

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

A Planning Session Meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union will be held on Saturday, February 7, 2015 at 8:00 a.m. at James Caulfield Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey.

A planning session meeting of the Township of Union Board of Education was held at James Caulfield Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey on February 7, 2015 at 8:00 a.m., pursuant to notice sent to each board member.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. David Arminio - President, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Thomas Layden, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mr. Vito Nufrio, Mr. Angel Salcedo and Mrs. Nancy Zuena

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. Richard Galante and Ms. Lois Jackson

Mr. Arminio called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. and led the board and audience members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The secretary read the statement required under the "Open Public Meetings Act", a copy of which is on file in the office of the secretary.

Mr. Arminio asked Mr. Damato about the presentation scheduled by Lt. Christie of the Union Police Department. Mr. Damato said that Lt. Christie had texted him last evening to advise that he was ill and would be unable to attend the meeting today. Mr. Arminio asked if there was a written report that would be reviewed today. Mr. Damato said that Lt. Christie was to give a new report regarding the traffic pattern at Hannah Caldwell School. He said that with the board's permission, he would like to ask Lt. Christie to give his report at the worksession meeting next Tuesday. Mr. Damato said that Lt. Christie would let him know if he (Lt. Christie) was feeling better and could attend that meeting. Mr. Arminio said that Item #2 in Operations would, therefore, not be discussed this evening and would be pulled from today's agenda.

Mr. Arminio said that in order to stay right on task, the agenda will be followed in a timely manner so that the meeting can be adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Education/Student Discipline

Technology - Mr. Arminio asked Mr. Vieira how much money was budgeted for the 2015-2016 school year for an assessment or an audit of the district's systems. Mr. Vieira said that he would have to check in the budget. Mr. Arminio asked if there has been any money allocated for that purpose. Mr. Vieira said that Ms. Hart prepares the technology budget and he could not say yes or no if she had budgeted for an audit. Dr. Lishak said that she knew that Ms. Hart did not budget for an audit. Mr. Arminio asked if there was a way to get something in the technology budget so that the district can get such an audit. Mr. Vieira said that he would have to look into that.

Mr. Tatum said that the board has, in the past, talked about having a technology assessment. Mr. Damato said that there was a representative in last year and he spoke to him about doing an audit. He said that this individual offered services which the district was not looking at that time; Mr. Damato said that the district was looking for more systems engineering background to get into the nitty-gritty of the configurations of the switches, etc. Mr. Tatum said that there was an assessment done a few years ago when one of the technology managers left the district and he did not remember what the cost was then but that was approximately five years ago.

Mr. Damato said that he spoke to a consultant yesterday and he is supposed to submit a proposal by Monday. He said that when the proposal is received, the board will know approximately what the costs will be. Mr. Tatum said that this will give Mr. Vieira an opportunity to rework some figures in the budget.

Mr. Layden said that he remembered the company that did the presentation and he thought they were pretty impressive. He said that they offered services that would be tailored to the district. Mr. Arminio said that he remembered the presentation about doing an audit but he did not remember that an audit was ever done. Mr. Tatum said that an audit was done of the system many years ago. Mr. Damato said that he thought it was done more than five years ago. Mr. Tatum said that he remembered it being before Dr. Jakubowski retired.

Mr. Layden said that Mr. Arminio had mentioned that Union County Educational Services Commission had such an audit. Mr. Damato said that this is the same firm that he spoke to and that was going to submit a proposal. Dr. Lishak said that the representative that had come to the district gave a lot of information about an audit of one area which is not the area that the district is looking to be audited.

Mr. Arminio asked what the district was looking for in technology that needs to be improved or at least get a handle on what is wrong with the technology in the district and what needs to be done to correct it. Dr. Lishak said that the district seems to have a problem with the infrastructure as it is not only running student computers but also the business computers. She said that when something goes down, everyone goes down. Dr. Lishak said that she is not a tech person but from the length of time that she has been in the district, it seems like what the district has done over the years is band aid and patch problems and as soon as more computers are added to the system, something else happens. She said that over the last couple of years, the district has upgraded its connections to Comcast which has cost a lot of money and the district has the capability for more data but it really seems that problems are caused by what is running in the system. Dr. Lishak said that the district lost internet connection last Thursday morning for about 1-1/2 hours; that was supposed to have been fixed over the holiday recess between Christmas and New Years; she said that the internet was lost for days at that time. Dr. Lishak said that the district had the company come in, a new part was ordered, installed and the system was upgraded. She said that a part within the part that was installed was not good and the company has replaced the part. Dr. Lishak said that the company said that everything was fine and the system went down again on Thursday.

Dr. Lishak said that part of the issue that the district has is that the district is relying on people who are telling us what is wrong and they are also the people that are selling the district the parts. She said that the district needs to have an outside vendor come in and whether they ever make another penny off the district, to come in to review the systems and make a recommendation of what is needed. Dr. Lishak said that once the overall assessment is made then the district can try to find a vendor who can fix the problem. She said that there are places in various buildings that still cannot get wireless connection even though there have been a multitude of data drops and line running throughout the buildings. Dr. Lishak said that a sweep of the entire district needs to be done.

Mr. Arminio said that he and Mr. Nufrio spoke to many of the tech people that were in attendance at the School Boards Convention. He said that they advised that there were many different kinds of assessments that could be done. Mr. Arminio said that most of the vendors advised that the district stay wired. Mr. Nufrio said that the representatives said that if you want to communicate between buildings the best way is to stay wired because there are too many obstructions between the buildings. He said that wireless is more expensive and is prone to more breakdowns. Mr. Nufrio said that within a building, wireless is okay.

Mrs. Zuena asked if any of the buildings were wireless. Dr. Lishak said that all buildings are supposed to have wireless access. She said that all buildings also have wired computers. Dr. Lishak said that there are some dead spots for the wireless service in the buildings. She said that she has been advised that "the drop is not close enough to where you have to be". Mrs. Zuena said that additional drops should be installed. Dr. Lishak said that it not just about adding drops, there are other issues in the buildings that will not allow the building to become completely wireless. Mr. Nufrio said that the a representative at Convention did mention that wireless poses a lot of complications. He said that the representative recommended that the district remain wired. Mr. Arminio said that there are many devices that student utilize that are wireless and cannot be "wired" for use.

Dr. Lishak said that in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, it was brought to the district's attention that there are servers at various locations in the district; depending on the size of the server the cost is between \$5,200 and \$7,500. She said that the more that is added onto a server, additional servers must also be utilized. Dr. Lishak said that when power was lost during Sandy, the district lost the ability to post anything on its website and she was worried what was going to happen to stored data. She said that most sites are now going to storage in the "cloud" so that it does not matter if the district has a flood or loses power; it will not affect the stored data. Dr. Lishak said that this type of storage involves a security question because you don't know where the data is going to be stored. Mr. Nufrio said that he did not think that "cloud" storage can be used for testing purposes. Dr. Lishak said that she was talking about all of the other information in the district. Mr. Vieira said that Systems 3000 which includes accounting, payroll and personnel, the data is saved on an off-site server but an internet connection in the district is necessary to access Systems 3000. Dr. Lishak said that the Teachscape program also has off-site storage.

Mr. Tatum said that one of the things that he recalls from when he oversaw technology was that "disaster recovery" was talked about frequently; meaning, that if something went down in the district, somewhere else in the district there would be a server that would be accessible. He said that this is something that the district never actually developed because when the internet goes down, the district cannot get anything done. Mr. Tatum said that there should be some sort of disaster recovery for when a situation like this occurs. He said that during Sandy, the district was supposed to have some legitimate device in order for the district to stay up and running; whether it be on or off-site.

Dr. Francis said that it is necessary to have power to where ever you are working. He said that he has a server in his office but he was offered, for a fee, to have all of his records backed up as frequently as he wanted in case something happened. Dr. Francis said that if the district was to have a system where the information is backed up off-site and if something goes wrong or if a server goes bad, the information can be accessed. Mr. Vieira said that is what the district has with Systems 3000; he said that there are off site servers in two different locations and the system is backed up nightly. He said that this procedure has enabled to have Systems 3000 run so much faster. Mr. Vieira said that backing up information in the office or processing a report is very quick.

Mr. Salcedo said that he first thought that a technology audit would involve computers, etc. He said that now he understood that the district required an infrastructure audit. Mr. Salcedo said that this sounds like something that should have been done a year ago. He asked what will happen if the internet service is lost during the PARCC test. Dr. Lishak said that since the system went down last week, she is having a meeting with the vendor who installed the new part over the holidays on Monday and requesting that they insure that any new part that is installed will not give the district any problems during testing. Mr. Salcedo said that it was his concern that there is a Director of Technology and why is it that the board has waited until now to hear that there are problems and why isn't the board hearing recommendation from the Director of Technology.

Mr. Tatum said that one of the reasons that the board is not hearing the recommendations from Ms. Hart is that she has a broken ankle and she has not been in district for the past month or so. He said that he was not so sure that Ms. Hart would have the "expertise" for the level that needs to be assessed because her real responsibility is dealing with reports, student information and repairs to the system. Mr. Tatum said that he thought that the level that the board was discussing right now is probably beyond her scope of expertise in all fairness to Ms. Hart. He said that throughout the years, the district has had infrastructure needs and unfortunately over the course of the years, it has been more of a "repair" situation than a full analysis of the system. Mr. Tatum said that there has not been an improvement to the system that would actually bring the district a little closer to the 21st Century. He said that the infrastructure in the district was build from the ground up internally for the most part and he did not know if the expertise existed to get recommendations from the Director of Technology.

Mr. Vieira said that sometimes the blame does have to go to Comcast which is the internet provider. He said that when he mentions that to Systems 3000, they say that the district can buy an insurance plan so that if Comcast loses power then the insurance plan would pick up another company to provide service. Dr. Lishak said that Ms. Hart was just

given that information from the State when PARCC was being discussed. She said that Ms. Hart had made contact with the insurance provider and the cost is almost as much as the cost of the original connection. Dr. Lishak said that there is also another secondary source where you can buy a system that runs alongside Comcast and although it is not as expensive as Comcast, it is still expensive. She said that Ms. Hart was gathering that data before her accident.

Mr. Nufrio said that Mr. Vieira was talking about total power loss from Comcast. Mr. Vieira said not electrical service only internet connection. Mr. Nufrio said that it would be total loss of the ability to access the internet and he knew that could happen. Mrs. Zuena said that it happens all of the time in school. She said that the other day she was trying to go onto Genesis to get grades and she was not able to access the system. Mr. Nufrio said that he has Comcast at his home and maybe something more must be done by Comcast to accommodate the school district. He said that he has not experienced any internet disruption but maybe there has to be a discussion with Comcast to see how they can best insure that the district has the "premium" level service and the district gets priority service. Mr. Nufrio said that if Comcast cannot provide the district with that type of security or peace of mind, than the district should find another provider. He said that if the internet goes down during testing, the state has said that there are things that can be done. Mr. Nufrio asked if the vendor that has been servicing the district is the best that the district can get and if not, perhaps another vendor should be sought out.

Mr. Salcedo said that no one at the meeting today is a technology specialist and that is why an audit is necessary. He said that the district is IT intensive and now the testing will be IT intensive. Mr. Salcedo said that the district needs to know what its vulnerabilities are and the system needs to be strengthened. Mr. Nufrio said that he remembers talking about this last year. Dr. Lishak said that this has been discussed a number of times.

Mr. Arminio suggested that the Education Committee put forth a resolution at the Worksession next Tuesday that asks for an audit of the technology system be done so that the district knows who to blame for problems that are occurring and what has to be done to repair the system. Mrs. Zuena asked when the internet goes down, is the district advised of what section is going down. Dr. Lishak said the district does know that. She said that what happened on Thursday had nothing to do with Comcast and what happened over Christmas break was not Comcast. Dr. Lishak said that the district knows when it is internal or when it is Comcast; she said that most problems are not due to the Comcast connection and it is within the district. Mr. Nufrio said that if the vendor is not able to furnish the help that is required instantaneously, then it is time to get another vendor. Dr. Lishak said that it is at a point where it cannot continue. Mr. Nufrio said that even though the Director of Technology may not be the one to furnish the board with answers, he hoped that she would at least have a hand on the pulse in terms of which companies today are providing the best possible service.

Mr. Tatum said that he remembered that the district used to use ProMedia a lot. Dr. Lishak said that the district still uses that vendor. Mr. Tatum asked what ProMedia does. Dr. Lishak said that ProMedia deal with SmartBoard installation. She said that most of the schools are done with SmartBoard installation and the district does not use ProMedia as

often as it used to. Dr. Lishak said that ProMedia is more of a company that does installations. Mr. Tatum said that at one time he recalled that ProMedia used to do a lot of technical work around the district and he thought that ProMedia was at the "top of the charts" with technology expertise. Mr. Damato said that ProMedia does have systems engineers working for them and that is really what the district needs. He said that over the years there have been many pieces of hardware installed around the district and they are all interconnected on the network. Mr. Damato said that before Jefferson School was re-opened, he had a conversation with a computer person who said that the district could have a signal go the "easy, unobstructed way" around the district or you can make it go the wrong way and it hits against other signals and that is what slows down the process. He said that there are a lot of re-configurations that need to be done to the hardware to get it to work the right way.

Dr. Lishak said that in fairness to the companies that the district has been using, when a vendor is called in to fix a particular problem; they come in to fix that specific problem and it is not their job to look beyond what the district has asked them to do. Mr. Damato said that the person he spoke to at Jefferson said that it would take months of work to get the problem fixed.

Mr. Layden said that he thought the first step to take was to make sure that there was money in the budget to do the IT audit. Mr. Vieira said that the district does budget \$300,000 for non-salary, technical services and supplies. Mr. Nufrio asked if this would fall under capital improvements as well. Mr. Vieira asked Mr. Nufrio if he meant as far as buying equipment. Mr. Nufrio said that anything attached to a building is part of the capital improvement and the district should be able to use capital improvement money to make the system right because the district does not have the time or the flexibility to put this off for another six months or a year. He said that we are in the technology era, like it or not. Mr. Nufrio said that things change so quickly that the district needs a company that will keep up with the changes and provide the right services and equipment as needed.

Mr. Layden said that although he felt that Ms. Hart was doing the best job that she could, based on comments made by Mr. Tatum, he wondered whether the district had the right person doing the job as Director of Technology; does she need an assistant or someone from an outside company to monitor the infrastructure to advise the district if there is a problem. Mr. Damato said that Mr. Layden brought up a very good point and maybe the board should be talking about what should be a part of the IT audit; should it just be hardware, should it be hardware and software, should it be personnel; what aspects is the district looking to audit.

Mr. Tatum said that when he met with the representative last year, that subject of the number of people that should be in place in the IT department for a district of this size. He said that with regard to the current Director, when Ms. Hart was hired, she was hired only to oversee the staff that was currently in place in the IT department which was probably only three or four people. Mr. Tatum said that Ms. Hart's main job was student information; handling data bases, doing reports, etc. He did not think that when Dr.

Jakubowski hired Ms. Hart for the position that he was looking at the position from the standpoint of being a high level technical person. Mr. Layden said that this is now problematic. Mr. Tatum agreed. Mr. Nufrio said that the position requires ongoing training.

Mr. McDowell said that he agreed with Mr. Layden that personnel may be the first avenue that the district wishes to look at because the Director of Technology should be the one speaking to the board about issues in the system and exactly what the district needs to fix the issues. He said that he felt the one of the first things that the audit should cover would be personnel so that the district can get the right people in place. Mr. McDowell said that the district needs someone working for it in a consultant capacity. Mr. Nufrio said that he and Mr. Arminio spoke to several people who provide continuing services and assistance.

One-to-One Computers – Dr. Lishak said that she has looked at the district's budget over the past few years, not just with the PARCC coming but with the installation of SmartBoards throughout the district. She said that the district has also had to replace standard computers and then the PARCC added to it. Dr. Lishak said that she was supposed to meet with another school district last week but the meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. She said that there are many school district in Union County and beyond where students have one-on-one computers. Dr. Lishak said that now that the computer labs in the district are completed, the district has money in its budget that could be used to furnish one-on-one computers to students. She said that it has to be decided at what level would be the best place to start.

Dr. Lishak distributed a packet of information to the board members. She said that the packet only contains information from Apple but she has also been in contact with Dell and she is also looking into the possibility of Chrome Books.

Mrs. Zuena asked if students were using computers or iPads mostly. Dr. Lishak said that different devices are being used. She said that some are using AppleAir, some are using Chrome Books; it depends on what the district's budget can sustain.

Dr. Lishak said that Linden purchased for every student from third through twelfth grade an Apple Air computer; in grades three, four and five the students must leave the devices in the building; sixth, seventh and eighth graders get a device to be used throughout the school day and they can take them home each night; the high school uses the devices in the same manner. She said that Linden chose to lease the computers. Dr. Lishak said that the price of the computer during the first year was \$850 per computer but the payments are spread out over three years. She said that all of the devices are under warranty and if all goes well, new devices will not have to be purchased in the middle school every three years but they probably will have to be replaced in either four or five years. Dr. Lishak said that Linden has committed to purchasing a new set of computers each year for the incoming freshman class at the high school because the students and the computers are paid off before the student becomes a senior and then the parents can purchase the computer for \$1. She said that the student will be able to take the computer that they worked on and that will go with them.

Dr. Lishak said that there are other expenses that go along with this. She said in addition to purchasing these computers, the district also had to train two techs that are now Apple techs that work on these computers. Dr. Lishak said that the devices are covered by warranty, the same as if anyone bought an Apple computer but it is not covered for all of the things that really happen. She said that the cost to insure the devices is \$73 per child which is paid by the parent; but if the parent is unable to pay it, the district picks up the cost of the insurance but in the event that the student breaks the computer, the computer is repaired but the parent must work out a payment plan until they pay whatever the insurance cost would be.

Dr. Lishak said that she was concerned because the device is an expensive piece of equipment and it could get stolen or lost. She said that Linden spends \$54,000 per year on LoJack to track the computers. Dr. Lishak said that between this year and last year there have been no stolen computers but there have been four lost computers that were recovered by LoJack. She said that the district does not necessarily have to go with an Apple device and she is meeting with another district on February 17 and speaking with Dell to figure out what kind of offer they can make to us.

Dr. Lishak said that the money that the district would be using for SmartBoards could be utilized. She said it will have to be determined if leasing is better than purchasing; should the district go with Apple devices or with a ChromeBook which is much cheaper but does not offer a lease option and these devices do not allow a student to do as much on the computer; it is really just a tablet that allows the student to be on the internet. Dr. Lishak said that she did not want the students in Union to not be as prepared as the students in the town next door.

Dr. Lishak said that the other issue is some students do not have wireless service in their homes and they would have to go to a library or other facility that has Wi-Fi to use the device out of school. She said that she did not know how many students this would involve. Mrs. Zuena said that Wi-Fi is offered in so many different places now.

Mr. Arminio said that there are a number of ways that the district can go with regard to this. Mr. Salcedo thought that this was a very exciting idea. He said that there is a large financial piece to this and he wanted to know if there was money allotted for something like this. Dr. Lishak said that every year the district allots money for things like SmartBoards and hard wired computers. She said that the district has replaced so many devices in preparation for the PARCC and she has purchased her last two SmartBoards and at the end of this school year, every room at Burnet will have a SmartBoard; all classrooms at Kawameeh have a SmartBoard and most of the elementary schools have SmartBoards in each class or they have access to a roll-in SmartBoard. Dr. Lishak said that about half of the classrooms at the high school have SmartBoards and there are classrooms that can be used if there is a need for a SmartBoard. She said that it is now time for the district to take the money that has been allotted for SmartBoards and look at something different like the opportunity for the students to have a one-on-one computer. Mr. Arminio said that the SmartBoards will eventually need to be replaced. Dr. Lishak said that the district is okay today with SmartBoards but if any school needs to replace a SmartBoard, there is money in the individual school budgets for that purpose. She said that since she has been in the district there have been some repairs to SmartBoards but no replacements.

Dr. Lishak said that one-on-one computers is the way that all colleges are going right now. Mr. Nufrio said that he always cringes when he has to replace any computer equipment at home because he is on a fixed income and the problem as Mr. Salcedo said is that this must be budgeted. He said that he emphasized again that he felt this would fall under Capital Improvement; it should not only be a small portion of the district's budget. Mr. Nufrio said that the district has to be sure that this can be financed without violating or crossing any lines. Mr. Arminio said that he knew that some SmartBoards can be run by using an Apple device. Dr. Lishak said that some of the teachers in district do that as well.

Dr. Lishak said that the price of a computer at this point is hardly anything it would be the cost of the SmartBoard and when the SmartBoards were first installed, they were so much more expensive than they are now and two years from now, they will be much cheaper.

Mr. Tatum said that when the district opened up Jefferson School, a number of the roll-in SmartBoards were moved to other elementary schools to enhance their supply because all new SmartBoards were installed at Jefferson School.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the one-on-one computers a lease/purchase agreement would allow the district to commit a set amount of money each year as opposed to the district purchasing devices and there is a price increase, price reduction or a maintenance agreement cost. He said that when a computer becomes obsolete, it is replaced with the most up-to-date computer. Mr. Tatum said that this is something that should be looked into. He said that he felt that the district was taking a step in the right direction by investigating what other school districts are doing.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the budget, the district needs to start rethinking how to use money that it already has is being used. Mrs. Zuena said that she felt it was a step in the right direction but if 2700 more computers are being used in the high school, the district will have to realize that there are that many more computers using the system and will the system be compatible with the increased workload.

Mr. Nufrio said that this is why the district cannot rely on a small portion of the budget for this purpose. Mrs. Zuena said that Union is one of the only districts in Union County that doesn't have one-on-one computers. She said that she works in Summit and they have them; she knew that New Providence had them as well. Mr. Nufrio felt that a leasing agreement was the best way to go because the district will not have to worry about replacing devices. He said that in the long run, even if the cost is a little more for the lease than the purchase, it would be worth it no matter what company it is. Dr. Lishak said that she liked that with the Apple devices, the students could purchase the computer after three years. Mrs. Zuena said that this is a great opportunity for the students.

Mr. Arminio said that if the district goes in the proper order, first an audit would have to be done and then the computers can be purchased or leased. Dr. Lishak said that the money for the purchase of these computers would be in the same budget line; whether it is a laptop or a hard wired computer.

Dr. Francis said that when he first came on the board, he wanted to suggest that the students receive some kind of an iPad or some device which could hold textbooks, etc. so that students don't have to carry heavy books back and forth to school. He said that he was glad that the board is discussing doing this; he thought that the district's money would be spent well for the education of the students. Dr. Francis said that most of the district's budget is for salaries and benefits for staff but he wondered how much was really going toward giving something to the students to help them learn and educate them.

Mr. Layden said that he agreed with what Dr. Francis is saying. He said that the district has spent a lot of money in the past couple of years on operational stuff. Mr. Layden said that the facilities have had a lot of upgrades and he felt that keeping the money in the classroom for the students, giving them the best technology and tools for the students to learn is the best way to go.

Fiscal and Planning

2015-2016 School Budget - Mr. Vieira said that the proposed 2015-2016 school budget is \$124 million, which is the general fund. Mr. Salcedo asked what the budget was last year. Mr. Vieira said that last year's budget was \$123 million. He said that \$76 million is for salaries and \$24 million is for benefits. He said that approximately 80% of the budget goes for salaries and benefits. Mr. Vieira said that the remaining \$24 million is non-salaries. He said that 2/3rds of the budget comes from the municipal tax levy. Mr. Vieira said that the tax rate is generated from the municipal levy over the assessed values in Union. He said that the levy for the 2014-2015 school year is \$81 million. Mr. Vieira said that the law says the district can increase the levy by 2% or \$1.6 million. Mr. Salcedo asked if that was without putting it out for a vote. Mr. Vieira said that was correct.

Mr. Vieira said that there are exceptions to increase the levy more than 2% and one of the exceptions is for increased health care costs. Mr. Salcedo asked what the health care costs went up this year. Mr. Vieira said that the increase was close to 10%. Mr. Salcedo said that it was his understanding based on his conversation last year with the insurance representative was that in 2017 a large increase will take place. He said that the district needs to get on top of that because that scared him. He said that health care costs are going up every year and the board needs to plan for the future. Mr. Damato said that every year the district has to deal with an increase in health care costs. He said that this is a cost that cannot be predicted and what next year will bring; it is a volatile market. Mr. Damato said that the tax is making it even harder to predict and to budget. Mrs. Zuena asked if the cost was totally absorbed by the board or does the staff contribute to the costs. Mr. Vieira said that districtwide, the average employee pays 20% of the premium and the board pays 80% but at the individual level the premium is based upon the employee's income; this ranges anywhere between 5% and 35% of the premium. He said that the higher salaried employees are paying 35%. Mr. Vieira said that this is based upon a state chart of charges received from Trenton. Mr. Arminio asked if the state could increase the charges. Mr. Vieira said that it was possible. Dr. Francis said that he read that the law was going to sunset this year and it can stay the same or can be renegotiated.

Mr. Nufrio said that this will depend on who is going to be running the state in the future. He said that the fiscal stability of the state is such right now that it is "broke"; he

said that the state is not paying into the pension fund; payments have been missed and all of that will have an impact on what will be done when the next person in charge comes into office.

Dr. Francis said that he also read that the district can increase the levy more than 2% if it was not used the previous year. Mr. Vieira said that the budget has been increasing 2% each year.

Mr. Vieira said that the tax rate is determined by the levy divided by the assessed values in Union. He said that in 2015, the assessed values (the tax base of the entire town) increased by \$9.6 million; that was a good thing. Mr. Vieira said that the levy divided by the assessed value determines the tax rate. He said that when he compared the proposed 2015 tax rate to the 2014 tax rate the increase is only .87%; and even though the levy is being increased 2% since the assessed value is greater, the increase in the tax rate is only .87%; which is \$36 for the average home owner in Union.

Mr. Vieira said that the municipal levy is \$83 million. He said that the district can raise the levy more than 2% based on something called bank cap, which is calculated based on the health insurance premiums that exceed a growth of more than 2%. Mr. Vieira said that the district has \$1.6 million available in bank cap that can be used. Mr. Damato said that if the district raises the levy by 2% approximately \$1.6 million or so cut out of the budget so that it is balanced. He said that this will necessitate laying off staff if the district just goes to the 2% cap. Mr. Vieira said that was correct. Mr. Damato said that the board needed to know that before Mr. Vieira gets to why the district must use the bank cap option.

Mr. Vieira said that to get to the \$124 million budget, he had to use \$1 million of the \$1.6 million available from the bank cap. He said that when he put the \$1 million into the budget which increased the levy by another million, the tax rate increases 2.05% which equals \$81 for the average homeowner in Union.

Mr. Damato asked Mr. Vieira to give the board the background of the past three years of dollar increases in the tax levy on the average homeowner in Union. Mr. Vieira said that in 2014 the increase was \$73; in 2013 it was \$98 and in 2012 it was \$129. He said that you may ask if the district was increasing the municipal levy by 2% for the past three years and the state aid has been flat, why was the average homeowner paying larger increases. Mr. Vieira said that in prior years the assessed values in Union were decreasing by millions of dollars. He said that he spoke to the Township Tax Assessor, Mr. Parsons to see what some of the assessed values that have increased and he said that there were several throughout the town. Mr. Vieira said that one is the old Red Devil property on Vauxhall Road; he said that the owner has cleaned up the property and has gotten it ready for development; he said that this increased the assessed value. Mr. Vieira said that there are also other industrial properties in Union that have been cleaned up and the assessed values are increasing. He said that the old Tuscan Dairy property is also be redeveloped.

Mr. Vieira asked the board for their thoughts about using \$1 million of the bank cap to increase the tax rate by 2.05% or \$81 for the average homeowner. He said that if the district does not use the bank cap, it will expire at the end of the year. Mr. Vieira said that

every year bank cap generates but the \$1.6 million that is available to the district right now will expire and the district will never be able to use it again. Mr. Layden asked if it was Mr. Vieira's recommendation to use \$1 million from the bank cap. Mr. Vieira said it was. Mr. Arminio asked where the other \$600,000 go. Mr. Vieira said that the district has a maintenance reserve of \$1 million; he said that he took \$600,000 out of the maintenance reserve account to balance the budget.

Mr. Nufrio said that Mr. Vieira said if the district did not use the bank cap it will expire. Mr. Vieira said that every year there is a calculation that generates bank cap. He said that out of the \$1.6 million, \$600,000 is based on the 2015-2016 calculations and the \$1 million is from 2012-2013. Mr. Vieira said that the district must use 100% of the 2015-2016 amount before you can use any of the prior years. Mr. Nufrio asked Mr. Vieira to explain the expiration and how it applies. Mr. Vieira said that the \$1 million from the 2012-2013 year must be used for bank cap this year or it will expire if not used for the 2015-2016 budget. Mr. Nufrio said that the district would not have a choice and it must be used this year. He asked where the money goes. Mr. Vieira said that it means that the district loses the opportunity to increase the tax levy more than 2%. He said that there is no pot of money that is in a bank account. Mr. Salcedo said that this would give the district the opportunity to ask for more money from the taxpayers. Mr. Vieira said that it will increase the rate 2.05%.

Mr. Salcedo said that the district will have the same issue next year and not that he was disagreeing with this but the problem is that he believes in always looking forward. He said that the bank cap could solve the budget problems for this year without looking at personnel but at some point the district must look at personnel. He said that he believed in the students and the teachers but at some point the issue of personnel will have to be addressed. Mr. Vieira said that the district should start looking at the issue now. He said that the district has a teachers' contract that will be ratified any day for this year and next year which has salary increases of 2.3%. Mr. Vieira said that moving forward, the district will not be able to settle contracts for more than 2% unless the district wants to eliminate positions. Mr. Arminio asked if the district was making up anything due to retirements. Mr. Vieira said that he would be analyzing that; he said it would mean accepting retirements but not replacing the positions of the retirees. Mr. Nufrio said that the district did that this year. Mr. Vieira said that the district did do that but then there were many "unbudgeted" positions that washed what was cut a year ago when he was doing budget preparation. Mr. Nufrio said that this seems to be a recurring situation and the district cannot bank on that. Mr. Salcedo said that the board should not only be looking at teachers, he said that it should extend to support staff as well. Mr. Arminio said that some things are mandated by the state.

Dr. Francis said that he did worry about the taxpayers that were on a fixed income because the taxes have increased about \$400 over the past three years. Mr. Nufrio said that the problem with the real estate in town is that fluctuations cause all of the turmoil in the values. He said that you always hope to bring in younger families who probably just making the line of qualifying for a mortgage and then the taxes are increased yearly, it then does not become so appealing to live in Union. Mr. Nufrio said that senior citizens have an option when they reach age 67 there is a reduction that can be applied for from the state which forgives any added increases to the tax bill. Mr. Vieira said that it is a

property tax reimbursement. Mr. Nufrio said that the taxpayer's income is not a factor and if push comes to shove this is something that the district can consider. He felt that most seniors did not know about this option.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the budgetary concerns, he attended the Superintendents' Roundtable yesterday and the Superintendent from New Providence made it a point that when a district is calculating all of the out-of-district tuitions and trying to budget for mandated programs, his concern was that year after year the districts are paying the increases with no cap imposed, the districts are not allowed to increase their revenue to even offset the costs of those programs. He said when he hears Mr. Salcedo speak about "looking down the road", year after year the out of district schools and programs continue to rise in cost yet the local districts' budgets are capped at 2%. Mr. Tatum felt that sometime down the road this may cause class sizes to increase due to cuts in personnel. He said that the way the budget is prepared right now, if indeed some staff retires, they are usually replaced by an individual with a lower salary but class sizes are maintained. Mr. Tatum said that the one thing that the district has been fortunate to do over the past few years has been to maintain manageable class sizes in the district. He said that what also has to be kept in mind is that there has been an increase in the number of homeless families in the district and the district must provide services for those students. Mr. Tatum said that all of those issues become part of the budget and the district has no control over these things because the district is being told by the county and the state that the services must be provided. He said that when he first became the homeless liaison in the district there was only one student and now there are probably 25. Mr. Tatum said that the district has received mandates to advise that if a student is displaced due to a catastrophe such as Super Storm Sandy, the district must provide for these students. He said that it is much easier to let students into the district than to tell them that they have to leave. Mr. Tatum said that all of these factors come into play in terms of budgetary concerns as well. He said that at some point in time the district will have to get more money from somebody or items will have to be cut. Mr. Tatum said that is very frustrating to get mandates from the state but no additional funds to run additional programs.

Mr. Vieira said that for the information of the new board members, the district receives \$31 million in state aid. He said that the district has not had an increase in three years and the state aid for the 2015-2016 school year will be released around February 24. Mr. McDowell asked if Mr. Vieira expected the state aid to be "flat" again this year. Mr. Vieira said that his budget is based on no increase in state aid.

Mr. Tatum said that if the district had the same number of mandates to match the amount of state aid that is received, it would make sense and the district could operate but the problem is that the mandates dictate more than that dollar amount. Mr. Vieira said that the state should increase the state aid by at least 2%. Mr. Tatum said that if the district was to look at the legitimate cost of things, he was sure that the district was in the negative column.

Mr. Damato said that this past week, a new law was signed by the Governor which requires districts to have all new kinds of allergy medications in the nurse's office which the district has to provide and administer.

Mr. Layden said that it seems like the district is stuck between a rock and a hard place; he said that the district's state aid is flat, the fixed costs of salaries and benefits are 80% of the budget. He said that he thought the district should start thinking out of the box and start to look at alternate sources of revenue, things that have not been looked at in the past such as public/private partnerships. Mr. Layden said that maybe getting a full-time grant writer would allow for the district to explore grants that are available to be applied for. Dr. Lishak said that the board has discussed bringing in a grant writer to get opportunities that the district does not have the ability to take advantage of. She said that she had the opportunity to discuss a different route instead of hiring a grant writer, there are companies that she would be meeting with to give proposals on how they can possibly find grants for the district; these companies are paid out of the grants that are applied for. Dr. Lishak said that by using one of these companies there will be no cost to the district unless a grant is obtained. She said that if a grant meets a need in the district and the district qualifies for the grant, these companies will write the grants and if the grant is awarded then the district gets the grant money and the "writer" gets a certain percentage of the amount of the grant. Dr. Lishak said that any grants that were available would be discussed in committee, the board would have the opportunity to decide if the grant would be advantageous for the district, a budget would be developed and the board would approve the application for the grant. She said that she and Mr. Tatum would be meeting with representatives from three companies to see what their terms are; she wants to get a company that has a proven record. Dr. Lishak said that everybody is willing to say that they can write a grant but they will have to show that they have written grants and the districts that they have worked with. Mr. Nufrio said that you really cannot rely on grants to fix the budget problems because grants have expiration dates. Mrs. Zuena asked if one of these companies would be in place of a grant writer. Dr. Lishak said that was correct. Mr. Tatum said that he knew someone who wrote a number of grants who will be doing some consulting work very shortly and he might reach out to her to see if she would be willing to write some grants for the district on a case-by-case basis. He said that this is something that the board has talked about in the past and Mr. Nufrio is right that a lot of grants "sunset" but at the same time, other opportunities become available and the district is not taking advantage of anything right now. Mr. Tatum thanked Mr. Layden for bringing this up today because the district is now relying solely on the budget for everything. He said that the district does want to do more things for students and the district must start resolving these issues. Mr. Tatum said that Mr. Vieira had a certain amount of money to work with and that is why the district must take a closer look at the budget and where money can be reallocated.

Mr. Nufrio thought that Mr. Layden was talking more about partnerships than grants. Mr. Layden thought that the district should be doing both. He said that there are corporations that make sizeable donations. Mr. Nufrio said that the district may have to agree to certain terms in these types of situations.

Mr. Vieira said that if \$1 million of the bank cap is used to balance the budget, the municipal levy will increase 3% but the tax rate will only increase 2% because the assessed values went up. He felt it was an opportunity. Mr. Vieira said that the district gets to increase its revenue yet the tax rate is only increasing 2%. Mr. Arminio asked when the budget would be complete. Mr. Vieira said that he would finalize everything to be

presented to the board at the March 17th meeting. Mr. Arminio asked if it had to go to the county for review first. Mr. Vieira said that the board will approve the submission of the budget to the Executive County Superintendent at the regular March meeting; then the Executive County Superintendent reviews the proposed budget and as long as the district gets her "stamp of approval" then there will be a public hearing on April 29th.

Mr. Damato asked what capital projects are included in the 2015-2016 budget and which projects had to cut out. Mr. Wiggins said that he wanted to replace the boilers at Union High School but he just found out yesterday that the budget for this project would have to drastically increase. He said that there is money in the budget to do the bathrooms at Union High School. Mr. Vieira said that \$700,000 out of capital reserve to do bathrooms in the high school. Mr. Wiggins said that he also proposed \$200,000 for doors to be used during lock down drills but he thought that was also cut from the budget.

Mr. Vieira said that some items that were cut from the budget were air conditioning at Battle Hill; baseball field bleachers; athletic field fencing and doors. Mr. Wiggins said that there was a problem during lockdown drills in the auditoriums, the cafeterias and the gyms townwide. He said that these would be addressed school by school. He said that Dr. Lishak has been very helpful in giving him some money to try to address some of these problems. Mrs. Zuena said that if all of these projects are being cut, what projects will be done. Mr. Wiggins said that he really wanted to do the boilers at the high school because he just replaced 12 more tubes and last month 18 tubes were replaced in the boilers. He said that there have been complaints from some of the teachers that there is inadequate heating in certain areas of the high school. Mr. Damato said that there are efficiency issues in that building and the boilers are not operating as efficiently as a new boiler would.

Mrs. Zuena said that it was mentioned that the boilers were being cut from the budget. Mr. Wiggins said that \$300,000 was allocated for this project but he was just advised by the engineer that the costs have gone way up. He said that he will have to review that project. Mr. Wiggins said that it is costing a lot of money to repair the boilers. Mrs. Zuena asked what projects, besides the bathrooms, would be done next year. She asked which bathrooms exactly would be done and would they be "gutted" and made brand new or just patched. Mr. Damato said that some of the bathroom walls are glass block walls that are structural walls. Mrs. Zuena said that the high school hosted a wrestling tournament last week and the main bathroom outside the gym had only two functional urinals, all of the others were covered in plastic bags and there were approximately 800 people in attendance. She said that it was embarrassing to the school. Mrs. Zuena said that the school needs functioning bathrooms if the school can be used for events. Mr. Damato said that the bathrooms need new floors, ceilings, plumbing and electric. Mr. Nufrio asked why the bathroom lines could not just be unclogged. Mr. Wiggins said that phone calls were not made by his workers and he was not aware of the problems until Mrs. Zuena told him this morning. Mrs. Zuena said that there was an issue with another bathroom in the area because there was a problem "snaking" the drains. She said instead of patching everything, at some point the district needs to totally replace the bathrooms. Mr. Damato said that more money should be allocated to fix the bathrooms. Mrs. Zuena said that there have been issues with the bathrooms at the high school for many years. Mr. Wiggins asked that the operations committee meet him on Tuesday and walk through the high school to see which bathrooms are priorities to get fixed.

Mr. Vieira said that there is \$210,000 allocated for bathrooms and of the \$210,000, \$30,000 for Burnet; \$150,000 for the high school and \$30,000 for Washington. He said that there is \$50,000 in districtwide asbestos removal; \$40,000 for sidewalks and \$350,000 for the boilers in the high school.

Mr. Damato said that there will be an additional \$12,000 received by the district in safety grant money from ERIC North. He said that Dr. Lishak has allocated funds from this grant in the past toward school security upgrades. Mr. Arminio asked if these funds could be used for the required doors. Mr. Damato said that the money can be used for doors or anything safety related.

Mr. Nufrio asked if there was money available from the state for asbestos removal. Mr. Damato said he was not sure. He said that there used to be a lot of grant money available for capital projects. Mr. Nufrio said that he was specifically referring to asbestos removal because the state had to be on board and therefore, they contributed toward the removal of asbestos. Mr. Wiggins said that he never recalled receiving money from the state for that purpose. Mr. Damato asked Mr. Wiggins to check on that. Mr. Nufrio said that he was able to get money from the state for asbestos removal. Mr. Wiggins said that the district has gotten rid of a lot of asbestos in the past and most of the really dangerous stuff is gone. He said that he was referring more to floors that are deteriorating that must be removed.

Mrs. Zuena asked if the doors are not done, is the district under violation under lockdown. Mr. Wiggins said that he believed that a report from the last lock down drill did include something about inability to lock down auditoriums, gyms and cafeterias.

Operations

Future Uses of Hamilton School – Mr. Damato developed a report for Hamilton School to give the board some options and discuss what historically has been the situation with Hamilton School. He said that Hamilton School was several buildings put together by several hallways. Mr. Damato said that the original building was built in 1908 and the last addition was 1991. He said that Hamilton School is like a split level house; every floor is a flight of stairs. Mr. Damato said that the front section of the building is not connected to the back section on the second floor and the six classrooms on the second floor can only be accessed by going down stairs, over and then back upstairs. He said that it creates a lot of issues for accessibility. Mr. Damato said that Hamilton School was rented to Morris Union Jointure Commission and they used it for all types of children including children with accessibility issues. He said that when it was used as a school for the district, those accessibility issues were dealt with stair climbers which are in the building right now that can be used for this purpose. Mr. Damato said that he put together some options in his report such as sale of the building, lease of the building and moving of space within the district, etc. He said that sale of the building would not be his first choice, however, it is an option that the board needs to be aware of because presently the district needs space in the schools. Mr. Damato said that he did not think that the board is looking to build a new school at this point. He said that would cost \$25 to \$30 million dollars minimum. Mr. Damato said that the district has an

available building that presently is being underutilized and ideally it would be nice to do something with it that would correct the space issues in some of the other schools. He said that as he pointed out in Option One of his report, the costs of operating an unoccupied building are \$85,000 per year; if the building is sold, the district would realize between \$2.5 and \$3 million and this amount, in theory, could be allocated to a capital reserve account or it could be put toward tax relief. Mr. Damato said that it helps that real estate prices are creeping back up but he had no idea exactly what the property would sell for and the question would be if Hamilton School is sold for a use that would be incompatible for residential neighborhood, it will cause some problems for the neighborhood and for the entire community. He said that this would pit the board against segments of the community if the board tried to sell the property and the buyer was trying to get the use it wanted for the property; there could be some issues there. Mr. Damato said that uses of the building would have to be approved by the Board of Adjustment because it is a pre-existing, non-conforming use right now, but when the public school abandons the use, then a purchaser of the property would have to get a use variance from the Board of Adjustment to have a new use of the building, even if it is a school; a variance would be needed to use the property for a private school as opposed to a public school. Mr. Salcedo said that the community would not want to have a charter school in that building. Mr. Damato said that if the board chooses to sell the school, the board cannot discriminate as to the buyer.

Mr. Vieira said that the district used to have no students going to charter schools and for the 2015-2016 school year he has budgeted \$250,000 in tuition to be paid to charter schools for district students; he said that there are approximately 17 students presently going to charter schools. Mr. Nufrio asked what the cost per student to send students to charter schools. Mr. Vieira said that the cost per student is pretty much in line with what the district student cost, approximately \$15,000 per student. Mr. Salcedo said that this is money that is leaving the district. Mrs. Conti said that the district also pays tuition for out of district students. Mr. Vieira said that the district also pays for the transportation of these students.

Mr. Damato said that he would not recommend the sale of Hamilton School because he did not think that the district would be able to replace the school, in the same geographic location, it would cost an awful lot of money to do that. He said just to purchase the property upon which to build a new school would be \$4 to \$5 million. Mr. McDowell asked if Mr. Damato was talking if another school was needed in the future. Mr. Damato said that if the choice of the board was to sell the school and it were sold, that would foreclose the opportunity to ever use that building again. He said that when the building was rented in the past, there was a clause inserted into the lease

which stated that if the Union Board of Education ever needed the building for a school use again, upon six months notice, the district could take the building back. Mr. Damato said that the lessee would then not pay rent and have to find another location. He said that this was the district's safety net if enrollment in the district were to go up by a sufficient amount, the district may want to reactivate the building as a school.

Mr. Damato said that he has analyzed the option of rental of Hamilton School and in addition to the foregoing of the \$85,000 per year to keep an unoccupied building running, the district would get rental amounts in the range of \$426,000 to \$600,000 per year. He said that this is not an insignificant amount. Mr. Damato said that renting is a consideration because it allows the board to maintain ownership of the building while having an income stream. He said that this option would also involve obtaining variances for anything other than a school use. Mr. Damato said that there would absolutely be parking variances and other things that are connected to the building that would create issues at a Zoning Board hearing. He said that he was not sure how easily that would be accomplished. Mr. Damato said that the last time the building was rented it was accomplished pretty easily because it was a public school for special needs and when the hearing was held before the Planning Board there was no opposition. He said that it was a very low impact use of the building. Mr. Damato said that he did not know that there were any other schools like Morris Union Jointure Commission in the market to rent Hamilton School. He said that he pointed out in his report that there is presently a building on Claremont Terrace near Kean College which is a good example of a school that is for sale right now and it is in the low end of the cost per square foot to purchase the building. Mr. Damato said that the sale price for this property is in the \$70 per square foot range. He said that there is no way that anyone could buy the land, forget about building a building, for that price. Mr. Arminio said that the builder for the other project across the street for the Claremont Avenue property is very interested in purchasing that property for development as housing.

Mrs. Zuena asked if any of the new housing developments that were coming into Union were 55 and over. Mr. Arminio said that the property by Kean is mixed use. Mr. Damato said that there must be some units allocated for either over 55 or low income. Mr. Arminio said that he had a meeting with the developer of that property because of his involvement with the historical society. He said that the developer stated that the average nationally was one student per nine units. Mr. Damato said that this is a very accurate assessment.

Mr. Damato said that there would be a cost associated with leasing the property and the property would have to be marketed through a broker, who would get a fee which is usually paid up front. He said that the first year's net rental would be much less than what he showed earlier in his report.

Mr. Damato said that option 3 was the use of Hamilton School as district offices. He said that this is the option that shows a little promise and is a little more interesting in terms of feasibility. Mr. Damato said that there are space issues at Burnet Middle School. He said that Special Services occupies a very large space at Burnet Middle School. Mr. Damato said that the space was analyzed a number of years ago to see how many classrooms could be put in the space. He said that it was determined that

five classrooms and a corridor down the middle could be put in that existing area. Mr. Damato said that the cost to renovate this area would be approximately \$750,000 which is a substantial amount of money. He said that whether or not the Burnet space is renovated, the special services department as well as all of the district supervisors could be moved into Hamilton School. Mr. Damato said that the most logical place to put these offices would be on the second floor of Hamilton School because if the district was going to lease the first floor of the building or use the first floor of the building for some other use, like pre-k, which the report also identifies as Option 4, it would be better to put students on the first floor because all of the administrative office as well as bathrooms, the cafeteria and the gymnasium are on the first floor or easily accessible from the first floor.

Mr. Damato said that there is adequate space for all of the supervisors that are currently housed at Union High School, which would free up a classroom in that building and all of special services would fit on the second floor of Hamilton School without too much renovation. He said that the building would only need to be cleaned up before the move could be made. Mr. Damato said that some partitions would have to be put up and a telephone and internet systems would have to be reinstalled; there are some capital costs associated with putting offices on the second floor at Hamilton School. He said that one custodian would also have to be assigned to Hamilton School but if only office are put there, there is no need to have a principal or a nurse.

Mr. Damato said that if the building is used for pre-k classes, a nurse would have to be assigned to that building as well as a full complement of custodians as well as a principal; the costs would be approximately \$494,000 per year, including benefits for the staff. He said that right now there is no staff in the building because it is vacant. Mr. Damato said that when the old Central-Five was closed, custodians and staff from Central-Five were moved to Hamilton School and the costs were a wash. He said that if a new building were to be opened, there would be new costs involved in operating Hamilton School.

Mr. Salcedo said that his issue is that he feels Burnet Middle School is already too large and the board is talking about making it bigger. He suggested that the district make Hamilton School like an annex to Burnet; take one of the Vice Principal's from Burnet and put them in Hamilton; remove 200 students and reduce class sizes. Mr. Salcedo felt that the size of Burnet was an issue.

Mr. Damato said that this was an interesting concept and he did not examine every possibility in his report. He only examined the possibilities that he thought were feasible on a short term basis or feasible because of cost or other considerations. Mr. Damato said that this is a possibility that could be explored.

Mr. Tatum said that one of the long term goals that the district has is to look at grade level configuration in the district anyway. He said that he did not know at this stage of the game where the district is going with that, but certainly the middle schools are an issue that need to be addressed. Mr. Tatum said that because there are two middle schools in the district, because there is somewhat of an imbalance between the schools and because there are different types of programs that the district is looking to

implement in the middle schools, it is certainly something that needs discussion. He said that grade level configuration could be one meeting by itself. Mr. Tatum said that along the lines of an annex, he thought the same thing only on a basis where the district is reducing size from different grades within the course of the district. He envisioned Hamilton as being a school where students want to go such as a specialty school. Mr. Tatum said he wanted the school to be something a little more dynamic than just an "annex" and teachers will actually want to be there and use a differentiated approach. He said that this school might span various grades. Mr. Tatum said that these are issues that the board has to discuss. He said that Mr. Damato was only exploring the "short term" options.

Mrs. Zuena said that having had a student who was separated from the other fifth graders when Jefferson was being built, it was really hard for the students to communicate. She said to take "selected" students from Burnet, unless Hamilton becomes a specialty school that students are applying to, it is hard because the students feel like they are the outcasts. Mrs. Zuena said that when Jefferson School was being renovated, all of the fifth graders were separated and did not get to anything as a group. She said that it is very hard to displace certain students.

MRS. ZUENA LEFT THE MEETING AT 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Arminio said that whatever the board decides to do with Hamilton School, will it be done for next September and when does the board have to make a decision. He said that the planning session was designed to have the information presented and come up with options. Mr. Arminio asked "by when" does the board have to make a decision so that it will be a viable option for the next school year to relieve some of the overcrowding or will be another entire school year before anything is decided.

Mr. Nufrio said that basically it is all about money. He said that the board has to decide which is the best, most economical and most feasible. Mr. Nufrio said that Mr. Damato laid out the plans but he did not give a recommendation as to what was the most economically feasible option. Mr. Damato said that he can recommend that the district not sell the building. Mr. Nufrio asked what Mr. Damato thought was the best option. Mr. Damato said that there was no "best" option. He said that if Hamilton becomes another school, it will add \$600,000 to the current expense budget just for salaries and benefits. Mr. Vieira said that was not a feasible option. Mr. Damato said that means that Hamilton cannot be made a school with a principal and staff. He said that the only options left are to use Hamilton for offices and rent the remainder of the building out. Mr. Nufrio said that this is the option that should be left on the table for consideration by the board. Mr. Arminio asked if there were individuals who might be interested in renting the first floor of the building. Mr. Damato said that the only feasible use for the first floor would be a school.

Mr. Nufrio said that short of finding a business to occupy the first floor of Hamilton School he asked Ms. Conti if she could use the space on the first floor for all of the special services staff. Ms. Conti said that she could house her entire department in Hamilton School. Mr. Arminio said that there is a building on Broad Street in Elizabeth and that building has been renovated and it is rented to a small businessman. He said

that each classroom is an office for a small businessman. Mr. Damato asked if Mr. Nufrio was suggesting that Hamilton School be rented out as office space. He said that if the building was used for something other than a school, it would have to get the approval of the Board of Adjustment. Dr. Lishak said that if Ms. Conti does not have enough people to fill the entire space, the supervisors who are presently housed in various school buildings throughout the district could all be relocated there.

Mr. Salcedo asked what would be done with the extra classrooms created by moving the supervisors and special services out of the school buildings. Mr. Arminio said that it would relieve pressure in some of the schools. Mr. Salcedo asked if by doing this would the district be solving a true issue or are things just becoming more comfortable. Mr. Nufrio said that it could provide additional classrooms for those students who would otherwise be sent out of district. Mr. Salcedo asked who these students were. Ms. Conti said that these are students who have special needs. Mr. Salcedo asked if the district had the programs for these students already. Ms. Conti said that as students get older and age out of programs which were developed at the elementary level and they have been in district, the district would want to expand the programs either to the middle school or the high school otherwise these students may have to go out of district because there is no space to house the programs. Mr. Salcedo said that the special education program would have to be expanded. Ms. Conti said it is but at a less expense than sending the child out of district. Mr. Salcedo asked if the programs would be able to be marketed throughout the county to pull students from other districts to Union. Ms. Conti said that there is a clearing house that is used between districts where there is a list of all special education programs in the public schools that can be utilized. She said that the district has utilized programs in surrounding districts to place Union students. Mr. Damato said that Hamilton was used for severe autistic students by the Morris Union Jointure Commission. Mr. Nufrio said that it would accomplish two tasks with one move.

Mr. Arminio said that the board has to think about all of the options presented and Mr. Damato will have to advise when the board has to make a decision and how long will it take to make the renovations at Burnet to make the space back into classrooms to relieve the pressure in other classrooms. Mr. Damato said that if the district had the \$700,000 to allocate for the renovation project, it would have to be started right now. Mr. Arminio asked if this was something that needed to be done immediately. Mr. Nufrio said that if this decision was postponed another year, what would that cost the district. Mr. Arminio said that the cost is \$85,000 per year to maintain a vacant building. Mr. Nufrio said that renovation could mean some tuition income to the district.

Mr. Salcedo said he felt there was a lot more involved with this decision in long term planning. He asked what the capital upgrade would cost. Mr. Damato said to renovate Burnet back to classrooms, the last time a plan was done about three years ago, and the cost was \$750,000. Mr. Salcedo said that he believed that there was a size issue at Burnet. He asked how many students attended Kawameeh. Dr. Lishak said that the enrollment was close to 700 students. She said that Kawameeh is "maxed" in every classroom; the only classrooms that are open are the labs downstairs. Mr. Salcedo said that doing the renovation would make things more comfortable for a lot of

people. He asked how many students are presently sent out of district. Ms. Conti said that at this time there are about 112 students and she felt that approximately 18 students may be able to be brought back to the district with this renovation. She said that number sounds low but each 18 times \$100,000 is a lot of money. Mr. Salcedo said that if Ms. Conti could present a case for this that would be the justification to go ahead. Ms. Conti said that even if teachers and aides had to be hired for these new programs there still would be a benefit to the district.

Mr. Arminio said that the board needs to consider time constraints and money. He said that if a resolution could be approved, it could be voted on by the board and the district could go from there. Mr. Arminio said that the board has been mulling over the use of Hamilton for three plus years with nothing. He said that something has to be done and the most viable option seems to be using the space for offices and allowing the space in the schools to perhaps generate some income for the district in at least one school.

Mr. Nufrio said that there was a building in Elizabeth which housed all of the supervisors in the district and even some directors had their offices there. He said that the district was paying rent for the space. Mr. Nufrio said that using Hamilton for the Supervisors is a good option and it is the most affordable option which could at some point be reduced to zero cost by any revenue that the district may get through the special education department.

Mr. Damato asked if the board wanted special services and the supervisors to be put in Hamilton School. Mr. Nufrio said that was option 3 on Mr. Damato's report.

Mr. McDowell thought that occupancy by special services and the supervisors was the best option.

Mr. Layden agreed from all of the comments that he has heard that this was the best option.

Mr. Salcedo said that his last concern was that once the board "went down this road" the district loses "x" amount of seats to change Burnet and reduce enrollment size at that location. He said that if more students are brought into Burnet, that increases the issue. Mr. Salcedo said that once Hamilton is filled with offices, the district no longer has that space to put students in. He said that having a middle school with 1200 students is a lot and how is the district going to mitigate that size. Mr. Damato said that all of the offices can be put on the second floor of Hamilton and there is still the entire first floor, cafeteria and gymnasium that can be used for students. Mr. Salcedo said that once the board goes down this road, it reduces the district's ability to change if it wants to change.

Mr. Tatum said that one of the things that has to be taken into consideration when you are dealing with middle school students or even fifth grade students, the main issue is that they are all the same age level and he thought that when you discuss configurations of grades, to take a look at what the best structure the district may become, may not necessarily leave those schools as they are right now. He said that

the whole configuration of the district can be changed. Mr. Tatum said that part of the research that he has done speaks to those spans that are shorter or less productive and when he speaks about this, he is talking in terms of looking at it in terms of the standpoint of analyzing what the best structure for the district is long term.

Mr. Tatum said that the supervisors work for the district and if the space is needed, it can always be taken back.

Mr. Nufrio said that if some of the space on the first floor at Hamilton can be maintained for classroom space, the school use is also retained. Mr. Damato said that the district is always retaining the school use. He said that he has spoken to the county office about this before the school went vacant to see if the district needed to get another school use to occupy the building to maintain the use. Mr. Damato said that the county office advised that the district did not have to do that; that it could be vacant and it still has school use. He said that renovations would come into play depending on student population. Mr. Nufrio said that this can be done in steps and does not have to be done all at one time as long as the district meets the criteria of having those lower grade classes as it is stated in Mr. Damato's report. Mr. Damato said that the biggest obstacle is the personnel overhead costs of operating another school.

Mr. Arminio said that if the board can resolve the issue of the future use of Hamilton School, this planning session is a success.

Update on Short-term Goals - Mr. Tatum said that some of the goals have already been touched upon today. He said that some of them are contingent upon the organization of a districtwide Planning Committee. Mr. Tatum said that a number of individuals have expressed an interest. He said that he is going through the selection process right now and he has developed a letter for those people who will be selected which will be going out next week. Mr. Tatum said that he also will be setting up a particular meeting time and all of the information that will be discussed will be developed and there will be a regular monthly meeting. He said that there will also be sub-committees created from the central Planning Committee. Mr. Tatum said that one of the other short term goals is to do a new mission statement. He said that he has written one that deals with 21st Century learning and the district's ability to have more student-driven instruction as well as the understanding of the student code of conduct. Mr. Tatum said that he wanted to take that statement along with the existing mission statement and give it to a sub-committee and ask the committee to compare them and create one viable statement that reflects where the district wants to go in the future.

Mr. Tatum said that as far as the needs assessment, they have been discussed. Dr. Lishak said that there has been a needs assessment done in each building and she has asked each principal to return the information and the analysis to her by the end of March.

Mr. Nufrio said that this should include any possible suggestions that the principals might have as to how as the building administrators can utilize the space that will be created by moving the supervisors out of the school buildings to Hamilton School.

Mr. Tatum said that the technology analysis goal has been discussed earlier and an audit will be done. He said that it was his goal to speak about where the district is today and he felt there was more information from the discussion at this meeting.

Mr. Tatum said with regard to the budget analysis, he said that the idea of a grant writer was discussed and the feasibility of how funds would be used at the meeting today but he has also had discussions with Central Office staff on several occasions about how to utilize money. Mr. Tatum said that he has spoken to Mr. Vieira about trying to generate some money for afterschool programs in the upcoming year. He said that he has "debated" a bit about the actual figure but the district is going to try to make it happen for the next school year.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the future use of Hamilton School. He said that Mr. Damato presented his report earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to a security analysis, he did meet with the Director of Security and Dr. Lishak has a security analysis. Dr. Lishak said that based upon what was provided to her, she discussed what was in each of the buildings with Mr. Ardito and what the principals, themselves, asked for in addition. She said that there are a couple of things that they are asking for and there is the issue of the doors required for lock down drills that have to be installed. Dr. Lishak said that overall, the district is pretty "tight" as to what each building has in terms of security, the principals' levels of comfort but they did ask for was larger monitors on the front door buzzers so that the person outside the door can more easily be seen. She said that will be taken care of before the end of the school year. Mr. Nufrio asked if installing larger screens would require an update of the security system. Dr. Lishak said it did not. She said that before the end of the school year, all schools buildings will have a panel in the front office that will monitor any door that opens. Dr. Lishak said that since many special education students are being brought back into the schools, this was a worry that a parent spoke to her about. Mr. Nufrio asked if the doors have been wired for this already. Mr. Wiggins said that all doors in district have been wired to be monitored. Dr. Lishak said that the way that the doors are wired, the configuration now comes to a panel in the main office and when a door is opened the system buzzes and a light shows which door has been opened.

Dr. Francis said that doors can be "magnetized" in an emergency. Mr. Wiggins said that would require them to be wired into the fire alarm service because doors have to open, no matter what, when the fire alarm goes off. He said that this is a much larger cost. Mr. Nufrio said that all doors in a school must allow for egress from the building.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to security, he had asked Mr. Ardito to do an analysis of the exterior of the buildings. He asked Dr. Lishak if there was anything in the report regarding this issue. Dr. Lishak said that Mr. Ardito did include this in his report. She said that if the board decides to do something different with Hamilton School, the requests would change and the budget would also change depending on the use of the building.

Mr. Tatum said that the next goal was to increase writing on all grade levels. Dr. Lishak said that she has asked all of the supervisors by the end of March to submit information on what was required and how many times were there benchmarks given. She said that the information will be provided to the board in April.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the website updates, there have been some updates but not to the extent that had originally been proposed. He said that he thought a lot more work was needed in this area and he would continue to monitor it. Mr. Tatum said that when the sub-committees are established, there will be recommendations that will come from them.

Mr. Tatum said that parent workshops are definitely ongoing in the district. He said that there have been workshops for the PARCC test. Dr. Lishak said that there were also parent workshops regarding preparation for college, junior information, etc. She said that there are also Title I workshops during the school year and there were ten parent workshops for HIB this year. Dr. Lishak said that the principals are working on providing a workshop before a PTA meeting at least one time during the school year which is building specific and is based on parent requests.

Mr. Tatum said that when he put the goals together, he said that quarterly newsletters were a very ambitious plan and are something that would probably get implemented more so next year because of the time that has been taken to get the format together. He said that the district has several new formats that it has researched. Mr. Tatum said that there was a parent at Washington School who spoke to his secretary yesterday, who volunteered to help with the newsletter. He said that one of the things that he recognized was that in the Superintendent's Report each month, when there is a highlighted item that a school sends to him because each school does a monthly report for him, he tries to highlight some of the things to share with the board and the public. Mr. Tatum said that a lot of information that he gets does not go into the Superintendent Report and he hoped to share this information in the parent newsletters. He said that he was looking forward to getting this off the ground.

Mr. Tatum said that he was not sure if the student/parent/teacher surveys have been done yet. Dr. Lishak said that each school has done at least one teacher survey. She said that the schools are developing a parent survey also.

Mr. Tatum said that alternative funding sources is something that was spoken about earlier today and at previous meetings. He said that the possibilities of some companies who write grants being utilized may come to pass in the future. Mr. Tatum said that for the most part this is in progress.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to the review of the budget, Mr. Vieira did give him an analysis of this some time ago and the cost of elementary school security officers was discussed. He said that this is something that he is still exploring because it is a critical area and there was no exact answer at this time in view of the current budget. Mr. Tatum said that there may be a possibility of getting additional funding for this

purpose. He said that there are still "greeters" in all of the schools which are there for a certain number of hours per week. Mr. Tatum said that he would continue to monitor the feasibility of the money that is being spent versus the money it would cost to have a bona fide security officer in each building.

Mr. Tatum said that with regard to a disciplinary advisory committee was something that he believed was omitted from the last draft but it is something that was proposed in the earlier meeting that the board had. He said that this is a panel that will be formed in Central Office when a student is up for expulsion. Mr. Tatum said that he has two cases this year that probably could have gone that route and basically he and Dr. Lishak handled them. He said that the building principal is involved but he wanted something a little more formalized where the committee will make a final recommendation to the Board of Education. Mr. Arminio said that he remembered being a part of something like this when he was on the Education Committee. Mr. Tatum said that the disciplinary advisory committee would actually discuss the case before it gets to the Education Committee.

Mr. Nufrio said that the district does not have a panel to do the preliminary investigation that he was accustomed to being a part of and the panel included someone from Special Services, the Director of Health, Education and Welfare and the principal or the individual who was making the recommendation and any witnesses. He said that this was the correct way to do this type of procedure because the committee will then recommend whether or not it is even feasible to recommend expulsion. Mr. Nufrio said that the issue does not go to the board until that committee says that everything is in place and gives the recommendation that the board consider the expulsion of the student.

Mr. Tatum said that there is still a lot more work to be done on the short term goals but it will be ongoing throughout the course of the school year. He said that today was just a system of checks and balances to see where the goals were. Mr. Tatum said that he is moving forward.

Personnel

Update on Procedures and Operations – Mr. Benaquista said that it has been a little over five months since he took over the Human Resources Department and he is still continuing to analyze different procedures and just the way things are done. He said that obviously the board has dealt with some things along the way already. Mr. Benaquista said that he is working very closely with Mr. Vieira to determine whether or not the district can afford it. He said that the board and central office did a great job to start the year off but there have been a lot of unbudgeted positions created this year. He said that much of it has been geared to special education needs. Mr. Benaquista said that recently many students moved into the district who already had I.E.P.'s written that required additional personnel to service the student. He said that this is a challenge that he did not think was going to go away but the district is dealing with it. Mr. Benaquista said that he would continue to analyze things and try to make them better. He said that one of the challenges since he has taken the position is "cleaning up the

office"; he said that this was a pet peeve of his. Mr. Benaquista said that his office is a tight space for the amount of files that he has to hold there. He said that it has been a challenge and he still has not completed going through the files to where he is comfortable making sure that everything is in the files that should be there. Mr. Benaquista said that it was presented to the board as a result of the audit that the district was cited on some documents that was not filed correctly in employee files. He said that will take quite some time to go through over 1200 files to make sure that every piece of paper and every file is there. Mr. Benaquista said that right now he is dealing with space issues as well as time to do that job as well as to go through things. He said that there are also files housed at Burnet Middle School from employees that have left the district. Mr. Benaquista said that these files must be maintained by the district. He said that he was warned before he went to Burnet and it is really a challenge to find a file at that location. Mr. Benaquista said that there was a safety issue involved in going to the Burnet space and he did not think that the space was a safe place to store files. He said that now that he is involved, it is a concern for him and he will be proposing some ways to back up files and not just have hard copies. He said that he would like a more secure, easily accessible way to get to the information.

Mr. Benaquista said that he has already signed up to go to recruitment at a number of colleges and he is also going to visit a high school that puts on their own recruiting fair. He said that it was a goal of his to have the district hold its own recruitment fair next year so that individuals can visit the district, meet the supervisors, the principals and central office staff to gather resumes and meet people for a few minutes to see if they are the type of individuals the district wants working for it. Mr. Benaquista said that in the future he felt the district needed to recruit more of the right people who fit into the district and not to just wait for someone to apply. He said that he would love to have a resume base that he could go access to invite people in for interviews.

Mr. Benaquista said that the Human Resources website has changed since he has taken over. He said that he is still adding information on the website to try to streamline and mainstream information for staff. Mr. Benaquista said that a long term goal for September, he hoped to have finalized a new employee handbook that will guide employees and so that they have information at their fingertips. He said that he is also going to post all of the policies concerning personnel on the website as well.

Mr. Benaquista said that he wants to make things better in the department and make the department more efficient and it has been a challenging five months.

Dr. Francis said that many physicians have electronic medical records where all patient information is kept. He said that he thought there should be a scanning tool that the district can purchase to electronically save all of the information. Mr. Vieira said that the photocopy machines have scanning capability but it would be labor intensive to scan all of the information. Dr. Lishak said that several months ago a woman came to her office and asked for her own personnel records; she said that the person had retired 30 plus years ago.

Comments from the Public

Ms. Lipstein said that with regard to the one-on-one computers in what grade were you planning on starting that. Dr. Lishak said that she has to meet with the companies first and get an idea of the prices. She said that she would then discuss with the Education Committee on what would be the best way to start.

Ms. Lipstein asked if admission to the AAP program was based on academic scores. Dr. Lishak said that part of the program at the elementary level, grades 3 through 5, use that but there are other ways to assess the students. She said that the standardized scores will not be considered as the district moves forward. Mr. Arminio said that was part of the board's statement that the PARCC results will not be considered in consideration in student placement.

Ms. Lipstein asked if the district was still considering hiring a grant writer or has that been tabled. Mr. Tatum said that right now the position is still on the books but it is on hold until he can ascertain whether or not there is a more feasible way to go with a grant writing company. Ms. Lipstein said that she had concerns about bringing in private companies. She said that she remembered Hillside had a grant writer who was fabulous. Mr. Tatum said that individual just retired and she was the individual who he had referred to earlier in the meeting.

Ms. Lipstein said that if the district is considering putting more computers in the classrooms, more professional development will be needed for staff.

Ms. Lipstein said that there was no decision made about what the district was going to do about increasing the cap or is it still under discussion. Mr. Arminio said that Mr. Vieira would have to present the budget first; the board cannot make a decision until the budget is presented. Ms. Lipstein said that the increase seems to be a small amount to get a lot more for the students.

Ms. Lipstein also asked about the district possibly considering another Bond Referendum to cover capital improvements throughout the district. She wanted to know if money from a bond could also be used for purchasing computers and infrastructure wiring. Mr. Damato said that anything that has a useful life of five years or more can be purchased with a bond. He said that maintenance and/or repairs for computers cannot be financed through a bond. Ms. Lipstein thought that the district could get a lot accomplished faster in this manner. She said that the people in the district want better schools and the district does have some deficiencies in technology and other things; she felt that the public could be sold on a bond for these reasons.

Ms. Lipstein asked if the room that was added to Hamilton School which has the separate entrance which was used for pre-k and kindergarten could be rented out for an organization looking to set up a child care facility. Mr. Damato said that it is on the ground floor plan, it is actually two classrooms and it does have a bathroom. He said that it could be rented out; it is also handicapped accessible or it can be rented out in conjunction with the entire rental of the first floor.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

There being no further business before the board, it was moved by Mr. Layden, seconded by Dr. Francis that the meeting be adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

AYE: Dr. Francis, Mr. Layden, Mr. McDowell, Mr. Nufrio, Mr. Salcedo
and Mr. Arminio

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION WAS CARRIED

Respectfully submitted,

**JAMES J. DAMATO
BOARD SECRETARY**