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## SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Scranton School Board of Directors held a Special Meeting for the Specific Purpose of the Board Vacancy on Monday, February 25, 2019 at 6:30pm prevailing time in the Board Room of the Administration Building, 425 N. Washington Ave., Scranton, PA 18503.

Board President called the meeting to order at 6:44pm with a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Roll Call: By the Secretary.

Present: Directors Duffy, Gilmartin, Lesh, McAndrew, Popil, Schuster and Dixon.  
(Director Patel turned in his resignation earlier in the day on 2/25/19)

President Dixon read the Notice of the Meeting and announced the purpose of the meeting.

Public Comment:

Rosemary Boland, SFT, encouraged everyone who has thought about running for school board to take it very seriously, the on again, off again is causing a lot of disruption in the district. Ms. Boland added that it is not an easy job and there are 10,000 + students depending on the School Board and all the people in this room to do the right thing and again take it serious and don't hold it for one month and quit; it is time for good people to step up, be positive about it and stay with it.

Bob Bolus, resident and taxpayer, spoke of the credibility of the Scranton School District and the need of members on the board to have the integrity and responsibility it takes to be a board member. Mr. Bolus said the students should come first before political ownership and playing games. Mr. Bolus expressed his opposition of Mr. Tom Borthwick who applied for the vacancy and feels Mr. Borthwick is the last person who should be on this board. Mr. Morgan recommended Lee Morgan as he is a hardworking, down to earth resident of the city.

There being no further public comment, candidates to fill the vacancy were escorted to the caucus room.

A discussion was now held between the board, Dr. Kirijan and Attorney Audi regarding the process of selection. Mrs. Dixon said that board members must ask the same questions of each candidate and the policy states the board chose up to 1/3 of the candidates. Mrs. Dixon explained that last vacancy there were twelve candidates and the board had up to four choices.

Dr. Kirijan said she asked Mr. Audi to look at everything because 1/3 of the applicants equaled 1.66.

Mr. Audi said he spent some time reviewing everything and there is a provision in one of the policies that all board policies must be interpreted in the manner that is reasonable and doesn't create absurd results so he thinks 1.66 of the candidates is an absurd result, the board agreed. Mr. Audi continued to say that the policy allows to have a maximum of 1/3,

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and since the result is 1.66 he doesn't believe they should round up the number so his interpretation is if the rule is in place they need to have one person chosen per board member. The other option Mr. Audi said is that if they disagree with that they can suspend the rules and use 1.66 but that would create havoc of a board member giving someone a number 1 and someone else a number .66, .5, .3 or .2.

President Dixon preferred they never suspend the rules.

Mr. Audi said his interpretation is that it is one person per board member because they cannot exceed the maximum.

President Dixon said if she understands the policy correctly is if the person that has their name written down the most times and if there is a tie they would pick from a hat.

Mr. Audi confirmed that names would be picked from a hat and voted in the order they were picked and the first person to receive majority vote would be appointed.

Director Gilmartin asked if they determine that list before they begin voting. Mr. Audi said yes and ties are picked from a hat.

President Dixon clarified that each board member gives the name to Mrs. Orr and sign it.

Director Schuster asked Mr. Audi that if each board member picks one person, even with all the nonsense from the last meeting and not have a back up. Mr. Audi said, correct, just one.

Director Duffy added on the heels of back up should they create a list from these people who comes in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.

Mr. Audi suggested they start with the process all over for new appointments.

At this time it was agreed that Mrs. Sarah Hall from the Times Tribune and Mr. Bert Gentilezza would assist the Board Secretary and tally the names.

Mr. Lee Morgan was the first to address the board and Mrs. Dixon informed him he has two minutes to address the board followed by four questions from the board.

Mr. Morgan said he never considered a school board seat before but since the district is faced with a situation of recovery he understands what the district is facing and is concerned about the closure of public schools and the Constitution of Pennsylvania calls for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education and he thinks all options need to be looked at to maintain the public school system especially when a coordinator comes in and has their own agenda. Mr. Morgan said he was troubled by the meeting at Lackawanna College with the Auditor General which looked more like a political rally and he would hope if appointed by this board he would run for retention or election and would like to look at solutions for the long term problems that the district is facing with the overwhelming amount of non profits adding that 30-40% of the city tax base is tax exempt.

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Director Duffy now asked Mr. Morgan what in his opinion is the single largest financial issue the district faces. Mr. Morgan responded the amount of non profits.

Director Schuster asked Mr. Morgan if any percentage of his household income comes from the Scranton School District. Mr. Morgan answered no.

Director Gilmartin, while realizing he has already answered her question when he addressed the board, asked if he were selected this evening if he would run for retention or consider running outright in the election.

Mr. Morgan said that he may do that but he may just go out and try to sway public opinion to try to counteract the state because he thinks there is a lot more power in numbers outside the school board; not necessarily working within the constraints as a director.

Director Popil asked Mr. Morgan if a recommendation from PFM was to reduce staff, whether teachers or nonprofessionals or a combination of both, would he support the recommendation.

Mr. Morgan said he would have to look at supporting documents and the effect on the classroom and the general welfare of the students to determine whether he would support it or not.

Mr. Morgan finished up and Mr. Tom Borthwick was the next to speak.

Mr. Borthwick thanked the board for another opportunity to address the board for the vacant seat and said there are issues he has been identifying that are plaguing the district that go back to when he first chose to run for the School Board in 2011 and he believes he makes a solid case based on his resume that the board has in front of them that he can bring a lot to the table and would hit the ground running. Mr. Borthwick continued that there is a lot facing the district from educational to financial standpoints and he has the background in both areas.

Mr. Borthwick said he would love the opportunity to work with the board and he now has a personal interest, his son and another child on the way and because of that his priority is to make sure his son receives the same or better education he had which was a wonderful experience and made him the person he is today. Mr. Borthwick said he understands there are very tough choices ahead, some uncomfortable choices but the bottom line is to pick the best course together.

Mr. Borthwick added that school districts and education is the bedrock of Scranton and the City of Scranton may be on the trajectory toward recovery but without the school district it is not going to happen. Mr. Borthwick has family that moved out of the city because they don't want their kids to go through this school district while it is collapsing. Mr. Borthwick said it is heartbreaking for him but he has a personal investment and community investment in making sure things get better.

Director Duffy asked Mr. Borthwick his opinion of the single largest financial issue facing the district.

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Mr. Borthwick responded the single largest is the funding formula and there is nothing legislatively on the board to fix that however he has seen through the receipts of the grants through the state that public pressure and public awareness the board has been bringing, it sounds like Harrisburg is listening and he believes maintaining that public pressure and using the Auditor General's voice on a state level to pressure the legislature and the Governor to have an equitable funding formula adding the amount of money they are shortchanged is somewhere around \$20 million a year and it is unfortunate that the board isn't able legislatively to address that.

Director Schuster asked if there is any percentage of his household income derives from the Scranton School District. Mr. Borthwick said yes, his wife is a teacher in the district.

Mr. Schuster asked if he would abstain from votes that pertain to the teacher's contract.

Mr. Borthwick said he could not commit to that because he believes in a base line that all workers deserve a fair contract and wage, but he would never vote on anything that would personally or individually be related to his wife.

Director Gilmartin asked Mr. Borthwick if he is selected tonight if he will run for retention or if not, will he run outright in the election. Mr. Borthwick responded yes and yes.

Director Popil asked Mr. Borthwick if the recommendation by PFM called for the reduction in staff, whether professional or non professional, would he support the reductions.

Mr. Borthwick responded that he knows PFM is probably going to have some unpleasant recommendations and if the choice is between following PFM recommendation and a state takeover, which would be worse, he feels like it's a devils bargain and his goal would be to avoid things being worse so if he had to he would, but he would want to see the recommendations and as a director he would feel his role would be to work with PFM to avoid that from happening.

Ms. Catherine Fox now addressed the board. Ms. Fox appreciates the opportunity to speak before the board and said she has a very large passion for the City of Scranton and the Scranton School District, is a product of the Scranton School District, she has a daughter and siblings in the district. Ms. Fox said she is very devoted to the Scranton School District and would not be where she is today without the teachers and experiences she had.

Ms. Fox believes she has the abilities to work closely with everyone on the board, and looking at everything a board has to do, there is a lot of work as well as a lot for her to learn as all of them did as well at one time. Ms. Fox said she is very passionate about everything she does and quoted something the Recovery Officer said recently that she has no skin in the game, which Ms. Fox can relate to and what she is passionate about is helping children and ensuring they have what they need. Ms. Fox said she works in the community every day, gives back to the community and would love the opportunity to give her time and expertise as a member of the Scranton School Board.

Director Duffy asked Ms. Fox what in her opinion is the single largest financial issue facing the district. Ms. Fox responded that there is a high cost to maintain aging buildings and the transportation costs.

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Director Schuster asked if there is any percentage of her household income comes from the Scranton School District. Ms. Fox said no.

Director Gilmartin asked Ms. Fox if she were selected this evening if she would run for retention or run outright in the next election. Ms. Fox said she would and would love the opportunity to serve on the board.

Director Popil asked Ms. Fox if she would support a PFM recommendation of staff reductions of teachers or non professionals, in any combination.

Ms. Fox said with the correct information she would support whatever is necessary.

Ms. Sarah Cruz now addressed the board, she has lived in the area nearly all her life, is an active citizen in the community and asking for the board's support

Ms. Cruz indicated she is cognizant of the issues and concerns facing the board and the school district adding it is imperative that someone who fully understands the gravity of the situation be selected. Ms. Cruz would work productively with the board, continue transparency, and restore the trust of Scranton tax payers. Ms. Cruz said she has the ability to work confidently, respectfully and in a gracious manner.

Ms. Cruz said there are a high number of students of color in the district and a leader is needed to represent them, someone who had a firsthand understanding of the struggles familiar to them, and as a first generation college graduate she will serve as a model for students while also passionately advocating for all 10,000+ students within the district.

Ms. Cruz concluded by saying it has been an honor and a privilege to speak before the board and thanked them for the opportunity.

Director Duffy asked Ms. Cruz, in her opinion, what the single largest financial issue the district faces.

Ms. Cruz said having attended previous work session and board meetings as well as being an informed reader of the Scranton Times it seems the most talked about is the Transportation issue.

Director Schuster asked if Ms. Cruz has any percentage of household income come from Scranton School District and Ms. Cruz said no.

Director Gilmartin asked Ms. Cruz if she were selected tonight would she run for retention and if she would outright run for election. Ms. Cruz said yes.

Director Popil asked Ms. Cruz if the recommendation were to reduce staff whether it be professional or non professional would she support the recommendation.

Ms. Cruz said it would be a challenge to answer without looking at the numbers as every employee has an important role.

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Mr. Pedro Anes now addressed the board, thanked them for the opportunity to speak and he is here to help the school district become the best in the state of Pennsylvania,

Mr. Anes has been in Scranton since 2002; he came to the area for the PhD program at Marywood University and subsequently was hired as an Education Director at Marywood.

Mr. Anes has been an advocate for the students and children in the Commonwealth adding one of his key successes was Every Student Succeed Act. Mr. Anes was selected by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education to help develop the Every Student Succeed Act which he thinks is a model for the way the school district should approach the recovery because all stakeholders from the community and learning leaders in the Commonwealth put in ideas to fix it.

Mr. Anes spoke of a recent incident with police using excessive force in the Hazleton Area School District, he obtained the video from Facebook within 24 hours and two days later they were in the school district addressing the school board regarding the fact finding and how the police force brutalized the student.

Mr. Anes serves on the Scranton Human Relations Commission, and is Commissioner for the Governors Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs and said his work in the state of Pennsylvania is for every student regardless of their ethnicity or their gender and serves on boards and commissions that are designed for equity of diversity and his commitment is to every student in the state.

In response to Director Duffy's question regarding the single largest financial issue facing the Scranton School District, Mr. Anes feels it is the transportation contract, it is a huge issue and seems to be one of the things no one likes to touch but it must be dealt with.

Director Schuster asked Mr. Anes if any percentage of his household income come from the Scranton School District and Mr. Anes replied no, his income is he is retired military.

Director Gilmartin asked Mr. Anes if he is appointed this evening would he run for retention in the upcoming election and if not selected tonight will he run in the next election. Mr. Anes said yes.

Director Popil asked Mr. Anes if he would support a recommendation to layoff professionals or nonprofessionals or any combination. Mr. Anes said he would, adding that the purpose of the recovery plan is to come up with a solution and it would have to be the absolute last option. Mr. Anes added that the taxpayer, teachers and students should not suffer the consequences because of the sins of the past, and decisions have be based on facts, on good fiduciary responsibilities, and good scientific study of the numbers. Mr. Anes said the best contribution is to learn from mistakes, atone from those sins and not repeat them. Mr. Anes spoke of introspection and reflection of how the district got here and how they're going to move forward without that he would be of no service to the students or the board if they can't think of the students and their futures first and foremost.

Board members now made their choices by submitting one name to the Board Secretary.

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Mrs. Orr, Mr. Gentilezza and Mrs. Hall from the Times-Tribune together tallied the names, with Mr. Tom Borthwick receiving the most votes of four entries. A motion to appoint Mr. Borthwick was made by Mr. Duffy, seconded by Director Popil. The motion passed with four (4) affirmative and three (3) negative votes. Directors Gilmartin, McAndrew and Schuster voted in the negative. Director Schuster asked the Solicitor if this needed a majority of the whole. Mr. Audi said no, just the majority.

The candidates were now brought back into the room and Mr. Borthwick was sworn in by Attorney Audi.

There being no further business, the Special Meeting ended at 7:40pm, followed by the work session and adjourned at 8:45pm with a motion by Director Popil, seconded by Director Duffy.

By: \_\_\_\_\_