TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSESSION MINUTES – May 10, 2022

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mrs. Williams called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL: Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Ms. Marissa McKenzie, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Ms. Chastity Santana, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL: Dr. Guy Francis (7:01 p.m.), Mr. John O'Shea (7:01 p.m.), Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby (7:05 p.m.)

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Christopher Buggy, Esq.

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

Dr. Francis and Mr. O'Shea arrived at 7:01 p.m.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the "Open Public Meetings Act", a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Mr. O'Shea read the district's mission statement.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes are to be approved next week.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel or operations and will be approved at the next meeting.

Superintendent's Report:

Dr. Taylor will give his report at the next meeting.

Mrs. Regis-Darby arrived at 7:05 p.m.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period April 27, 2022 to May 10, 2022 (no incidences to report), in accordance with the information in appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

E-1A. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT'S DETERMINATION OF HIB

Affirm the Superintendent's determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the periods April 13, 2022 to April 26, 2022, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION: None

 AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams
NAY: None MOTION CARRIED

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mr. O'Shea presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Minneci stated F-16 – Dr. Mullick – there is an increase of \$1,500 since last year.

Dr. Taylor stated F-27 - ESS - Mrs. Conti is here if you have any questions. Mr. O'Shea stated this is different from last month. Mrs. Koon stated we have two different ESS. One is Effective School Solutions which handles the therapeutic, mental health services and last month you hired three additional clinicians to help in that area and the other ESS Northeast LLC is for our paras and subs.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated when this company was first hired it was about \$230,000 and now it is up to \$630,000 and the premise was that we were bringing this company in to save the district money. I asked for the past three weeks where was the savings? I got a power point presentation with garbage. I still don't know how much money we saved.

Mrs. Conti stated the power point was all encompassing to answer all the questions, including a grid with different savings amounts. Are you talking about student placement or costs on the savings? Mrs. Regis-Darby stated both.

Mrs. Conti stated student placements through an IEP – we are looking at what is the educational need of the students and how we can addresses those needs. The IEP team is not looking at cost at that point. Cost doesn't enter into when we consider student placements and what is appropriate because the value is what is appropriate for the student to educate them in the least restrictive environment within their own community. This part of ESS is driven by individual IEP.

We have increased the amount of programs in the district. When we started in November 2016, they came in for Burnet to serve about 18 students. As the students began to age-up into the high school, we brought in a clinician for the high school and then we brought in the program at Kawameeh which served students with autism. There are different programs at different levels and addresses certain needs. You have more programs and you are serving many more students.

Costs – it is hard to give exact numbers because you are placing students in a least restrictive environment. If you are bringing a student back from out of district, you may be able to tell how much that amount is. For every year you remain in district, the amount could be different. You don't know what the cost for the transportation route would be because it changes.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated you keep saying you don't know but from 2016, 2017, if I look I can tell you exactly how much money was spent by that program. I can tell you exactly how many students were brought back; how many were not brought back. You can do a financial analysis and tell me exactly how much money was spent for that program.

Mrs. Conti stated I do have numbers of who came back to district. Let say the first year the program was 200,000, it was in its inception stage and if you bring back three students and the average for transportation is 100,000 – so right there you are saving 300,000. It is above what you spent for the program.

What do you say is the value for the other 15 students that it served? Prevention is also a piece – it is the least restrictive environment.

Dr. Taylor asked what would happen if we were to eliminate these services? What would happen to those kids? Mrs. Conti stated we would have an IEP team meeting and maybe we would have to pay for ESS in another school, or the student may be placed out of district.

Dr. Taylor stated what about hiring qualified people and bring them here – what was that about? Mrs. Conti stated when you talk about therapeutic placements, you are bridging district services with similar services that is happening in an out-of-district placement. When you have a school social worker certification, you are not able to provide therapeutic services. You would be hiring outside clinicians and you could but you have to factor in too when you are staffing, there is oversight on the therapeutic program – there is a supervision piece over clinicians.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated this is a waste of time. I'm sitting here and you are asking me to vote next week and I don't have clarity in terms of just give me a financial analysis in terms of how much money have we saved. We started with 18 kids, how many kids do we have now. How many kids did we bring back into the district? We pay a lot of money for this program; I'm not saying it is not working. I just want to know why we are paying so much money. Has it saved us any money? That was the biggest selling point. Show me the proof.

Mr. O'Shea stated I would ask that we pull F-27 until we have much more information. We are looking for hard numbers. The slide show was nice but didn't tell me a thing either. Mrs. Williams stated it wasn't specific to our district. Mrs. Conti stated the numbers on the one slide did have numbers that it was based on. I will confer with Dr. Taylor. I will give you exact numbers who are out of district and how many brought back. It would be an estimate when you talk about prevention. When you see the numbers it will be above the cost of the program.

Mr. O'Shea stated go back four years to tell us (a) how many students are in the program, (b) how many came back, (c) what was the cost at the time – not what we saved for the years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Dr. Taylor stated Duncan Young, the CEO, will come next week and we can ask him this information. Mr. O'Shea stated make it explicit that if he wants to go forward, I have to see hard numbers.

Mrs. Minneci stated we don't know how many kids would have to go out of district over these last few years, without ESS being here. Mrs. Conti stated you can get how many students were served by the program; what programs we had; how many kids were out of district and came back. For the students that are here and may have been prevented from going out and served LRE. We can put those numbers together. It would be an estimate is how many students it prevented.

Mr. O'Shea stated I know that; I'm looking at how many students were starting in that program? What was the number at the end? How many students were out placement? How many did we bring back? For those school years, what was the cost at that time?

Mrs. Conti stated if three students in the first year came back and it was 300,000 and the cost of the program was 200,000 – without even looking at the other students. It was more than what the cost was. Mr. O'Shea stated at least give us a barometer of where this program is going.

Dr. Taylor stated he will reach out to Mr. Young and figure it out with Mrs. Williams.

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked O-2 – Pomptonian renewal – asked that the district do an end of school year survey with the students concerning food services so we can find out if the kids like the food. Dr. Taylor stated he had asked food service to do a focus group with the students and will ask the food service to put together a document regarding that focus group.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked if the district did any RFP's this time. Mrs. Koon stated that she checked and we are still under the 5 years. I am satisfied with working with them and you have up to five years.

Dr. Francis asked if there was an increase in attorney fees. Mrs. Koon stated yes, attorney fees went up to \$175/hr. and paralegals is \$95/hr.

Dr. Francis asked what is O-9 - JDM Consultants? Mrs. Koon stated this is a firm we would like to bring on to assist and oversee the buildings and grounds department. We can discuss this in executive session.

Mrs. Williams stated we have a discussion item and this has been done in the past so it will go on the agenda next week for vote.

DISCUSSION ITEM:

1. REQUEST FROM TOWNSHIP OF UNION EDUCATION FOUNDATION – LIVINGSTON SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - Request from the Township of Union Education Foundation requesting the use of Livingston School playground on June 4, 2022 for a Family Fun Health Fundraising Program (10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.), in accordance with the information in appended to the minutes.

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Ms. McKenzie presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Ms. McKenzie stated there seems to be some duplicates on P-1B; Mr. Benaquista will take a look at it.

Dr. Taylor stated next week on the agenda, there will be voluntary and involuntary transfers. The delay is because Mr. Benaquista is meeting with everybody so questions/concerns can be answered in person. If you have any questions on the transfers, you will get the agenda, please email me or call me if you have any questions ahead of Tuesday's meeting.

Policy Committee:

Ms. Santana presented the Policy Committee agenda for first reading:

POL-1. APPROVE POLICY 3233 - POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Approve Policy 3233 – Political Activities, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-2. APPROVE POLICY 5460 - HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Approve Policy 5460 – High School Graduation, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-3. APPROVE POLICY 9560 - ADMINISTRATION OF SCHOOL SURVEYS

Approve Policy 9560 – Administration of School Surveys, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

POL-4. APPROVE POLICY 9181 – VOLUNTEER ATHLETIC COACHES AND CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY ADVISORS/ASSISTANTS

Approve Policy 9181 – Volunteer Athletic Coaches and Co-Curricular Activity Advisors Assistants, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member. (*First Reading*)

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Williams asked that Pol-2 – Policy 5460 – High School Graduation be updated with the following language: "10 hours if there are circumstances that cause extended school closures" because with COVID there were some issues with the students getting their community service hours and Mr. Hoyt and Dr. Taylor talked about it and it was reduced to 10 hours. If there are circumstances, where the school is going to be closed for weather or illness or whatever, it would be prudent to put that in there.

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Minneci presented the Residency Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION: None

Technology Committee:

Mrs. Brens-Watson presented the Technology Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION: None

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

Dr. Taylor stated finance committee, we are scheduled to go on June 6th to visit North Brunswick to see how they have been working through the referendum process. My

recommendation is that we meet after we visit and talk about the concepts that I suggested instead of having an additional meeting.

New Business:

Dr. Francis stated the cannons in front of the school are an eye sore – can it be removed? It could be a potential safety hazardous. Either have it removed or something. Mr. O'Shea stated the cannon has been around a long time; we should try to salvage it and make it safe. I would like to see it stay but we do have to worry about the safety and security.

Dr. Taylor asked if there were sharp edges? Dr. Francis stated I don't know but it doesn't have any tires, it is all metal. There was a parent with a child near it and if someone gets hurt, it is a lawsuit.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked what is an internal HIB? A parent asked me. Mr. Benaquista and Dr. Taylor both stated it is only categorized as a HIB.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated congratulations to Ms. Lorenzo at Kawameeh and her team, they did an amazing job on their production of Muse – we should be impressed and proud of our students.

Comments from the Public:

Lynn Cornaccia stated head rep at Livingston Elementary School. Last week was teacher appreciate week and Dr. Taylor sent out a message. I have to say that 90% of the teachers that I talked to did not even respond to it because we are working without a contract and you had given us the option of a 2.5% increase. You are voting on next week three members who may or may not rightfully deserve an increase in their salary – what does it say about us. You appreciate us: we teach your kids. We are there every day, whether we are sick or not, COVID we were there. Why don't you show appreciation to us? A video that was sent just from him, not from any of the Board members, appreciating the teachers for all their hard work. Why don't you sit at the table with us and negotiate a fair contract. I make \$26,000 a year. If I was not married and working here, I would have to have a roommate. My question is and I'm not expecting an answer, can you live on \$26,000 a year – pay for gas, food and everything else – you can't do it. I'm not here for the money. If I was here for the money, I would be long gone. I'm here for the kids. All five of my kids graduated from Union High School. One is now a lawyer, two are teachers, one is a teacher in this district, my daughter-in-law is a teacher in this district. I have two grandchildren living with me and they will become Union Township kids. Show us some appreciation for all of those teachers that taught your kids. Negotiate a fair contract with us, that is all we are asking. We are not asking for a million dollar raise. We are asking for a fair and a decent contract raise.

Cindy Corbin stated I'm a second-grade teacher at Washington School. I have four children who all went through Union schools. I love our Town. I would not want to live anywhere else but here. It is a beautiful microcosm of our world. I would like to express my disappointment in being offered less than the County average in our contract. We have done everything that you have asked of us and more. We strive for improvement in academics, while nurturing our students emotionally every day. I do not feel I have done a below average job and

I feel unappreciated. We need to maintain a competitive salary to attract and keep the best teachers. I would like to express that our children deserve smaller class sizes at the lower elementary level. My second graders who missed half year of kindergarten and all of grade one. I have 25 students in my class. Our principal asked for another section but was denied. I feel this is a disservice to the children to have such a large class size in such a critical year in their education. More structures are being built in this town every day; how can this be addressed. We need more classrooms and lower-class size. Finally, we have many older buildings in this town and they are beautiful but they need attention. The girls bathroom across the hall from my classroom has been closed for repairs all year. Our roof leaks in many places when it rains. What can be done about these structural problems? I think our children deserve better.

Cathy Sharpe stated as a paraprofessional in this district for 40 years, I would like to tell you about how little increases in my salary is compared to the agenda item of three percent increase in salary to both assistant superintendents and the business administrator. My salary going back to 2017 was \$34,554. Being that we did not receive a salary increase for the 2021-2022, my current salary stands at \$38,187. Over a five-year span, I have received an increase of \$3,733. The three administrators for one year will receive over \$5,000. I'm not begrudging them since they are at a much higher pay scale than myself, but how is it that we sitting here have to fight for everything we have. Our salary increases fail in comparison to administrators. This continues to be a checkbox for their raises while teachers and paraprofessionals always have to wait and fight and get whatever money is leftover for us. We wonder why there is huge shortages in educators or remaining in the profession, maybe we should all, especially the Board look at maybe this is the reason why qualified people are not entering this profession.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated UTEA President. I wanted to comment on Pomptonian. I don't know if you are aware that they breached their contract because over this past year, they did not provide any services in the faculty cafeteria. It is ridiculous that over 250 work there and you can't even buy a cup of coffee and they have to stand in the children's line. Show some respect, Pomptonian should not have closed that cafeteria and I hope before you approve them, you check the contract because I think they owe you money. There is a sign on the door that says they don't have enough employees. You see how we all pitch in so maybe their manager should pitch in. I'm glad that question was asked about the attorneys, going out to bid, I wish everything would go out to bid. Last is the salaries. When the UTEA does salary guides, the lower the salary, the higher the percent. Everybody doesn't get the same percent. It is discouraging when you see \$5,000 in one year; my cumulative raise was \$4,000. I think we should think about using percent's a little differently; the higher you go the percent should be lower – that is what we do. I hope you would consider that too.

Cindy Ferrati read a statement from Diane Hickey who teaches preschool at Washington. "I wish I could be here to speak with you in person unfortunately I have to work my second job tonight because I didn't receive a \$5,000 raise."

Christina Bursler stated high school counselor at Union High School. I have been working without a contract since June 30th. I want to speak to the agenda point. I'm not inclined that those that are up for approval are not deserving of their increase – everybody works hard – but we are very deserving of a fair and livable wage as well. I'm hopeful at tomorrow's

negotiation meeting that we can come to some sort of resolution to give all of the UTEA members a fair and livable wage.

Tiffany Reid Anglin stated I'm a teacher at Franklin Elementary School. I just want to talk about the increased class sizes. As a kindergarten teacher at Franklin, we also had an increase in class sizes. I have 25 in my class and another teacher has 24 and the third class has 19. We also asked for an additional class. As we move forward to next year, if we could possibly open up a fourth section going into the school year.

Lydia stated I also live in this Town. We also pay taxes. It keeps going up and me as a para, it is not going to cover. I love my job. It doesn't pay much. I do it because I love it. Thank God I have my husband, if not, I would not live on it. I love what I do and the kids I have been working with. Every school I work with, I feel great there. These teachers are great. I have two daughters that work in this town and they go home and they are still working. I had a daughter who had a baby early and she was still putting in grades after she had that baby a few days later because whoever was hired for her job, didn't like it and quit. They do deserve this raise.

Marilyn Meekan stated a teacher at Franklin Elementary School. I'm here to bring up something that has been bothering me for quite a few years. In 2020, in response to complaints about the racial divide among staff at Franklin, it was recommended by the current Board of Education attorney that at a minimum, the Board should institute training to recognize implicit biases and work to eliminate them. It went on to say that this should be a continuous process. We really need some training at Franklin. It should not be one training at the beginning of the school year. It should be constant, consistent trainings throughout the year. Along with the collection of objective data to ensure that the program are benefitting the school community. We are having some serious struggles at Franklin and we need help.

Vicki Moraco stated teacher at Franklin Elementary School. I wanted to comment on working without a contract, I definitely agree with everything that was said. We have been working short staffed. We are huge in our number of students in our classes. I know for myself and a lot of my colleagues, we come to work every day and try not to miss a day to give the best services to our kids. We are burnt out. I love the kids; I love what I do. I just want to be compensated for it. Franklin is definitely a struggling school amongst our staff. We had some leadership equity training. I was part of that committee maybe 2 years ago. It was across the district and I really believe we were making strides because it seemed like the majority of the other committee people that were on it were saying that we did need more PD. That there is a divide and we need something to bring us together. We need the education. We need to diminish the ignorance and understand in a formal way. Not just colleagues talking about it behind the scenes. We need to sit in PD to help things get better and do believe it can get better with education. I think we need it ongoing for a period of time so we really see the change. To keep transferring people, we will do that each year then; whoever says is the problem will be transferred and then everyone is at risk. I'm scared of that; I don't want to be transferred because a few teachers team up on me for whatever reason. I work my butt off. I just want to know that I'm safe in the school that I teach in. Colleagues that we can be professional. We can put the children first and that should be above everything else. There is a stigma, and I don't

mean that in a negative way; it is just being uneducated. I ask that our PD be instituted again and continued on so that the staff at Franklin School has a fighting chance to want to come to work and get along with each other professionally.

Eboni Dockerty stated teacher at Franklin Elementary School. This is my third year at Franklin. I came in excited and ready to work and learn and my excitement had diminished working at Franklin with working with some of the other staff there – it is very toxic. I was also part of the committee because I want there to be a change. Being new to the district and falling in love with the students at Franklin. I work almost every program but we still haven't had any except for the one at the beginning of the school year and I feel that is unacceptable. We need more training. I have been finding my own PDs to educate myself and I feel the district has to enforce it more. As a result of the findings, the environment has become increasingly worse. It is sad to say but I don't always love going to work because there are staff members that don't speak to me and I can't tell you why. It is not an environment that you want to have when you work with children. I feel it is unfair and it is extremely inequitable to make this the responsibility of one person. It is my hope for the sake of the children at Franklin and the new staff members like myself, that there are some changes.

Zakiyyah Cobb-Roseberry stated teacher at Franklin. As you know some of my colleagues have spoken about some of the issues that we have at Franklin – the lack of diversity training that has been promised. About two years ago our Board attorney recommended through previous investigations that we get some training on cultural competency, culturally responsible teaching – to date none of those things have been completed. It also recommended that the district recruit and retain more minority teachers. Things that haven't been done. It is my hope that those things can be done before you take any additional steps. How can you want the environment to change if your Board attorneys are saying this is what is needed at Franklin. Two years later to not have any of those resources made available. Teachers of color, teachers of non-color – sometimes it is ignorance, the only way to combat it is through education. How can we expect to unite post-COVID? If you want us to be culturally responsive, you have to provide the training and it has to be ongoing. It is not a PD that people will sign up for. I think it is the only building in the school district that has more than five black teachers in the building. I hear everybody talking about diversity and equity, Franklin is diverse. With diversity has to come education. In corporate America, that is the first thing you do when you are hired – diversity training. Culturally we are all different and in order to learn how to interact with each other in ways that we feel respected, there are a lot of things people don't know. How can we be a school district where education in paramount and not educate our teachers and staff members and work with them so that we are actively doing the right thing for our students and staff. It is my hope too that things change and that we just don't remove and replace people because that doesn't change the problem. It just makes the problems go to another door or makes the problems at Franklin worse. Many of our students benefit from our diverse staff. It is a wonderful thing and we hope that you recruit and retain more teachers of color in this district. Color runs a spectrum. Every child should see themselves reflected in a staff member in this school district. Our Asian students, our black students, our bi-racial students – it is very important. Research says that is how you teach self-efficacy, and we want our students to be 21st century learners. We want them to go onto this world and be amazing. How can we when we are not doing it with our teachers and that is my hope.

Mrs. Williams stated to all of the teachers that spoke, we do appreciate you and everything you do in this district. The paras, the teachers – this Board is made up of educators so they know how hard you work with our kids. This Board is made up of parents with special needs kids, my son is one of them. I truly understand the work that the paras do. Be encouraged that we do appreciate you and we are working on your behalf.

For the teachers that spoke from Franklin, thank you for your feedback and coming to us and thank you for letting us know because if we are not in the classroom, we don't know everything. We are here, we are listening to you, we appreciate the comments and the feedback. We care.

Ms. Santana stated I can't sit here and say it is not personal to me. I fought to be in this spot right here to make decisions for our school district. As I sit here I have flashbacks of a teacher that ran to my door because my son forgot his homework. I was in the bathroom having a mental breakdown because my daughter was failing everything during COVID and she refused to do any more. Of a neighbor that sees me every day and knows our struggle. I care tremendously. All 10 schools – I have been in them. I fought for them. You are heard. Do what you have to do and we are here to do what we have to do. Know that everyone sitting here really cares. I say that from the bottom of my heart.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Ms. McKenzie, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:08 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: collective bargaining agreement; Lowery litigation 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: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Ms. McKenzie, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams
NAY: None
MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 9:45 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Ms. Brens-Watson, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

All present voting YES

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON BOARD SECRETARY Work Session Minutes