

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – January 19, 2021

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The regular meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, January 20, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, pursuant to notice sent to each member.

Mr. McDowell called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. McDowell asked for a moment of silence to remember one of our employees that passed away January 6<sup>th</sup>, a bus driver from our district, he has worked for our district about 20 years, his name is Jean Vincent, a bus driver. He began in 1997; he was beloved by his co-workers and his nickname was Cowboy No. 1. Take a moment of silence for Jean Evans Vincent.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

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

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Dr. Kalisha Morgan (arrived at 8:34 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq., Kendal Longmore, Esq.

Dr. Francis led the Board and audience members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the “Open Public Meetings Act”, a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Mrs. Minneci read the District’s mission statement.

COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS:

Steven Le stated F-1, the Treasurer’s Report – the cash receipts for Fund 30, the non-school development authority capital reserve fund, I saw an increase of \$9 million as the monthly cash receipts. Can there be clarification? Does that \$9 million stem from the bond proceeds for the Phase I of the Energy Savings Plan. If that is the case, for the Board’s clarity, as well as the public’s clarity, if there is any potential for it to be broken down in the Treasurer’s Report where we know that the \$9 million is part of the Phase I of the Energy Savings Plan and to know what

other capital reserve fund are dedicated to other projects in the district. Mrs. Koon stated we plan to open another capital account which the Board approved last month to separate out so we are not commingling capital funds; we opened a capital fund/ESIP and will move the money into that separate account so we can track those projects individually in that capital account.

#### Approval of Minutes:

Moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the following minutes be adopted:

1. November 4, 2020 – special meeting/executive session
2. November 10, 2020 – worksession
3. November 11, 2020 – special meeting/executive session
4. November 17, 2020 – regular meeting
5. November 17, 2020 – executive session #1
6. November 17, 2020 – executive session #2

#### DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O’Shea, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Mrs. Minneci (#1,3,6), Mrs. Regis-Darby,  
Mrs. Williams (#4,5,6)

Mr. McDowell stated a quick comment to our attorney, Mr. O’Shea voted yes on those minutes, he did not attend those executive sessions. Mr. Taylor sated there is no legal requirement to be present at a meeting to approve minutes. Mr. McDowell stated thank you very much; I learned something new.

#### G. Communications:

##### LETTER OF RETIREMENT – CLARK

Letter of resignation, for purpose of retirement, from Marvin Clark, custodian-Union High School, effective February 28, 2021.

##### LETTER OF RESIGNATION – HUDSON

Letter of resignation from Kristen Hudson, social studies teacher-Kawameeh Middle School, effective March 4, 2021.

##### REQUEST FOR EXTENSION – PLACCA

Request for extension of unpaid non-FMLA child rearing leave from Nicole Placca, Spanish teacher-Union High School, new return date April 1, 2021.

##### REQUEST FOR LEAVE – PARKHURST

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) followed by non-FMLA/non-NJFLA leave from Jennifer Parkhurst, school counselor-Connecticut Farms Elementary School, April 6, 2021-April 1, 2022.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – SANTAMARIA**

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) from Maggie SantaMaria, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher-Franklin Elementary School, March 8, 2021-June 24, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – DENNIS**

Request for paid medical leave from Maureen Dennis, paraprofessional-special services-Connecticut Farm Elementary School, January 18, 2021-April 30, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR EXTENSION – O’HOLLA**

Request for extension of unpaid leave (non-FMLA/non-NJFLA) from Laura O’Holla, teacher-Jefferson School, new return date March 1, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – POLIZZI**

Request for paid child rearing leave and unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (concurrently) from Abby Polizzi, teacher-Battle Hill Elementary School, February 22, 2021-September 23, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR EXTENSION – MACK-RAMOS**

Request for extension of non-FMLA/non-FMLA child rearing leave from Ebony Mack-Ramos, teacher-Livingston Elementary School, new return date June 1, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – LaRUE**

Request for paid medical leave from Deanne LaRue, teacher-Livingston Elementary School, January 25, 2021-March 5, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – LIENTO**

Request for paid medical leave from Joanne Liento, paraprofessional-Battle Hill Elementary School, December 7, 2020-June 24, 2021.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE – SIDERMAN**

Request for unpaid non-FMLA medical leave from Jason Siderman, special education teacher-Union High School, December 17, 2020-June 24, 2021.

**Superintendent’s Report:**

Mr. Benaquista stated that we will have the student liaisons, Hannah Caldwell Elementary School PTA, the auditors and the first period reporting.

Gabriella Guido (9<sup>th</sup> grade) stated I talked to my peers and a lot of them feel they are still getting a lot of work compared to how it was in regular school. A majority of them feel comfortable in their own homes.

Faith Olayinka (12<sup>th</sup> grade) stated I can start with the same thing the 9<sup>th</sup> grader said. It seems like we are getting a lot more work. I know it is hard to figure out what type of work to give out to students over the screen but it like teachers are piling us with work – they will give us homework and classwork and on top of that you have a project. It seems very overwhelming. It

seems like teachers really don't seem to care or maybe they do but it is not shown to us so it seems like we have lack of motivation in the classroom. We tend to not do the work or put our bare minimum to it. I feel like if teachers took more time out of their day to talk to us about how our day was or how we are feeling or anyway they can possibly relate to us so that they just don't jump into the lesson and it doesn't feel like we just have to pass the class instead of actually learning things. Right now it feels like we are just getting by and not actually learning anything. By the time a test comes, it is random knowledge and it doesn't really stick in our heads. Students actually think they are getting used to being inside. I think that is a good thing that students are used to be online; other students are saying there are a lack of mental health days for those that are having a harder time to focus at home which they didn't know they were going to have a hard time. Now that we are home it is hard for some students to pay attention in the classroom or get some work done. They need that certain time to regroup themselves and some students just want school to open back up and they are concerned that if they go back to school, they may have major social anxiety. They probably never had this problem before but if you haven't been outside in months; not a lot of people in the hallway, it is just a feeling of being overwhelmed. Some students are a little bit scared to go back to school but they really want to because they feel it would help them mentally and progress better in school.

Mr. Benaquista stated you mentioned about teachers to talk to you prior to getting into the lesson, do you want to elaborate on our first meeting with the high school administration, counselors, yourself as a student and share a little bit about the direction we are looking to go because the students have voiced that to the administration.

Faith stated what we were thinking and some teachers already do this because it is just part of their natural style and it comes easy to them. I was thinking that some teachers could either take the time out to just ask some type of general question where it gets the class flowing together where we are actually one class. I feel like some students are more comfortable talking in the chat in Zoom than talking out in public in class. Where some people are easier to tell their feelings out straight through the computer. I feel if teachers ask questions like "how is your day?" or "how did your weekend go?" or "what's your favorite type of music?" – some type of conversation that can get the class flowing generally in one type of unity and you can see how the teacher is feeling as well. I feel like students should be able to reciprocate from how the teacher is feeling and ask the teacher "how is your weekend?" and have that type of connection. Currently you can't have a connection over virtual school but if we could create that connection through simple questions, it would be easier for students to start speaking out and getting more comfortable with the teacher and see where we are all coming from.

Mr. Benaquista stated thank you and we are going to keep that going – the voice of our students. The high school is looking into putting in more SEL time where it is guided to allow an avenue for our students to speak up. Thank you for your assistance and your voice is heard and we need more students to share what is going on.

Pedro Torres (11<sup>th</sup> grade) stated many of the complaints I received this month are what my fellow liaisons have already said. A lot of my colleagues continue to be frustrated and stressed out about the amount of work we receive on a daily basis. Especially given that the PSAT's are next week and in the upcoming months many students will be taking the SATs. As

time progresses, burnouts are coming more and more prevalent with the lack of motivation and staring at a computer screen for five plus hours a day, along with the abundance of schoolwork we are given daily. I hope these issues will be addressed. One suggestion I received from a peer was for an anonymous comment system where smaller complaints that wouldn't make sense at a Board meeting could be received by the administration of the school and this could sort out smaller issues that students are facing.

Mr. Benaquista stated I will make sure that Mr. Hoyt listens to some of those suggestions – I think they are great.

Deanna Chase (Hannah Caldwell PTA) stated some of the things that we have been able to accomplish this year is outside events for all of our children. We posted an ice cream social, with a local ice cream truck, we COVID screened/temperature checked and prescreened again upon arrival with hand sanitizer stations. Instead of doing a lot of small events throughout the month, we put our pumpkin patch and trunk or treat together. We had a couple of local businesses come in for that and donate free food and coupons to keep the families shopping and spending money local as well.

We partnered with the Union Fire Department for safety month and did a scavenger hunt. We have done a lawn sale fundraiser, a photo fundraiser to give parents options to have Christmas cards or holiday pictures and we also partnered with a lot of our teachers. We have a teacher liaison this year and we are hosting a paint and sip this Friday. We had a local business make hot cocoa bombs that the PTA paid for. We did a holiday tribute with our music teacher and we have also done virtual bingo where we purchased gift cards from local businesses to keep the families local.

We are planning a couple of events for the spring. We have an executive board meeting in a couple of weeks so we will see what the spring brings and we were very gracious to local and national businesses to host a silent auction to raise money for the spring and end of year expenses. We have had a very good year so far and we are hoping, despite COVID, that we can keep it up. Mr. Benaquista stated thank you to the PTAs for doing all they do for our students.

Mrs. Koon introduced Suplee Clooney, the auditors for the district, we are audited annually. The Board recently selected Suplee Clooney as our district auditors and we have Mr. Warren Korecky and Mr. Eric Zimmerman are here to provide an overview.

Mr. Korecky stated this is a presentation of the 19-20 auditor for fiscal year ending June 30, 2020. We delivered the CAFR and the Auditor's Management Report last week. What is required is that if you have any recommendations that they be read into the record.

I would like to start with the Auditor's Management Report – it is required by the State Department of Education. It is not just a financial audit, it is also a compliance audit with all the rules and regulations of the State Department of Education that we must check. There are about 9-10 general areas under financial planning, purchasing, food service, student activities – that they require us to look at. Here are where your recommendations would emanate from.

On page 10 of the report, there are several recommendations that I would like to read and make a brief comment.

First recommendation under financial planning is the district should keep an accurate analysis of the balance on deposit in the Payroll Agency Account. All that is you have a trust account and all the payroll transactions are running there. At the end of the month there is money left in the account and you should have an analysis that belongs to whether it is federal tax, state tax, pensions, deductions for health insurance, things like that – you didn't have an analysis for that

Second recommendation is that the Board of Education should designate someone to prepare and submit the compensation certification to the NJ Department of Treasury as required by NJSA 18A:14.4 – it is called E-Cert – you certify to the Department of Treasury the top administrators' salaries and stipends paid during the year. It was done in prior years but it was not done this year.

School Food Service – the district should update their unpaid lunch receivable with the Food Service Management Company to pursue collection of the outstanding balances. These are the outstanding balances/receivables from students who do not pay. They are on your books. You need to make some type of policy to write those off or make an effort to collect them.

Student Body Activities – the district should continue to communicate districtwide standard policies and procedures for the maintenance of all student activity funds. You do have a policy manual that deals with receipt/disbursement/recording and purchasing and the documents that should support all the transactions of the student activity fund; not depositing on time, bills that are paid and don't have invoices attached to them, signatures on vouchers – take the manual out and go through all the individuals that are in charge of the student activity funds to refresh everyone's memory.

Pupil Transportation – the district should establish procedures that will only report students that qualify for transportation needs. There were some on the reports that didn't qualify so only people that qualify for transportation should be on the report.

Facility and Capital Assets – the capital lease purchases be properly added to the Capital Asset Inventory. If you lease property during the year, it is required to be part of your physical asset inventory.

Dr. Francis stated the student activity funds – we had an issue with alleged money being stolen a couple of years ago and there was something put in place to make sure that money was deposited on time, better record keeping on receipts – it is three years later and we are still dealing with this issue. Can someone explain that?

Number five – establishing procedures that only report students that qualify for transportation needs – did that affect us financially adversely or was that neither here nor there? Mr. Zimmerman stated it doesn't affect you financially, it is part of your state aid submission report – ASSA report and the problem here was you had some students that were tested that did

not qualify for certain transportation needs that were still being reported to the State on this transportation report. The requirement of the State – we did our test; found some exceptions – financially no. These students were related to aid-in-lieu and those parents were not paid by the district, they were just incorrectly reported to the State.

Dr. Francis stated going back to number four – the people that should be responsible for the student activity fund should be school principals and Mrs. Koon you will get on top of that going forward. I know you don't have anything to do with it because you weren't here at the time. I just hope that you will stay on top of that.

Also, the lunch, we should have something either a policy to write it off or we should be going after the money. I hope we can fix that issue.

Mrs. Koon stated Mr. Korecky can you explain as far as the lunch balance and writing off – what would be our options? Mr. Korecky stated you can write it off but you have to be on top of this on a continuing basis. You can't let this go. You have to have something in place like if a student does not pay or doesn't have the ability to pay, you don't want to deny somebody a lunch, but there has to be something in there if you give a free lunch where the parents are contacted pretty soon after that. At least give them an idea that their account is a deficit. You can't let this go on continually in the year. If you are on top of it and you contact them and say you owe this amount because your students didn't have money and they received lunch, it is worth your effort, but it is going to take effort on someone's part to contact the parents.

Mrs. Koon stated the write off everyone is referring to is really using tax levy or taxpayer funds. Mr. Korecky stated yes, you have to cover it some how because it is a revenue. It is on the books as a receivable. You write that off you are going to write it off your surplus; it has to be covered because you are giving the lunches out and absorbing the cost for the lunches so somewhere you have to make a transfer from your deficit not receivable.

I want to make a brief comment. You have the CAFR – where the financial statements are in here and there is an introductory section from the district itself. It is quite redundant and confusing. There are districtwide financial statements, fund financial statements and it does present a lot of financial information. What I would like to tell the Board members – I like to go to page 85 and it is the budgetary comparison schedules – the C-1. It gives you a broad based presentation of the general fund which is your day-to-day operations. It gives a detail of all your revenues, what you anticipated, what you realize, gives a detail of the appropriations you had, transfers that you made, actual expenditures against those accounts and the variances against those. It also acts as a profit and loss so it tells you a lot of information. The other schedules in the report are important but they are summarized and you can't get the detail of what happened in the district in summary form. This schedule from pages 85-95 gives you a good presentation of what happened in the district. If you turn to page 95, it gives you a profit and loss and it tells you how you ended the year financially. You started the year at \$9.4 million of surplus, you generated \$2.3 million in surplus and you ended the year with \$11,747,000 surplus which is pretty good; however, your surplus at \$11 million is broke down to several components. I will make a brief comment on each one.

The first one is \$2,517,000 – those are encumbrances – goods and services that were ordered before the end of the year and weren't completed orders. When those purchase orders come through in July/August/September, you have the money set aside to pay for those.

You have a capital reserve of \$681,000 for any capital projects you have in your Long-Range Facility Plan. You have a maintenance reserve of \$450,000. You have an emergency reserve of \$725,000. You have the surplus you used in the 2020-21 budget - \$2,227,251 – that is set aside for this fiscal year. You have excess surplus - \$1,692,000 – that is your 2% over your operating expenses for the year. It has to be used in your 2021-22 budget – the budget you will be working on shortly. That is the minimum you have to appropriate - \$1,692,000. Your free and clear surplus of \$11,700,000 is \$3,453,000 that is your 2% that the State let's you keep. You can use that for any purpose, any budget purposes in the 2021-22 school year – any contingencies or amendments you want during the year.

Dr. Francis asked how much is the 2%? Mr. Korecky stated it says unassigned fund balance - \$3,453,850 – that is the amount the State let's you keep free and clear.

Dr. Francis stated looking at the capital reserve we only have \$681,000 – is that enough for a district our size? Mr. Korecky stated for a district your size that is a little low. During the year if you have extra appropriations that you are not using, you transfer it to the capital reserve at the end of year. If you see where your surplus is, before you close out, you pass a resolution increasing your capital. I would suggest that you take a hard look at that. It is low for a district your size and the amount of buildings that you are operating.

Dr. Francis asked can some of the unassigned fund balance be transferred into that at the end of the year? Mr. Korecky stated that can be at the end of the year.

Dr. Francis stated for the 19-20 school year which was half of last year – up until June, what was our fund surplus from that because that money we can use for next year – do you know what money that is? Mr. Korecky stated that is the \$11,747,000 as of June 30, 2020.

Mrs. Ruiz stated the capital reserve, I understand it is low for our size district. What do you suggest we be at for a healthy capital reserve? Mr. Korecky stated the only way you can do capital is through bond issues and if you can't get any referendum passed to make capital improvements, the only way you will do that is through budget. You have a long-range facility plan – it should be up to \$1.5-2.0 million – that is just an estimation. You have to look at your capital needs – major repairs and renovations. If something is eminent, you have to have money set aside someplace. Unless you want to put it in the budget and raise the taxes to do that but since you are at the cap all the time, you will only be able to do that if you set money side in your capital reserve. You have a lot of buildings and have major repairs. You should have a bigger capital reserve in my opinion.

Thank you to the Board Secretary and Superintendent for all the courtesies they have extended to us throughout the audit. We do ask for a lot of information. With the COVID-19, they accommodated us and made the audit more efficient. I would like to thank the Board for the appointment. We do appreciate the business.



Mr. Benaquista stated thank you. All the employees that came to do the audit followed our guidelines and I didn't have any worries of who was working. I want to thank you for that.

Dr. Francis, speaking back to the students' accounts, Mrs. Koon and I have had several conversations. She already brought some good ideas and we are putting together a new manual. Also to help parents out paying the lunch debt, Mrs. Koon is going to be meeting with all the principals and make sure that everyone is part of keeping track and moving forward. Before COVID we did make some leeway with parents paying off debt but then COVID hit and we put it on the backburner with everything going on in our community. Mrs. Koon and her office will be doing a lot with our administrators to make sure they are overseeing the student activities account.

Below is a summary of Mr. Benaquista's Superintendent Report. The full report can be seen on Zoom on the district website.

Attendance for the month of December: Staff 98%; students 96.8%.

The HIB report for period one (September 2020 through December 2020) was presented as required by the New Jersey Department of Education; see E-3 of the agenda.

The Student Safety Data System Report (SSDS), formerly known as the Violence and Vandalism Report, for period one was presented; see E-2 of the agenda.

Ed Foundation released grants for teachers to apply. They are electronic this year. The Ed Foundation shared with the Board and administration, since 2002, they have given out grants to our educators. When the grants are used, they impact the students in our district and help out the classroom in many different ways. Thank you to the Ed Foundation.

Update on AP – the Committee, which consists of multiple stakeholders, has been meeting weekly since November and working towards reimagining the guidelines used for placement of students into Honors and AP courses at the middle and high schools.

The Committee is in the final stages of preparing their recommendations which have been developed based upon current research on placement practices and data from districts across the State and from Union.

Before making their final recommendations to the Education Committee, the Honors/AP Committee would like to get the feedback of parents, guardians, students and staff on the proposed criteria. They have prepared a pre-recorded video outlining the committee's recommendations for placement procedures as well as a form which the community can provide feedback.

Look for an email to all K-12 parents, guardians, staff and grades 6-12 students that includes information about how to view the pre-recorded video as well as a form to provide your feedback to the committee. The committee's goal is to review all feedback and make any

appropriate adjustments, presenting final recommendations to the Education Committee in February.

Highlights in district – for the high school I will highlight the students as they get accepted to any college or post-secondary accomplishments. Please reach out to Mrs. Bristler, a UHS school counselor with college acceptance updates. We also want to highlight students that are not just athletic based.

At Union High School I want to recognize senior Ja'Shawn Robinson, he will be attending William Paterson. Senior Lyric Scott, has signed a full scholarship to play field hockey at Rider University and Desmond Igbinoson has signed and will be playing football at Rutgers.

Washington School clothing drive – I was amazed by the clothing drive – the gym was at least halfway filled. Staff members and PTA were there helping. It was a great event to help people. Washington School participates in several fundraisers headed by school counselor, Kim Marano. These include Alex's Lemonade Stand, Pennies for Patients, Bubbles for Autism and WHIP Pediatric Cancer Research. Due to the pandemic, it has been difficult to continue to raise funds for these causes so on January 10<sup>th</sup> they held it's first clothing drive. Students voted and decided the money would be donated to the "Make a Wish" foundation. It is a great learning lesson for the students.

Battle Hill – pre-k to 4<sup>th</sup> grade had an opportunity to attend a virtual "Met the Authority Event" with Nancy Bonilla, co-author of children's book series called "Jangala Tribal Warriors: Living, Growing and Learning from the Heart". The vent was possible thanks to the PTA and Battle Hill administration. The book is primarily based on positive psychology, focusing on non-violence and peaceful living.

Kawameeh – three students had work accepted and exhibited in the NJPAC Winter Virtual Art Show. Congratulations to Karina, Vihana and Arielle.

Virtual v Hybrid Survey was sent out - where the parents could select what they want when we are able to get back to hybrid. Right now 56.7% chose virtual, 35.1% chose hybrid and 8.3% did not respond. We are working on those parents to reply.

Martin Luther King highlights in the district:

Burnet Middle School – social studies classes will be kicking off Black History Month beginning with MLK Jr. Day and continuing through February and they will have a virtual museum.

Franklin Elementary School – Teachers created activities about Dr. King for their classes to discuss the ideals that were important to him. Teachers connected the ideals of Dr. King to SEL and how we treat one another. Featuring a story about a young boy asking his mother what the world would be like without black people. The mother guides the boy through a "normal

day” without the items or advancements invented by black people. Ultimately the son comes to appreciate black history.

Hannah Caldwell – Classes read books or watched videos about Dr. King and then discussed his dream for equality.

Jefferson School – Teachers provided a multitude of activities for students – a virtual field trip along with a virtual MLK library. Videos/documentaries were shared with the students with a discussion that followed.

Kawameeh Middle School – social studies classes had virtual field trip of Morehouse college, MLK March at Lincoln Memorial, the MLK Memorial in Washington, lesson that looks at a MLK’s approach of non-violence to fight back against segregation, discrimination and social injustice during the civil rights movement, video clip by Kid President about MLK and what MLK day of service is.

Livingston Elementary School – Brainpop Jr.: MLK Jr., Flocabulary: MLK Jr., shared a MLK Jr. virtual library with students and books that would be read aloud to students, watched his “I have a Dream” speech and discussions about what our dreams for the future are.

Washington Elementary School – Scholastic Magazine – read aloud and an information video with an accompanying song about how one person can help make a difference; google slide on Martin Luther King Jr. timeline; Flocabulary – Martin Luther King Jr. slide with choices of read aloud and videos about his life; nearpod lesson, virtual field trip.

Battle Hill Elementary School – watched videos, had discussions, read aloud a story about the life of MLK Jr.

Connecticut Farms Elementary School – Read aloud “Celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day”, listened to story “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”, google slides, Brainpop Video with vocabulary and talking about equality and tolerance.

Union High School – Flocabulary video, featured booklist with ebooks and audiobooks about MLK Jr., read/watched “I have a Dream” speech, discussion of the forgotten legacy and mission of Dr. King.

Our students in grades 9-12 can enter into an essay contest in the NJSBA’s annual Black History Month Contest.

Department of Special Services – The child study team and school counselors met to collaborate on ways to continue to increase participation of students who attend out of district schools in the district/school community.

The department administration met with the Special Education Parent Advisory Group Executive Board for their monthly meeting to collaborate on ways to continue to increase

communication between district families and the district regarding issues concerning special education and related services.

Highlights of projects in the district for 2020-2021 – districtwide: installed plexiglass desk shield on all desks; installed A/C in several classrooms in the district.

Union High School – new floors in guidance office, nurse’s office, allied health classroom, in a classroom; three bathrooms renovated – two in library and one faculty bathroom; new iron railings in front of school; painted hallways, lockers, trim, doors and classrooms, remodeled the ISS office and installed a man trap.

Burnet Middle School – installed new flooring in guidance center, painted hallways and staircases, remodeled the old coking room to a game room, build a new showcase at school entrance.

Kawameeh Middle School – painted classrooms and hallways, new man trap in progress.

Jefferson School – new LED lighting – ESIP, painted hallways and classrooms.

Connecticut Farms Elementary School – new front steps and new railings, new LED lighting – ESIP.

Hannah Caldwell Elementary School – new floors in guidance office, CST room and hallway, painted all hallways.

Livingston Elementary School – new floor in a classroom, painted staircases, new LED lights – ESIP.

Battle Hill Elementary School – new gym floor in progress, new LED lights – ESIP, painted classrooms and hallways.

Hamilton School – new LED lighting – ESIP.

Washington Elementary School – installed new flooring in computer lab, new serving line in cafeteria, new A/C in auditorium – ESIP, painted lockers, hallways and staircases.

Field House – installed new A/C in weight room, new LED lighting – ESIP.

Administration Building – installed new alarm panel, LED lighting – ESIP, new heating system – ESIP.

I want to thank Barry Loessel and his head maintenance and custodians – they oversee our district – when that audit was finalized – his men have been working above and beyond to make sure our buildings are ready when we get the o.k. to move back in the hybrid form.

I met with all leadership of the findings – went through every issue on the audit and our HVAC guys confirmed that for the most part our buildings are ready to go between ventilations, windows are buildings are deemed safe. They have adequate ventilation. We will make sure that we keep everyone safe.

Our next hurdle is monitoring COVID cases within our community. I am meeting with the health department weekly to see where we are at. Right now the COVID numbers are very high. As soon as that comes down, the health department feels we are safe to offer hybrid – we will move into that.

I did meet in a Town Hall with the administrators and also any staff member in our district. I presented the meeting as if I was in a classroom teaching to give an idea to all our faculty, staff members of what it is going to be like teaching in front of you as well as at home. Our IT staff has been doing a phenomenal job with providing trainings to teach hybrid. We want to support our teachers as they transition back. We will create a transition period and provide professional development.

We will not make February 1<sup>st</sup> to move to hybrid but we are continuing to prepare so when we can move to hybrid we are read to go and our teachers are prepared. I will make a note of what the student liaisons said about students having anxiety about coming back. Once our buildings are open, any students that want to visit the school prior to school starting, we will make sure that our principals work with our parents in allowing that opportunity. We want our kids comfortable to.

I want to thank the directors that have been supporting me and we have been meeting with superintendents throughout the State to try to get a jump start on the issues that they have dealt with and try to avoid them in our district and as a team we will meet and collaborate on some of things we need to do.

In the upcoming month I'm hoping to get out to all students, parents and staff information about safety measures, returning to hybrid and sanitation within our buildings. I'm going to try to make a creative video that will show what is going on in our district and what will happen once we return to hybrid.

We also will be letting you know what platforms are currently existing and what new ones we are bringing on. It is also important for our parents to know what our staff is using as far as platforms so they can become familiar. I will push out information about that.

I would also like everyone to know that pre-k registration – information will be going out very soon. It will be posted and we will send it out. It will be an online registration.

I did put a survey for parent questions dealing with returning to hybrid. After that survey I did get some questions and I think it is important to answer and send it out to the parents which we did. I'm doing the same thing for staff. I held my Town Hall and got a lot of questions and I'm answering them. I will make sure to send that out.

If you do have any questions in the future, please let us know and we get in touch with you and answer the questions that you have.

Mr. McDowell stated a lot of information and a lot of things going on in our district and happy to hear about it.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked that all the committee chairs present their resolutions as a group. Mr. McDowell stated we can since we went through them all last week. If there are any items you want to emphasize, please feel free to do but otherwise let's pass them as a whole.

#### Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, for adoption:

E-1. *Superintendent's Report of HIB-December 15, 2020 to January 12, 2021 – reported at worksession January 12, 2021.*

#### E-1-1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period January 13, 2021 to January 19, 2021 (no incidences to report), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

#### E-1A. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Affirm the Superintendent's determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period December 15, 2020 to January 12, 2021, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

#### E-2. APPROVE STUDENT SAFETY DATA SYSTEM REPORT (SSDS)

Approve the Student Safety Data System Report (formerly Violence and Vandalism Report) for period one of the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

#### E-3. APPROVE JANUARY REPORT – NJDOE – HIB

Approve the Township of Union Public Schools January report presented by Superintendent as required by the New Jersey Department of Education of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB). The report provides the public with the information collection from September 2020 through December 2020, as well as the number of incidents per school building, status of investigations, HIB investigators, nature of the HIB reports and the discipline resulting from the report findings. The HIB report also includes all training of school district personnel, building programs and assemblies during the time period.

#### E-4. APPROVE NJDOE MANDATED TUITION CONTRACT

Approve the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) mandated Tuition Contract for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

E-5. APPROVE REVISED 2020-2021 SCHOOL CALENDAR

Approve the revised 2020-2021 School Calendar, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

E-6. APPROVE AMISTAD RESOURCES GUIDE

Approve the K-12 Amistad Resources Guide, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

Dr. Morgan arrived at 8:34 p.m.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mr. O’Shea, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for adoption

F-1. TREASURER’S REPORT

That the Treasurer’s Report dated December 31, 2020 be accepted.

F-2. SECRETARY’S REPORT

That the Secretary’s Report dated December 31, 2020 be accepted.

F-3. CERTIFY TREASURER’S AND SECRETARY’S REPORT

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(a), I certify that as of December 31, 2020 no budgetary line item account has obligations and payments (contractual orders) which in total exceed the amount appropriated by the district Board of education pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:22-8 and 18:22-8.1.

/s/ Yolanda Koon  
Yolanda Koon, Board Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dated

Pursuant to N.J.A.C.6A:23-2.2(h), we certify that as of December 31, 2020 after review of the secretary’s monthly financial report (appropriations section) and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials that to the best of our knowledge no major account or fund has been over-expended in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.2(d)3 and that sufficient funds are available to meet the district’s financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year. This certification is solely based on the information provided by the School Business Administrator and Board Secretary and is assumed by the Board to be correct.

**F-4. APPROVE APPROPRIATION TRANSFERS**

Approve appropriation transfers in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-5. APPROVE LIST OF CONTRACTS/PURCHASE ORDERS**

Approve the attached list of contracts and/or purchase orders pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-5 (bid exceptions to requirement for advertising) and 18A:18A-10(a) (purchase through State agency; procedure), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**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 appended to the minutes.

**F-7. PRE-APPROVE DISTRICTWIDE STUDENT FIELD TRIPS**

Pre-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-8. APPROVE LIST OF 2020-2021 STATE CONTRACT VENDORS**

Approve the amended list of the 2020-2021 State Contract Vendors pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-10(a) (purchase through State agency; procedure) to facilitate schools' purchasing, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-9. APPROVE 2020-2021 OUT-OF-DISTRICT STUDENT PLACEMENT LIST**

Approval be given to amend the 2020-2021 out-of-district student placement list, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-10. APPROVE FUNDRAISERS**

Approve the following fundraisers, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

Event Name	Date	Purpose
Apparel Sale	January-April 2021	UHS/National Honor Society – to raise funds to lower the cost of students' stoles
Juneteenth Celebration	May-June 2021	UHS/Roots: Black Excellence Club – to educate and bring awareness to community regarding Juneteenth
Freshmen Class Virtual Game Night	January 29-May 28, 2021	UHS/Freshmen Class – to raise funds for freshmen class activities

**F-11. ACCEPT DONATIONS**

Accept the following donations, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

From	For Use By	\$/Item
Union Wrestling booster Club	UHS/Athletic Department	\$6,500 (to purchase wrestling mats)



**F-12. APPROVE PURCHASING MANUAL**

Approve the 2020-2021 Purchasing Manual, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-13. APPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF ADDITIONAL FUNDS – ESSER GRANT**

Approve the acceptance of an additional amount of \$71,662.00 from the CARES Act (ESSER) Grant, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-14. 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
Union High School	3202/Athletics	My Frames – frames for Hall of Fame Class of 2019-2020	\$1,400.00

**F-15. APPROVE ACCEPTANCE OF FAST GRANT FROM NJEA**

Approve the acceptance of a FAST Grant in the amount of \$7,500.00 from the NJEA for a community reading program titled: Union Reads, in connection with the information appended to the minutes.

F-16 *Agenda item approved at January 12, 2021 worksession (LearnWell)*

F-17 *Agenda item approved at January 12, 2021 worksession (Kid Clan Services)*

**F-18. APPROVE ROMANA KULIKOVA MD – EVALUATIONS**

Approve Romana Kulikova MD to provide neurological evaluations and neurodevelopmental evaluations at the rate of \$480.00 per evaluation in the office and \$600.00 for evaluations in the school for the 2020-2021 school year, not to exceed \$6,000.00 [Account #11-000-219-320-01-19].

**F-19. ACCEPT COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT AND MANAGEMENT REPORT**

Accept the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and the Auditor's Management Report, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*auditors will present report to the public at the regular meeting on January 19, 2021*).

**F-20. ACCEPT CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN (CAP)**

Accept the Corrective Action Plan for Single Audit Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2020, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-21. *For informational purposes only – vote not required.* List of legal services for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**F-22. APPROVE NJSBA AS SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH FIRM**

Approve New Jersey School Board Association as search firm for Superintendent search, in an amount not to exceed \$15,000, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**Operations Committee Resolutions:**

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

**O-1. APPROVE SECURITY DRILL/BUS EVACUATION REPORTS**

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:41-1 and P.L. 2009, Chapter 178, approve the following security drill and bus evacuation reports for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**O-2. APPROVE NOTIFICATION OF ASSET CHANGE OF STATUS**

Approve the Notification of Asset Change of Status for disposal of a Polar Mohr 76EM paper cutting machine, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**Personnel Committee Resolutions:**

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Dr. Francis, seconded by Mrs. Brens-Watson, for adoption::

**P-1A. PERSONNEL ACTIONS – NEW HIRES**

Personnel Actions-New Hires be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**P-1B PERSONNEL ACTIONS – EXTRA PAY**

Personnel Actions-Extra Pay be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**P-1C PERSONNEL ACTIONS – TRANSFERS**

Personnel Actions- Transfers be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**P-2. APPROVE PUBLIC AGENCY COMPLIANCE OFFICER – KOON**

Approve Yolanda Koon as Public Agency Compliance Officer (PACO) for 2021, at no cost to the district.

**P-3. ACCEPT LETTERS OF RESIGNATION/RETIREMENT**

Accept letters of resignation/retirement from the following staff:

Name	Position	Location	Eff. Date	Reason	Notes
Marvin Clark	Custodian	UHS	2/28/2021	Retirement	
Kristen Hudson	Social Studies Teacher	KMS	3/4/2021	Resignation	Letter indicates last physical day will be 3/4/2021

**P-4. APPROVE LEAVES**

Approve leaves for the following staff:

Name	Position	Location	Leave Dates	Leave Type	Notes
Maureen Dennis	Paraprofessiona l-SS	Connecticut Farms	1/18/2021-4/30/2021	Paid Medical Leave	
Nicole Placca	Teacher of Spanish	UHS	Extension of Unpaid Return 4/1/2021	Non FMLA Child Rearing Leave	<b>Org. return was 3/1/2021. FMLA entitlement exhausted.</b>
Jennifer Parkhurst	School Counselor	Connecticut Farms	4/6/2021-4/1/2022 <b>Return 4/4/2022</b>	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) followed by Non FMLA/Non NJFLA	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 weeks.
Laura O'Holla	Elementary Teacher	Jefferson	Extension - Updated Return: 3/1/2021	Unpaid Leave (NON FMLA/NON NJFLA)	Previous FFCRA entitlement exhausted. Org. return was 1/4/21.
Maggie SantaMaria	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade Teacher	Franklin	3/8/2021-6/24/2021	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/ NJFLA (Concurrently)	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 weeks.
Abby Polizzi	Elementary Teacher	Battle Hill	2/22/2021-9/23/2021 Return: 9/24/2021	Paid Child Rearing Leave and Unpaid FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently)	FMLA/NJFLA (Concurrently) entitlement not to exceed 12 weeks.

Ebony Mack-Ramos	Elementary Teacher	Livingston	Extension Return 6/1/2021	Non FMLA/Non FMLA Child Rearing Leave	FMLA/NJFLA time exhausted. Org. return 1/4/2021
Deanna LaRue	Elementary teacher	Livingston	1/25/2021-3/5/2021	Paid medical leave	
Joanne Liento	Paraprofessional	Battle Hill	12/7/2020-6/24/2021 Return 9/1/2021	Paid medical leave	
Jason Siderman	Special education teacher	UHS	12/17/2020-6/24/2021 Return 9/1/2021	Unpaid non-FMLA medical leave	

**P-5. APPROVE DESIGNEE – STUDENT ACTIVITIES ACCOUNT**

Approve Delia McLean as the additional designee for the ConnectOne “Hannah Caldwell Elementary School Student Activities Account,” at no cost to the District and approving the removal of Kira Baskerville as designee for said account.

**P-6. APPROVE ATTENDANCE AT UNION COUNTY WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP MEETINGS**

Approve Kim Conti, Director of Special Services, to attend Union County Women in Leadership Group meetings at no cost to the district for the 2020-2021 school year.

**P-7. APPROVE STUDENT TEACHERS AND INTERNSHIPS**

Approve student teachers and internships for the 2020-2021 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**Policy Committee:**

Upon recommendation of the Policy Committee and Superintendent of Schools, the following policies were moved by Dr. Morgan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, for adoption:

**POL-1.POLICY 4119.27 – DISTANCE LEARNING POLICY**

Policy 4119.27 – Distance Learning Policy, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes. (*FINAL READING*)

**POL-2.POLICY 5516 – USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDING DEVICES**

Policy 5516 – Use of Electronic Communications and Recording Devices, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes. (*FINAL READING*)

**DISCUSSION:**

None

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

Dr. Francis stated I just want to make sure that both policies were updated. Dr. Morgan stated I spoke with the attorneys and we made the necessary changes. The policies I was referring to last week were not these policies but our committee will be meeting to discuss the policies I brought up about the restart and recovery.

Mr. McDowell stated R-2 will be removed and discussed in executive session.

**Residency Committee Resolutions:**

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

**R-1. APPROVE LIST OF STUDENTS REMOVED FROM ROLLS**

Approval be given to amend the list of students removed from the rolls [one (1) student exited the month of December 2020 (1 from secondary) or a total of six (6) students for the 2020-2021 school year] who are not domiciled in this school district, in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

**Approval of Bills:**

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mr. O’Shea, that the Board concur with the bills listed in the permanent bound register appended to these minutes and be ordered for payment.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**Unfinished Business:**

None

#### New Business:

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked do we have a cap for the 2021-2022 kindergarten class of students? Mr. Benaquista asked do you mean per class? Mrs. Regis-Darby stated yes, I think last year they added one additional class due to funding. I wanted to know if we are adding another pre-k class or are we capped at 59 students for that grade level? Mr. Benaquista stated I don't have that information on me; I will find out and make sure you get that information.

Mr. McDowell stated I believe there were 300 pre-k students this year. Mr. Benaquista stated correct. Mr. McDowell stated I think Hannah Caldwell at 8 pre-k classes.

Dr. Francis stated the Ed Foundation – from January 24 to February 7<sup>th</sup> – eat delicious food at Cozi Corner, located at 558 Rahway Avenue, Union. Mention the Ed Foundation to donate 5% of the total purchase to the Township of Union Education Foundation. They do so much for our students, as well as teachers in providing grants; I think it is a good thing to mention. Mr. McDowell stated I agree and as Board members I think we are obligated to attend Cozi Corner for a bite to eat. Mr. Benaquista stated that flyer was sent out to the community.

#### Comments from the Public:

Vito Nufrio stated I would like to address this to Mr. Benaquista and Mr. Taylor – with regards to what was indicated by the auditor that there is still an outstanding amount of funds that were not yet recovered from lunch debits from the past. I'm hopeful that some of the money from the CARES Act could be dedicated to help alleviate that deficit right now. Since COVID took such a toll on everyone – in one way or another – financial and in a personal manner, perhaps some of that money can be rerouted or could be applied to help defray that deficit from the parents that still owe money to the district. Just a thought – if it is possible, that would certainly reduce the anxiety that is currently on the minds of parents that owe money for their children's' lunch.

To Mr. Benaquista, in the 50 plus years that I have been in this business, I have never had such a comprehensive presentation by a Superintendent as you did this evening. Highlighting all the students' activities and what the schools have accomplished. It is important because Board meetings generally talk about so many other things but the recognition of the students is really the foremost and most appropriate that it should be highlighted at each and every Board meeting. Thank you again.

Jill Hall stated I wanted to expand on what one of the student liaisons was discussing. I was given the opportunity to attend that meeting with Mr. Benaquista and the high school administration to discuss some of the concerns that the students had brought forward. We met the next day as a group and I have a focus group that we run with freshmen through seniors to really explore student mental health and staff mental health and we had an extremely productive meeting. At the faculty meeting at the high school, we were asked to do a short presentation and what we are hoping to come out of that is increased connection and discussion and conversation between students and teachers and teachers and students. Our kids are dealing with a lot these days and it is not business as usual and they are ready to stop pretending that it is and start talking with their teachers. We are trying to move in the direction of a morning meeting but so kind of a check in – just a conversation not related to academics to demonstrate that we are going

through this common traumatic experience together and we need to lean on one another to get through it and to have a deeper relationship beyond the classroom and create a community where we are invested in one another. I'm really looking forward to continuing to work with the students.

In addition, I'm working with Hillside, Linden, Scotch Plains and Springfield. We did a presentation last month on vaping and we wanted to do one with mental health and some other communities wanted to get involved. It went from three districts to 6-7 and we are going to be presenting on adolescent mental health specific to some of the things that our kids are experiencing because of the pandemic and we are targeting February 23<sup>rd</sup>. As soon as we have our speakers committed and we get a flyer together, we will ask Mr. Benaquista to approve it and get it out. It will be a Zoom meeting – K-12 – for all our parents and community members. We are on top of this mental health situations and the conversations are productive and moving forward and we are really looking to continue to be able to support our kids and their families.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you and I am really glad to hear that because listening to our senior representative, Faith, it seemed like some of our students are having a tough time and missing out on the socialization part of it. I'm glad to hear you are doing what you are doing

Susan Lipstein stated I want to remind everybody that the Ed Foundation grants are due March 15<sup>th</sup>. They need to go to Maureen Guilfoyle first and then to us. There are over 150 grants that have been disbursed and worth over \$200,000. They go to every grade, every school and every subject over the 20 years. Don't be shy about applying. Please visit Cozi Corner during January 24<sup>th</sup> to February 7<sup>th</sup> – right up to Super Bowl Sunday. Go early, often and mention the Ed Foundation because all of that goes back directly via the teacher grants to the children in the classroom. Thank you.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you Mrs. Lipstein, thank you for what you are doing for our teachers.

Kathleen Brunsmeyer stated I want to thank Mr. Benaquista for the awesome, amazing superintendent's report that covered all the schools. I think that is amazing. I would like to say about five years ago that I first stepped forward at a Board meeting and asked about the lunch balance situation because being in the school and seeing the amounts of money that was outstanding for certain people was shocking to me how we could have that. We always were having budget issues. I am sad that it took a long time – well over four years to get it started where we were collecting from some people. COVID hit and I feel bad. There are some people who really took advantage. I know people are hurting right now and I know people are in different financial places, I understand that, but there are people that took advantage then and I would hate to see them taking advantage anymore. I would like us to continue to get that money back. We need it for the children. We don't want to lose for what we want to do in this district. I do have to say that having the high school liaisons. I'm a former Union parent; now my daughter is in a different town and high school and she came in and she said this is the best thing I have ever seen that Union did – why can't every town listen to the kids. I don't know who exactly started it, I think it is fabulous and I love that you are listening to the kids. Thank you and happy new year and have a great year.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated UTEA president and I wanted to give a thank you to Mr. Benaquista for the excellent communication channels he has established. He had a huge meeting with us last Thursday with all the members. He sent out a parent letter today and he did include the staff on that letter.

I also want to share some community projects that the UTEA is working on. In the future we are working on a community school initiative, a grant for a community fine and performing art center that we hope to put in the UHS courtyard. Mr. Hoyt and Mrs. Osty have been a big help. I have had conversations with the Town Business Administrator and also the Director of Public Works – we are really looking to make this a town-wide project. Hopefully we will get that grant.

In conjunction with the Relay for Life, we are going to do a reading initiatives, where we will be reading to the kids on the field and giving out some books – that was on the agenda tonight and that is thanks to Suzanne Whitley and Lisa Krauz – that's in the future but the current one is the Parsonage Project and we are taking ten special days to highlight our ten schools and invite our school families to the Parsonage. It is a gem in our Town. The Township of Union Historical Society and their members have been wonderful working with us in this effort. On Sunday, January 10<sup>th</sup> we had our first – the Battle Hill Day and we had 150% more than we expected. I ran out of gift cards. I want to thank Ronnie McDowell who showed up that day. I appreciate it and owe him a gift card. This Sunday is Kawameeh Middle School Day. I hope the Kawameeh parents and families will bring their children. I hope it is as successful as Battle Hill.

Elsie Mackie stated I wanted to piggyback off the comments in the discussion we had last week in terms of out-of-district students – it was a comment from Mr. O'Shea, one of the new Board members. I wanted to reiterate, and I know Mr. O'Shea you are brand new but we have had a history of always having the scarlet letter on our backs every time around this time. Usually it followed by special services charges, the budget and all of it gets deflected that fiscal management breakdown is because of special education. One of the things that really bothered me and I understand where you were coming from was that out-of-district students are back in school. In district students with disabilities are not. Out of district students are getting to catch up but in district students are really doing the best that they can and our teaching staff and supporting staff are doing the best they can.

When you start that conversation - \$13 million – what the public hears is \$13 million is being spent on special education and every year we have to go through it. By April something is happening with the paraprofessionals are going to be private or aides are going to go and it is always attributed to special education. I think for me it is the fact that you coming on board is something like you bring a new life to it and thankfully you have some experience with BOE but prior to the election I didn't even know who you were. I had to Google to find you that is why a lot of times it is irresponsible when people boast about in public because what it shows me that the public really doesn't pay attention to who is running and who is making decisions for our students.



However, this is not about you, it is about the fact that special education always has to deal with this. None of us chose this life. We had babies, dreams, aspirations and they happen to have disabilities. At the end of the day, we have to educate them and treat them like we treat our gen ed students. I get to say that because I have two other kids that are in gen ed.

Enough already, you have a finance committee, you have an abundance of things to look at, why is it always special education. We have to fight every day. Once we get that diagnosis, we are fighting. We are finally in a position where we are all trying to work together and here we are again. This is not to you Mr. O'Shea – you are brand new but this is someone who has been going to Board meetings for eight years and have watched us have to deal with it. This is an important year. You have three union contracts you will be dealing with so that means money will be at the center of everything and the community once again will get caught up. The last time was privatization which deeply affected by son and ended a lot of relationships behind it because of the lack of indifference. Until you live it, you don't understand. Each kid is individual and it is individualized so you can't even say they are all the same.

Please watch the narrative when we are talking about finances. Look to other areas. Stop focusing just on special services. Other areas can be cut and other areas should be looked at.

#### MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mr. McDowell, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, that the Board go into Executive Session at 9:04 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, items falling under attorney-client privilege and student confidentiality and privacy and other matters exempt from public exposure.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

The Board returned to public session at 9:20 p.m.

Mrs. Williams stated that R-2 is being removed from the agenda because the student was transferred out of the district by the grandmother; students who voluntarily withdraw will not be listed under residency; so we do not need to vote on R-2.

**MOTION TO ADJOURN:**

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Williams, seconded by Mrs. Brens-Watson, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:22 p.m.

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

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,**

**YOLANDA KOON  
BOARD SECRETARY**

