

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – March 11, 2025

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, March 11, 2025 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.

Ms. Carbonell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Ms. Dixiana Carbonell, Mr. Michael Cohan, Mrs. Elsie Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Guida Faria, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Mr. Greg Nasta, Ms. Chastity Santana, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Dr. Gerald Benaquista, Dr. Jose Rodriguez, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Mr. McDowell led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and read the district's mission statement.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the "Open Public Meetings Act" that adequate notice was published in The Union County Local Source, The Star Ledger and/or Tap into Union, posted in the Administration Building and the Clerk's Office of the Township; a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at the regular meeting of the Board.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel.

Comments from Public (on resolutions in **BOLD** and ALL MATTERS):

Ms. Carbonell read the following statement to the public in attendance:

"Good evening everyone. I'd like to take a moment to thank you all for being here today. As we begin the public comment portion of this meeting, I want to remind

everyone that we value your input and appreciate your time and effort in sharing your thoughts and concerns.

As Ms. Koon stated previously, I ask that all comments be respectful and constructive, and that we refrain from calling out, yelling, and disrespectful language.

Each speaker will be given three minutes to address the board. Please remember that while we are eager to hear your perspectives, we may be unable to engage in back-and-forth dialogue during this portion of the meeting. However, your comments will be carefully reviewed and taken into consideration by the board, and if feasible, the Superintendent or designee, will respond to questions in real time or provide a response at a later time.

With that said, I invite our first speaker to approach. Please state your name and address.”

Natercia Lopes – she thanked the Board for their service. She asked if the money being spent at Hannah Caldwell Elementary School would affect the other schools in the district. Ms. Carbonell indicated that the district took a hit at the State level, and we are waiting on the federal government. Dr. Benaquista will address this next week in his Superintendent Report.

Mrs. Lopes – the Burnet Middle School play was cancelled. Dr. Benaquista replied that the play has been postponed until May.

Michelle Zatta – she indicated that she was concerned with the changes to Policy 2200 on the agenda. It indicates that the Board is not approving curriculum and that it is up to the Superintendent. Dr. Rodriguez indicated that the curriculum is being revised every 5 years – so it is 50 curricula per year. The Superintendent recommends it to the Board, and it is ultimately approved by the Board.

Mrs. Zatta – appreciates the Town Halls but the last one was during the day and not many people attended. Most people work so there would be better attendance if it was in the evening. Dr. Benaquista indicated that the district is trying new things to see what works best for the community. He also mentioned that they will try to record them for future viewing.

Jill Hall – she appreciates the creative thinking, but she hopes that there will be continued dialogue concerning the extended day program. The program provides credit recovery, and many students were able to get their degrees because of this program. She asked the Board consider how many students that go out and what the district pays for. She suggested a paid adult night school.

Ms. Carbonell mentioned that we need to be creative; any ideas you have to please share with the Board and administration.

Mrs. Koon read an email from Mrs. Lipstein:

“Last month, Ms. Conteh-Mackey, one of the chairpersons of the Operations committee, asked at the public meeting that anyone with concerns about security in the buildings bring it to the attention of the board. One major concern that we all should have is whether all the security cameras in all of the buildings are successfully working. The Operations Committee, Board President, Superintendent, Ms. McKenzie, and the Head of Security need to meet and be sure that we have authentication that all security cameras in the buildings are in good working order. Even the best principal and security guards cannot do their job in an emergency if all cameras are not in working order. No one wants a tragedy in our district that could have been prevented. Even if we think "it can't happen here," we all know that it could. The district and administration need to have proof that all security cameras in our buildings are effectively functioning.”

Ms. Carbonell responded by saying that the IT Department and Ms. McKenzie are addressing these issues.

Virginia Jeffries – asked questions concerning the check register and F-ATTY and being unorganized and out of order. Mrs. Koon indicated that F-ATTY is a recurring total for attorney fees and it is a year to date which was requested by a prior Board. The check registers – one is for special education, and one is for general. She indicated that Systems 3000 has corrected the invoice number column.

Superintendent’s Report:

Mrs. Koon presented the proposed 2025-2026 budget (presentation appended to minutes): A summary is below:

Budget Mission – to continue to support district initiatives, pre-k program, honors and AP courses, technology, STEM, vocational, interventions, performing arts and athletics.

Budget Development Process:

- Began in October with enrollment projection
- In December and January - meetings with principals, supervisors and directors
- Review of all cost centers proposal
- Budget reviewed with Board of Education through committee process
- Approval of preliminary budget – March 18, 2025
- Submission to County Superintendent – March 20, 2025
- Approval of final budget – April 29, 2025

Superintendent’s FY26 Proposed Budget:

- \$182,736,043 (all funds)
- \$1,036,640 (decrease over last year’s budget) – .0056%

Drivers of the 2025-2026 Budget:

- Increase of health insurance premiums

- UTEA/UASA/ACMTE/UTTA – contractual and pending obligations (steps, longevity, stipends)
- Contracted service
- Transportation/Buildings
- Special Education (related services)

Snap-Shot – Anticipated FY26

- 1,172 contracted employees
- 7,717 students enrolled (PreK-12)
- 494 students enrolled in PreK expansion program
- 2,698 students – daily transportation (480 students receive aid-in-lieu)
- 5,606 meals served daily (breakfast and lunch)
- 12 buildings and facilities

Snap-Shot – Staffing

- 51 Administrative/Supervisory Staff
- 706 Instructional Staff
- 168 Teacher Assistant/Other Assistant
- 9 Non-Instructional (IT, Specialists)
- 89 Custodian, Café Assistant, Tradesmen and Monitors
- 46 Secretaries
- 30 Security Officers, front Door Greeters
- 73 Transportation

K-12 District School Enrollments – Oct. 2024-Projected FY26

- 417 Battle Hill
- 409 Connecticut Farm
- 445 Franklin
- 800 Hannah Caldwell
- 487 Livingston
- 577 Washington
- 580 Jefferson
- 977 Burnet
- 726 Kawameeh
- 2,319 UHS

Totals – K-12 District School Enrollments:

- FY23 – 7,250
- FY24 – 7,473
- FY25 – 7,694
- FY26 – 7,717

Charter School Enrollment (based on October 15)

- 2021 – 39

- 2022 – 53
- 2023 – 46
- 2024 – 62
- 2025 – 51
- 2026 – 51

FY26 Notable Revenue Deductions/Additions:

- Local - \$39,645 (last year \$1,187,368)
- State Aid – decrease of a net \$1,734,137
- Extra Ordinary Aid – \$330,819 (increase)
- Medicaid Reimbursement - \$32,130 (last year \$232,881)
- Fund Balance - \$2,497,298 (same as last year)
- Federal Funding and Non-Public – reduction of approximately \$887,095.20
- PreK State Aid – decrease at 25% of carryover – lost \$337,850

FY26 Total Operating Revenues - \$169,710,265.86

FY26 State Aid

- Equalization Aid - \$38,781,607
- Transportation Aid - \$2,813,317
- Special Education Aid \$11,577,015
- Security Aid - \$2,898,496
- Total: \$56,070,435 (decrease of \$1,734,137)

District Local Tax Levy:

- Tax Levy - \$108,210,402
- Debt Service - \$1,687,350
- Total Tax Levy - \$108,897,752

Student Transportation Snap-Shot:

- In district – 1,710
- Out-of-district – 193
- Vo-Tech – 115
- Shuttled to/from HCES – 200
- Student Non-Public Parent Transported – 480 (\$1,177 aid-in-lieu per student)
- Total: 2,698

Budget Cost-Saving Measures – the Board of Education continues to explore cost-saving measures. Shared partnerships are sought at the local, county and State levels.

Board President Carbonell thanked Mrs. Koon for her presentation tonight and at the retreat. Very tough news and tough decisions to make.

Mr. Cohan indicated that we will need to appeal to the State Department of Education to reconsider; our legislators will advocate for us. All these numbers come from a State funding formula; however 52% of our students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Faria, for adoption:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period February 19, 2025 to March 11, 2025, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

E-1A. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT’S DETERMINATION OF HIB

Affirm the Superintendent’s determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the periods February 12, 2025 to February 18, 2025, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista informed the Board that under E-1 – BH #2 – he is overturning the decision to meets the criteria and therefore the backup will be updated.

AYE: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mr. Cohan, for adoption:

F-7. APPROVE DISTRICTWIDE STUDENT FIELD TRIPS

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.

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Operation Committee Resolutions will be presented at the Board’s regular meeting.

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

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

P-2. APPROVE SUBSTITUTE LISTS

Approve Substitute Lists for the 2024-2025 school year.

Name	Position	Rate
Willians DeJesus Ramos	Sub-custodian	\$16.00/hr.
Owen M. Marshall	Sub-custodian	\$16.00/hr.
Shamera T. Robinson	Sub-custodian	\$16.00/hr.
Paulette Street	Daily security sub	\$36.05/hr. (pending paperwork)
Giovanni Zuena	Daily sub	\$140/day (pending paperwork)
Sulochana Chordia	Daily sub	\$140/day

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Policy Committee:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and the Policy Committee, the following policies were moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Faria, for (1) **FIRST READING and /FINAL ADOPTION**):

POL-1. POLICY 0155 – BOARD COMMITTEES

Approve Policy 0155 – Board Committees, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-2. POLICY 7510 – USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES (M)

Approve Policy 7510 – Use of School Facilities, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-3. REGULATION 7510 – USE OF SCHOOL FACILITIES (M)

Approve Regulation 7510 – Use of School Facilities, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

And (2) **FIRST READING**:

POL-4. POLICY 0141 – BOARD MEMBER NUMBER AND TERM

Approve Policy 0141 – Board Member Number and Term, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-5. POLICY 2200 – CURRICULUM CONTENT (M)

Approve Policy 2200 – Curriculum Content, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-6. POLICY 3160 – PHYSICAL EXAMINATION (M)

Approve Policy 3160 – Physical Examination (teaching staff), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-7. POLICY 4160 – PHYSICAL EXAMINATION (M)

Approve Policy 4160 – Physical Examination (support staff), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-8. POLICY 5337 – SERVICE ANIMALS

Approve Policy 5337 – Service Animals, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-9. POLICY 5350 – STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION (M)

Approve Policy 5350 – Student Suicide Prevention, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-10. POLICY 8420 – EMERGENCY AND CRISIS SITUATIONS (M)

Approve Policy 8420 – Emergency and Crisis Situations, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-11. POLICY 8467 – FIREARMS AND WEAPONS (M)

Approve Policy 8467 – Firearms and Weapons, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-12. POLICY 9181 – VOLUNTEER ATHLETIC COACHES AND CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY ADVISORS/ASSISTANTS

Approve Policy 9181 – Volunteer Athletic Coaches and Co-Curricular Activity Advisors/Assistants.

POL-13. REGULATION 3160 - PHYSICAL EXAMINATION (M)

Approve Regulation 3160 – Physical Examination (teaching staff), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-14. REGULATION 4160 – PHYSICAL EXAMINATION (M)

Approve Regulation 4160 – Physical Examination (support staff), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-15. REGULATION 5200 – ATTENDANCE (M)

Approve Regulation 5200 – Attendance, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-16. REGULATION 8467 – FIREARMS AND WEAPONS (M)

Approve Regulation 8467 – Firearms and Weapons, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-17. ABOLISH – POLICY 0164.6 – REMOTE PUBLIC BOARD MEETINGS DURING A DECLARED EMERGENCY (M)

Abolish Policy 0164.6 – Remote Public Board Meetings During a Declared Emergency.

POL-18. ABOLISH – POLICY 7231 – GIFTS FROM VENDORS (M)

Abolish Policy 7231 – Gifts from Vendors.

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci indicated an update on residency will be discussed in executive session.

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

Mrs. Minneci – Read Across America - she went to Livingston Elementary School and read to the students in Mrs. Bruns Meyers class. She also indicated she is on the Senior Citizen Advisory Committee – she is impressed by the Cosmetology students – who go over to the senior center and give manicures. Allied Health students also go over. These students are terrific – they engage with the seniors and the seniors enjoy them. If there are any other programs, send them over. Dr. Benaquista indicated that they were looking at different items like computers and technology.

Mr. Cohan – Read Across America – he also went over to Livingston Elementary School to read to the students and those students love to hug.

Mr. McDowell – F-7 field trips – Supreme Court of New Jersey – he stated Blane Grant is a retired Administrative Director of the Court System and he is from Union. He would like to have him inducted into the UHS Hall of Fame.

Ms. Santana – Wrestling Tournament – she attended and indicated our staff and students are great – they are making Union proud.

Dr. Benaquista indicated that Mayor Bowser, UPD and Senator Cryan were at Livingston School for Read Across America.

Board President Carbonell - one of our security guards, Ray Reilly – saved a person in a burning car and burned his hands. He showed courage and selflessness. Dr. Benaquista indicated that we will recognize him in the future.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Ms. Santana, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:17 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: student matters, litigation update, personnel

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: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 10:03 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board, it was moved by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, seconded by Mr. Nasta, that the Board return to public session at 10:03 p.m.

AYE: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana, Ms. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Ms. Santan, that the meeting be adjourned at 10:04 p.m.

All present voting YES

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

