

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION AGENDA – October 8, 2024

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, October 8, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Ms. Santana called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

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

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. Ronnie McDowell

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Ms. Carbonell led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance and read the district's mission statement.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the "Open Public Meetings Act" that adequate notice was published in The Union County Local Source, The Star Ledger and/or Tap into Union, posted in the Administration Building and the Clerk's Office of the Township; a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:10 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b: personnel, legal update, student HIB appeal

Please take notice that minutes will be taken of the discussion conducted during the executive session and the Board will disclose the minutes of the executive session when the disclosure will not result in unwarranted invasion of individual privacy or prejudice to the best interests of the Board of Education and provided that such disclosure does not violate federal, state or local statutes and does not fall within the attorney/client privilege.

Action may be taken when the Board reconvenes in public session.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 7:03 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Ms. Carbonell, that the Board return to public session at 7:03 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Approval of Minutes:

The minutes will be adopted at the regular meeting of the Board.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel and operations.

Comments from Public (on resolutions being approved):

Mrs. Koon read into the records an email from Lisa Krauze, the School Library Media Specialist at Kawameeh Middle School:

“Ms. Santana,

I'm so glad you were able to stop by the Kawameeh Library last night. As I told you when you were here, I have focused my book budget on purchasing books that are not only diverse in representation, but also in accessibility. Last year, along with John Irwin who was the Bunet librarian, I got a grant to purchase [VOX Books](#) - books that contain an audio component that allows students to listen along as they read printed books. This year, I used a portion of my book budget to expand this collection with similar read-along books - [WonderBooks](#) by Playaway. These books are excellent for students with dyslexia and other reading issues to help decode words and enhance comprehension, for ESL students learning to pronounce words, or for any students who simply want to read along as they hear the narrator make the words come alive. They are proving to be very popular.

I have also focused my budget on buying [large print books](#) where available. They have the same content as regular print books but are easier on the eyes. Large print books make reading more accessible in a number of ways including:

- larger print, with fewer words on each page, makes reading seem to go faster which is encouraging to struggling readers

- increased white space helps readers from skipping words and lines
- students with vision problems will have an easier time reading the words

My rep at Playaway also told me that they are coming out with a new product: Decodables - books that will have 2 modes. One mode will read the story aloud, and the other mode will break down the sounds using phonics. These books could be great for ESL, special ed, and younger grades for young readers. I plan to have a video meeting in a few months to find out more and see a demonstration. I plan to share this information with the librarians in other schools and grades, as well as with teachers and possibly supervisors in other departments.

Thank you and the rest of the board for your continued support.”

Virginia Jefferies indicated that the minutes from the September 10th used the word “stated” and the word “stated” means an exact quote; therefore there were misquotes of members of the public and they need to be updated with the exact quotes.

Ann Margaret Shannon - POL-1 and POL-2 – indicated that they have a meeting on October 9th to discuss these items and asked if voting on same could be postponed. She also mentioned that first reading should be October and final reading should be in November.

Superintendent’s Report:

Superintendent Report will be next week.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

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

Mr. Cohan asked for the Board to be provided with the technology of Atlas for curriculum.

Dr. Rodriguez informed the Board that 250 curricula are being updated; some are major changes because of new standards or just upgraded to stay current.

Mr. Jeremy Cohen, Mrs. Randi Hutchinson and Mr. Craig Wojcik provided a presentation to the Board.

- Atlas is not new but new in this district and digitizes the curricula and is more accessible to parents and staff
- Planning parent meetings in or about December
- It is web based and there is an internal version and a public version
- Unit overview
 - Content
 - Guiding Questions
 - Standards
 - NJ Mandates
 - Assessments
- Core and supplemental unit resources – suggested resources for teachers for students

- At risk of failure students
- Multi language learners
- Gifted and talented
- Special ed/504
- Modifications for the classrooms
- Teachers worked together in a collaborative effort
- Teachers trained over the summer and in September it was part of the PD training
- Family night in December for parents to learn Atlas
- Platform is valuable to our students and teachers

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Minneci – it is a wonderful tool.

Mrs. Mackey – what was feedback from staff? User friendly, great resource.

Ms. Carbonell – happy we are moving forward. Can we do curriculum audits to see if we are hitting the standards? Ms. Hutchinson indicated that the standards report show the percentage; you can look at assessments; give reports to act on.

Ms. Carbonell – assessment platform; student struggles. Mr. Cohen indicated there are two coaches – math/literacy that will work with teachers to have a common assessment. You can make decisions using the data.

Mr. Cohan – thanked the team for their presentation and he is pleased with this new tool; it will move the district in the right direction. Dr. Benaquista indicated that it is a collaborative effort to bring more into the district.

Ms. Santana – when everyone uses this, the teachers will be working collaboratively in all schools so that all students will have the same education.

Mr. Cohan asked the Board to look at E-8 – the nursing plan – and look at what nurses have to do every day.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was reported:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period September 18, 2024 to October 8, 2024, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

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

E-7. APPROVE LO LOGRAMOS CONSULTING – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Approve Lo Logramos Consulting LLC to coordinate two (2) workshops on the October 14, 2024 professional development day entitled “Unlocking Proficiency through WL NJSLS” for district staff members at a cost of \$2,500.00 to be paid for using Title II funds #8434, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Ms. Carbonell presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

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

F-7. APPROVE DISTRICTWIDE STUDENT FIELD TRIPS

Approve districtwide student field trip destinations and purposes pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.8, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-16. APPROVE WEBSTER BANK LEASING & FINANCING – LEASE PURCHASE LOAN

Approve the lease purchase loan from Webster Bank Leasing & Financing, Inc., in the amount of \$1,110,000.00 for equipment lease of three (3) boilers (over a 5-year period) to replace outdated boilers at Burnet Middle School, Livingston Elementary School and Washington Elementary School, that are not functioning efficiently, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-17. APPROVE BOND COUNSEL – WILENTZ GOLDMAN & SPITZER

Approve agreement with Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer for bond counsel services for the various projects the district needs, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Operations and Committee agenda.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mr. Nasta, 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, if applicable, bus evacuation reports for the 2024-2025 school year, in accordance with the non-public information appended to the minutes.

O-2. LETTER FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION RECREATION DEPARTMENT – JEFFERSON SCHOOL PARKING LOT

Letter from Superintendent of Recreation for the Township of Union requesting the use of the Jefferson School parking lot on Saturday October 19, 2024 (rain date Sunday, October 20, 2024) from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. for the Township’s annual Trunk or Treat event, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Minneci – O-2 – Trunk or Treat event, we do this every year. O-3 – UHSPTA - Junior bonfire event has been approved in the past.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey – O-3 - had concerns about the safety and the liability of the district. Dr. Benaquista stated the fire department is involved in this event.

Mr. Taylor indicated that the PTA uses your facilities, and they should have their own insurance.

It was agreed by the Board to move O-3 to the October 15th meeting for vote and Mrs. Scott-Hayden agreed to amend motion to not vote for O-3 this evening.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Policy Committee:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools and the Policy Committee, Mr. Nasta presented the following policies for **FIRST READING**:

POL-1. POLICY 3433.1 – VACATION BLACKOUT DATES

Approve Policy 3433.1 – Vacation Blackout Dates (Teaching Staff Members).

POL-2. POLICY 4433.1 – VACATION BLACKOUT DATES

Approve Policy 3433.1 – Vacation Blackout Dates (Support Staff Members).

DISCUSSION:

Ms. Santana informed the Board that if they had any concerns regarding these policies, it can be pushed out to next month. Mr. Taylor informed the Board that the district's bylaws indicate two meetings, so if the Board wishes to change how policies are approved, it is permissible.

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda.

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey indicated that the realignment special education population committee only has one person who joined, and she is very disappointed and asked how can we connect with people. Ms. McKenzie indicated that we need to tell people to join when other committees are full.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey suggested that if no one else joins, we need to make it a key component in other committees. Dr. Benaquista indicated he would add it to the realignment update. Mr. Cohan suggested reaching out to SEPAG. Ms. Santana suggested to invite the Township ADA committee.

New Business:

None

Comments from the Public

Virginia Jeffries spoke about the following: OPMA, Board Policy, failure to invite members, comments not added to minutes, two claims filed against her, job descriptions from the September 10th agenda, will the positions be advertised; what is the difference between a confidential and an executive administrative assistant.

Kathleen Bruns-Meyers - thinks the UHS PTA is a gold standard PTA and doing an amazing job. She also mentioned she was not sure if it is clear regarding the realignment committees but she will join the special ed committee.

Susan Lipstein – asked if the curriculum are all included; the presentation should be made at the regular meeting and indicated that December is not a good month for a meeting with

parents. She indicated she didn't see anything on the website regarding the alignment committees. She also asked that meetings be on Zoom to reach more people.

Dr. Benaquista advised the community that the curriculum right now is on the website in PDF form. Once the Board approves the curriculum this month, the digital version will go up on the website.

Ms. Santana indicated that from 2012-2020 – 8 years – she was a parent, nobody could stop her from coming to the meetings. The door is open, she will listen to comments and she wants all parents involved.

Ann Margaret Shannon indicated that she will make sure the realignment committees are mentioned at her meetings of October 10 and October 17.

Clay McClaim indicated that he has signed up for the realignment committees to be involved. People here are moving the district forward; continue doing what you are doing.

Dr. Benaquista indicated that it is not just about speaking at Board meetings. We will continue to highlight the positive things and not get sidetracked. Next week we will highlight staff. We will keep pushing forward.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:27 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b: personnel, legal update

Please take notice that minutes will be taken of the discussion conducted during the executive session and the Board will disclose the minutes of the executive session when the disclosure will not result in unwarranted invasion of individual privacy or prejudice to the best interests of the Board of Education and provided that such disclosure does not violate federal, state or local statutes and does not fall within the attorney/client privilege.

Action may be taken when the Board reconvenes in public session.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 9:27 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board return to public session at 9:27 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of School, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Ms. Carbonell, for adoption:

AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT'S DETERMINATION OF HIB - CFES #7

Affirm the Superintendent's determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for case CFES #7 (2023-2024).

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Ms. Carbonell, Mrs. Minneci, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mr. Nasta

MOTION CARRIED

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

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

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

