

**MEETING MINUTES FROM A REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
MULTICULTURAL INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**HELD AT 7:00 P.M. ON JANUARY 28, 2026**

**VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE**

**A. CALL TO ORDER** *meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm by Roxanna Tirado.*

**B. STATEMENT REGARDING PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT - read by Roxanna Tirado.**

*The notice requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied with respect to this meeting of the Multicultural Inclusion & Accessibility Advisory Committee which is being held via Zoom video conferencing. This information, along with the public internet link and telephone call-in information was posted in the Municipal Building, and sent the official newspapers of the Township, the Verona-Cedar Grove Times and the Star Ledger and MyVeronaNJ.com, TAPinto and the Patch, the official online news source(s) of the Township, at least 48 hours preceding the start time of this meeting. A public comment period will be held in the order it is listed on the meeting agenda and instructions on how to comment will be provided at the appropriate time.*

**C. ROLL CALL**

**Present:**

Roxanna Tirado

Michele Gruet

John Vajda

Rita Chevalier

Kathleen Francis

P.J. Pimpinelli

Tovah Kopan

Michelle O'Neill

Cynthia Holland - Council Representative

Diane DiGiuseppe - Superintendent of School

Sinaileen Dacoff - Student Representative

Elissa Pena - Student Representative

**Absent:**

Naura Reynoso

Michael McMahon - Verona Recreation

Claudine Pascale - Verona Public Library

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting for 12/17/25 were approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

## **REPRESENTATIVE UPDATES**

Library update – R.Tirado provided the library update stating that the library will be hosting a Chinese Tea and Dance on 2/7/26 at 7pm, in order to celebrate Lunar New Year.

Schools update – D.DiGiuseppe provided a comprehensive update on several topics surrounding inclusivity in the Verona Public Schools. Below is the update provided by D.DiGiuseppe:

This week, Verona Public Schools is celebrating Inclusive Schools Week, an annual initiative that highlights our district’s ongoing commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and belonging for all students.

This year’s theme, “Children First: Building a Stronger Tomorrow,” emphasizes prioritizing every student’s right to learn in environments that support diverse needs, recognize individual strengths, and foster a sense of belonging. This theme reflects a core belief guiding our work in schools: when learning environments are intentionally designed to support students with disabilities, they become stronger and more effective for all learners.

This marks Verona’s fourth annual Inclusive Schools Week, taking place January 26 through January 30, and aligns closely with the district's daily instructional and support practices already in place.

Across our schools, inclusion is reflected through:

- Co-teaching and in-class support models, where general education and special education teachers collaborate to provide access to grade-level curriculum while addressing diverse learning needs within the classroom.

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices, including flexible instructional strategies, multiple ways for students to engage with content, and varied methods for demonstrating understanding.
- Related services delivered in inclusive settings, such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling, are embedded in classroom routines whenever appropriate, reducing barriers and increasing access.
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) is embedded throughout the school day, helping students build self-awareness, empathy, collaboration skills, and a sense of belonging.
- Collaborative problem-solving teams, including child study teams, intervention and MTSS structures, and school-based support teams that proactively respond to student needs.

Inclusive Schools Week provides an opportunity to make this work visible and celebrate inclusion across different areas of school life:

Monday would have been had it not snowed – Inclusion in the Academic Classroom  
“Being inclusive is no sweat” – wear sweatshirts or sweatpants.

Tuesday – Inclusion in Music  
“Dream of harmony” – pajama day.

Wednesday – Inclusion in Art  
Celebrating the range of perspectives inclusion brings – wear your favorite color.

Thursday – Inclusion in Physical Education  
Team Up for Inclusion – wear your favorite sports team apparel.

Friday – Inclusion in Schools and Community  
Be Inclusive in Verona – wear Verona maroon and white.

Students are also participating in an Inclusive Schools Week Collage Contest, creating artwork that demonstrates what inclusivity looks like in their school community. One student from each Verona school will be selected as a winner, with each receiving a \$50 prize.

Inclusive Schools Week reinforces that inclusion in Verona is not limited to a single week, program, or population. It is a shared commitment – woven into instruction, services, school culture, and community partnerships – focused on ensuring every child feels valued, supported, and empowered to succeed.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize and sincerely thank C.H.I.L.D. (Children Having Individual Learning Differences), Verona's Special Education Parent Advisory Committee, for their tremendous support of Inclusive Schools Week.

C.H.I.L.D. generously provided lessons, materials, and resources that are being used across our schools this week to help students better understand inclusion, empathy, and belonging. Their work enhances classroom conversations and gives educators meaningful tools to support inclusive practices in developmentally appropriate and impactful ways.

C.H.I.L.D. exemplifies what a SEPAC should be – a true collaborative partner with our Department of Special Services and our teaching staff. Their partnership is rooted in shared purpose, open communication, and a collective commitment to ensuring that all students are supported, valued, and included.

We are grateful for their leadership, advocacy, and willingness to work alongside the district to strengthen inclusive practices – not just during Inclusive Schools Week, but throughout the year. Their collaboration directly contributes to making our schools more responsive, compassionate, and welcoming for all learners.

Recreation – Update to be provided next meeting.

Town update - R.Tirado welcomed C.Holland to the MIAAC Committee as C.Holland will be the council representative.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Two Town-Wide Initiatives - R.Tirado stated that there are two grants that have been given to Verona: Integrated Healthy Communities and Age-Friendly Communities. More information will be provided on these grants when the information becomes available.

2026 events - R.Tirado discussed the MIAAC calendar for 2026 and dates were chosen for all events. The dates (and tentative dates) are outlined in the MIAAC calendar.

Events include:

- Lunar New Year
- Black History Month
- Women of Impact Panel
- Older Americans Education & Awareness
- Pride Celebration
- Disability Pride Awareness Campaign
- Hispanic Heritage
- Falloween
- Diwali
- Hanukkah
- Quiet Sessions with Santa/Fair in the Square

## **MEETING ADJOURNED**

Meeting was adjourned at 8:03pm