UNION TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

WORKSESSION MINUTES – JANUARY 14, 2014

Meeting held at James M. Caulfield Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. David Arminio, Ms. Susana Cooley, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Richard Galante, Ms. Lois Jackson, Mr. Thomas Layden, Mr. Francis Perkins, President, and Mr. Angel Salcedo

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. Vito Nufrio

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Perkins at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Jackson led the board members and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Damato read the statement required under the “Open Public Meetings Act” a copy of which is on file in the office of the Secretary.

Mr. Damato administered the oath of office to Ms. Lois Jackson.

Mr. Perkins said that committee appointments have not yet been made. He said that he has spoken to a number of people to generally continue the committee assignments that the board has had going into tonight’s meeting. Mr. Perkins said that, therefore, tonight as a worksession the board will operate as a “committee of the whole” discussing each item as a whole. He said that Mr. Galante will continue as the chair of the Personnel Committee; Mr. Arminio will continue as the Liaison to the Union County Educational Services Commission and Mr. Layden will continue as the chair of the Operations Committee

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Perkins said that the minutes will be considered for adoption at the regular meeting next week. He asked that the board review the minutes and if there are any changes, alterations or corrections they should be made known before the meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS:

All communication has been referred to the appropriate committees for consideration.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

Dr. Martin said that the attendance statistics for December 2013 are as follows: student attendance was 95.05% which is increased from the previous year when it was 94.369% and staff attendance was 93.537% which is increased from 93.401%. He said that the district has been focusing on improving attendance districtwide.

Dr. Martin said that on Saturday, January 18, 2014 there will be a show at Union High School, “Union Celebrates Broadway”. He said that the show will start at 7:30 p.m. and the cost is $14.50 per ticket. Dr. Martin said that tickets can be purchased at UHSPAC.com or tickets can be purchased at the door one hour prior to the show, beginning at 6:30 p.m. He encouraged everyone to see the show because it will be a terrific show.

Dr. Martin said that on Monday, January 20, 2014 is the Martin Luther King Celebration for the Township that will take place at 12:30 p.m. at Hannah Caldwell School auditorium. He said that all are invited to attend.

Mr. Perkins urged all those that can to attend the Martin Luther King Celebration at Hannah Caldwell School. He said that there has historically been a large turnout for this event and it is a good opportunity to say hello to people and show community support.

Mr. Perkins said that for those who are not familiar with the board’s procedure there are usually committee meetings prior to the worksession. He said that the chair of the committee would introduce the resolutions under each committee title.

EDUCATION/STUDENT DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE

Dr. Francis read each of the agenda items.

Mr. Salcedo asked what an out of district atypical student placement was for his clarification. Ms. Conti said that this is the list of the out of district student placements which need board approval. She said that all of the tuition contracts are individualized according to a student’s IEP. Ms. Conti said that there is an attachment to the resolution which delineates the schools, the tuition rates, etc.

Mr. Perkins asked about the Tuition Contract Agreement with Burlington Township. He asked if the district transports someone to Burlington Township. Mr. Tatum said that this resolution is an agreement with Burlington Township because the district has a student that became homeless in Union and when a district resident becomes homeless, for the first year, by New Jersey Law, the district is required to pay the tuition for that student. Mr. Perkins asked who made the determination of when and where a student becomes homeless. Mr. Tatum said wherever a student resided last is how the determination is made. He said that wherever a student is placed through the homelessness, that district would contact the district to indicate that Union was the last district of residence and therefore, is responsible to pay the tuition. Mr. Tatum said that it used to be that the last resident district would have to pay the tuition indefinitely but a few years ago that was limited to one year only. He said that the family of the student makes the decision of where the student will go to school. Mr. Tatum said that there are some exceptions to this rule.

Mr. Perkins asked about the Districtwide Emergency Plan for Faculty and Staff. Dr. Lishak said that the emergency plan is a living document and it is examined often. She said that when she last reviewed the plan to be sure that a number of items were contained in the plan, she realized that all of the identification for Central-Five School was never changed to Jefferson School. Dr. Lishak said that all of those were changed. She said that there was also a secondary site which was added for an evacuation site for one of the other schools in the district as well as the use of yellow cards for notification to emergency personnel in the event of a lockdown for identification in outside windows. Mr. Perkins asked if otherwise was the plan pretty much the same as it was last year. Dr. Lishak said it was. Mr. Perkins said that one of the concerns that were raised last year after the Super Storm Sandy experience was that the policy did not have very much in it with regard to the response to a natural catastrophic event. He asked Dr. Lishak if this was being addressed in the upgrade of the Emergency Plan. Dr. Lishak said that the plan right now is as it was in September. She said that there were no amendments made. Dr. Lishak said that there has been discussion about doing an audit, seeing where the district might move some of its technology, which would be a big help to the district. She said that these are some of the things that will be discussed in a general meeting with members of the Township and the district as the plan is rewritten for next year. Dr. Lishak said that as different things occur, they are being addressed. She said that because it is required by the State, the district has always kept a plan together for the a tornado. Dr. Lishak said that the district practices, in addition to fire drills, ten drills through the school year. She said that last year the district did not practice a tornado drill because tornados don’t usually happen in this area and the very first day of summer school last year came as a “tornado warning”. Dr. Lishak said that as the weather changes the district must start taking a look at everything and decide how the district will handle those events.

Mr. Perkins said that following Super Storm Sandy, the people who were involved which included board members, people from the Township, first responders, Township Administrators, Dr. Martin and several others met and compiled a “Lessons Learned” document which he anticipates will be used to develop an enriched and upgraded emergency plan. He said that he had the opportunity following that event to discuss this with the Superintendent of Schools in Brick Township and he pointed out that before the storm he had a house on the bay and after the storm he had a house in the bay. Mr. Perkins said that there were some very good items of advice that this individual shared with him and several others at a meeting in Trenton.

Mr. Perkins said that he wanted to speak about technology and access to the internet in the district later in the meeting.

FISCAL AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Mr. Arminio presented the items on the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

Mr. Perkins asked Mr. Vieira when he anticipated making a presentation with respect to next year’s budget. Mr. Vieira said that he would speak to the board at the February worksession. Mr. Perkins said that in the past, the board has waited for the Governor to give his proposals regarding state aid. Mr. Vieira said that he is putting the budget together assuming the district will be receiving the same amount of state aid as it received for the current school year which is approximately $30 million and a quarter of the district’s budget in the general fund. He said that the state aid figures are not release by the Governor until the end of February. Mr. Vieira said that if the state aid is increased, that will help out the district because currently the district is looking to balance the budget by reducing some positions in next year’s budget. Mr. Perkins said that he thought Mr. Vieira was trying to say that the district would have to come up with some money that it didn’t have to last year. He said that one of the items in consideration is a reduction in staff. Mr. Perkins said that the board, obviously, would not like to reduce staff and there have been no decisions made about how the district will approach the shortfalls that are anticipated at this time. He said that the district is capped at a 2% increase on the local tax levy and the district is limited as to what it can do. Mr. Perkins said that the give back in the law is that the district does not have to submit a budget to the public for review and ratification. He said that over the past 19 years the district has only failed to pass a budget once. Mr. Perkins said that there have been no serious discussions nor has he, Dr. Martin or any of the staff to the best of his knowledge come up with any hard and fast proposals to reduce the expenditures for the next school year.

Mr. Vieira said that one of the reasons that the expenditures have increased so much for next year is that on March 1st, the district’s health insurance premiums are increasing 17% over the current premium or approximately a $2 million increase. Ms. Cooley asked if the district is looking into changing the plan to be charged less of a premium because her company’s premium was increasing and they changed their provider. Mr. Damato said that the district’s biggest problem is that there are collective bargaining agreements which govern what can be done. He said that the language in the teachers’ contract says that if the district switches carriers the newest carrier has to provide coverage equal to or better than the previous coverage “in all respects”. Mr. Damato said that it is almost impossible to duplicate. He said that there have been arbitration cases that have ruled that the change in networks is a diminution in benefits; if you remove certain hospitals the level of benefit is being reduced. Mr. Damato said the he personally did not see that as a reduction in the level of benefits because if you can get the same care in another hospital that might be a few miles further away. He said that these are the cases that the district has to deal with. Mr. Damato said that there are options for the district to change carriers and he is looking into those options. He said that he planned to have a meeting with the operations committee of the board to review a proposal from the district’s insurance broker on various plans. Mr. Damato said that the board needs to hear from the mouth of the insurance broker what the practical problems in the market are. He said that another issue with going with a new carrier is that the district is running at 99% of premium costs; in other words, if $1 million was the total premium, the district is spending approximately $999,000 for claims. Mr. Damato said that this does not leave Horizon enough of a margin for their overhead and administration of claims. He said that the company is saying to the district that they cannot make it work with the amount of money that the district is paying them. Mr. Damato said that there is an option of switching back to NJ State Health Benefits which is a plan that is offered to the entire state and lots of public employees are in that plan all over the state. He said that the problem with switching back to State Health Benefits is everyone pays the same rate and the rates for that plan, given the increase, are still higher than what the district’s rates would be with the 17% increase. Mr. Damato said that there is a possibility that the district could switch to another carrier but the problem with switching to another carrier is that the district will not get an “equal to or better than” benefit and the problem with switching to the state is that it costs more money than the 17% increase.

Ms. Cooley said that her company’s old insurance carrier also commented that the employees were putting in too many claims. She said a few months ago, the board had a discussion about how staff is not going for physicals, and they were not utilizing the benefits that are offered to them and on the other hand, the insurance company is saying there are too many claims being submitted. Mr. Damato said that the district does not have catastrophic claims such as cancer cases that are causing the problem. It is 40% that is using chiropractic treatment on a regular basis; its general orthopedic issues and prescriptions that are eating up the premium dollars. He said that the company is typically looking for a fifteen to eighteen percent margin just to cover their overhead. He said that he met with the representatives from Horizon yesterday. Mr. Damato said that originally Horizon came in with a 31% increase in the premium and the 17% increase was as a result of many meetings. He said that the company was not willing to change the outlook of how it was going to play out and they were not interested in discussing a further reduction. Mr. Damato said that they have an idea of what the rest of the market provides and they know what their competitors are charging and they know what the state is charging because Horizon runs the state plan. He said that it was an interesting dynamic to try to figure out how far Horizon will go before they say that the premium cannot be reduced any further. He said he felt in the future there will be much cheaper products available to employees and the district has had discussions with its insurance broker to have Horizon provide a menu of “cheaper” options. Mr. Damato said that the employees are now paying between twenty and thirty-five percent of the premiums for their healthcare. He said it was a sliding scale based upon how much the employee earns. Mr. Damato said that some of the people who are in the young, healthy, no children area are not really in need of a comprehensive plan like Direct 10 and they would be very happy with a PPO plan or another type of plan which would be less cost to them. He said that these are things that are being explored for the future. Mr. Damato said that Governor Christie in his address today talked about health plan premiums being handed over to the districts to negotiate what will happen after they are up to the thirty-five percent or the maximum contribution. He said that the district will have to negotiate with the collective bargaining units what happens to the percentage premium after that such as increasing the co-pay from $10 to $20; reduce prescription benefits and how can the district manage the coverage to make it less costly to the taxpayers.

Mr. Arminio asked if the Wellness Program was “kaput”. Mr. Damato said that the Wellness Program is not “kaput”; there are a lot of programs going on for employees to participate in, exercise-wise. He said that he guessed that they are just not publicized enough to the board but the programs are mainly at Jefferson and Hannah Caldwell Schools; he was not sure about the other schools. Mr. Damato said that there is a Wellness Coach that is provided by the insurance broker; he visits every school and the central office and takes blood pressure readings and counsels people on health issues to have a positive impact on claims. Mr. Damato said that he felt it was working but he felt that it would have to trend for 4 or 5 years before the district can see any real results.

Mr. Perkins said that this is something that the board has been doing for as long as the board has been negotiating with its employees and health benefits have always been a difficult area. He said that the district has changed carriers innumerable times but it is never easy and the district does not want to continue to change the routine of your employees for health care. Mr. Perkins said that employees establish relationships with physicians and become familiar with the process of filing claims in a certain way and when the carrier changes, even if it is argued that it is compliant with the contract with respect to the level of care and benefits provided, it still is a change that you would really rather not impose on employees.

Dr. Francis asked if the company was giving the district hard numbers of the amount of claims that are submitted. Mr. Damato said that he did have hard numbers of the amount of claims and they are broken down into categories. Dr. Francis said that Blue Cross/Blue Shield is not for profit and if they are saying they want to cover their administrative costs, he can understand that. He said that some companies will increase their employees’ co-insurance or deductibles to lower the cost of the premiums. Mr. Damato said that in some of the older collective bargaining agreements the subjects of deductibles, co-insurance, co-pays and coverages were negotiated to lesser amounts. He said when you go back to the state plan, you get what is in the state plan; there is no negotiating the level of benefits when you participate in the state plan. Mr. Damato said if you want to get out of the state plan, there is the issue of providing a plan at least for the teachers’ union that is equal to or better than in every respect. He said that this is a real issue because once you are in the state plan, the level of benefits cannot be negotiated and if you go out of the state plan and go to another carrier, the district is stuck with that level of benefits. Mr. Damato said that the last time the district changed health carriers, because the district saved such a significant amount of money it offered each employee a $500 rebate and all the employee associations took the deal except the teachers; he said that the teachers wanted to go to binding arbitration and the outcome of the arbitration was the arbitrator eventually rendered a decision and the teachers did not get anything. Mr. Damato said that the district has changed health carriers about ten times in the past twenty years. Mr. Perkins said that changing carriers is not an easy process. Mr. Damato said that there are approximately 1200 covered employees in the district. Mr. Perkins said that everyone can appreciate the amount of time that Mr. Damato, by virtue of the completeness of his answers, has spent a lot of time dealing with these issues. He said that he was not anxious to change the experience that the employees have with their doctors.

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

Mr. Layden reviewed the agenda items.

Mr. Perkins asked Mr. Wiggins to explain resolution O-3. Mr. Wiggins said that there was a window that was damaged beyond repair when the contractor was working on the Franklin School Cupola and the window had to be replaced.

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. Request for fee waiver for use of Jefferson School gymnasium and cafeteria on Thursday May 22, 2014 by Township of Union Education Foundation for their annual reception – Mr. Arminio said that the Education Foundation gives a lot of money directly to the students through the teachers and he thought that the board could find it in their hearts to waive fees for this event. Mr. Perkins asked if there was anyone who had another use for the space at the same time. Mr. Damato said that the facility was clear for this use. Mr. Perkins asked if there was any reason why the board should not grant this request. There being none, it was decided that a resolution would be added to next week’s agenda to approve this request.
2. Request for use of Union High School football field and gymnasium for the period July 21 through July 25, 2014 by New York Giants Youth Football Camps – Mr. Damato said that the district received a letter from this organization regarding the use of the facility and requesting that the facility will be used for one week for a youth football camp. He said that this is something that has been recommended by Ms. Ionta. Mr. Perkins asked if there was any reason why the board should not approve this request. Mr. Wiggins said that depending on the weather and the heat; the field does get a lot hotter than a grass field. Mr. Salcedo asked if this camp would be strictly opened to students that attend Union Schools. Mr. Damato said that he was not sure who it was opened to because the request letter does not address that. Ms. Cooley said that last year a friend’s child participated in a camp that was held at Kean University and there were children from all over the state participating. Mr. Salcedo asked if it was a non-profit organization. Mr. Damato believed it was. Mr. Salcedo asked what the cost to the board would be if the field is destroyed, etc. Mr. Damato said that this organization provides liability insurance which technically means that if someone were to be injured on the field, the district would have the benefit of their insurance but that does not mean the district would not be named in a lawsuit. He said that insurance is provided for personal injury and not for property damage so if the field is damaged, it would be on the district. Mr. Arminio asked if the district could ask the organization to get a rider for property. Mr. Damato said he did not know if the organization had an insurable interest for property damage. He said that normally the district would charge a fee to use the field and the fee is meant to cover wear and tear, etc. Mr. Salcedo said that if this camp is not strictly for Union residents, why not charge the organization a fee; he thought this was fair. Mr. Damato said that he did not think that this organization was asking for a fee waiver. Ms. Cooley said that although there is staff on duty already there will probably have to be additional maintainers used to clean up after the camp is completed. Dr. Francis asked what the district gets out of this. Mr. Damato said that there is a fee which the board approved for the use of the field. He said that the biggest problem when renting out facilities is people leaving garbage behind and so renters are charged for custodial or maintenance people to pick up after the event is finished. Mr. Perkins asked what is the date by which the board must make a decision on this matter. Mr. Damato said that there did not appear to be a date but obviously the organization would like to advertise the camp as soon as possible. He said that we can contact the organization and tell them that they must pay the full fee and they also must pay for two maintenance workers for the entire time the camp runs to do cleanup. Mr. Perkins requested that Mr. Damato get together with Ms. Ionta to come up with the terms and conditions that would satisfy the district’s concerns regarding this rental. Mr. Damato said he would do that.
3. T-Mobile – Mr. Damato said that this is something that the board worked on about a year ago. He said that T-Mobile wanted to put a cell tower somewhere on Union Board of Education/High School property because they had a cell tower on the smokestack at Red Devil for many years and the smokestack was removed. Mr. Damato said that they are looking for a temporary site. He said that they have a mobile trailer mounted pole at the Department of Public Works garage but it is not giving their subscribers the coverage that they need and they are looking for a permanent location. Mr. Damato said that they wanted to place a permanent cell tower in the courtyard closest to the North Third Side of Union High School near the entrance to the Union Center National Bank. He said that this area is an area about 75’ by 200’ and the classrooms in that wing all face that grassy courtyard. Mr. Damato said that the district went out to bid for this purpose and bids were received. He said that the high bid was $2500 rental per month and the board would have to commit to 20 or 25 years. Mr. Damato said the vendor would build a permanent structure and a monopole in that area which would block a lot of the light and air in that courtyard and once it was put on the site plan of what they wanted to do, he became more concerned that $2500 per month really was not worth the esthetic degradation of that courtyard. He said that when the bid was structured, it was structured so that the board would get the land lease for the area where the switching equipment would be located on the ground and half of the revenue from the pole. Mr. Damato said that T-Mobile was very upset by that and during a meeting someone from T-Mobile cursed him out for about ten minutes and he ended the meeting and walked out of the room. He said that was the last he heard from T-Mobile until about a month ago when someone called him and told him they were really sorry; the rude person on the phone had been fired. Mr. Damato said that he had the representatives from T-Mobile come in for a meeting and they brought two lawyers and their tech guy to the meeting. He said that T-Mobile asked if there was anything that could be done. Mr. Damato said that he would bring the matter back to the board and maybe there is another location that the tower could be place. He said that an alternate location that was discussed were the light poles on the football field on the visitors’ side. Mr. Damato said that a new light pole would have to be constructed, the lights would have to be reconnected and in addition, the cell antenna would be placed at the top of the pole. He said he thought this location might be a little bit better but he thought that the board should take a look at the football field and see if this would be an appropriate change to what is existing. Mr. Damato said that $2500 per month is not a lot of money. He said that he told the lawyers that were at the meeting that if someone else locates on the pole, the district wants 100% of the land lease but the district also wanted half of the pole revenue. Mr. Damato said they replied that “something would be worked out.” He said that he did not commit to anything because it must be publically bid but before he went to great lengths to structure another bid and go through the bidding process, he wanted to get the board’s feelings about how to proceed.

Mr. Galante said that if Mr. Damato could work out the financial end of the deal an existing is always better than a monopole because a monopole is usually something ugly to look at and nobody wants it. He said that if it is on top of something that is already there, most people don’t care. Mr. Damato said that the existing light poles do not have the height required because they are only about 90 feet tall and T-Mobile is looking to put up a pole that is 150 feet tall. Mr. Galante asked if there would be a way an extension on an extension pole could be put up. Mr. Damato said that T-Mobile said that the existing poles would not support the “load” and the “wind load”; they would need a deeper footing and a stronger pole. He said that if the board did not think it was a good idea that’s okay and if any board member would like to discuss this matter further they could contact him at his office. Mr. Damato said that T-Mobile is trying to locate as close to Red Devil as possible. Mr. Wiggins said that an area on Board of Education property near Conlan was looked out which was acceptable for T-Mobile. Mr. Perkins asked if anyone has spoken to the municipality about this. Mr. Damato said that he did not think there was an interest by the Town to put up a monopole and enter into an agreement for 25 years. Mr. Perkins said that the board does not have any idea of what the proceeds for additional rentals would be. He said that T-Mobile would own the pole and they would rent space to other carriers. Mr. Perkins said that they play a game among themselves that they level out the cross-reimbursement. He said that he had no clue of what the district could anticipate as additional revenue; he said that $2500 might turn out to be a good deal particularly when the technology changes to the point where monopoles are no longer required.

1. Request for use of Cooke Memorial Field and Union High School cafeteria by New Jersey North-South All-Star Football Classic to be held on Monday, June 23, 2014 – It was brought to the board’s attention that since there have been some additional days added to the school calendar due to snow days, high school graduation is presently scheduled to take place on Tuesday, June 24th. Mr. Perkins asked what advantage is there to the district to host this event. Ms. Cooley said that the organization is offering all proceeds from the snack stand to the Fifth Quarter Club. Mr. Perkins said that this money would not go to the district. Ms. Cooley said that the district needs to plan ahead for graduation. Mr. Perkins stated that the board would not be inclined to approve this request.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Mr. Galante presented the items on the agenda.

Mr. Galante commented that the nurses provided from Delta-T (P-7) would be in place of a substitute nurse. Ms. Conti said that it is not only for substitutes. She said that what was happening for some field trips nurses have been required and until recently, Ms. Ionta has been able to fulfill the need to go on field trips with students who have physical needs. Ms. Conti said that there also have been several students who have seizures and nurses are required to ride on the bus to administer medication. She said that she has not used nursing services in quite a long time however, there seems to be quite an increase of need for nurses. Ms. Conti said that Ms. Ionta may also need to use the service to provide substitute nursing in the schools for general education students because she is running into a problem with getting substitute nurses. She said that she has asked Dr. Martin if these services could be utilized now even though it will not be approved until the 21st of January to provide safety first for students.

Mr. Perkins asked if the parent workshops given by Ms. Calandrea would be funded by federal funds. Mr. Vieira said that the workshops will be paid for through Title I.

Mr. Perkins asked about the SmartBoard training. Dr. Lishak said that February 14th is the districtwide Professional Development Day and this is the presentation that Franklin School has decided to do with its staff.

Mr. Arminio said that the use of the SmartBoard and being able to use the software that goes along with it is an awesome way to enhance the education of students in the classroom. Mr. Salcedo asked if every classroom had a SmartBoard. Dr. Lishak said that she could only speak for the secondary school but at Kawameeh all classrooms have SmartBoards; in Burnet about ¾ of the classrooms have them and at the high school about ½ of the classrooms are equipped with SmartBoards. Mr. Tatum said that all classrooms at Jefferson School are also equipped with SmartBoards. He said that in the elementary schools, the principals have been purchasing them annually and through the Special Services Department the district has an abundance of SmartBoards in classrooms throughout the district. Mr. Perkins said that the board has talked about SmartBoards and the use of projectors as an alternative years ago and at the time the SmartBoards cost about $10,000 each. Dr. Lishak said that the cost of a SmartBoard now is approximately $4,000 for purchase and installation.

POLICY COMMITTEE

Mr. Arminio stated that the policy that is listed for approval was rewritten. He said that Ms. Conti, Ms. Hall, Dr. Lishak, Ms. Ahern as well as Mr. Damato had input into the rewriting of this policy. He said that the policy is only three paragraphs long but it is the procedure that is about seven pages long. Mr. Arminio recommended that the board review the Appendix attached which indicate the warning signs of suicide for their own knowledge and benefit. Mr. Damato said that there have been recent revisions and as a result, the policy and procedure had to be completely rewritten. He said that Ms. Conti helped out a lot on this and he thought that there was a nice balanced, good, workable policy in place which is easier to understand and administer than the prior policy. Mr. Damato said that the district now needs someone to train everyone to make sure they understand the policy and procedures. Mr. Perkins asked if the policy was consistent to the law as it applies to the district and the development of this policy. Mr. Damato said it was. Mr. Perkins asked if it was consistent with sound practice. Mr. Damato said that it was an interesting and delicate area of mental health and it is constantly changing. He said that there is a lot of new thinking that comes out every year and Ms. Conti has been keeping abreast of the changes and how it impacts students and teachers. Mr. Damato said that he thought maybe by next year the district would be revising the policy again.

Ms. Conti said that one of the biggest changes was that mental health professionals needed to be defined. She said that the definitions of mental health professionals are included. Ms. Conti said that parents need to know who will be allowed, according to district policy, to clear a student to return to school. She said initially she had a committee of staff such as clinical social workers and psychologists to give input; she said that there were a lot of meetings at many different levels until she got to who she wanted to use as qualified mental health professionals to be able to say that the child can return to school or if they might be a danger to others. Ms. Conti said that there is also the training that goes into it for staff. She said that every 100 hour five year professional development cycle, the district has to instruct certified staff on suicide prevention, what to look for, signs, etc. Ms. Conti said that some of the forms were also revised to make sure that they were included in the procedure as well. She said that it is certainly a big area and there has been quite an increase in mental health problems of students and having students be evaluated and getting mental health clearances before they can return to school. Ms. Conti said that she anticipated that increasing over the years and the demands of the Child Study Teams and Guidance Counselors, etc. are much more demanding because of the Crisis Intervention work that they have to do.

Mr. Perkins asked if the policy was specifically with regard to suicide or potential suicide. Mr. Damato said it included all traumatic events. Ms. Conti said that the emergency plan that Dr. Lishak spoke to earlier now has expanded over the years since the policy was originally written so the policy was not needed for events such as tornadoes, school lockdowns, although it may come into play at some point in tandem with an emergency event. She said that she is seeing that students might have homicidal ideation, not only suicidal, and there are other factors that have to be taken a look at when you are looking at “danger to self or others” and keeping the school community safe. Ms. Conti said that there have been times when multiple members of the staff are needed to address issues in a timely manner. Ms. Cooley said that the district has some really great staff members when it comes to dealing with this type of situation. She said that they are very supportive.

Mr. Perkins encouraged everyone to look at the policy before next week.

APPROVAL OF BILLS

Mr. Perkins said that the bills would be approved for payment at the regular meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Mr. Perkins said that a number of months ago the board had talked about reviewing the practices and procedures of the I.T. Department. He said that on several occasions fairly recently the district has had their servers go down as a result of power outage and internet problems. Ms. Hart said that there had been a problem with the transformer and Comcast was having difficulty with internet service. Mr. Perkins asked why the district had in-house servers. He said that one of the items that he came back from his meeting with the Brick Township Superintendent that the district should have all materials saved on a server which is off-site so that the district does not suffer an outage when the power goes out. Mr. Perkins said that when he visited the Business Office last week he was advised that the computers were down and information could not be accessed. Ms. Hart said that some servers are not in district and some servers are. She said that the student data base has back up off site. Mr. Perkins said that the people at the Business Office said that they were unable to get on the network. He said that he remembers the district purchasing backup power a number of years ago and why didn’t that kick in. Ms. Hart said that employees’ inability to get on line was because the power was down. Mr. Perkins asked if there was any emergency backup power in the district. Ms. Hart said that there is a battery backup. Mr. Perkins asked if they functioned when the power went off at the high school. Ms. Hart said that she did not know. Mr. Perkins said that he would like pursue this in the near future.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Arminio said that Washington School was having a blood drive on Friday, January 17th from 2:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Arminio said that there is an article in the January 2014 issue of the N.J.E.A. Review there is a great article entitled “Goodbye NJASK . . . So long HSPA . . . Hello PARCC”. He said that this discusses what is coming down the road with regard to testing in the state and how it will affect the districts.

Mr. Arminio said that the girls’ track team placed second in the county relays last week. He thought that regular county’s for the girls are this week or next week. Mr. Arminio said that the team set a county record in the 4 x 100 relay.

Mr. Arminio said that Union High School is having a Tricky Tray on March 26th and they are looking for donations for the event. Ms. Cooley said that all proceeds from the Tricky Tray go toward scholarships for Union High School graduates.

Mr. Arminio said that he is the representative for Union County Educational Services Commission which is the quasi public education institution for disabled students in all areas from ages 3 through 21. He said that he had the new tuition rates and he distributed them to the board members. Mr. Arminio asked Ms. Conti approximately how many students from the district are serviced through Union County Educational Services Commission. Ms. Conti said that she did not know the exact number. Mr. Arminio said that the tuition for one student is very high; for example at the Crossroads School, which is an autistic program for students aged 3 through 14, the tuition is $66,000 per student per year. Ms. Conti said that you also have to add the cost of a personal aid and transportation costs to that amount.

Mr. Arminio said that Union County Educational Services Commission was interested in purchasing the Cerebral Palsy Building in Union to use as a facility but they decided not to do this because the cost to renovate the building was approximately $3 million.

Ms. Cooley said that Title I is presenting a workshop tomorrow at Union High School Library at 6:30 entitled “Calming Parent Fears of the High School – Tips for easing the transition, positive parent/teacher communication and setting goals and supporting their child.” She said that Ms. Bridges, school counselor, will be making the presentation.

Mr. Perkins said that Mr. Arminio has been the most diligent board member, ever with regard to the Union County Educational Services Commission. He said that he hoped Mr. Arminio would report to the board from time to time on what is happening there. Mr. Arminio said that every school district in the county is represented at these meetings and it has been decided that every representative will go back to their respective boards to report what is going on.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Mrs. Lipstein wanted to know who would be able to attend the parent workshops that were referred to in resolution P-8. Dr. Lishak said that these workshops will be funded through Title I and they are meant for only parents of recognized Title I students. Mrs. Lipstein asked if it was for all aged students. Dr. Lishak said that it was specifically for Title I recognized students from Burnet Middle School. Mrs. Lipstein assumed that the workshops were not four hours long. Dr. Lishak said that the way the Association has it in their agreement is that for every two hour presentation, there is also two hours of preparation for the first presentation.

Mrs. Lipstein thanked the board for taking a look at the Foundation’s request to use Jefferson School for their annual reception. She said that she has already talked to Mrs. DiGiovanni and the date has been cleared at the school. Mrs. Lipstein said that once the board approves the request, she will begin meeting with Mrs. DiGiovanni and ARAMARK to set everything up.

Mrs. Lipstein said that she was very excited about the grants that the Foundation has given out this year which are listed in the letter which is the backup for resolution O-4. She said that the teachers that were awarded grants have been sending progress reports to the Foundation and all teachers will be present at the reception to give a report on what they have done with the students throughout the year. Mrs. Lipstein hoped that all board members will be attending the reception.

Mrs. Lipstein said that with regard to the T-Mobile cell tower, she said that many years ago there was a request to put a cell tower on Franklin School. She said that the parents were not happy about that and the Township decided against it. Mrs. Lipstein said that there was also a big “to do” when a cell tower was proposed near galloping hill in a residential area; she said that parents were not happy. Mrs. Lipstein said that she did not think it was a good idea to put a cell tower near where children are because no one is really sure about what the effects are and with the small amount of money that the district would get, it would not be worth it in her opinion. She said that if the board considers T-Mobile’s request, she felt that the parents should be advised and their opinions be considered and discussed before a decision is made.

Mrs. Lipstein asked if the courtyard that was considered for the monopole the same courtyard that Mr. Rafael wants to put his environmental classroom. Mr. Damato said that it was not. Mrs. Lipstein asked if there was any progress with that project. Mr. Damato said he thought that Mr. Rafael was making a presentation tonight. Mr. Wiggins said that originally Mr. Panunzio was coming to the meeting tonight regarding the food recycling program and he asked Mr. Rafael to come to the February meeting. Mrs. Lipstein said that the Foundation will be giving Mr. Rafael additional money for this project in addition to the money that he received from Lowe’s. Mr. Damato said that with regard to this contract, there will still be a substantial amount that the board needs to provide. He said unfortunately when you build anything on school property it must be done with a sealed drawing from an architect. Mr. Damato said that there is electric, etc., put into the outside classroom and the project must be approved by the State, etc. He said that there are still some hurdles to get over before any action can be taken. Mrs. Lipstein asked what progress has been done on the project. Mr. Wiggins said that he does have a “hard” number for the architect’s costs. Mr. Damato said that there were also some construction costs that will not be covered by the grant. Mrs. Lipstein said that she felt this was a very worthwhile project. Mr. Damato said that the matter would be discussed at the February worksession.

Mr. Olivio distributed a packet of information to the board. He said that he now teaches at Union High School but he had been at Burnet Middle School for 32 years. Mr. Olivio said that he teaches mentally challenged young adults. He said that while he was at Burnet, he completed three projects with the students. Mr. Olivio brought the board’s attention to a letter which he wrote to Mr. Perkins regarding what had transpired with regard to these three projects which were completed by the students and funded by donations. He said that when he was moved to the high school a year and a half ago, the projects that were at Burnet; one was the teachers’ room, one was the courtyard and one was the bushes down the front walkway. Mr. Olivio said that as he left Burnet, no one actually took over these projects, therefore, the bushes were removed from the front of the building; the fireplace has been removed from the Teachers’ Room and that room has been repainted. He said that these projects took an enormous amount of time, work and “blood, sweat and tears” and begging for the projects to be completed. Mr. Olivio said that he has spoken to the board before and have urged the board to come up with a resolution or a plan to protect student projects. He said that the letter he sent to Mr. Perkins was dated May 24th and it alerted the board that these projects were in jeopardy and in August the Teachers’ Room was repainted and the fireplace was removed. Mr. Olivio said that the letter which he sent on May 24th was the result of the bushes being removed and that is what prompted him to come to his second board meeting in thirty-four years. He said that he was adamant about replacing school property that was destroyed which was the fireplace which his father constructed and the students put the stone façade on. Mr. Olivio said that he would like the fireplace reinstated and also the room back to the original colors that it was. He said that he finds it interesting that over the past summer, all the work was done in the Teachers’ Room when there was a brand new school that had to be opened and personnel was being taken from all schools to finish that project but the custodians in Burnet had time to do this to the Teachers’ Room. Mr. Olivio asked the board if there has been any movement on a resolution to protect the projects that have been done by students with disabilities. Mr. Perkins said that as Mr. Olivio was talking he thought that this subject is something that the Policy Committee may want to consider as a matter of policy but he did recall Mr. Olivio coming to a board meeting and having a conversation. He said that he cannot tell Mr. Olivio for sure what happened or didn’t happen to follow up on Mr. Olivio’s presentation at the last meeting he attended. Mr. Olivio said that there was an investigation done by Mr. Tatum over who was responsible for the removal of the fireplace at Burnet and he did have a discussion with Mr. Tatum about the investigation but the findings were not conclusive because the security camera footage would take an enormous amount of man hours to review to see someone carrying an eight foot fireplace out of the building or in pieces. He said that since he did these projects with the students, he was surprised that no one had the courtesy to contact him before anything was done.

Mr. Perkins asked if there was any reason why things can’t be put back the way they were. Mr. Tatum said that he was going to speak to the Operations Committee last month with recommendations to rectify this matter based upon his investigation. He said unfortunately because it was supposed to be a “packed” agenda, Mr. Olivio and he corresponded and it was decided that it would not be appropriate to come last month. Mr. Tatum said that he was trying to identify who would be the Operations Committee chairperson which was just decided upon tonight. He said that he did speak to Mr. Layden and he has invited Mr. Olivio to next month’s Operations Committee meeting and at that time he would present them with the entire report as well as his findings and recommendations. Mr. Tatum said that this matter can then be considered by the Operations Committee.

Mr. Perkins said that he was not sure if board approval was required and he said that the board did say that the matter would be corrected and it should just be done unless there is a good reason why the district cannot do it. He said that he was in full accord with Mr. Olivio’s feelings on the matter.

Mr. Tatum said that he would wait for a forum where he can present the findings of his investigation. He thought that Mr. Olivio was okay with the recommendations that Mr. Tatum would be making.

Mr. Perkins said that he was personally embarrassed about this situation. Mr. Olivio said that he was also. He said that he has an annual Christmas Dance for all students that he has taught since 1980 and at the party last month he had to answer student questions about these projects. Mr. Olivio said that he had to explain to these students that their hard work of practicing on a blackboard with a roller and then painting on a wall in the Teachers’ Room has been covered up. He said that he told the students that he was working with the board and he was going to rectify all of the projects that they did and when they come back they will see them. Mr. Olivio said that this was his promise to the students and he was hoping that this would be the board’s promise to him. Mr. Perkins said that he did not feel this needed board approval and Mr. Olivio and Mr. Wiggins should just get together to discuss how the work will be done.

Mr. Perkins said that over time he has been an advocate of the board acting as a “committee of the whole” and that is not something that is not done in other districts, instead of having individual committees in certain subject areas to sit and act as the board did this evening and discuss each resolution. He said that individuals who are assigned to a particular committee may have some particular background, experience or training to provide some inputs that otherwise are not available. Mr. Perkins said that he was not an enthusiastic supporter of having “cells” of specialized knowledge on the one hand, on the other hand there are those board members who have background training and experience in particular areas which could be helpful to the board as a whole. He said that the committees have no power at all except to vote at a board meeting and each board member has one vote. Mr. Perkins said that he has had discussions with Mr. Damato about the use of specialized committees over the years and he knew that he was legally correct that committees are made up of folks who develop some language or some expertise through discussion with appropriate staff members; probably the fiscal committee is the easiest to discuss in that the committee is the group of people that meets with Mr. Vieira and ask questions to get a better understanding of the fiscal matters of the district than a board member in general and would be in the ideal circumstance in the position to come in and present the resolutions in this particular area and have some understanding of what the resolutions are about and why the committee was recommending approval by the board of a particular item on the agenda. He said that none of the board members has the time to do that in any detail and the board must rely on staff. Mr. Perkins said that he has argued over the years that the district pays a lot of money to professional staff and their talents, opinions and expertise ought to be available to the board through the Superintendent, usually, but in other cases not through the Superintendent. He said that tonight, for example, Ms. Conti addressed some substantive issues that the board discussed and therefore committee chairs and committee members have the right to look to staff members for advice and assistance in fleshing out matters. Mr. Perkins

said that he has not spoken to all board members yet but he will speak to everyone individually, and he did have a proposed set of committee assignments but he did not want to make them until he had the opportunity to talk to each board member with regard to committee preferences. He said that he would have this list ready well before next Tuesday.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

There being no further business before the board it was moved by Mr. Galante, seconded by Ms. Cooley that the meeting be adjourned. All present voting yes.

Respectfully submitted

JAMES J. DAMATO

BOARD SECRETARY