

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINTES

December 17, 2024

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The special meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, December 17, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member.

Ms. Santana called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

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

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey 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.

Board and District Goal Discussion:

Dr. Benaquista informed the Board that in January, he plans on updating his district goals and create a new strategic plan.

Board President Santana indicated that Board goals will be done by committee. Ms. Carbonell indicated to use QSAC as a guide when creating goals.

Mr. Cohan indicated his topics are: district realignment, maintain commitment to students/families in light of federal cuts, assessment of reading program, balance budget, improvement of instructions.

Ms. Carbonell's fiscal goals: finish with a balanced budget, prioritizing excellent education, capital improvements, staff capacity, recruitment/retention of staff.

President Santana indicated if you look at other neighboring towns, the goals are district specific.

Mrs. Faria asked what are the objectives of the Board – supporting staff? What are we committed to do?

Dr. Benaquista indicated the district realignment is one of his goals.

Mrs. Scott-Hayden's operations goals – ensure maintenance of buildings; a walk through twice a year.

Mr. Cohan – S.M.A.R.T. goals – by 4/15/2025 presentation by Superintendent, 5/31/2025 – implementation of realignment.

Ms. Carbonell – educational quality – concern for student performance and success and our special population students.

Dr. Benaquista indicated another district goal is student achievement and growth. Special education in every school or in sister schools.

Board President Santana asked all committee chairs to send the committee goals to Mrs. Faria.

Mr. Cohan mentioned that there are different timelines – fiscal year, academic year and calendar year. We need goals to stay in play to December. Dr. Benaquista indicated to start goals for July 1st and some goals could carry into multiple years.

Ms. Carbonell indicated goals should be done by district data; the strategic plan is a tool, not a goal, it could be a work in progress, a living document. Devote time during the Board retreat for goals. Board President Santana suggested that the goals now are for January-June and at the retreat work on goals for July and going forward.

Ms. Carbonell mentioned that everything is related to the students – student performance needs to be the driving force. State student performance is low. Hannah Caldwell school facilities are dated and funding is not there. The goal should be to focus on an evaluation of our schools and the upkeep or rebuilding of our schools. Dr. Benaquista indicated that the LRFP is not current and that needs to be in there to produce a new plan.

Ms. Carbonell indicated that there are possible changes in the state/federal funding so the district needs to be fiscal stewards.

Mrs. Conteh-Mackey – talk through the goals with the community and how to communicate with them. There is a disconnect with our rolls and what we do and expectations.

Dr. Benaquista shared a document with the Board from Mr. McDowell – “13 Things School Board Members Wish People Knew About Them” (a copy is appended to the minutes).

Board President Santana asked Mrs. Minneci to forward personnel and residency goals, Mr. McDowell to forward IT goals to Mrs. Faria and Mrs. Faria to do policy goals. Mrs. Faria will consolidate the goals and send it out as a draft for review by the Board and finalize it by December 31st.

Mrs. Faria mentioned that test scores is one measure and the challenge is how do we measure student success that is not part of testing.

Dr. Benaquista indicated that the shared document will be part of his Superintendent Report. He mentioned that we need to encourage parents to meet and talk with us instead of coming to meetings to fix things.

District Goals:

Dr. Benaquista indicated the strategic plan will drive the Board goals and superintendent goals. Revise mission/vision statement with the help of students.

He also mentioned that you can't get data on 5th grade because it is a solo school. He is focusing on K-8 and believes that we will see a difference in years to come.

Retreat:

Ms. Carbonell asked to consider January 11th for the first Board retreat.

Executive Session:

Board President Santana asked that going forward there needs to be an agenda for executive session for timing purposes.

Board Goals:

Board President asked that all goal information should be sent to Mrs. Faria by Wednesday night.

Other Business of the Board, if necessary:

None

Comments from the Public:

Virginia Jeffries – concerns with the OPMA, the annual Board meeting dates, rescheduled meetings, any changes to the meeting dates need to be advertised with adequate notice and the Board's retreat needs to be open to the public.

Focus should be on the community and not only parents and students; schools are funded by taxpayers and property owners.

She asked when the Long-Range Facility Plan was last updated.

Mr. Buggy advised Ms. Jeffries that all required notices were published.

Jill Hall – asked what the previous goals were and were they achieved. Also, asked that the Board revisit the previous goals to see if they are working or not.

The Mission Statement was created by one person. She is excited to get into the process with the students of revising the statement.

PD is at the beginning of the year. It is important on how we measure success of students.

Board President Santana asked that the prior goals be sent out to the Board members.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Ms. Carbonell, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 7:14 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: attorney/client confident matters

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. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 8:17 p.m.

MOTION TO RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:

There being no further business before the Board it was moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, that the Board return to public session at 8:17 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mr. Cohan, seconded by Mr. Nasta, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

A YE: Ms. Carbonell, Mr. Cohan, Mrs. Conteh-Mackey, Mrs. Faria, Mr. McDowell,
Mrs. Minneci, Mr. Nasta, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Ms. Santana

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY