

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – February 8, 2022

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, February 8, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mrs. Williams called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Ms. Marissa McKenzie, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Ms. Chastity Santana, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. John O’Shea (arrived 7:03 p.m.), Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby (arrived 7:01 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Dr. Scott Taylor, Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Dr. Gretel Perez, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Dr. Francis led the Board 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.

Dr. Francis read the district’s mission statement.

Comments from Public on Resolutions:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week’s regular meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel.

Superintendent's Report:

Mrs. Williams stated next week the auditors will give a presentation, the Superintendent will give the State of the Schools and there will be a student spotlight. Tonight, there is a presentation from our healthcare brokers.

Mrs. Koon stated that the healthcare brokers and Aetna are here tonight. Willis Towers went out with a request for proposals for our healthcare coverage.

Chuck Walters and Denise Lang from Willis Towers and representatives of Aetna attended the worksession. Mr. Walters stated that there were a lot of conversations with Horizon (present healthcare provider) and they were not competitive. So they conducted a request for proposals and Aetna came out as the most advantageous for the district and they provided a 16-month rate which would make renewal July 1, 2023. The plan would include healthcare, dental and vision. The effective dates are March 1, 2022 and for vision April 1, 2022. See presentation attached to minutes.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for reporting:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period January 19, 2022 to February 8, 2022, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated E-2 – my personal view on this, this is definitely not curriculum; it is not research based. If the district continues to do this to kids, we are failing the kids in the district for doing this to them. My personal opinion, and as a parent, this is not curriculum and I want the public to take a look at this.

Dr. Francis stated E-4 – school calendars for three years; why are we doing that? Dr. Taylor stated we are only approving the 2022-2023 school year, the other calendar will be removed. I did let the education chair know.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mr. O'Shea presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-18 – do we know what the corrective action plan is? Mrs. Koon stated we should be receiving a copy from the auditors on Friday. We will deliver them to the Board members' homes. We have one finding from June 2021 and that was in our enterprise fund – food service account. The finding was that we did not spend the money in time. We spoke about COVID and its impact on shipment and lead times. We put the purchase order on in April and hoping we would have those purchases made and received and paid by June 30, 2021. Unfortunately, we did not receive the goods in time. The statute states that you can't have a profit of more than three months of your monthly expenditures. It is a good problem to have but this year we are trying to put the purchase orders in earlier. We spoke about the money that we would like to bring some awareness and improve Burnet's cafeteria to make it more inviting. We want to change the service line and make it more streamlined. We are working on that. Hopefully we can find a State contract vendor and/or a co-op which would cut out the bidding process. The bidding process is like 20 days from advertising, evaluating the RFP and putting it on the agenda to be approved. They said we are looking at least at 20 weeks for the service line. We are working the best we can.

Everybody is experiencing that because they received a lot of funding in the food service account. In part, all meals were free this year as well as they increased our reimbursement rate. Mrs. Regis-Darby asked if there was a monetary number associated with that increase? Mrs. Koon stated we are looking at around \$200,000 to put in this project. I did speak with Dr. Taylor to see if that is something we want to invest in. There was talk about other things. We feel it is the best need for those kids and those kids deserve it.

We did meet with Pomptonian and they gave an idea of what they wanted to do. They want to customize which would take even longer. We are meeting this Friday if we can just order the standard service line which is still an improvement to what we have. It would put the cashiers on the outside.

The correction is to try to spend the money sooner.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked if we don't meet that particular deadline because of production, is there a possibility that we could lose that money. Mrs. Koon stated no. It would carry over and you would get another finding. We are doing as much as we can do.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-19 – the budget calendar, are we on point? Mrs. Koon stated we are continuing to work through the progress. The Governor typically gives his address on a

third Tuesday of February and then the numbers come out on that Thursday. We are still working on the budget.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-20 – do we know the number of students and is it a particular building or districtwide? If we are increasing this, do we also have to increase funds to the private schools within the community? Mrs. Koon stated this is additional special education students that need to be evaluated. It is districtwide. Mrs. Regis-Darby asked do we have to increase also for St. Michael's? Mrs. Koon stated I will check for nonpublic. I will follow-up with Kim Conti on that.

Dr. Francis stated F-20 – have we exceeded \$7,000 already? What are we expecting to spend? Mrs. Koon stated I will check.

Dr. Francis stated F-22 – have we exhausted the \$5,000? I know there are more investigations. Mrs. Koon stated we are close to the \$5,000. Dr. Taylor stated I have three current and will need some time to be processed.

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Operations Committee agenda.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Dr. Francis for adoption:

O-2. APPROVE CHANGE IN HEALTHCARE PLAN - AETNA

Approve the change in healthcare provider to Aetna Healthcare Insurance for medical, prescription, dental and vision for the period of March 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Santana stated O-1 – security drills. Are they sending notices out to the parents for these modified lockdowns and letting them know what is going on? Dr. Taylor stated that he had given direction to the principals; he would follow-up tomorrow with each principal.

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Ms. McKenzie, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for adoption:

P-1A. PERSONNEL ACTIONS – NEW HIRES

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

P-5. APPROVE STUDENT TEACHERS AND INTERNSHIPS

Approve student teachers and internships for the 2021-2022 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Francis asked in the future are we going back to be having executive session before the worksession? Mrs. Williams stated if we need to we can.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Ms. McKenzie presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Policy Committee:

Ms. Santana presented the following policies for first reading:

POL-1. BYLAW 0142 – BOARD MEMBER QUALIFICATIONS, PROHIBITED ACTS AND CODE OF ETHICS

Approve Bylaw 0142 – Board Member Qualifications, Prohibited Acts and Code of Ethics, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*first reading*).

POL-2. POLICY 3125 – EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHING STAFF MEMBERS

Approve Policy 3125 – Employment of Teaching Staff Members, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*first reading*).

POL-3. POLICY 8420 – EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Approve Policy 8420 – Emergency and Crisis Situations, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*first reading*).

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Francis asked why are we adopting Bylaw 0142 and Policy 3125? Ms. Santana stated Bylaw 0142 was passed initially, we wanted to match and codify it into the bylaws. Policy 3125 was recommended by our superintendent.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked is there a rationale for Policy 3125? Dr. Taylor stated we as a team felt that it is important to bring back some of our recent resignees if they want to return to Union. There is no need to wait five years; especially since we have a teacher shortage. Ms. Santana stated we are trying to break barriers to bring people on board. Dr. Taylor stated and of course if they left on good terms.

Dr. Francis stated we should abolish that policy because it should be up to the superintendent to bring back who he wants to hire. It is not up to us. If he doesn't want to bring somebody back he can say no and he won't recommend it. If he does, it is still up to the Board to decide. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated it is not up to us, it is up to him. Why do we need a policy to dictate what he should be doing. It is his decision.

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda. Mrs. Minneci stated that once the student is on the agenda, they have already withdrawn from the district. We are just approving the removal.

Technology Committee:

Mrs. Brens-Watson gave an update from the Technology Committee meeting. She stated that a lot of background work is being done on the website. It is a much anticipated update. One of the challenges is the amount of data and content being migrated.

Thank you, Mrs. Paul, for the hot spots and devices for students; this is not just for the free and reduce lunch students, she is looking into this for everyone. There were an additional 250 students who registered for the 2021-2022 school year so an additional 500 Chromebooks have been purchased. The IT Department has been expanded to include two additional IT support specialists.

Dr. Francis asked where are these students from. They said they wouldn't be coming from these developments? Dr. Taylor stated they are working on the data and will provide data to the Board.

Ms. Santana stated to send an email to a teacher through the district website, there is no direct, it throws you into limbo. It doesn't work. Is there something where there is the teacher, this is the email and I can copy and paste into my email? Dr. Taylor stated I don't think we can do that on this current platform but I promise we will do something so you will have a quick link on the new platform. The new platform should be rolled out late March, early April.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I use that email; sometimes it gets lost in SPAM; there is a confirmation you receive after sending an email.

Ms. Santana stated but it doesn't memorialize what you sent. Mrs. Brens-Watson stated it does. Ms. Santana stated a list of the names and phone numbers are not on the website.

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved at the regular meeting.

DISCUSSION:

None

Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Minneci stated the notes from the committee meetings were sent to us by Mrs. Watson. I thought that each chair would prepare and send out. Is anyone opposed to doing our own notes and sharing them? Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. McKenzie and Ms. Santana all stated yes.

Mrs. Minneci stated I think it is just another burden for them. That is how we did it in the past; the chair would discuss when they came to the worksession what went on in the meeting. I thought each chair would do their notes and share them with the rest of the Board.

Dr. Francis stated we do this in the worksession so it is not closed. I could not open the email. Mrs. Minneci stated we received them so we were prepped so as you go through the agenda and if you have any questions.

Dr. Francis stated my concern is as a Board we are not supposed to be communicating. Mrs. Minneci stated send it to Diane and she can send it out. It is just another burden for Mrs. Watson. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated that is double work.

Ms. Santana stated the rationale behind it – as someone new, I don't know how you function without minutes. My vision was a neutral party. You can not always say that a chair is completely neutral. Somebody that is admin isn't. Every committee meeting there is someone there from admin. If they get the minutes together and because of legalities where I can just send it – this way it goes through a neutral party. In the red tape of our system it might be considered double dipping. I'm looking for a future where a new member comes on who doesn't know anybody and doesn't know where to go and you can say here are the minutes from this meeting.

Mrs. Minneci stated I just thought it was an extra burden. I was under the impression that each chair was going to make their notes to share. I'm just voicing my opinion.

Dr. Francis stated I still don't understand what this is all about. If I'm a chair and I'm taking minutes and I submit to Diane and Diane can send it to everybody; I don't know why we send it to Bernadette Watson. Mrs. Minneci stated Dr. Taylor took notes from their meetings and then they sent it to Bernadette to type up and send to us.

Dr. Francis stated I think the chair should take the minutes and submit it to Diane. Mrs. Minneci stated I'm just clarifying what is going on.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated even when we go into executive session, should be as concise and directly to the point as possible. Since there are no attorneys at these committee worksession, is there a legal consequence for Board members sending these out? Mr. Buggy asked are we talking a verbatim record. Ms. McKenzie stated no it is more like an outline.

Ms. Santana stated before this idea, I spoke with Lester Taylor, Dr. Taylor – legally this was the avenue that got the information to the Board members. If you don't want to read them, you don't have to. Mrs. Minneci stated that is not the point; I'm talking about the extra steps.

Ms. Santana asked why didn't it carry on. When I got here I didn't get any minutes. Mrs. Minneci stated because we sat here one by one and chair discussed.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated you would come with your notes from your committee meeting and as we sit here at the worksession, you would go over what you talked about in your committees and then you would go over the agenda items and if anyone had questions they would defer the questions to the chair. That was typically how it was done.

Ms. McKenzie stated the administrator that sat there took notes and they had their administrative assistant do it. They are not getting our notes. Mrs. Minneci stated we used to do our committee meetings in person prior to the worksession.

Ms. Santana stated we can speak on everything but personnel but that is not true because I had questions about operations – the fire drills. My point, if the minutes and information is there, I don't have to ask the question. Mrs. Minneci stated I agree but all I'm saying – the process and the way it was done. I wasn't saying not to do it, it is just an extra step.

Dr. Francis asked who designed this process? Dr. Taylor stated I felt it was helpful to have the administrators take the notes and send it off to Bernadette so she could put it all on one format. I'm receptive to whatever else.

Ms. Santana stated I'll take ownership as being the one that would like information. I'm the one who spearheaded it to everyone else and ultimately to Dr. Taylor and he came up with this idea and I agreed to. Ms. McKenzie stated in my district that is how it is done. Everyone has an administrator that sits on a committee and the administrator is responsible for doing the minutes, not the Board member. We send to the secretary and she sends the minutes out to the Board members. Ms. Koon stated Dr. Taylor stated we would streamline it to his secretary. We need to get a consensus on how to move forward.

Dr. Taylor handed out the goals of the Strategic Plan and asked Board members to review (same is appended to minutes). He stated he would like to move forward with the process. The stakeholder group that included Nellis, Nancy, Jill Hall, Ann Shannon and others. He stated that he would have the community review after the Board has reviewed and given their feedback. Do you have any suggestions today? I will review this once more next briefly so we have more of a public viewing of us talking about it. On February 23rd I will be brining the community together to develop the action steps that support the goals.

I am handing out the goals – this is a sample of something I have been talking about (same is appended to minutes). Putting charts together with the goals and the action steps. I am moving forward with restorative practices. I felt an urgency to move forward to do. I have

already started building it into the strategic plan; I have not gotten community input yet. I have made that executive decision to do that.

Look at the third goal – it is about equity and fostering social emotional growth – I laid out the action steps and move forward with restorative practices for year one. I have not gotten to years two and three. I will ask the community in two weeks to help us work through this chart. I really want the Board to have the say in the goals before I go out there. If you have any comments about the goals the steering committee drafted in November.

Mr. O’Shea asked do you want us to discuss this privately with you individually? Dr. Taylor stated I would like to discuss this openly so it is transparent.

Mrs. Scott-Hayden stated Goal #3 – equitable access and inclusion – bringing in the union and NJEA bringing in training. I see your goal talks about student and leaders in grades 9-12. We identify the service – restorative practice leaders and that is great and amazing but I think we have to teach restorative practice also before we can work with students. We should definitely be looking at that; as well as getting the union in here – they do it for free and do it well. We should be collaborating with the union and our members can get that for free. I talked with you earlier about building up those cohorts, identifying and starting with 30 leaders from three different buildings, have a cohort and breaking it down over time because you can’t do it overnight. I’m all for students but I think we have to start with staff.

Dr. Taylor stated what you are pointing out is way forward that we would want to update this document to reflect. This is a sample and it is a living document. We can codify what you just said in here. I would be held accountable as the chief school administrator in getting this done.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the community needs to come in; to hear their voice; creating those measurable steps on what to do next and creating those action steps then given to them -. Dr. Taylor stated we as a Board need to do our work. It needs to be put in print. It should be launched by July 1 into the September 1 with a plan.

Mrs. Scott-Hayden stated we spoke about building this into the school calendar. In East Orange when we did our professional development, we made sure that we took all the stakeholders who are responsible for our half-day work group sessions for the different career groups that they had whatever it is that they needed to move their career forward. We talked about taking out the November days for professional development and given out that whole week and moving it over to spring. I’m not sure how you do it in Union and who is in charge of what; professional development happens. I think we need to work this out for the following year to make sure we move the whole district in that direction. It may have to be in cohorts because of so many people. Dr. Taylor stated absolutely right and why we need a three-year plan. You hold me to it and I hold my principals and directors to it.

If the Board is interested, my goals that you evaluate me on can be aligned to the strategic plan. Mr. O’Shea stated it is going to be.

Dr. Taylor stated the NJSBA evaluation tool, almost always I would say goals in progress. It is very hard to achieve all goals because you set very high expectations. I would have the schools PDP in part, include elements of the strategic plan. The budget should be supporting the strategic plan. I do want to hear about the goals from you guys.

Mr. O'Shea stated these are very general, I would like to see the meat that is behind these words. Get the community involved, parents, stakeholders – let's hear from them before I give you an idea of whether it is right or wrong.

Dr. Taylor stated he would like the Board to reflect on the goals and have a discussion next week. He wants to narrow down the days that he brings the public together to one.

Dr. Taylor stated the Board retreat – ethics training is March 23rd – I would propose we have the retreat that night. Mrs. Scott-Hayden stated she cannot make the 23rd – I have a work commitment. Mrs. Williams stated I looked into you having the ethics training individually; having the retreat at that same time we can't bring you up to speed on. Dr. Taylor stated we may have to wait for the summer or fall.

Ms. Santana asked can we do an evening? Dr. Taylor stated that is what I'm recommending for that day but it seems to be hard to get everyone together.

Mr. O'Shea stated having a 2-3 hour retreat won't work; need 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. – do it on a weekend so you don't have to take off of work. Dr. Taylor stated I think the Board needs some leeway on a date.

New Business:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I read an email about summer assignments. Can kids be held responsible for a grade for summer assignments in September? When it comes to summer assignments, is it mandatory? Mr. Buggy stated you mean summer reading and grading in September. It is something we will look at. Dr. Taylor stated districts do it in all different ways. I never had anyone ask for legal counsel on it. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I would like legal counsel. I am not a fan of summer assignments, I'm a fan of summer projects and activities, especially high school. They are transitioning into adulthood. You have a job and you can use those hours; volunteer at a nursing home, community center or food pantry. Kids are being held responsible for summer work and they are being graded in September when legally, and I looked at the education law, they are responsible to come to school for 180 days. Are the teachers available in the summertime to answer questions that students may have on the summer assignment? The answer is no. Why is it that she will be held responsible for a grade in September when the student has a question, there is no one to answer that question. I think I need clarification; that grade can bring a child's average down.

Dr. Taylor stated I will have Chris email me and pass it to you. I asked Dr. Perez to come up with a committee to look at summer assignments.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked how many female security guards do we have? Mr. Benaquista stated three in high school, including the class three officer. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated it is a big concern, especially in the bathroom.

Mrs. Williams stated I appreciate your questions but we are still doing new business and not really having a discussion and we still have members of the public who want to speak.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated as a Board member I would like to have my question answered; otherwise, I can sit in the public and as a parent can ask those questions.

Mrs. Williams stated I am just asking you to be respectful of our public.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated when you pay for your senior yearbook there is a \$2.75 charge on PaySchool. Are parents going to incur those charges? I thought we said there were going to be no charges for the parents when they use that system. Mrs. Koon stated PaySchool is the tool that is not only your food service but other activities. What was stated and agreed upon was the district would pick up the administrative fee for lunch; however, for other activities, the fees are paid by the parents.

Comments from the Public:

Cathy Jakositz asked about the March 7th mandates about masking. Will the district lift the mask mandate? Six districts in Union County have already said yes.

Dr. Taylor stated it is premature; he would gage the community and then speak with the Board. By community I'm talking about personnel as well as parents and guardians. We have 3-4 weeks. Ideally, I want to consult with the Board so maybe a week before that mandate.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated the email system is awful on the district website because any time I try to email a Board member, you click on it and you don't know. If you can improve the email for the Board I would appreciate it. UTEA is a vital part of Union's community. The UTEA sponsored the first ever elementary school girls' basketball team – the children are so excited to be a part of it. We have done teamwork. Every school had their own shirt and color. We worked on commitment. Every girl has their own basketball so they can practice at home. There was a trip to Seton Hall University for a basketball game to see how women can excel in basketball – it was an incredible experience. I can't wait for our girls to play for Seton Hall. The kids and parents love it. I want to thank the Board because without transportation and the grounds crew, UTEA paid for everything, but you made it happen.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Ms. Santana seconded by Mr. O'Shea, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:31 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: Ionta and Lowery - pending or anticipated litigation, contract negotiation and matters falling under the attorney-client privilege.

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, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 8:47 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Ms. McKenzie, seconded by Ms. Santana, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

All present voting YES

MOTION CARRIED

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

