

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION  
WORKSESSION MINUTES – April 20, 2021

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, April 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at the Union High School Library, 2350 North Third Street, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. The public attended via Zoom. Action was taken.

Mr. McDowell called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Mr. John O'Shea

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby (arrived 6:13 p.m.), Mrs. Kim Ruiz (arrived 6:30 p.m.), Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mrs. Sandra Paul

ALSO PRESENT:

Afshan Ajmiri Giner, Esq.

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

Dr. Morgan arrived at 6:13 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.

Mrs. Minneci read the District's mission statement.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Brens-Watson, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:15 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b: personnel, superintendent search, pending or anticipated litigation, contract negotiation and matters falling under the attorney-client privilege.

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, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Mrs. Ruiz arrived at 6:30 p.m.

The Board returned to public session at 7:24 p.m.

Comments from Public on Resolutions:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week's meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel and operations.

Superintendent's Report:

Mr. Benaquista asked Mrs. Conti to introduce Effective School Solutions. Mrs. Conti introduced Effective School Solutions and stated they provide therapeutic support for students.

Effective School Solutions gave a presentation. A summary is below:

Effective School Solutions (ESS) supporting student mental health in re-entry and beyond. ESS has partnered with Union Public Schools since 2017 to implement intensive clinical programming at Union High School, Burnet Middle School and Kawameeh Middle School to serve the districts' most at -risk students in acute need of behavioral and mental health supports.

Mental Health Support – intensive, in-school clinical support, mental health awareness and prevention; lower levels of care and crisis screening, mental health vision and planning.

2020-2021 Impact Summary – uninterrupted delivery of therapeutic services; strong student engagement with needed therapy; significant district cost savings; improved educational outcomes; high levels of family engagement.

Mental Health Crisis Facing our Young People – mental health outcomes have been degrading for students for over a decade; the COVID-19 pandemic has increased sources of trauma; the latest research indicates that students will have significant social-emotional challenges upon return to school.

Traumatic Impact of COVID-19 – academic stressors; family and economic stressors; social isolation; anxiety about COVID-19; increase in intensity of existing mental health changes.

Tier 3 Clinical Program Structure: A Set of Best Practices – daily group therapy; weekly individual therapy; bi-weekly family therapy; monthly parent support group; districtwide professional development and newsletter; rigorous clinical supervision; specialty protocols and modalities of care; ongoing objective measurement of outcomes; urgent interventions.

Diagnostic Profile of Typical Tier 3 Students – students often present with clinically complex issues requiring intervention – diagnoses: PTSD; acute stress disorder; autism spectrum disorder; major depressive disorder; ADHD; reactive attachment disorder; anxiety; oppositional defiant disorder. Clinical issues requiring intervention: trauma; depression, including suicidal threats and self-harm; anxiety; school avoidance; grief; suspected substance use; parental substance use; sexual identity issues; homelessness; domestic violence; financial instability; parental disengagement.

Prevention Profiles – students who have been successfully retained in the least restrictive learning environment typically present in ways that prevent the student from accessing their education and/or prevents other students from accessing their education due to behaviors.

Uninterrupted Service Delivery: Over 2,700 interactions (90% of services this school year have been delivered virtually).

Strong Student Therapeutic Engagement – provide morning wake-up calls, daily classroom check-ins, individualized Google-Classrooms; providing virtual office hours for CST, teachers and separate hours for students; creating virtual behavioral modifications as well as hand-delivering rewards/incentives.

Total estimated savings from returners and avoidance for 2020-2021: \$2,100,000.

The presentation is appended to the minutes and same can be viewed on TV34 and the district website.

Mrs. Conti stated they do provide our district professional development at no charge. They do this as support for our district. We are working on a social/emotional learning training that we hope to roll out before the end of the year. Thank you all.

Mrs. Ruiz stated when I first joined the Board, it was only at Burnet Middle School at that time but now it is at Kawameeh. When did that happen?

ESS representative stated the high school came in year two and Kawameeh is now in its second year.

Mrs. Conti stated even though a program is at Burnet, the high school or Kawameeh, students still can access those programs. We don't always have an autism program in each of the schools – it is open to all students in the middle school.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated thank you for your presentation. Can you give me a quick summary of the re-entry plan for our kids that are being transitioned back?

ESS representative stated we are working with our current students preparing them for coming back and working with the Child Study Team as well and what needs they have to come back into the building to be successful. We collaborate with CST as well as guidance and other staff in the school building to provide the best services to the students.

We provide PD to teachers and paras and one principal asked if we could provide PD to students and we absolutely can. It is great idea. I brought it to our clinical director here who worked with professional development and our other teams in providing and creating the training and presentations for all our students. That is what I thought was forward thinking – what can we do on a large scale to support students when they come in. All students are not in our program but we are working with principals in how can we help support you in bringing those students back and integrating those students who are maybe more avoided where school avoidance wasn't an issue for them before and now they may have anxiety. Identifying those students and working with them on the ground and helping support them as they come back.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked is it possible to have some sort of re-entry plan in written form so we know what that looks like for the 2021-22 school year? ESS representative stated absolutely, no problem; we can provide that to you.

There are three parts to that – (1) individual student by student planning that takes place with the student and equip them with the strategies in the schools – working on a treatment plan to help them overcome their anxiety and fear to get back in to the building; (2) professional development for educators – we will be happy to provide details on what that would look like; (3) a parental learning series which we would love to do virtually for the district – a quarterly parental series – giving parents coaching and things that they can use to manage the re-entry of their students. Next week we will send out a pre-recorded “getting back to school social/emotional learning for re-entry” video. We did it in English and Spanish.

For kids that are currently in the cohort – these are kids that are getting treatment all the time. We have been open to the idea of flexing data, at no additional cost to the district, to help other students that might be transitioning back to school.

Mr. McDowell stated in September, we may be expecting more students with issues and are you preparing for that now? ESS representative stated in all the districts that we are in, we are talking about flexible services.

Mr. Benaquista stated student liaisons will present next week. The budget was approved by the County office so at this point it is more of a process and there are items under Fiscal that will need to be voted on next week.

Also we are preparing for end of the year activities. At the superintendents' roundtable they gave us some updates but we are still waiting on further guidance. We will plan graduation outside. I spoke with Mr. McDowell in looking to move graduation to Saturday because of capacity and I'm working with the high school administration and the graduation committee. There is more to come but at least this way we will be ready. At the stage we are at now, we will have to have multiple ceremonies like last year. There is a lot that goes into planning graduation and end of year activities and following the restrictions and guidelines. My hopes are that the DOE will pass down guidance that will allow us to host graduation in one ceremony so the students can graduate with their classmates.

Next week I will preview some other highlights and information; as well as HIB; attendance and summer programs.

#### Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Ruiz stated that there was only one item on the agenda which is the reporting of HIB and therefore no Education Committee meeting took place and therefore only E-1 will be reported next week.

#### DISCUSSION:

None

#### Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

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

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

#### F-6. APPROVE DISTRICT WIDE TRAVEL AND RELATED EXPENSES

Approve district wide travel and related expenses pursuant to the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7 and Board Policy File Code 6471 and in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

#### DISCUSSION:

Mr. McDowell asked why is this being approved tonight? Mrs. Koon stated it is date sensitive.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

**MOTION CARRIED**

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

**DISCUSSION:**

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-16 – is that for the 2021-22 school year? If so, how much have we spent? Isn't that number high? Mrs. Koon stated it is just a guideline. There was not much travel to my knowledge – somewhere around \$15,000 but it is not to exceed \$85,000. Mr. O'Shea stated should that be changed to say "not to exceed \$85,000". Mrs. Koon stated we can add that.

Mr. O'Shea stated F-20 – safety grant – that is yearly? Mrs. Koon stated yes. We are hoping to have that application in by the end of April. We reached out to our security director with regards to what projects he would use the funds for.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-21 – I know we are doing the three-year old's this year – are they part of the budget? Mrs. Koon stated yes. We are expecting 30 three-year-old's and 270 regular students for a total of 300. The 30 students will be at the outside providers – YMCA.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked do you know when the parents will be told? Mrs. Koon stated I will have to check with Mrs. Walker on how she is going to roll that out.

Mr. O'Shea stated F-22 this is a mini audit. Mrs. Koon stated it is a mini audit. The auditors will be here for a day to help assess and project where we think our surplus will be at June 30<sup>th</sup> and to make sure that we can put something in capital reserve – emergency reserve. We are anticipating to cover the lunch debt over a period of three years – roughly \$70,000 for three years. They will come in to make sure we are following and in compliance with our corrective action plan.

**Grievance/Negotiations Committee:**

Mrs. Minneci presented the Grievance/Negotiations Committee agenda.

**DISCUSSION:**

None

**Operations Committee Resolutions:**

Dr. Francis presented the Operations Committee agenda.

Mr. Benaquista stated next week the Board will have a company for O-4. Mrs. Koon stated as part of the ESIP program we went out for bid for roofing – 11 bidders picked up and 8 submitted. The alleged lowest bidder is being contested. We forwarded it to our attorney for final review. The proposed awardee did come in under budget. Hopefully in the next day or two the attorneys will send us their final recommendations and be placed on the agenda.

Mr. McDowell stated it is being contested by one of the other bidders. Mrs. Koon stated correct, the second lowest bidder. Mr. McDowell stated we did receive an explanation from Barry Loessel describing what is going on the roofs. A question was asked about some of the schools' roofs being relatively new. Mrs. Koon stated the question was regarding Jefferson

which was recently done within the last five years. With the ESIP program, they are going to retrofit it to extend the warranty on that particular roof.

#### DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated O-3 – is it in person at Jefferson? And is there a cost to the parents? How do parents apply to this? Mr. Benaquista stated Camp Invention – we allow them to have the camp in our district. There is a cost. We are having a lot of work done over the summer in our buildings because of ESIP so right now everything is tentative. I have to meet with the faculty member that is handling Camp Invention. This may be updated and I will bring more information next week on the exact cost for this year and if it is definitely in person because we still want to give an option of hybrid for the families that are still uncomfortable about coming in and that is one thing that they stressed. Before next week I will get answers.

Dr. Francis stated I'm sure Jefferson is not the only school that we had a new roof recently – can Mr. Loessel check the other schools for new roofs? Mrs. Koon stated according to his emails that I forwarded to you but I will have him double check that but in his email he said Jefferson was the only one that was getting retrofitted but I will confirm that.

Dr. Francis presented the discussion item - Letter from Township of Union Education Foundation requesting to use the playground at Livingston Elementary School for painting fundraiser on May 20, 2021 (rain date May 27, 2021) and also requesting the use of tables for the fundraiser. Mr. McDowell stated this will go on next week for approval.

#### Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Dr. Francis presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

#### DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Ruiz stated P-5 – do the affirmative action officers receive any type of training? Mr. Benaquista stated yes. Ms. Walker is going to be joining me to replace Mrs. Boakye. In the past we have gone to training. I am going to research if the training will be virtual or in person

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated P-4 – some of the leaves are earlier in March. Mr. Benaquista stated anytime we receive a leave request, it goes on as soon as we receive it, as long as the document is there we need to honor the leave.

Dr. Francis asked the cosmetology teacher, her retirement is not until December, why is she on now? Mr. Benaquista stated originally she was thinking of June 30<sup>th</sup> but now she decided to stay until December 30<sup>th</sup>. She could have put it in September but she is giving us a lot of notice because that is not an easy certification to replace. We are happy we have this program. We have had previous students that have come back to us showing interest. She is giving us time to find a replacement.

Mrs. Minneci stated I see people retiring that may have had my children – nothing but wishes of good luck.

**Policy Committee:**

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following policies were moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz for adoption:

**POL-1. APPROVE POLICY 1648 – RESTART AND RECOVERY PLAN**

Approve Policy 1648 – Restart and Recovery Plan, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes. (*final reading*)

**POL-2. APPROVE POLICY 1648.02 – REMOTE LEARNING OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES**

Approve Policy 1648.02 – Remote Learning Options for Families, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes. (*final reading*)

**POL-3. APPROVE POLICY 1648.03 – RESTART AND RECOVERY PLAN – FULL-TIME REMOTE INSTRUCTION**

Approve Policy 1648.03 – Restart and Recovery Plan – Full-Time Remote Instruction, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes. (*final reading*)

**DISCUSSION:**

None

**AYE:** Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O’Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mr. McDowell

**NAY:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Technology Committee:**

Mrs. Brens-Watson presented the Technology Committee agenda.

**DISCUSSION:**

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated T-2 - it is not monitoring services. Mrs. Paul stated is the vendor we can use and it has been approved by E-Rate to allow us to purchase network infrastructure equipment at a discount. We will change the agenda item to read “purchasing”.

**Approval of Bills:**

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, and moved by Mr. O’Shea, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, that the Board concur with the bills listed in the permanent bound register appended to these minutes and be ordered for payment.

**DISCUSSION:**

Dr. Francis asked why are we paying the bills now? Mrs. Koon stated it is time sensitive on some of the bills - healthcare insurance. As you recall, we did postpone our meetings to a week later.



AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

**Unfinished Business:**

Mr. O'Shea stated we discussed going out for RFPs. We had a discussion in finance and Mrs. Koon brought up three main issues that we have to look at this year. Whether going forward with current vendors or do we need to go out for RFPs. The two most important ones is the healthcare and banks. We concurred that the number one issue that we have to look at is Fairview Insurance may not be doing the right thing for us – I don't know what our program is all about. I think we should go out with an RFP regarding that. Mrs. Giner stated Mr. O'Shea, if you are going to recommend, don't discuss the specific vendor.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I think we have gone out for RFPs and I would support going out for RFPs.

Mr. O'Shea stated we will take one at a time but immediately would be healthcare. In regards to banking, we are waiting for our present banker to come back to us with incentives for us to stay with them. In this town alone we have ten financial institutions.

If we are going out with RFPs, we should put out immediately an RFP for the broker of record for the healthcare and wait a 30-day period for our banker. Once we get the broker of record for insurance that we immediately move on to the banking. We can tell the bank that we will do month-to-month until we put a recommendation out. I would like to see what they are going to offer first. Mrs. Ruiz stated I'm in agreement with you, I think that is necessary.

Mr. O'Shea asked can this go on next week's meeting to go out for an RFP. Afshan stated you just have to direct the administration that the Board wants the administration to go out and bid for certain professional services – that is all you need to do. You don't have to do a special resolution.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated is there still a working list of RFPs? Mrs. Koon stated for clarity, right now my direction based on the Board's consensus is to go out right now for the healthcare broker and wait 30 days for the current bank proposal and they revisit or go out for the banking.

Mr. McDowell stated lunch piece needs to be talked about tonight. Mrs. Koon stated good news, today at 1:30 p.m. I received a notice from Pomptonian, our current food vendor, letting all business administrators know that the USDA have extended our waiver which will allow us to continue to serve free meals to all students and the waiver is extended until 2022. That is a good thing. However, we do have to find out because the lunch applications are tied to federal funds so we need to know how that is going to impact whether or not we still need to create a campaign and do the lunch applications. We are waiting for guidance but that is good news and that buys us another year and we will not need to raise lunch meals for the next school year.

Mrs. Ruiz asked was that an initiative that we requested or did they extend that to all schools? Mrs. Koon stated it is all school districts. The Biden administration had campaigned on hunger due to COVID and it impacts our students and he just got the official word today that they are going to extend it for another school year and we will not incur any additional debt and it gives us another year to knock down the debt.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated during the last meeting, I did bring up the issue of advocating for additional funding for our district. I would like to bring it to the table once again. So far we haven't done anything or coordinated efforts. I'm not talking about one person; I'm thinking about various representatives in the State of New Jersey that we should be communicating with. My concern is that we are going to miss out on the opportunity to advocate for ourselves to get additional funding.

Mrs. Ruiz stated shouldn't that correspondence come from the Board President since you speak on behalf of the Board? Mrs. Brens-Watson stated not necessarily. We as a Board can bring it to our representatives and others. Is it something we want to do as Board not just one person? We can advocate as individual citizens.

Mrs. Ruiz stated anything that comes as a Board initiative should come from the Board President, it shouldn't come from individual Board members. Mr. McDowell stated I think it can. Mrs. Ruiz stated I thought it was only the Board President can speak for the Board. Mr. McDowell stated for outside – right. Mrs. Ruiz stated we can all “co-sign” it but it should be from the Board President. Mr. McDowell stated I'm thinking any kind of initiative or ideas should come from the Board. I know that the UTEA has been pushing also and I will contact Ann Margaret Shannon to find out how we can also be involved in and support each other. Mrs. Koon had reached out to Mr. Stevens and the candidate for State Senate Jamal Holly and they are aware of our situation and to see if there is anything they can do. I will reach out to the UTEA to see if we can come up with more funding from the State.

Mrs. Brens-Watson asked do we need to pass a resolution? Mr. McDowell stated let me contact the UTEA and Mr. Stevens and what he has in a way of guiding us on who to talk to.

Mrs. Koon stated I did meet via Zoom with Mr. Ricky Stevens who is the legislator's director for Assemblyman Holly and we spent about 30-40 minutes discussing the challenges the districts are facing. We left off with the next step is he wanted something tangible so I supplied him documentation of the three major cost drivers of our budget and challenges that we are faced with. He has a meeting with Jamal some time this week and he was going to get back to me within another week or two. Obviously we are looking for other opportunities. We know nothing can be done because this budget is set for fiscal 2022 but there may be other funds or grants to help supplement some of the areas. They know Statewide that the school funding formula needs to be revised.

Mr. McDowell stated we have been working with the Township of Union in the past and we meet with them every couple of months to discuss what they can do for us in the way of shared services and how we can work together to move our district along. We will be doing that

again very soon and we will have a little more leeway to do that once this COVID pandemic has eased up a little bit. We will start working with the Township so we can look into additional funding for our district.

Dr. Francis stated the shared services with the Township – we need to make sure Mrs. Koon is part of it and making sure it is equal in terms of dollar amounts. A lot of this stuff is tangible – we need equity on both sides. Mr. McDowell stated I think that was one of the issues or problems we had in the past was the recordkeeping of services provided by each party. It is going to be very hard for us to keep track of who is doing what for whom.

#### New Business:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated during the education committee – there was a grant given that had to be used for the kids for the summer program. Mrs. Ruiz stated the one Mrs. Guilfoyle discussed. Mr. Benaquista stated the ESSR II – money for the program, not just through the summer, I believe it continues until 2023 and there is even more grant money coming out. There are definitely strict guidelines on how we use this money – the documentation that is needed to show regression or learning loss. Our goal is to have a program in each building this summer. Between our Title I, ESY and our summer programs and really hitting in the SEL, (inaudible) and STEM. We are going to expand our bridge programs to be a more inclusive program for the needs that the kids may have.

We sent out a parent survey and the administrators will meet with parents, staff and students to discuss the needs of the summer program. I have been talking to Mr. McDowell and if we need to put it on for the Board. We may need to hire. One of the things I'm worried about in offering some of these programs, is it will be a challenge to find the staff. We are thinking about how we can combine some of the programs and hitting on all the needs of the kids. The data may not show where the kids are at and that is why they will let us use the money in the future because we might not notice what a child needs to be successful and that is why a loss of learning – we will need to create programs for children as we recognize and have evidence that they need support. We will continue to have to build programs for our kids – it may not be today, tomorrow or may take some time to really make sure that every child is where they should be at.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I know we only have about 45 days left – the English department to look at purchasing for the new school year – I think it is imperative that we really think about revamping our library especially including culturally responsive text within our library. If we have to purchase books for the 2021-2022 school year that we should focus on those culturally responsive text.

Mrs. Ruiz asked do we have an SAT day that we do here at school so the students have an opportunity to take the SAT for free here. I know other schools do it. I think it is a great opportunity and we can make sure that every student that can sit for the SAT has at least one shot if the family can't afford it. Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Moran prepared a calendar of all tests. She can present to the Education Committee next month. We have both the PSAT and SAT. Right now we pay for the PSAT for our students. If that is something that is hindering our

students from taking it, we should at least get that evidence and come up with a game plan. If we can as a district take care of it. I will follow up with Mrs. Ahern and Mrs. Moran.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked is there any update on the State exams? Mr. Benaquista stated we have had to upload our district data into the system. It is done in homeroom. I can have Mrs. Moran give the Board an update but we have done what we needed to do for State requirements.

Mr. McDowell stated I want to update the public on where we stood on the superintendent search in order to try to maintain clarity and transparency. The process is still moving along. I reported last time that we had 34 candidates apply for the position. We narrowed that down to 12. The last week in March we interviewed those 12 candidates over a period of three days and narrowed that down to four candidates and now we are in the process of deciding who we will hire among those four. We expect by the end of this month to have a candidate presented to the public.

I would publicly like to acknowledge Mrs. Cappiello and Mrs. Koon – hours upon hours being here with us and made sure we had everything we needed as far as documentation, and working with our NJSBA representative Mrs. Thornton. I just want to acknowledge Mrs. Koon and Mrs. Cappiello for all your work; it is very appreciated. Thank you – I know you put a lot of time and effort and it is appreciated.

Mrs. Ruiz stated the public was very concerned about their input in this process and the surveys went out and there were specific criteria and people mentioned in their responses to the survey that they wanted to see a superintendent and it is important for the public that the responses to that survey were reviewed, assessed and the questions that were asked of the candidates were formulated directly from those responses. You were heard. We took your concerns into consideration and each candidate was asked 16 questions and several questions had 3-4 parts. I just wanted to reassure the public that we absolutely heard you and we received your input and applied it to the process. I wanted that to be clear.

Mr. McDowell stated thank you and I'm so glad you mentioned that. All the questions and comments were taken into consideration from the public and staff when the interview process was performed.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated with regards to testing – the NJSLS was cancelled. Mrs. Paul stated ESL – the testing for the ESL and ELS for special education will continue. We are fulfilling the requirements for those students.

#### Comments from the Public:

Jeffrey Monge stated the Township received \$15 million in aid; I want to ask if there has been any conversations related to that and how they can potentially help the school board needs during tough times budget wise.

On the RFP side there is a schedule that was put together with some thought as it pertains to some of the contractors relating to work that has to be done over the summertime. I ask that each Board member take a look at that schedule. I think it is a great idea to go out to bid for the

healthcare broker. It was a big oversight in my opinion the last time was the lack of experience versus the folks that we had. There was call center opportunity for teachers and the like and that was not being offered and that was a great loss to the staff.

F-17 – not sure why that is being voted on prior to the budget being voted on. It will be great to see how the proposed budget items there compare to costs projected this year's budget of professional fees.

The RFP for the bank, as well as any contractor, I think it is necessary to go out for competitive bid. The RFP for the bank when it was first bid out, when I was on the Board, over the years we were able to save hundreds of thousands of dollars based on that competitive bid.

Mrs. Koon, I know looking at the budget presentation submitted to County, the budget got balanced off the backs of the facility maintenance costs or reserves, as well as supplies. I think a lot of that balance was due to the increase in the insurance costs. I'm curious if you have something up your sleeve as it pertains to balancing because we are going to take money out of the classrooms especially the facilities and they are in need of desperate repair above and beyond what is being done this summer.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated UTEA president – I want to thank Mr. McDowell for mentioning the UTEA's work on the legislative side. I definitely am looking forward to working with you on those issues.

If people didn't know, the UTEA had a family game night – David Arminio was the MC. It was a wonderful and fantastic night.

Reminder the Parsonage Project – very fun and successful. We already had seven Sundays that schools participated and we have three left. This Sunday is for Franklin families. We saved the last two schools because they are the most historical schools – May 2<sup>nd</sup> is Hannah Caldwell and May 16<sup>th</sup> is Connecticut Farms. If you are not in those schools but you haven't had a chance, obviously it is open to everyone and please come out.

Elsie Mackie stated I want to invite all of you – the Board members, the community of Union, this Saturday, the Township of Union Committee Autism Jazz Fest. It is going to be at Rabkin Park. It is to raise money for various disability initiatives but anyone can come with or without a donation. Come and have a great time and really try to bridge this gap with the community. I hope to see you all there.

Mr. O'Shea and Mrs. Koon – I want you to know that you are both doing an amazing job – a lot of information, very thorough and I pray that it continues and you both stay independent. The focus should always be on the children and the educational staff.

Mr. Benaquista, I would like to know where we are in terms of home services for children with disabilities. I never hear any discussion about that during these meetings. As you all know the children have been out of school a very long time and a lot of children have regressed. In home direct communication and contact is necessary to get them back up to speed.

The last time we were awaiting what the State said but there hasn't been any clarity and I haven't heard the Board make mention to it. I would appreciate and the whole disability community would like to know what the plans are.

Mr. McDowell, in terms of superintendent, what will be the stakeholders involvement? Will they get the opportunity to meet your top two candidates? I know you received a lot of feedback – I know there is a union, there are various committees, various community stakeholders – what is with that?

Susan Lipstein stated I'm speaking on behalf of the Education Foundation – we are having a fundraiser in May and there will be more information coming out on that. Also, I want to thank those teachers – it has been such a busy year. I have spoken to many and they said their workloads have been increased by having to pivot and change and constantly working in a different way this year and two ways at once which is a challenge. I had teachers that took time to apply for grants from the Education Foundation for the 2021-2022 school year. We received applications for the 2021-2022 and the Foundation will be voting on them in May and approving the applications that we receive. We are planning a Zoom announcement for those teachers that will receive the grants. We are looking forward for an exciting 2021-2022 school year.

Mr. O'Shea stated this is just an announcement – talking about communicating with the Town. I just want the public to know the Township has received an enormous amount of food for people who are in need. They will be giving out this food on April 28<sup>th</sup> between 10 a.m. – 11 p.m. at the Senior Citizen Center. Please tell everyone that you know because I would like to see all of this food given to our Township rather than sending it someplace else. Mrs. Ruiz asked for Mr. O'Shea to share the flyer. Mr. Benaquista stated I will reach out to the Town and also get the flyer and distribute to our community.

Mrs. Koon stated I would like to respond to Mr. Monge; for clarity he was mentioning F-17 being voted on and it will be voted on next Tuesday. F-6 was what we voted on tonight. I believe he also mentioned about the facilities and the budget. We are planning to use a lot of the grant money to facilitate and help us cover some of the large repairs and purchases.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:38 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Mr. O'Shea,  
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON  
BOARD SECRETARY