

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

UPDATE ON FULL DAY 3- AND 4-YEAR PRE-K

Statement of Mayor Michael Gonnelli
June 7, 2024

I am issuing this release to advise you of some very upsetting news I recently learned about the full-day Pre-K program the Secaucus Public School System was planning to start for the upcoming school year. Based on a recent meeting I had with acting Superintendent Charlie Voorhees, and a few Board Members, as well as subsequent discussions, they have determined the program cannot move forward.

I previously informed you that I had several meetings with Erick Alfonso, the current Superintendent who has been placed on administrative leave, who informed me, and all involved in our meetings, that he was securing grant funding from the State that would entirely pay for a full-day Pre-K program. As a part of the grant the district was required to partner with outside daycare and Head Start programs to secure the space necessary to house the program and was required to continue with those partnerships into the future. Unfortunately, I have learned that Superintendent Alfonso never executed agreements with the outside daycare programs. Furthermore, a couple of the outside facilities have decided not to participate in the program and the New Jersey State Department of Education determined an additional facility did not meet their standards and could not be considered. Additionally, it was determined the costs of the program would exceed the grant funds and the proposed growth of the full-day Pre-K program would place a significant strain on our education system in the coming years. Due to these and other reasons, the program cannot move forward.

In short, it seems Superintendent Alfonso either provided me with incorrect information or did not fully analyze and understand the requirements and limitations of the grant and the impact on the school system. I am so very disappointed in how this situation developed. It was only a few weeks ago that the Board of Education opened registration for the full-day Pre-K program, and I know many children and parents were looking forward to this offering. This is, frankly, very upsetting, and utterly embarrassing.

The one thing I do appreciate is that Acting Superintendent Voorhees quickly looked into the program, fully analyzed the grant, reached out to vendors and quickly made a recommendation that the full-day Pre-K program does not move forward. I know this was not an easy decision and it was not easy for Mr. Voorhees to deliver this news to me.

As I have said in the past, I will continue to work with the Superintendent and the Board of Education on any initiatives that will benefit the school children of Secaucus. That commitment remains. However, I also fully expect that any future programs or initiatives the Superintendent and Board seek to implement will be thoroughly vetted and fully understood before steps to implement are taken.