

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – MARCH 9, 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, March 9, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. via Zoom, pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mr. McDowell called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. John O’Shea, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Dr. Guy Francis (arrived 6:08 p.m.), Mrs. Kim Ruiz (arrived 6:06 p.m.), Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams (arrived 6:06 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gerald Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mrs. Sandra Paul

ALSO PRESENT:

Afshan Ajmiri Giner, Esq.

Mrs. Brens-Watson led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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.

Dr. Morgan read the District’s mission statement.

Mrs. Ruiz and Mrs. Williams arrived at meeting at 6:06 p.m.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Minneci, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:07 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 and matters of 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.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Dr. Francis arrived at meeting at 6:08 p.m.

The Board returned to public session at 7:04 p.m.

Comments from Public on Resolutions:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next weeks' meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel.

Superintendent's Report:

Mr. Benaquista stated that the student liaisons will be next week, and he will speak about opening of schools and highlight a student from Battle Hill and things going on in the district. Tonight, Mrs. Koon will give a presentation on the proposed budget. I want to thank Mrs. Koon, she put together a very thorough presentation. She put a lot of time and energy into it and her presentation will look a little different from what we have done in the past.

Unfortunately over the last few years we have had to cut our budget to have a balanced budget presented to the County. This year we are in the same position, it is just not as bad as we were in the past. Anytime we have to cut money out of the budget, benefits and salaries are the two biggest expenses, and we will be working together and hoping with the number of retirements and resignations, certain positions that don't need to be filled, we can get through attrition. We will continue to meet with administrators on secondary and high school level to see about different schedules and if it can impact the 6th or 7th period stipends that would help, as well as looking at enrollment district wide. Hopefully through retirements, if it is a position that we do not need to replace, that is an easier way to cut within the budget.

Mrs. Koon stated I'm the Business Administrator and have been here for three months and have learned quite a bit in this short period of time. Annually by law the district has to present their budget and it needs to be submitted to the County by March 22nd. Mrs. Koon presented the proposed budget and a summary is below and attached to the minutes:

- Budget Mission – continue to support district initiatives to ensure physical and mental well being and safety of students and staff, encourage relationships with school community and community

- Budget Development Process – meeting with principals, supervisors and directors; review all cost centers and proposals; budget framework developed; approval by Board; submission to County; approval of budget
- Ongoing Initiatives (STEM, CAR, AP/Honors, Mental Wellness, Technologies, Pathway Programs, Co-Curriculars-Performing Arts, Supply Chain Management, Kean University Initiatives)
- Superintendent’s FY22 Proposed Budget - \$146,562,254.00 (increase of \$4,811,454)
- Drivers of the 2021-2022 Budget – increase of health insurance premiums, UTEA/UTASA/ACMTE contractual obligations; charter schools; transportation; special education-related services
- Snapshot of Current Year FY22 – 1,155 contracted employees, 7,138 students enrolled (K-12), 300 students pre-k, 1795 students transported daily, 2,300 meals served daily, 12 buildings/facilities)
- Staffing Statistics 2021-202 – 1,155 total staff
- District School Enrollments (as of 10/2020) – Battle Hill 377, Connecticut Farms – 375, Franklin – 460, Hannah Caldwell – 592, Livingston – 385, Washington – 546, Jefferson 525, Burnet Middle – 1,023, Kawameeh Middle – 682, Union High – 2,173 for a total of 7,138
- District’s Enrollment Trend – decreased
- Charter Schools Enrollment – enrollment has gone up
- FY22 Revenue Sources – local levy and miscellaneous; State and federal aid; fund balance; grant and entitlement (including pre-k); debt service
- FY22 State Aid - \$35,084,171
- Appropriations – employee benefits, professional technical service, purchase property/repairs, other purchase service, supplies and materials, equipment, miscellaneous other
- FY22 Budget by Categories – General Operating - \$131,845,513; fund 20: pre-k - \$5,491,721; all other grants \$3,293,629; debt service bonds - \$3,282,431; grand total \$146,562,254
- District Local Tax Levy (2021-2022) – Tax Levy - \$95,524,677, Debt Service \$3,282,431 – Total Tax Levy \$98,807,108
- Transportation Snapshot – students - in-district – 1,429; out-of-district – 129, vo-tech - \$103, non-public transported – 134, paid aid in lieu – 328; total 1,795
- School’s Age and Square Footage
- Faculty and Grounds Projects (current year) – plexi-glass/shield, flooring, steps and railing, LED lighting (ESIP), renovated bathrooms, new gym floor, A/C, serving line, painting of classrooms, hallways, etc.
- ESIP Projects for FY22 – Phase I – LED lighting, building improvements, water fixture recommissioning, high efficiency transformers, walk-in refrigeration, gym AU’s, HW converter, chiller, drop ceiling installation, roof design, steam trap replacement, automation system, rooftop/split system replacement, steam boiler with controls
- ESIP Projects for FY22 – Phase II – solar system, roof repair/replacement, auditorium HVAC renovation with cooling addition, steam boiler replacement with controls
- Pomptonian Food Service – implemented farm to school, increase participation in grab n go hot meals, rebranding the main serving lines, new promotions, café Instagram account

- FY22 Service Enhancements Planned – made to order deli bar, salad bar, replacement of POS system, purchase additional warmers, replace milk coolers
- Budget Cost-Savings Measures – the BOE continues to explore cost-saving measures. Shared partnerships are sought at the local, the County and the State levels.

Mrs. Ruiz stated even though we saw a dip in enrollment from last year to this school year, we are still seeing it higher than 2018 obviously more people are moving in or more kids are school age. I'm concerned as to whether or not we are going to have enough space for the increase in students which is guaranteed to increase because we have all these new developments in Town with all the beautiful luxury apartments that they are building around Town. Has there been a study to conduct an analysis as to the projected percentage of increase in student population growth in our district?

Mrs. Koon stated we are in the process now and I reached out to the planning department and he is supplying me some information regarding how many anticipated students will be coming into the Town. He predicted that it wouldn't be that many and I also offered to him that maybe we can have a Board member present to represent the school district and also with these developments that are coming into the district, what are they offering to put into the school system. I know there are a lot of pilot programs going on so they should be donating or doing something for our district. I have spoken to them about that and he is supposed to be sending me information based upon all the apartments and new developments that are coming around. So we are looking at what the impact will be to the school district.

In addition to that our pre-school enrollment is increased by 30. We are going to have 30 students at the YMCA so we will occupy two classrooms at 15 students. I spoke with our director Mrs. Walker.

Hopefully as that program grows we may be able to expand our providers and not just at the YMCA so that may free up some classroom space.

I have been working with Mr. Benaquista and his team and we are looking at the class enrollments by school and by grade. We did notice that there are quite a few classes that are 14-16 students so we may need to increase our class sizes to free up some space. We are looking at how to create more space.

Mrs. Ruiz stated thank you and you made a very important point that we all these new developers come in, they should contribute to our school district. I hope when those meetings happen everyone is pushing for that.

Dr. Francis stated I don't know if you seen our impact study done a few years ago. The Town refused to do one. They always been claiming that these developments will have little impact on our schools and we know that is not true. They assume because you are living in a rental apartment people are not having children and that is something I just can't understand. I think it would be good for you to look at the impact study we as a district put together and had one for us. I believe it was a preliminary meaning that their were other units like the Vermellia project that were not completed and therefore I don't believe they took into account those

additional units and all these other places that have since been developed. I think we should have the impact study updated to reflect that. They have been building and building but have not contributed to either expanding the schools – like Washington or Livingston or even trying to build new schools.

Mrs. Koon stated I was surprised that we didn't have a representative from the Board at any of these planning meetings. The man at the planning board said he didn't have a problem forwarding to me the meetings and maybe we can partake. This is our opportunity to bridge and build a rapport with the Town so we can at least know who is coming in and what is going on around us and make these developers that are coming in to contribute because it is going to impact our schools.

In addition to that we need to reach out to our legislators regarding charter schools because those numbers are increasing. We need to be vocal about it. In the three months I have been here, it went up \$146,000 then they told me that we need to budget \$900,000 so that is another \$123,000 over what we budgeted last year. That is an area that we need to start looking at and monitoring and seeing why the students are leaving and see what we can do to capture and keep our students.

In addition to make sure we fill out all our applications because that impacts our aid as well – free and reduced. We do have quite a bit of challenges here and it seems like we have a decent team that is willing to work. I will throw out ideas I have but I need people to do the work.

Mr. O'Shea stated certainly the development has been quite rapid here in Union. We just found out that Vermella is in their second stage of luxury apartments but they do open the third phase they stated to the administration that they have every intention of selling rather than renting. You have to look at what the ability is going to be versus their luxury apartments. Are they going to be the same? Why would someone want to buy a luxury apartment? Children would be a factor there and we would have to worry about that. Unless you are in the realty business, right now the hottest town going in buying new homes is here in the Township of Union. There is hardly any inventory. My street alone within the last two years, I have had three homes sold on my street and there are five new children. Another was just sold and they are people from the City and three more children coming in. That is eight more children just on my street. We have to look at all situations in regard to this. There are a lot of single family homes that are being bought up by different parts of the City of New York coming here to New Jersey. The luxury apartments is something we are going to have to monitor but I do feel that the developers have to be more open to us as to what are their plans. We may have to raise our voices. This happened in the past district I was on a school board and they came back up with a study of the developer and I asked the developer to give it to us – we never got it. We will have to be very careful with this.

Mr. McDowell stated I think we need somebody on that planning committee. We have to remind our Township of Union, even the developers, if our school district is not doing well they will not be selling the apartments. It would behoove them to invest in our schools in order to make their luxury apartments look a little more attractive to new buyers.

Dr. Morgan stated charter schools started over 20 years ago, I thought the charter schools had to be in the neighborhood. We don't have charter schools in Union. Are people moving here that are already enrolled in charter schools? Or are people leaving to go to charter schools and we now have to pay? I'm confused.

Mrs. Koon stated are like a private entity with a private entity. Money is filtered through our district. They are Union resident students that are going to charters, wherever – it could be Newark – there are over 13 charter schools that our students are going to and we are responsible.

Dr. Morgan asked do we pay for transportation in addition? Mrs. Koon stated unfortunately since we are strapped with transportation and if the school is two miles or greater for elementary and if it is secondary 2.5 miles or greater, we are responsible for transportation. Because our fleet is already full, we have to pay aid in lieu by law which is roughly \$1,000 a year.

Dr. Morgan asked how many students are we paying for to bus and as well as paying in lieu of? I think I saw over 500 students that are not enrolled in Union Public Schools that we are paying for transportation. Mrs. Koon stated 328 is aid in lieu for the parents taking their kids to and from and the other non-public we are providing transportation. You are absolutely right.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated you are saying 328 x \$1,000 per student is the transportation fee? Mrs. Koon stated exactly, that is \$328,000 and then you have your non-public so it does escalate.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I sat through many Board presentations and I just want to say thank you so much for being transparent with this budget presentation. I was able to follow it and understand exactly what the numbers were.

I noticed you said there was an increase for the pre-k of 30 students which would be two classrooms at the YMCA; does that include the three-year old's that are being invited into this program for the next school year? Mrs. Koon stated yes, that is where our 3-year old's will be housed next year at the YMCA. We are excited about that.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked do we have a projected number for the 2021-2022 school year in terms of numbers? Mrs. Koon stated the total she applied for was \$5.4 million. The budget went in at \$5,491,721 which is \$1,351,766 over last year.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the costs driving the district, if you were to pick one of the costs driving that we can tackle it in district to save us some money, what would you tackle? Mrs. Koon stated that is a good question, I'm only here three months so I need to learn a little bit more about the Jefferson issue because we have over 14 routes going to one school for one grade and I don't know the history and I need to do more studying on that. I think we should revisit it. I have spoken to Mr. Benaquista, I heard a little bit about what it is all about – the history, but we need to take a look at that and bring in attorneys, real estate brokers because we want it to have

equity and we want all of our students to have the same opportunities in education. I would look at that area.

Another area is health insurance premium – I reached out to our brokers and we need to make our brokers work for us. We are paying them. I'm looking at asking what are some preventive measures that we can do to help the overall health of our staff to prevent some of the health issues that are occurring. I think they had some incentives for health workshops and things of that nature.

Mr. Benaquista stated our last broker and having Mrs. Boakye in personnel really did do a lot with wellness throughout our district. We spoke about our rate increases not too long ago and with the experience, relating to the health of an employee and overall district experiences – the number of claims versus what we are paying as a whole, we have been averaging about 80% but some months are in the 70's and some months in the 90's. Wellness is very important because if we can keep our experience at 80 or below, we would be slowing down the increases and 2% on our premium is a lot of money. It is very important that we continue with the wellness and working with our broker to create the programs. Mrs. Boakye was a great asset of being that bring between the broker and the district so moving forward whoever becomes that person overseeing personnel that is a key part of their job to pick back up and continue to do. It could mean indirectly mean millions to us.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated thank you for presenting this budget with a mission.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Ruiz gave an overview of the Education Committee. Mrs. Ruiz stated the education committee met earlier today. My overview of the meeting is as follows – we discussed E-2 which is the 2021-2022 school calendar and there are only three significant changes and they added three professional development days.

Mr. Benaquista stated we add back five half-days which are now five full days because PD were half days. It is benefitting the students. We were already closed and election day so we only added the one five-hour PD day.

Mrs. Ruiz stated we discussed E-3 – the NJDOE allocations. The learning acceleration which is \$190,000 will be used this school year to help with the learning loss that our students have suffered as a result of COVID and virtual learning situation. Obviously, the mental health supports and I believe Mrs. Guilfoyle stated that we are looking to use that as soon as possible to assist our students with the mental health concerns that resulted from COVID and the isolation and virtual learning. I believe the \$2.9 million will help us with infrastructure.

We also discussed E-4 – in the past we have had community-based instruction sites where our students with special needs would go to learn life skills and working skills so they would be placed at Shop Rite, etc. but because of COVID we can't do it the way we once did so this year we are collaborating with Pomptonian and our students will be placed in the cafeteria and will be learning the same kind of work skills and life skills.

Finally, E-5 – this school year’s calendar and the revision to this calendar is that our students will be off on Monday, May 31st and Tuesday, June 1st because there was an error that was caught in the current calendar.

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

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent’s Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period February 17 to March 9, 2021 (no incidences to report) (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Minneci stated in E-2 – there is a date of “Thursday, May 3, 2022” and it should read “Tuesday, May 3, 2022”.

Dr. Morgan asked the ESSER money – has there been any discussion on summer programs for our children? Mrs. Ruiz stated we did discuss summer programs with respect to the \$190,000 to assist with the learning loss that our students have endured as a result of the virtual school year.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we talked with Mrs. Guilfoyle to incorporate some kind of 4-6 learning loss program for the kids and she told us that she would get back to us and their plans for that.

Dr. Morgan stated I would like to make a recommendation that we also look at some sort of enrichment for kids who may not have suffered as much educationally but they probably need to be around their friends.

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mr. O’Shea stated because of scheduling we were not able to meet prior to this meeting; we are scheduled to meet as a committee on the 16th before the regular Board meeting.

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-22. APPROVE TECHNOLOGY FOR EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION CONSULTING – EVALUATIONS

Approve Technology for Education and Communication Consulting, Incorporated, to provide the following evaluations for district students: Assistive Technology Evaluations - \$850.00 per evaluation and Augmentative Communication Evaluations - \$900 per evaluation (not to exceed \$7,500.00), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes [Account #11-000-219-320-01-19/7074].

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Grievance/Negotiations Committee:

Dr. Francis presented the Grievance/Negotiations Committee agenda.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Dr. Francis, seconded by Mr. O’Shea for adoption:

G-1. APPROVE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT WITH ACMTE

Approve Memorandum of Agreement between the Township of Union Board of Education and the Association of Custodial, Maintenance and Transportation Employees (ACMTE), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

None

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Dr. Francis presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Dr. Francis presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

O. Policy Committee

Dr. Morgan presented the following policies for first reading next week:

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

Approve Policy 1648 – Restart and Recovery Plan, in accordance with the information in the hands of each Board member (*first 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 in the hands of each Board member (*first reading*).

Residency Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Williams presented the Residency Committee agenda. Mrs. Williams stated Mrs. Regis-Darby had a question about children that have been exited via hearings and students that have been exited for other reasons. I have a list; the students they reached out for wellness checks – there were eight returned mail and one deemed homeless. Next week we will be voting on two and if there are any other children removed from that list I will let you know.

Technology Committee:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated they did not have the technology committee meeting, but stated the following updates:

Old Business

- Working on current proposals for district telephone and notification systems.
 - No update
- Move from Systems 3000 for payroll and personnel to Genesis during 2020-2021 school year.
 - Update: In discussions with payroll and personnel regarding this change
 - Postponed move to Genesis system during the 2021-2022 school year.
- Security camera systems for middle and elementary schools
 - Update: Received quotes and reviewing for changing system in middle schools.
- Replacement of current fiber between wiring closets in middle and elementary schools.
 - No update
- Replacement of district old electronic whiteboards
 - Update: Viewsonic purchases continue to be delivered to the school district.
- Professional Development
 - Update: Continue to provide teachers with technology resource training for the week of March 8th thru March 12th.
- District Technology Plan
 - Developing criteria for the plan
 - Adopting new sections such as hybrid and virtual learning. Using a few previous requirements stipulated in the 2013-2016 state technology plan
 - Committee will be a combination of stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, support staff, and administrators. 8 to 10 stakeholders will be on the committee.
- District website
 - Presently in discussions on proving the district website on ease of use and appearance
 - Changes will be made to the present site to provide more communication to the community and stakeholders

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

Mrs. Ruiz stated hybrid is going into effect next week – are the middle school and high school students going to be switching classes or stay in one class and the teachers will switch?

Mr. Benaquista stated for middle and high schoolers – the students will be switching classes.

Mrs. Ruiz asked will there be designated routes – one-way routes? Mr. Benaquista stated yes. The principals should have sent out their building plans. Everything will be found on our main webpage and updated as needed. This is where all the COVID information will be going. The district has to have a platform to allow parents to see daily COVID cases – it will be a total and by school. A lot of times information only goes to those that are impacted but the community can see if it is impacting our district. There is counseling and mental health information; information on quarantine; our building handbooks – so this is where everything will be.

Mr. McDowell stated I saw this and thought it was a great idea. Mr. Benaquista stated as we get more information, the site will grow as we need it to.

New Business:

Mrs. Ruiz stated first – can we get a status update on the pathways program? How many students are involved, how is it going? It was supposed to start this school year but I don't know if it did. It would be nice to have an update on the pathways program. How effective it actually is? What is the feedback on it from students and/or parents?

The SAT schedule for this Saturday at the high school. I'm assuming that is a go; I haven't received any cancellation notice. I'm just wondering if we are good to go on that? Finally, I believe our CAD senior students take the test in April or May and I just wanted to know if that is happening this year. If so, is that in person? A virtual exam? How many students are taking it? I know we had invested money to get the seniors the technical equipment that they needed to be able to prepare for it. I'm assuming they are ready to go.

Mr. Benaquista stated SAT is still on for Saturday. The pathways, a lot of people are sending questions and they were answered with the video the other night and I will get you more accurate data but there was a lot of interest. I'm looking forward to getting a bunch of students involved in.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I thought it was being rolled out this school year. Mr. Benaquista stated I believe it was being put out this year to plan it for next year. Mrs. Ruiz stated we put it out last year for incoming freshman for this year and I was on the education committee last year. Mr.

Benaquista stated we have to recruit every year to get more students involved. I apologize I'm getting it confused with our Kean initiative for next year.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I'm talking about our high school pathways program. Mr. Benaquista stated I will get you updated information for next week on how many are enrolled. I hear there is a lot of interest moving forward.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I think every child should turn their camera on when they want to turn their cameras on. I read an email recently from the high school principal and the email stated that kids will be marked absent for not turning on their cameras. I think as a district we have to be more collaborative with the students in our district. We have a senior class graduating in less than 12 weeks and I think we have to work collaboratively with our students to ask them "what is it that they want?" I think to threatened kids when we are going through a pandemic; when we want kids to come to school; where we want kids to participate and to tell them that you are going to mark them absent if they don't turn their cameras on - think the district could have handled that situation better and not add that stress to the students. I think we need to be more collaborative with our students and we have to ask them what is it that they want and I think we are not listening to our kids and we need to do a better job of listening to them.

Mr. Benaquista stated the district has been accommodating students that need to keep their camera off. I also think in one of our distance learning policy speaks to the camera and expectations. I know principals all year have been sending communication out to the community about the expectation. I think it is important and we want the students engaged and at times it is very hard when their cameras aren't on. I don't disagree, I wasn't there for the message received, I want to be clear that along the way I know specifically if a child was uncomfortable, and us collaborating with the family, to find out the reason and then the school is accommodating many children for those situations. For a child to not respond during a lesson or not have the camera on, I worry about that because I want to make sure the child is alright and is learning by participating in the lesson. I didn't get a chance to respond to an email I received; however, I will as soon as I have a minute but I don't want people to think we do not accommodate our children that need to have their cameras off.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated thank you Mr. Benaquista but also I will say that we also have to look at this from different perspective as a community and there are a lot of ways to know if children are there. I want all the children to turn the cameras on. I love seeing all the kids on cameras. But I think as high schoolers and middle schoolers, I know some teachers have been doing this in the district – every 2-3 minutes they do an instant poll to see if all the kids are there. They have been saying turn your cameras on for 2 minutes, we have a gradual release and I think that was also mention in part of the districts plan I read online. Those are all places that we can incorporate those kinds of things to at least know that the children are actively participating. I think we have to be more collaborative with our students in our district and we just have to listen to them more. Mr. Benaquista stated I agree with you 100%, I just also think there are many angles to this and we want to make sure we are keeping the kids engaged and accountable. The most important thing I look at is to make sure that the collaboration is going on between the teacher and the student and in certain cases the guidance counselor has to be involved or administration but I know a lot of cases the teachers are accommodating the students and I had

teachers call me and ask me if it was alright and I said absolutely. I don't want you to think that we haven't helped the kids and be o.k. with keeping it off. You can always collaborate with students and learn something but it shows that if we were already accommodating a lot of students that it was being done. It could be just a message and the way you heard it. Districtwide our administrators have been involved in this throughout the whole pandemic.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the letter states "students will be marked absent if they turn their cameras off" and as a district we have to look at that differently. We want our kids to be engaged in class; no matter virtual, hybrid or combination of both. We don't want to mark our kids absent during this difficult time. They have suffered a lot. They have lost family members; they have lost community members. I think there is a better way to approach that.

Mr. McDowell stated that can be taken up in professional development. This is a all a new way of teaching for lots of teachers; they are not used to teaching to a computer screen with 25 faces on it. I think some feel more comfortable, like you do Mrs. Regis-Darby, seeing the faces of the students and then they know they are engaged. This is all new to all of us. I think they want to feel like the students are engaged and when you can see the face, you are not quite sure. Maybe there is something they can have PD on so there is a better way to do this and develop from there.

Mrs. Ruiz stated to Mrs. Regis-Darby's point, I learned earlier today that there was a class in the high school – a mass exodus of students who logged off the Zoom class as a result of this turn your camera on/leave your camera off battle and we can't have that. We are already worried about learning loss and when our students are logging off in mass because there is some sort of fight or disagreement of whether or not they can have their camera on – we lost them. Isn't it better just to have the student with the camera off and still attending class instead of a bunch of them logging off because of the battle of the struggle of the cameras being on or off. It needs to be addressed. We are three-quarters the way into the school year and they have made it this far. They are doing as well as they can be doing and I think they are trying. I think we need to find a happy median because we don't want to see a bunch of teenagers boycott an attendance camera on policy and then nobody is in class.

Dr. Morgan stated I have to agree about PD. This is different and it is hard. We must be sure our teachers are equipped to come up with strategies to keep students engaged because just because a camera is on doesn't mean they are engaged. May be do some quick assessments, breakout rooms – just to be sure that students are engaged for the time that they are there. If what Mrs. Ruiz said is true, that is sad that we lost that amount of instruction because of a battle between students and teachers.

Mr. Benaquista stated this was recently brought to me and I haven't had a chance to respond. I ask that I have a chance to deal with the issues before it becomes part of Board business. I don't think it is right that we are speaking about it for the first time tonight when I hadn't had a chance to respond to a meeting that was within the last week.

Mr. McDowell stated it has been brought to your attention now. You can deal with it.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I was able to attend the Jefferson PTA meeting this past week and I want to say to the PTA thank you for inviting me and allowing me to be part of their conversations. We know how hard our PTA's work and our parents and how hard they try to be engaged but I was impressed by the conversations that were taking place because it went beyond just trying to plan. The parents at Jefferson are really looking forward to the time they can plan events in person. It was also conversations about inclusion and equity that they were holding and how can they maintain keeping their families engaged and making sure that everyone is receiving the same kind of opportunities to be part of the community. I appreciate those conversations and I'm sorry to hear that they had to cancel their clothing drive because there are so many of those happening and it didn't make sense financially. They are moving into something different – it is a vendor's fair and people can rent tables and bring whatever items they want to sell there. Look for information from the PTA.

In addition, I just wanted to remind everybody that Jefferson School is looking for PTA nominations for next year and they depend on other schools to do that.

In addition, you and I attended the NJSBA meeting last month and we have another UCSBA one tomorrow. Mr. McDowell stated it is a Zoom meeting.

Mr. McDowell stated I sent an email to the Board members about the event at the Parsonage – this past Sunday was Union High School parents and kids and coming up this weekend is Washington's day at the parsonage.

Comments from the Public:

Sydney Darby stated my concern and many other students have with regards to the hybrid/visual presentation. It was stated once we switched to hybrid/virtual things would (inaudible) even though right now there is no Board of Ed policy that can require or force any student to turn a camera on. Through experience, having the camera on does not lead to participation or engagement rather it increases anxiety and stress. As the interim superintendent, the principal that currently represents our students, I'm asking you to acknowledge students right to privacy. Students shouldn't be forced to do anything that makes them uncomfortable. Also it was said at a PTA meeting by the interim principal that students would be penalized for not turning on their camera. In an email it said we would be marked absent if it wasn't on. There is a lack of falsehood and knowledge on what the truth is. At every board meeting it is said that the district's priority is the well being of students social and emotional needs even more so during this difficult times. Forcing students to turn their camera on is clearly against that. Respectfully speaking, I think the districts priority needs to be more focused on improving our school ranking, students' education and wellbeing of students rather than focusing on whether or not they have their camera on.

Paul Casey stated thank you to Mrs. Koon for that great presentation. As a community it is really great to see that level of detail and information provided to us so we can be educated on our district budget.

One of the things that I wan to echo is calling on legislators to identify ways the gap in funding can be bridged. Being 20th out of 21 districts in the County of Union for percent

increase shouldn't be acceptable to anyone in Union and I encourage all stakeholders to reach out to our State legislators to request that there be solutions to this – whether changing the funding formula, bridge the gap on a one year space so moving forward we can be caught up and no underfunded. There must be strategies. I reached out to all three State legislators and we only heard back from one and indicated that there is only less than a handful of community members that have reached out to him. I would ask people to join me in reaching out because I do think that is the way you make change happen by reaching out to our local legislatures. You can find that information on the parents for change Facebook page. If we don't put that kind of pressure on our officials to bridge that gap, we will continue to have this same problem every year and that is not acceptable for our children.

Jeff Monge stated Mrs. Koon that was an amazing presentation; you have only been here for a handful of months and you were spot on the trends that have been effecting our district financially. I also appreciate the conversation of enrollment and projected increase and how that can be spoken to and Mr. O'Shea, I had a conversation with the person who did the last report and one of the things he was talking about was empty nesters selling to new families. You saw some indication of increases not coming from the developments but home sales of empty nesters to families that are bringing in school age children.

At the end of the day, numbers don't lie. We really need to focus on that and not necessarily put band-aides on wombs that are hurting our community but really looking at a school formula which we talked about in the past and really trying to see if we can sit down with our legislators and trying to fix what stuff is broken. Also having representation of the Board of Education on the planning Board is important. It is something that Mr. McDowell did a few years' back.

Elsie Mackey stated I don't know if the Board went over the polls and what was decided but I wanted to know if there was anything pertaining to special education population. How will the Board assist and help with our kids. The other area is status of coverage in terms of Mr. Benaquista. I understand he is acting interim and the Board is currently doing the search but I want to know how will we effectively manage. Are we setting him up for failure? Who is assisting with Personnel, hos is assisting with curriculum? Who is assisting with oversight in the management of our schools. You put it on one person and it is unfair but if don't want to be fair, it has a domino effect in the trickle down effect.

Have there been any interim plans in place? Should we get some sort of notification – especially with the children coming back; someone has to interview these people coming in, There is nobody from personnel and it just seems like we don't know what is going on. These kids are going to need to be assessed and see how far they have gone, come, we don't have that information.

Clarification on the goals surrounding special education and also are there any goals in terms of supporting the athletics program. A lot of kids have been out of school and not part of sports. I'm sure there are things in place but one year without sports has delayed their endurance, having injuries – does the Board have any things surrounding that.

Again, coverage in terms of curriculum because who is overseeing. It is a lot and I'm hoping the Board who is responsible for superintendent and ultimately the schools – let us know what is going on with oversight.

Stephen Le stated I want to thank Mrs. Koon for her presentation and I want to go back to the date of presented with regards to district school enrollment – as clarification and information here.

In October 2017, the enrollment was 7191; then it went down in 2018 to 7071, then in 2019 it went back up to 7199 and then in October 2020 the number went down to 7138. If you take the number from 2017 which is 7190 and the number in 2020 which is 7138, the number in 2020 is actually less than the number in 2017.

Secondly I want to reference have we looked at the enrollment in the past; going back 10 years ago and 18 years ago. When I was in the school district, there was about 7800 students and according to the New Jersey Department of Education, the enrollment in the class of 2002-2003 was 8,059. When you go from 8,059 students in 2002 to 7,838 that is almost 900 students less. That is the equivalent of 2-3 elementary schools.

Going back to the October 2020 figures and I know someone stated about the 2020 demographic report that was commissioned by the Board, according to the study and the authors conclusions that with the new housing departments they would project for 2020-2021 an enrollment of 7179 students. I think you presented tonight that the enrollment was 7138 which we are off and under the projection by 31 students – that is my third point of clarification.

Lastly, there has been a document – a comprehensive annual fiscal report by the Board of Education in 2019 and it was a letter from the business office that supplemented the report and it said on page 2 of that letter “studies have shown that these types of transit oriented and downtown development do not attract very many school age children and the rentals to date have been consistent with those studies and that was signed by Mr. Tatum and Mr. Vieira.

I just wanted to put forth those facts; data points and the more accurate interpretation of those numbers being presented tonight for the Board and public.

Amber Sanders stated I would also like to address the hybrid/virtual expectations. I followed the requirement of turning on my camera today and I put it on an angle which I can be seen. Even though I turned it on and turned in my assignments on time, I still received an email from my teacher threatening that if I'm not in full view of the camera at all times throughout the period, I'll get marked absent. I feel that I'm being bullied or threatened to turn on the camera towards me even though it makes me uncomfortable. It is not fair that I will be penalized for something as insignificant as being in view of the camera.

Reiki Singleton stated I want to thank Mrs. Koon for the presentation. I know how difficult it can be to pull all those things together, especially for such a large school district. My comment today is really for the teachers. I work for Math-for-America, an organization that provides fellowships to New York City teachers; however, they now have a New Jersey program

to support elementary math teachers. I wanted to make sure that this school district is aware that this program exists and will apply for fellowship. It is currently for elementary math teachers and that means any teacher who regularly teaches math and that is K-5 so they can apply for this fellowship. It is over the summer in August when the teachers would need to be part of the summer institute which would be at Montclair State University. The application due date is March 31st. The information was sent to the school board, the superintendent and to the teacher's union. I will resend it to the teacher's union so they can take advantage of this opportunity.

Susan Lipstein stated I wanted to mention concerning Stephen Le's comments – I believe he serves on the planning board of the Town and for full disclosure he should mention. Although we have lower enrollment our classroom space is still small and there is a whole different way of allotting space.

We do have quite a few students that we are paying \$1,000 for transportation who would be enrolled in our public schools except that their parents have chosen to send them to a non-public school but they are still costing us \$348,000 in transportation – that has to be looked at too when you are looking at enrollment figures.

Also the plan the district paid for did not have all the current numbers of what is going on. I only found out tonight that they are going to be selling, not renting, and I don't think we have any kind of figures at this point. I think what was brought up by our Business Administrator to have a representative from the school district that is working together hand-in-hand with the planning committee is going to be a whole lot better and would show a willingness to work with the district and not playing a numbers game that isn't always accurate. I think that suggestion was wonderful and I would like to see that happen.

William Eikehart stated I'm a teacher at the high school. I just want to address some concerns over the use of cameras in classrooms. I think the reason why this new policy came into place was due to the fact that some of the teachers' feedback to the administration was one of the best ways to engage a student is to visually see them. The point of this was not to punish the students, not to harm the student, not to bully the students, it is to most effectively engage the students. When they are in our classroom you can see them always and we can have conversations. We can see their expressions and it is really one of the best ways we can most effectively communicate with them. The policy was not in any way meant to harm the students or any other than most effectively engage the students in the most appropriate education possible.

Chasity Santana stated Mrs. Koon I completely thank you because a lot of times we forget that no matter how many degrees and doctorates we have, just keeping it simple and breaking it down so that the common person can understand what you are saying. I followed your presentation and I like that you said "I don't know what we can really do – I'm not here long enough – give me some time and maybe we can come up with something".

I haven't been on for a while but I want to congratulate everyone that has gotten on the Board and who has been on the Board and hopefully we can work collaboratively to get the kids in Union what they need.

Yocasta you were at the Jefferson PTA meeting – thank you for everything you contributed. I look forward to working with you. Monday is going to be a great day for me because my 8th, 7th, 5th, 4th, 3rd graders will be in school at least two days a week.

I think that working together – a lot of great things are going to happen. I agree that with the development going on should they be contributing to the Board of Ed – absolutely but the Board of Ed should be proactive in asking and demanding money for our children.

Arycelli DiGirolamo stated I couldn't believe what is happening tonight. I am very concerned that some Board members actually raising a question about why are the students being forced to show or open their camera while class is going on. Isn't this an issue that we should be able to deal with at a different level? Shouldn't we be calling the principal? Shouldn't we be emailing the principal and speaking to the principal of the high school in a private way? We actually have to bring this issue to the Board of Ed meeting and blast the issue to the whole entire situation. How many people are complaining about this? I want to know because to me it seems to me it seems like it is a few people. I want to have the total amount of parents and students complaining about this because to me it is an issue of only a few. The fact that we had to bring this issue to the board of ed meeting is actually concerning because when you have an issue with a teacher, the first order of line is call the teacher, deal with the teacher first, then go to the next step. We couldn't deal with this issue at a different level but we had to bring it to the Board of Ed meeting. I highly doubt that we couldn't deal with this issue at a different level.

My other concern is why are we very concerned about the school ranking in 2021. Is this the first year Union High is ranking really low? How was the last five years? How about the last six years? Were we really high? What happened before? Where were all the Board of Ed members at; they didn't think about it? Why all of a sudden now? We are going through this difficult time when you just hired an interim superintendent. How about last year when we had a superintendent? How about the two years before? Why didn't we think about this before? We only have two new Board of Ed members. What happened to the other members that were working here for so many years? And the past members that are not on the Board any more but they are to be here commanding all the time and complaining about this. What happened? I need an explanation about that.

No. 1 – when we have an issue with a principal of a school – can we address this issue with the principal of such school instead of blasting that principal at the Board of Ed meeting.

Kathleen Bruns-Meyers stated as a long time board of ed junky, I would like to also say thank you so much to Mrs. Koon for that incredible presentation. I know you worked with Mr. Benaquista. I'm blessed to be teaching pre-k in the district and my class was blessed and had Mr. Benaquista do a read-aloud story that I got to share with my class for Read Across America Week.

I think you are doing a fabulous job and Mr. Benaquista is doing an amazing job with all that has been put on his plate. I got an email from him at 1:30 a.m. in the morning so I know he is working way beyond any contractual hours of any of us.

That was an incredible presentation and I know Mr. Benaquista worked on it also and I would like everybody to know in the district how involved Mr. Benaquista with everything that he has on his plate with what is going on and handling five peoples job. I think that he gave time to read and video tape himself and send it out to the students speaks to his love for our students. I would like to thank him on this level so everybody knows what an incredible job he is doing on behalf of our children.

If you would like to come into one of our meetings in the morning, we would love to have you too. Mrs. Koon stated I plan to get around.

Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Koon does make a great partner; a great asset to our district and I enjoy having that confidence in her to be a partner of mine and it made my life a lot easier when she finally got to us and she did do an excellent job tonight. Mrs. Koon stated I didn't do it alone, the supervisors, the accounting staff, everyone pulling together and reaching out. I thank everybody for putting things together; we do have a lot of work ahead and challenges but I do feel working collaboratively together we can achieve and make some progress.

Laura Detgen stated I just want to shout to my former students – very proud for their sharing their voice. I hope that we all welcome their voices and not view them as complaints but commend them for doing their research, educating themselves and allowing themselves to be heard. I think our student liaisons and student leaders that have come to meetings and spoken are a voice that we need to truly reckon with and listen to; they are our future. I appreciate you.

Suehay Monge stated I want to echo what Mrs. Detgen said. It takes a lot of guts to get up to speak their truth and express how they are feeling. I don't think anyone whether it is administration, board members, teachers, whoever, community people should be out here. If this is how they feel about the cameras being turned off, then that is their truth and they should be allowed. They have a voice. We all have freedom of speech so if the students are coming here, it takes a lot of courage to do that and to be dismissive about it or to shame them for trying to speak their truth is not o.k. That is my personal take on it. I commend them because it takes a lot to speak their voice.

Mr. McDowell stated I forgot to bring this up during New Business. I want to give the public the following update on the Superintendent search. The district received 37 completed applications in response to our position of superintendent; 34 met or exceeded criteria and 3 did not; 22 sitting superintendents; 4 principals, vice principals or assistant principals; 6 directors/supervisors; 5 other; 26 had earned doctorates, 32 from New Jersey, 1 from Colorado, 1 from Nevada, 1 from Maryland, and 2 from New York.

This is to maintain transparency and let you know how it is going.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Minneci, seconded by Dr. Morgan, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

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

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

