

**TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
ORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 7, 2021**

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The organization meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Thursday, January 7, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, pursuant to a notice sent to each member.

Mrs. Yolanda Koon, the Board Secretary, called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

Mrs. Koon led the Board and audience members in the Pledge of Allegiance

Mrs. Koon administered the oaths of office to the newly elected Board members – Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Mr. John A. O’Shea and Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEWLY-ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS:

1. Yocasta Brens-Watson
2. John A. O’Shea
3. Nellis Regis-Darby

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. John O’Shea, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mrs. Sandra Paul, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle

ALSO PRESENT:

Afshan Ajmiri-Giner, Esq., Lester Taylor, Esq., Kendal Longmore, Esq.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT:

Mrs. Koon read the Open Public Meeting Act Statement.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Mrs. Ruiz read the District’s Mission Statement

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS:

Richard D’Avanzo congratulated the new Board members for a successful 2021 year and asked if there would be any resolutions being walked on tonight. Mrs. Koon stated not to her knowledge.

Mrs. Koon stated at this time we will have our attorney provide the process for the nomination of office of presidency.

Afshan Ajmiri-Giner stated Mrs. Koon asked me to go over the process for the board officer elections for tonight. In the absence of a policy that specifically sets forth the procedures, we follow what is customarily done in school district as well as what has been done in the past in this district.

When Mrs. Koon opens up the floor for nominations for president, any member of the Board can nominate themselves or any member from the Board for that position. If we have more than one nomination for the position of president, we will do a roll call in the order of the nomination. First individual, we would do a roll call for that individual (after all nominations have been made). If there are multiple individuals, we will do a roll call on one, two and three. The other thing about the process is if the first individual reaches majority vote of the Board, and in this case majority vote would be five votes of the Board members present, then we would not move forward with a vote on the second and third nominations, as that individual has sufficient affirmative votes to be appointed for president.

Once we have appointed a Board president, at that point the Board president assumes the chair and will take over the meeting and we will continue with the appointment of board officer of vice president.

ORGANIZATION:

Mrs. Koon called for nominations for the Office of President.

Moved by Dr. Francis, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that Mr. McDowell be nominated for the Office of President.

Mrs. Koon called for other nominations. No other nominations made.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: Mrs. Ruiz

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mrs. Koon stated congratulations Mr. McDowell, our new Board president.

Mr. McDowell assumed the chair as President. Mr. McDowell stated thank you and welcome back to Mrs. Regis-Darby and welcome new Board members, Mrs. Brens-Watson and Mr. O’Shea.

Mr. McDowell called for nominations for the Office of Vice President.

Moved by Mrs. Brens-Watson, seconded by Dr. Francis, that Nellis Regis-Darby be nominated for the Office of Vice President.

Mr. McDowell called for other nominations. No other nominations made.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz

NAYES: Mrs. Minneci, Mrs. Williams

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. McDowell stated Mrs. Regis-Darby has the majority of votes for the office of vice president. Welcome aboard as vice president. Mrs. Darby stated thank you Mr. McDowell.

Mr. McDowell stated there are several resolutions that need to be voted on as part of the reorganization meeting.

ADOPT NJSBA CODE OF ETHICS

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mr. O’Shea, that the Township of Union Board of Education adopts the School Code of Ethics for the 2021 Calendar Year:

WHEREAS, each School Board Member is responsible to read and become familiar with the Code of Ethics for School Board Members; the Code of Ethics became part of the School Ethics Act on July 26, 2001. Questions about the Policy should be directed to the District Board Secretary. If the Board Secretary is unable to answer the question, you may be directed to the School Ethics Commission from whom you may request an advisory opinion; and

WHEREAS, the following Code of Ethics (Policy No. 9271) for Board Members is set forth as a guide to conflict-of-interest situations and unethical activity for Board Members.

18A:12-24.1 CODE OF ETHICS FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

- a) I will uphold and enforce all laws, state board rules and regulations, and court orders pertaining to schools. Desired changes should be brought about only through legal and ethical procedures;
- b) I will make decisions in terms of the educational welfare of children and will seek to develop and maintain public schools which meet the individual needs of all children regardless of their ability, race, creed, sex or social standing;

- c) I will confine my board action to policymaking, planning and appraisal and I will help to frame policies and plans only after the board has consulted those who will be affected by them;
- d) I will behave toward my fellow board members with the respect due their office--demonstrating courtesy, decorum and fair play at all public meetings and in all public statements;
- e) I will refrain from inappropriate conduct in public meetings and in making public statements, refraining from any disparagement of my fellow board members or others on a personal, social, racial or religious basis;
- f) I will carry out my responsibility, not to administer the schools, but, together with my fellow board members, to see that they are well run;
- g) I will recognize that authority rests with the board of education and will make no personal promises nor take any private action which may compromise the board;
- h) I will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interest or partisan political groups or to use the schools for personal gain or for the gain of friends;
- i) I will hold confidential all matters pertaining to the schools which, if disclosed, would needlessly injure individuals or the schools. But in all other matters, I will provide accurate information and, in concert with my fellow board members, interpret to the staff the aspirations of the community for its schools;
- j) I will vote to appoint the best qualified personnel available after consideration of the recommendation of the superintendent;
- k) I will support and protect school personnel in proper performance of their duties;
- l) I will refer all complaints to the superintendent and will act on such complaints at public meetings only after failure of an administrative solution.

The board shall see that all members of the board receive training in understanding and adhering to this code of ethics and shall discuss it annually at a regularly scheduled public meeting. Each member shall sign documentation that he/she has received a copy of it and has read and understood it.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Francis asked why are we doing this? We have never done this before and the Roberts Rules of Order is another. Mrs. Koon stated these resolutions are recommendations of the NJSBA; they provide a plethora of resolution that they recommend and suggest that Boards of Education place on their reorganizations and Roberts Rules is another one of those resolutions using that as a guide on how we conduct our business.

Mrs. Giner stated to clarify for Dr. Francis, it is the standard language from the Code of Ethics and it is customary over the State at this time for all school districts to adopt it as part of their reorg. Dr. Francis stated o.k., but I know it is in our policy.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

ADOPT ROBERTS RULES OF ORDER

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, approve adoption of Roberts Rules of Order as the official procedure manual to be used to conduct meetings for the 2021 calendar year.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Morgan stated I'm concerned about the language to appoint the Board attorneys to act as parliamentarians for the 2021 calendar year. Our Bylaw 9121 states that the president, as part of their duties to answer all parliamentary inquiries requiring questions of law to the Board's attorney. So if we make the attorney the parliamentarian, then they cannot direct questions to themselves. I think that standard practice is that the Board Secretary will serve as the parliamentarian.

Mr. O'Shea stated point of order. The reason why you should make the parliamentarian the attorney is because not that I'm saying the Board Secretary would not know but it is the expertise of law by the attorneys. If something is addressed to the Board by the public, it has to be addressed to the president. It is up to the president to make the decision whether he or should would want to answer it, if they have the answer, or to defer to the parliamentarian. The best parliamentarian, because of law – Title 18, would be the attorneys.

Dr. Morgan stated I disagree. I think the parliamentarian should be the Board Secretary or a member of the Board. The attorney was not elected by the public. The attorney works for the Board. Mr. O'Shea stated yes, but the Board was elected by the public to be entrusted to make sure that all laws are done by State ad by Title 18.

Dr. Morgan stated I understand that but our policy states that we can refer to the Board attorney if necessary. Mr. O'Shea stated just because you have that in your policy, does not mean it is right. It may have to be reviewed.

Dr. Morgan stated the policy today states that the questions can be referred to the Board attorney. Mr. McDowell stated I think the point there is questions of parliamentarian procedure not questions of law. Questions of law we would obviously bring them to the attorney. As Mr. O'Shea made a point of order, that is a parliamentarian procedure and if there are any questions about the parliamentarian procedure, we can refer those to our attorneys because we can rely on them for the correct direction as to how we should proceed. It is not a question of whether something should or shouldn't be done, it is a question of which procedure should we use and we are voting to follow Robert's Rules of Order, not Robert's Rules of Law.

Mr. O'Shea stated we are following Robert's Rules of Order; fine then let's vote on that.

Mrs. Giner stated my recommendation would be to amend this resolution to remove the part that says "appoint board attorneys as parliamentarians" and just vote on the Robert's Rules of Order since that is the official procedure that the Board follows and the procedure that is in the policy. The discussion ends there. You already have a policy that sets forth who the point person is; who the chair person is and how the questions need to be directed.

Dr. Francis stated we have to follow our bylaws and policies. Let's not change the bylaws or policies on the fly. This has always been a problem with our Board. We don't follow our policies and bylaws. I agree with our lawyer. Let's just amend it and vote on the Robert's Rules of Order. Mr. McDowell stated I also agree with our attorney. I can amend this resolution if there are no other questions or other discussion. None noted.

It was agreed to by Mr. McDowell and seconded by Dr. Francis to remove the phrase "and appoint board attorneys to act as the parliamentarians" from the resolution to adopt Roberts Rules of Order as the official procedure manual to be used to conduct meetings for the 2021 calendar year.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE MEETING NIGHTS

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, to approve the schedule of committee meetings, work sessions and regular meetings be adopted in accordance with the schedule, appended to the minutes; and be it further moved that copies be posted in the Administration Building and with the Township Clerk and that copies be sent to the Star Ledger and the Union County Local Source for publication.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE POLICY MANUAL

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, to approve the Policy Manual of the Township of Union Board of Education presently in effect be hereby readopted.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE DESIGNATION OF OFFICIAL NEWSPAPERS

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, to approve adoption of the formal resolution appended to the minutes designating the Union County Local Source and the Star Ledger as newspapers to receive notice of meetings and fixing charges for notices to the public meetings in the amount of \$60 for 2021.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE DESIGNATION OF INTERNET WEBSITE FOR OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, to approve the adoption of the formal resolution designating the Township of Union Board of Education's internet website (www.twpunionschools.org) for official notification pursuant to the New Jersey local unit pay-to-play law, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE DESIGNATION OF DEPOSITORIES FOR FUNDS OF THE TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION (School Activity Funds)

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Williams, to approve designation of Connect One Bank, Investors Savings Bank, Wells Fargo Bank and Unity Bank as depositories for funds of the Township of Union Board of Education as currently maintained, in accordance with the list appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

APPROVE AUTHORIZATION OF DEPOSITORY BANKS TO HONOR AND CHARGE ACCOUNTS OF TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, to approve authorization of the following depository banks to honor and to charge the accounts of the Township of Union Board of Education and all Board of Education checks and drafts bearing the stamp or perforation commonly known as a facsimile signature of the Treasurer of School Monies and the President of the Board of Education and that checks and drafts of the various Board of Education accounts be signed by the designated officers, in accordance with the list appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

FISCAL AND PLANNING COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

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

F-1. APPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF CARES ACT GRANT SUBAWARD INCREASE

Approve acceptance of the CARES Act Subaward increase from \$302,452.60 to \$358,550 for the period of July 1, 2020 through December 30, 2020, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked if this was a per student increase? Mr. McDowell stated yes it was; the information we received as part of the backup states it was moved from \$42.18 per pupil to \$50 per pupil.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. McDowell stated I know Mr. D'Avanzo asked earlier about if there would be any resolutions walked on and it was impossible for Mrs. Koon to answer that because she would not have any knowledge of anything being walked on. I would like to walk on a resolution this evening to make our current Assistant Superintendent Gerry Benaquista our Interim Superintendent from today until June 30th.

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mr. O'Shea, that Mr. Benaquista be appointed Interim Superintendent for the period January 7, 2021 to June 30, 2021.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Ruiz stated my only question about this scenario is that while I welcome all comments from the public and stakeholders and I'm happy to hear everybody's concerns, likes and dislikes, I was extremely concerned and a bit disturbing to receive correspondence from elected officials about this particular motion that you are making and the desire to push the appointment of Mr. Benaquista particularly from elected officials that is disturbing to me. We are supposed to be independent Board members and we are not to have any politics involved; that is the only concern that I have to this circumstance.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you Mrs. Ruiz. I would also like to mention that there was also another letter from the County Executive Superintendent; that was sent to Mr. Taylor, our attorney, and that letter was forwarded to all the Board members. In that letter the Interim Executive County Superintendent stated that if we did not have a superintendent in place by January 7th then he would appoint one. For me that made no sense at all when we have someone doing the job now; who has been with the district long enough to merit this opportunity. Even without that letter from the County Superintendent, I still would have made the motion to make Mr. Benaquista our interim superintendent.

Dr. Morgan stated this is directed to the attorney. I believe there was discussion whether the title would be interim or acting, can you please clarify?

Mrs. Giner stated this would be an interim position. Mr. McDowell stated it would be an interim position for Mr. Benaquista. Mrs. Giner stated yes and this would follow the same process you would for any other interim, acting, permanent superintendent. If you do appoint today because you have the directive from the Department of Ed to either appoint today or have

somebody appointed by the Department of Ed, if the appointment goes through today, you would have to enter into a separate contract and that is something I can discuss in executive session.

Mr. McDowell stated another question directed to the attorney, I don't know if you would consider this a personnel matter or not, we are discussing this now in public, is that acceptable? Mrs. Giner stated the current tone of the discussion is appropriate for public, if you are going to go into specific, I would then ask that we go into closed session. If Board members do want to go into specifics, we can go into closed session. The procedure after appointment can be in executive session.

Mr. McDowell stated I assume that we will have to have a contract for this position. Mrs. Giner stated I can discuss that in closed session.

Yocasta Brens-Watson stated I do have some questions; I did look at the job description for the superintendent but I'm more curious specifically as interim or acting superintendent – the extent of the duties and responsibilities. If we could discuss in executive session I would appreciate it.

Mr. McDowell stated it seems like we need to go into executive session now.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the Board go into Executive Session at 7:55 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 and matters falling under attorney/client privilege.

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.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAYES: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Because of conflicts, Mrs. Minneci and Mr. Benaquista did not attend executive session.

The Board returned to public session at 8:35 p.m.

Mr. McDowell stated just to refresh the public's mind, I made a motion that we appoint Gerry Benaquista as our interim superintendent from today through June 30, 2021. Mr. O'Shea seconded it. We discussed this executive session and now we will take a vote.

The below vote is for Assistant Superintendent Benaquista to be Interim Superintendent for the period of January 7, 2021 to June 30, 2021.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated before I cast my vote I want to say that I have been on the Board for an hour and 36 minutes so I don't have enough information so I will abstain.

Mrs. Ruiz stated before I cast my vote I just want to reiterate my concern with the correspondence that I received from elected officials at both the local and State level regarding this matter. When I was elected I was very clear that I was an independent voter and I would never surrender my judgment or vote to any political influence and those correspondences were very disturbing in the fact that they were pushing for Mr. Benaquista.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Williams
 NAYES: Dr. Morgan, Mrs. Ruiz
 ABSTAIN: Mrs. Minneci, Mrs. Regis-Darby

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. McDowell stated Mr. Benaquista if you are willing we would like you to serve as our interim superintendent – details and contract to follow.

Mr. Benaquista stated thank you and I appreciate that nomination and thank the Board for that.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Paul Casey stated congratulations Yocasta Brens, John O'Shea and Nellis Regis-Darby on their joining the Board. I would also like to congratulate Mr. McDowell and Mrs. Regis-Darby on their roles as president and vice president. I wanted to take a moment because everybody in this Zoom and our country dealt with yesterday's events on our capital in a different way and some are more traumatized on what they saw or didn't see than others. I think as a district it is important that we recognize the feelings of our staff, teachers and our students and give them the opportunity to talk about the events yesterday. Most importantly because we saw how the Capital Police responded to the events yesterday and how they handled a large mass group of white terrorists, I refuse to use the word protester in their case. Took over the capital and were allowed to do so. We saw how law enforcement dealt with the less violent protest in another arena and that can be very traumatic to young people. I have two sons one in 6th grade and one in 9th grade. The 9th grader was absolutely following it closely and it is important as a community give our children the opportunity to share their feelings in these efforts. I know it was a quick turnaround, neither of my children had the opportunity to have these kinds of conversations in school today. I asked if it was brought up by teachers and it wasn't. I would really encourage the district to take it under advisement that it would be important for teachers,

counselors, whoever to give students the opportunity to talk to one another about it without a bias opinion but giving them the opportunity to share. I think it is a really credible thing and important in a time like this. For most of our children, this is the most historical yet traumatic event of their lifetime. As a district it is incumbent upon us to make sure that we are there for all the children in the district and then dealing with an event like this. Thank you and good luck this year and congratulations Mr. Benaquista and look forward to great things to come.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you Mr. Casey and you made a great point about discussing these issues in the classroom.

Susan Lipstein stated congratulations to our new Board members and I wanted to wish the best of luck to Mr. Benaquista. But I have something painful that I want to talk about and I debated even bringing it up but it is heavy enough on me that I'm going to. I had tremendous respect for public school teachers, administrators for years. I'm not speaking as president of the Ed Foundation but the Ed Foundation has raised over \$200,000 to help teachers better in many ways. Teachers often say that they don't get respect that they deserve and I heard leaders say feel that public education has been under fire for years. I was disappointed when the three community leaders received confidential information that they weren't supposed to have and without a blink of an eye they made it public at a Board meeting fully knowing that it was not made available to the entire public and not everybody had access to that information and the letters that they submitted contained information that I know was inaccurate and incorrect and it led to enormous amount of misinformation being spread over the community. The fact that they brought it up after public comments started and I couldn't make my public comment because I didn't even know about this information and I don't even know if I would have because it was confidential but that took my rights away and that bothers me for a few reasons. We expect our children to follow the rules. If someone took final exam answers that were confidential from you and they gave them only to select few in your class, you as a teacher/administrator would expect consequences to the person who took those answers and you would probably want consequences for the students that took that information. It troubles me as you as professionals and leaders show this kind of behavior that you wouldn't want the children to do and it seems logical to me that if you want respect, you want to hold yourselves to the same standards you set for our students and that is what troubled me about your actions. I sent my concerns to the UTEA. I don't know a way to handle this better. If you are really concerned about this, you could have sent those concerns to the Board privately and maintain the confidentiality and then when the resolution was put on, which it was, then everybody would have had a chance to speak. I think we have to be really careful in today's world that we don't go on a slippery slope that is going to create issues that we don't want to have. We have enough. I had to say that because I feel so strongly about what happened with confidential information. I would like to see an investigation but it doesn't seem like there is going to be one because some action should be taken. There should have been some consequences. I'm looking forward to seeing positive progress in the future in this district. We have a long road ahead. I look forward to all of us working together to improve the education in our district for all of our children.

Vito Nufrio stated Happy New Year to everyone. Mr. McDowell since it is the rules that all comments are to be addressed to the chair, congratulations to you, you had this experience before and tonight you reinforced my confidence in you as a leader. Your actions tonight

denotes that this Board can move forward in unity. You have selected the right leader for this district. Mr. Benquista, I wish to compliment you and wish you only the best. Mr. McDowell, thank you so much for taking the stand that you did this evening and for the rest of the Board that voted, thank you and have a good evening.

Lilianna Almeda stated I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Board members, congratulate the new president and vice president. What I have seen this evening has put my mind at ease in terms of everything that has been going on with this school year. I have seen some positive movement for this Board and the best decision that you have made as of yet is to bring Mr. Benaquista on. We are extremely excited that we will have someone who knows our district, our children, our teachers and our staff and who will do his very best to ensure that everyone is taken care of. I have seen so far Mr. Benaquista is sending out communication as to the status of what is going on with the schools, the time they can expect things to occur; although we do know those dates can change, have changed based on the ongoings of COVID and other matters but we appreciate the communication as I can speak for several parents that this is what we were looking for and this is what we will continue to look for. Please keep in mind that all we want is communication and the best for our children, teachers and staff. Thank you.

Jeff Monge stated first I want to congratulate the new Board members and I think it is important to acknowledge that Nellis Regis-Darby, Yocasta Brens and Mr. O'Shea had tremendous support from the community with over 12,000 votes for Nellis and Yocasta was almost 12,000 – so that is pretty amazing. The community has spoken. They deserve a fair opportunity, along with the other members, to help ensure a new change to the district that has had enough drama and I think the last person said it well – we really need this as a community. The one thing I would also add is that we do have new Board members and we should respect the voice of the community. Lastly, there have been a lot of rumors out in the community and unfortunately it is just that and it doesn't bring us together; especially those that attempted to run for Board of Ed and I think we need everybody's support and try to support our Board and try to bring the district forward. It is really needed in a time of healing right now. Thank you.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated UTEA president. I want to thank everyone at the meeting tonight. I want to thank all the BOE and I want to congratulate everyone on the Board of Education. I look forward to working with all of you and Mr. Benaquista. I would like to add to Mr. Casey's comments and going back to the name on my screen it was yesterday's professional development. The Union Township Education Association is committed to improving this awful world that we live in and I can't express how I felt yesterday. I was sitting in a professional development workshop that was coordinated by the Union Township Education Association for our members specifically on social justice issues and institutional racism and it is just incredible to me that at the same time that we were having an awesome workshop what was going on in this country and it is just beyond crazy. The UTEA social justice committee is dedicated to addressing these issues and working with the Board of Education and trying to make a difference in this crazy world. I hope we can make some progress with that and work with the Board of Education in providing professional development in this area.

Miguel Gusman stated I want to express how grateful I am to see two mothers who have been elected to the school board with children in our school district. I know this is not Nellis'

first rodeo. I know this is the first time for Yocasta and Mr. O’Shea. My desire is that as they embark in this three-year journey, and hopefully longer, the idea here is that I hope that we can see better improvements, collaboration amongst school board members like we haven’t seen that much of lately. Beginning 2021 I hope that we can progressively move the district forward. Congratulations to Mr. Benaquista, time will tell on how the district goes. I hope that in the next coming six months of your tenure there that you would represent our district well. Overall, including yourself and the school board members, that you would put our students, teachers first in all that you do and that you make them a priority when making decisions for our school district and that your decisions will not be based on political interests or political influences but as independent Board members understanding the impact of your decisions collectively. I want to thank you because you didn’t have to run but you chose to run and public overwhelmingly elected you as Board members so we are grateful to see you there in those seats. We hope to progress. Congratulations Nellis for your vice president position and Ronnie for your president position. I would also end it in this note that yesterday’s events were disheartening, sad and it was sad what our president is doing to our country but overall I will say this, I hope that the leadership in our local town, members of the school board, members of our Township committee and those that are elected officials of our own local town will serve as a better example than those that have been serving on the national level, including our president. The other thing I want to say is I know that the Education Foundation has done a lot of good work, I still want to commend the Education Foundation for all the good work that they do in our community. Thank you.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

AYES: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan, Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams
 NAYES: None
 ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**YOLANDA KOON
 BOARD SECRETARY**