t get attendance for policy readings. Oftentimes, there are committee members and very few people, so I encourage people to show up.”

Later, board member and liaison for the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology, Montu Patel, announced that Mark Miller, a longtime Centennial School Board member, died Sept. 24. Miller had previously served as president of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Patel extended his condolences and spoke kindly of Miller’s dedication to the institute and educating him in his duties.

“When I was new to Robert’s Rule of Order, he helped,” said Patel, “I think it should change to ‘Mark’s Rules’ now.”

After John Gamble, a school board member from Central Bucks and a member of the Middle Bucks board, resigned because of death threats from his community over the masking mandate, Patel announced that he

took the position as chairperson in his absence.

Both Patel and another board member, John Augenblick, urged members to attend committee meetings to give input beyond the school board meetings.

As many community members became fired up about facilities construction, Augenblick reported that the district had suffered tremendously from deferred capital spending in the past few years, such as structural updates being deferred to sustain other parts of the budget.

Many objected to the football stadium and athletics fields taking priority in discussing the distribution of capital expenditures. According to an order by the district to the ELA (Environmental Landscape Associates) group, which is heading the improvement to the outdoor athletics area, the total investment has cost the district over \$1.9 million.

Recent changes approved have been the demolition of drain pipes under the field, additional drainage at the basketball court, and revisions to the handicap ramp in front of the high school.

The board also approved a 40-page

PDF of paperwork to agree to new bond issues and refinancing to save the district over \$260,000 in its current bond of over \$10 million. The finance committee also announced it is moving forward with modernizing its real estate collections to offer payment plans to those suffering hardship and carrying “a big stick” to those who are not facing hardship but don’t pay the tax.

While the board said it is excited to finally give their students their field and track to use, and open the outdoor facilities to the public, community members expressed disappointment that things, such as boilers and structural upkeep, were left by the wayside.

As a welcomed respite, student presenters Mia Chuma and Lydia Eastburn announced student events and workshops available during the fall. They encouraged students to attend away games to show support. Homecoming will be on Oct. 9, and the theme is “There is no place like home,” a “Wizard of Oz” homage.

The next board meeting will be in person and virtual Oct. 28. A live stream of the meeting will be available at nhsd.org.

Central Bucks names Robert Farley to school board

Lorraine Sciuto-Ballasy elected vice president

Siobhan Donaldson

The Central Bucks School Board voted 5-3 to elect Robert Farley as a new board member to hold the line with a full board until December, and unanimously voted to elect Lorraine Sciuto-Ballasy as vice president, in the face of a divided community.

"I'm honored," said Farley, who just recently retired. He said that it is his goal to become more involved in his community, saying "I've taken in a lot of information tonight and I'm ready to uphold my sworn oath."

The appointment will be a short-lived, four months, as that position and four others on

the board are up for election on Nov. 2. Those elected will take their seat in January, leaving Farley a short time as the representative of District 9.

The district publicly posted five submitted candidates to fill the position until December, including Farley. Those submitted were Theodore TJ Kosin, Andrew Miller, Svetlana Shubinsky and Jennifer True. All candidates were required to live in Warwick Township, where the previous member, John Gamble, resided.

A notable candidate who withdrew from the temporary appointment was Diana Leygerman, she is running for the district's school board

seat in the coming November elections. Leygerman is facing off against Republican opponent Jim Pepper for the four-year appointment.

Before the meeting began, Jodi Schwartz, the board member representing District 7, publicly apologized to the board and the community after her social media posts airing her own frustrations with the board's interior conflicts were made public. She said the posts were in poor taste and she wants her last few months to end on a better note.

However, the public's reaction at the meeting skewed negative. They focused primarily

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Central Bucks names Robert Farley to school board

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in the divisive Health and Safety plan, and a few clapped when the board denied a motion to pass an updated version of the plan by a 5 to 3 vote with one abstaining. The

update would change language in the plan to clarify that the district is an educational institution and not a medical one.

Superintendent Abram Lucabaugh reiterated that the district

will follow the Bucks County Health Department, saying, "If the Health Department says so, we do so."

Robert Bozek, a critical care nurse from Doylestown, questioned the district on this during public comment.

"You put out an exemption and honestly, it makes me feel sorry for folks on both sides," he said. "I feel as though you're passing the buck [of liability]."

Bozek was speaking in regards to Central Bucks releasing an exception to the required masking order. The exception slip from CBSD needs only a parent's signature to show that the child has a medical condition or a disability that exempts that student from wearing a facial covering during school. This is a controversial departure from other mask exemptions that require a signature from a medical professional. The Bucks County Courier Times reported that over 1,000 masking exceptions had been submitted to the Central Bucks School District

since the order's release.

Several speakers during the night made comments about their disappointment and anger towards the school board in recent months, examples like lack of accountability over bullying of students in the district and some being unable to contact board members. A few aired grievances against medical professionals and inability to get in touch with the head of the Bucks County Department of Health, Dr. David Damsker.

One speaker played a voice-mail of a doctor saying he would not sign their exemption form, but that their young child may be able to adapt to masking through positive reinforcement and open communication. Another stated that the Childrens Hospital of Philadelphia was "corrupt," alluding to a supposed conspiracy between CHOP and the Center for Disease Control manipulating COVID-19 data.

Beyond that, Dr. Lucabaugh, recognized Assistant Principals

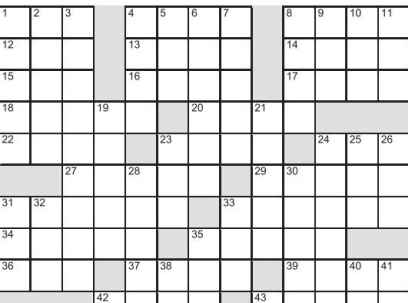
Kathryn Deibert of Bridge Valley Elementary School and Dr. Sinead Doherty of Butler Elementary School. He said they recently were brought on staff, and he was overjoyed to recognize them and their excellent reputations, wishing them well.

The board voted to approve 11 new bus and van drivers for Plumstead Christian school. It was considered welcome news, after a countywide reporting of bus driver shortages for Bucks. The Morning Call reported that Pennsylvania has an estimated 1,000 unfilled bus driver jobs in school districts across the state.

Warrington Township has received approval for an easement for a pedestrian connection to Easton Road. The township informed the board that it would build additional sidewalks along Lower Barness Road, including Titus Elementary School.

The next meeting for the board is 7:30 p.m. Oct. 12, at the Central Bucks Education Services Center in Doylestown.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Central Bucks board member speaks out about negativity

Parents warn of potential legal action

Siobhan Donaldson

Central Bucks School Board met Tuesday to discuss its Health and Safety Plan, and replacement of the vice president, who resigned during the previous meeting.

Karen Smith, a board member, spoke up before public comment, saying “the least I can do is say something,” after community members and parents reached out to her about the negativity present in the meetings. She said that she would repeat that the school does not condone the bullying or harassment after each negative comment.

John Gamble, the board’s vice president, resigned at the previous meeting citing the harassment he and his family had received over the Health and Safety Plan from both sides of the debate. Gamble and his wife received police protection after Gamble received death threats from the community.

After the board initially voted against universal masking, John Gamble said he was considered “public enemy number one.”

“Covid has broken you people, and it’s disgusting,” Gamble said when he announced his resignation, addressing the room of community

members. “I watch how you treat each other here. It’s disgusting.”

Smith said that she is not in favor of a plan that doesn’t require a doctor’s sign-off on the mask exemption form. The form allows parents to send their children to school unmasked because they are unable to wear a mask due to medical, mental, or a disability.

Previously, the board voted 5-4 in favor of following Gov. Tom Wolf’s order, which was released on Aug. 31. The order instituted universal masking and applies to K-12 schools, public and private, for all students and staff, regardless of their vaccination status. The order went into effect on Sept. 7.

“Since your own liability is your concern, the Pennsylvania Department of Education published a letter to a school district that failure to comply is a violation of the law,” Dabiella Burg, an attorney from Furlong said. “Please make no mistake, if you don’t require medical documentation, you are opening yourself up to liability and a negligence action.”

Friday, the Philadelphia Inquirer had reported that Gov. Wolf said those who allow medical exemptions without medical approval violate the state order.

“The message from the state education department didn’t threaten specific consequences,” reported the Inquirer, “but pointed to a letter it sent this week to one district deemed noncompliant, warning that school officials could be found in violation of state laws and that the district could face legal action.”

TJ Kosin, a Warwick parent accused online of identifying with a far-right anti-government group, had come to the meeting and said that the community needed to “be better.”

“Since this misinformation campaign against me and the media,” he said, “this group has been showing exactly what extremism is.”

Kosin said that his son, a minor with autism, had been accused of not having a disability because it was not visible. He also said he had received death threats.

Kosin and his wife’s charity, Proud American Patriots Network (PAPN), was reported on by Jared Holt, a fellow at the Digital Forensics Lab in Washington. Holt had said the network identified with the Three Precenters, and sought to recruit from online militia movement communities.

At the meeting, the board failed three roll-call votes to elect a new

vice president of the board to serve until the December reorganization meeting. Tracy Suits and Leigh Vlasblom argued over the election, alleging lack of representation for the minority in the board. Roll call votes to elect members like Karen Smith, Lorraine Sciuto-Ballasy, and Sharon Collopy ended in stalemates.

Five seats are up for grabs on the board this election cycle including District 9, which Gamble vacated.

Candidates Diana Leygerman, an English teacher in the Philadelphia area, and Jim Pepper, a attorney in Doylestown, are campaigning for the open seat, which will be voted on Nov. 2.

A president and vice president are elected every year during the reorganization meeting, which is held during the first week in December.

As masking has become universal at the CBSD, the legal suit against the district under the Americans with Disabilities Act will stay in a holding pattern, said the organizer.

Susan Lipson, the organizer, posted an update Sept. 7, saying that the law firm had already spent most of the money in preparation to take the board to court the day after the meeting if it did not institute masking.

“We now must wait for a couple of

weeks to see if we do indeed need to go to court based on what the school district does over these next couple of weeks,” she said. The remaining amount of money will be donated to a non-political cause in the district, Lipson said.

The lawsuit was instituted against the district after the board initially voted not to pass its Health and Safety plan initially, which followed CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics guidance.

During the previous meeting Dr. Abraham Lucabaugh was appointed as district superintendent. The board voted to approve his contract with the district, which set his term to end in 2026. The board also elected Barbara Markowitz as school board treasurer.

According to the contract, a superintendent has a right to speak on all issues before the board, and hold a seat, but is unable to vote. The annual salary would start at \$225,000 a year, and is required to be evaluated yearly by the board. If the board deems him “proficient” during this evaluation, the language says, he will gain a 2% increase yearly.

The next meeting for the board is at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 28, at the Central Bucks Education Services Center in Doylestown.

Raucous CB Board meeting ends with mask mandate

School director in state's third largest school district resigns over death threats

Siohban Donaldson



SIOHBAN DONALDSON

Medical advice

Doylestown Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. Scott Levy speaks at the Central Bucks School Board Meeting.

Doylestown Councilman Thomas Jarret dies

Freda R. Savana cated to serving the borough.”
White said he credits Jarret with en-
revitalization. The Justice Center, the
“Restaurant Renaissance,” the revival

Central Bucks School Board voted to pass a Health and Safety plan 5-4 that institutes universal masking in school. Nay votes were cast by Sharon Collopy, Judi Schwartz, Tracy Suits and Dana Hunter, board president.

“I’m done with the bullying, effective tonight,” John Gamble said after announcing his resignation. He cited the environment that this debate has had on him and his family, that because of receiving death threats, he and his wife had police escorts and protection.

“This is the worst decision I have ever made,” said board member Leigh Vlasblom. She spoke about the environment and community response to the board, telling of constant threats and reading painful posts and memes about them and their families on social media.

This comes hours after Gov. Tom Wolf announced that masks would be required indoors at all private and public schools, including state-run child-care centers, regardless of vaccination status. In previous statements, the governor said local districts could dictate their masking rules. The mandate goes into place next Tuesday, Sept. 7.

“This is a necessary step to keep our students and teachers safe and in the classroom,” he said in a press conference less than five hours before the meeting. “Where they should be and where we want them to be.”

The governor also said that before he took action “more than half of the school districts in the state had not taken action.” After turning to lawmakers they yielded no results.

The meeting was held at Central Bucks High School West to accommodate the size of the crowd and community members and parents became more agitated with each passing public comment. As the night progressed, members became more impatient.

Board President Dana Hunter asked for a few members of the audience to leave after their behavior became disrespectful and attempted to clear the room of the public because of rowdiness. In a surprising twist, public commenters gave their time to President and CEO of Doylestown Health Jim Brexler and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Scott Levy.

“We’ve seen a change of the spread,” Brexler said, assuring that Doylestown Health will work with schools and agencies to bring data of infections in the community. “We are desperately in favor for

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Raucous CB Board meeting ends with mask mandate

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schools to be open, and we are here to make sure it happens safely.”

Dr. Levy confirmed that and spoke about how Doylestown Health was the first to remove the universal masking requirement when cases reached an all-time low. He said he was proud of the system’s efforts in clinical trials and physicians who “follow the data” beyond single studies. He had said the newest variant has up to 1,000 times the viral load as the original virus and is twice as transmissible.

Dr. Levy and Brexler were jeered by community members so loud it became impossible to pick up their words. Other medical professionals, such as James Hansen, a physician from Buckingham, said that though these are trying times, one cannot ignore the numbers.

“The Delta variant of COVID-19 is the most dominant form and has shown an increase of symptom bur-

den to young patients, including children,” he said. Repeating that Bucks is a high transmission area for the virus, he said masks and vaccinations are the easiest and cheapest forms of protection from forced school closures.

Public opinion was divided, with many bringing up questions of how masking will be enforced and staff’s ability to assess students on whether they can or cannot go home or isolate. Others brought up the trials they experienced at home.

Jamie Walker and Shannon Harris, two district parents who filed a lawsuit in June, asking the court to compel CBSD to follow 2020 Bucks County Health Department guidelines, spoke against the universal masking in school. Harris focused on the mental toll of the masking order.

“Regardless of Gov. Wolf’s order,” Harris, of Buckingham, said. “My kids and I are victims of psychological trauma.”

The district has responded to the suit, stating that the court should toss the case out, that neither Walker nor Harris made a direct claim of injury or damage for themselves within the school, a requirement that gives the plaintiffs grounds to bring a case against Central Bucks, according to a news report.

On Aug. 25, several parents retained an education law firm and started a fundraiser to sue the district, raising over \$40,000. The suit alleges that the school violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by refusing to make “reasonable accommodations” for students with disabilities. They hope to bring the suit before a federal judge to compel the school district to follow the CDC and American Academy of Pediatric guidelines for the next school year.

The newest revisions instituted in the plan were that the district will adhere to the Department of Health order with a few exceptions; if the

order expires, they will refer back to their Aug. 27 plan. Parents can ask for an exception without a doctor’s signature.

The plan also forbids discussion around the vaccination status of another adult or student. This means that any staff, such as teachers or school nurses, cannot ask an adult or student about their vaccinations.

The CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend masking indoors for everyone over the age of 2 at K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

After a scathing letter from the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Acting Secretary of Health Alison V. Beam, calling out the BCHD for its rejection of the guidance from the CDC, the Bucks County department released a memo on the 23rd saying it will follow the guidelines given by the CDC and AAP.

The memo went on to say that schools are now required to report

cases to the BCHD and must work closely with the health department to contact trace those who may be exposed.

At the end of the meeting, the board appointed Dr. Abram Luca-baugh superintendent and Barbara Markowitz as board treasurer.

Last week, Central Bucks asked for community input on what to do with the money it can receive from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSERF), an emergency grant program under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) passed by Congress in March.

However, the ESSER fund requires that school districts that apply to receive it must pass a final Health and Safety plan by Sept. 1. The board passed a draft plan within days of the initial July 30 draft submission deadline, within the wee hours. The plan will be a standing agenda item to return to at a later date.

Agriculture secretary visits Carversville Farm

Siobhan Donaldson

With hands deep in the soil, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and his team joined volunteers at the Carversville Farm Foundation to reap the investments of the state's charitable food system.

"Food is a basic human right," said Redding, "and having access to that is critical."

At the Carversville Farm Foundation, a nonprofit that grows organic food to donate to those in need, volunteers and staff are harvesting potatoes. Secretary Redding arrived with representatives of organizations that get the fresh food into hands across Bucks.

Though a small amount of what they gather, around 10%, is sold through the farm's website to local consumers, the foundation said it has donated over 100,000 pounds of produce to food pantries and soup kitchens across the area.

"It's a simple premise. We have food in the state; let's get it into the hands of those who need it," said the secretary.

The foundation has several partnerships, with those of note being the Ronald McDonald house, and is looking to

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SIOBHAN DONALDSON

State Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding joins food distribution agencies digging potatoes from this year's harvest at the Carversville Farm Foundation.

Agriculture secretary visits Carversville Farm

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grow more each year – expanding its roots to more in need.

Jayne Clements, executive director of Feeding Pennsylvania, said, “Our food banks help serve the nearly 1.3 million Pennsylvanians who are struggling with hunger, about half a million of whom are children.”

“From a state boasting 53,000 farms,” she said, “that’s just completely unacceptable.” Clements pointed out that the states can’t have charitable food without a charitable food system.

On the local level, Bucks has a community ready to meet that challenge.

“I am humbled to represent the people who eat the food,” said Madelaine Burgess, food pantry coordinator for the Doylestown and Pennel food pantries. “When you go to the grocery store, you probably go around the edges – and traditionally, food pantries gave out the middle.

She said, “What people want is fresh food, and we are proud to guarantee it week to week.”

Sen. Steve Santarsiero said that though the farm is in a place that has so much to offer, there are still pockets of poverty. “It should never be the case, in an area with such a robust agriculture sector, that we have people going hungry.”

Stephanie DeLucia, the farm administrator, watched on as volunteers carried full baskets of potatoes to the collection bin. It was eight years since

Secretary Redding had been to the farm, at that time in its infancy.

“We’ve been donating for about six years now,” she said, explaining that the farm has been donating across the greater Philadelphia area and New Jersey. “Even with the impact of COVID, we were able to donate over 100,000 pounds this year.”

During the height of the pandemic, when lockdown orders were in effect, the Carversville Farm continued to stay tight-knit and keep the show going—relying on double masking and keeping outside as much as possible. Stephanie says they’re super lucky in 2021 with volunteers, especially since they had to pause accepting them in 2020.

The Bucks County Opportunity Council supports programs like this. They act as a distributor under the PASS act – known as Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System— which acquires surplus and other agricultural products and distributes them to those in the state with food insecurity.

Against all odds, Secretary Redding looks over the field covered in dirt up to his forearms and sees the fruits of that labor – literally.

Tony D’Orazio, the co-executive director of the farm, grins widely and discusses soil with him, happy to see the place they started several years ago brought to new heights. Steven Tomlinson, the farm manager, gestures to the germinating crops of carrots behind them – a future donation to the cause.

Heather Foor, food program manager at Bucks County Opportunity Council, will see the distribution of those crops firsthand as the council delivers food to those in need. She said the farm donation is one of the council’s most viable programs.

“We hear from our clients all the time, who are on fixed incomes, that they would just bypass the produce section at the grocery store,” Foor said. “So by getting the Fresh Connect (the council’s free fresh food market) with us, they don’t have to worry about food – we provide it.”

Through that partnership with the council, the farm committed over 50,000 pounds of produce to the council for this year. Through the PASS program, the BCOC can now get meats to meet the communities needs.

In 2015, Gov. Wolf passed Executive Order 2015-12, better known for creating the Governor’s Food Security Partnership, which strengthened the relationship between farmers and consumers. Pennsylvania is the first to have a state-sponsored farming program akin to this.

Over the past five years, funding for the initiative has grown by \$2.5 million a year. The CARES act gave them another 10 million in the past year – and has skyrocketed the ability to donate over 16 million pounds of food to all 67 counties through the PASS program.

And there is nowhere else to grow, but up.

Central Bucks passes controversial health and safety plan

Siobhan Donaldson

Central Bucks School District voted 5-3 Tuesday to pass a Health and Safety Plan for the 2021-2022 school year, with no mask mandates, no contact tracing, or social distancing policy.

Community members met the district's plan with starkly different opinions, following an extremely tense press conference and four-hour public comment session.

"We trust pediatricians for guidance on infant sleep, the nutrition, and growth of our children," said Dr. Mariam Mahmud, a pediatrician, at the press conference before the meeting. "Why are we not trusting them now?"

The press conference began before the scheduled board meeting. The organizers, medical professionals, concerned parents, and students voiced that they wanted the plan to be changed to follow American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations.

However, they were met with a polarized audience, either working to interrupt speakers, hold signs over them, or cheer at loud volumes and voicing encouragement.

A large group of Central Bucks support staff on the edge of the crowds brought attention to the



SIOBHAN DONALDSON

Members of the community make their opinions on mask mandates in schools known during a press conference outside the Central Bucks School District Administration Building in Doylestown Township Tuesday.

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Central Bucks passes controversial health and safety plan

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district's movement to only give a less than 50-cent increase to staff – or a 2% increase of their salary based on their pay scale.

Deneen Dry, president of Central Bucks Education Support Professionals Association, said that regardless of the vote, the support staff has been there since the start of the pandemic and will continue to be there – mask mandate or not.

Several people were turned away as the school meeting began and the conference ended due to fire restrictions on room capacity, and the signed-up speakers numbered almost 70.

One such speaker was District 7 Nominee Debra Cannon, who spoke out against masking due to the “severity it would cause to developing minds,” directing attention to suicide rates among youth.

Cannon said that Gov. Tom Wolf had sent out a press release before the meeting started, saying that mask wearing is no longer required for Pennsylvania students.

Later into the night, board members heard from various community members, several mothers, taxpayers, nurses, and even young students, wanting to be heard. While some offered solutions to the plan, having separated classrooms of masked and unmasked students came up multiple times, many focused solely on the mask-mandate in the draft.

Dr. Meredith Ray, a licensed physician in Pennsylvania whose child is in middle school in Central Bucks, stated that she was deeply disappointed with the school's safety plan. Citing her care of teachers and bus

drivers who died of exposure to COVID-19.

“I’ve been wearing a mask every day for 15 months with a face shield; it is not harmful to doctors or nurses to wear a mask every single day – and it is not harmful to children either,” she said. “We don’t need a study to tell you that masks are healthy because surgeons and nurses have worn them every day, for decades upon decades, in the OR. I wore it for 15 months without developing a brain infection or having my brain cells starved of oxygen.”

Anastasia Przybylski, a nurse from Doylestown, said that though she was happy to have her son at home for seventh grade, he is going into ninth, and she wants him to return to school.

“I’ve been researching through my job, and talking to people who have COVID, (and) it’s often the person who shows up sick [that infects people,]” she said. “People need to take responsibility for themselves and stay home when they aren’t well.”

In the plan itself, the draft says that CBSD will continue to provide in-person instruction during the 2021-2022 school year and will switch to online when required.

The plan states that as the Health Department no longer requires individuals to report positive COVID-19 test results or exposure, they will not report them. The plan continues to say it will not notify anyone of positive cases of COVID-19 within the school population or otherwise.

Though, during the meeting,

Acting Superintendent Abram M. Lucabaugh stated that the plan was a “fluid” document – subject to change as the situation permits it.

Voting in favor of the no-mask mandate policy were school board members Sharon Collopy, John Gamble, Lorraine Sciuto-Ballasy, Leigh Vlasblom, and Dana Hunter. Voting against it were board members Jodi Schwartz, Karen Smith, and Tracy Suits.

Another measure passed in the meeting was the motion to induct Diwali, a festival of lights and one of the major festivals celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists, into the school calendar. A movement to do so was spearheaded by Patee Pasi, a rising Junior at Central Bucks West, and an extensive petition was signed by hundreds and various community members.

Lambertville votes to buy Closson property

\$3.77 million bond is proposed; vote April 22

Siobhan Donaldson

Lambertville, N.J., City Council voted 4 to 1 to move forward in purchasing the Closson family property after a robust debate and emotional public comment on March 25.

The council passed the first reading of a \$3.77 million bond ordinance to purchase the property, including the Homestead Market and the Holcombe House on Route 29. The next and final reading, including a final vote on the bond, is April 22.

Residents gave overwhelming support to purchase the Closson property during the city council Zoom call – including Haley Ubel, a young Lambertville resident who asked the council to protect the hill she and her friends sled down every year.

The 9-acre property has been the center of controversy in Lambertville since the Closson family placed it for sale in 2020. Lambertville residents have used the area recreationally for generations, and the property is considered one of the few open spaces in the city.

However, the bond amount led to a heated discussion between Councilwoman Benedetta Lambert and Mayor Julia Fahl on the purchase's economic impact on Lambertville.

“What I am asking the council to do, makes me a hypocrite,” Mayor Fahl said.

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Lambertville votes to buy Closson property

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"This is an incredible amount of money for our community, but this is worth it for the culture of the town. If we don't do something to save it, it will turn into housing, and we can never get it back."

The council also passed a resolution that it must have an agreed-upon action plan for the property before conducting any changes to the property. Only \$2.73 million to acquire the property will be used, less a \$71,000 initial deposit. The city will hold the remaining amount for that property only.

The City Council Chair Julia Taylor, and the mayor stressed that the project's action plan would include public input, that if the city does not need the remaining amount of money in the bond, it can cancel significant portions or amend the bond within the next three years.

Councilwoman Benedetta Lam-

bert, however, was not convinced that this purchase would work out in the long run of the town's finances. She said she was "concerned" with how Lambertville will handle the debt.

"For the last couple of years, the city's heard that we are in a dire financial situation and that we are unable to maintain our existing buildings," she said, "and now we're looking to bond over \$3.7 million dollars to double our facilities inventory without any plan?"

Lambert also said that the city is already \$2 million in debt. She said that purchasing the property may increase spending in the future, raise taxes, and cap the city's ability to bond for the next 25 years to about \$450,000.

"I'm thinking of the future. I'm thinking forward to the people who have reached out to me – who are terrified that they cannot afford to live in this community because of the cavalier approach to 'we can't afford not

to buy this.'"

Lambert then brought up a controversial survey that the city conducted in the past six months, which only recorded around 400 responses from the town's over 22,000 voting population. She argued that there should have been a referendum to cover the entire population. Mayor Fahl responded that the family would have sold the property before they could do so.

Fahl argued that "If we do not do the work to preserve this site, then I think we have failed as a community that claims to want historic preservation."

As the meeting turned to public comments, they skewed heavily in favor of the bond.

Louis Toboz, a resident of 41 years and the city historian, gave full support to the ordinance to secure the Closson property.

"This property, this house, is not

just the most important piece in the county, but one of the most important pieces of property in the county," He said. "George Washington had been there during the battles of Trenton and Monmouth. This family protected this house for eight generations – it was granted to them in 1704. If nothing is done, this property will be gone, and gone forever."

However, not all residents were supportive of the bond. A few were opposed to the money the city would have to put into the property.

Matt Hanson, who grew up in Hunterdon County and moved to Lambertville seven years ago, said that he is highly concerned about the residents being able to continue living in town.

"What concerns me, as we take out more debt, is who will be able to afford living here," he said. "Will the artists be able to continue living here? Will the LGBT individuals who

frame this town be able to continue living here? I don't think it's possible if we do this."

When a call to vote on the first reading of the bond opened, Councilwoman Lambert recounted how much she loved the Closson property and the town's cultural ties to it.

"I recognize the value of this property, and this has been very difficult for me, but I am keenly aware of the issues of this city. I know that this puts me in the minority, but I really feel that I need to vote no."

Council President Julia Taylor, and Councilmen Steve Stegman, Wardell Sanders, and Mayor Fahl all voted yes against Lambert's single no on the first reading of the ordinance.

Lambertville City Council also announced that due to the weather, the city would reconduct street sweeping on April 19 and will be doing pothole repair during the first two weeks of April.

Impromptu Rally Brings Community, Local Figures, to Court House.



Siobhan Donaldson
Jun 1 · 5 min read





Kneeling in the shadow of the Hunterdon County Courthouse, protesters showed their support to get justice for George Floyd — the man who died in police custody in Minnesota and sparked dozens of protests across the nation.

Starting in the park behind the courthouse, the rally was organized via text messages and other private communication not connected to any specific organization. Participants gathered from across the county, with an appearance by a co-founder of Flemington DIY and running Democrat city councilman Malik Johnson.

Mayor Betsy Driver of Flemington issued a press release before the event, stating that the event had no permit and that police would be instructed to act in a de-escalating manner, and urged the organizers to contact her.

“Because no permit has been issued,” She wrote, “There is no insurance coverage in place [...] The lack of permit exposes the decentralized leadership of this grassroots event to serious personal financial risk in the event of injury or property damage.”

At the protest, two organizers stepped forward and identified themselves, and passed out literature and bottled water to about hundred participants. Holding a megaphone, they thanked the community for being there, and implore for community change and support to those arrested by police for protesting.

“We are here to protest the killing of the people in Minneapolis, and to show that black lives matter,” one said into the megaphone. “This town is one of the most affluent in the

country, and we have a list of bail lists- so get out your credit cards and put your money where your mouth is.”

They then handed the megaphone to the several community members that volunteered to speak.

Taking social distancing precautions, by keeping masks on distancing themselves from others, they shared their thoughts and experiences with racism, police violence, and government officials.

“I have a strong memory of being on the bus as a child,” One young man said into the microphone, “believing that with a black president, that racism was from a bygone era. I was innocent then. Now, as the years have gone by — that innocence has been chipped away.”

“I love my school, my friends, and Flemington — but the city does not guarantee my safety. They have not spoken out about what happened in Minnesota. So I cannot say that I truly love this place.”



Bradd Powell took the stand, and identified the young man as his son. Speaking with his mask over his face, he held a large sign that said ‘VOTE’ and thanked the organizers and led chants with the crowd- saying ‘Black lives matter’ and ‘George Floyd lives in all of us.’

“This is the future of America,” Powell said, “Multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial — the population is gonna be the future of America. Were going forward [...] we care about each other.”

Powell also said that he felt upset by the loss of the life of any individuals, and that life is precious, saying ‘that we have to change the system’ and get everyone involved. He later said that he was happy for the support from the community, and the singling out of black lives to protect.

Malik Johnson took the stand, who is running for Flemington City Council this year against Elizabeth Rosetti, and spoke of committing to change in Flemington.

Others who approached the stand spoke of taking the stand against racism, speaking out against relatives and co-workers who speak discriminatory language, and working hard against injustices.

One woman, who identified herself as Karen, spoke of taking this message home — and of white community members doing the work to protect those affected by racism.

“Don’t be a Karen!” she said into the megaphone, to cheers.





Protestors holding signs, shown from behind.

The group then moved to the front of the court house, and chanted out ‘No justice, no peace, no racist police,’ and organizers instructed the crowd to take a knee for nine minutes and 45 seconds, to show how long the officer, Derek Chavin, had his knee on George Floyd’s neck.

Motorists showed their support for the protestors by shouting, and honking horns, to the knelt silent crowd. Police officers kept their distance down the street, and Hunterdon County Sheriff Frederick W. Brown looked on across the street.

The Sheriff said at the protest that it was ‘more like a memorial.’ and that the people of Flemington were fortunately, very well-disciplined. When asked about the de-escalation order, the Sheriff said that the police were there to show discipline, and keep the situation calm.

He later said in response to a question about other protests in the state, that he saw the actions taken by police officers in New York and Newark were necessary for the situations at hand.

Mayor Betsy Driver looked on from the street corner, and expressed that she was happy to see that the protest was peaceful, though said the organizers should have sought out a permit.

“We don’t say no to people asking for a permit,” she stressed, “We want to make sure that it was safe- and that someone, like white nationalists, who has bad intentions can be stopped.”

“You have to assume the worst in these situations, and make it clear that’s our intention.”

Driver had also relayed that the Hunterdon Democrats were planning a similar event, but gave no details about a date.

The event disbursed peacefully, with protestors walking away from the courthouse and deeper into the borough, masked up and still holding signs.

Beautiful to See, Yet its Roots Create Rot: Sable Arias's 'Invasif Desires'



Siobhan Donaldson

Feb 23 · 4 min read

Note: this article has been republished and edited here for archival purposes.



Sable Arias's painting surrounded by her many prints of invasive species.

The Student Art Gallery, located in the Vaughn-Eames building, displays large printings of invasive plants on recycled hand-made paper, delicate books bound together, and the artists' desire to uproot weeds that encroach on herself.

Connecting to the parasitic bamboo that surrounds her home in Little Egg Harbor, and the most recent infestation of Lantern Flies, Sable Arais hopes to explore what it means to have a healthy life over a beautiful one.

“I am a repurposed artist; I like to reuse things. I borrowed giant frames from a friend. Some [items] are brand-new but many are recycled,” Arias explains while pointing and examining her work on the gallery walls, each signifying her environment and personal self.

Arias, who graduated with a BFA in Studio Arts at Kean University and is a Student Representative in the art department at Kean University, displays her newest exhibit after three years of hard work. Surrounded by art pieces made from recycled, and repurposed materials, Arias creates what she hopes to be a ‘connective experience’ with her audience.

“It started building up to building things beyond me,” Arias explains. “I like to be able to impact a person more. It brings satisfaction to me and brings me joy that they receive happiness when they get a hand on [the art]. It’s about sharing experiences.”

With a focus on bookbinding, printmaking, and experimenting with paper-making, Arias envisions a world where she can create tangible experiences with various textile feelings. Hand made paper with differentiating percentages of recycled materials (her crown jewel being the 100% recycled white paper prints with the invasive species ‘tree of heaven’), a large tapestry made of strips of cotton, old bed-sheet, and various other fabrics, and her use of foraged plants around the pine barrens.

“I grew up entertaining myself. I was home-schooled with 4 siblings growing up and we were taught to do things with our hands — I was always sewing, cooking, going outside to find things to use. I thought art was a flat piece on a frame, but when I came to Kean I realized I could do more than 2-D. I could do a combination of things, pushing myself as far as I could go.”

Arias had seen Vincent Musetti’s final show, an artist who graduated from Kean University in 2016. He works primarily in sculpture, taxidermy, and oil paints.

“When I saw his show, I saw that there was so much more to what I could do. He did so much mix media- and it hit me that I don’t have to be a painter to be an artist. I can just

be an artist,” Arias said. “I was inspired to do what I wanted to do. I wanted to make books, I wanted to improve, to learn more, to know more. Even though my works don’t serve a specific purpose- it’s the experience of thinking things apart that drew me in.”

In *Invasif Species*, Arias examines her life and the teachings given to her. She speaks on how though some of those teachings were beautiful, they were poisonous. The art marks the weeding out the unhealthy things in her life. Moving away from thinking ‘it’s just life’ to becoming more in control of her own. As a Native American and Spanish artist, Arias felt disconnected from her culture when her parents had raised her isolated from it- and now feels that she may return to it.

“I grew up keeping it to myself, and how am I gonna grow without sharing? And conversing? Seeing how other people feel — knowing that not everyone will like it- but seeing someone see my work and interact with me opens a conversation not there before. It lowers my anxiety, connecting with them, and drives me to keep connecting.”

Arias’s final show ran until Jan. 30. At her closing reception, she opened up many of her works for sale, from handmade books to prints she made with hand-crafted recycled paper. There, in the small gallery with huge windows, Arias was greeted by her many friends and Kean alumni. A situational reflection of the life she had built for herself at her time at Kean. At some points, she wiped away tears looking about at her work, as people filtered in and out.

“My family saw it the other day,” Arias said. “They understood what I was saying and saw how much I love my work.”

Currently working through commission and her Etsy store, Arias is moving on to the bookbinding master’s program at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. You can find her work on Instagram at [@sparrow.ht](#), [LaCeibaStudios](#) on [Etsy.com](#), and [ko-fi.com/sparrowht](#).

Tower staff reporter Valerie Sanabria contributed reporting.

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STEM ACADEMIC ADVISER CHARGES DISCRIMINATION ABOUT LOSING JOB DURING CANCER TREATMENT

[December 7, 2019](#) |

By Siobhan Donaldson | Published by December 7, 2019

A longtime Educational Opportunity adviser for the Science and Technology programs alleges that she was let go after she was diagnosed with uterine cancer and went on medical leave, according to a complaint filed with the New Jersey Supreme Court.

Elis Sosa, who began working at the university two decades ago, is charging the university with age discrimination, disability discrimination and violating New Jersey's anti-discriminatory laws.

"Kean's decision not to renew Sosa's contract," said the complaint. "constituted retaliation for

requesting medical leave, disability discrimination and age discrimination.”

Sosa also alleges that she was replaced by a younger, non-disabled, worker after she left her position.

The Exceptional Educational Opportunities (EEO)/Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program provides access to higher education for educationally and financially disadvantaged students, as defined by the State of New Jersey, Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, Educational Opportunity Fund.

The complaint alleges that in 2018, Sosa submitted a reappointment application as required in her position every five-years. . The application included letters of recommendation from both of her supervisors at Kean as well as letters from Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, Johnson & Johnson and the University of South Florida.

It alleges that in March of 2018, Sosa provided notice to Kean for medical leave to undergo cancer treatment for four months. Later that March, Sosa was placed on a Performance Improvement Plan. In May, during her leave, she received a letter from President Dawood Farahi stating that Kean was not renewing her contract.

Sosa’s final day at the university was June 30.

Sosa is represented by John Messina Esq. who is a partner of the law firm Berkowitz, Lichtstein, Kuritsky, Giasullo & Gross, LLC.

Sosa’s case was filed Nov 1, and has been given a track assignment. The case has been given a discovery time of 450 days, as is expected for cases identified under the civil rights category in the New Jersey court system.

“Kean University does not comment on personnel matters or pending litigation,” said Margaret McCorry, Kean’s Director of Media Relations,

In January, Kean **settled a lawsuit** about age discrimination at the Equal Opportunity Center. William DeGarcia was the interim director for the Equal Opportunity Center at Kean in 2009 when he was allegedly given the directive from President Farahi to “restructure, streamline and clean house” at EEO/EOF.’

DeGarcia alleged that in 2012, he was passed over twice by a search committee for a permanent Director’s position at the Equal Opportunity Center. The person who was chosen for the position was under 40 and held no executive experience.

DeGarcia received \$375,000 from the university in his settlement, with terms that all claims of discrimination were neither proven nor denied.

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FIVE TENURE-TRACK PROFESSORS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR A RETURN NEXT YEAR

[November 14, 2019](#) |

By Siobhan Donaldson | Published by November 14, 2019

Five tenure-track professors have received letters from the Office of Academic Affairs not recommending their return next year despite having the full support of their departments.

The affected faculty will lose their jobs on June 30 unless President Dawood Farahi chooses to overturn the decision, said James Castiglione, Kean Federation of Teachers President.

The KFT said in an email to their members on Oct 22 that a 'disturbing' number of probationary tenure-track faculty members received letters stating that

the administration is not recommending them to President Farahi for tenure positions. Those who received the letters were in various years of the five-year process to achieve tenure. No reason was given for the non-recommendations.

“Many of these junior faculty members had the unanimous, or near-unanimous, support of their colleagues,” the email reads. “This means the administration is overturning decisions made by faculty who know first-hand the professional achievements of junior faculty.”

Margaret McCorry, Director of Media Relations for Kean, said in an email that the University Provost “carefully and equitably” reviews each tenure-track faculty member’s record to determine if they will be recommended to the president.

“President Farahi reviews all of the recommendations and any appeals to make his final recommendation to the Board of Trustees,” McCorry said. “That process is still ongoing. The tenure process is designed to ensure each faculty member is treated fairly and the faculty with the strongest records achieve tenure and deliver a world-class education to our students.”

To appeal non-recommendation, recipients had to turn in their substantive appeals by Nov 1, two weeks after receiving the letters. On Nov 15, President Farahi forwards the nomination to the Board of Trustees Academic Policy and Personnel Committee.

Castiglione said it is a travesty to lose those teachers for both the students and the departments.

“Even if they try to replace those instructors,” Castiglione said. “It’s hard to recruit new candidates afterward.”

When the staff members leaves, Castiglione said that “sometimes they are replaced, some are replaced with non-tenure track Lecturers, and some are left unfilled.”

On May, 12 GE lecturers were not reappointed by the university. Those let go alleged they were let go after publicly criticizing the university for moving them into an open office space, which they thought would compromise students’ privacy. Kean has denied the accusation.

Jan Balakian, a tenured professor in the English Studies Department, said the importance of a tenured teacher is in their “commitment to the university and students.”

Balakian spoke on how much potential Kean has in their student population and opportunities, advocating for certain adjunct professors being hired full-time.

“We have a beautiful campus in the best location with the most diverse student population, with a Distinguished Speakers Series, and renowned faculty who run valuable programs,” Balakian said. “If we had a ratio of 15 students to 1 faculty member, students would come from all over the country to study at Kean.”

Note: this has been edited and changed for archival purposes, originally published in 2017.

Phi Theta Kappa Hosts Art Show, Focuses on The Relationships Between Beauty and The Beholder.



Painting exhibited in the closed-off section of the art show (left), PTK members pictured (right)

Light streamed in from the windows in the cafeteria at Raritan Valley Community College early in the morning on Nov. 16, as The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society (PTK) displayed and placed artworks for sale. The works were community-submitted, ranging in medium and style, under the theme “Beauty in The Eye of The Beholder,” to foster conversation on beauty and vulgarity in art with the audience and students on campus.

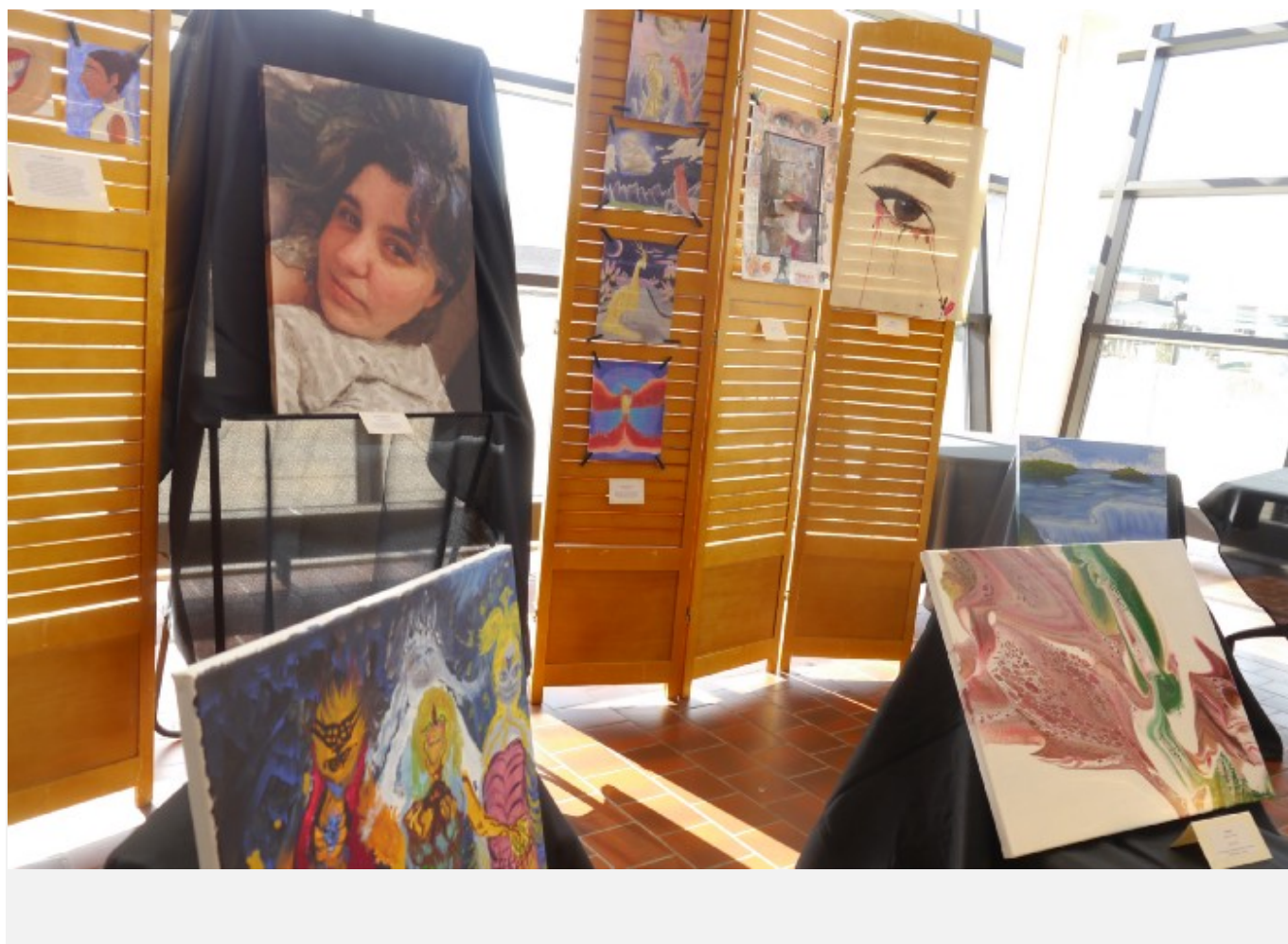
Lena Hadler, president of PTK, looked over the artwork that spanned the corner of the cafeteria. She smiled when she recounted the night before, during setup.

“I realized last night as we placed everything together, staying late into the night, that the reaction from everyone was how amazing it all turned out,” said Hadler. “It was

difficult because people could submit whatever they wanted; sketches, pictures anything at all. But the feedback so far has been people seeing the art as interesting, and that there were so many ways of making art.”

PTK changes officers every year, as people come and go from RVCC; alas in previous years the club had not done a community-based program such as this. previous officers had of course done many student-focused events; however, for this event, most of the artworks came from a large range of people, such as parents, teachers, and independent artists. Though students were especially encouraged to submit works of which they were proud.

Within the gallery itself, wooden screens held up sketches and painted collages, while oil and acrylic paintings were propped on easels and chairs. A teacher-submitted painting, copy of a selfie taken lying down on her couch, stood stark in a sunbeam while students milled around to stare at colorful surrealist drawings. A group of visiting high school students grinned and gossiped over a *Game of Thrones* piece utilizing Pointillism, talking about spoilers and favorite characters, while others stood silent next to realistic paintings of world leaders.



The open art section of PTK art show.

In a secluded corner, signs displayed for viewer discretion were posted outside a closed-in area where works that may be deemed inappropriate were held.

“In the past,” President Hadler explained while gesturing to the enclosed area, “the Art Department has had to take down artworks due to content, for being inappropriate or being offensive, but we decided to have a closed-off area for those kinds of works.”

The main table held donation jars since the day of the art show fell on Giving Day when clubs can raise money. There were also several pieces of paper surveying students’ experiences ranging from favorites to what can be improved. While many of the art pieces were just for a display to be returned or sold off in another venue, some pieces were directly purchased at the show- to much acclaim from supervising staff. There in the cafeteria, volunteers greeted any passersby, excited to show what the student body had to offer.

Edited by Zachary Nickl