

**TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION  
WORKSESSION MINUTES – March 8, 2022**

**NOTICE OF MEETING:**

**TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:**

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, March 8, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mrs. Minneci called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

**PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:**

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Ms. Marissa McKenzie, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Mr. John O’Shea, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Ms. Chastity Santana, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden

**ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:**

Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams (arrived 7:24 p.m.)

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:**

Dr. Scott Taylor, Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Dr. Gretel Perez, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Mrs. Minneci led the Board 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.

Ms. McKenzie read the district’s mission statement.

**Comments from Public on Resolutions:**

None

**Approval of Minutes:**

Minutes will be approved at the regular meeting of the Board.

**Communications:**

Communications are part of personnel and will be voted on at the regular meeting.

**Superintendent’s Report:**

Dr. Taylor stated that he and Mrs. Koon will be presenting the preliminary budget at the regular meeting. Two students will be spotlighted, and Maureen Guilfoyle will give a presentation on the ESSER grants and what the funds will be used for.

Mr. Benaquista stated John Tripp from Clear will present on a residency verification system. I thought this is important and we worked out the funding which will come out of the security budget. Many districts use Clear – Elizabeth, South Orange/Maplewood, Jersey City, Franklin, Edison, Fairlawn and others.

Mr. Tripp stated Clear is a public records data base and we pull information from Experian, Equifax, TransUnion, motor vehicle agencies and phone companies to verify residency. The district would provide an excel sheet of all custodial parents and submit to Clear, this is called a batch, and it will be compared to our data base. Any thing in red indicates a “no match”. We create reports for you.

Mr. O’Shea asked if the credit companies are the lion share of the data? Mr. Tripp stated no, we get information from other sources – like tax assessor records, courts for liens and judgments. Mr. O’Shea stated working with the courts and Townships – that is not always accurate.

He stated when they create the reports, we are calling out to those agencies to find out the information they have as of today.

For your investigators, they will want to see the current address and vehicles registered to the suspect. Investigators would go to the last three addresses in Clear and see where the vehicle is registered.

Mr. Benaquista stated we used previous cases and you see all this information which is pretty impressive. This could impact charter school students and we do a lot of investigations on our students. Mrs. Koon asked who is your competitor and do you have a state contract? Mr. Tripp stated Acura is the competitor, but they don’t do real time. The State contract is T16.

Mr. O’Shea asked are we doing this randomly? Mr. Benaquista stated we would purchase one batch a year with unlimited searching. He also stated we could purchase for example 10,000 – so about 2,500 for the residency office. Mr. Tripp stated the 7,200 is once a year and you can do unlimited searches throughout the year. Mr. Benaquista stated there are also other things they offer – video module that will give you clips of where the car is parked every day but we are not there yet. One out-of-district student would pay for this easily in a year. We have so many kids coming in and out and it is hard to keep track. Our residency does a great job.

Dr. Francis asked what is the cost? Mr. Benaquista stated \$800 per month and it would come out of security. I will start in July and we would run the batch around September 15<sup>th</sup> and see what comes backs. Mrs. Regis-Darby asked to do it October 31<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Benaquista stated a lot of the kids move in during the summer.

Dr. Francis asked what is the difference for those that are renting and those that are homeowners? Mr. Tripp stated it is wherever the record follows. If you are renter, your utilities, car will follow to your address. If you want to see who owns the property, that would be a real property search.

Mrs. Williams arrived at 7:24 p.m.

Mr. O'Shea asked who are we following? Mr. Tripp stated we are following the parents. Mr. O'Shea asked where do you start first – with the address or the parents name? Mr. Tripp stated we start with the address.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated if we do this once a year, that leaves all the other months for people to do whatever. You may not find this out until the end of the academic year. It doesn't seem once a year verification is efficient. Mr. Benaquista stated we can do it more but we will start with that. I want to test to see how much it helps us before we make a huge investment.

Ms. Santana asked does it link to relatives? Mr. Tripp stated we have a dashboard analytics that identifies relatives and potentially associates as well. Ms. Santana asked as each child registers, can we go in and use? Mr. Tripp stated a batch is a per input charge – one time per year. The searches are unlimited. If you get returned mail, you can run those names.

Dr. Perez stated you can run checks on all new students at registration – it is all on how we want it. You can do grade bands during different times of the year you can cross check.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we can run the batch anytime during the course of year, if I run the batch in October, what if I want to run 100 students in November – how would that be charged? Mr. Tripp stated if you are running it through an excel spreadsheet, then that is a batch.

Mr. Benaquista stated it gives us flexibility to do more batches but not of the whole district. We can create a new registry batch in December for all the new registrations. I'm confident that we will be able to do it periodically. I really think this will benefit us and highlight residency issues.

Mrs. Williams asked does this take the place of re-registration? Mr. Benaquista stated that is something we can talk about and use it for re-registration. Dr. Taylor stated we would do re-registration but not as frequently. If this works for us, may be we do it once every 2-3 years.

Ms. Santana stated we have not done this regularly – they have done one registration in 10 years.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated in terms of anticipated savings, if we look at how many students we have exited since October 2022, how many students have we exited? If that is the case, your system would be able to identify those students in October. So there is a cost savings. Mr. Benaquista stated the residency cases that takes months, it could shorten that too.

Mrs. Minneci stated residency can take years and we haven't been able to identify so if this can help us make it quicker.

Mrs. Koon stated this could also help with the homeless. Mr. Tripp stated yes. You can put an alert on this person and receive an email whenever there is a new address.

Dr. Francis asked who will be operating this? Mr. Benaquista stated two people will be authorized; licenses are tracked. Dr. Taylor, Dr. Perez and I need to sit and talk about this. Also it tracks whoever uses it. Dr. Taylor will make a decision on who will be using it.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

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

E-1. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT’S DETERMINATION OF HIB

Affirm the Superintendent’s determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the periods February 8, 2022 to February 15, 2022, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

E-1A. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period February 16, 2022 to March 8, 2022, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O’Shea,  
Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mrs. Regis-Darby

MOTION CARRIED

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Education Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked why are we so late on submitting the ELL three-year plan? We could have submitted it in 2021. Dr. Perez stated there was no delay. It is submitted every three years. This year was the year it was up for renewal. We are going to be starting year one; the next time we have to submit a three-year plan would be 2024-2025.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked how many do we have in our district? Dr. Perez stated we have between 100-400 students.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mr. O’Shea presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee meeting.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-10 (out of district students) – is \$13 million a correct number? Mr. O’Shea stated yes.

Dr. Francis stated F-13 (increase in P.O. - Assistive Tek) is this needed? Mrs. Koon stated they have already spent \$3,800 – so it is needed.

Ms. McKenzie stated the dollar amounts are blank for budget items. Mrs. Koon stated the Governor provided his budget speech for fiscal 2023 budget address. The districts will be getting their assigned funding on Thursday so we should have the numbers plugged in by Friday.

Dr. Taylor stated we balanced the budget with flat aide. Mrs. Koon stated we will be presenting next week to the public.

Dr. Francis stated can you go over the bank cap? Mrs. Koon stated we need to change F-19 – it shouldn't say bank cap because we are not eligible for any bank cap. We did receive an enrollment adjustment of \$346,950 and that is because of the increase in enrollment which is about 163. We will reword F-18 – we decided to dip into the fund balance (our savings) so it will read “approve use of excess surplus/fund balance”. With flat aid we will be able to use \$4.6 million. We will have to replenish that this year by looking at our spending.

Dr. Taylor stated when we talk about savings, don't be mislead to think that we are talking about an account that we actually put this money in. This is all the money that we didn't end up using this year because we were extra frugal and/or the teams froze budgets and only allowed for essential purposes.

Mrs. Koon stated for F-19 – instead of use of bank cap, we will be “approving enrollment adjustment”. Mrs. Regis-Darby asked how many students? Mrs. Koon stated around 130 and it is a weighted average.

Ms. Santana stated regarding Clear, did we do our due diligence? Mr. Benaquista stated re-registration cost about \$30,000 in extra pay salary.

Mrs. Minneci stated each school was doing something different so you need a PD on re-registration. So you are spending more money. Mrs. Williams stated you need to train people so they are on the same page, doing it every year and seeing if we can get our savings that way and then using it. It is easier to keep a student out then to get a student out. I think re-registration is part of it. I think they were talking about using Genesis as a re-registration process. If we still need help, find a package that assists us in re-registration.

Mrs. Minneci stated I think to get started, we need a company like this to get us through this mess and once we straighten it out and after a year if it is not doing the job we need it to, then we revisit it. Mr. Benaquista stated the company is about \$10,000. It's \$800 a month which includes a batch up to 10,000 and unlimited searches.

Dr. Taylor stated for the homeless students that live in other communities, we are busing those kids to us so we can use Clear.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated every year we see these increases on the agenda, does that department look at other vendors to see if they have a comparable pricing or do we keep going

with the same vendors over and over. Mrs. Koon stated my understanding is that they do vet through vendors and companies and these are vendors that are open and can handle the capacity. She tells me that they are time sensitive and we are required to be in compliance of these IEPs.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked has the accountant presented to you before you do your budget? Mrs. Koon stated yes, we meet with all the departments.

Dr. Taylor stated I'm meeting with an organization to audit our special education program. I said in my interview that I would do it and I'm following up and once I have this meeting, I will follow up with the Board. It is wanting to pay a service to have someone come in from the Education Services Commission of New Jersey to do a full audit. They will also review our vendors. This is to make sure we are maximizing our in-house resources to keep kids in, our IEP's are they up to snuff, that can prevent litigation down the road, vendors – are we duplicating, transportation.

Mrs. Williams stated I mentioned this to Mr. Benaquista last year about doing a poll of parents of special ed children to find out what their needs are. We get sued a lot. Clearly we are not providing or giving them the services that they think they need. If we talk to parents of special needs children, we can get a better idea of what their needs are and then with the audit and the results of the poll, we can get a better idea of keeping our kids here and bringing them back. Dr. Taylor stated maybe we can use this organization to run that poll.

Mr. Benaquista stated we talked about relationships with parents and not being afraid to sit. Where we can build relationships and work together. Their feedback is invaluable for the services they feel their kids need. We will also look at the testing.

#### Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Operations Committee agenda. The following discussion item will be added to the agenda for vote next week. This is something we do every year.

#### REQUEST FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION VETERAN'S ALLIANCE

Request from the Township of Union Veteran's Alliance Parade Committee for the use of Hannah Caldwell Elementary School's auditorium on May 14, 2022 for a fundraiser, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member.

#### DISCUSSION:

None

#### Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Ms. McKenzie presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

#### DISCUSSION:

Dr. Francis stated Mrs. Guilfoyle is retiring; we have big shoes to fill.

#### Policy Committee:

Ms. Santana presented the following policies for first reading:

POL-1. APPROVE POLICY 1648.11

Approve Policy 1648.11 – The Road Forward COVID-19 – Health and Safety, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL -2. APPROVE POLICY 2415.05

Approve Policy 2415.05 – Student Surveys, Analysis, Evaluations, Examinations, Testing or Treatment, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-3. APPROVE POLICY 2431.4

Approve Policy 2431.4 – Prevention and Treatment of Sports-Related Concussions and Head Injuries, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-4. APPROVE REGULATION 2431.4

Approve Regulation 2431.4 – Prevention and Treatment of Sports-Related Concussions and Head Injuries, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-5. APPROVE POLICY 2451

Approve Policy 2451 – Adult High School, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-6. APPROVE REGULATION 2460.30 (NEW)

Approve Regulation 2460.30 – Additional/Compensatory Special Education and Related Services, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-7. APPROVE POLICY 2622

Approve Policy 2622 – Student Assessment, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-8. APPROVE REGULATION 2622 (NEW)

Approve Regulation 2622 – Student Assessment, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-9. APPROVE POLICY 5541 (NEW)

Approve Policy 5541 – Anti Hazing, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-10. APPROVE POLICY 7540

Approve Policy 7540 – Joint Use of Facilities, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

**POL-11. APPROVE POLICY 8465**

Approve Policy 8465 – Bias Crimes and Bias-Related Acts, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

**POL-12. APPROVE REGULATION 8465**

Approve Regulation 8465 – Bias Crimes and Bias-Related Acts, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

**DISCUSSION:**

Dr. Francis stated Policy 1648.11 – he felt it was not necessary to add the language in Appendix M. Ms. Santana stated during the pandemic, before the lifting of March 7<sup>th</sup>, when visitors were coming to the door, there wasn't anything in place. As policy, we felt that we should put something in place when visitors did come to the door that there was a baseline/foundation to enter the building.

Ms. McKenzie stated I believe this was a recommendation from Strauss Esmay. They send us policy alerts and then they put in what is recommended.

Ms. Santana stated last year this Strauss Esmay was passed – nothing changed. I am the chair and I am picking up and we have to present and review everything that was done last year. Nobody went through policy. Strauss Esmay makes a recommendation and we bring it to the Board. There is a lot to be done.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated Policy 2451 – is it adults or students age 16? Dr. Taylor stated if we had an adult high school it would serve students over 16. Ms. McKenzie stated this is only if we had an adult high school. Strauss Esmay put these out and we tailor it or they make revisions and they make recommendation to the Board. We don't have one, this is if we had one. It is a mandated policy.

Dr. Francis stated Policy 7540 – we have the shared services agreement – which is unequal – why do we need this policy? Ms. McKenzie stated this is joint use of facilities – changing around some verbiage and eliminating this line to give us an option. It is allowing other entities. Dr. Francis stated we have a shared services agreement, does it affect that? Ms. McKenzie stated no. Dr. Taylor stated the end of the document speaks to having a joint service agreement to do shared facilities and services.

Mr. Benaquista stated it is like Rabkin Field – we own part of it and the Town owns part of it, it states maintaining jointly and we worked that out with the shared agreement. Dr. Francis stated we haven't revisited that in a long time and we need to; it was always unequal.

Policy 8465 – you took the word “hate” out – is there a reason? Ms. Santana stated because Strauss Esmay suggested it. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated just because they suggested it doesn't mean we have to. Ms. Santana stated I like the word “hate” not in it. Ms. McKenzie stated it is more the politically correct term “bias” as opposed to “hate” crime. I don't think that term is used any more.



Mrs. Brens-Watson stated there is a movement about not talking about this. We need to take it upon ourselves to be careful not to eliminate all of it because there is a movement to not refer to “hate crimes” and you can’t talk about the fact that there is a real problem out there.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked is that the legal definition of the “bias” term? Mr. Buggy stated I don’t know the source of this definition and I don’t know where Strauss Esmay got their definition from. I can get back to you on that.

#### Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda. She stated that there was a hearing today and it will be discussed in executive session.

#### Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved at the regular meeting.

#### Unfinished Business:

Dr. Francis stated he asked that the committee meeting notes be sent in PDF because he is unable to open it in his email.

Mr. Benaquista stated the UTEA, because of COVID, has not spent as much money, so they are giving out gift cards for \$30 and the Town is matching it with \$20 – so they are giving out \$50 gift cards to their UTEA members for stores in Town.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the state of the high school – we need to discuss what is going on about safety; it is embarrassing to the community. We really need to address these issues. The community wants to rally behind you, Dr. Taylor, but is becoming harder because of some of the incidences. We need to have a real conversation and ask for help. There are real issues affecting the high school.

Ms. McKenzie stated you need to convene the school safety committee. Dr. Taylor stated we have increased security and I’m not saying that is the only answer. I will reconvene the committee. We have a lot to do to repair the relationship damage done by the pandemic.

I do have changes I would like to make to the high school for the next school year but I’m not prepared to share at this time.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated who is on the safety and climate culture committee? Dr. Taylor stated I will speak with Mr. Benaquista and we will follow up. Mrs. Brens-Watson stated we are required to have this by Code.

Ms. Santana stated Mr. Benaquista and Dr. Taylor, your presence is needed at the high school. The high school will get better and then the district will get better. I love what you do with the elementary schools but the high school needs you too. Dr. Taylor stated we are there, but we can step it up.

Mrs. Williams stated we need to encourage the students, the school gets a lot of bad publicity and make them realize that these things don't define the entire high school. Dr. Taylor stated social media has taken on a different life post pandemic. I remember videos of fights going viral pre-pandemic but I don't remember them going as viral as they do now – within minutes. I'm trying to find a balance between being defensive of our district and embracing reality that we are dealing with dysfunction right now. Let's be mindful that the perception is a little bit worse than the reality. I'm not saying it is good.

Ms. McKenzie stated perception becomes the reality. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I disagree with Dr. Taylor. Ms. McKenzie stated maybe we need to have a Town Hall meeting at the high school to get parents out to hear them and the kids. Dr. Taylor stated I have a committee coming over tomorrow at 4 p.m. – the parents that are the first goal committee – focused on curriculum.

Dr. Taylor stated the VP situation at the high school, we are down two because they are on medical leave so we are working on adding to the group. Hopefully within the next two weeks we will have a full four vice principal team. I will convene a safety committee meeting in two weeks.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated this Board needs to tour all the school buildings and we need to see with our own eyes so we can make informed decisions and to show that we are invested in those buildings. Dr. Taylor stated March 29<sup>th</sup> will be the Board's tour of the school buildings.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated "hate" "bias" it doesn't matter. The issue of uniformity in terms of the messages that goes out to the community. I appreciate the message from Mr. Hoyt to encourage students to respect other students who wear or don't wear masks. All schools should have these messages.

#### New Business:

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated shout out to Mrs. Cino at the high school for remaining committed to the winter concert. To all the teachers that showed up and for making the concert so inclusive. I sent Dr. Taylor a video of the kids signing jingle bells. It was the best moment and there were beautiful voices and music but the signing of jingle bells touched my heart. Congratulations to our board members whose kids were inducted into the National Honor Society.

#### Comments from the Public:

Brenda Rivera stated regarding the safety on the transportation issues – I hope you looked at my email today. With regard to the safety matter, my daughter comes home from the high school and I feel there is a disconnect with regards to making our students feel safe at the high school or keeping them informed that administration is doing certain things. For example, for weeks my daughter has been talking to me about the transformation of the parking lot and all the solar panels and the investment of money that the district is doing with that and I walk into classrooms and there is missing tiles on the ceiling. Why are they fixing the gym floor when we know kids that can sneak in and out of the high school because they know what doors don't lock throughout the building. There has to be communication. My daughter cannot go to the bathroom because there are kids smoking pot. There is a safety concern that I have as a parent

and I understand why parents are going outside of the district. There has to be some assurance to kids that you are in a safe place, we see the need, not only to us but the community, and to them. Bring them in and let them tell you. I'm sure they can be sincere enough to tell you. The automated messages, lengthy messages, that Dr. Taylor makes. I wish in those messages we addressed real issues. Tell us what the challenges are in the high school. Speak to us. Don't make it seem that the district is perfect, it is not, there are needs that are not being addressed. I ask that there be more transparency; don't share only the good, share with the community the challenges and concerns and maybe we can come together and make a difference.

Kathleen Brunsmeyers stated I heard people talking about the building next door is being sold and the school district is buying it. I don't know but I wanted to let you know it is out there. People think the district is buying the gym. I had read across America week in my classroom and we celebrated the week. Dr. Taylor came in and read one day. I had Mr. Kloc, the secretaries, some parents come in. Last year I had a virtual, Mr. Benaquista sent a story in. I just wanted to thank everybody for that and thank you everyone for your hard work. Congratulations to the parents of the National Honor Society.

Jill Hall stated one of our students at Union High School won the State Oratorical Contest and he is one of my premier delegates in Model UN and he is fabulous, and he is going to national. Can we invite him to a Board meeting? He will get a lot of accolades because he makes his presence known everywhere. Dr. Taylor stated just send me a reminder email. Ms. Hall stated Faith our former winner came back to help him.

#### MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Ms. Santana, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:39 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: litigation update and residency matter.

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, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

**MOTION CARRIED**

Mrs. Brens-Watson left prior to the start of executive session at 8:40 p.m.

The Board returned to public session at 9:39 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Ms. McKenzie, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

All present voting YES

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON  
BOARD SECRETARY

