

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION  
WORKSESSION MINUTES – November 10, 2020

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, November 10, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. via ZOOM, pursuant to the notice sent to each member.

Mrs. Minneci called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Dr. Guy Francis, Mrs. Sherry Higgins, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. Vito Nufrio, Mrs. Linda Richardson, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gregory Tatum, Mr. Gerry Benaquista, Mrs. Fernanda Manochio, Mrs. Diane Cappiello, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mrs. Sandra Paul

ALSO PRESENT:

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

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

Mrs. Cappiello 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. Williams read the District’s mission statement.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

To be approved next week.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Communications are part of personnel and operations.

Superintendent’s Report:

Mr. Tatum stated tonight is an overview of what to expect next week. There is a presentation on an equity journey by Dr. Falaise and there will be an overview of our AP program – Mr. Benaquista will be presenting data next week on past years on our AP program and what is the criteria that has been implemented over the past two years. There will be an update on school re-entry and also conditions of the district. One of the things that has been

reported to me while our architects have been going around doing assessments, there were some areas they found of concern. Some of those areas have been addressed. There will be more information coming up about the change in schedules that we have worked on over the last week or so to facilitate a hybrid re-entry. We are also watching very closely the numbers in the State in terms of the number of cases that have started to rise and what we are hearing there may be some additional intervention by the Governor. All those things will be pertinent to what we actually discuss and present next week.

#### Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Ruiz gave an update from the Education Committee meeting. Mrs. Ruiz stated last night the Education Committee met and we discussed a few items. The first one is E-3 and that is the Kean articulation agreement; that agreement will allow our senior students to take a course in the spring of 2021 called Intro to Public Speaking and the course will be free for any student who is eligible to take it. You must have a minimum GPA of 3.0.

We also discussed ELA diverse texts. I am very happy to share with everyone that we are updating the novels that we use in ELA from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades to better reflect the demographics of the students we have in the district. We will have a more diverse selection of supplemental novels that the students will be reading and those novels will have authors or discussed themes that are more diverse – LGBTQ, immigration, etc. so we are happy to see that change for our students. Mrs. Moran expressed that after reviewing the supplemental texts that were used in our district they were very euro centered and didn't really accurately reflect our student body.

We also discussed the honors/AP criteria which is currently being reviewed and revised with an ultimate goal of giving more students the opportunity to take AP classes and diversifying the student body in our AP classes – that is also really good news.

On diversifying the supplemental novels for our ELA classes, it is going to start this year so we will see those new novels rolling out in the second marking period. Our students are obviously virtual, so we will see a lot of them in e-format and be able to access them online.

Kudos to our department and our district for bringing in a sociologist to provide the framework and support for our teachers so that they are better prepared and more sensitive in dealing with conversations that deal with social inequalities because obviously those conversations are going to come up now.

We also discussed our student liaisons and when they will be joining us again. I know Mr. Benaquista was going to look into that for us.

We discussed the PSAT which is currently scheduled for late January for our juniors and whether or not that date will still allow our students the ability to be competitive for National Merit Scholarships to be considered for them.

Finally, we discussed the UHS Halaqa Club which is on our agenda as E-2. That was pulled from our agenda at the last meeting for further discussion and after being reviewed by our attorneys, it was determined that we can consider it for the next meeting to vote.

Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Cappiello will be pushing out the short opinion so all the Board members will have that in their email tonight. Mrs. Cappiello stated it is in their email right now. Mr. Benaquista stated so next everyone knows, as far as the background and the reason for voting on that and approving it.

Mrs. Ruiz presented the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

#### DISCUSSION:

Dr. Morgan stated thank you for the detailed report and I'm happy to see that we are getting some literature for all of our students but I do have some questions regarding the sociologist you said will be coming to speak on social inequalities. Will there be any training on cultural responsiveness teaching for our staff so that they will know how to deal with our students from different cultures and backgrounds? My second question was the PSAT – why was it so late? January is a bit late for PSAT because many students, particular juniors, are starting to take the SATs at that time and three, any plans to offer any additional courses through Kean University. Many colleges, NJIT, Rutgers Newark, they offer their catalogs on basic level courses to students. You only mentioned one, intro to public speaking and I wonder if we can allow students that are taking honors courses, Spanish, English, math, who will be able to have dual enrollment. Although we focus a lot on AP, currently research is showing that dual enrollment is key because students can enter college with credits. I'm wondering if we can get Kean University to offer some courses to our high achieving students so they can walk out of high school with college credits.

Mrs. Ruiz stated we discussed I believe all three of those items. Mrs. Moran did explain to us yesterday that the sociologist did provide a framework for our teachers but also support to be able to deal with those topics in a culturally sensitive way and that individual will continue to provide support throughout the school year – that was my understanding.

With regards to the PSAT, I was told that the date was selected because we are still all virtual and there was no tentative opening date in this marking period so the College Boards allowed the district to pick their PSAT dates. Because of the situation with COVID and most districts being virtual, that is why that date was picked.

I believe Mr. Benaquista you shared with us last night and I believe Mr. Benaquista and Mrs. Guilfoyle have a meeting coming up very soon with Kean University to discuss exactly what you were proposing Dr. Morgan – to expand the amount of classes that our students can take. Mr. Benaquista stated that is correct. A couple of weeks ago I was at a function with the President of Kean and I pretty much said the same thing Dr. Morgan said – what I want for our students. He said it is interesting that you are bringing this up because I'm going to be rolling out my Kean Scholar Academy. I just received an email from one of his assistants today saying they are still trying to get a date. They will offer it not to just Union but other districts that want to partner with them. That will come in shortly and that will be what Dr. Morgan was talking

about – allowing our seniors to be able to walk out of high school with college credits. We have been talking about it with the new president at Kean, he had that vision at the early start of him being president. He knows it is important to influence and give the students exposure to the college. We are very lucky because it is down the street from us and I think we are going to keep growing and find ways to have our students be part of Kean as well. I think there was an agreement with St. Peter's a couple of months ago. We will still branch out but we have to utilize Kean because it is down the street.

With respect to the cultural responsiveness, I think you will hear a lot more Dr. Morgan next week in the presentation by Dr. Falaise. We wanted to update the Board on what we started two years ago and where we are at today. This is a three-year journey that he will be with us. He wants to share with the Board.

The Board keeps talking about a retreat and hopefully we can accomplish that as a Board. I told him to hold aside a segment so that we as a Board can have him come participate with us. I'm really excited about that if we could end up getting a retreat scheduled, part of that retreat could be him working with us on everything that he is sharing with our district. It is not just about the classroom, it is about hiring, looking at our policies, it is everything. The comprehensiveness of it is what I'm excited about because it is really going to audit our district and give us a lot of resources to use to move in the direction that we need to continue to go. We have taken steps. I want to go on the record saying under Mr. Tatum leadership, with Mrs. Moses leading a big part of that curriculum, we have taken steps but nobody in education can ever say it is enough. We have to continually analyze the students that are sitting in front of us today and say what else can we do to meet with what their needs are. I believe some of the stuff that is coming through our agreement with Kean will really help us. I'm glad you mentioned that and thank you.

Dr. Morgan stated thank you Mr. Benaquista, I'm very happy to hear all of this tonight.

#### Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Richardson gave an update from the Fiscal Committee meeting. Mrs. Richardson stated we met with Mrs. Manochio and she was informative. Some of the grants that Mrs. Guilfoyle applied for are coming through. We received the COVID relief fund in the amount of \$508,000 which helped with the hotspots and some of the changes that we had to make to insure that we were doing the proper cleaning for the school when we reopen again.

CARES grant from the County for \$302,000 – was received. Mrs. Manochio stated the digital divide money has already come in - \$900,000.

Mrs. Richardson stated the employees are doing their job by applying for all these grants that are available - \$1.7 million. I believe there are more to come. Mrs. Manochio stated there may be some smaller ones that are still out there. Mrs. Guilfoyle can address that part if there are any other grants that we can apply for.

Mrs. Richardson presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

Mr. Benaquista stated we added F-20 – approving the submission of the security grant. We received approval through the Alyssa Law and that is where the money is coming from. We don't have to put in panic buttons because the police radios that we bought years ago and we had received approval but now it is the submission of the grant so we can get the money and use it for other security purposes.

#### DISCUSSION:

None

#### Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Richardson presented the Operations Committee agenda.

Mrs. Richardson stated we have discussion items - Letter from Township of Union Recreation Department requesting the use of school gyms for winter recreation programs for the children of Township of Union during the months of January through April.

Mrs. Richardson stated we did discuss this because of it being indoors and the cleaning process. Nobody wants to prevent them from using the school gyms but we were concerned about the schools being used and getting properly cleaned afterwards. Mr. Benaquista stated we should have this discussion with our Board attorney and full Board the next time we have an executive session. I have had other requests from other entities that use our buildings in the winters and I'm holding off on a decision to share with them because there was rumors that the NJSIA was going to make some changes and/or the Governor on winter sports. Right now it is early on and if we were going to approve anything, it needs to have language in there about depending on COVID and our school community we could end up canceling it. I want to be transparent with everyone because it is very hard to plan but at the same time when Mrs. Ionta and I were on with the County Superintendent and we were talking with the County Health Department, Union County is the highest in the number of cases over the most recent times. There are a lot of districts have gone remote not necessarily because of the school but what is going on in the town. We need to get some advisement from our attorneys. It is not about us not wanting people to use our facilities, we have to remember we are talking about hybrid and we will have kids in the building every day and we want to make sure we are doing the proper cleaning after these people are using our facilities and sometimes they are there until after 10 p.m. to make sure it is safe for the kids and staff to enter the next day. I would like some time to discuss it with the full Board and getting some advice from our attorney on what measures we have to do to ensure that we keep everyone safe. Mrs. Richardson stated thank you, that was our concern as well when we were reviewing it.

Next is the Letter from State of New Jersey, Department of Transportation, offer to purchase temporary construction easement, Route 82, Section 1, Parcel E32.

This is located at 1000 Caldwell Avenue. I believe it is Morris Avenue – Burnet Middle School – to take a portion to utilize it for construction. We really don't have much more information than that. Mr. Benaquista stated I don't have any information but I can find out.

Mrs. Manochio stated it is an easement – eminent domain so we don't have much choice. The lawyers can let us know for certain. We did pass it to them to take a look at it. It is on the corner of Burnet Middle School – Morris Avenue and Caldwell – I believe they need temporary use of that corner and they will pay for the temporary use of it. That was my understanding but it is in the hands of the attorneys.

Mrs. Richardson stated we don't have normal school hours right now but if it took place during school regular hours, we would have to worry about the children exiting and crossing the street. Mr. Benaquista stated there is a police officer there every day because it is a busy intersection.

Ms. Longmore stated we have been in review of the letter and from our understanding they are doing construction on the sidewalk. We will further discuss this with the Board but the project according to the letter is only for one month. As of right now the project is part of a larger construction that the State is doing along Morris Avenue. We hear and understand your concerns about the students and we will continue to review and discuss it with the Board.

Mrs. Minneci stated if you gone down Morris Avenue, they are doing something similar on the opposite side of the school.

Dr. Francis asked what is the original project? Ms. Longmore stated the letter doesn't say but I believe they are doing construction regarding the sidewalk and the bus stop that is right there – constructing something for the people waiting for the bus to seat in – from my understanding but the letter doesn't say exactly. Mrs. Minneci stated they must be updating the one that is there and improving it.

#### Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mr. McDowell gave an update from the Personnel Committee meeting. Mr. McDowell stated we met last night with Superintendent Tatum and Assistant Superintendent Benaquista. We went over some items for the elementary school principal situation. Mr. Tatum will be presenting someone next week to fill one of those positions. We also talked about having CORE supervisors that will cover grades K-12 – math, science, social studies and language arts.

One other item we talked about and we will talk about this in executive session, I assume, the change from creating a Director of Preschool Instruction. We have someone right now that is a supervisor. Mr. Benaquista stated it is just a title change. The only other thing is Mrs. Conti may have a supervisor recommendation for next week as well.

Mr. McDowell presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

Mr. Benaquista stated P-6, the reason why our hourly rates are being reapproved right now is because in January our minimum wage goes up – Mrs. Cappiello add to the resolution that it won't take effect until January 1, 2021.

**DISCUSSION:**

Mrs. Williams – P1B – are they retro? Mr. Benaquista stated without looking at the list a lot of times when it is one of the teachers that we need to cover a class, we approve them because they are hired with us and it goes retro back to the start date; when we can't hire a teacher, there is contract language in the UTEA agreement that if they pick up another class they get a pro-rated stipend based on the time. What we will do is approve them and we will always update the language to reflect the actual start and stop date so payroll has that for their records for auditing purposes. Mr. McDowell stated the earliest I see is September 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Benaquista stated sometimes stipends are missed and as it is brought to our attention that a teacher had a sixth period, we have to get it on the agenda for approval so payroll can pay.

**Policy Committee:**

Mrs. Minneci stated I don't see anything on policy this month. Mr. Nufrio stated that is correct.

Mrs. Ruiz stated the Policy Committee did not meet. My question is where are we with respect to the policies that we talked about implementing that needed to be implemented for COVID related issues. Mrs. Minneci stated I believe we did speak with the attorney about that. We are looking into what the State is sending out. With COVID, we have cleaning the building and all that in the plan for now. Right now Ms. Longmore can you update us?

Ms. Longmore stated I currently do not have that information. We can get back with you. Mrs. Minneci stated I think Mr. Taylor will be hoping back on soon. We will get back to that Mrs. Ruiz.

Dr. Morgan stated we are really late with this policy that should have been approved in September. We must get this done. The Policy Committee must meet so that these policies regarding remote learning and all the things the State is mandating that we do; it needs to be done. I'm not on the Policy Committee but I'm asking the Policy Committee to please meet so we can get this done. Mrs. Minneci stated thank you and noted.

Mrs. Ruiz asked where are we with the policy that Dr. Morgan walked on that was supposed to be considered for revisions, edits and merging with the other policy – what is going on? Mrs. Minneci stated we haven't met yet but we will be meeting and we will get to it. There is a meeting this week – a committee was formed with the principals, the supervisors, some Board members about policies. Mr. McDowell stated the meeting is Thursday. Mrs. Minneci stated that is part of Dr. Morgan's policy. Mrs. Minneci stated we have to coordinate with the education and we will get to it – I promise you.

**Technology Committee:**

Dr. Francis gave an update from the Technology Committee meeting. Dr. Francis stated

**Old Business**

- Digital Divide grant
  - The purchase order has been completed and devices were ordered. Waiting on the delivery of the devices to the school district.

- Chromebooks for the high school.
  - Update: Receiving shipment week of 11/9/2020.
- WiFi infrastructure upgrade at elementary schools
  - Update: All schools completed except Hamilton admin building.
- Working on current proposals for district telephone and notification systems.
  - Update: Funding has been released. Approximately \$390,000. Received two quotes. Working with Gerry and Maureen on getting grant submitted. The deadline for the grant is 11/20/2020
- Move from Systems 3000 for payroll and personnel to Genesis during the 2020-2021 school year.
  - Update: Contacted Genesis. Negotiating costs and timeline to move forward with this project.
- Elementary school door access systems
  - Update: Installation is complete. Teacher and admin data will be uploaded in the next several days

#### New Business

- Laptops for middle and high school teachers
  - Update: devices were purchased. Waiting on delivery.
- Security camera systems for middle and elementary schools
  - In the beginning stages of investigating this project. Replacing the security server system.
- The replacement cycle of middle school Chromebooks 21-22 school year.
- Secondary Internet access for load balancing of bandwidth for the district.
- Upcoming Erate cycle 2022- 2023.
  - Replacement of older switches in the wiring closets at middle and elementary schools.
- Upcoming technology infrastructure project 2021-2022
  - Replace current fiber between wiring closets in middle and elementary schools due to the inability to expand beyond 1GB
  - Replace with new fiber and configure for 10GB between wiring closets
  - 60% of the project was approved and funded by Erate 2021-2022
- Project 10 million by T-mobile
  - District qualified for 346 hotspots under the program.
  - 100 GB of data
  - No cost to the school district

The last thing is Brain Pop Jr. – K-2<sup>nd</sup> and Brain Pop – 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> – additional online educational services for our students.

Craig Wojcik stated Brain Pop Jr. – we wanted to make sure we had enough digital resources for our younger grades especially as we give out the one-to-one devices so everyone has access to them and make sure every students has the necessary digital resources and in the package came Brain Pop as well so we will have it covered from K-8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr. Francis presented the Technology Committee agenda.



**DISCUSSION:**

None

## Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

## Unfinished Business:

None

## New Business:

None

## Comments from the Public:

Barbara Katz stated my son goes to Jefferson and he got off today telling me that it is going to be a half day every day next week. Parents have been told nothing. I'm just curious – are we going to be told because I think it is funny that they are telling the kids but they haven't informed the parents yet. If we can be informed that would be great.

Nellis Regis-Darby stated E-3 or E-4 – the articulation with Kean – do we know if the textbook is going to be covered by the district or will the students have to purchase the textbook by themselves? Do we know the reason why pre-k is not counted in our Title I numbers? The merit scholarship, last school year, do we know how many students were qualified for the merit scholarships? In terms of platform for reading for our youngest kids, especially K, 1 and 2 students in our district, do we know what platform the district is using so that the students have access to text because that is a lot of the concerns that I'm getting from a lot of my friends who have K-2 students. The parents are looking for a platform to engage their students with reading text and I'm not sure what we are using as a district.

Suehay Monge stated I have concerns regarding the PSATs and the date that was chosen which is late January. I'm not sure if that has actually been confirmed yet or if we are still waiting on the ability to enter the buildings. Either way, what is plan B if that period of time we are not able to have the students back into the building to take this exam? As it is I'm concerned regarding the merit scholarships and also the fact that they are going to be taking this test so close to when they start taking the SATs that there is really going to be difficulty engaging where the students are going to need to focus their tutoring or their efforts on whether it is English or math if they needed to work harder to increase that grade. They really don't have a bar or gauge. The last PSAT taken was last year. It was far back where it really doesn't provide a good gauge for these students to be able to perform their best on the PSAT. I'm concerned about that and I'm hoping someone can answer my question about having a plan B if that doesn't work out for the students. The second thing was in regards to the policy that Dr. Morgan walked on at the last meeting. I heard Mr. McDowell mention that there was a committee being formed. I just want to know if parents were invited to be part of this committee as stakeholders? Were students invited? Were any members of the special education community invited as well? In providing

equity, even the current policy that we have, I don't remember it mentioning students with special needs. So that is something that I wanted to bring up and also the student liaisons who were instrumental in the first revision of the honors and AP rubric. I just want to make sure that we are including all aspects of the community so that we can really come up with something – come up with a policy and implementation of that policy that reflects the entire community.

Paul Casey stated I just would like to thank the district leadership for bringing the articulation agreement over the finish line and to hear that more are coming – that is fantastic. Many years coming and it is definitely going to be something that benefits our kids for years to come. I would also like to thank the parents that put the time in to help the district address the Black Lives Matter movement in Union and to support it will really make a difference in the lives of many children in our community. To hear tonight being addressed with things of diversity of literature and in our teaching staff is a really fantastic thing to be hearing that the voices of our community are being heard. Speaking of voices in the community, I want to congratulate John O'Shea, Yocasta Brens and Nellis Regis-Darby on their recent resounding victory in the Board of Education. Finally, I would like to welcome the new Business Administrator, Yolanda Koon, for joining us in Union, we welcome you. I spent several years in Plainfield so you are coming to a great community and we are happy to have you.

Mrs. Minneci asked if we have executive session. Mr. Benaquista stated nothing from administration; if you want to discuss the add on or I can push out a rationale to everyone why we need to change the title – nothing else is changing in the job description. I don't think we need executive session. Mrs. Minneci asked if counsel had anything. Ms. Longmore stated no I don't.

Mrs. Minneci stated if everyone is comfortable with sending out the information. Mr. Benaquista stated Mr. McDowell are you good with me just sending out a rationale? Mr. McDowell stated that is fine with me.

Mr. Nufrio stated just a question – when Mr. Benaquista sends out the rationale, my question would be, is this going to be an additional cost to the district? Mr. Benaquista stated there will be no cost, just a change in title. Mr. Nufrio stated thank you.

#### MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mr. Nufrio, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

AYE: Dr. Francis, Mrs. Higgins, Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio,

Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

DIANE CAPIELLO  
ACTING BOARD SECRETARY