

PUBLIC STATEMENT

TO ABSECON COMMUNITY REGARDING STATUS OF

ABSECON BOARD OF EDUCATION v. PLEASANTVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION

DECEMBER 22, 2020

The Absecon Board of Education believes it is important to keep our community abreast of the latest developments related to the Board's efforts to end its sending/receiving relationship with the Pleasantville Board of Education and send its high school students to Absegami High School, which is run by the Greater Egg Harbor Regional High School District. For years, the Absecon community and its students have had to endure Pleasantville's severe financial and educational mismanagement. For example, in 2019, the New Jersey Department of Education found that 16 half-days at Pleasantville failed to provide the State-mandated four hours of instructional time to count as an academic day. Similarly, this mismanagement has led to serious safety concerns at the school. In just the past few school years, a Pleasantville High School teacher was arrested for allegedly engaging in a sexual relationship with a high school student, a Pleasantville High School principal was arrested for alleged possession of child pornography and pled guilty for child endangerment and possession of an assault firearm, a Pleasantville teacher had his license revoked as a result of pleading guilty to a federal health benefits fraud scheme, and a shooting took place during a high school football game at Pleasantville High School, endangering the lives of Absecon students who attended the game and killing a 10-year-old boy.

As a result of this mismanagement, the Board sought permission from the Commissioner of Education on September 6, 2019 to terminate its sending/receiving relationship with Pleasantville. Since that time, the Board and its attorneys have been working diligently to move this case forward. While normally the case would already have proceeded to a hearing, like so many other legal proceedings in New Jersey, it has been delayed. The Administrative Law Judge has indicated that her preference would be to hold the hearing in-person so that she can assess the credibility of the fact and expert witnesses who will be testifying. That is our preference as well, as we believe our witnesses and experts to be of the highest quality and character. The hearing is anticipated to involve six or seven days of testimony and, currently, is scheduled to take place on January 19, January 20, January 25, January 26, January 27, February 18, March 1, and March 2, 2021. In anticipation of the hearing dates, the Board has been working with its attorneys and experts to prepare our arguments and witnesses. However, due to the uncertainty caused by COVID-19 and the Governor's executive orders, it remains unclear whether any or all of these dates will need to be postponed. It also is possible that the Administrative Law Judge will find that continued delay no longer serves the parties' or public's interest and decide to hear the case via Zoom. We will continue to keep the community updated as we learn more.

While COVID-19 is one reason the case has been delayed, we would be remiss if we did not mention that Pleasantville repeatedly has sought to delay the proceedings. Originally, this delay was due to Pleasantville failing to timely provide responses to Absecon's requests for information (and in some instances not even providing any response to the Board's requests).

This has resulted in Absecon seeking telephone conferences involving the Judge and filing a motion seeking to have the Judge order Pleasantville provide the information. More recently, Pleasantville filed a motion seeking an indefinite delay, based upon an entirely different lawsuit having been filed over a year earlier in the Mercer County Superior Court. That lawsuit was brought by a number of public interest groups asserting that the State needed to take certain measures to desegregate New Jersey's Public Schools. Our attorneys opposed this motion on the grounds that the Mercer County case has no relevance to our case. The Judge all but agreed with our attorneys, denied Pleasantville's motion and rejected its efforts to stay this case for several years.

While the process has not moved as swiftly as originally anticipated, the Board remains committed to Absecon students being provided the best public education available, while also ensuring that our community's tax dollars are used efficiently and effectively. The Board is confident that leaving Pleasantville and having our students attend Absegami meets both of these goals.