

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 16, 2021

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The regular meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom pursuant to notice sent to each member.

Mr. McDowell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. John O’Shea, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Sandra Paul, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mr. Craig Wojcik

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Mrs. Williams led the Board and audience members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the “Open Public Meetings Act”, a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Mrs. Regis-Darby read the District’s mission statement.

COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the following minutes be adopted:

1. December 8, 2020 – worksession
2. December 8, 2020 – executive session #1
3. December 8, 2020 – executive session #2
4. December 15, 2020 – regular meeting
5. December 15, 2020 – executive session #1
6. December 15, 2020 – executive session #2

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Dr. Morgan (#1, 2, 3), Mrs. Minneci (#3, 5), Mr. O’Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby

MOTION CARRIED

Communications:

LETTER FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Letter from Township of Union Education Foundation listing grants that were awarded to teachers for the 2020-2021 school year.

LETTER FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION VETERAN’S ALLIANCE

Letter from the Township of Union Veteran’s Alliance Parade Committee requesting the use of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School’s auditorium on May 8, 2021 for a fundraiser.

LETTER FROM UNION TOWNSHIP CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Letter from the Union Township Chamber of Commerce requesting the use of the Union High School facility site for the Chamber’s 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Mayor’s Day 5K Run on September 26, 2021.

LETTER OF RETIREMENT – GOTTLIN

Letter of resignation, for the purpose of retirement from Edward Gottlin, Woodshop teacher–Union High School, effective June 24, 2021.

LETTER OF RETIREMENT – ROMEO-ANDRIULLI

Letter of resignation, for the purpose of retirement, from Teresa Romeo-Andriulli, teacher-Battle Hill Elementary School, effective July 1, 2021.

LETTER OF RESIGNATION – YANCEY

Letter of resignation from Tamiyah Yancey, educational media clerk-Franklin Elementary School, effective March 1, 2021.

REQUEST FOR LEAVE – POLIZZI

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) from Abby Polizzi, 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher-Battle Hill Elementary School, February 3, 2021-June 11, 2021.

REQUEST FOR LEAVE UPDATE – SHARPE

Request for leave update to paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) from Courtney Sharpe, teacher-Battle Hill Elementary School, January 19, 2021-May 7, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – D’ALOIA**

Request for paid medical leave from Mark D’Aloia, computer teacher-Hannah Caldwell Elementary School, January 14, 2021-March 31, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – FORD**

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) followed by unpaid non-FMLA/non-NJFLA child rearing leave from Erian Ford, preschool teacher-Hannah Caldwell Elementary School, April 23, 2021 and returning September 1, 2022.

**REQUEST FOR INTERMITTENT LEAVE – KRUPA**

Request for intermittent leave from Constance Krupa, Special Services Accountant-Hamilton, January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEASE – SINGER**

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) from Corinne Singer, science teacher-Kawameeh Middle School, March 5, 2021-October 14, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR INTERMITTENT LEAVE – ZURKA**

Request for intermittent FMLA from Christine Zurka, instructional paraprofessional-pre-k-Battle Hill Elementary School, January 22, 2021-June 30, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF LEAVE – ROBERTS**

Request for extension of unpaid non-FMLA for internship from Shareenah Roberts, special services-paraprofessional-Burnet Middle School, extension through June 30, 2021.

**Superintendent’s Report:**

Mr. Benaquista stated we will start with the Student Liaisons.

Gabriella Guido (9<sup>th</sup> grade) stated we are just curious on what day we are going back to school. They are pretty happy now. Mr. Benaquista stated there is a lot more to come with opening of schools. Our intention for the students is March 15<sup>th</sup>. I will be speaking on it later in my superintendent report. It is great that the students are looking forward to coming in even as a hybrid format. I have heard from a lot of students that they are ready to get back into school.

Faith Olayinka (12<sup>th</sup> grade) stated Joshua went to a bowling match. We are becoming a little more satisfied because school is opening up and we are getting closer to that time where we can see each other again. Most of people I talked to so far were some what hesitant about coming back to school but I feel like being back at school, some are saying will be a good outlook for them – so some are excited to come back to school. Mr. Benaquista stated I’m sure some of the seniors want a normal ending to their career with us in Union. I’m hoping things will get better and that all the key grade levels will have a great ending to this very different school year. Thank you liaisons for your report.

I want to announce that after this Board meeting, I will be releasing my first video “Around the U” – highlighting some things. It will hit on our future teacher program at Union High School. We got to speak with Mr. Zieser and some of the students. It also highlights Black

History Month. Franklin Elementary School wanted to get to know the superintendent, so they asked questions and they were answered. It will shorten my report tonight but I don't want to stop highlighting all the positive things going on around our district.

Our attendance for the first time for both staff and students is 97%.

February 13<sup>th</sup> – the high school Key Club helped our community by distributing boxes of food to the Union residents.

The Washington PTA had a daughter date night to celebrate Valentine's Day and the Hannah Caldwell PTA also had flowers delivered to the daughters for Valentine's Day.

National School Counseling Week is February 1-5<sup>th</sup>. We want to recognize that and all the hard work our counselors are doing. With returning to hybrid, they will have a key task in making sure all our students and staff have all the tools to be successful, especially on the social/emotional side.

Jefferson School had over 50 families attend the Caldwell Parsonage on Sunday.

Faith mentioned bowling – the Union bowling team record is 5-1 and bowling tonight against Cranford. Good luck to the bowling team.

Several articles in Tap Into Union – Battle Hill Elementary School students got a chance to meet the Mayor. They spoke about a bunch of things – one being career choices, harassment intimidation and bullying and just questions focused on education.

We sent out a correspondence last night and there was a lot of questions today. More correspondence is going to be coming out in reference to opening schools. There is a lot that goes into it. There is a video going out about the cleanliness of the buildings, sanitation and what are cleanings are going to look like. There will be a schedule set up for the two weeks that the teachers are in with more PD that we need to provide the teachers. Recently a Board member shared an article with me about opening up schools and you have to make sure that your teachers and staff are prepared first before you bring the students in. They also have to prepare for students coming back in that maybe dealing with anxiety about returning to school.

Our special ed kids, we usually allow them to come in during the summer to get used to the environment and that is something we want to schedule before we open with all the students.

I know there are questions about students with IEPs and how it is going to be included in our reopening plan. All the students with IEPs will receive their program and services per their IEP. Case managers will continue to monitor students with IEPs as well as contacting parents regarding the educational needs of their students. Case managers will work the students and parents regarding the transition back to in person learning. If parents have questions about their child's services, they should contact the case manager. Case managers will also work with parents to determine the format of IEP meetings – virtual or in person. There may be an adjustment period but we will implement and file all the IEPs and as well as work with parents.

Mrs. Conti stated I think that is perfect. I don't have much more to add other than the case managers will be working with the parents regarding transition back into learning. The case managers will continue to monitor the students' educational needs. If there are additional needs, reach out to the case manager and if the case manager notes any changes that need to be discussed, they will reach out the parents and an IEP meeting or an amendment may be discussed or held to determine the additional needs. We will continue to work together.

Mr. Benaquista stated recently there was new guidance as far as opening up schools that we will make sure we are following. Depending on the number of students that requested hybrid, as things change, we may need to go to our original plan of A/B – four days a week Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday with a deep clean on Wednesday. If the numbers are low enough we may only have one hybrid group. We are analyzing all the responses and we may have to put out a schedule and that would come from the building principals. We will keep communicating with the community.

Depending on positivity rate within the community – that is a key aspect of whether a switch to go back to virtual learning. Other things that could impact us going hybrid is the substitute coverage is key to be able to facilitate any accommodations we are doing or if we just don't have enough personnel to facilitate all the needs of the classrooms.

I want the community to know that we are still advancing to open but there are a lot of key factors that go into that. We have to go through this progression to get to this ending point. Our target date is March 15<sup>th</sup> but there are some things that can affect and change that date. I want everyone to know that the educators in this district are working very hard to get us open in a hybrid format. We have a lot of discussion and work to do to make sure everyone feels safe and to make sure we are following all the guidelines. There is a lot more communication to come.

It was an easy month on HIB, there were no incidences to report.

Last week there was a question about the accelerated program and is it going away? I want to state that I do have a meeting set up with Mr. Cohen next week, the supervisor of mathematics. Right now there are currently no plans to change anything we have in place. Just like we did with honors and AP criteria, if we need to put a committee together to look at the data and the research for the middle school, we will do that.

Ann Hart stated the form for the parent to choose if they want virtual or hybrid is now closed so the cannot enter or update their answer. If they do want to change what they chose, they should contact the principal or the main office secretary at their building. Mr. Benaquista stated I believe we had about 3% left. Mrs. Hart stated we are down to almost nobody but some of the parents were changing their answers up until I closed it today. Mr. Benaquista stated we have to at one point start planning with data that we have. There will be a fourth marking period so if somebody chooses virtual and wants to come back to hybrid, each principal will send out a form to their community and if anyone wants to change, we will send that out 10 days prior to the fourth marking period and then we will have to re-evaluate our numbers and see if an A/B

group is needed. Thank you Mrs. Hart. If you need to communicate, please go through your building principal. Mrs. Hart stated if they are not sure what they had chosen, if they log on to the Genesis Parent Portal underneath your child's picture, it tells you "requested hybrid" or "requested virtual".

Dr. Francis asked will there be a school based question and answer Zoom meeting for parents? If a parent got more information, they can make an informed decision. Mr. Benaquista stated I am planning a town hall meeting – I haven't put out that information yet. I have to work with IT because depending on how many parents will sign up, I may have to do more than one. It is a good idea but I just haven't had a chance to schedule. I want to offer different time frames so I may do more than one.

Dr. Francis stated if possible, maybe Mr. Loessel can give us an update on the readiness of all our buildings. Mr. Benaquista stated we are going to be putting together a document. Mr. Loessel do you want to speak about your meeting with your HVAC guys and where we are at.

Mr. Loessel stated we had a two part thing with the ventilation report – one was actual ventilation and the other was mechanical ventilation. We have over 600 rooms, 74 were questioned for enough natural ventilation. We went around and we do have mechanical ventilation which means ventilation of 4.0 is the level we want to be and some were 3.1, 3.2, 2.8 – we went around and all those rooms have natural ventilation so we are very good with those rooms. It is a lengthy report so I can't explain everything right now. I can say 98% of what was in the report are fixed. There are rooms that we are not going to use because there is no ventilation whatsoever or windows. I am very convinced that we are ready to open.

Mr. Benaquista stated a couple of them were offices. As far as classrooms, I don't remember many on that list. Mr. Loessel stated there were a few but most of them were 3.8, 3.9 which with the mechanical ventilation that brought us up. With the mechanical ventilation you get about ten air exchanges every hour – we have enough air that is going around.

Mr. Benaquista stated our licensed HVAC guys were the ones that performed the work. Mr. Loessel stated correct and we saved a lot of money. They gave us an analysis on how much it would cost us and it was close to \$10 million for someone to come in. I think we are ready to go. We made a video of the processes of how we are going to clean; we used green products. When the video comes out it will answer a lot of questions. Mr. McDowell asked when will that video be available? Mr. Benaquista stated I'm hoping next week; they are editing it right now.

Mr. McDowell stated can you take a moment to explain what we are considering as hybrid. I think there are a couple of variations to that; I think it might be helpful to know what Union is considering hybrid.

Mr. Benaquista stated hybrid is a mix of virtual and in person. Right now we are starting the year as Phase I – half day schedule. That was because of our busing. Why we are not going full days is because of lunches. It is very challenging to have so many kids eating in the same place. We are following every school levels half day schedule. It is the only way our busing can get to every place. We will be utilizing our entire bus fleet to get our kids to school and home.

There was some parents that don't want to put their child on a bus but we still have to run those routes because we have children on each bus route. The students will be in school learning on a day schedule set up by the building principals and then the students will go home and finish their day. Everyone gets an hour to grab their lunch, getting home and getting settled for the ending of their day.

We are set to go Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and everyone virtual on Wednesday. If we can facilitate our numbers, is the number of hybrid students that chose to come back, if the class size is not that big then we can possibly have one hybrid group. In the original plan it was set as an A/B group. The building principal will send out to their students and they may do it by last name, so students in Monday, Tuesday, virtual Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and the other group is virtual Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and in person Thursday Friday. When we have all the information from every parent, we will be able to say if we can accommodate one hybrid class or an A/B hybrid. I won't be able to give final notification on that until all our principals get a chance to analyze and see where the class sizes are at. I want to make sure our classes can keep that social distancing.

Our goal is to progress to a higher phase and possibly being able to handle lunches in school. The goal is to get us open in some sort of hybrid fashion.

Everyone I speak with in the medical profession and hearing from people that have family in the infectious disease field, the key is protecting yourself. Wear your mask, sanitize and wash your hands frequently and to social distance. Outside of our schools, life is going on for a lot of people. What is everyone doing – they are making sure they are protecting themselves.

We want to remind our community, staff, students, everyone – the number one thing you can do against COVID is to protect yourself.

If we want to come back and have a successful ending to this very different school year, it is going to be by sacrifice, working together, collaborating and leaning on each other as we have through this whole pandemic. The community stepped up and we were flexible throughout this process.

The ongoing communication is making parents feel a little more comfortable because they are hearing the thought behind some things; working together with staff, students, administrations, our community, our custodians – we have collaborated more than we have in a typical year.

I have attend more meetings in Central Office and I'm sitting in with the UTEA on their rep counsels, holding teacher Town Halls, I'm going to hold a parent Town Hall. I'm going to as many PTA functions to hear from them. I want to hear the concerns of the community so we can come up with a plan to make people feel comfortable.

Mrs. Conti and I hit it a little bit on our special ed students but there is a lot more communication that has to go out for them. Talk about equity, that is a major group in education

today. There is a lot of inequity that impacts them because of certain disabilities and we have to consider all their needs. It is very important to work together to offer a hybrid program because we know the special ed students that are selecting to come back in person will be able to get more services because virtual services are challenging at times.

We have to look seriously at learning loss. The next grant coming out is focused on learning loss and ventilation.

My goal is to get us open in a hybrid format but it is not going to be without us a community working together and being flexible and understanding. We will deal with issues. We are making the change that is best for our children. I will never not listen to someone. I will always take what they say very seriously. I will always think about and reflect on it and I will also gather a team together to improve on x, y, z.

Right now we have 2600 students out of 7200 that want to come back to school. We have to do it safely and work together and try to accommodate as many of our educators and students needs. I know we can do it because we are no different than many other districts and they are having success during this time.

I'm not saying that we won't have cases, that is inevitable. We have to be smart and keep educating people on the latest information and keep reminding students and parents of not sending their child in if they are sick.

When I talk about collaborative effort, it is every stakeholder that you can think of within our Township working together and being mindful that this is not just about them – this can affect other people very easily and that is why a mask in school is very important. We can't tolerate students taking off their masks for no reason. We have to address those things. It is about the safety of everyone.

If you have questions, reach out to your building administrator or if it is something I would deal with, reach out to my office. Thank you to all for putting in the time and energy that we have taken to get where we are at. It will take a lot of more time and energy to go those next few step to get us open.

I am answering as many emails and phone calls to try to have that one-on-one dialogue with concerned parents and teachers and sometimes students. I'm here but please be patient because it does take time to respond on a one-on-one fashion.

Question about Pomptonian and them taking care of the outstanding lunch moneys – that is not the case. We were working on the deficit even during the transition with Pomptonian coming in. They do not get involved with students that don't pay. They are fee based. They get the money and we get the x-amount of profits that go towards our cafeterias in many different ways. Mrs. Koon and I are working on it and we spoke about it last week.

There was a question on budgeting for special services. This is a sticky subject. Let's just say I bring up transportation – sometimes special services gets beat down and it's



misconceived because we choose as a district to outsource our transportation routes. If we reverse that and did all our special ed routes ourselves, it would be what are we doing with transportation because now we are outsourcing all our routes that aren't special ed. I think the key is all budget items especially since Mrs. Koon is on board with us, we are going to be looking at and coming up with creative ideas of how we can analyze the trends that are going on in these budgets. If it is something we can control, then we will control it.

Part of our goals is to be looking at our financial situation and improving on it and coming up with a plan over the next year or few years of how we are going to change the fiscal mindset of our district in controlling costs. Mrs. Koon has only been here a couple of months and I think over time you will see and it takes time to make change. You will see a change in our business office under Mrs. Koon's leadership. Our conversations are healthy, our mindsets are on the same page. We need to build back savings to put back into our reserve accounts. Our reserve accounts are very low. We will continue with the fiscal management because it impacts so many other things in our district.

Some questions were directly to the Board and it is not my place to answer them.

Thank you and if you have any questions you can reach out to me or my assistant Ms. Esposito and we will get back to you.

#### Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby for adoption:

E-1. *Reported at February 9, 2021 worksession (Superintendent's Report of HIB)*

##### E-1.1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period February 9 to February 16, 2021 (*no incidences to report*), (***no vote required; for reporting purposes only at regular meeting***).

##### E-2. APPROVE HOME SCHOOLED STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Approve J.R., a high school student who is home schooled, to participate in the athletic program of Union High School.

##### E-3. APPROVE TUITION CONTRACT

Approve Tuition Contract with Newark Public School for Z.I., in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

##### E-4. APPROVE TUITION CONTRACT

Approve Tuition Contract with Plainfield Public School for J.E., in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

**E-5. APPROVE HONORS/AP PLACEMENT PROCEDURES FOR SY21-22**

Approve the Honors/AP Placement Procedures for school year 2021-2022, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated E-5, page 4, we talked about it last week, the wording on that document said that kids had to request to be placed on a waitlist. Is that still the verbiage? Mr. Benaquista stated at this time it is.

The Board voted.

Dr. Francis stated I thought to Mr. Benaquista's email that E-5 was going to not be there. I thought the committee was going to present to the Board. Mr. McDowell stated Mrs. Ruiz had that same idea. Mr. Benaquista, correct me if I'm wrong, but because the presentation was already done with the Education Committee, that they would recommend to the Board. Mr. Benaquista stated I sent an email out over the weekend; the plan from the beginning was that the presentation would go out to the whole community. I also sent it again with that correspondence. I felt that the presentation was done. I could have played the video for everyone but I didn't think it was worth the time. The whole community and Board had a chance to review the presentation. Within that presentation, you heard from students and they did present to the education committee because it was placed on the agenda and that is what we have done in the past. We felt that the whole community should have input and they did get feedback. At this point, that is what is being recommended. I felt for the sake of time as well as the presentation was already completed, there was no need to present again at the Board meeting.

Dr. Francis asked to change his vote and abstain on E-5. Mr. Taylor stated as a point of order, respectfully to Board members, the motion was called, made and seconded. There was an opportunity for discussion and discussion occurred and a roll call already transpired. Technically it is too late to change the vote and continue conversation on this matter.

Dr. Francis stated I want to address what you just said. There was a meeting 2-3 months ago where you had a Board member change their vote to what they want. You allowed it to happen. I'm going to tell you Mr. McDowell that I want to change my vote from a "yes" on E-5 to "abstain".

Mr. Taylor stated I was trying to finish my comment. I'm not allowing or disallowing anyone; I don't have the authority or power; however, I was trying to advise the chair from a protocol standpoint and Robert's Rules on where we were in a meeting. Again, the roll call already occurred, the vote is already in the record. Mr. McDowell, as a matter of formality or lack thereof, as I said before, this is not congress, I will defer to you since we haven't moved on to the next item on the agenda. I will defer to you Mr. McDowell as to what you want to do at this juncture. You can either make a motion to rescind this and do it over or you can allow Dr. Francis to change his vote. I just want to point out to Board members to be mindful of the order, motion, second, discussion, you have all the time to vote your conscience one way or the other, I just wanted to put that out as a point of order and Mr. McDowell I will refer it to you as to

whether Dr. Francis changes his vote. I don't see a problem doing it this evening but I just wanted to point it out for the record for everyone to be aware of.

Dr. Francis asked where was Mr. Taylor on this three months ago? Mr. McDowell stated it doesn't matter right now. Dr. Francis stated it does matter. If it didn't really matter he wouldn't have brought it up. Mr. McDowell stated I do remember the incident that you spoke about and it was a few months ago and because of that I do think I will allow you to change your vote from "yes" to "abstain" on E-5.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O'Shea,

Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: Dr. Morgan (E-5), Mrs. Regis-Darby (E-5), Mrs. Ruiz (E-5)

ABSTAIN: Dr. Francis (E-5), Mrs. Williams (E-5)

MOTION CARRIED

#### Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mr. O'Shea, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for adoption:

#### F-1. TREASURER'S REPORT

That the Treasurer's Report dated January 31, 2021 be accepted.

#### F-2. SECRETARY'S REPORT

That the Secretary's Report dated January 31, 2021 be accepted.

#### F-3. CERTIFY TREASURER'S AND SECRETARY'S REPORT

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(a), I certify that as of January 31, 2021 no budgetary line-item account has obligations and payments (contractual orders) which in total exceed the amount appropriated by the district Board of education pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:22-8 and 18:22-8.1.

/s/ Yolanda Koon

Yolanda Koon, Board Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_ Dated

Pursuant to N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.2(h), we certify that as of January 31, 2021 after review of the secretary's monthly financial report (appropriations section) and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials that to the best of our knowledge no major account or fund has been over-expended in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.2(d)3 and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year. This certification is solely based on the information provided by the School Business Administrator and Board Secretary and is assumed by the Board to be correct.

#### F-4. APPROVE APPROPRIATION TRANSFERS

Approve appropriation transfers in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-5. APPROVE LIST OF CONTRACTS/PURCHASE ORDERS**

Approve the attached list of contracts and/or purchase orders pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-5 (bid exceptions to requirement for advertising) and 18A:18A-10(a) (purchase through State agency; procedure), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-6. APPROVE DISTRICT WIDE TRAVEL AND RELATED EXPENSES**

Approve district wide travel and related expenses pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7 and Board Policy File Code 6471 and in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-7. PRE-APPROVE DISTRICTWIDE STUDENT FIELD TRIPS**

Pre-approve districtwide student field trip destinations and purposes pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.8 in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-8. APPROVE LIST OF 2020-2021 STATE CONTRACT VENDORS**

Approve the amended list of the 2020-2021 State Contract Vendors pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-10(a) (purchase through State agency; procedure) to facilitate schools' purchasing, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-9. APPROVED LIST OF CONTRACTS/PURCHASES (STUDENT ACTIVITY)**

Approve the attached list of contracts and/or purchases pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-5(21) (paid by funds raised by or collected by students), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

School	Account/Department	Vendor/Description	Amount
Union High School	3201/Athletics	HUDL – purchase indoor camera to livestream games/events	\$3,500.00 (estimate)

**F-10. APPROVE 2020-2021 OUT-OF-DISTRICT STUDENT PLACEMENT LIST**

Approval be given to amend the 2020-2021 out-of-district student placement list, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-11. APPROVE FUNDRAISERS**

Approve the following fundraisers, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

Event Name	Date	Purpose
Sock Drive	February-March 2021	UHS/National Honor Society – collection of socks to be donated to Bridges Outreach in Summit, NJ
Read-A-Thon	March 2021	Washington Elementary School/Student Council – to raise funds for Make-A-Wish of New Jersey.
Face Mask Sale	March 2021	
Virtual Bingo	April 2021	
Fun Run	June 2021	

**F-12. ACCEPT GRANTS FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

Accept grants from the Township of Union Education Foundation for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-13. APPROVE DON JOHNSTON COMPANY FOR PRESENTATION TO EDUCATORS**

Approve the Don Johnston Company to present to educators a webinar, at no cost to the district, to review the software programs of Readtopia, CoWriter, and Snap & Read, previously purchased via district Purchase Order, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-14. APPROVE ONLINE GROCERY SHOPPING APPLICATIONS AS PART OF CBI**

Approve the use of online grocery shopping applications for student use as part of Community Based Instruction (CBI) when on site instruction resumes. This includes the Stop & Shop website/use of PeaPod to complete purchases online at Stop & Shop, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-15. *Approved on February 9, 2021 worksession (UCESC-Home Instruction)*

F-16. *For informational purposes only – vote not required.* List of legal services for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Operations Committee Resolutions:**

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Dr. Francis, seconded by Mr. O’Shea for adoption:

**O-1. APPROVE SECURITY DRILL/BUS EVACUATION REPORTS**

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1 and P.L. 2009, Chapter 178, approve the following security drill and bus evacuation reports for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**O-2. APPROVE RENEWAL OF HORIZON HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN**

Approve renewal of Horizon Health Insurance Plan for the period of March 1, 2021 to February 28, 2022.

**O-3. APPROVE DENTAL PLAN – HORIZON DENTAL**

Approve renewal of dental plan with Horizon Dental for the period of March 1, 2021 to February 28, 2022.

O-4. APPROVE REQUEST FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION VETERAN’S ALLIANCE  
 Approve request from the Township of Union Veteran’s Alliance Parade Committee for the use of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School’s auditorium on May 8, 2021 for a fundraiser, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

O-5. APPROVE REQUEST FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
 Approve request from the Union Township Chamber of Commerce for the use of the Union High School facility site for the Chamber’s 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Mayor’s Day 5K Run on September 26, 2021, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:  
 None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea,  
 Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Dr. Francis, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, for adoption:

P-1A. PERSONNEL ACTIONS – NEW HIRES

Personnel Actions-New Hires be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

P-1B PERSONNEL ACTIONS – EXTRA PAY

Personnel Actions-Extra Pay be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

P-2. APPROVE STUDENT TEACHERS AND INTERNSHIPS

Approve student teachers and internships for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

P-3. ACCEPT LETTERS OF RESIGNATION/RETIREMENT

Accept letters of resignation/retirement from the following staff:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Eff. Date</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Notes/ Corrections</u>
Edward Gottlin	Teacher of Woodshop	Union High School	6/24/2021	Retirement	Update to previous date submitted

Teresa Romeo-Andriulli	Elementary Teacher	Battle Hill Elementary School	7/1/2021	Retirement	
Tamiyah Yancey	Educational Media Clerk	Franklin Elementary School	3/1/2021	Resignation	

## P-4. APPROVE LEAVES

Approve leaves for the following staff:

Name	Position	Location	Leave Dates	Leave Type	Notes/ Corrections: All tentative approvals are pending required documentation.
Mark D'Aloia	Teacher of Computers	Hannah Caldwell Elementary	1/14/2021-3/31/21	Paid Medical Leave	
Erian Ford	Preschool Teacher	Hannah Caldwell Elementary	4/23/2021-9/1/2022	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently)  Followed by Unpaid/Non FMLA/Non NJFLA Child Rearing Leave	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 unpaid weeks.
Constance R. Krupa	Accountant for Special Services	Hamilton	1/1/2021-12/31/2021	Intermittent FMLA/NJFLA	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 unpaid weeks.
Abby Polizzi	Elementary Teacher	Battle Hill Elementary	2/3/2021-6/11/2021 Return: 6/14/2021	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently)	*Update to previous leave FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not

					to exceed 12 unpaid weeks.
Courtney Sharpe	Elementary Teacher	Battle Hill Elementary	1/19/2021-5/7/2021 Return of 5/8/2021	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/ NJFLA (Concurrently)	*Update to previous leave FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 unpaid weeks.
Corinne Singer	Teacher of Science	KMS	3/5/2021-10/14/2021 Return 10/15/2021	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/ NJFLA (Concurrently)	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 unpaid weeks.
Christine Zurka	Instructional Paraprofessional	Battle Hill Elementary	Intermittent FMLA 1/22/2021-6/30/2021	Intermittent FMLA	FMLA entitlement not to exceed 12 weeks.
Shareenah Roberts	Special services-paraprofessional	BMS	Extension through 6/30/2021	Extension of unpaid non-FMLA for internship	

**P-5. APPROVE ATTENDANCE AT NJ CASE**

Approve Kim Conti, Director of Special Services, to attend the New Jersey Council of Administrators of Special Education (NJ CASE) and/or NJ CASE meetings at no additional cost to the district other than Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)/CASE membership dues previously paid by district Purchase Order.

**DISCUSSION:**

Dr. Francis stated congratulations to the retirees.

**AYE:** Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**MOTION CARRIED**



### Approval of Bills:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, and moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Brens-Watson, that the Board concur with the bills listed in the permanent bound register appended to these minutes and be ordered for payment.

### DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci , Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

### Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I just want to make sure I’m transparent with the community about E-5. I know we met as a committee and we talked about E-5 in great length. One of the biggest concerns about E-5 to me, which was actually brought up by Mrs. Ruiz was the idea that kids had to request permission to be placed on a waitlist. I think we had good discussion about that sounding like an appeal process. I wanted the committee to go back and change that language so the kids know that they don’t have to do that; that will be in discussions with the guidance counselors and that still being on that paperwork was problematic to me. I just want to be frank with the community and that is why I said no. I think when things are discussed in committee and they are valid questions from Board members, that it should go back and those questions should be answered.

### New Business:

Dr. Francis stated if a law firm is going to be the Board attorney for the whole Board they should be consistent with their decisions or recommendations and if they are not, we as a Board should start to consider going in a different direction by either finding someone else within the law firm to come here and represent every Board member and not just a few. I would like to consider that; maybe you can talk to the law firm and address those issues. This thing has been happening from back when Paul Griggs was our attorney. We have an attorney that wants to be an attorney for certain people, certain Board members and other times they want to change the rules. Can’t have that. If they are not going to be the Board attorney for the full Board then we should go in a different direction.

Mr. Taylor stated if I can respond to Dr. Francis. I respect your comments. Just by a way of example, when Mrs. Regis-Darby just gave her comment – that technically was not new business; however, I gave her a liberal (inaudible) to make her comment because it wasn’t procedurally going to impact anything that occurred this evening. I do pick and choose when to throw penalty flags unlike the refs in the Super Bowl game against Kansas City but the reality is I’m trying to be fair and impartial to all Board members. As I indicated to you sir, when you made your comment or changed your vote, it was procedurally out of order pursuant to Robert’s Rules and your bylaws; however, my conclusion was that it was permissible for the President to allow you to change your vote as it did occur.

Dr. Francis asked where were you again when the previous Board changed her mind? Mr. Taylor stated I have no idea sir, I will be happy to look at the minutes of that meeting – do you have a date or agenda item? I don't recall at this time.

Dr. Morgan stated I appreciate that we are following Robert's Rules of Order because that is what we should do; however, I have to agree with Dr. Francis although I usually don't, for the past years we have not and if we are going to follow Robert's Rules we need to state that and stick to that but we can't just do it when it is certain leadership on the Board when it wasn't followed before. Robert's Rules have never been followed and it was brought to our attention by members of the public that we don't follow Robert's Rules. I'm not the president, I have never been the president but we need to follow that. I agree with Mr. Taylor but we have to be consistent and if it wasn't followed in the past, it just seem ironic to me that when Dr. Francis brought something up, now we have to follow it.

Mr. McDowell stated I do appreciate what you are saying. I do agree with Mr. Taylor. We are trying our best to follow Robert's Rules of Order but Mr. Taylor deferred to me to give Dr. Francis permission to change his vote. I didn't see a real problem with that. I knew that the motion had been moved and been seconded, open for discussion, voted on and it was closed but because Dr. Francis brought up the point that last year the same sort of thing happened, I thought it would be best to allow him to change his vote. We will try our best to stick to Robert's Rules of Order but sometimes it is o.k. if we miss something once in a while. What I would like to always do is to give people the opportunity to speak and share their opinions. I don't see anything wrong with what happened tonight with Dr. Francis changing his vote. I know it was out of order but as Mr. Taylor said it may have been procedurally wrong, it had no impact on what we were doing or what was accomplished.

As far as Mr. Taylor, I don't see him as favoring one side over the other. I never have that is me. I don't think we need to look into making any changes there. I know Afshan is also our attorney and I have no problem with her. I don't have a problem with our attorneys at all. If anyone else does, let me know and that is something we can talk about. I also prefer if you like, we can discuss this in executive session.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I don't think this is an executive session topic because it is not related to matters of litigation or personnel. My only concern is that the role of parliamentarian pursuant to our policies belongs to you, Mr. McDowell, the President of our Board. I appreciate Mr. Taylor's position that we should be following Robert's Rules, I agree; when he acts as the parliamentarian, it is almost as if he is the tenth Board member and has somehow taken your role from you and I think we have to be very careful with that because the president's role is the president's role and we should all be deferred to that role Mr. McDowell. That is my only concern. It is not specific to Mr. Taylor. I don't think any Board attorney should be taking on the role of parliamentarian when our policy says you are the parliamentarian, and you are supposed to do that. It would be different when the issue arose today with Dr. Francis wanting to change his vote, if you deferred Mr. McDowell to Mr. Taylor, but that didn't happen because Mr. Taylor jumped in before that. My concern is that we have to be careful with superseding someone else's role because the parliamentarian role is yours Mr. President.

Mr. Taylor stated there is no dispute from a legal standpoint that the parliamentarian is the Board president. It is also good public policy to rely upon the advice of your attorney because the Board President, respectfully, is a lay person. He is not an attorney. He is not trained beyond going to the general courses from the NJSBA which provides little if any guidance on parliamentary procedure, etc. In my 20 years of practicing law and representing dozens of school districts, municipalities, counties, etc. it is not common and expected for the attorney to call a point of order. If we were in person, I would whisper into Mr. McDowell's ear or pass him a note with respect to these issues to assist him and quite frankly assist you as a Board because it would be borderline malpractice if I sat back and allowed you as a Board to violate your bylaws and/or legal procedural issues. I'm looking at your Bylaw 9126 where it says the attorney shall be the legal advisor of the Board and its officers in questions related to their duties. I interpret that to be related to general parliamentary procedures to maintain order, decorum, legality and ethical compliance with respect to your Board meetings. My advice was in no way intended to supersede Mr. McDowell's role and/or your collective responsibilities. As I indicated to Dr. Francis, I don't have the power or authority to allow or disallow something; all I'm giving you is advice that you can accept or reject and vote with your conscience. Mr. McDowell stated thank you.

Dr. Francis stated we did not ask Mr. Taylor for advice on that, neither did you Mr. McDowell. It took a thousand words to say a few things. My point is we didn't ask him for advice.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you Dr. Francis and in all honesty, I probably would have asked him for advice. As he said, I'm not trained in parliamentary law. I do know the basics but there are somethings I may not know. I will rely on Mr. Taylor from time to time. Mr. Taylor, if I'm going down the wrong road, I'm looking to you to redirect me.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated just a couple of things that I have been thinking about in terms of new business. I just want to congratulate all of the students who have made it to the honor role in the last two quarters. I think they are doing amazing even though they are working under very strenuous circumstances. I also want to congratulate their teachers for the hard work that they are doing.

In terms of the honor roll, one of the things that I noticed is, it is very complicated for us as parents to find this information on the website of the district. Would it be possible for us to undertake this and I don't know if this is something through technology committee or how we should be going about this. I am looking for you for answers in terms of procedural issues. To really refresh our website to make it more user friendly for parents and the community in general.

Dr. Morgan I am sorry if this should have been brought to you first as the chair of the policy committee, I am requesting and asking this Board to think about forming a committee to review the "at home instruction procedures" for students based on illness. This is for students who are hospitalized or who have long-term care at home and need home instruction or instruction in a hospital. I am not talking about the policy, I'm talking about the procedures.

They have not been looked at since 2015 as far as I can tell. I think it is important for us especially during this COVID environment that we make those procedures as friendly as possible and less cumbersome for families to be able to follow. This is something that I would like us to do; look at them and form a committee that would be made up of a nurse, district's physician and other interested members.

Dr. Morgan stated thank you for that. As you know the Board's role is to develop policy and enforce policy so what you are asking sounds like you want bylaws related to that policy so that would come from the superintendent and his team. I think the policy is fine but you are asking for procedures and things for parents, that doesn't reside with the Board of Ed, our job is to only enforce the policy that is set. We do not run the district. Mr. Benaquista, you hear the request of Mrs. Brens-Watson so maybe you can start to work on that. Mr. Benaquista stated absolutely. I will also speak with IT and our administrators about publicizing our honor roll students. I think anytime you can honor any student that is achieving and I agree we need to do a better job of making sure we are getting that out; not just our website but on social media.

I'm glad you brought up a new website. I'm struggling with the platform versus the cell phone for our website. The hosting company we use for our website is not a great integration with the cell phone; that is one of my biggest pet peeves. I already started conversation this summer going with a new hosting site that has a better platform for cell phones. Most parents and students get on their cell phone before their computer. We are looking at School Messenger and they do have a better platform than what we have now. We are looking to update our website in the near future. We have to do it at the right time so it doesn't disrupt the normal practice of the district.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I want to send a shout out to Ms. Rivel, who is an art teacher at Kawameeh, I'm doing this as a parent because I don't know if I will have an opportunity to do this later, I just wanted to say thank you to her. She personally goes around bringing her students little care packages. She is amazing. My kid loves her. Thank you for doing that; you make his day. I know you are making the day of many other students out there. We appreciate you.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you, it doesn't fall under new business, but we will let it go.

#### Comments from the Public:

Khadja Sankoh stated I'm a senior at Union High School. I'm an active participant in the Union High School Performing Arts Company. My concern is about the company itself. Last spring we were in the works of doing a show called Welcome to Thailand and a week before we were to open COVID hit and we weren't able to do it. It was disappointing. For this fall show, we were supposed to do a production of Emma but we weren't granted access into the building to record from the Board of Education. Which is also disappointing but we are planning to do Welcome to Thailand again this spring but the same thing is happening and we are not getting access from the Board of Education to do it in the school which is disheartening to hear because the basketball team is able to do their sport in the gym. The auditorium is bigger than the gym and we would be social distancing. We are not asking to be in front of a live audience because of COVID we can't do that. Our whole set is in there that the students built – we are just asking to have permission to record our production in there and stream it to the residents of Union and

over the country to spread some happiness. It's my senior year and the majority of the students in the Performing Arts Company are either juniors or seniors so it is our last opportunity to shine. So pretty please.

Mr. Benaquista stated Mr. Rago and myself had a conversation yesterday on how we are going to roll out safely to get you guys started. He filled me in on some of the ideas. We have to meet and iron out a couple of things so that all the procedures are in place. I have feeling you will be back shortly in a safe way – social distance, pods for practice and recording but to give you that platform to put out the play that you worked on last year; which I look forward to seeing. Be patient; we are working together; don't think the supervisor of the department isn't working to get you open. We just have to review everything and he will be able to send out information to everyone involved.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you Miss Sankoh you make a very valid point and I hope you and your group will be able to put your play on.

Daryn Martin stated I wish it was different but it is the same thing all the time – ventilation – I heard the gentleman talk a little bit about it. I think the ventilation system and the safety stuff should have come out first before you came up with a date for opening schools because that is the foundation. It will be interesting to know when this report comes out what the air quality of the rooms are. I also haven't heard about medical staff, professional nursing staff – is there going to be enough in these schools. I'm looking for a comprehensive, cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting with enough people to be able effectively do that not just say you are going to do that – but people that can do it. Temperatures are still being checked all over the place and some people don't get a fever or temperature. How is that going to be rolled out and how is that going to work? I'm really puzzled on what the health director is looking out because there is a bunch of new variants and Union is still a red zone. We are still a red zone. We had over 112 new cases over the last couple of days. I'm very confused about this roll out by everybody. I need somebody to be very specific about what is going on here with this going back into school. We have to have health and safety rolled out before we come up with dates. I know everybody wants to get back to normal but I don't think that is going to happen until 2022 in my opinion with these new variants. I need something specific not just lip service. I need something in writing that I can look at. I don't think any kids or staff should be in those buildings until those things are done. I keep saying it but I haven't gotten the reports yet.

Catherine Sharpe stated I'm concerned about the March date for opening schools. I'm not alone in my concern. Many staff members are also concerned. As we can tell from the survey, more parents are keeping their children home than are sending them back into the building. In the self-contained classes, teachers and paras cannot stay socially distance and still do their jobs the way they are supposed to do them. One on one paras in general ed classes cannot stay socially distance when they are supposed to be working with their students. Pre-k staff cannot stay socially distance from the little ones when they are there trying to instruct them and help them in their playtime and their educational time. You are asking us to go back in March and students mid-March. Then we break for spring break. Then probably for two more weeks after that we quarantine because of students and staff traveling over break. This does not make any sense at all to me. Let's try and wait until mid April until we see what the numbers are at

that time and then make a better estimate of whether it is safe to bring our students and staff back into the building.

Laura Mendoza Vias stated I had an issue from January 2020 – over a year ago, pre-COVID, then Superintendent Tatum had presented to the community plans to reconfigure the elementary and middle schools in Union from the current plan. This was strongly based on documented research that had been provided to the district by experts that indicated that the current plan is not in fact what is best for the students. There had been discussions that started with the 2021-2022 school year that the elementary schools would be community-based neighborhood schools throughout at least 6<sup>th</sup> grader and perhaps even 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Therefore making Jefferson School a community elementary school. There were also discussions resulting with savings to the district on busing costs etc. I'm not aware today whether the reconfiguration plan has been further considered to be implemented. There is large support in the community in favor of doing the reconfiguration of schools in our district. I'm even aware of some parents considering leaving the district should the reconfiguration not take place. I would like to know the status of the plan; if it is something that is still viable as an option especially given the results of the studies. If so will the Board consider putting this as a priority back on its agenda sooner rather than later. If so what are the time frames that the community can expect the reconfiguration plan to go into effect. Many of us parents whose children will be affected are eager to obtain answers so we can plan accordingly. I thank the Board for its time and anticipated consideration.

Lilliana Almeda stated first comment, Mr. Benaquista, you are doing an amazing job. Your communication with the district is clear, to the point and is being carried out in a way where parents feel they are being communicated to. You actually on a PTA meeting with my children's school and it was a breath of fresh air to see you there and actually share all the activities that we have going on in our school. We have an amazing PTA with a lot of amazing ideas that could be shared throughout the district to help out other schools that may be lacking in activities. Maybe all PTAs can come together and share their activities for kids which are actually helping. I'm going to speak about my two children during their time period at home. As a decision to go back to school, my kids are super excited. I'm excited, a little anxious but I'm excited that they finally get to go back to school after a year of being home. It has taken an emotional toll on them.

The other comment – our Board of Education should be a united front towards the community. I know everyone has different points of views. You do represent your community and as such you should behave in the same way. Many comments that may not seem great towards each other; maybe you should keep that in private session. You should be coming on here to inform the public as to what is going on in the district; not to go back and forth at each other. I think as the Board, we have a great Board, we just need to work better together and act better towards each other. Even if you can't do that in the public meetings, you should save that for the private meetings. Thank you.

Judy Amorosa stated have you done for each classroom and office, marked off capacity for each room for appropriate social distancing? Isolation room for the students that possibly could have COVID. I know there is one nurse per school; I would like it to be considered that

extra nurses be hired because you are going to need somebody to monitor the isolation room for the sick students. I would also like punch lists of all the remediation that has been done in all of the schools to be made transparent and shown to the public and possibly posted on the website. I would just like transparency, and I would like to make sure that things have been done. I just don't want to hear that schools are ready is not good enough for me. I like to see the exact plans; it is only two weeks before staff goes back, a month before students go back and if I heard correctly, Mr. Benaquista said that there is only going to be one cohort; depending on how many students are going back, that might not be sufficient and I think at this point that you should have more solid plans and they should be posted on the Town website. Again, I would like to see on the website what was done in each school to remediate and what the exact plans are and they should be posted as soon as possible and not wait until the last minute.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated UTEA president. Happy Mardi Grau to everybody. I want to thank Mr. Benaquista for working 24/7 to move our district forward in this very difficult time. His communication pieces and meeting with the UTEA have been appreciated. Every UTEA member wants to be part of the success of our district. Every member is working diligently to educate our students and keep them on track. Everyone here knows how difficult the education field faces during this pandemic but there is still much angst.

In January Barry Loessel, Director of Maintenance, did meet with the three associations and assured us that all building repairs have been completed. However, there is still some skepticism and many concerns concerning logistics. I will meet with Mr. Benaquista to discuss them. I wanted to complement Mrs. Sharpe, in addition to all her comments which are very important, I have a few more.

If there are going to be mass breaks will they be done outside the building? We know lunch is grab and go so will there be snack breaks and if they are will they also be outside? Will every member who is to remain virtual be accommodated and when will they be notified and will extra accommodations be made to assist the many members in classes where close contact with students is inevitable? On behalf of the Union Township Education Association, I look forward to discussion with these questions.

I do want to comment on the Parsonage project which is very successful. We had to triple our budget because the first three were so successful. I like to think of this as the pandemic field trip project because it is a way to get the kids to a wonderful museum. Working with the Union Township Historical Society; we have had Battle Hill Day, Kawameeh Day and Jefferson Day. This Sunday is Livingston Day and March 7<sup>th</sup> is Union High School Day. I look forward to all ten schools participating.

Jeffrey Monge stated Mr. Benaquista I know you tried to answer some of the questions that I spoke to last week – some weren't 100% clarified. I think it would be helpful for the public and also the administration is to be able to offer two different types of updates. One is to share the report that was mentioned. What defines readiness for each of the schools? And how each of the schools are meeting the requirement for readiness? If they are not, when are they going to be able to do it as far as the time related to that? I think it is important not only to have an open forum for the parents but particularly for each of the schools – you Mr. Benaquista, the

principal and any other leadership that will be able to speak to those particular schools because each building is very unique and the personnel is unique across the district – that is facility wise.

Operationally, what are we doing as a district? What are going to be the unique operational guidelines that we are going to meet for each of the schools. Each school is different – egress, ingress is different, personnel is different, age is different. It is very important to put these guidelines out, readiness check lists out and share it with the community.

As an idea, to offer a virtual tour of each of the buildings. I know there has been work done in each of the buildings – Plexiglas – to be able to have a video tour of all the improvements that were made prior to folks coming in, I think is going to be very important.

One of the things I am also concerned about is you have to have the teacher buy-in and that is not 100% clear to me that it is there. What is necessary to be able to get that buy-in? What good is having our kids coming to our classrooms if we don't have some of our teachers in the classroom.

Myrna Louis stated I would like to echo the sentiments of the parent who asked about the plans to reorganize the school district and to move grades 7 and 8 to Burnet and all the elementary schools would go to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. For myself, my son left Hannah Caldwell last year and now he is in Jefferson virtually and I feel like going to the middle school may be a little bit overwhelming for those kids that are entering the 6<sup>th</sup> grade next year. In terms of not being used to being in a classroom setting, having to go from classroom to classroom with multiple teachers so I am also interested in learning about what the plans are and if they are not going to change all the elementary schools to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, what would be the plans to transition the new 6<sup>th</sup> graders going into these larger middle schools. I'm concerned about that and I feel a lot of kids may get lost in trying to get used to going to a middle school after being out of school for so much. I understand that we are going back in March but that is only three months. I feel like a committee or working group or something should be put together to address the kids going from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Jill Hall stated I would like to invite the members of the Board and public to a presentation that is being put forward on Zoom on Tuesday evening, the 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7 p.m. addressing teen mental health in the COVID era. I have been receiving a lot of requests for information about how to best respond to student distress and anxiety particularly during the lockdown and our County association got together and Union in addition to five other districts will be putting forth this presentation for parents. We have a speaker coming in from High Focus to speak specifically to motivating students, completing school work, issues surrounding depressed moods and other issues of concerns that parents may have.

We put out a flyer a couple of weeks ago and I will push the flyer out again tomorrow but I wanted to announce it here so everyone would be aware to look for it. If you have any questions, just shoot me an email.

Susan Lipstein stated I want to mention to the public that on Thursday, the Board is having meeting at 5:30 p.m. on ethics training which they have yearly and then at 7 p.m. there



will be a planning meeting. Those are open to the public. I have attended them in the past and would encourage the public to attend. Both are extremely important. The planning meeting – the Board will be working on goals and will give us the framework for the progress we want to see the district to achieve. I want to make sure people are aware of those meetings. I'm looking forward to seeing the progress of the Board.

Rich D'Avanzo stated UTEA vice president. Last week I spoke about the status of standardized tests. Mr. McDowell I sent you a couple of tidbits and I'm not sure if you were able to share with your colleagues. A lot has to do with the inequity period when it comes to asking our students. All the State did was to delay it for one month. There is a bill in the assembly by the two education chairs but I don't think anything is going to happen quickly or overnight and I was hoping to see if there was any progress about the Board of Ed coming up with a resolution or letter directing it to the State Commissioner and Governor Murphy. Just recently, Highland Park Board of Ed, did the same thing. They drafted a letter to send directly to Murphy's administration. Learning loss – that term comes up constantly, we know that. We have measures. We are the educators. We know where our students are. Why do we have to spend the amount of time and there is no online platform and you would be asking every student to come into that building in order to take it because there is nothing in place. The State needs to apply to the federal government. Hopefully you can move ahead and be proactive. Many of us fight for public education issues and I think that is part of your advocacy as Board members to try to do the same as well.

Elsie Mackay stated thank you to Mrs. Koon, Mr. Benaquista and Mr. O'Shea – I appreciate effective communication in terms of the finances and there are ways to go. I want to say thank you for not putting a bullseye on special education because that was the norm in the past. I appreciate you looking at all areas.

I wanted to get some clarity in terms of the exchange with the lawyer. One of the things that this Board said, that things were going to change and stop what was in the past and move forward. Today's exchange proved that we need to find out what you actually do, what is your responsibilities because based on that exchange across the board, it is always conflicting and back and forth and it speaks as to you not understanding the process and how can we have faith in a board that doesn't even understand what is right, wrong, what is not and when the lawyer gives advice, we have to watch an exchange. I wonder if the plan is to remove him and replace him with someone else. If that is the plan, just say it and spare the community this back and forth that we continuously go through.

In terms of special education, I am happy that we are going to have a Town Hall. I think when it comes to kids with disabilities, Miss Sharpe hit it on the nail, what plans do we have in place in terms of social distancing, paraprofessionals – my son goes to out-of-district and it is working and there are zero issues in terms of COVID; however, we are coming back in district and we need a clear plan and the special education community really needs to hear from you Mr. Benaquista. We need some sort of guidance and understanding because it is tricky and we do want to have the confidence in terms of coming back and making sure all is well.

In terms of finances, one of the things I heard was that you would be working more with special education to get additional funding. I want to know if you are really looking at your local politicians. I know a number of BOE members and people have issues with the politicians; those are your issues not the community nor our student issues. Are you advocating and trying to get us money because if we all want to be naïve and think that you are going to leave out, we should be trying to get the maximum amount of money to get the vents fixed, the buildings fixed, the infrastructure and the money that we are getting is not enough especially for the children coming back from a year long break. We need funding and we need partnerships. I'm hoping this new Board will let go of all of the stuff that happened 20-30 years ago or whatever you feel because it is not about you, it is about a community. As a community, you should be working with everybody to get the maximum amount of resources for the students. Negate all the other stuff. I don't care and a majority of us don't care either. We just want what we can get for our community and district.

Suehay Monge stated thank you to Mrs. Ahern and the counseling department. They put together a parent/student viewable presentation for all grades. I specifically want to say thank you for the junior one. It was an amazing presentation; it was for career and college ready. There was so much information on there. The information was fantastic. You can access it at any time and it really helps guide you through Naviance and all the things that come to play with juniors and seniors. It was a great addition for parents to view any time.

I wanted to ask a question about the SAT that Union High School is going to be hosting in March 24<sup>th</sup>. Where are we on preparation for that. They have not yet stated that Class of 2022 will be test optional. I wanted to know where we are with that. We pulled off the PSAT seamlessly so I'm hoping that they will be able to do the same thing with the SAT in March.

Will we know, as it pertains to the return, what teachers will be returning? That might change parents minds as to whether or not they may be sending their kids back if the majority of their teachers are not going to be in person.

Genesis – I have concerns about when the teachers are putting the grades into Genesis. This is something I have encountered since middle school. There was a big push to have parents sign on and monitor their student's grades but I'm finding that not all teachers are putting the grades up until seven days before the end of the marking period or even after that. Which is concerning because there is no way for parents to track the success of the students and the students can't track it as well and at the end of the day no opportunity for them to be able to come back from a failing grade or a "C" that could have been a "B". It is difficult because we want to hold the kids accountable but if the teachers are not being held accountable for putting the grades in by a certain time, what message are we sending them. I know there is no current policy, maybe that is something that can be considered. It is best practice for teachers to put in the grades within a certain amount of time so the kids know how they are doing.

I am disappointed. I was expecting to see the presentation for the AP/Honors classes that stated at the last meeting. There were some questions that would have been best answered by the committee that got together to come up with the new guidelines.

Rashad Moore stated what is the protocol for kids going back to school that may be sick and when the teachers find out they are sick, what are they going to do at that moment. Do they go into quarantine or what happens when their brothers and sisters in other schools are you going to notify the other schools? It is a major concern. I hear nothing of that nature. It needs to be brought up. My kids is going to go for now but it really depends on what else I hear regarding the safety. Safety is everything; it is more important than anything else. Obviously when they go back to school, they can easily bring it home to the families. I would love to hear about that.

Paul Casey stated I just want to comment and thank the young people that were on this evening. The senior about the performing arts program and congratulate her for coming to the meeting and having her voice heard. The students serving as liaisons, I think that is setting a great example for all the students in the district. My son was listening and paying attention so I hope he decides to speak one day.

I also wanted to ask about the superintendent search and hope that we can get an update on what the process is for the permanent superintendent position. I think that is important for the community to know.

Mr. McDowell stated to bring you up to speed with the superintendent search. If you go to the district website, there is a section and hopefully you have already taken the staff or community survey. If you click on the superintendent search, it will take you to another location to show you the position that posted in the newspapers and also a calendar of the superintendent search. I think the survey is still open so the public and staff and can comment on what we should be looking for in a superintendent. I wanted to make sure that everyone is aware that we have contracted with the NJSBA to conduct the superintendent search for us. Our representative is Gwen Thornton. She met with us to do some training and she is also doing the ethic's training for us in two days.

As of last week we had eight applicants that had applied and interested in the position of superintendent. That process is moving along and for the sake of transparency, you can look at the timeline on the district website and see where we should be at this stage of the process in looking for a permanent superintendent for our district.

Mr. D'Avanzo, I did read the articles that you sent me and they are very interesting and I'm also aware of the Highland Park motion and we will talk about that same thing in executive session.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated in regard to the superintendent search survey. One of the things that we heard very strongly from our community as a Board was that the community wanted to some input on this search. One of the ways that we can do that is through the survey itself. I am urging our community to take that survey seriously and to resist the urge to give us responsive that are not helpful. You need to tell us what the characteristics are of the person you want us to hire. The answers you give us are going to help our representative from NJSBA to kraft the questions that will be asked of all the candidates. We cannot do that effectively if we don't have answers that reflect what you are looking for in a person. I am urging all of you to

take the survey seriously and respond with answers that are going to help us in the end and be part of this search in the best way you possibly can.

Ann Hart stated the superintendent survey closes on February 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. McDowell stated as Mrs. Brens-Watson stated, we are looking for input from our district and that includes are community and staff. We want to take all your opinions into account so that we can get a superintendent that will be best suited for our district.

Mr. Benaquista stated if it is in regard to the rice notice, we don't have to discuss that at this point but if there are any other matters than we will go in.

Motion for Executive Session:

Moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 9:09 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b: personnel, attorney-client privilege and/or pending or anticipated litigation

Please take notice that minutes will be taken of the discussion conducted during the executive session and the Board will disclose the minutes of the executive session when the disclosure will not result in unwarranted invasion of individual privacy or prejudice to the best interests of the Board of Education and provided that such disclosure does not violate federal, state or local statutes and does not fall within the attorney/client privilege. Action may be taken when the Board reconvenes in public session.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 10:17 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Williams, seconded by Mr. O'Shea, that the meeting be adjourned at 10:19 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci , Dr. Morgan, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON  
BOARD SECRETARY



