

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – November 12, 2024

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, November 12, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Ms. Santana called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

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

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. Ronnie McDowell (arrived 5:34 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Dr. Gerald Benaquista, Ms. Marissa McKenzie, Dr. Jose Rodriguez, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Ms. Santana led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Cohan 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.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 5:35 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, legal update.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 5:54 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, that the Board return to public session at 5:54 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the following resolution be adopted:

APPROVE APPOINTMENT OF BOARD MEMBER – FARIA

Approve appointment of Guida Faria to replace the unexpired term of Mary Lynn Williams until December 31, 2025.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

ADMINISTER OATH OF OFFICE

Mrs. Koon administered the oath of office to the newly elected Board member:

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 5:57 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 matter, personnel, legal update.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 5:54 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, that the Board return to public session at 5:54 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be adopted at next week's meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of Personnel.

Comments from Public (on resolutions for approval):

Virginia Jeffries indicated that the Board is prohibited from hiring a public relations firm because it is in violation of statutes and Board policy.

Susan Lipstein indicated that she has questions concerning moving the students to Kean. She will email her questions to the Board and Superintendent. She also indicated that she likes the resolution P-8b but 5:00 p.m. is a hard time for parents.

Mr. Buggy welcomed Mrs. Faria to the Board.

Superintendent's Report:

Superintendent Report will be next week.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was reported:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period October 16, 2024 to November 12, 2024, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

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

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

Affirm the Superintendent’s determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the periods October 9, 2024 to October 15, 2024, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*KMS #1 was removed from the report to next week*).

E-8. APPROVE VENDORS – PARENTING UNIVERSITY WORKSHOPS

Approve the following vendors to coordinate Parenting University workshops during the 2024-2025 school year for district families, at a cost of \$7,800.00 (to be paid for using Title I funds account #17050, 168849, 17476:

(a) Wisdom Spring Wellness Services to provide the following sessions: (1) Just Breathe: A Return to Wellness for Parents of School Age Children” and (2) Mindful Parenting: Learn Effectively to Communicate with Your Children, in the amount of \$750.00 (to be paid for using Title I funds account #17476), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

(b) Inspired Instruction to provide the following sessions: (1) Empowering Families: Preparing Students for NJSLA-Math, (2) Empowering Families: Preparing Students for NJSLA-ELA, (3) Strategies for Supporting Mathematics at Home, (4) Supporting ELA at Home: Boosting Your Child’s Literacy Skills, (5) Tackling Absenteeism: Ensuring Your Child’s Success”, and (6) Train the Brain: Improving Study Skills and Executive Functioning at Home), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

E-16. APPROVE QSAC DISTRICT PERFORMANCE SELF REVIEW AND DISTRICT QSAC TEAM

Approve the QSAC District Performance Self Review and District QSAC Team, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Cohan presented the remainder of the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista indicated that E-4a/b – Nicole Ahern is on Board with this. It is a timesaver and keeps track of HIBs. It keeps the district compliant with the law and it is anonymous reporting. If the software programs are successful, these items will be budgeted when the grants run out.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Ms. Carbonell, 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.

F-21. APPROVE GRAHAM BEHAVIOR SERVICES – BT SERVICES

Approve Graham Behavior Services to provide Behavior Technician services for a total of 320 hours at the rate of \$80.00 per hour, 10 hours a week (not to exceed \$25,600) for the 2024-2025 school year [Account Fund #11-000-216-320-01-19/7043], in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

F-23. APPROVE AUTHORIZATION TO USE FUNDS – CAPITAL AND MAINTENANCE RESERVES

Approve the authorization to use funds from the district's Capital Reserves (\$700,000) and Maintenance Reserves (\$300,000) to address the emergency expenses related to the temporary closure of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School and the cost associated with occupying temporary space at a new location.

F-24. APPROVE SUBMISSION TO NJDOE – EMERGENCY PROJECT

Approve submission for review and approval to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and other agencies as required, of an emergency project for temporary educational use of the 3rd and 4th floor at 1085 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey, including amendment of the District's Long Range Facility Plan (LRFP) to be consistent with the project as required.

F-25. APPROVE AGREEMENTS - TEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES – 1085 MORRIS AVENUE

Hannah Caldwell Elementary School has been displaced for the remainder of the FY25 school year; and

WHEREAS, the need for temporary educational facilities for the students of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School is urgent; and

WHEREAS, Kean University has offered the use of designated space on the 3rd and 4th floors located at 1085 Morris Ave, Union, New Jersey, for this purpose; and

WHEREAS, the parties have negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Licensing Agreement, and Affiliation Agreement to govern the terms of this temporary educational use;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education hereby approves the MOU, Licensing Agreement, and Affiliation Agreement with Kean University for the temporary use of the specified building space for the educational purposes of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista advised the Board that we are working very hard and have shifted students to our schools but the space is not adequate and we do not want virtual learning. Kean has unoccupied space available for the district to use. He indicated he is very thankful for all the leadership, teachers, UTEA, staff and volunteers who have been helping out. He anticipates that the students will be in Kean by November 18th. There will be an open house on Sunday.

We are waiting for NJDOE approval. The mayor, Governor Murphy, Senator Cryan and the administration from the Township have been helping us. There are 39 classrooms being developed, there is a multipurpose space for gym activities and additional lunch space.

Mr. Cohan indicated the Affiliation Agreement with Kean allows Kean students to do practicum with our students.

Dr. Benaquista indicated that the Boys and Girls Club is a drop off hub for our students because we don't have enough bus drivers.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey asked if communication will be going out to teachers regarding meetings. Dr. Benaquista advised that communication will be going out and information regarding HCES is on the district website.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Ms. Carbonell presented the remaining items on the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista advised that the personnel job description previously approved is not a new position. He indicated that administration is trying to update and correct job descriptions so that we are aligning employees to their position.

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista informed the Board that there will be a residency update next week.

Technology Committee:

Mr. McDowell presented the Technology Committee agenda.

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved at next week's meeting.

Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Koon read the following email into the record from Michelle Zatta to Board President Santana:

“Hi Chastity,

Thanks for stopping by the Livingston Eagles Garden + Expansion Committee booth at Open House last week and spending time talking to us in length. And thanks for recognizing us at the last BOE meeting.

Below is the blurb about us and attached is the flyer for the Garden Party event on Friday, Sept 27 if you would like to share.

Please also let us know who to contact to make the playground / outdoor expansion happen within the school district. There is sadly no playground equipment for k-4 to play on and we are trying to change that. The playground that does exist is only for the 3-K program.

About The Livingston Eagles Garden + Expansion Committee

The Livingston Eagles Garden + Outdoor Expansion Committee was formed to work towards providing an outdoor learning space and gardening experience for LES students and the Livingston community. This initiative will enhance their understanding of nutrition, local environment, and community. The gardening experience that we offer students through workshops offered during the school year also promotes education on sustainability, civic service, and STEM while building community connections and improving access to fresh produce and outdoor recreation. With those goals in mind, the Livingston Eagles Garden + Outdoor Committee has applied for and has been awarded a total of 4 grants, with

the most recent one being the Whole Kids Garden Grant awarded this past August.

The Garden and Outdoor Committee is also helping to lead efforts to improve and reimagine the school's blacktop and playground, which will be a multiyear effort requiring collaboration with various stakeholders.

Upcoming Events

The Livingston Eagles Garden + Outdoor Committee invites friends and families to our Fall Garden BBQ Party on Friday, September 27th from 5:30-7:30pm, at the back lot behind the school. Delicious food will be available for purchase, and all proceeds will support our efforts in maintaining the garden and creating educational initiatives for our LES students. [RSVP HERE](#) to join us for fun games and activities, and be sure to take a peek at what the kids have been planting in the garden!"

Mr. Cohan gave compliments to the Administration and HCES staff. He traveled to the sites where the student were and the children were having a great time and the staff was handling all of this very well.

He also mentioned he attended the NJSBA workshop in Atlantic City. He attended the Legislative Panel workshop and they spoke favorably about reforming the funding act to remove special services and transportation from the base formula.

Dr. Benaquista informed the Board that each building stepped up to welcome the HCES students and staff.

New Business:

Ms. Santana welcomed Guida Faria to the Board and thanked everyone who submitted their resumes.

Ms. Carbonell – it was a unique and devastating situation with HCES. It was nice to see people come together and work together. Thank you to the students for their resiliency and to the parents for challenging us. She also recognized and gave credit to Mr. Shaw and Mrs. McDowell.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey – a round of applause to our students for their resilience and a shout out to the transportation team – it was well organized. Thank you to the teachers.

Ms. Carbonell – thank you to the Town and UTEA for their support.

Comments from the Public:

Virginia Jeffries – the cards should be in the order that they are received. All members of the public should be welcomed. Rules are being ignored. She has questions and concerns on

how people are treated. Mold does not occur over night and it is a health threat to the students and staff.

Phillip DiMatos - he didn't like how people would get up while other people were talking. He indicated that if illegal things were happening, he would report it to the necessary departments. It is about the kids not you.

Trish Colmes – her concern is how much is all of this going to cost? Rent? New books? Will the taxes go up? Are dollars being used from other schools? Dr. Benaquista indicated that Kean is not charging the district for the space.

Natercia Lopes – she has kids at Burnet Middle School and there are mushrooms growing on the walls. HCES teachers have been complaining about this issue and nothing was done. Kawameeh is a better school and Burnet is being ignored. South Plainfield teachers have been fired and we hired them. East Orange is bankrupt.

Susan Lipstein – there is a disconnect with the Board and parents. Previously questions were responded to but now there is no response. She sent questions to the Superintendent, but they weren't answered. People were asked to donate for HCES – it is not a time for expensive positions. Money should be spent on our students and schools.

Ann Margaret Shannon – she appreciates all who are helping with HCES. Thank you to Anthony Cirella and his custodians, to the UTEA teachers/staff. She asked for a status of receipt of the report and remediation plans.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Ms. Carbonell, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:05 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, legal update

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.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 8:55 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, at the Board return to public session at 8:55 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

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

APPROVE UPDATE TO REQUEST FROM DMK SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Approve update to request from the Douglas Michael Krueger (DMK) Scholarship Fund and Township of Union to use the Union High School stage or Kawameeh Middle School Auditorium on Saturday, November 16, 2024 (8 a.m.-2 p.m.) for rehearsal and Sunday, November 17, 2024 (8 a.m.- 9 p.m.), to present Union’s Got Talent 2024 (requesting all fees be waived) (Certificate of Insurance to be provided by Township.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mr. Nasta, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

