

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – December 10, 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, December 10, 2024 at 6:00 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 6:01 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, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Ms. Chastity Santana

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey 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.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:04 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 matters.

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. Carbonell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public at 7:03 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. Scott-Hayden, that the Board return to public session at 7:03 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes will be approved next week.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel and operations.

Comments from Public (on resolutions in bold):

Ms. Carbonell read the following statement:

“Good evening, everyone – I would 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.

We ask that all comments be respectful and constructive, as we aim to foster a productive dialogue that benefits our community and the work we are here to do.

Each speaker will be given three minutes to address the Board. Please remember that while we are eager to hear your perspectives, we are unable to engage in a discussion during this portion of the meeting. However, your comments will be carefully considered by the Board and, if necessary, followed up on.

With that said, I invite the first speaker to approach.”

Michelle Zatta – F-15 – asked if that is all that is in those accounts. Mrs. Koon advised yes, the funds are in the reserves.

Virginia Jeffries – F-15 and F-16 – asked if that is what is currently in the reserves? Is there a written communication from the State regarding funding? How were vendors chosen? What will be done to minimize change orders? Are vendors certified to do lead remediation?

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Benaquista advised the community that the Special Services Department would be presenting Transition Planning this evening. A copy of the presentation is appended to the minutes. A summary is below:

- Purpose
 - Transition services
 - Based on child's needs
 - Includes instruction, related services, community experiences
- Process
 - IEP team
 - Staff Training/Workshops
 - Student Activities
 - Community Presentations (families and students)
 - IEP Plan of Transition
 - PCAST
 - DVRS – Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
 - DDD – Division of Developmental Disabilities
 - DDD Outline
- Programs
 - CBI – Community Based Instruction
 - WBL – Work Based Learning
 - In district
 - External to district
 - Post Secondary Education/Programs
- Outcomes
 - Post secondary goals
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Community access
 - Independence
- Future Planning
 - Continued Professional Development
 - Continued Linkage with SEPAG
 - Discussions with IEP Team
 - Collaboration with stakeholders

- Resources

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was reported by Mr. Cohan:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period November 20, 2024 to December 10, 2024, in accordance with the information available to each Board member (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was 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 November 12, 2024 to November 19, 2024, in accordance with the information available to each Board member.

E-2. APPROVE CO-OP SPORTS PROGRAM BETWEEN TOWNSHIP OF UNION PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS – GYMNASTICS

Approve a Cooperative Sports Program to combine the Dayton High School (Springfield Public Schools) gymnastics team with the Union High School (Union Public Schools) gymnastics team for the 2024-2025 school year.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

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

E-5. APPROVE GO GUARDIAN TUTOR ME/PEAR DECK – TUTORING SESSIONS

Approve Go Guardian Tutor Me/Pear Deck, as a NJDOE approved vendor, for the High Impact Tutoring Grant Award. The tutoring vendor will coordinate virtual on demand tutoring sessions for district students in grades 3 through 12 during the 2024-2025 school year (not to exceed \$119,405.65 from account fund #20489) [previously approved vendor due to the High Impact Tutoring Grant allowing the district to extend services into the 2024-2025 school year].

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

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

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista – E-2 – is a cooperative sports program between Springfield and Union and when we don't have enough athletes for a team, district students can join Springfield's team.

E-11 – Kean Scholar Academy is being paid out of Title IV funds. It is college level programs at the high school and will save parents money when the students enter college.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Ms. Carbonell, seconded by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, for adoption:

F-6. APPROVE DISTRICT WIDE TRAVEL AND RELATED EXPENSES

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

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 available to each Board member.

F-15. APPROVE AUTHORIZATION TO USE ADDITIONAL FUNDS – CAPITAL AND MAINTENANCE RESERVES

Approve the authorization to use additional funds from the district's Capital Reserves (\$934,030.00) and Maintenance Reserves (\$650,000) 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. Anticipate refunding the reserves upon receipt of insurance funds and other additional state funding.

F-16. APPROVE EMERGENCY VENDORS – HANNAH CALDWELL CLOSURE \ TEMPORARILY SPACE (1085 MORRIS AVENUE)

Approve the authorization to temporarily suspend the normal procurement process to expedite and use the following qualified vendors due to emergency school closure at Hannah Caldwell. This measure ensured timely response and restoration of essential operations, prioritizing the health and safety and wellbeing of our student and staff: (a) M & M Construction, (b) Liberty Transport & Storage Grp, and (c) Rapid Hillmann Environmental.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Koon advised the Board and community that the auditors are finalizing the audit and once the audit is complete, additional funds will be added to the capital and maintenance reserves. She also stated that 18A:7 – due to emergencies, we do not have to go out to bid if we inform the County Superintendent and Business Administrator – which the district did. We are using these funds until the insurance company makes reimbursement payments, and we receive additional funding from our legislators. We need to pay these vendors.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Ms. Carbonell presented the remainder of 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:

None

Policy Committee:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following policies were moved by Mrs. Faria, seconded by Mr. Nasta, for **FIRST READING**:

POL-1. POLICY 3216 - DRESS AND GROOMING

Approve Policy 3216 – Dress and Grooming (Teaching Staff Members), in accordance with the information available to each Board member.

POL-2. POLICY 4216 – DRESS AND GROOMING

Approve Policy 4216 – Dress and Grooming (Support Staff), in accordance with the information available to each Board member.

POL-3. POLICY 7230 – GIFTS, GRANTS AND DONATIONS

Approve Policy 7230 – Gifts, Grants and Donations, in accordance with the information available to each Board member.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda:

DISCUSSION:

None

Technology Committee:

Mr. McDowell presented the Technology Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

None

New Business:

None

Comments from the Public:

Mrs. Cespedes informed the Board that there have been two discharges of the carbon monoxide alarm. She made three requests to the principal and Superintendent and did not hear back. She received information from the Town Clerk because she filed an OPRA request.

She also mentioned that she requested a progress report from her son's teacher and he advised her that her son was on video games. She sent an email to Craig Wojcik but he did not respond.

She told the Board that there is a lack of responsiveness from the district.

Ms. Carbonell advised that Dr. Rodriguez will follow up regarding the progress report and Ms. McKenzie will follow up regarding the facilities.

Luisa Biaz – transition planning – more training for the CSTs is needed. Spanish parents are not receiving the information.

She asked who are we hiring and what is the budget? UHS clubs – there is no club fair – she was told because they are waiting for the budget. When will that get approved. Dr.

Benaquista advised her that there is an agreement with the UTEA and in that contract they are approved so they can have the club fair. Agenda/Minutes need to be taken in order to be paid. We cleaned up the clubs to make it more accurate and every May they can be updated.

Virginia Jeffries – the November 19th meeting was insulting to all – the self-congratulations; there are still environmental concerns. She continued by reading the Code of Ethics.

Michelle Zatta – the NJSLA’s – the district is below average. She sent questions but no one has responded. Dr. Benaquista advised that a presentation will be next week.

Mrs. Zatta questioned the two checks totaling \$740,00 for HCES’s gym and HVAC system which was prior to the mold issue. She also wanted to know how DB got awarded the contract.

Cathy Jakositz – we need to reward our administrators for doing a good job – not move them around. If you let them shadow other administrators – it fixes the problems. Let’s train people to excel.

Ms. Carbonell thanked her for her candor; there are things we would like to respond to but there are a lot of things going on in the district.

Kathleen Brunsmeyers – she will only bring positive things – her children had great teachers in Union. A shout out to IT – Alessio – he is amazing. Thank you for approving our field trips and Happy Holidays.

Ann Margaret Shannon – F-17 – that is a lot of money for bus routes and wants to know if there is a guarantee. Ms. Carbonell advised the community that T&M will be at next week’s meeting to give a presentation.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mr. Nasta, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

