

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – October 10, 2023

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, October 10, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Ms. McKenzie called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Ms. Dixiana Carbonell, Ms. Marissa McKenzie, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Kimberly Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Mr. John O’Shea, Ms. Chastity Santana (6:07 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Dr. Gerald Benaquista, Dr. Gretel Perez, Mrs. Yolanda Koon

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Ms. Carbonell led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Koon read the statement required under the “Open Public Meetings Act” that adequate notice was published in The Union County Local Source, The Star Ledger and/or Tap into Union, posted in the Administration Building and the Clerk’s Office of the Township; a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Ms. Santana arrived at the meeting (6:07 p.m.)

Ms. Carbonell read the district’s mission statement.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Scott-Hayden, seconded by Mrs. Williams, that the Board go into Executive Session at 6:08 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b: personnel, legal.

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, Ms. Carbonell, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana,
Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams, Ms. McKenzie

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board ended executive session at 6:24 p.m. and returned to public at 7:00 p.m.

COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS (agenda action items only):

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week's regular meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel.

Superintendent's Report:

The Superintendent will report at the regular meeting next week.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Ms. Carbonell presented the Education/Student Discipline Committee agenda and the following was reported:

E-1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period September 20, 2023 to October 10, 2023, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

DISCUSSION:

None

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Ms. Santana presented the Fiscal and Planning Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Ms. Santana presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Scott-Hayden presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

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

P-1A. PERSONNEL ACTIONS – NEW HIRES

Personnel Actions-New Hires be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

P-1B PERSONNEL ACTIONS – EXTRA PAY

Personnel Actions-Extra Pay be approved in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

P-2. APPROVE SUBSTITUTE LISTS

Approve Substitute Lists for the 2023-2024 school year.

Name	Position	Rate
Emmanuel Paradela	Sub-custodian	\$16.00/hr.
Suekim Assing	Sub-custodian	\$16.00/hr.
Maricry Alvarez	Sub-bus driver	\$22.00/hr.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated it is sad to see Megan Bohse resignation. She wrote all the letters of recommendations for her students. Congratulations to her for becoming a fire fighter.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Ms. Carbonell, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana,
Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams, Ms. McKenzie

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Policy Committee:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Williams presented the following policies for **FIRST READING**:

POL-1. APPROVE POLICY 1642.01 – SICK LEAVE (NEW)

Approve Policy 1642.01 – Sick Leave, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-2. APPROVE REGULATION 1642.01 – SICK LEAVE (NEW)

Approve Regulation 1642.01 – Sick Leave, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-3. APPROVE POLICY 2419 – SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS (M) (NEW)
Approve Policy 2419 – School Threat Assessment Teams, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-4. APPROVE REGULATION 2419 – SCHOOL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS (M) (NEW)
Approve Regulation 2419 – School Threat Assessment Teams, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-5. APPROVE POLICY 0164 – CONDUCT OF BOARD MEETING
Approve Policy 0164 – Conduct of Board Meeting, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

POL-6. APPROVE REGULATION 2624 – GRADING SYSTEM
Approve Regulation 2624 – Grading System, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:
None

Technology Committee:

Mrs. Brens-Watson informed the Board that the Technology Committee met on Monday and Mrs. Regis-Darby attended to advise the committee that there are educators in Liberia that need our district to provide laptops/computers. Mrs. Paul will look at her inventory to see what the district has. There is a person who will pay for the shipping of the laptops/computers to Liberia. Our district will be helping young minds and there will be an international connection.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated donating the laptops/computers will give these students the opportunity to attend university.

Ms. McKenzie asked what are the barriers? Mrs. Brens-Watson stated inventory is being done and we will need to ask the attorneys if there is documentation that is needed.

Mrs. Koon asked if there is international documentation that is being confirmed? Mrs. Regis-Darby stated the Board needs to approve the donation to the specific school and the shipping will be paid for.

Dr. Benaquista stated maybe we can reach out to the community to see if they have any laptops/computers that can be donated. Ms. McKenzie stated if the community does donate, they need to sign a hold harmless just in case the computer is not cleaned out properly.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we can ask the shipper to donate the money to us so that district can ship it directly. Ms. Santana stated you need to confirm that the computers will be free to those children.

Mrs. Brens-Watson informed the Board that she has received many emails asking for Zoom access to be available for Board meetings and she wants to make a motion.

Moved by Mrs. Brens-Watson, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, to approve to reinstate Zoom access to the public for Board meetings.

DISCUSSION:

Dr. Benaquista stated we need to make sure the platform works. Mr. Taylor stated if technology is not ready, it cannot start and administration may need time or resources to get this done.

Mrs. Regis-Darby suggested that the motion be adjusted with a deadline so that the structure can be in place. Mr. Taylor stated this should be reviewed in committee and the policy/bylaw concerning conduct of Board meeting (0164) should be updated so that Zoom access can survive.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated she wants to do this without changing the policy. We are invested in equity in this district and so we need to reinstate Zoom. Our IT department is more than capable.

Ms. Santana stated she had five children and attended meetings for years. She said that at Zoom meetings, you can't hear it clearly and there is feedback. If you want Zoom without comment I'm o.k. with that. The community can email comments to Mrs. Koon by a specific deadline. When you come to meetings you are vested and nothing comes easy. She also stated that on the agenda is a policy that will change the format of the meeting where comments from the public will only be in the first half of the Board meeting. No public comments on Zoom.

Ms. McKenzie stated the Board will be eliminating the comments at the end of the meeting and the comments in the beginning of the meeting will be for anything and that was done in response to that parent at the last regular meeting. She continued by saying she agrees with Ms. Santana and she would be o.k. with options but no comments.

Ms. Brens-Watson stated she feels strongly about this. If we can make it better we should.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated you need to fix the Zoom problems. Ms. McKenzie stated we need to work out the kinks and maybe work that out before it goes for vote and also put it in our policy.

Mrs. Scott-Hayden stated Zoom access should not have comment period; however, there can be an email option, or be on a list to speak but to raise your hand and speak, no.

Mr. Taylor stated it needs to go to committee – comment, no comment, email comments and it needs to be in consultation with administration and IT. Therefore you have options tonight – (1) withdraw motion and refer to committee, (2) call for vote on the motion or (3) someone can make a motion to amend to refer it to committee.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated Zoom should be given back to public and to say we have to figure it out is not responsive. We have an IT Department who can do this.

Ms. McKenzie made a motion to amend the motion to move it to committee.

Mr. Taylor stated the first motion was superseded. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated there is a motion on the floor that needs to be voted on. Ms. McKenzie stated per Roberts Rules this is allowable.

Moved by Ms. McKenzie, seconded by Mrs. Williams, to amend the motion to move it to committee.

AYE: Ms. Carbonell, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams, Ms. McKenzie

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Mrs. Regis-Darby

MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Taylor informed the Board to have it discussed as a committee as a whole to flush out all the details.

Moved by Ms. McKenzie, seconded by Mrs. Scott-Hayden to approve the Board to review Policy 0164 – Conduct of Board Meeting as a committee as a whole to include discussion of reinstating Zoom access to the public at Board meetings.

AYE: Ms. Carbonell, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams, Ms. McKenzie

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Mrs. Regis-Darby

MOTION CARRIED

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved next week.

Unfinished Business:

Ms. Santana stated the staff directory online has not been updated and it is very difficult to find people. She would like to see the name, position, email and phone number on the district website.

Dr. Benaquista stated our buildings are learning how to do this. Website training is very expensive and each building will learn how to do this and make those changes. Ms. Carbonell stated access by multiple parties could cause a security breach. She believes IT should do this.

New Business:

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated the district needs to recognize the work of Elissa Malespina, the librarian at the high school. Her amazing journey and a defender of our children's right to read. She is working with government officials regarding banned books. She should be recognized at a meeting – either next week or next month.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated she has concerns about our employees because what we do for one employee, we should do for all. Some get special treatment like early release time. Mr. Taylor stated when Board members receive information, you need to refer it to the Superintendent. It does not have to be brought up at a Board meeting. There are policies, procedures and contracts and there is no one size fits all.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked what is happening at the high school, can it be shared in executive session. Mr. Taylor stated this should be asked in executive session – personnel, contracts and litigation.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked if the district should create regulations or guidelines of what is going on in this world? Mr. Taylor stated that is a governance issue. You need to be mindful of freedom of speech.

Ms. Santana stated there could be some favoritism but some people have invisible disabilities. She stated if you go to committee meetings you learn more. The committee spoke about this; you can contact the chair.

It was requested that committee meeting minutes be emailed to each Board member.

Comments from the Public:

Ann Margaret Shannon asked what happens if someone has a comment to make after the Board goes through the agenda? Committee as a whole – will that be done in public? Fourth grade basketball – we moved from Kawameeh to Burnet. She thinks next year they need to move to the high school small gym because so many people attend.

Antonette Thompson's daughter spoke, Catherine, 5th grade student, who wants to be in the gifted and talented class. She has a 4.8 GPA and wants to be challenged.

Mrs. Thompson stated her teachers state that she should be in the G&T classes but she has been given the run around. It says that parent's recommendation is part of the process but she is not being heard. It is not o.k. that her classmates are getting in and she is not. The system is not equitable. Her daughter needs to be in an accelerated program.

Mr. Taylor stated the Board can't respond in public regarding student matters. Dr. Benaquista stated there will be a communication going out tomorrow concerning this. A meeting has been scheduled with the parent.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Ms. Santana, seconded by Ms. Carbonell, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Ms. Carbonell, Mrs. Regis-Darby, Ms. Santana, Mrs. Scott-Hayden, Mrs. Williams, Ms. McKenzie

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Yolanda Koon

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY

