

MINUTES
SPECIAL JOINT STUDY SESSION MEETING
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
FARMINGTON CITY COUNCIL
FARMINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
JANUARY 27, 2025 – 6:00P.M.
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBER

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The Farmington Hills City Council meeting was called to order by Mayor Rich at 6:00pm.
The City of Farmington City Council meeting was called to order by Mayor LaRussa at 6:00pm.
The Farmington Public Schools Board of Education meeting was called to order by President Weems at 6:00pm.

2. ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS

City of Farmington Hills

Council Members Present: Aldred, Boleware, Bridges, Bruce, Dwyer, Knol and Rich

Council Members Absent: None

City of Farmington

Council Members Present: Balk, LaRussa, Parkins, Schneemann, Taylor (arr. 6:15pm)

Council Members Absent: None

Farmington Public Schools Board of Education

Members Present: Blau, Heinrich, Hull, Smith, Turner, Walker, Weems
Members Absent: None

Others Present

City of Farmington Hills: City Manager Mekjian; Assistant City Manager Mondora; City Clerk Lindahl; Deputy City Clerk Ashley Hopper; Director of Special Services Schnackel, Director of Communications and Community Engagement Sullen-Winn, and Director of Diversity, Equitiy and Inclusion and Employee Development Harvey, Interim Police Chief Piggot, Fire Chief Unruh, and City Attorney Joppich

City of Farmington: City Manager Murphy, City Attorney Saarela, Director of Public Safety Houhanisin; City Clerk Bachman and Bill Wood, Fire Marshal

Board of Education: Superintendent of Schools Coffin; Assistant to the Superintendent Scripture

3. COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

Mayor Rich explained that the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to explore opportunities for collaboration between the councils and the school board. The focus will be on identifying

meaningful joint efforts that can benefit the community. A list of five key topics had been developed with input from the participants.

a. Communication

- Strengthen communication between the School Board and City Council
- Share minutes and other key communications between the City Council, School Board, and the City of Farmington to foster collaboration

Discussion

A significant number of Farmington/Farmington Hills residents are not connected to the school. Accessing communication between the cities and the schools and then appropriately sharing out to the residents can help bridge this gap.

Suggestions included:

- Establish regular strategic planning discussions between a representative from the school board, superintendent's office, and one or two members of each city council, meeting monthly or at least quarterly to improve communication – if quarterly talk by phone at least monthly. The purpose is to improve communications and work on strategic planning together.
- Have a liaison from each council meet with Superintendent Coffin and Board President Weems to have a more in-depth discussion regarding issues facing the schools and cities.
- City managers, law enforcement, and superintendent establish a weekly phone call and/or email to update each other on what is happening within each sphere of influence.
- As strong communication builds a successful community, and as residents often ask council members and city officials for information regarding the schools, having a readily available reference (a "cheat sheet" that includes recent events) would help the cities provide accurate information while they communicate their support for the schools. Superintendent Coffin provided such a sheet to the attendees. Similar documents are provided by the cities as a matter of course – these should be regularly shared around.
- Provide links regarding the school district on each city website, with a short but clear statement that the schools are valued partners in the life of the city. Links to the cities can be posted on the school website.
- Broadcast school closings broadly, especially since closings affect others – the Costick Center closes when the schools close.
- The library is a significant community resource and its director and board are open to collaborative efforts; they should be invited to join the conversation in the future.

These suggestions were well received; the consensus appeared to move forward with concurrent implementation, with quarterly strategic planning meetings attended by liaisons and weekly conversations between the city managers, law enforcement, and the superintendent receiving highest priority.

b. Student Achievement

- Encourage residents including seniors to volunteer and support student learning.
- Develop ways for the City to support and honor student achievement.

- Share research findings and programming updates from the School Board to foster ideas on how the City can support educational efforts.
- Addressing childhood hunger

After reviewing current achievements goals and strategies in order to accelerate learning growth and achievement, while continuing to identify and support students who are struggling academically, Superintendent Coffin pointed out that students who come to school hungry, or lacking adequate housing, or with worries about what will happen after they leave the school day, are not learning-ready. Ensuring students have proper nutrition, adequate and safe housing, community support and outreach for the entire family, promotes readiness for learning.

Families who have meaningful and engaging work experiences and opportunities, and students who are emotionally, psychologically and physically safe, are learning-ready.

The cities and the schools can work together to ensure students are ready to learn when they come to school.

Discussion

Regarding clarity of terms and action:

- Improve the messaging regarding student achievement, so that messaging is consistent across all entities.
- Achieve clarity in what the cities can do to support the school district and then set meaningful goals to achieve that.
- Share the school's dashboard (it's "north star") at the next quarterly meeting.

Suggestions included:

- Help students be learning-ready by strengthening families. Include parenting classes and support groups in offerings at The Hawk. Explore partnering with the Michigan School of Psychology to help with this effort.
- Encourage the wider community to support the schools through millages and volunteerism. Develop messaging for residents who do not have students in the public schools. Emphasize the benefit of a successful school system to the entire community.

Addressing student hunger

- After significant discussion regarding the importance of this issue and acknowledging that the State provides free breakfasts and lunches to all students, the suggestion was to form a subcommittee to research and ultimately facilitate coordination across all available community resources to address student hunger, which often reflects family hunger and points to other needs within families. Include in this coordination the Children, Youth and Families Commission, CARES, and other organizations and agencies.

Honoring student and educator achievement

- Develop ways for the cities to support and honor student achievement, and also educator, staff, and district-wide achievements.
 - Acknowledge student and staff achievements and at city council meetings.

- Proactively show up at student achievement events, including graduations.
- Participate in March Reading Month at the schools.

c. Job Readiness and Experiential Learning

- Foster internships and real-world learning opportunities in city departments and local businesses.
- Offer the City's resources and alliances to create job opportunities for young people.
- Internship/Summer Employment
- Shadowing Program

Discussion

In addition to the list above, the following items were discussed:

- Encourage students to attend municipal meetings.
- Formalize the shadowing program
- Take a youth delegation to the National League of Cities.
- Internships should be thought of broadly and include the professional community as well as the government bodies.
- Give students the opportunity for speaking engagements at city hall on a variety of topics, including sharing their family's original culture.
- Strengthen the relationship with the Chamber of Commerce and involve them with these goals and activities. Engage with Oakland County relative to opportunities they offer.
- Help students to be work-ready by helping them get a work permit.
- Support and participate in career day, which this year is on April 25.
- Support and facilitate information regarding summer jobs.
- Involve the homeowners associations and the DDA.
- Again, involve the Library with its unique resources.

As this discussion was wide-ranging with potentially many moving parts, Mayor Rich suggested that representatives from each entity together form a sub-group to explore actionable ideas around the concept of job readiness and experiential learning.

d. School Safety and Emergency Preparedness

- Strengthen school safety through better coordination between the Schools and the Police Department.
- Encourage active shooter training in schools through collaboration with the Police Department.
- Discuss Emergency Preparedness. Possibly develop a round-table collaborative exercise.

Farmington Hills Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer, drawing on his extensive law enforcement experience including his years as Chief of Police in Farmington Hills, expressed deep concern over rising gun violence and the need for stronger school safety measures. He noted that while the community has been fortunate to avoid a major school-related shooting incident for over 40 years, the school district remains at risk. Reflecting on his past role in establishing the school liaison officer program, he stressed that more proactive steps are necessary and should be taken immediately. He emphasized that active shooter training has to be the top priority, urging regular, full-scale active shooter exercises involving both law enforcement and school personnel.

He warned that preparedness alone is insufficient without comprehensive, realistic drills that take months to properly plan.

Superintendent Coffin provided an overview of the district's ongoing safety initiatives and partnerships with local law enforcement. She emphasized the strong collaboration between Farmington Public Schools, the Farmington Public Safety Department, and the Farmington Hills Police Department, particularly through the School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

Superintendent Coffin highlighted the district's expansion of ALICE training, which now occurs four times a year as full-day sessions, incorporating CPR and Stop the Bleed training. This training is mandatory for all new staff and has been extended to noon aides upon their request. The sessions are supported by local law enforcement, district nurses, and MedSkill students.

To enhance emergency response, the District recently adopted standard response protocols, ensuring a uniform communication system across all schools. Public address systems have been pre-programmed with five standardized emergency announcements, allowing any staff member to quickly initiate an appropriate response. Bullet-resistant glass has been installed in key areas across all buildings to enhance security in high-traffic student spaces.

Additionally, the district is actively updating its emergency operating plans in coordination with SROs, principals, and crisis teams to ensure consistency and awareness throughout the District. As part of security improvements, they have explored solutions like Centegix and other security companies to supplement the existing four SROs. The district is also evaluating vape sensors with motion detection capabilities for school bathrooms.

Superintendent Coffin affirmed the District's commitment to school safety and welcomed further discussions or recommendations.

When asked about conducting a full-scale, one-day active shooter exercise at the high schools in coordination with law enforcement, Superintendent Coffin expressed support for the initiative.

Discussion followed, focusing on:

- Appreciation for the good work Superintendent Coffin is doing regarding this issue, and the effective partnerships she has forged with the local police departments.
- Understanding that a potential student shooter can be stopped if he is noticed early enough.
- Acknowledgement that this issue has different components, including easy access to guns.
- Suggestion that the Cities offer OK2SAY training for the wider community.
- Prevention involves specific actionable items, several of which – including an emphasis on “noticing and belonging” – are being currently implemented throughout the school district.

After robust discussion, there appeared to be consensus that the best outcome of tonight's meeting is for the police chiefs from both Farmington and Farmington Hills to continue to work with the school administration regarding the best way to move forward, with the recommendation that high school students receive the same full ALICE training as staff, and that the one-day full-scale training event described by Mayor Pro Tem Dwyer be a priority.

e. Transportation

- Before and after school tutoring

School Board President Weems noted her concern that some students are not able to take advantage of after school mentoring and/or activities because they don't have after school transportation. This situation relates to academic achievement. President Weems wondered if there was an opportunity for the City to help provide after school transportation.

President Weems further clarified that the after school program at The Hawk is only for middle-school students. She was suggesting that after school transportation be provided for high school students who stay at the school for additional mentoring/academic help.

Mayor Rich acknowledged the request but was unable to provide a response without more information and research.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Lubaway, Farmington resident, said he had attended the Michigan State Board of Education meeting on January 14. Despite Michigan's adoption of strategies a decade ago to rank among the top 10 states in K-12 education, yet the state currently ranks 41st out of 50.

Mr. Lubaway highlighted disparities in literacy proficiency across school districts. Farmington School District's 58% proficiency rate places it 68th out of 580 districts. He emphasized that African American and low-income students in both Michigan and Farmington lag significantly behind their peers. He challenged Farmington Public Schools to take a leadership role in closing the achievement gap and improving educational outcomes statewide.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Council and Board members expressed appreciation for tonight's meeting, and enthusiasm for continuing this important collaborative effort. Conversation had been respectful, wide-ranging, and has led to actionable ideas including appointing liaisons and beginning a structure to provide a meaningful, unified effort to work together to support the success of all students and families in the community.

Mayor Rich thanked everyone for their active participation and suggested reconvening toward the end of summer to assess progress and determine next steps. As there appeared to be consensus, the Library would also be invited to participate in future discussions.

ADJOURNMENT

The Joint Meeting adjourned at 8:22pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carly Lindahl, City Clerk