

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – May 14, 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, May 14, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the Union High School/Library, 2350 North 3rd Street, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Ms. Santana called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

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

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams (6:08 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Dr. Gerald Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Mr. Nasta led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Nasta 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 Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:03 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, student 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: 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 6:56 p.m.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week's meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel and education.

Moved by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, seconded by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, to amend the order of the agenda to allow a presentation under the Superintendent Report before Comments from the Public.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Superintendent's Report:

Jeremy Cohen, Randi Hutchinson, Craig Wojick and Vincent Rettino presented Unlocking Potential: Maximizing Time and Resources. A summary is below and the presentation is appended to the minutes:

Our Most Valuable Resource is Time:

- Academic (64%)
- Enrichment (12%)
- Lunch/Recess
- Maintenance

Union's Breakdown:

- K-4 full day = 380 minutes
- Grades K-4 spend 15%-20% of the week on enrichment
- Special Area teachers are often used to cover classes
- Students still have a lot of growth to make in academic areas

The Goals:

- Preserve and increase enrichment opportunities for students
- Enhance staff and student supports
- Improve efficiency of instructional day

Enhance Staff and Student Supports

- Preserve enrichment opportunities – physical education/health, art, music/chorus, library, computer science and literacy, world language; permanent building-based substitutes
- Increase enrichment offerings – STEAM course, after school enrichment program
- Enhance staff and student supports – literacy coaches, reading specialists

Improve Efficiency of Instructional Day:

- Improve enrichment course scheduling
- School 1 (Fall)/School 2 (Spring)
 - Physical education/health (full year-2x week)
 - Library
 - Music/Chorus
 - Computer Science & Literacy
- School 2 (Spring)/School 1 (Fall)
 - Physical education/health (full year-2x week)
 - Art
 - World Language
 - STEAM
- Increase academic instructional time:
 - 80 minutes per week in grades K-2
 - 120 minutes per week in grades 3-4

Staffing Impact:

Current Position	New Position	Difference
• 6 Art	4	-2 FTE/1 position create-UHS
• 6 music/chorus	3	-3 FTE
• 6 comp science & Lit	3	-3 FTE
• 6 library	3	-2FTE/1 moved to Jefferson
• 4 World Language	4	0 FTE/1 position create UHS
• 0 STEAM	3	+3 FTE
• 0 literacy coaches	3	+3 FTE

Highlights:

- Increase academic instruction time
- Ensure exposure to all enrichment courses
- Provide after school enrichment
- Add support staff with 3 literacy coaches-K-4
- Transition to reading specialists
- Permanent building-based substitutes
- Ensure financial flexibility to address future staffing needs

Comments from Public (on resolutions and all other matters):

Mr. Buggy reminded the community that during public comment, all comments are addressed to the Board President. Questions regarding personnel will not be responded to.

Anthony Cancel stated he posted an open letter to the Board regarding the increase to the budget by the State.

Zora Fox stated she is the music teacher at Connecticut Farms, and she was let go today at 10:45 a.m. and music is important; some students excel in music and dance.

Justin Ciaccio, PTA president at Jefferson, stated the students fell in love with Zora as the music teacher at Connecticut Farms. We are short teachers, we need to hire teachers and teachers need their breaks. He asked the Board to reconsider.

Rev. Dr. Nichole Drakeford stated if you need additional information concerning the church's request to use Jefferson School please contact her.

Kim Eason stated First Baptist Church is asking to use Jefferson School for worship services.

Kayla Khaled stated she had concerns about after school programs and asked if there will be busing and if special ed students would be included. She also stated that students need brain breaks – special classes like music, art.

Emmanuel Cruz, K-4 music teacher at Livingston, stated if it wasn't for his music teacher, he wouldn't be the man he is today.

Helen Soto, teacher at two schools in district for Spanish, stated she lost 17 days when she had to cover other classes.

Melissa Antolovich, Battle Hill Librarian, stated she is concerned about the cuts to the elementary librarians asked that the Board reconsider these changes.

Mary Ellen Patricco stated as an educator and taxpayer, why weren't teachers included in these discussions? With the State aid increase of 25%, where is the money going? Math and music are associated together; playing an instrument helps with academics.

Jon Paul Adams stated he is a product of the Union system. He stated he doesn't see collaboration and the goal is to be partners. We are here for our students to have a productive education.

Grace Rible, 4th grade student, stated art is very important – can't imagine not having art; library is important because she loves to read and they teach you how to research; computers are important too – it teaches you so much and music is important – she plays the flute and she loves chorus too. Special area teachers are awesome.

Colleen Cannon, visual arts teacher at Connecticut Farms read the Mission Statement. She stated if the district cuts the arts program, you are teaching the students that it is not important. It is important for their social/emotional being.

Melanie Kendl, G&T computer teacher at Franklin stated their contract was not renewed today and her students look forward to their classes. What is the plan for these students' enrichment.

Sol Atencio stated her younger son has a passion for art and looks forward to it and the library. She is grateful for the art and librarian teachers. The district is receiving more funds and to please use those funds wisely.

Jennifer Crane, 2nd grade special education teacher at Washington, the kids are being hurt because we are taking away 50% of what they love. Keep kids as priority.

Ann Margaret Shannon, UTEA president, 50% is not enough for our students – ask Dr. Benaquista to reconsider. All districts around us still have art, music, Spanish etc. The UTEA can brain storm schedules with the district. 15 positions were cut; 4 were fired.

Diane Hickey stated there is a mental health crisis and reducing schedules in the arts will be detrimental.

Adekoya Brown stated very hard to get home instructions because of the cuts.

Ank Tuladhar stated he grew up with only core subjects and he is angry he didn't have art, music, etc. Having art music and computer is important.

Kristin Nunes stated she wants to compliment Donna Restivo and all the others who got us back online.

Kelechi Okere stated his kids will be in the system in September. He is insulted by the presentation, and you used a Columbia study to justify. There is no budget presentation; where is the money being shifted to? Why are we reducing teachers? Libraries and research is important.

Jennie Abbott stated art therapy was important to her child and he likes music too. What was the percentage of multi-language students in the Columbia study?

Michelle Zatta stated the elementary school students will be hit the hardest. When you take away resources of art and library it is a detriment to studies. She would like Dr. Benaquista to meet with elementary school parents.

Lia Almeida stated it is a very disappointing year at Connecticut Farms and looking to put her students in a private school. Reading, arts and computers are very important for elementary students. Please reconsider.

Casey Kerkhil, physics teacher, stated if you get rid of supporting classes, it makes core classes more difficult.

Donna Larkin stated we know with data, children do better with visual arts. By calling these classes enrichment classes is abhorrent. Without these classes, we see an increase in attendance loss. Visual literacy is more important now. These courses are necessary and should be mandatory.

Gannel Fari stated there is no transparency in this Board; we will note this in November.

Lady Gorospe stated she has children in this district and a product of Union. She was very active in choir, UHPAC and she had languages in school and she wants her students to have the same opportunities.

Layla A., freshman at Magnet, she played an instrument. These courses teach you how to think out of the box and learn to be confident.

Rich D'Avanzo, UTEA vice president, stated they had a meeting last Thursday with Dr. Benaquista and the curriculum team was there but the presentation was not given to us at that time. Tomorrow is the cutoff for RIFF notices. No one discussed with us the extra classes after school. Block periods which are 80 minutes cut out cooking, etc and increased student discipline issues.

Cynthia Ferretti, 2nd grade teacher, stated using special area teachers as subs and cutting them out is not going to help. Get rid of ESS. Are RTI personnel qualified to be reading teachers?

Patrick Phillips stated he is a product of Union. Fifty percent of enrichment classes is not enough. These classes helped him and are important to students.

Jackie Vincent, teacher at Connecticut Farms, stated it looks great on paper but who will be teaching after school programs. There won't be anyone.

Sheila Dy stated we had enrichment classes in the Philippines, and it made us happy. You can't take these away from our children.

Desdemona Larhin-Haas stated special classes are important and helped her clam down and learn a lot.

Jamie Gundersen, G&T computer teacher, stated we are more than teachers. I have difficult classes but they are engaged in his classes and he knows his students. SEL is important.

Angelica Gomes, PTA parent, stated you need to do better. Taking 50% of our enrichment classes is not o.k.

Suzanne Mensah state it is very disheartening of what is happening in schools. This will impact her family. Please reconsider.

Cataleya Vargas-McBlain, Battle Hill student, teacher told her yesterday that special area teachers will be cut and it will make students sad.

Nyri Jenkins-Jackson stated she came in to support the district teachers. Any student with a learning disability will be affected by only having art half of the year.

Tom Vocca, first year instrumental teacher, stated if you have 50% special area classes you won't have spring and winter concerts.

Mike Reilly, computer teacher, stated he helped design the curriculum, what are you cutting out?

Jennifer Esteves stated she is a product of the union schools and would not have had the confidence without the enrichment classes.

Jesselyn Orpilla, teacher at Franklin, stated this news was a shock to her and music is an outlet to her.

Jennifer Suarez stated her only outlet was art. There is a teaching shortage in New Jersey and this won't help.

Joanna Reilly, G&T computer teacher at Battle Hill, stated her students are a great joy to her. If special area teachers need to cover core classes, then her students will get even less than 50%. Please reconsider

Sienna Bucu stated she is now an artist and she has traveled the world fully funded as an artist. They should not be called enrichment classes; these classes are important.

Elsa stated her son graduated the Union system and had a great education. You need to give these kids a chance. If your schools are doing well so are your students.

Superintendent Report will be presented at next week's meeting.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

The following agenda item was reported by Mr. Cohan:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period April 28, 2024 to May 14, 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 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 April 17, 2024 to April 24, 2024, 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. Williams, Ms. Santana

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Cohan presented the remaining Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was added to the agenda and moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for adoption:

E-13. APPROVE CONTINUATION OF SUSPENSIONS

Approve continuation of the long-term suspension of Students #240567 and #256501, as discussed in executive session.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Ms. Carbonell presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda; F-35 will be added to the agenda for approval this evening.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Ms. Carbonell, seconded by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, 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-9A. APPROVED LIST OF CONTRACTS/PURCHASES (STUDENT ACTIVITY)

Approve the attached list of contracts and/or purchases pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-5(21) (paid by funds raised by or collected by students), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

School	Account/Department	Vendor/Description	Amount
Battle Hill Elementary School	2013/3 rd grade	Liberty Science Center – field trip	\$2,861.50
Battle Hill Elementary School	2013/3 rd grade	University Sports and Entertainment – trip to NJ Jackals-grades K-4 on May 29 th	\$2,380.04
Burnet Middle School	2006	CharterUp – transportation to music festival	\$5,537.28
Connecticut Farms Elementary School	GL2014/4 th Grade Field Trip	Liberty Science Center – admission to Liberty Science Center-4 th grade	\$1,358.00 (not to exceed)
Kawameeh Middle School	17/Music	Creations by Sahn – music t-shirts for Parks competition	\$1,848.00
Kawameeh Middle School	17/Music	DeCamp Bus Lines – transportation for competition at Dorney Park	\$4,750.00
Union High School	2012/Prom	Fabiana Aparicio – prom décor	\$1,370.65
Union High School	2201/School ID fines	Alpha Card – ID card lanyards and plastic covers for attendance office	\$3,500.00
Union High School	2049/NHS	NASSP – graduation materials for NHS seniors	\$2,487.50
Union High School	3280/Athletics	Kuntztown University – estimate for summer wrestling camp for 16 wrestlers	Not to exceed \$12,000.00

F-35. APPROVE AUTHORIZATION TO EXECUTE ENGAGEMENT LETTERS

Approve authorization to the School Business Administrator, Board President and/or Superintendent to execute engagement letters and similar documents for professional services related to information technology.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden stated that with respect to food services – they will be implementing a student committee so that the students will have a say in the food services.

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Personnel Committee agenda; P-12 and P-13 will be added to the agenda for approval this evening.

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

P-12. APPROVE REINSTATEMENT OF EMPLOYEE

Approve reinstatement of Employee #8907, as discussed in executive session.

P-13. APPROVE TRANSFER

Approve transfer of David Shaw from Principal of Burnet Middle School to Interim Principal of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School, effective May 20, 2024.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Policy Committee:

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

POL-1. ABOLISH POLICY 5755 – EQUITY IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Approve to abolish Policy 5755 – Equity in Educational Programs and Services.

POL-2. APPROVE POLICY 0164 – CONDUCT OF BOARD MEETING

Approve Policy 0164 – Conduct of Board Meeting.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda.

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

Ms. Santana stated that the Board and district will be working collaborative together with all stakeholders.

New Business:

Mrs. Williams informed the Board and community that May is mental health month and we need to not be afraid to speak about mental health – start having that conversation.

Mrs. Minneci stated Memorial Day weekend – walk with your school for the Veteran’s Parade.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Williams, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON

