

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – OCTOBER 8, 2019

NOTICE OF MEETING:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, October 8, 2019 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 7:08 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. Vito Nufrio, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Linda Richardson, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Sherry Higgins

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gregory Tatum, Mr. Gerry Benaquista, Mr. Manuel Vieira, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mrs. Sandra Paul

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.
Afshan Ajmiri Giner, Esq.
School Liaisons – Joshua Tidwell, Pedro Torres, Faith Olayinka, Gianni Guido

Mrs. Richardson led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Vieira 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 being voted on:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week’s meeting.

Communications

Communications are part of personnel and operations.

H. Superintendent’s Report

Mr. Tatum stated the student liaisons will give their report.

Joshua Tidwell stated the freshmen did not come to me with any complaints and after talking with Mrs. Moses and my guidance counselor, Ms. Bridges, it is due to the fact that the freshmen are just settling in. I will promise you that I will have something to say.

Gianni Guido stated I'm a senior and I have a couple of topics. The first one is lunch prices, it is too high and we're running out of money at a rapid pace. I don't know if this is a Board problem, or a Mr. Hoyt problem, but a lot of seniors are saying that the prom date is way too close to finals. Mr. Benaquista stated Mr. Hoyt. The last one is a lot of students say that the bathrooms are closed 9th period so can you close them after school – is this Mr. Hoyt? Mr. Tatum stated this is something you certainly should bring to Mr. Hoyt but if there is no satisfaction gained you can come back to me.

Faith Olayinka stated 11th grade – some of the students were complaining because they thought since there were blue bins in the cafeteria that they are recycling but we were told that our school doesn't have a contract for recycling. So the bottles we think we are recycling are actually going in the dumpster. Mrs. Minneci stated we want to recycle. Mr. Loessel stated we will handle that. The Township picks up our recycling. Faith stated that they take the bottles from the blue bin and they put them in the actual trash. Mr. Nufrio asked who is they? Faith stated the custodians. Some classrooms don't have blinds – something to cover the windows so you can't see the outside because it really not safe when you can see through the window.

Pedro Torres stated first I got a lot of complaints that the lunch is too small. Everyone I have talked to says the lunch is a big improvement from last year but they want bigger portions. The next thing is headband rule; some say they don't understand it. Three, I'm don't know if this is something you can figure out now – the new classroom orientation – switching up and I don't think this concerns the freshmen, so I don't know if there is something that can be done there. Community service opportunities – some people came to me and said how they want the school to post lists and stuff of community service opportunities because not everybody is part of Key Club. They want it posted because they don't know where to get their hours. Club fairs – I got this from a friend and I thought it was a great idea. Last year it was poorly made, it wasn't very organized or advertised. I believe a club fair is very important. It is a way to introduce the freshmen and the other grades of new clubs and stuff. An idea that we had was for a club fair – group for each club – instead of presentations – that way people can go around and experiment and go to different groups and see what the club is about and more advertised than last year. Another point, more fundraising events – last year we had field day and it doesn't have to be a big thing like field day – a raffle or pajama day – that can help fundraise money.

Mrs. Ruiz stated you mentioned the restructuring of the wing – can you explain why you thought it was a nuisance? Pedro stated you have teachers in one place and others in another place – it is a nuisance because things changed from before. You have your teachers in one place. Mrs. Ruiz asked a nuisance because you didn't know about it before you got to school? Pedro stated no, we knew it was going to change we just didn't know where the classrooms were and stuff.

Faith Olayinka stated we have nine periods in the high school, some students are running from science to all the way upstairs and they get to their class late and you could get detention which you don't deserve for being late. Students have to run to their classes.

Mr. McDowell stated for community service you can volunteer for the Relay for Life – May 30th. Pedro stated if there are more opportunities if you can post a list or something. Mr. Benaquista stated years ago they used to have a list each month because community based organizations are looking for people. In the past, as long as you went to your advisor and got a approval for example your church is doing something – you can bring in those hours – you just have to communicate with your advisor. We encourage you to go into the community and volunteer.

Presentation by Izabella Escurra, Union High School student – Girl Scout Service Project. I am in Girl Scout Troop 40092 for the past 12 years and I'm working on my Gold Award and I want to renovate the courtyard for Union High School. As a student of Union High School, there are many students, including myself, who struggled with balancing all school activities and extracurriculars. From homework, to clubs, to outside sports and jobs, it takes over a lot of a student's life. Students become stressed and under so much pressure to move at an extremely fast pace that most people cannot keep up with; this leads to the lack of confidence within students to be dedicated and hardworking. According to an article "The Epidemic of Anxiety Among Today's Students" it states, "by high school, high achieving students face overwhelming pressure to succeed... In the Pew survey of teens, academic pressure tops their list of stressors: 61 percent say they face a lot of pressure to get good grades". Us students are constantly in desire to live up to the standard of being the best of the best while managing school, work, friends, family but unfortunately not all of us can do that; we become stressed and hurt to live up to the expectation of school, and we are constantly told that we just have to keep pushing. But sometimes, not everyone can do that; we all have breaking points and extremely stressful days where sometimes we just need a day or two to be able to relax with our friends or enjoy our own company. My idea of constructing a courtyard for Union High School is the first step to helping relieve the stress for our students and even faculty as a community. See presentation appended to minutes.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I love the idea. Why don't you reach out to Home Depot or Lowes because sometimes they will do a charitable act as long as they can put their name on it.

Mr. Tatum stated next week the high school marching band will perform for us. Also there will be a presentation by the Union Public Library/Friends of Union Public Library regarding the summer reading program awards and lastly the NJSLA test results. Thank you to the students that came tonight.

[Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions](#)

Mrs. Regis-Darby gave a committee report. We met and spoke about ideas for the 2020-21 school year and they are impressive ideas; especially for our high school students.

Mrs. Regis-Darby presented the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

Mr. Taylor stated there is an added one - E-9 on HIB matters.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mr. Nufrio, for adoption:

E-9. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT'S DECISION ON HIB
Affirm the Superintendent's decision on HIB No. LES 2018-2019 #3.

AYE: Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio, Mrs. Regis-Darby,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated E-7 – congratulations to the district – instruction and program which heads underneath the Education Committee – it went from 60% to 80% - that is really good. I'm so proud to be sitting here as a Board member and kudos to the district.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions

Mrs. Richardson gave an update of the committee meeting. She said that Mr. Vieira gave the finance committee an overview of the fiscal picture for the school district. It seems that we are in good shape. We discussed several matters and some need to be taken care of and there is funding available. Hamilton School has mold and that is under control – Mr. Loessel is taking care of that. Mr. Vieira assured us that there is funding to take care of that matter. We discussed transfers, positions that are opened and being filed and he gave us an overview of where we are financially. We are in better shape than we were last year. We had a reduction in health benefits for \$150,000. Mr. Vieira stated our health benefits have decreased due to the fact that the TA's in the district who have 1-3 years of service are now employed on a part-time basis. They are not eligible for health benefits and it is something the district can no longer afford.

Mr. Nufrio stated you probably read that the State health benefits program has indicated that there was a reduction in premiums. I know we don't have State health benefits and we have a contract but that is something we need to look into for the next contractual year. There is a sizeable savings that could be realized. It would be foolish not to look into it. Mr. Benaquista stated we met with the broker and the broker said where we fall right now and the plan we have with Horizon, it is way under the State health benefits. They did bring that to our attention as well. There are some other things going on with benefits in the State. Mrs. Richardson stated is it correct that you have to pay a penalty to get back into the State benefits? Mr. Vieira stated that is true. Mrs. Richardson stated then we would be looking at additional costs to get back into the State benefits plan. Mr. Vieira stated our health broker does an analysis on all the different plans that are out there and then they give us a recommendation on what is the best cost and most beneficial to us. Mr. Nufrio stated I still would like to see a comparison of that. Along with saving some premium money, the State health benefits does not require a broker so there is a savings there.

Mrs. Richardson presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Nufrio stated F-4 – transfers – I'm sure all transfers were vetted by Mr. Tatum. Mr. Tatum stated yes.

Mr. Nufrio stated it is important to note that in the meeting that we had it was indicated that there were no proposals submitted for bids for outside buses. Mr. Vieira stated the non-public students through the Union County Ed Services Commission – we go out for bid for transportation – this year the bid for Union Catholic and Roselle Catholic – non-public students, we didn't get any bidders. In lieu of providing a bus for those students, we pay the parents \$1,000 per student. There was some concerns that students didn't have a bus but we didn't get any bidders for the routes. Mr. Nufrio stated which is a cost factor of about \$400,000. Mr. Vieira stated we have about 400 non-public students that receive the aid-in-lieu of per statute. Mr. Nufrio stated have you been able to respond to some bid submissions. Mr. Vieira stated usually the bids come in a little less than \$1,000 per student. Mr. Nufrio asked are we going to attempt to resubmit a bid. Mr. Vieira stated we can't because we pay \$500 in the fall and \$500 in the spring. We won't rebid for this school year. Dr. Morgan stated you may want to reconsider because as a parent of a Roselle Catholic student we were able to get a bus on our own. Mr. Tatum stated it is the jointure commission that puts the bids out and Mr. Taylor explained that once before.

Mr. Taylor stated the county is the legal agency. Dr. Morgan stated you probably would have gotten a cheaper bid. Mr. Taylor stated every year public school districts across the State go out for bid for transportation services for in-district students as well as the non-public schools. The public entity can't force a private company to respond to a bid. The district went out twice for bids, no one responded and/or they responded in piece meal fashion for certain routes. This is an issue that I have seen other districts that I represent for whatever reason market force/market conditions, these bus companies aren't volunteering for some of these routes for whatever reason. This isn't something that the administration is at fault for, it is really the county's issue because the county is the lead agency. Some of these questions could and should be directed to them as to what initiatives or efforts they are or can be doing to enhance the attractiveness.

Dr. Morgan asked can our transportation talk to the county? I don't think it should be parents. Mr. Taylor stated the same way parents come here to express concerns and accolades and complaints to the school district, parents can go to the county as well. Board members can do it in their individual capacity. We can look at that contracting relationship with the county. It is probably cheaper to total it all together and do the routes and companies still have not responded. Perhaps we want to look next year as to whether Union wants to individually solicit bids for your routes and see if it is a cost benefit or not but just the timing of this year's efforts which again were done twice by the County didn't result in any successful or responsive bids for the routes in question. Board members have expressed your concerns and empathy on behalf of the community as well as the administration. It is not something they can control. If they could there would be transportation.

Mr. Tatum stated Mrs. Calderone, the supervisor of transportation, made several efforts and the County was uncooperative. She came to me several times and was willing to rebid the route at one point and to put it out ourselves but I think there were some restrictions that we couldn't do it on our own because they have a contract – I may not be 100% correct but I do know she made several attempts.

Mr. Nufrio stated any entity that would be considered would need to be an approved entity by the State. Mr. Tatum stated correct.

Mr. Taylor stated you already paid the aid-in-lieu of transportation for half the year to parents. Whether it would cost you more or less for busing, it is more convenient for a bus to be provided versus a check to be provided. Perhaps the Board can request the administration to meet with the County soon to get a sense of what occurred, what is the plan for next year so that the Board can figure out whether there is any contractual obligations that they are bound by or if there are ways to separate from the County and take steps in the spring for the next school year. Dr. Morgan stated so we can get notified earlier.

Mr. Vieira stated I also wanted to mention that we, the Union Board of Ed, went out to bid for transportation for field trips and we advertised twice and in the past Villani would bid and was awarded the bid, this time nobody bid. Dr. Morgan stated that is who the parents have for Roselle Catholic. Mr. Vieira stated I don't understand why they didn't respond to our bids. Mr. Tatum stated I thought they were capitalizing on this because they are making separate deals with parents.

Mrs. Ruiz stated F-18 – I saw a very high dollar amount for two law firms and my question is the legal fees – how far back do they expand – is that a month worth? Mr. Vieira stated from July 1st. Mrs. Ruiz stated we have two law firms, two pretty big lump sums – what are the dates of service. Mr. Vieira stated three months, we get billed for July, we pay it in August. Mr. Taylor stated looking at this there is a DiFrancesco firm. Mr. Benaquista stated that is an outside firm doing an investigation. Mr. Taylor stated we serve as your Board attorneys. Mulcahy firm is special counsel. Mr. Benaquista stated there are three firms for special counsel. Mrs. Ruiz asked the Mulcahy firm, that is one of the firms approved over the summer for investigations. Mr. Benaquista stated I would have to check. For outside attorneys we do a not to exceed \$5,000. If it is in excess of \$5,000 it is not one of them. Every investigation is not to exceed \$5,000 unless another resolution gets on the agenda to extend that. Mrs. Ruiz stated when I see the total for the Purcell, Mulcahy firm – it says it is \$75,000. Mr. Vieira stated that is the total for all firms.

Mr. Taylor stated in accordance with the Board's request, you have received our monthly status update. There are 2-3 dozen matters we are handling – some in litigation, some are special litigation which do consume a lot of time and effort as well as day-to-day counseling with the administration, Board and committees. We are happy to discuss any questions or issues that Board members may have. Mrs. Richardson stated last month's bill was \$33,000.

Mr. Taylor stated my associate Courtney Knight is here this evening to give you a litigation update in executive session on the Ionta/Lowery vs Union Township Board of Education matters and that will also fill in some gaps.

Operations Committee Resolutions

Mrs. Richardson gave an update of the committee meeting. She stated Hamilton school is having a meeting in November but the area that has mold has been completely cut off – it is in the basement and it is being fixed.

Mrs. Richardson presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Minneci asked Mr. Loessel to give an update on Connecticut Farms. Mr. Loessel stated when we started construction on the driveway – a regular parking space is 8-10 feet, we made the gate 24 feet. They say it is too narrow and now we have to cut the fence post and do it over again. It will take another week or two to get that done.

Mrs. Minneci stated it is a security fence. Mr. Loessel stated it's a security fence when the cars go in, the kids will be unloaded from the buses and we don't want anybody to go through there so the fence will be up there to stop that.

Mr. Nufrio stated O-4 – I asked Mr. Loessel whether or not the Hamilton situation will be rectified sufficiently so that it does not put any of these individuals in jeopardy. Mr. Loessel stated the people there are in no jeopardy. The mold is in the basement and is all secured. As long as nobody goes down and disturbs it, it won't go airborne. I met with three remediation companies. One was \$45,000, the cheapest was \$16,000 – we talked to Manny the other day on how we will fund this. Mr. Nufrio stated is there a time frame that this needs to be complied with. Mr. Loessel stated as long as the mold is not blowing around the school, no. We have it contained in one spot. Mr. Nufrio asked the air was tested? Mr. Loessel stated every classroom, hallway and downstairs was tested. The mold level is very low but there is black mold down there. At the end of the remediation we will have another test. Mr. Nufrio stated all this was reported to OSHA. Mr. Loessel stated OSHA was called in so we have to report to them right now where we stand and what our reports are. They won't come out because they know we are doing our due diligence and getting everything cleaned up. Mr. Nufrio asked have we had any complaints from individuals? Mr. Loessel stated every day we get complaints. We sit in mold every day but it is the black mold that needs to be cleaned up and that is contained. Mr. Nufrio stated how have the district responded to these individuals who complained or will complain about suffering some setbacks? Mr. Taylor stated can we discuss that in closed session. When you talk about whether employees have expressed concern about health, that would fall under attorney client privilege pending and or anticipated litigation and that would fall under workers compensation. Mr. Nufrio stated I wanted to know how we responded to these individuals other than just what Mr. Loessel is saying. Mr. Taylor stated that would not be appropriate for discussion in public. Let me give you a hypothetical – an employee submitted a letter to the superintendent, to your question – have we responded to people who submitted claims or questions – if his answer was no and that was three months ago, does that person now have more of a claim for the employer failing to respond – now we have it on public record that it was that

way. Some things fall within the fiduciary obligation of accepting the body corporate politic which is the public school district – you have fiduciary obligations to protect that – not to cover up things however not to unnecessarily disclose information that would harm, effect or impact the financial standing of the school district. The goal is to mitigate damage not to enhance and expose damage. Mr. Nufrio stated my question was not intended. Mr. Taylor stated I’m not saying it was. Mr. Nufrio stated I was being genuine. Mr. Taylor stated it was a great question but it is for closed session.

The discussion item regarding the request from Vauxhall Historical Society will be added to the agenda for approval next week.

Personnel Committee Resolutions

Mrs. Williams presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

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

P-1A. PERSONNEL ACTIONS – NEW HIRES

Personnel Actions-New Hires be approved in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member.

P-1B PERSONNEL ACTIONS – EXTRA PAY

Personnel Actions-Extra Pay be approved in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member.

During vote Mr. Nufrio stated as advised by counsel that those of us who may have a conflict in the district, that perhaps we should cover all bases in the event that Mr. Benaquista’s office or we failed to notice any name that we may be conflicted; although I don’t see any. I will recuse myself on employee #10897 – that does not mean that this individual is getting anything in this particular meeting.

AYE: Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio, Mrs. Regis-Darby,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mr. Nufrio (Employee #10897)
Mrs. Minneci (Employee #8933)

MOTION CARRIED

Policy Committee

Nothing to report under Policy Committee.

Residency Committee Resolutions

Mrs. Williams presented the Residency Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked have we considered October 31st in the residency meeting? Mr. Tatum asked what do you mean? Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the removal of the students, have we considered the October 31st deadline. Mr. Tatum stated you mean the 15th. Mrs. Regis-Darby asked can we remove after next week? Mrs. Minneci asked can we move these to the next meeting. Mr. Vieira stated moving these three students to the November meeting. Mr. Taylor stated there is no legal requirement to take action on these matters tonight or next Tuesday. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated that is my suggestion. Mr. Taylor stated there is no legal obligation to vote on this tonight I would suggest we move on and I do have some updates on attorney/client privilege in closed session and I will be happy to continue this conversation.

Technology Committee

Mr. Nufrio stated we did have a meeting this evening; there will be upcoming situations pertaining to UHS Chromebooks. Mrs. Paul doesn't that also involve the middle schools? Mrs. Paul stated no just UHS. Mr. Nufrio stated the Chromebooks have a span of life which is due to expire. I did question whether we were cognoscente of that when we made the lease purchase of these Chromebooks. They were not used but the manufacturing of the items preceded the time that we purchased them by three years so essentially since they normally come with a 6-year life span, that no longer applies except I did question whether or not the contract, this is another possibility of our attorneys making more money, is to look into the contract to see if there is anything in that contract that would possibly give us a position to argue and to present to Google. I understand that it is already an idea being discussed among many others – possible class action lawsuit that the items we purchased did not come with a disclosure. Depending on the contracts, perhaps there is something there that would put us in a position where we can say to them you never told us this. In essence in making a new agreement, they should give us some credit in an ideal situation. That is something that needs to be looked at. Once the 6-year period expires, those Chromebooks are useless, they cannot be used. It is already embedded in the budget, Mr. Vieira confirmed it, for the new lease purchase agreement but before we go ahead and ink any contract, it should be reviewed. If there is nothing there, then there is nothing there. I was disturbed by the fact that they didn't bother to tell us.

There is a district agreement with Lincoln Tech for interns to be assigned to our district – two individuals – it is similar to what teachers do their field work. I did ask if there is any payment to the district for that and I don't believe there is. Mr. Vieira can look into that as well. It would be minimal and usually it is a nominal fee paid to the teacher who is receiving the individual in the classroom but this is different. These two individuals will be doing repair work. We are getting service out of them.

There is a "Girls Who Code" program coming to the table for both UHS and middle schools and this is for and I commented that "girls" wasn't the appropriate word – it certainly is not politically correct. These are technically not girls they are women. It suggests a young person rather than an adult. They are going to be doing the recoding for the ID cards. There will be a demonstration by Clear Touch and a scheduled demo for U-Sonic. Can you give a quick overview of that?

Mrs. Paul stated we are looking on what we should be doing with smartboards – they are slowly becoming obsolete. The technology has changed so much over the years. We have been looking at different companies to bring in to do a demo. We had Clear Touch this week at Kawameeh and Mr. Malanda, Ms. Lorenzo and some 8th grade teachers were there. They could see it and ask questions. We have another company U-Sonic coming in too. We are trying to be proactive on finding a way on how to replace these devices that are dying. Everything that is workable we will keep working but as time goes by and we have to replace something, we would like to have an idea on what we can replace it with. Mr. Wojcik came up with an idea that is really great. He implemented it at Battle Hill, Washington and Kawameeh. It works but it may not work for everybody especially if you have little kids and they need to touch the board. High school and middle school teachers might not need kids to walk up to the board to touch it. At the elementary level you may need to come up with a touchable device. Mr. Wojcik stated we are looking for solutions for all scenarios. We want it to be a universal thing for the district so no matter what school you are going to they have the same options and resources.

Mr. Nufrio stated the more important aspect of this is it would be half the cost of the smart boards. Mrs. Paul stated the solution Mr. Wojcik came up with is half the cost of the smart boards. Mr. Wojcik stated that is upfront, long term is cheaper as well. You don't have the cost of bulbs – everything is modular. If something breaks, you replace individual pieces or upgrade individual pieces.

Mr. Nufrio stated I did ask if we had any plans on what to do with the smart boards. The answer was we are going to do it on an as needed basis. We might retain a lot of the smart boards for special situations that may arise.

Mrs. Paul stated the last item has to do with phones. We still have a dinosaur of a system. We are in the investigative process right now – work in process. We will report after they do more research as to what company may be more suitable. I included Mr. Loessel and Mr. Benaquista in the process because the State requirements of notifications. There are other things you can use the phones for – notifications and security.

Mr. Nufrio stated you are looking at neighboring districts who already implemented major changes. Mrs. Paul stated yes and I even contacted our Town to ask what they use. I'm reaching out to everywhere.

Approval of Bills

Bills will be approved at next week's meeting.

Unfinished Business

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated last year's school meal balance – has that been paid off? Mr. Vieira stated no. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated can the policy committee look at the lunch policy because I noticed a \$75 minimum before the parents are being contacted to let them know that they owe for a school balance. Mr. Vieira stated we have a three-step notification. Mr. Benaquista stated there was a company that was reaching out to our previous BA and I saw several emails stating I'll contact you when I'm ready. He wasn't ready to take on this and it is still an issue. It should have been dealt with months ago. Me and Mr. Vieira did talk about

getting a conference with this person again and seeing what we need to do to have that taken care of. To be fair to Mr. Vieira it got thrown on his lap.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated this list I was handed – it says for a high school before they even tell a parent that they are delinquent they have to get to \$25 before the first attempt to reach out to a parent. Mr. Benaquista stated we need to look at our Board policy to update it. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we need to look at it immediately. Once the student's account reaches \$75 then they will receive an alternate meal which is a cheese sandwich which is the same cost as a regular meal that we are paying. It doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Taylor stated this is an issue that districts across the State are facing. Invite your vendor to come in to describe the federal national lunch program – the reimbursement rates, the charging rates, etc. In some instances it costs you more to throw away a meal versus to give it to someone. The fees are strictly within your policy and whether you want to give a humanitarian meal versus a regular meal. Your vendor can fill in some of the blanks with that.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated this is actually in our policy so the policy committee needs to take a look at this. Mr. Taylor stated the vendor can help explain to the committee the pricing structures.

Mrs. Hart stated My School Bucks – when your balance is getting low - \$10 or something – it tells you that your balance is getting low and then you get 2-3 emails saying your balance is low. It is us contacting the parents when they hit the \$25. The parents already know. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated only if the parents use school bucks some parents don't and only if you set it up that way. You can set it up not to receive messages.

Mrs. Ruiz stated then there are parents that are just going to ignore it. Mrs. Hart stated they said they send two messages that your balance is low but they don't keep telling you that your balance is low or negative and it keeps accruing.

Mrs. Ruiz stated it is October 8th, I'm positive that our deficit right now is in the five figures. Mr. Vieira stated it's not that much - \$30,000. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated it is ridiculous. Mrs. Ruiz stated in that case we will hit over a quarter million dollars by June if we don't fix it.

Mr. Taylor stated have your vendor come into the committee to explain some of these issues. One of the issues is how you can promote parents to sign up for free and reduced lunch. A lot of times these balances balloon because parents and students who are eligible are not signing up – for whatever reason, sometimes it is that they didn't know. If you can have initiatives at school events, community events, etc., get those forms filled out, it can help you.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated some of the deli slice machines in the elementary schools are not working. Mr. Loessel stated that lady calls me every day with a problem and she never said anything about those. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated at Kawameeh. Mr. Benaquista stated I did hear something but I'm sure if it was continual you should have heard about it.

New Business

Dr. Morgan stated I think I brought this up last year so I'm going to bring it up now because it is early in the year. Suspension data – whether or not that can be included in our reports. Staff attendance data and you already report attendance. Mr. Tatum stated I report that every month. Dr. Morgan stated I would like to see suspension data. Mr. Tatum stated we can do that – it would be middle and high schools. Dr. Morgan stated I would like to see if it is first occurrence, second occurrence – what we should be looking at – students who are being suspended multiple times and whether we are putting interventions in place.

Mrs. Richardson stated I went to the Union County School Board Association meeting last week for school budget and finance basics. During that meeting there was an update from Dr. Lawrence Feinstein, executive director, there is an alarming increase in mental health issues within the school districts. He said there has been an increase in suicides – 84 suicides in the last two years with 24 students treated for attempted suicide. Sixteen percent of students are considered to have mental illness untreated. Twelve percent are suffering from anxiety. Twenty percent of 13-18 years old are at risk and fifty percent of the 15-18 year olds do not receive any mental health care. There is a video they prepared – “Building a Foundation for Hope” and it will be available to all school district in the future. He also suggested that we look within our own school districts to get a school board task force crisis prevention. I just wanted to mention this. Hearing this information, it was very alarming to hear that there was an increase in suicide. There is so much anxiety and they need to know that it is o.k. to get counseling and aid. If we do more mindfulness and let them know and teach them how to distress. The services are there but people are unaware – so we need to get the word out.

Comments from the Public

Mr. Guzman stated I think that support for mental health is vital; however, when addressing it as a school district we should also look into resources for families as a whole, not just the individual student. A lot of these issues that these young folks are facing come from or are a result of family issues. Provide families with the resources that they can tap into to get the support they need.

Technology – what is the end of life on the lease agreement for the Chromebooks – 3-5 year lease? I have been in IT for 18 years and three years is usually average. We can't expect technology to last that long. The Chromebooks lasting three years is a pretty decent rate. Keep an eye on them and think of the different model options. Different models can create longer lease terms that can save money at the end of the day.

Mr. Wojcik mentioned an idea he had – did he say what the idea is? Mr. Taylor stated members of the public, ask your questions, make your comments and when they finish the Board and administration can answer if they are able.

Mr. Guzman stated I would ask that you consider making these changes to help offset the costs. If you are thinking on bringing in new technology and UHS is the focus, then use the UHS smart boards as replacement inventory for the smaller schools if the smaller schools need the hands on touching. Decommission some of them so that you are using them to replace as things break.

The nurse situation – we have a son with a health situation and the nurses in this district have been superb – from Miss Chi at Washington to Miss Holder at Kawameeh and now the nurses at the high school, they are fantastic. I just wanted to commend them on their level of professionalism and hard work that they put in – in taking care of our kids.

Kathleen Brunsmeyer stated last year at meetings I was told they were developing a plan to get the money back – either collections or something. Where we started or finished last year with and what happened with the outstanding balances from the lunch from last year – which were probably over a half million dollars.

Can someone tell me the actual policy regarding lunch? Mr. Monge stated 3570.

Ms. Brunsmeyer stated last year I was fortunate to go to Cranford High School to see “Anx the Movie” – it was all about anxiety – it was a documentation on kids and young adults and how they deal with anxiety and getting through school and debilitating anxiety. I believe the name of the company is Indy Flicks. This was an incredible presentation. I wanted to take my daughter and her friends to go. It needs to be seen by everyone. It was incredible and moving. I would love to have that kind of presentation and program here in our district.

The substitute situation in this district is abominable. We can’t get subs to fill in across the board. We are pulling people from one position to cover another position. I would love to not have everybody pulled. What can we do at this point? We used to get so many subs. I don’t know why they are not taking it; I don’t know what the new company we are hiring subs through. I just hope we can try to get it together. We are killing the good people. I would love to see everybody happy and able to do their job and taking care of children in the proper way.

Alex Balaban stated about the substitutes – if we hired this outside firm, do they advertise for substitutes. The school boards I served on there was never a problem with substitutes. We had a long list of substitutes that the Board approved at the beginning of the school year and there was never a problem filling the substitutes for the course of the school day. I don’t know how this company deals with this issue. There is a critical need for substitutes in each school building there should be outreach and advertisement to that. Dr. Morgan stated there are no subs. I have worked in two different school districts in the last three years – one used a company, one did not – there is a shortage of substitutes statewide.

Mr. Benaquista stated the company doesn’t start until October 15th. The same amount of subs from last year carried over and every month we were approving 20-30 people new to our district. There are plenty of subs in our system. The subs need to take the job and that is something we can’t force them to do but we never stop hiring subs. Mr. Balaban asked how much do we pay subs? Mr. Benaquista stated \$100 for non-certified.

Chasity Santana stated E-4 – approve school nurse service plan – I’m not sure what the information is but I would like to say please note when making decisions on our school nurses, they are an integral part of our school community. There was a time when I only had a general ed child they were merely there for boo boos, immunizations, and it wasn’t until many of you

know he became a Type I diabetic that I knew what it actually was that our nurses do. It is literally a life and death situation with my son. My school nurse is my son's walking pancreas while he is at school. With respect to the plan, my question is – is this plan changing structure, hierarchy. I always found it odd that the person in charge of the nurses is not a nurse. Are we doing something with a head nurse? Is this the new service plan implementing, proposing? The public has the right to know what integral changes are being proposed or asked about when it is specifically to our school nurses.

O-3 – the approval of school emergency management plan – until I became a parent of a child with an IEP or 504, I always thought we just go with the flow but then what I found out is that I personally put things into play, into my IEPs and 504s that have to do with my children's school emergency plans. For example, my one son has a life saving device on him, in his body and it is attached to a phone. I sit down with all my teachers and I specifically tell them – what's the plan when there is a shootout and my kids over here beeping because he is too high or too low? We put kids in a closet, under a desk, what are we really doing. Like I said, I write it in to my 504 or IEP so when I see approve school emergency management plan, are we taking our IEP and/or 504 children into effect because it is something that is statewide.

With lunch, I have five different children – three in one school and two in another and what I can tell you I get calls for – on a building level – from one of my principals saying your child has a debt and then I look into the account, I forget about it, but I never get a follow-up. The other school I got one call and I get the My School Bucks and technology but last time I checked, in order to have a child, you don't have to have a phone or an app. We can't always digress to it's on the school lunch app. It is probably those people without phones that are owing the money. We have to find a way because it's \$30,000 and we are only in October and it is going to get more and more because people are not filling out free and reduced application.

Mr. Loessel – I have done 15 book fairs at Washington – the gym clock is right twice a day – 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. – can you help me out with that?

Cathy Sharpe stated I'm happy with the new cafeteria service; everything seems to be going well. The portions on the elementary level – if they ate everything we would have to carry them upstairs. They order a bagel – they get a bagel, cream cheese/butter, juice, carrots, fruit and a yogurt. They eat the bagel and then I see them heading towards the trash can. I say no, put it on the table. We do put it out on the table so if somebody is still hungry they can eat it. The chicken nuggets are tenders and they give them 5-6. When they get pancakes, there were 10-12 silver dollar pancakes. The portions are great.

I do have something to complain about. All of sudden in the cafeteria, the knives and the forks were gone and there was a utensil about the size of a pencil – it was a combination spoon/fork. It does not work; especially for my special ed kids who have PT problems. I went to the head person and I said what happened to the knives and forks and she said all I know they called me and told me to take all the knives and forks out of the cafeteria and they sent them the sporks and she said she thinks it is for safety purposes. Two days later all the knives came back but not the forks. To me a kid running around with a knife is just as dangerous as running

around with a fork. Have some regular plastic forks there for these children who can't eat with the sporks. It is frustrating. Who do I contact about this? Mr. Vieira stated I will handle it.

Lydia stated thank you to the UTEA for all the negotiations. I am very happy where I am and I hope it stays this way and next year will come along better.

Mr. Monge stated we are asked to ask the questions and wait until the end – this is my third month I asked a bunch of questions and haven't gotten any response. Hopefully next week there will be responses to the items that I brought up over the last couple of months. One in particular was what actually happened to the paras. Of those 90, how many are still in the district, how many lost benefits and things of that nature. I can send another email. Mr. Tatum stated don't send an email, set up an appointment. Mr. Monge stated it is not just for me I think it is important for the public to hear it. I can report on our discussion but it is not just for Jeff Monge it is for other folks too.

Hamilton – I have been talking about Hamilton for a couple of years – to have the district save money. The cost of running it last year was about \$100,000. Now we have black mold issues. It is a building that is going to cost us more money than anything else. You need to look at the potential of moving the folks in there to spaces we do have available in the district to save money – either lease or sell the building for future use.

The lunch policy – it isn't a dollar policy. It says at the building if a kid is in arrears than the principal is supposed to notify the parent. Ten days after that notification, if there is no answer, then there is another stop and 10 days after that there is another step. It is a building issue. Food services you talk to; it is a policy thing.

The emergency plan – I used to bring that up every year. I would always ask and Mr. Benaquista would have an answer. Has there been consideration for not only students with special needs but also the staff members in those plans and every time I asked the question they have always said yes. I don't know how that is communicated to parents but it is a fair concern especially for some kids that have issues, especially with physical disabilities.

Connecticut Farms – have we every spoken to the parents and PTA about a plan? Now we will spend more money into a plan that parents had an issue with because they weren't spoken to. I implore you, before you spend more money, please talk to the parents.

The maintenance plan – I spoke about this in previous years. Last year, I said how did you come up with these numbers. You had bigger buildings getting less money than smaller buildings – it doesn't make sense. I timed out and didn't get back on the Board and never got an answer. I see the new plan and it is the same thing – no rhyme or reason but the scope of work for everything you are approving, is the same for every building. The administration building has a budget for \$40,525. Connecticut Farms is at \$39,000. It is a school and it is bigger than this place. Battle Hill - \$33,000 – much bigger than this place. There is no rhyme or reason.

Looking at the actual numbers versus what was budgeted – Washington School - \$26,000 under budget; Hannah - \$40,000 under budget; Hamilton - \$33,000 over budget.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated community service – at UHS the kids would get an hour of service for donating a pair of socks and I don't think that is community service. What I would really like to see – I work at St. Joe's every once in a while – I would really like to consider our own neighbors. I would love to have a kid come down my street and shovel my snow or mow my lawn.

I like the courtyard idea – my only concern would be the classrooms that are around it. Mr. Benaquista stated when we were speaking about taking care of that. Totally against any GPA requirement; that is a negative spin on what you are trying to accomplish.

Technology – I too was confused when they were talking about Craig's solutions but I think what he said we were using television with modular pieces and things like that.

I have mentioned many times as the UTEA president that we have money and I have said that NJEA will finance – we do something called PRIDE in town, there is something called FAST – family and schools together, if someone could come up and they wanted to do a medical health fair, a movie night – if you come up with these ideas and share them with us, we can help finance this stuff. I have said it before but I will continue on saying it and I hope you take advantage of it.

We need more paras and everyone is working really hard to try to make it work. I hope as a team we get it done.

Susan Lipstein stated the education foundation had a pizza tasting two weeks ago. The Key Club reached out to me at the last minute for community service and I told her we would be needing people. We had 15 students – they were unbelievably wonderful. If anyone says anything negative about Union High School, let them talk to me. I told them to come at 3:30 and I got there earlier and some of the kids were already there. On their own they just did everything. They were wonderful and I can't say enough and you should be very proud. Pedro was one of them and I can't say enough about him. It was a wonderful night and it was financially successful.

Richard D'Avanzo stated a while ago we talked about health benefits and in the last contract negotiations – the UTEA came up with the savings – both our members and the Board as well, a substantial amount of savings by switching plans. After this upcoming election, we are expecting to hear movement regarding Chapter 78 – the amount which public employees pay for their health benefits. When you think you are getting a raise, a lot of that money leaves your pocket for health benefits. We are hoping that it moves on the assembly side. We have a lot of sponsors. We hear positive things. It will save the Board money as well as taxpayers. It will help alleviate these costs. One of the things we don't have in our coverage is glasses, contact lenses. Hopefully after election day will have much better news to alleviate issues financially for everyone.

Mr. Taylor stated you have already spoken once and the Board's policy is you get one chance. We will let you speak this time but please be brief.

Alex Balaban stated I'm in PERS myself and what they did with the CWA contract with the Chapter 78, CWA was able to escape from Chapter 78 by crafting their own modified contract. What the State is doing now is transferring everyone into Horizon. The State is projecting health insurance costs overall with be 2-3% less than this year.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Richardson, that the Board go into Executive Session at 9:14 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.

- Pending or anticipated litigation, contract negotiation and matters falling under the attorney-client privilege – Ionta v Lowery and Agenda item F-12.

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: Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio, Mrs. Regis-Darby,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 10:51 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Richardson, seconded by Mrs. Williams, that the meeting be adjourned at 10:51 p.m. All present voting YES **MOTION CARRIED**

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**MANUEL E. VIEIRA
BOARD SECRETARY**