

**MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSHOP MEETING**

March 13, 2024 – 6:00 p.m.
Central Office (First Floor)

Presiding: Comm. Manuel Martinez, President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Rodney Henderson, Deputy Superintendent
Khalifah Shabazz-Charles, Esq., General Counsel

Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz
Comm. Valerie Freeman
Comm. Eddie Gonzalez
Comm. Della McCall

Comm. Joel Ramirez
Comm. Nakima Redmon
Comm. Kenneth Simmons, Vice President

Absent:

Comm. Mohammed Rashid

Student Representative:

Mr. Thaddeus Chestnut

The Salute to the Flag was led by Comm. Martinez.

Comm. Martinez read the Open Public Meetings Act:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to insure the right of the public to have advance notice of, and to attend the meetings of the Paterson Public School District, as well as other public bodies at which any business affecting the interest of the public is discussed or acted upon.

In accordance with the provisions of this law, the Paterson Public School District has caused adequate and electronic notice of this meeting:

**Workshop Meeting
March 13, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.
90 Delaware Avenue
Paterson, New Jersey**

to be published by having the date, time and place posted in the office of the City Clerk of the City of Paterson, at the entrance of the Paterson Public School offices, on the district's website, and by sending notice of the meeting to the Arab Voice, El Diario, the Italian Voice, the North Jersey Herald & News, and The Record.

Comm. Martinez: Before we jump into the heart of the agenda, I would like to invite up Dr. Vanessa Serano, Principal of School No. 2, and a few of our students who are here to share some words.

Ms. Geraldine Geraldo: Good evening, everyone. My name is Geraldine Geraldo, School No. 2 Student Council Treasurer.

Ms. Danielise Arvega: I'm Danielise Arvega, the School No. 2 Student Council Liaison. Last night for our ring ceremony, Dr. Newell came and was our guest speaker. As a grade, we all came together to write her a thank you note that we'd like to share for you today.

“Dear Dr. Newell, on behalf of all eighth graders, we would like to say thank you for taking the time out to meet with us yesterday. We were delighted to finally meet you and get to know our new Superintendent. Your speech was very inspiring and added the perfect sentiment to our special night. We know it was pressuring to be our guest speaker, but you did an amazing job and you really motivated us to push past our limits.”

Ms. Geraldo:

“We wish you the best of luck in your new position as Superintendent. Knowing that Paterson often experiences many challenges, having someone like you at the helm reminds us that we are in good hands. Once again, thank you for everything. You made our night one to remember and we are forever grateful. We hope to see you again in our school really soon. Sincerely, School No. 2 Class of 2024.”

Dr. Vanessa Serrano: I just want to say this was all them. They actually got together, came to my office, and presented this to me today. I had nothing to do with this. This was all the students.

Comm. Martinez: We thank you as the leader of that school and we thank you, young ladies, for being here.

PRESENTATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Update on School No. 3

Mr. Richard Matthews: Good evening, Board members, Madam Superintendent, and Deputy Superintendent. Today we sent out the paperwork to the SDA. The charge was to take care of School No. 3 and start the remediation. We had agreed to use the SDA funding of \$3.5 million towards the remediation. There's a form called 'Attachment A' that has to be filed out by the district and signed by myself. I shared that document with Superintendent Dr. Newell this morning and I gave a copy to Board President Martinez. That went down to the SDA today. They get it and recognize it as an emergent project. They give us a disbursement account. Mr. Mapp in the Facilities Department will put together the requisitions to start the process and the abatement. Is there anything you want to add to that, Mr. Mapp?

Mr. Neil Mapp: The process will start via requisition and then a purchase order once we get the account from the state. That will allow us to engage an environmental engineer who will come in and do the specifications for what should be remediated throughout the school. Those specifications are then submitted to the NJDCA for permitting. That effort is going to take about three to six months to get through the documents, permitting, and approval to do the work.

Comm. Martinez: I'm going to ask you to pause to allow the translators to catch up.

Mr. Mapp: The environmental engineering design effort is going to take about three to six months. Once the approval and permits are received by the contractor, we will then begin the abatement process. That's taking out all of the potential hazardous materials in all classrooms, hallways, and other ancillary spaces throughout the building. That abatement process is going to take about six to eight months. The eradication of any harmful materials throughout the building is going to take about a year to be completed so around this time next year there is another design process that will begin. That process will be to design the reconstruction of the school after we've pulled out all the walls, ceilings, and anything that contains hazardous materials. We would be left with a bare shell. There's an architect that will be hired to design all of the wall finishes, lighting, HVAC, and put everything back into the building that's required for educational adequacy and safety. We can look at fire alarm, possibly sprinklers, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems going back into the building. We have to design new construction documents and that will take about six to ten months and then the construction begins thereafter. We'd like to begin the construction earlier because there are some aspects that can be done without permits. But we have to get permitting to do the construction and once that's done, we then have to get occupancy permits. We're looking at a September 2026 opening. If we can better that, we certainly will. We expect to complete the actual construction on or about March 2026 and then there is the lighting of the building, bringing all the systems online. We have to move classrooms from other schools, such as MLK and Dale Avenue, back to School No. 3. That entire effort to get phones, computers, and everything back in place is going to take the entire summer. That's why we're saying a September 2026 opening. The funding that we have received from the SDA will start the initial design and construction abatement. Then there's another round of funding that we have to secure to do the actual retrofit and reconstruction of the building. I think that was presented to you last week. Those numbers range from \$5 to \$7 million. There were two options.

Comm. Martinez: I think we're caught up there. Just for clarify and to fill in the gaps, the consensus was to go with Option B to be done over phases. The first bite at that apple is getting the abatement through and then we proceed on to the next phase.

Mr. Mapp: Yes.

Comm. Martinez: Any questions from Commissioners? For those of you who may have further questions, we will hear them during public comments when we get to that. Right now, we will open up the floor to Board members.

Comm. Gonzalez: Good evening, Mr. Mapp. I have a question about the Plan B Option, which is to upgrade the sprinklers and a few other things. Are we going to be able to rectify the heating and A/C capacity for this plan?

Mr. Mapp: Absolutely, because we will be ripping everything out. Currently, School No. 3 has no mechanical heating system. They have a boiler that provides hot water which runs through tubes throughout the classrooms. There's no way to regulate that. Those tubes and pipes that run throughout the classrooms are attached to the walls that are coming out. Everything comes out. Everything is brand new going back in.

Comm. Gonzalez: Are we going to have an HVAC system moving forward?

Mr. Mapp: HVAC means heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. Every occupied space has heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you.

Comm. McCall: How much money did we receive from the state? Are we getting all or some of it?

Mr. Matthews: The funding that has been received is \$3.5 million. I went to the SDA last week and told them that was not enough money. I went there last Tuesday and last month. Even when I went there last week, they reminded me that I asked them for more money. They told me that for the 2024-2025 school year they will give us more money, but they wouldn't say what that number is. We're meeting with them next Wednesday regarding the high school, but they are not going to give a number right now. It's in the Governor's budget under emergent funds, but our number right now I'm going to assume is somewhere between \$3 and \$4 million.

Comm. McCall: In meeting with them, they haven't given us a number yet. We're just estimating how much they're going to give us?

Mr. Matthews: I'm sorry, I don't want to say estimate. We've gotten two rounds of money from the SDA. The first round was \$4.1 million. That was for 2022-2023. For this year we got \$3.5 million.

Mr. Mapp: Those funds were for capital projects to remediate any health and safety issues we've been having throughout the district for all these years, not specifically for School No. 3. That funding was given to us this year, \$3.5 million, for capital projects. We're allocating \$3 million of those funds to the School No. 3 project. We expect another allocation of capital project funding next year. We're not sure how much as yet. We don't know if we will be able to have \$4 or \$5 million to complete the second and third phases of the project.

Comm. Gonzalez: Just to follow up on that, the \$3.5 million was for other schools that needed some upgrades. If we then take that \$3.5 million, the idea is to not have those other schools upgraded as proposed originally, which is the reason we asked for that \$3.5 million. This is an emergency in my eyes. It's something no one expected. It's a hazard. How is it that we're using \$3.5 million for what we deem necessary for other schools and allocating that for School No. 3, as opposed to the SDA coming up with the funding source to remediate the School No. 3 emergency? We've asked for emergency funds for other schools. Are they not emergencies anymore?

Mr. Matthews: Yes. We wanted to connect all those dots in a bigger meeting regarding facilities, but we were able to only hone in on School No. 3 and the high school. There are bigger pieces of the pie regarding emergent funds. As of last week, the charge was to do School No. 3. We had a whole list of projects that were allocated for \$3.5 million. If we choose to go ahead and spend the money here on School No. 3, it's going to impact the jobs that we have over here. When we asked for the money, we identified the jobs. Those are some of the conversations that were part of that presentation I submitted to you last week.

Comm. Gonzalez: My point is that I think we really have to put the hammer down on the SDA and ask for the funding that's necessary, not so much us debating as to what we may get. There has to be some advocacy around this. I know Dr. Hodges had explained this before he left. Many of our schools are over 100 years old. This year it's School No. 3, but next year it might be another. I know we were recently fully funded, but we have to be more aggressive in the requests that we make. I'm not saying you're not aggressive in your requests, but the fact that we're taking funds from other places to do this is necessary. I'm with it 100%. However, we also need to take into account that

they are responsible for our schools. They are ultimately responsible for these sorts of projects, not us.

Mr. Matthews: We will continue to advocate for more funding. Not to get too diverted, but last week when I gave the presentation, one of the things that I stressed to the SDA was the number of buildings that we have that are over 100 years old. They understood that. We said thank you for the \$3.5 million. We do appreciate it, but our needs are greater than what we're receiving, and we need them to look at us a little bit differently and try to give us more money. I'm pretty aggressive when I ask for money. I'm down in Trenton. I'm advocating on our behalf to get more than what we're getting. I'm being very appreciative, but I let them know there's more that's needed. I've been down there with Ms. Grant. She's been down there with other people, but we have to keep going down. We can't just go one time and not show up again. I have it on my calendar for the whole year. I gave it to Board President Martinez every meeting that they're having for the whole year. I let Mr. DaSilva know I'm coming, and I tell him what I'm going to talk about. I'm mixing it up between School No. 3 and additional funding. I talk about the number of buildings that we have that are overage. We're pushing.

Mr. Thaddeus Chestnut: (Comments made away from the microphone)

Comm. Martinez: To the public, if anyone has any questions about what they just heard, you'll have your opportunity during public comments.

Discussion on the 2024-2025 School District Budget

Mr. Matthews: Thank you, Board President Martinez. I hope you guys don't mind me sitting down because I'm trying to prepare in case there are questions. I have my notes here and I have to take notes. I have a whole layout and this podium is a little bit too small. I want to thank my budget team. We're going to have a budget discussion tonight and hopefully we can communicate to you what happens when we receive additional state aid. What are the key metrics that are important for us to be able to balance the budget? We hear about state aid coming in at a very good clip. We know that the Governor for the last five years has promised to fully fund all the school districts, or even refund based on districts who have received too much money. We did get \$54 million. When I met with you last month in February, we had showed you a gap of \$26 million based on receiving \$34 million in additional aid. Some of those numbers changed. State aid came in at the end of February and we were able to balance out the budget in a lot of different ways. We're going to show you a balanced budget at different levels of tax levy so that we can have a discussion on what is the best way forward for Paterson Public Schools. Some of it is repetitive and I hope I don't bore you, but we do have some new Board members here. The district revenue is not increasing as quickly as expenses. We have a slide that I have given out over the last couple of years called 'structural deficit.' It's really important that we hone in on what that means and what the impact is, not just today, but for the next 20 years. In 2024-2025 we got a big bump in state aid, \$54 million. That was the final year of S-2. I'm going to show you the five years of state aid under the Murphy administration. One thing we have to keep in mind is that Murphy has another year to give us funding. After that, we could be at another situation politically so that's going to be something we have to be concerned about. The district has 22 buildings that are over 100 years old. Maintenance, repair, and remediation are big things. We have buildings that are leaking water, drainage issues, old boilers, old chillers, and HVAC. We're dealing with a lot of stuff in maintenance and repair. The budget over in Neil's department is over \$30 million. Charter school costs this year are \$147 million. Passaic County Tech is \$14 million. That number has come down. The total cost between the charter schools and

PCTI is now \$162 million. What are the cost drivers? Salaries and benefits are over half of our budget. Charter schools are \$162 million. Transportation is over \$20 million. Security is over \$9 million. Substitute costs are over \$10 million. If you look at out-of-district tuition and regular SPED, that number is over \$50 million. That's not in your slide. I have it from my budget meetings. Charter school numbers over the last six years from 2019-2020 up to the current year are increasing every year. The cost to the district has gone from \$63 million to \$147 million for 2024-2025. We have 7,370 kids enrolled. This number is growing every year and it's adding to our budget. Year-to-year, charter school costs are going up between 17% and 20%. Getting back to structural deficit, and I'm going to lead into state aid and what the impact is, that structural deficit is not a once in a lifetime situation. It's a chronic problem whereby every year our expenses are exceeding our revenues. This next slide here is an illustration of what happens. The budget went up \$37 million so there's a \$20 million gap there between the state aid and the budget increase. In 2023-2024 we got \$34 million. The budget went up \$51 million. This year we got the \$54 million and our budget went up \$73 million. That shows you that even with state aid it's not enough to balance the budget. There are other revenues that we rely on to get to a balanced budget. Those revenues for the 2024-2025 year are \$146 million of additional revenue that we have to come up with to get to a balanced budget. I'll show you in another slide what those revenues are. This is S-2 under the Murphy administration for the last five years. He's done real well for Paterson Public Schools and a lot of the Abbott districts. We've had good numbers over the last couple of years and it has allowed us to balance budgets, raise other revenues, not have any layoffs, and increase programs and instruction. Let me show you this simple slide that depicts what the budget is versus the increase in state aid. You see for 2020-2021 the total state aid was \$446 million. The total budget was \$533 million. The gap or shortage after state aid was \$86 million. The next year, state aid was \$476 million. The total budget was \$568 million. The gap was \$91 million. Next year the gap was \$110 million. The gap was \$127 million in 2024-2025. In 2024-2025, the gap is \$146 million. For 2024-2025, our state aid is \$583 million. Our total budget is \$730 million. Our gap is \$146 million. How do we close that gap? We have extraordinary aid, tax levy, tuition, miscellaneous revenue, Medicaid reimbursement, budgeted fund balance, and excess surplus. Excess surplus is something that we did not generate for many years. Last year we generated more surplus than Newark and Jersey City. \$35 million is a big number for us to generate. We have capital reserve and Fund 20 contribution. This is what makes the \$146 million. Without these numbers we're not balanced. State aid alone does not get the job done. How much money should we be paying as a taxing entity? The state has a formula based on Paterson's net valuation, which is \$6 billion, our median income, and us being a low wealth district. There's a formula that says what we should be taxing for educating our kids. I took a snapshot off the state aid summary report. It's coming right from the state every year what we should be taxing. I circled the \$123 million. That's what the state says. To fully fund Paterson based on state aid and tax levy, they're saying you should be taxing your people at \$123 million. We've gone through this slide before. I think we said over the last couple years we've been showing a lot of sympathy in terms of not trying to get to that number because we don't think it's reasonable. This is what the state says we should be taxing. Right now, we're taxing at \$73 million, not counting the 5% increase that we're having for 2024-2025. The next slide is going to give you samples of what it looks like based on no tax increase and up to a 5% tax increase. Remember the number \$73 million is what we taxed for the current year. The \$123 million comes from the state as what you should tax based on the demographics and the valuation of the City of Paterson. Going left to right, fiscal year 2024 is where we are right now. That's \$656 million going into 2024-2025 at 0%. I'll try to slow it down for you. I'm going to go to the bottom line a little bit. You see here that if we keep the taxes flat at \$73 million, there's a gap of \$1.4 million. If you go to 1% here, the taxes go

to \$73,900. There's a gap of \$731,000. I put in bold the 'budgeted fund balance' line to show you how we can balance at 2%. Remember the \$146 million that we talked about. I have the \$35 million here which is budgeted fund balance for everything over 2%. Now I'm using \$1.9 million of my fund balance, which is money that we should not be touching. That's rainy-day money that should be there for an extreme emergency. It puts us on thin ice. At 3%, that number goes down to \$1.2 million. Everything is remaining the same. The number that's changing now is fund balance, which we know we should not be touching. At 4%, we're using \$506,133 of fund balance. At 5%, we don't touch fund balance. We're still balanced. We still have our excess surplus. We have our state aid. Everything is intact. This is where we are at 0% up to 5%. We're voting on the budget on Monday, March 18. It has to be at the county on March 20. Whatever we decide to do, it's important that we get that done soon because we have to give you budgets to vote on by Monday. Last year, we got it to you before we were ready to give it to you. We want to get it to you right. We went through the budget last year and we were balanced, but we never submitted it without going through the edits. We were rushed and our per-pupil costs got all screwed up last year. We want to make sure that we don't get rushed to do this and make a mistake. We need to really make sure that we can give you the right numbers and get through all the edits. Our budget is a lot. I'm not making excuses; I'm just saying we need to time it so we don't make a mistake and give you a budget and not argue about something that's not really our fault. Because we didn't get through all the edits and the budget is balanced, other numbers are off. That was behind the scenes what happened last year regarding that per-pupil cost. We want to make the gap at \$1.4 million. If we are at 0% tax increase, we have a gap of \$1.4 million. One way we can fix that is we have a capital leasing program that we're ordering technology for the next four or five years. By cutting that it's going to yield a savings of \$489,000. We're not cutting instruction or people. We're doing it through cost savings through capital lease. There's no hit on instruction and programming or head count. There's no impact in the classroom, which is the most important thing. We're not going to touch instruction. I sat down with my team and our Superintendent, and we wanted to be smart about making any decisions in terms of cutting anything. We didn't want to touch people or instruction and programming. That's the smart way to go forward. Lastly, this is a history of where we are as far as the taxes over the last five years. You see we're trying to move it in a downward direction. It puts us in a better spot because we're not touching fund balance. What you see along the lines of how we're going to do this, you should never touch fund balance. That should be sacred in terms of how we manage the budget. That should be sacred. That's just my input. That's not coming from the Superintendent. That's just me talking. I'll take the bullet for that. This is the recommendation that we have before you in terms of what we do for 2024-2025. As far as the impact, we're talking about .49 cents a day. Annually, it's \$175. The city raised taxes this past year. Their annual impact was \$161. Ours is \$175. We're \$14 more than the City of Paterson. Even though our percent number is higher, our impact is the same. They're a bigger part of the budget. Mr. President, that's all I have right now.

Comm. Martinez: Let's all take a deep breath and jump right into this discussion because that was a whole lot to consume.

Mr. Chestnut: (Comments made away from the microphone)

Mr. Matthews: You're asking hard questions. Thank you for the good questions. We're doing a capital lease program. We're going out for financing for utility trucks, athletic buses, and technology. Through that program, we're able to save the money and not cut bodies, take teachers out of the classroom, or cut academic programs. It's a financing deal that we're going through with the Passaic County Improvement Authority.

We have a resolution to come before the Board at next month's meeting for approval. That's how we want to cut through savings.

Mr. Chestnut: While trying not cut anybody from the classroom or instruction is fine, I did want to bring two concerns. When it came to our budget cost drivers, I noticed that the second one was charter schools and fourth was security. I notice that we're starting to spend more on machines that check for weapons or firearms when it comes to students. Because we're spending more money on these expensive machines, how much is that driving our budget?

Mr. Matthews: Awesome question. I sincerely mean that. Those are one-time costs. We spent the money already. It's not a recurring cost. We don't have to pay for it more than just the one time. This number is based on contract services. We hire a company that does a lot security for the district. It's manpower, labor, administrative costs, and equipment costs with the contractor. Security cameras and metal detectors are one-time costs that were already expended, and we don't have to buy it again.

Mr. Chestnut: On that note, when it comes to labor, I know we have been spending a little bit more on security guards in the buildings. Are they making an impact when it comes to our students?

Mr. Matthews: I'm going to say it for the last time. Awesome questions! I know Mr. Price is back there right now. One of the things that I talked to Mr. Price about is our spend. Do you spend your money on keeping people safe? What's the right number to keep people safe versus how much money we spend in the classroom? The Director of Security is back there. I have this conversation with him all the time. I constantly challenge him and ask are we spending too much money on security keeping our kids safe. What's the right number? What's the right mix of people versus Board guards, contract guards, and taking money and putting it into the classroom? It's something that we constantly monitor. I ask him are we doing too much in terms of spending on this item when we can spend more money for teachers, SACs, IAs and things that hit the classroom. He's probably not going to like what I'm going to say, but he's speaking from a security lens and keeping the schools safe, which he should be doing. What I have to do is spend the right amount. We have to keep kids safe. We have to spend money in security. I asked Mr. Price one time with all the security cameras; we should be able to reduce staff. We went around and around on that. These are conversations that people here are not privy to, but these are the conversations that my budget team and I have with him, challenging his numbers and what he wants to do. We have very professional conversations about the security spend. My department meets with every department in the entire district. There are over 75 different departments. These are the conversations that we have over everybody's budget. That's what we have to do to make sure every budget is tight, right, and we're maximizing the taxpayer's dollars. That's what we're spending, taxpayer's dollars. Whether it's state or City of Paterson, our job and charge is to make sure that the money is being spent the right way. We always can do better.

Mr. Chestnut: I very much appreciate your thoroughness.

Mr. Matthews: I appreciate your questions too.

Mr. Chestnut: I very much appreciate that you have this concern when it comes to security because it's a concern of mine as well. I do see and agree with your staff about security cameras, making it so that we don't need to have as many security officers in the buildings.

Mr. Matthews: Mr. Price and I didn't agree on that one.

Mr. Chestnut: We agree on that.

Mr. Matthews: Mr. Price is going to have my head after this meeting. I know he's back there.

Mr. Chestnut: Speaking as a student, I notice that with so many security guards and police officers it actually makes the environment feel a little bit more unsafe with the amount of firearms that are now in the building. Another thing that comes to mind is that money could be spent on faculty and guidance counselors who could be giving students emotional support and ways of not causing violence within the schools, preventative measures from a purely law and order standpoint versus crime and punishment. I would like for us to take that into consideration when it comes to the budget and see it more as a tool and not so much an end. At the end of the day, we will never be able to solve every single act of random violence that happens at a school. But the main thing is that we want to create a community and environment that prevents these things. We don't want to punish. We want to prevent any violence from happening.

Mr. Matthews: Exactly.

Mr. Chestnut: Recently we just installed a metal detector that is long running. It feels like a TSA building. I don't want our security to feel like the TSA. It's an illusion of security. It's not really something that's there to make sure that we're safe. It's more to create the impression that we're safe. I want us to have effective measures that make sure we're all safe within the building and that students are being treated like human beings rather than criminals.

Mr. Matthews: That's awesome.

Comm. Martinez: I think I speak on behalf of everyone sitting up here and in the audience that you're so poignant and precise in your delivery and accurate in your statements. I'm beyond impressed with what I'm hearing from you right now. Keep going. When you turn 18, you have an internship offer from the attorney over here. You have campaign managers. Thank you for sharing.

Mr. Chestnut: Another concern I have was with charter schools. I don't mean to get political, but a lot of the City Council members have been putting money into creating more and more charter schools. When it comes to our budget, I want you to clarify how we are delegating the budget. How much money are they getting versus the public schools from the money we have?

Mr. Matthews: This is going to open up a can of worms. I'm going to explain it to you in a way that it is. If you talk to charter school people, you're going to hear something to the effect that 10% of the money stays back at the public schools. That is not correct. There's a formula that has three tiers of per-pupil costs for charter schools. It's regular education, special education, and bilingual. Each category of kid gets a per-pupil number. For instance, for Paterson Public Schools it's all a blended weighted number, \$22,000 per kid. For the charter school, every category has a separate per-pupil number. I recently sent it to one of the Commissioners because we get it into our state report. It's not just one number like it is for the public schools. It's three different numbers. It's 90% of equalization value and there's no 10% that stays back at the

public school. There's no 10% of that number that's in our budget. It was asked of me at a prior meeting where that line is. There is no line. I have to go back to my books and give you what the statute is, but it really breaks out the whole funding formula for charter schools versus public schools. They get three different numbers. The regular rate is \$10,000. I don't want to misquote the numbers. No money is staying back at the public school. They have three different tiers of per-pupil costs based on where that kid is.

Mr. Chestnut: So none of the money is coming back to public schools?

Mr. Matthews: \$147 million goes out. There are two true ups during the course of the year. For instance, we get this number here, the \$147 million and the number of kids. That number says 'projected.' I'll use Newark as an example. Newark will get this number of \$147 million and 7,000 kids, but they may budget \$140 million. Why? Because their number goes down when they do the true-ups when they have a midyear adjustment and end-of-year adjustment. Kids are coming and going. But when we get our true ups after the ASSA number comes through, we never budget lower than the \$147 million because our number rarely ever goes down. That's just a projected number. We have that number in our budget right now. A lot of districts can budget less because their numbers always go down. More kids leave and don't come back. To answer another way, the PCTI number this year is \$14 million because we got a big credit for a lot of kids who have been coming back to the district. That number this year was like a gift. It was \$4 million that we original projected. That worked to our benefit because when we gave the projection back in February, we had a higher number for Passaic County Tech. When we got the true-up for our budget, it went down by \$4 million. That helped us balance the budget. That was one of the positive things when we were going through the budget process. We got this credit from Passaic County Tech of \$4 million. I don't know if I answered your question, but I do have that data regarding the whole per-pupil stuff on charter schools.

Mr. Chestnut: Do you see charter schools more as a benefit or a detriment to our budget?

Mr. Matthews: I see it as neither. They're Paterson Public Schools kids. They're all our kids. I think parents deserve to have a choice. I had one kid who went to a parochial school and one who went to a public school. My older kid went to Don Bosco Prep. He was a better fit for that school. My other kid was a local Teaneck High guy. It was a better fit for him. Parents have to do what's best for their kid. I don't think you should ever take away choice from a parent. That's my personal opinion. Professionally, I have to look at the big picture and understand that they're all our kids. However we can best educate our kids by parents doing the best for their kids, I think we should always respect that decision. I want to elaborate on my answer one more time. The charter school people say, "You can't afford to educate these kids. If you give us this money, we can educate all those kids too." Give me that \$147 million and we'll educate our kids we have right now and those kids too.

Mr. Chestnut: If you just got that \$146 million, would that be of benefit for all our students?

Mr. Matthews: Give me \$147 million and me, Dr. Newell and the rest of the team can educate those kids too.

Mr. Chestnut: Is there any way that we would be able to expedite that?

Mr. Matthews: No. That's not something that we can do. There are individual entities and businesses that operate. They have a right and have made applications to the State of New Jersey. They have made investments to have those properties, build buildings, and hire staff. If we had \$147 million, we will figure it out.

Mr. Chestnut: Thank you.

Comm. Martinez: Everyone, take about two minutes to let the microphones cool off because he blazed them up and they're burning right now. I'm not trying to be funny, but this is about as real as a conversation we can have about these topics in a very long time. I applaud you for bringing that to the table. I'm sure I speak for everyone else that I welcome sitting down with you and discussing these topics even further and getting into it deeper to educate you more so we can educate each other and the community. Kudos to you! I'm not trying to placate you. I'm being humble and sincere. You were on point. Phenomenal! Anyone else want to try to talk after that?

Comm. Simmons: I have two questions, one for the BA and one for the Superintendent. You mentioned the cuts for the capital leasing and you talked about technology. If we cut the capital leasing, with the current technology we have, what is the current life expectancy? Does that put us back into the digital divide?

Mr. Matthews: This is a four to five-year buy. I had already spoken to the technology people and they had given me the okay even before this came up. It's a minimal cut when you're looking at all that we're ordering over the five-year period. It's not just technology. It's facilities so the whole package included some utility vehicles that are very expensive. It's not all being hit with technology. It's a shared cut.

Comm. Simmons: Even the technology is over four or five years. When we purchase Chromebooks, for example, we're probably approaching end of life on those devices. I would expect that we would be placing another order probably this year. If we don't place that order, because this is part of the capital leasing...

Mr. Matthews: We will be able to place a very sizable order.

Comm. Simmons: But with the capital leasing.

Mr. Matthews: Yes sir.

Comm. Simmons: If you can't place that sizable order, where does that put us in terms of devices for students? You said it wasn't going to affect instruction.

Mr. Matthews: The order is very sizable. The reduction was a conversation that we already had, and it was a reduction that he was able to live with that we didn't feel would impact instruction. Mr. Saleh would probably be the better person to explain.

Mr. Mohammed Saleh: Our current Chromebook fleet was purchased during the pandemic in 2020. We're now hitting 2024-2025, which is hitting that four-year lifespan. Most of these Chromebooks were purchased with a three or four-year warranty, which means that warranty is now up. These devices break constantly. They're in the hands of students. We know this. It's okay, but we have to be able to ensure that we can provide them a device. That's the direction that we chose as a district, to give every student a Chromebook knowing that especially throughout the pandemic that was key. It's also an integral part of our instruction now, not just for students, but for staff members as well. In this order that we put together, conceptually there are three

different devices for students between k-2, because we realized we learned from our initial purchases. They are going to have some devices that would better cater to the younger age with some extra capabilities that will allow them to use that device without the dexterity of their hands to be able to type, use a mouse, or a track pad. We will have a generic device for grades 3-12. Then a specific staff device that is a little bit larger and has more resources so they can have those extra tabs open and do what they need to do. We've also tied in a little bit of surplus because we found what has been successful is to give each school about 5% to 10% buffer in each of their buildings. That way as a student's device breaks, which happens, they can then reissue a device to a student. Once their buffer gets low, they let us know. We have a ticketing system. We go through that entire process to ensure that every staff and student has a Chromebook device almost always.

Mr. Matthews: I forgot the buffer part.

Comm. Simmons: If we're cutting capital leasing, we're not able to place that order.

Mr. Matthews: We can.

Comm. Simmons: With cheaper devices?

Mr. Matthews: It's quantity. It wasn't all in one shot. It wasn't a one-order deal.

Mr. Saleh: It's one order that will last us for five years. There were two options. We could either buy 'x' number of devices and replace a small amount of our fleet once every year. I don't know the number off the top of my head. We would replace 5,000 Chromebooks every year moving forward. Or we could buy 30,000 Chromebooks right now and that will last us for five years. Those are the two options. The recommendation that I put together and we worked through...

Comm. Simmons: So, it's basically for a different funding source.

Mr. Matthews: Local funds in the budget. Let me explain. We have the \$2.6 million in the sale and leaseback of textbooks. We're replacing that debt of \$2.6 million with this capital leasing and do technology and vehicles. This was discussed in fiscal two times. We're not increasing the budget. We're giving our kids devices for the next couple years with no increase to the budget.

Comm. Simmons: Are we leasing or not?

Mr. Matthews: It's called capital leasing. It's financing.

Comm. Simmons: I'm confused along with everyone else. Everyone heard you say we're going to cut through capital leasing.

Mr. Matthews: Every kid will still have a device.

Mr. Saleh: It's a one-time purchase.

Mr. Matthews: Instead of ordering 35,000, we order like 33,000.

Comm. Redmon: I know we discussed this in finance. Are we replacing the current debt that we have right now?

Mr. Matthews: It's a replacement. It's a wash.

Comm. Redmon: That's all you had to say. You started talking about the quantity of books.

Mr. Matthews: It's a wash.

Mr. Chestnut: I understand that we're talking about quantity. The better idea is 30,000 for the five years. I have a question regarding the hardware or the faculties. I know hardware is probably taking up some of the budget as well, the different software products that we're using. Where does that come into the budget?

Mr. Matthews: It's all part of the package.

Mr. Saleh: What was the software you mentioned?

Mr. Chestnut: I know that English teachers recently started to use Study Think. It's an online program, but I know that we also bought books to go with it.

Mr. Saleh: This is more of a capital expense. It's a one-time purchase. What you're talking about is a license. That is something we renew every year. That comes out of an academic budget because that's instructional program.

Mr. Chestnut: Thank you. Licensing doesn't come into this exact school budget at all.

Mr. Matthews: It comes under academics. It's all part of the whole budget.

Mr. Chestnut: I'll save the software questions for later. I just wanted a little clarification about the capital and things like that. As long as it's a one-time purchase, I feel that the five-year plan is the best one to go with.

Mr. Saleh: Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: My second question is to the Superintendent. In terms of what was presented with the ranges of tax increases from 0% to 5%, I wanted to get the Superintendent's thoughts about what's being proposed. If we have to cut, what are her thoughts on where we would start to cut?

Dr. Newell: Thank you for your question. What I would prefer to do is have enough revenues to put in place some of the budget priorities that my team and I have plus what I have received from the Board. Some of the budget priorities are to expand the Gifted & Talented program across the district and increase our fine and performing arts offerings. I know that before I came on board there were conversations about having an alternative middle school. I know that I have had conversations with some principals who are wondering where we are with that. We've talked about what incentives we can put in place to address the vacancies that we have in the district. We've talked about the labs at Eastside High. I know that we have also received from the Board artificial intelligence. What are we going to be doing further with AI in the district, as well as E-sports? Those are just examples. What would be beneficial for the district is that we have money in our coffers, more revenues than less. A big-ticket item I know was presented at our special meeting last week. Option A for School No. 3 was \$5.7 million, and Option B was \$7.8 million. If we are looking at budget cuts, one of the things that we would have to understand is that we cannot fund everything if we are cutting. The first big ticket item is when we look at School No. 3, which is \$7.8 million, it would have

to be done over an extended period of time. I know that Mr. Mapp, our Executive Director of Facilities, mentioned a September 2026 opening understanding that money could be tight. We may have to extend the work that we do on School No. 3 and anticipate, for example, a 2027 opening if we don't have enough money in our coffers. This would mean we would have to reprioritize how we use the money and some of the budget priorities that myself, cabinet, and the Board have. We would have to look at that and scale back. Those are just some of the things. Obviously, that is not definite. It's just something that we would have to consider and go back to the drawing board with all of these. There are no numbers on any of these that I have mentioned based on cabinet priorities and Board priorities. We would have to be open-minded and consider everything at this point.

Comm. Martinez: Were there any other follow-ups for the Superintendent or BA on anything pertaining to the budget?

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I know there's no item to vote on, but I know that we have to give the Superintendent a direction the Board wants to go into. Would we do that right now or after public portion? We have to leave here with something. Mr. Matthews stated it's a lengthy budget. We need to leave here with some type of a decision, consensus, or idea on what we are voting on Monday.

Comm. Martinez: To add specificity to what you're saying, what percentage are we looking to agree on?

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Yes.

Comm. Martinez: That's a lot to take on. I want to be mindful. I'm not trying to kick the can on the discussion. I'm just trying to balance that we have a large audience here and I don't want to keep you guys here too late.

Comm. Redmon: I think we should make this decision now before we go into public portion, so we'll know what we're working with. Then we can have the numbers. Our time is running short. We only have this weekend to discuss those numbers for Monday.

Comm. Martinez: We can start by asking for your recommendations. Do we consider starting at 4%? Do we start at 5%?

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: To start off, we should hear what the administration's recommendation is and then we can go from there. If we agree with the recommendation, we're a step ahead.

Comm. McCall: In all fairness, I know we want to hear the Superintendent's recommendation as well, but our BA is the financial piece of it. I'm just curious to see where he would land a number. If we're going to get to a number, he's got the numbers right now. I know they probably talked or whatever, but I'm curious to find out from the BA where he stands with a number. If not, we will be here all night because we'll each have a number. At the end of the day, I would like to know where we're starting. We've got a whole lot of ranges there to consider. I just want to know where we're going to start. If not, we will be here all night. I know where I want to be and I don't know where everybody else wants to be. We need to know what the administration's part is and where they would like for us to start. This is going to be a real conversation. There are a lot of people out there who will be affected by the decisions that we make. Thank you, Comm. Redmon, for bringing it to this point. All of the talking that we've done we're

going to be here all night trying to figure it out. I just want to get to the nitty-gritty of it. There are constituents out there, there are parents here, and there's a community that wants to have some type of idea of what they're dealing with when it comes to these numbers. Money is serious and we don't have it. A lot of people here that live in this city already pay high taxes. I want to know where we are. We need to get to the nitty-gritty of our decision, and we have to make a responsible decision tonight at least to start the conversation. That's just where I'm at.

Mr. Matthews: Am I supposed to answer?

Comm. Redmon: At this point the administration should be driving this conversation. The Board is now adding what they need to add at the back end. We just heard the priorities, but we don't have money attached to those priorities. We can't make a real decision until we have actual financial numbers sitting in front of us. We can estimate and say this project is going to cost this much. Those numbers should be presented to us before the budget suggestion with the percentages and increases we're talking about. We can talk about 3% and 4%, but what are we getting for that? We don't know. This is what I want to find out. What are we getting for the percentages that are presented to us? At 1% you can tell me what the capital improvements at School No. 3 would cost us. When we move from School No. 3, if we want to do an addition to Rosa Parks Performing Arts School, how much would that cost? For me, being realistic and having been through several budget presentations, I need to see a real number. What are we trying to obtain? What are we actually voting on? Right now, we can just vote on percentages and not know where this money is going to go.

Comm. McCall: I was under the impression that tonight we were discussing and not making any hard votes.

Comm. Martinez: That is accurate. Tonight is the discussion. The vote will take place on Monday, but this is where we have to roll up the sleeves and talk about numbers.

Comm. McCall: I totally agree with you that we're going to talk about numbers, but I would have hoped that this administration has already discussed what we have been presented tonight when it comes down to the things that the Superintendent just said. I would hope that by tomorrow we can receive those other numbers. They have to have had some type of discussion – I want to believe they did – to say if we ask for 2%, this is what it can do and how it can do it. If it asks for 4%, what it should do. If they didn't, shame on them. We're here tonight to make a decision on Monday. I want to make sure that whatever needs to be put on the table has to be put openly to this public body so that we can make a sound decision or at least leave here with some type of dialogue understanding where we have to come back on Monday and talk about. You're the one who said we need to discuss it now. Don't go into public portion. I want to discuss. I want to know where we are. Whether it's Madam Superintendent or Mr. Matthews, I want to know now. I need a bathroom break, but I'm willing to hold on because I need to know what this 2% does for me. What does 4% do for me? You know I'm not going with 8%. I want to know what kind of an impact does 0% or 1% brings. If I don't know the impact, I'm not making a good decision. I want to know what we're doing.

Comm. Redmon: Comm. McCall, you actually answered my question. In order for us to make a sound decision, we still need to know the top priorities of this district before we move forward. She gave us some of the list. What we're sitting here to discuss is our priorities. What do we agree we want to move on and what do those numbers look like? Then we can make a sound decision of what that percentage may be that we're moving forward with. The Superintendent gave her priorities. As a Board, what are those

priorities that we're willing to adopt and what those numbers look like? Then we can move forward. That's what I'm asking.

Comm. Freeman: Again, we're here with the budget. When I first came on, we were in the same place. I thought I made it very clear that if I'm not clear on what we're doing – because I feel like we're being rushed – I'm not going to vote yes on a budget when we don't have those numbers. It's very important that we have these numbers. People here in this district get paid very well to do the things that they are hired to do. I expect those things to be handled and done expeditiously or in a timely manner. There's no way that we should be sitting here once again when the budget needs to be somewhere on Monday. Today is Wednesday. It's absolutely unacceptable to me and I will vote no always. It will always be no if I'm not clear. I don't have clear numbers or clear answers. First of all, this should be a priority. It's very important to me that the community knows where we are. I do not like to be in a position that I am in today where if I don't vote yes, you know who gets to make these decisions. We can't have this. I don't like it. We need to be clear. Today is Wednesday and this has to be somewhere on Monday. It will always be a no for me. I want the parents and community to understand I will never vote yes on something that I'm not clear on or have clear numbers on. I'm not going to put myself in a position like that. It wouldn't be fair to the community because if you're doing this, we're not clear ourselves. This is my stance and I do understand my fellow Board members' position. We're here again. I don't like to be here again. I don't want to be here all night talking about the same thing. It's crazy. It's not to throw any shade or anything. This is how I feel, and I have a right to feel how I feel. I'm not going to be forced to vote yes. I need to know where we stand. What does it consist of if we look at this number or that number so people will understand? To me, it's very simple, but we make it very hard. I'm just not okay with it. I don't like it. I don't want to be here. We did this last year. We don't have to do this again. Some of us may agree and some of us don't. That's my personal opinion.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Comm. Martinez, I apologize. I had something to say regarding the budget. Mr. Matthews don't go too far because I do think a lot of the questions may have already been answered in one of your slides. However, we do have the public here who has been waiting since 6:00. Many of them weren't even allowed inside until 6:00. Just to be fair, we can take the opportunity to listen to their concerns. If they want to stay, we want them to stay to hear what's going on with the budget. It's already 7:30 and we want to give you the opportunity to share your concerns first. Then we welcome them to stay to hear the budget concerns as well. They're all here for a reason and we want to make sure. That's my suggestion, Mr. President.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. Ramirez that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be opened. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Ms. Lori Phillips: Good evening, everyone. I had to come publicly to discuss some issues going on in my building at School No. 27. When I explained what was going on, that person said to me, "How's that working out for you?" So, I have to bring this publicly now. My name is Lori Phillips. I'm currently at School No. 27. I've been there for the past 26 years. Not only have I been an employee there, I was also a student back in the days when there was no diversity going on. I was the first set of minorities to go to School No. 27. I've been subjected to what I believe to be silent bullying, retaliation, and harassment. I was asked by Mr. Rojas last year when I spoke to him about different incidents if I would like to go to another school. I said absolutely not. I'm

here for the students and the parents. I have spoken to several staff members about my concerns dating back 12 years ago with Mr. Simmons and Pastor Clayton. I wanted to look into the favoritism. Certain staff members in the building past and present get extra jobs throughout the building. All staff should be afforded the same opportunity. I have questions about staff lunches. We were told that we could no longer purchase staff lunches. For the past 25 years since I've been in the building, we were always able to purchase staff lunches. Ms. White gave me a name of Ms. Tanner to send an email to with that question. I don't know who Ms. Tanner is. I never received an email back from this person. I just want to know what the proper protocol is when you send out an email to administration and they do not send an email back to you. Vice versa, if we were to do that to them, we would be considered being insubordinate. I'm currently working as a first-grade personal assistant. For the past 25 years I was working as a kindergarten instructional assistant. First grade currently has gym with two kindergarten classes on Wednesdays and Thursdays where there is a total of 75 small children in the gym at one time. When we went to eighth grade, we always had two gym classes all the time. I was asking why there were so many students in the gym at the same time, especially a mixture of first grade and kindergarten. I was told by administration that it's because of the resource and ESL students. I just don't understand why when we went to eighth grade, we were able to have two gym classes per grade. 75 little children in that gym at one time is too many. I also spoke to Mr. Pugliesi, Mr. McDowell, and Ms. White about possibly getting a Bengali parent liaison. Our community is very much Bengali now. Mr. McDowell told me to give him a call tomorrow, which I will. I want to personally thank Mr. Price and Mr. Olympio for the professionalism and respect they have given to me regarding a confidential incident that was leaked out about me and discussed amongst staff members. I also want to thank Ms. Grant and Mr. Teague for always advising me on how to advocate for our children. Lastly, I want to thank Donna Actable for allowing me to be on the Kindergarten Transition Committee for the past six years. As a paraprofessional, I believe others are also in the same predicament as me where they feel that they cannot speak up due to fear of retaliation. Please look at that and make sure respect is all across the board from custodians, lunch monitors, paraprofessionals, and teachers. We might not have a degree behind our name, but our input is also important because we deal with our children on a daily basis.

Dr. Petula Harden-Brown: Good evening, everyone. I was here last week, and I promised you that I was going to come back again. I will come back again until my inquiry is properly addressed. The question that I left off last week was, what is the criteria for advancement within the Paterson Public Schools? Madam Superintendent Newell did respond in writing today regarding an email that I sent. I found the email vague and evasive as it did not address all the items that I outlined in my email. I will continue to come here and solicit feedback. As this young lady stated – and I worked with her at School No. 27, one of the schools that I had worked at – it seems to me there's a pattern when you receive an email. If you choose not to respond to it, you just don't. It is unfortunate that this is the platform that has to occur in order to have an inquiry or concern properly addressed. My employment with the Paterson Public Schools has never been about my race. However, the district has made it about my race. I will not be exploited and used when it serves the district. As far as I'm concerned, as far as what your hiring practices are, they are what they are. However, what is the criteria? Not the qualifications, because I'm very well aware of what the qualifications are. I too know that my email was not addressed because if you did address it, you would have had to admit that I do meet and exceed all the qualifications for principalship. I want the respect and the opportunity that I deserve in terms of working in this district. Thank you so much for your time.

Mr. Sasha Wolf: Mr. President and members of the Board of Education, my name is Sasha Wolf. I'm a Field Representative for the New Jersey Education Association and I'm proud to represent the over 130 members of the Paterson Food Service Association, most of whom are sitting behind me in the audience today, including Wanda Arroyo, our President. I think it's fitting this being budget season that we talk about expenses. There's been a lot of talk about expenses and what is necessary and unnecessary. I would submit to you that the members of the Paterson Food Association workday in and day out serving tens of thousands of meals to the students of these schools. Without their labor, this district would grind to a halt because students cannot learn on empty stomachs. Yet, the district, taking a fine and operational food service program, has chosen to spend unnecessary money to subcontract part of the food service operation to Sodexo. I think you enjoyed some of their meals tonight. That work should be done by our members. Sodexo is tone deaf to the interests of the students of these schools. For example, during this Lenten season there are no meatless options for Fridays. There are insensitivities during the month of Ramadan for meals that should not be served. I might add that sometimes our kitchens receive food deliveries that are spoiled. For example, recently blueberries were delivered that were spoiled and they were expected to bake them into muffins. You tell me what makes sense, throwing good money after bad or putting the food services back where it belongs in our members? This is no disrespect to the Food Services Director, Krystal Tanner. She's doing a fine job. But make no mistake - this work should be done completely in-house. Most of my members not only work in Paterson, they live in this city. They send their kids to these schools. I also represent over 1,000 members who live in this city, whether they're food service workers, teachers, or work throughout the State of New Jersey. They are registered to vote, and they are watching. We do not countenance subcontracting and we believe this work should stay in-house. Consider that when you're looking at renewing the Sodexo contract. Don't do it. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Monifa Greer: Good evening, Board and Paterson. I'm here because I found out we may be changing our health care plan. I'm very happy with Horizon. I heard that Aetna may be the choice that may come about. Unfortunately, Aetna is not accepting certain medical issues that may arise with any of our staff members that I work with. I would like to understand why they're deciding to make that change. Horizon has worked for me and for many of the other staff members that I know of that are medically inclined. Please consider keeping Horizon. Thank you.

Ms. Greta Mills: Hello, everyone. I'm Greta Mills, a teacher in Paterson and a resident. At School No. 10 we need an art teacher, world language teacher, and technology teacher. All my students get is gym five days a week. I know some of the other students do also. It shouldn't be the responsibility of the teachers to teach art. We have a lot of students who need to learn to speak another language so they can get a job and compete against the other people who are bilingual and trilingual. We have a lot of students who just speak English. When they go out into the workforce, it's going to make it difficult for them to get a job. We don't have a technology teacher. We have laptops, but it's the responsibility of the teachers to teach the students how to use the computers and the different software programs that the district has put into place. We need assistance. It shouldn't be on just the teachers to make sure. We have some schools with robotics and AI. Then you have some other schools, like School No. 10, where you have nothing but what the teacher offers in the classroom. There's no art, world language, or technology teacher. On the replacement of laptops for students, the students break those laptops. What are we going to put in place to replace it? Just like in real life, if you have a laptop and it's not working in a week, you can take it back to the store. What are we doing to replace those laptops when their parents are dishing out money to replace them and it's still not working or stops working? What are we doing

so that they can get a different laptop? It shouldn't be that kids have to go without a laptop. Every school needs to have parking for teachers. You have parking for principals, secretaries, security, and nurses. No parking for teachers. If the teachers don't come to school and we're not needed, please let me know. I never got a response to my question about Proximity and how they're getting paid more than we are. They get to sit at home in the luxury of their houses while the rest of us have to get into our car where there's no parking. They're getting paid more than we are. I would please like to have a copy of this budget, the different numbers that you're coming up with. The public should have the right to look at this budget also and you should put a document out there so we can give our opinions. Getting back into the classroom, we need to have smaller groups. As I stated before, maybe you need to get all your supervisors back into the classrooms, taking five students at a time and not just coming in to observe somebody for 20 minutes. You weren't there the whole time for five or six months. Now you're coming in one time to observe somebody and give an opinion. That is not valid because you don't know the teacher or the students. Thank you.

Ms. Phillips: I was just speaking to Ms. Tanner, and I had the wrong email address. That's why she never got back to me. I apologize.

Comm. Martinez: Thank you for the clarification.

Ms. Iris Rivera: Good evening, Paterson School District, Commissioners, staff, and administrators. My name is Iris Rivera, PACOPAD. I just want to follow up with the email we sent out on February 7 to Dr. Newell, Ms. Coy, and Comm. Gonzalez. The parent is waiting for an answer regarding special education transition. They're waiting to meet with them. Ms. Irizarry has been in touch with me since February 29. There was an incident at International High School. Her son was assaulted by another student. I want to know what is the protocol and procedure when someone gets hurt. The student got home, and he was not feeling well. The parent took her son to St. Joseph's Hospital. The student is verbal. He's in high-functioning special education. The doctor decided to call the Paterson Police Department and file a report of simple assault. According to the doctors, they decided he needed to call and press charges. The parents went the next day to the principal and informed them of what happened and asked to follow up. There was a conversation between the parents and the principal. Yesterday Ms. Irizarry received a phone call that her son was suspended with no paper. I don't know the procedure when someone is bullied and hurt. Does someone get notified? The police report said that he can file charges against the juvenile who hurt her son. That means she can go to 401 Grand Street to family court juvenile department and file charges, but she hasn't done so. I want to know what else the parent can do besides talking to the principal, case worker, and teacher. Her son was suspended, and he was the victim. Why didn't the other student get suspended? There's a lot of investigation. I don't know if someone can answer me back. When someone gets hurt in the district, what is the protocol to follow up? She would like an answer. She showed me an email regarding the teacher that the son's behavior is not good. He lowered his grades. He has some disorders, stress, and anxiety. I want the Commissioners and the Board of Education to follow up on this case. Like I showed you, the police got involved. Follow up with the parents and the email that I sent. They would like to talk to you regarding the transition. Thank you so much.

Comm. Martinez: Thank you. Our assistant superintendent is going to speak to you offline and provide you better guidance.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening, Mr. President, Commissioners, Madam Superintendent, Mr. Deputy, staff, and community. I want to start by thanking Mr.

Matthews for his persistence. The SDA funding does not happen automatically. Although it should happen by law, it does not happen without advocacy, and we do need additional advocacy because the legislators have not allocated them enough. The Governor has not allocated them enough in this current budget to meet the need. The SDA is \$500 million just to meet the current needs, not the things that will emerge over the next year. Please do lift your voices and add to the advocacy. I also want to thank Mr. Matthews and his team for the budget report. How does cutting technology, facilities, and security in half affect teaching and learning? I think that was answered, so thank you for that. I'll also add my voice to Sodexo. We have lots of horror stories. I've been to other districts where they're providing them with wonderful food. My experience and opinion is that they're treating Paterson kids as second-class citizens and we should not be spending our limited funds on them. Finally, I want to raise an unpopular subject, which is right sizing. I want to say equity starts at home. If we're going to advocate for equity in the community from the state and the feds, we need to have it here as well. We've observed a clear divide between the resources available to different parts of this community and schools in the community. We cannot have a 1:15 ratio in some schools and 1:60 in others. It's a common practice. It needs to change. We need to serve all our children equitably. As we consider this budget and look at the teacher shortage, I hope that we will consider the goal. What about the kids at School No. 6, School No. 20, and in our most depressed areas and who are underperforming? Let them have an opportunity to learn and thrive as well. I know change is difficult. I only hope that the process is being done in a way that is healing centered and compassionate. People are being made to move, but let's work together and make all boats rise and all children succeed. Thank you.

Mr. Corey Teague: President and members of the Board, I wanted to speak tonight briefly about the resizing and the shifting of the educators as well. The amount of teachers that reach out to me every day because of the mental health they have to go through from being shifted out of their classes is disheartening. I don't think a lot of times we realize what we're doing and the impact the decisions we make have on folks. I'll refer back to 2013 when I made that huge mistake to move the elections from April to November. I talk about that all the time because we have to be cognizant of the fact that sometimes the decisions, we make can impact more than just us. There are educators who reach out to me as of late and have told me that between the high rent in the City of Paterson and being told that... You have principals that are telling teachers, "On Monday you're going to be moved out. On Monday you're going to lose your position in your classroom." These are principals. I'm not a Board member. I'm just putting it out there. School No. 27 is a real problem. If you guys don't fix that problem, mark my words, those lawsuits are going to come trickling in. When we look at the budget and the decision that you're going to have to make, I don't think you guys can afford another lawsuit. Not at the pay rate that many of you receive. Let's be clear. The Board members do not receive pay from the district. That's a volunteer position. But there are a lot of top-heavy positions in the district. I actually thought after 2022 I was going to receive only a percentage of phone calls. The calls I get now have quadrupled and that's very alarming because you want to believe that things have gotten better. I'm not here to paint with a broad brush, but we have some real work that has to get done in this district. Start with School No. 27. You can write that down. Corey Teague told us that we need to start with School No. 27. I can't tell you what to do, but I'm advising you. If you don't take that very seriously and go over there and find out what's going on...because it didn't just start. That school has had issues for years, from the last principal to the current one. Go over there please, for the love of God, and find out what's going on. Start in the basement and work your way up. If you find things that are wrong, get rid of people. Don't be afraid to get rid of people if it is causing a detriment to the academic welfare of our scholars. Get rid of them. It ain't personal.

Don't get rid of the people at the bottom who are down there with the children every day. Get rid of those people who are in those high positions who don't care what's going on with those children, who talk to the staff any kind of way, who treat staff any kind of way, and who have a serious Oedipus complex. Get in those buildings and find out what these principals are doing because the children are taking that anger and bringing it home and into our communities. Thank you.

Ms. Rose Uribe: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm a little nervous. My name is Rose Uribe. My daughter attends Alexander Hamilton Academy. She's a seventh grader. I wasn't going to come here tonight, but I was talked into coming about a concern regarding a field trip that is coming on Friday. She was chosen by her science teacher to attend Princeton University for a science event. Her science teacher was going to attend the trip until yesterday. I was told that her science teacher was pulled out. I never got a notice or received any letters stating that the school had a new vice principal at her school. The vice principal tells me that another male from another school is going to accompany a group of girls to the trip. I have concerns. That male teacher does not know our children. They're all girls. They don't have a relationship with these girls. The vice principal does not have a relationship with these girls either for her to have a meeting with them yesterday to tell them their science teacher is not going with them on their field trip. Another male is going. When my daughter asked a question, her response was, "This is what happens when you come late." No. She didn't ask you that. She asked why her science teacher who she is comfortable with was not coming on the trip. Princeton University is a big school. She's a preteen. Things happen. You never know. She might get her cycle. Anything can happen. Who's going to help her? Is she going to feel comfortable with another male teacher from another school accompanying her? Absolutely not! I called the Board of Education. I spoke to Dr. Warren's assistant. I explained to them the issue. Before I called the Board of Education I did call the school. I did speak with Ms. Cassini, and she lied to me. She told me the reason the science teacher was pulled out was because there was no substitute. That's not true. Someone did pick up her job. What is going on that their science teacher who they're comfortable with is not able to go with them and accompany them? I'm not sure how factual this is, but it was a situation. I don't know if the science teacher and the vice principal had words. Maybe the reason the science teacher was pulled was because there was an issue between her and the vice principal. Maybe she's trying to prove a point. The point is not between her and the teacher. The kids are suffering from this because now they're not going to be able to go on this trip comfortably without their science teacher who knows what they're learning and they can relate to on this trip regarding the things that they're learning. I'm here today because I'm concerned as a mother of a young girl. I feel like we have a lot of individuals in these high positions that don't know how to treat our children, don't know how to handle our children, and then say that our children are misbehaving. The problem is they do not know how to work with our children in urban communities. That's my issue. Today I'm here and hopefully we can make a decision to reverse this decision of allowing my child's science teacher to attend this trip. It's on Friday.

Comm. Martinez: Thank you, Ms. Uribe. We're going to have one of our assistant superintendents speak directly to you to see if we can get it resolved.

Ms. Uribe: Thank you.

Ms. Kyranisha Williams: Hello, everybody. I have a quick question for you guys. I was listening to your budget. It was like \$7 million. When you go out of district, every parent in that Board meeting has a copy of the agenda. You have a link for the parents to access that agenda back there. If you go on the New Jersey website, it's not broken

down like that book back there. Why isn't an agenda online in all types of languages for every parent that speaks every language? That agenda is only in English. If Arabic parents are reading that book, how are they going to know how to translate that book back there? Nobody knows how to translate that book. When you talk about the money, you have Tier 1 through Tier 5. You get state and federal money. Why is that not broken down? How do we know which money goes to the state and to federal? You guys get two different grants. Thank you. Have a nice day.

Ms. Chivonne Bryant: Good evening. I'm Chivonne Bryant. I've been sitting back observing. I wasn't going to speak. I'm from School No. 27. I want to put on record that I have some concerns with the rightsizing and the way it was done. I got a message from someone 12:00 before the last meeting saying my name was on the agenda to be in-house transferred to a technology teacher. I'm not certified to be a technology teacher. I was a math teacher for the last five years there, a highly effective teacher for the last five years. Last year when we had a crisis and we didn't have enough math teachers, I taught until you hired someone to come there in February, the biggest population of African American students there. I'm also a resident here. I worked my way through the system. I had kids come through the system. I started out as a substitute, an aide, and then became a teacher. People who make more than me pulled my PC number. How do you do that? I don't understand that. They switched my PC number with them and now they're a math teacher and I'm a technology teacher. How does that happen? The angst that it has caused me and my students who I've been with all year... I've called and emailed many times to the point where now we have caller ID in every office. People don't get back to me now. They say, "I'm going to fix this. I'm going to get back to you with information how Ms. White is doing this." They never call me back. I get an operator and the person will yell. She yelled from the back saying that I had to speak to someone else concerning it. She asked for my extension to get back to me and it took her days to do that. I called my union representative as I'm entitled to. I got a letter on February 26 that I was a technology teacher when I woke up. I didn't get changed until last week. I was still teaching math. I put in for compensation and was denied. I got another email which Ms. Warren was copied on that said you will stay in your place until I tell you to. Out of fear and other things maybe I didn't want to speak tonight, but something says to me that this is not right. I don't care if Mr. Rojas or anyone else decides to do a chase of my attendance history and my this and my that. My mental health matters more because this district has put me through a lot for the 20 years that I have served this community. I have worked in other areas. I have worked with Comm. McCall before. I have worked at Passaic County Community College before. I have worked with Comm. Simmons before. I have worked with your sister before. I have worked at Eastside High School because I'm under special education. I did not have this problem. I was transferred because they no longer needed me. I was working with the technology department, and I taught economics and finance because they had a big SPED population there. I started at School No. 6. I've been transferred many times and now every day I'm reminded I was in-house transferred. Ms. White said I was right-sized. I called the union and they said I'm in-house transferred. What was I? Who's going to tell me what I was? Then I'm told I'm going to be transferred any day out of that building. Why me? There are other people who make way more than me, whether it was due to attendance or whatever, and if I put my salary on notice you would say I couldn't afford to live in Paterson. You didn't understand why I wasn't at work sometimes. We didn't care about the emotions back then. Before COVID, nobody cared about the emotions of the person. Nobody cared what I was going through. Therefore, when I didn't receive my increments or whatever, now somebody who makes twice what I have is taking my position as a math teacher in the school and he gets to stay there because he's a state tester. This is not right. I didn't want to speak on it because who knows what's going to happen tomorrow.

But do you know what? It's not about me anymore. Ms. Phillips advised me. When I first got there, I thought she was concerned about me because I fell and broke my wrist and she seemed very concerned and genuine. Things started to change. It started to flip very quickly. When I started asking questions, everybody seemed to start flipping very quickly. I'm literally shunned from my own school. People do not speak to me, as if I'm the one who transferred myself. I go to work. I'm either in my classroom with my students on my lunch or I'm in my car. I don't cause any problems. I've not been written up for anything. Yes, people have told me about my attendance. I've put that on record. Up until this year, this has been one of my best attendance years until I got hurt. I got an email to pack my stuff up Monday and to switch rooms with him by the next day. That was 6:43 in the morning they were discussing me. The chief said he had no boxes. At 10:00 after I threw everything out that belonged to me, I got another email saying he's not ready to change classes yet. Who's reimbursing me? I can't afford to live in Paterson. I barely can afford other things. It's not right. I'm sorry. Thank you. It's not right.

It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. Ramirez that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be closed. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Comm. Martinez: At this time, we will jump back into the discussion on the budget. I'll start by asking the Superintendent if she wants to give her report or blend her comments on the budget into the report.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Newell: I know that we had at least one person come to the microphone to discuss health care. The presentation on health care has been removed from tonight's agenda because after much careful thought and consideration I've made the decision that the district will stay with our current health care provider. I will make a recommendation to the Board that we do not change our health care provider. Additionally, I'm pleased to inform the Board and the community that I am currently planning a series of community forums for April. These forums will focus on the Paterson School District's upcoming five-year strategic plan and will include a series of presentations from the New Jersey School Boards Association. They have worked closely with the district in the past. Right now, we're looking at dates when we will be choosing to host these forums. I'm hoping to hear from everyone, particularly our parents. We really need the feedback to figure out our direction for our next strategic plan. We will not be starting from scratch, but we will be adding on to the work and going through the plan to see what we keep, what we move on with, and how we can add on to the strategic plan. Please stay tuned for more information and make every effort to attend. I was invited to the Eighth Grade Ring Ceremony. As you can see, we had two members from the eighth grade from School No. 2 with their principal, Dr. Vanessa Serrano. One of the things I enjoy most about my role is the opportunity to get out into the schools and see our students and the dedication that they have. Yesterday's ceremony at School No. 2 was a wonderful opportunity for me to get out and see all the hard work of the staff members, students, parents, and guardians. I'm thankful for that opportunity and thank you for the invitation. Similarly, I was invited to two of our preschools, B.J. Wilkerson Memorial and the YMCA Preschool of Paterson. During those visits, I had the opportunity to tour the facility, meet the staff members, and read to the children. Visits like these are often the highlight of my week. It's nice to see the great work being done for our youngest children in these schools. I'd like to thank Dr. Janice Powell of the YMCA Preschool and Mr. and Ms. Williams of B.J. Wilkerson Preschool for granting me the opportunity. Finally, I visited the Paterson Museum for the Art and Essay Contest Ceremony. The

ceremony was hosted by the InnerFaith Performing Arts Center. I'd really like to say a special thank you to Councilwoman Ruby Cotton and Ms. Rashonda for arranging the ceremony and for extending the invitation. It's incredible the talent that we have in this district. I really look forward to nurturing and pouring hopefully more resources into our arts for our students here in Paterson. Finally, I would like for Mr. Dalton Price to give us an update about an incident that happened yesterday. That will be the end of my report.

Mr. Dalton Price: Good evening. What we do know is that there were two incidents yesterday near the ATMA School. One incident happened on Carroll Street and the other one directly on Summer Street in front of the school. What we do know so far is that one person that they're looking for is a student from one of the schools. That we know from the Paterson police. One person was shot. It was an adult aged near 40 years old. There were students involved. This did not take place in the school. At no time were they in the school. It happened at 3:50 in the afternoon. Nothing involved Eastside or ATMA at the time. Everything took place outside near the park. That's where it started and that's where it's finished. That's what we know so far. Are there any questions?

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Comm. Martinez: I'll just jump into my report which kind of leads right back into the budget conversation. Then we will open up the floor. I know the Commissioners are looking for the recommendation of the BA and the Superintendent. After hearing the presentation, it's worth noting that this is the first time in my tenure here that we have been fully funded. That's something to be proud of, grateful, and happy for. We're finally getting what we're entitled to. It should have taken place for a long time. I think it was demonstrated, at least to my eyes, that being fully funded does not mean that we now have extra money. The deficit still exists. I know a heavy part of the conversation as we move forward is going to be what we do with regards to taxes. What's that number? What's the increase? What's the percentage? I was speaking to folks internally who were here long enough. I offer this for context. In 1991 the state took over. From 1991 to 2008 – that's 17 years – the district didn't raise taxes at all. In 2009 for the first time in those 17 years we raised taxes to the tune of 6%. Then we went an additional two years without raising taxes. This is a large contributor to how we ended up where we are right now. All of those consecutive years that we were not raising taxes put us behind the eight-ball and have contributed to the position we're in now. The perception is we're fully funded and we're flush. We shouldn't have to raise taxes. That's not accurate and in my opinion is not true. The reason why we had to raise taxes in 2020 14%, in 2021 14%, and in 2022 12% was because for all those years we didn't raise taxes. I'm of the thought that instead of not raising taxes at a zero clip and then drastically raising them at 14%, that we find a middle ground. We have to find a responsible percentage where we do have to increase and raise taxes. We have to put in our share. It is my opinion that we cannot claim to care about the education of our children and want better for them if we're not willing to support that. That means we have to pay into it as well. I understand the larger context of what's going on with the city and the financial situation, but it's our fair responsibility. The state norm is a 2% increase every year. My proposal is that at minimum we have to start at a 2% clip and work up from there. Anything less than a 2% clip in my opinion is irresponsible. Those are my two cents. Those are my offerings. With those things being said, I open up the floor for the conversation and further thoughts. We'll start with the BA.

Discussion on the 2024-2025 School District Budget

Mr. Matthews: Thank you, Comm. Martinez. One of the things that was asked of me was to give this comparison between 0% up to 5% and what the impact would be. At the 0%, the impact is \$1.4 million in terms of a gap. At 1%, it's \$731,000. My recommendation in fiscal as well as last night is the slide where it says 5%. You see the red circle there. There's no fund balance being used. That to me will be fiscally responsible as a district to not touch your fund balance. I believe that number is sacred. At 5% there are no cuts. There's no reduction of programs. It's responsible and we don't touch our fund balance. My recommendation last night as well as tonight is that we do a 5% tax levy, and the impact is .49 cents per day. Annually it's \$175, which is \$14 more than the city did at 2.6%. That's my recommendation, the 5% tax levy. I did talk to the Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent. We are all on the same page with that. We've had deep conversations about where we should land. We did have the 8% last month. We did look at it. Based on what came in for closing that gap in terms of the revenues we feel that is a responsible number to the tax paying public in Paterson, which we know the pool is only like 25,000 people. As we have shown in the past, we're being very sympathetic, but we're playing catch-up. We're doing it at a moderate pace. Thank you.

Dr. Newell: I also concur. I do think that we should look at the 5%. When we think about the long-term in terms of sustaining to go to 0%, we need to have something in our coffers. I don't think that we should deplete our fund balance. Our fund balance is like our rainy-day money, and I think we should not drain that. I think we should go with the 5%. That is my opinion. That is my feeling. I have spoken with the Deputy and BA. I think 5% is where my recommendation would be.

Comm. Redmon: Since we already have the recommendation from the Superintendent and the BA, can we get the top priorities so we can discuss those, the top ticket items we want to see her move forward with in the budget?

Comm. Martinez: I'm with you but before we move on to that portion, the 5% is on the table. If there's any discussion about that, we can have that. Then we can proceed into your part. I'm just trying to make sure it's a full conversation.

Comm. Gonzalez: This is always the hottest topic every year when we come around budget time. I want to be fiscally responsible, but also, I'm concerned because you did mention that the city raised taxes. We're going to raise taxes. Whether we're a little less or over, it's in addition to. At the end of the day, we also have to be mindful of the parents. The parents are the ones flipping this bill. It's not coming from anywhere else. We have to be mindful about what we heard here today. Comments were made about folks not being able to afford living in this city. That's a major concern. When I look at this presentation, I do not see where the tax cuts are. I do not see the line items. I'm not on the fiscal committee. No one reached out to me in reference to advising us as a group to talk about where the cuts are. I don't know where you're cutting the money from. What departments? What line items? It's things that we may need. It's things that I may want to advocate for. It's hard for me to say let's do x, y, or z or let's go with whatever proposal is being made, whether it's 2% to 5%, without having those details. I think Comm. Freeman had mentioned this is not a full presentation for me. I want to be fiscally responsible, but I need to know where the money is dedicated to. If we're going to increase 5%, where is that money going to? What line items are you adding funding to? You gave one example of IT. That's a good example. That's not this budget. That's not all the line items that are here. We have a lot of deficiencies in the district, things that we need. The young man here talked about one-time costs of security

cameras. These are discussions we need to have. We're getting this presentation at this hour and just randomly select whether it's a 0% to 5%. Without having that information, I think I can't support this.

Comm. Simmons: In the presentation it shows where the money is coming from. When he's talking about cutting, we're talking about cutting from the fund balance. We're paying into covering that gap. For a lot of years, we did not have a fund balance. Situations like School No. 3, we didn't have money to cover that. We have emergencies that come up all the time. We see it when we have flooding and bad weather. We have to replace boilers and things like that. We know that money is not coming right away so we have to cover that. Mr. Matthews, can you go through those items on how you're covering the gap? Those things where we're talking about cutting, we're talking about paying into it and taking away from our revenues.

Mr. Matthews: Let me go to a slide that really explains it. After we got the state aid at \$583 million, this is all based on 5%. There's no number here in this slide because we're saying we're not going to use the fund balance. Fund balance is 2% of your total appropriations. That's like your lifeline that you're not supposed to ever touch. At the 5%, we don't touch fund balance. The \$146 million is all the categories that make up that revenue to get to a balanced budget. Going through this slide here, at 0% I bolded "budgeted fund balance." At 0%, we're using \$1.9 million of fund balance, rainy day money that we should not be touching. The state says that you're supposed to maintain a 2% fund balance at the end of the year. When we do our audit for 2023-2024, we have to have about \$14 million in unassigned fund balance. There are other reserve accounts like capital reserve. We have money in maintenance reserve. We have money in emergency reserve. These reserves we can touch. But your unassigned fund balance, that's not assigned to anything. That's sacred. You don't touch it. At the 1%, we're touching \$1.9 million of fund balance. It's bolded. I thank my Superintendent for making me do that. At 2%, we're still touching the fund balance, the \$35 million of excess surplus. It's good business practice that we try to adopt that we don't spend 100% of our budget. Our budget is \$700 million. I try to get through the year at 96%. Let me balance other budgets. For 2022-2023, \$35 million fell out. That contributes towards balancing this budget. We got our state aid of \$54 million, nice. Tax levy, nice. This money is revenue, nice. But \$35 million came from pretty decent business practices by the district. We're not perfect. We still do a lot of things that can be cleaned up and fixed. We can be better. For a district this size, a 1% improvement is huge. If we get incrementally better little by little, those are big windfalls. Getting back to the 3% tax levy, we're touching fund balance at \$1.2 million. I'm keeping the revenue the same. I'm not touching appropriations. Normally when we get to this point, we have to cut to balance. Here we have revenues that allow us to balance without making cuts. At 4%, we're at \$506,000 of our budgeted fund balance. At 5%, there's zero fund balance that's being touched. Now we're operating in safe territory. That's why I made the recommendation at 5%. Now we're not touching fund balance. Districts do it all the time. They go below the 2% all the time to balance out their budget. It's nothing illegal about doing that, as long as at the end of the year I'm ending up at 2%. If you look at the budget calendar, everything that we're doing is right along the calendar. We gave you the calendar back in September. We are doing everything according to the timeline of the budget calendar. We get our state aid at the end of February. We can't balance until we get that number. Two or three days later we're balanced. Now we're going through the jockeying of where we want to land. We're in a better spot than we've been in the past. We're normally sitting here figuring where we're going to cut to balance the budget. Now we're trying to decide what revenue number we want to go with to balance the budget. We're in a better spot than we've been in the past. We're not figuring out where we're going to cut. We're thinking about where we want to land. Do we want to

use fund balance or not? The Superintendent and I had a long conversation a couple days in a row and multiple times today. We don't want to touch that fund balance. There's no disagreement there. We should never want to touch it. I can't make a recommendation for anything less than that.

Comm. Gonzalez: The \$35 million says 'excess surplus.' Does it come from positions that are not filled?

Mr. Matthews: It's operations for the whole entire year. For instance, if money falls out that goes to budgeted fund balance. Anything over 2% goes into that category.

Comm. Gonzalez: Does that include salaries?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Gonzalez: This year we still haven't been at full capacity. We're expected to have some excess surplus because of the over 150 employees that we still need to fill, understanding that we have to put it into the budget because we have to fill them. As the year goes along, that's money that hasn't been touched. We're only a couple months away from the end of the school year and we have over 150 positions that haven't been filled. That's going to go into the excess funds, which would add to what you're saying.

Mr. Matthews: Not all 150 budgeted goes into fund balance. Part of the 150 was filled, but we also have what's called unanticipated expenses. We have to pull money from some of those salaries to pay. To give you an example, out-of-district tuition went up \$16 million more than budgeted. Kids are being referred out of district. We have to pay for that. Part of the budget is planning for unanticipated expenses. You can't budget so tight that when things come up you can't pay for them. There are things that are not anticipated that we have to budget. The Superintendent may say she wants to do a program and I have to find \$200,000. We may get a bid that comes in after the budget is done. That happens. When we approve the budget on whatever day it is, two days later we're already out of balance because things are coming up.

Comm. Gonzalez: I hear you. You can't predict. You can't expense from a line item you don't know we're going to have. In other words, you don't know who's going to come on from now to June that might start taking some of those salary funding sources. You can't assume that \$35 million was salary.

Mr. Matthews: It's not all salary.

Comm. Gonzalez: Understood. Whatever the number is for the salary, and I'm not disputing what the number is, but whatever that number is we're already towards the end of the year. We only have a couple months left. Whoever we didn't hire, that's going towards the excess funds. How you use it is what you're explaining. You take those excess funds, and you might pay for capital improvements or whatever the case is. All I'm saying is that after reviewing this it shows that you have \$1.4 million in the negative. There have been a lot of contracts since I have been elected that I have not approved and have not voted in favor of that I thought were a waste of money. If we're going to be fiscally responsible, why are we giving money away to Midwest companies to come in here and do a job in recruiting kids when we have our own department to do that job? Use the money in-house. We're giving it to other contractors. There are plenty of contracts that have passed that I have not supported that I see could have been easily cut. If those are on the table again, those should be looked at and anything

else that we're spending and giving away willy-nilly. I don't mind that it becomes controversial. At the end of the day, what you're asking us to do is raise taxes again. We've been doing it every year for the past couple years. The city just did that. We have to also advocate for the parents who voted us in to represent them and that was a hot topic for us. Most of you don't live in Paterson. A lot of you don't live in Paterson, most of you. You don't pay these taxes. You go home and your levy is not really impacting you. If it does, you make enough money to pay those taxes. We have people here who are under the national average income, even the state average. We can't just say we need. What we need to do is start finding cuts so that \$1.4 million gets eliminated from extra spending. If you had to, let's assume that we didn't get this \$54 million from the state, which is a blessing. What if we didn't get it and you had to find cuts? That's the challenge that I'm asking. Where are we going to find those cuts? Where are those unnecessary expenses? It's only \$1.5 million from what I see, and that's tapping into the budget fund balance. The remainder is \$1.4 million. I have confidence in you that you can find \$1.5 million where we can cut out of a \$700 million budget. That's the reason I'm opposed to this conversation as if it's okay that it's 5% because we need it. We've never had this amount of money. I understand there are costs that keep coming up. Without a doubt I understood that, but we were funded \$54 million by the state. There are always additional expenses that we have to cover with union costs increasing. I get all that, but we have to be mindful and not always be looking at the citizens, the people who are paying the tax dollars, to cover that bill. We have to be fiscally responsible and identify where we can make cuts. That's the harder work and that's what I'm challenging you with, finding where we can cut \$1.5 million so that we don't have to raise taxes.

Comm. Simmons: I heard everything you said. I've seen this before. I've been here long enough to see years where we get funding like this and then the next year we don't or we get cut. I've been here when we've had to lay off 400 people. We didn't raise taxes because we got this funding thinking next year this was going to continue and it just doesn't. I know I say this all the time. Superman is not coming to save us. We have to save ourselves. If we are here for children, I can't make decisions for children based on what the city is not doing. When the city decides that they want to give 30-year tax abatements, the city collects 95% and the county gets 5%. We don't see a dime of that money. If the city is not doing what it's supposed to do, how will we say we're about education? To Comm. Martinez' point, if I'm here for children, I have to make decisions for children. We can't afford to cut programs. We can't afford to cut teachers because we don't have them. That's what ends up happening. We have to make decisions based on what's going to happen five years from now. Like we talked about in fiscal, we can't make decisions on this budget based on this year alone. We have to think about what's going to happen next.

Comm. Gonzalez: I want to follow up to that real quick.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Manny, when were those two years that we raised taxes 14%?

Comm. Martinez: 2020 and 2021.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Some of the staff members in this district do not live in the City of Paterson, but all these Board members do. I live in this city. I'm a property owner. I pay taxes. It's painful. At the end of the day, I have a three-year-old son that starts preschool in September. Those are the kinds of things that you measure up. There are a lot of parents on this Board. There are a lot of parents who wished their students had a better education, including me and many of you. Now it's building that opportunity for my children. Guess what? I'm not leaving. I'm not moving. My kids have to come to

school here. I don't want to start making the decision of paying more money to potentially put my students in a different school district while I'm sitting here making decisions that could prepare them right here in Paterson. I don't want to pay for a private school. Honestly, I don't necessarily want to put my kid in a charter school either. I want them to go to Paterson Public Schools just because that's what my husband and I did. I'm sitting here able to make those decisions for him to have the opportunities so that most of our students aren't calling all of us to help them get into Passaic County Tech. I don't want them to go to Passaic County Tech because I want Paterson to have what they need. I want them to be able to grow and prosper and leave the City of Paterson with a well and qualified education. We won't have parents calling in the seventh and eighth grade to help them get their child there. That's the first part, and continuing to make these cuts and making sure we don't have the resources to not grow. We're talking about sustaining. That's means we're plateauing. We're having discussions of being in deficit. Now we want to keep the status quo. When do we grow? If we're not having a conversation about growth, growth does not come empty-handed. I have the opportunity and blessing to be in a financial situation that I can pay the taxes. But I have family members who don't. My mom doesn't. My aunts don't. I'm still making that conscious decision because in 2021 when Comm. Martinez, Comm. Redmon, and I were elected we were out there having the conversations with the community. When we put a 14% tax increase, we went to the community and explained to them why the increase was necessary. Some didn't understand. Some did. At the end of the day, \$179,000 was the price they were willing to pay for their child's education. At the end of the day, we talk about how our students are dropping out of school, grade levels, not having after-school activities, not having counselors, not having AP courses, and our academies falling apart. How do we view that without money? How do we do that? I try to keep a savings account. I own a home. I had a leak in my house these past days when it rained. It was leaking in my dining room. Thanks to my savings account, because I don't make a lot of money, I was able to make sure I had the money to repair that leak. It's the same conversation with the school district. You can't just spend all of your savings in order to pay your bills. Something has to change. I think that's the conversation we need to have. I know Mr. Matthews talked about the Governor. This is his last year. We don't know what happens next year. We got \$54 million, and we are very thankful of him. We also understand that he's promised to be fully funded and offered us millions of dollars for his last two terms in office. This is the first year we can see we've gotten the full amount that he has promised. He said within seven years. It's been seven years, and they weren't the amount that was promised. If the Governor who promised to fully fund us for seven years did not do it, what is our expectation for the next Governor who may not have education as a priority? Those are the conversations we need to have. We talk about unnecessary expenses and contracts. Comm. Gonzalez, I'm with you. I understand. Mr. Matthews gave us a calendar. These are the times that we had a conversation with the administration. I want a list of contracts. These are all the contracts that I didn't think were necessary. We put them on the table, and we have a real conversation. There are a ton of things that we pay for that I don't agree with. At the end of the day, we have a calendar, and we knew what the expectation was. We knew where we were supposed to be and we're here. We can't say we don't have the conversations. Cheryl, Tineish the Superintendent, and the assistant superintendents are constantly providing us information and that's the due diligence we have to do as well. I know they've done it in the past and Mr. Matthews has given us a truckload of contracts for us to review and for us to see the expenditures. I do apologize for being lengthy, Mr. President. I do agree with the 5% because at the end of the day I have the ability and I'm confident of going out into the community and explaining to them again why this is important. I know some will be upset, but at the end of this day the vast majority and we have shown that

because we're still here, we're still having these conversations, we're still out in the community, we live here, and they've understood. I agree with the 5% tax increase.

Mr. Chestnut: I appreciate the hesitancy and apprehension of the Board of Education when it comes to making this very important decision. I respect all of you for taking into account the student body, teacher body, and community body when making these decisions. Saying that, I would like to propose a compromise. I hear Comm. Gonzalez when it comes to thinking about cutting and the tax levy of 5% or below for the people. I also hear Comm. Castillo-Cruz' and Comm. Martinez' concerns of discussing this with the community as we previously have done with the 14%. I think that we would be able to discuss and convince the community that 5% would be an effective measure. We would be able to convince the community if we inform them that we're going to be making official decisions that will be responsible in the future. For instance, when it comes to funding for School No. 27, resizing is a very main concern for many of the teachers. If we take care of things like that and make sure that we're satisfying the teachers' and students' needs when we propose things like the 5%, it will be credible and even taken with appreciation. I heard a concern about proximity learning teachers making more money than teachers who are in the district. If we're going to be talking about fiscal responsibility and making sure that our teachers are happy in the situation, they're in, maybe we should think about cutting down proximity learning while also raising the tax levy. We don't have to do only one thing when it comes down to it. We can still make decisions that are going to be beneficial for the teachers and also the people in a five or ten-year plan. I just wanted to say that because I feel as though it's a reality that would benefit. To Mr. Matthew's credit, his presentation has led to that conclusion of trying to make sure that these things are balanced in a way.

Comm. Freeman: When you're raising taxes in the city or here, most people want to see change or improvement. How much have we improved? I say that because when you continue to do that and there is no improvement, of course people are going to be upset. Do I want to see teachers cut? Absolutely not! We're struggling to maintain the teachers with the salaries that we offer them. We lose many teachers to several different districts because of the salaries that we offer these teachers. We raise taxes. There is no improvement. We come back next year and raise taxes again. Still no improvement. Test scores are not improving. Those are my concerns when you talk about raising them. Granted, when we first started talking about raising taxes, I was not going to go with the 8%. Now you broke it down and we got to 5%. That's good. We must be mindful when we continue to raise them, and we must, that we also must improve. Most people in the community, when you're raising taxes want to see some benefit and some improvement. The city raises the taxes, and the city still looks horrible. You continue to raise the taxes and the services continue not to improve. That is a concern of mine. I do understand if it's not done, certain things will be cut. At this point we can't afford to cut anything because we're improving at an alarmingly slow rate. Can we improve? I do believe so. But it was my main concern when you're raising taxes you have to show improvement. You have to show the community and the people who are bearing paying the taxes that things are improving in the city and School Board. I won't say we haven't improved in some areas, but we have to be able to show improvement. When you get a raise or bonus, you get it based on your performance. Some people think \$100 and .49 cents a day is not a lot. As Comm. Castillo-Cruz said, some people can afford it and some can't. It's a struggle. I need to see improvement throughout the whole district. I'm sure the community would want to see it also. Graduation rates need to go up. Summer school rates need to go down. Reading levels definitely need to go up. If we do this, we must put our foot on the necks of the departments and others to make sure we're doing everything in our power to improve. I don't want to hear we're not on level because we haven't raised taxes. I don't want to

hear that. It's our responsibility to make sure the teachers, supervisors, and all department heads do what they have to do to get our children on the right level to be able to go to college when they graduate and not have to take remedial classes before their core courses. That's concerning to me. Your mother scraped up money to get you into school, but you can't even go and do your courses because you have to yet take the remedial classes because you failed the entrance exam. That's crazy to me. For the sake of not losing teachers, because we can't afford that, I'm going to go with this 5%, but I'm looking for improvement across the board. Our reading levels are shameful. Our graduation rate is shameful. We had a big graduating class last year. Why? Most of the graduation class was in summer school, but they walked. Absolutely unacceptable! I'm going to agree to this because I do trust and have faith that we can do what we have to do to get these children up to par and give the teachers the resources that they need to get them up to par. I heard some people talk about Proximity and other things. We have to put our foot on those departments that are responsible to do that if we want to remove certain things that we all voted on, and some of us didn't agree, to help us bring students back to the district. We must make sure that the departments who can do those things and who should be doing those things do them. With that being said, I'm going to agree with the 5%, but I'm definitely going to watch for improvement across the board. I believe that is what most of the community will want to. You raised my taxes. I want to see some improvement. Just like with the city, they raise the taxes and there's garbage all over the place. It's the same thing. Raise the taxes, homeless all over the place on the railroad tracks. There is no improvement. The quality of life in the city is no good. You raised my taxes, so I expect something different. I'm going to go with the 5% and I'm going to sit back and watch for a little while.

Comm. Martinez: Accountability and return on the investment. Loud and clear!

Comm. Freeman: Thank you.

Comm. McCall: I guess I'm a little different because in all this presentation no one talked about pulling up the bootstraps and what we were going to do different. I come from a family that believes that when cuts are necessary, you get your budget, sit down, and regroup. You look at what you have, what you have been doing, and how you can do it differently to make a difference. We got the \$54 million. I know a lot of folks out there looked at it like "they should be fine" and we're not. I get the catchup part. I hear it loud and clear. When do we go back and really itemize what's needed and what's not? I know when I first got on this Board there was a particular contract, and I just didn't find it necessary. To this day, I've never really gotten what I asked for, the results of what this particular group did. That was that company that was supposed to go out and recruit our children back to the district. When I look at this presentation, they really didn't do a good job because we got more kids this year in charter schools than we have an increase in children here in the district. That's what this report says. The report talked about how many children. Last year we had 6,691 and this year we got 7,370 students. This took us into an additional \$15 to \$18 million difference. I just want the district to be very mindful that we streamline everything. I know somebody might say how important it is. It's really important. I think some things that we spend on we don't have to. Our kids aren't getting what they should get. I say that without a problem. I visit the schools. When I walk into a school that has the best of everything and then I go to a school and it's dreary because it hasn't been painted or doesn't have what the other schools have, I have a problem with that. If we're going to talk about raising taxes, I want to make sure that every school gets the same opportunity that the other schools get. I don't agree with 5%. I'm a taxpayer in this city. I just think there are other ways that we need to look at this. I'm never going to go against the grain. I

joined a team to work with. This Board should be a team. You're not going to always get what you want, but I am concerned. I think there is a lot of waste in this district, and I say that without a problem. Whoever doesn't like me afterwards, I'm okay with that too. I think we really need to look at how effective the teachers are that we pay all this money to and we're not getting. I meet teachers who don't make the money and they're trying their best to make this district the best that it can be. We don't balance it out. We get the same conversations at this podium. I'm sorry if I'm ranting, but this is how I feel. All we do is pass people along. We know the problems that we have. Instead of dealing with the problem, we pass them to another school and another school has to deal with it. Now this year it's not that school anymore because that school now is doing better. Now we have the other school that was doing better, but because we had to make a change...we have to stop the nonsense. If the person isn't effective for this district, they have to go. I mean that with everything I have. If I'm a problem, I should go. I didn't get elected to get along with everything because that's the norm. I got elected because I really want to see change. I'm with you. We have to build for the next generations to come. But I don't want to put more money in this district, and it continues to be wasted and we're still not going to see a change. I say that because you went up 14% and our kids still can't read. We make these increases. We found that mess was going on all this time, but the money was still coming. If we're really going to be about change on this Board, if we get this 5% increase, I want accountability. I don't have any more kids who have to go through this district. I don't even have any grandchildren that have to go through here. But I want to make sure Ms. Jackson down the street whose child is coming to our school gets the best education just like they get in Saddle Brook, Elmwood Park, and Paramus. They deserve it. I was fortunate enough to go throughout this entire state to see different districts. They don't look like us. If we're going to make this increase, it's got to matter for our kids. Parents play a part too. Don't just run down here with us when it isn't going your way. We play a part too. Any teacher who's out there doing their job, I take my hat off to you. If there's anybody in this district who's not doing the job, we got to stop. It's time to clean house. If we're going to put more money for more solutions to clean the house, then we have to do our part by cleaning it.

Comm. Gonzalez: Respecting everybody's comments and opinions, I wanted to follow up on Comm. Simmons' comments. He made a point I agree with. We may not get this funding down the road. Who knows what happens? This is fully funded for this year while the Governor is in office for the remainder of his term. We don't know what's going to happen with the next Governor, whoever that may be, but hopefully we have enough advocacy to make sure that this remains intact. That's what PEF has done in the past. That's what other Commissioners and community members have done. I recall going to Trenton with PEF before I was on the Board to advocate for this, along with former Comm. Hodges. We need to do a better job as a community to advocate for what's right for us. As a district, we need to fight harder. Your argument actually strengthens mine in the sense that if we're not going to get future funding – we don't know that for sure – the idea is not to spend more, especially on the backs of taxpayers. The idea is to cut back so that if we don't get future funding we're not hurting again because we made educated cuts where there need to be necessary cuts. There's no luxury there. Let's cut back a little bit on the luxuries. There are definitely luxuries. As Comm. McCall was saying, there are luxuries in the sense that contracts and things get approved that we really don't need and at the end of the day I haven't seen a benefit to the kids. Those are dollars and cents that add up to millions. We just need to cut that \$1.5 million to make sure that if we don't get future funding, we already started ahead of time. When we teach financial literacy and we start telling our kids how to save money, if they're spending every dollar they get, not much is going into savings. That's what we're discussing here. We have to teach people how not to spend on those 15 pairs of

sneakers. Save a little bit. Cut back on the expenditures. I don't see any cuts here. That's the problem that I'm having personally. That's being fiscally responsible, especially if we think we're not going to get future funding. We have to get into a habit of cutting the unnecessary fat, if you will, to be prepared for something in the future that may not come our way, so we don't need to continue to raise these taxes. I respect what Comm. Castillo-Cruz had said as well about the needs. We are blessed and many of us are blessed to be above the 90th percentile of the income range in the City of Paterson. I'm not voting for me. If you look at the median household income, it's really low. I wouldn't say something like that because I was voted in not to vote for what I can afford. I'm going for what I was elected to do. During my campaign, this was a very hot topic in very poor communities. Not only do they want their kids to be educated and provided the best resources, but also for us to be fiscally responsible. To go out and talk to the community and they will be fine with it, they will not. They never have been. They go to City Council and they argue about the tax increases. It's just a constant battle with these individuals because they don't understand the needs and all the details and we're pushing this down their throats. I would have loved to have several community forums on this very topic, but we haven't had that. We should have had several community forums to discuss this and ask the parents if they were okay with the 5% increase to see their responses. I can almost guarantee you it would be an overwhelming no. I'm trying to be responsible on both sides. We want to have a balanced budget and one that's going to be healthy enough to cover our expenses and have a little extra for unexpected expenses, but it can't be at the taxpayer's back all the time every year. If we went from 14% a couple years ago to 10% to 8%, it's still a lot. Just because we're talking about 5%, I'm not impressed. These folks are losing their homes. Personally, at work I deal with these individuals on a daily basis. There are hundreds if not thousands of people who we interact with who just can't afford anything. For us to be cavalier about 5% is almost an insult. That's my perspective. I strongly feel that as the district we should propose where we can find areas to cut and that needs to be thoroughly discussed. That's my opinion and I respect everybody else's.

Comm. Martinez: Hearing everything I think there's a way we can operate on parallel tracks. I don't think we have to operate in the extremes to say we're either going to do one or the other. We can live with one foot in both worlds, and we can trim and get better in that sense. We also have a responsibility to contribute. For context, out of the last 34 years since 1991 when the state took over, we did not contribute one single cent for 27 years. Like Comm. Simmons said, Superman is not going to save us. We have a responsibility to play a part. We can't rely on the feds and the state and say, "What is everybody else going to do?" These are our kids. If we're not willing to buck up a couple extra bucks for the sake of them, then we're hypocrites. We can't be for education and children and then say, "We don't want to pay for it. You pay for it." How is that even logical? They are our children. This is our city. We have to contribute. It's that simple. Again, I'm not saying \$175 is nothing. For a lot of people that is significant. But when you look at it in the larger context, it's a small investment we're making for future generations. It may seem like a win right now to say we're not raising taxes, but we're handcuffing our students five, six, or seven years down the line. We ended up in this spot that we've been in the last couple of years because for 27 out of 34 years we did not pay a single cent. We have to play our part. The city is doing their thing. We can't worry about what they do. We worry about children. The city worries about their thing. We have children to worry about. Investing in education for the sake of our children and future generations is a no brainer to me.

Comm. Simmons: You said something key. I think we have to look at this as an investment into our children. Earlier this year I talked about the correlation between the lack of education and crime. This is where these types of things play out. If we don't fix

this and we don't make sure our children are educated and can go out into workforce or attract employers, then we're not doing our job. We're not doing our due diligence. The city is not going to do it. The city is not going to attract employers because we have to fix this first. Secondly, we charged the Superintendent earlier this year in December with doing a system-wide audit. We voted on that process to start. I agree with you that there are some places we can look at where we're spending, but I don't think we're going to have that information until next year. It takes time to go through all that so that we will have a clear understanding of what's working, not working, where efforts are being duplicated, and where we can cut and make savings. We won't know until next year when that audit is completed. We have to give the Superintendent time to get that information to us. I don't think that's going to happen by Monday.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: At the end of the day, we're building the City of Paterson. Our students are going to live here and be the next business owners, homeowners, and elected officials. Whatever we do here is what's going to guide our city in the next few years. We're not going to be around forever. If we don't start building now, then where do we leave our city? We charged the Superintendent with a list of things. We have to give her the money and the opportunity to do so. We can't handcuff her from the beginning. Then she will never meet our expectations and we will fault her for not meeting our expectations. But we're not giving her the finances in order for her to do that. Even when we talk about building our students and teaching them financial literacy, we need to make sure that we have the funding to have the professionals to do that, but also be an example. This whole district is an example of financial literacy, budgeting, and saving for the future. That's very important. As we continue to build on education, grade levels aren't going to change overnight. We've made different strides. Have they been perfect? Have they been 100%? Probably not. I'm not an expert, but it does take time. We have created things. There are some buildings that have ESL programs. There are academies, IBM programs, different partnerships, and AP courses. We've used money, these tax increases, to build on those things and we need to continue building. Charging the Superintendent with increasing our grades and reading levels, she's not going to do it next year. I think that should never be the expectation. It will probably take about three years for us to see a change. We've already been seeing a change in the development of different students in different parts of the city. Because of funding we have been able to hire specialized teachers to do ESL programs and the Newcomers program. There has been small progress that we have made. You only can continue to build in order to see a generalized change. There are pocket changes. You have to then continue to invest in order for it to continue to grow and then take some time. We have a new Superintendent and now it's her charge. We have to at least give her the ability to do that so that we can hold her accountable. I know that Comm. Ramirez and Comm. Redmon want to jump in.

Comm. Simmons: I wanted to make reference to something too. When we talked about students who can't read, there was something I thought about and I had to go back and correct for myself. When we focused on third graders going to the fourth grade and their reading levels were low, we forgot that they went from kindergarten to virtual learning. They weren't in school for two years. Third grade was really where they first started to learn. Those are the things that we have to think about too. I don't like to use the pandemic as an excuse, but the reality is that it's going to affect students for the rest of their educational careers.

Comm. Redmon: I respect everybody's opinion sitting at this table and I think everybody has made a wonderful point to the budget. At this point, the Superintendent gave us her recommendation. We now have until Monday to make a decision to vote it up or down. We would like to see what she's going to propose in this budget as far as

her priorities. I'm just willing to hear what the priorities are going to be, what money is going to be attached to it, and what we need to do to budget for those projects. I agree with everybody. I know some things could be cut and some things we can be better at. Right now, we've said that over and over. We just need to charge you and your team with making sure you get that information back to the public and us so we can make a sound decision on our students' education.

Mr. Chestnut: I echo what many other people had been talking about before. Through the tribulations of the pandemic and the effect that it has had, we have to show a certain level of responsibility. We ask students all the time to take individual responsibility for themselves, for their learning, and getting the motivation to work for the system of education and see a benefit. We also have to take responsibility onto ourselves to provide those opportunities to be successful. I feel our Superintendent is very much going to get those things done if we hold her accountable. We have to allow her that budget and make this investment so we can have adults in the future who are going to be leaders of change and will make the city better. We are all committed to that, and we all can agree that we want that. I say we go with the 5%.

Comm. Martinez: I love you, man.

RESOLUTIONS FOR A VOTE AT THE WORKSHOP MEETING

Resolution No. 1

WHEREAS the Paterson Public School approves payment for the list of bills dated through 3/13/2024 in the amount of \$16,818,495.84 beginning with check number 241340 and ending with check number 241628 along with direct deposit number beginning with 1974 and ending with 1997 and

WHEREAS the Paterson Public Schools also approve wires in the amount of \$8,000.000,00 bringing the grand total \$24,818,495.84 and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that each claim or demand has been fully itemized, verified and has been duly audited as required by law in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:19-2.

Resolution No. 2

WHEREAS, on March 15, 2007, the State of New Jersey adopted P.L.2007, c.53, *An Act Concerning School District Accountability*, also known as Assembly Bill 5 (A5), and

WHEREAS, Bill A5, N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12(3)f, requires that conferences/workshops have prior approval by a majority of the full voting membership of the board of education, and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12(2)s, an employee or member of the board of education who travels in violation of the school district's policy or this section shall be required to reimburse the school district in an amount equal to three times the cost associated with attending the event, now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education approves attendance of conferences/workshops for the dates and amounts listed for staff members and/or Board members on the attached and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that final authorization for attendance at conferences/workshops will be confirmed at the time a purchase order is issued.

CONFERENCE/WORKSHOP REQUESTS

STAFF MEMBER	CONFERENCE	DATE	AMOUNT
Dr. Cicely Warren	NJASA and NJPSA/FEA Women's Leadership Conference	March 18, 2024	\$259.00 (registration)
Assistant Superintendent	Somerset, NJ		
Munira Bootwala	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/School 26	Newark, NJ		
Noa Bogatch	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/Eastside H.S.	Newark, NJ		
Vanessa Campos	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/School 16	Newark, NJ		
Theresa Coleman	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Dance Teacher/Rosa L. Parks School of Fine & Performing Arts	Newark, NJ		
Carmelina Crincoli	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/Alexander Hamilton Academy	Newark, NJ		
Gillian Furniss	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/New Roberto Clemente School	Newark, NJ		
Kenneth Garrabrant	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Math Teacher/STEAM H.S.	Newark, NJ		

Bradley Gold	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Science Teacher/STEAM H.S.	Newark, NJ		
Peggy Goodwin	Kennedy Center Arts Integration Professional Development for Educators/NJPAC	March 21, 2024	\$50.00 (registration)
Art Teacher/School 18	Newark, NJ		
Oshin Castillo	2024 NSBA Annual Conference	April 5-8, 2024 (traveling on April 4 & 7)	\$5,370.09 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Board Member	New Orleans, LA		
Valerie Freeman	2024 NSBA Annual Conference	April 5-8, 2024 (traveling on April 5)	\$4,299.28 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Board Member	New Orleans, LA		
William Mirra	Administrators & Supervisors: Getting to Know the NGSS and NJSLA – Science	April 19, 2024	\$175.00 (registration)
Science Supervisor/Eastside H.S.	Bloomfield, NJ		
Lance Gaines	Public Purchasing Educational Forum	April 23-25, 2024	\$1,071.50 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Director of Purchasing	Atlantic City, NJ		
Jose Mantilla	Public Purchasing Educational Forum	April 23-25, 2024	\$1,071.50 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Purchasing Agent	Atlantic City, NJ		
June Gray	NJASBO Annual Conference	June 4-7, 2024	\$1,160.07 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Assistant Business Administrator	Atlantic City, NJ		
Richard Matthews	NJASBO Annual Conference	June 4-7, 2024	\$1,160.07 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Business Administrator	Atlantic City, NJ		
Dr. Carlos Miranda	United Under the Sky: International Planetarium Society (IPS)	July 20-26, 2024	\$2,944.70 (registration, transportation, lodging, meals)
Planetarium Manager/Paterson P-TECH	Berlin, Germany		

***FOR RATIFICATION**

**Total Number of Conferences: 18
Total Cost: \$17,961.21**

Resolution No. 3

WHEREAS, Paterson-Promising Tomorrow Strategic Plan, Goal 1: Teaching and Learning to create a student-centered learning environment to prepare students for career, college readiness, and lifelong learning.

WHEREAS, Field Trip of New Jersey has underwritten a grant to provide bus transportation to schools across the state for field trips and learning experiences.

WHEREAS, this grant will provide Paterson students with transportation to the in-person Young Women's Conference in STEM at Princeton University. Students will engage in interactive experiments, campus STEM activities and talk with women in various stages of their STEM careers during the career panel.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Paterson Board of Education approves the donation of \$700.00 for each school (School #8, School #12 and P-Tech) from Field Trip of NJ to offset the cost of the transportation, for a total of \$2,100.00 for three schools at no cost to the District.

Resolution No. 4

WHEREAS, increasing student achievement through the effective academic programs is Goal 1 of Priority 1 of the Strategic Plan for Paterson Public Schools and creating and sustaining partnerships with community organizations, agencies, and institutions is Goal 3 of Priority 3; and,

WHEREAS, The Field Trip New Jersey Fund has made a grant available to Paterson P-TECH to support the field trip to the Young Women's Conference in STEM Careers on March 15, 2024 at Princeton University.

WHEREAS, funds bestowed to Paterson P-TECH will be used to pay for transportation to and from the event on March 15, 2024.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Paterson Board of Education approves the Field Trip of New Jersey grant of up to \$700.00 for transportation to Princeton University.

Resolution No. 5

WHEREAS, increasing student achievement through effective academic programs is GOAL 1 of Priority 1 of the Strategic Plan for Paterson Public Schools creating and sustaining partnerships with community organizations, agencies, and institutions is GOAL 3 Priority 3.

WHEREAS, School 24 recommends and encourages teachers to take their students on educational field trips to equip them with practical and theoretical knowledge applicable to their field of study.

WHEREAS, The Paterson School District recognizes the need for students to participate in field trips to events and places that will enhance their educational experiences and academic learning.

WHEREAS, School 24 will receive \$700.00 by the way of a grant from the FIELD TRIP NJ FUND to help pay for transportation for Students in 4th-8th grades on a field trip to WINTER4KIDS program in Vernon, NJ.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Paterson School District approves the acceptance of this grant for \$700.00 from the FIELD TRIP NJ FUND to help pay for transportation for School 24's students to go on a field trip. This resolution complies with the Paterson School District's policies regarding the acceptance of donations.

Resolution No. 6

WHEREAS, the Department of Family & Community Engagement in partnership with PPS PTO Leadership is in concert with Parental Involvement Strategic Plan: Teaching & Learning, Goal: Communications & Connections Teaching & Learning, Communications & Connections; Parental Involvement Goals: (1) may pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings & training sessions; (2) may train parents to enhance the involvement of other parents; parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and non-academic support services, school policies, & community resources; and

WHEREAS the Department of Family and Community Engagement will provide transportation to "Parent NJ State-Assembly Tour" field trip on (March or April 2024 day TBD); and

WHEREAS, the department of Family and Community Engagement will educate parents in the importance of education and challenges that they are faced with resiliency and teamwork. This training will enhance the involvement of other parents and encourage school PTOs and school budget education participation; and

WHEREAS the Executive Director of Family and Community Engagement will be responsible for the district complying with the terms and conditions of "Parent NJ State-Assembly Tour Field Trip March or April 2024 day TBD". The total budget of this event is \$4,039.40, which includes transportation, parent education workshop activities and food; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Department of Family and Community Engagement to provide transportation and food to the "Parent NJ State- Assembly Tour Field Trip March or April 2024 day TBD". The breakdown of the buses will be as follows: (2) buses to NJ State House Annex in Trenton NJ \$3,000 and lunch for parents of \$1,039.40 via local school budget parental involvement for educational training. "Parent NJ State Budget Hearing -State Tour Field Trip March-April 2024 TBD not to exceed \$4,039.40.

It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. McCall that Resolution Nos. 1 through 6 be adopted.

Comm. McCall: (Comments made away from the microphone)

Comm. Gonzalez: Last year this time around February we had a whole bunch of parents who came up to the Board meeting and advocated for the return to caps and gowns. It was very clear to us at that time that the community wanted caps and gowns.

There were a lot of parents who came out asking for this. We're a year later and we still haven't had a meeting to discuss caps and gowns. June is right around the corner. We haven't had a policy meeting on this subject yet. I'm going to propose that we as a Board expedite this and skip the policy committee at this point and take a vote on it with a motion. Our eighth grade and high school students would be allowed to have a cap and gown graduation. I will put a motion.

Comm. Simmons: Point of order, we're in the middle of a motion.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: The motion can be made in the course of this meeting. It can't be made during the discussion of an open motion right now.

Comm. Gonzalez: How do we do that? This requires a vote that would include...

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: You can do that under new business or before the meeting closes out. You just can't make it in the midst of what's on the floor.

Comm. Martinez: Right now we're voting on Items 1-6. Once we close out that vote then we can revisit what you're proposing.

On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Paterson Board of Education Standing Abstentions

Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Transportation (Bus Companies)
- Downtown Special Improvement District
- Celebrate Paterson
- Passaic County
- Passaic County Board of Social Services

Comm. Valerie Freeman

- Self
- Family
- Paterson Cares, Inc.
- Paterson Community Health Center

Comm. Eddie Gonzalez

- Self
- Family
- New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC)
- Community Charter School of Paterson

Comm. Manuel Martinez

- Self

Comm. Della McCall

- Self
- City of Paterson

Comm. Joel D. Ramirez

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Passaic County Community College

Comm. Mohammed H. Rashid

- Self

Comm. Nakima Redmon

- Self
- Historic Preservation of the City of Paterson
- County of Passaic

Comm. Kenneth Simmons

- Self
- Family

GENERAL BUSINESS

Items Requiring a Vote

Instruction and Program

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Instruction & Program met this past Monday. The items discussed will be presented for next meeting.

Operations

Comm. Ramirez: Operations met today. We discussed items O-24 through O-37, which are the ones on the agenda to be discussed at the next meeting, all procedural transportation items. A few items we asked questions on that have answers that will come to us through academic services. There was nobody at the meeting to answer those questions. I'm hoping that they will send some answers before the next meeting and we will recommend those items to be approved.

Fiscal Management

Comm. Redmon: Fiscal met yesterday, but I'm not giving a report. We will wait for the next meeting.

Personnel

Comm. Redmon: Personnel met on Monday. The items discussed were the vacancy rates, which have increased due to the rightsizing. We also talked about hiring at the building levels and filling some of the administrative positions at some of our schools. There were some issues that came up when we were discussing trying to move forward with hiring practices in the summertime. I will talk to you more offline about it. There were some procedural things that might need to change in order for us to move for May 15. That is the conclusion of my report. We ended our meeting at 5:05 p.m. Present was myself, Comm. Ramirez, Comm. Simmons, Mr. Rojas and Mr. Bryant for Ms. Shabazz-Charles.

Governance

Comm. McCall: Governance will be meeting on Thursday.

Committee Report

Facilities

Comm. Martinez: Facilities is scheduled to meet next Wednesday, and we will have an update from the SDA regarding the STEAM School. I anxiously wait to get that report to be able to share with everyone then.

Family & Community Engagement

Comm. Freeman: We will have a report at the next meeting. We did not have enough people to have a meeting. At the next meeting I will present a report.

Policy

Comm. Simmons: Policy is meeting next week. I did want to let Comm. Gonzalez know that the cap and gown item is on the policy agenda. Secondly, even if there's a motion to approve it, it would not happen this year. It will be effective next year because it's March. Those orders are in for caps and gowns.

Comm. Gonzalez: If it passes, I think we charge the administration to push for this to happen. I think it's irresponsible of us to not at least try to get this pushed through simply because it's been a year already and we have not had that discussion. We've been approached individually several times about this and we keep saying the same thing, that it's going to be put on the agenda and it hasn't. Even if it's a week, it's too long. There are vendors out there who might be able to assist us if we ask for it. If this gets approved, I strongly encourage that the administration work diligently and hard with whoever has done some work with us in the past and others that can actually get this done. I feel it can be done.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: If we would go down that route and charge Madam Superintendent, what would be a plan? It's mid-March and we have to notify parents and give them the opportunity to submit their money. Let's say we give them to mid-April. What would happen if we don't get the order in time for graduation?

Dr. Newell: Let me look into that and get back to you.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: This was a policy that we put into play.

Comm. Simmons: The policy has to change first.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm going to put a motion to change that.

Comm. Simmons: You wouldn't be able to realistically change that policy. The earliest that policy could change would be at the regular meeting in April. You still have to amend the policy.

Comm. Gonzalez: If we pass the motion to amend the policy and it passes with a majority vote, she can then continue to do that effort ahead of time. We don't have to wait for the policy to be updated technically. She can do it now if she wants to just to have the information to make sure we make people aware. I'm going to be very blunt. I'm tired of the hesitancy of people just waiting and waiting. We were asked a year ago and it's a simple change. It's literally a handful of words that we need to eliminate from the policy that was added to allow our students to graduate with dignity and have a cap

and gown because they asked for it. The parents asked for this last year. I don't know why it takes us so long. This is what I'm talking about with the functioning of this Board sometimes. How hard is it to change this policy? There was a Board prior to this Board that probably didn't agree with it. When us three came on Board, I felt we had the majority at that time to pass. We agreed. We heard the community loud and clear. The issues came that there were some ideas of why this should not have been the case because if you give a kid the ability to graduate in the eighth grade with a cap and gown they won't want to go to high school. I've never heard that in my life before. I think that enough is enough. We need to at least try and stop holding back so much. Let's put a motion through. Let's get the thing amended. It's our job to find a way. Let's stop saying no. Let's find a way to get the darn thing done.

Comm. Simmons: I'm just going to play devil's advocate really quick. If we discuss this in policy committee and it doesn't make it out of committee, how do you change it?

Comm. Gonzalez: The Board can do this without going to committee. We don't need to go to policy for this if the majority of the Board is in favor of this. The problem is that we have been punting this down the road for a year.

Comm. Simmons: But we actually haven't. We haven't met.

Comm. Gonzalez: We knew about this in February of last year when 16 parents came up to the podium saying they wanted this. We were all there, with the exception of Mr. Ramirez. I don't know if he was watching television that day. When we went on the conferences, you had individuals approach you and say they wanted to get this done. We all agreed and said we would talk about it in the policy committee and get it approved. Here we are many months later again in the same scenario giving the community the same excuses. We can't be functional and get things done because we're not on the same page. There's a difference of opinion...

Comm. Martinez: I'm just going to respectfully push back on your statement that this is the lack of function of the Board. If that was brought to the table a year ago, it hasn't been spoken about since last year. If this was so pressing, how come we're only hearing about it a year later?

Comm. Gonzalez: That's my point. I brought it up numerous times.

Comm. Martinez: Okay. It was brought up last year and no one, including yourself, brought it up until today. Now it's our fault?

Comm. Gonzalez: I wasn't on the policy committee last year. If I was, this would have been addressed a long time ago.

Comm. Martinez: If this was discussed a year ago last February, respectfully, it hasn't been brought up publicly before today.

Comm. Gonzalez: Why?

Comm. Martinez: You tell me. This is your thing.

Comm. Gonzalez: Respectfully, I wasn't the chair of policy. We discussed this with the policy folks who said that they were going to put it on the policy. This year I'm on policy and we still haven't had a meeting since January to have this discussion. When you say it's up to me, I'm doing my part right now. If we're going to wait down the road to

have a meeting, we're losing time. This is something so simple. It doesn't require a lot. It's an omission of just one sentence.

Comm. Simmons: Point of order.

Comm. Redmon: Two things happened. It was brought back to committee. The chair of the committee was Dr. Hodges at the time. Comm. McCall was in that meeting because I was there also because I happened to call into that committee. They had a full discussion about the policy because I sat in policy last year. We had a full discussion about the cap and gown policy. Dr. Hodges gave his opinion for why the policy was initially changed. Comm. Simmons also gave his opinion for why the policy was changed. We said that we would revisit the whole thing after we came back to it. Am I lying, Comm. McCall? I just want to make sure that we're clear on something. When it was asked to be brought back to policy, policy doesn't meet every month. Policy meets when we have updates from the state. When it was asked about at the February meeting of last year, it was placed back in policy. When the next meeting came up in policy, it was brought back for full discussion and Dr. Hodges reported back on that policy at a Board meeting. I will have Cheryl pull it.

Comm. McCall: With all due respect, certain people in policy did not want caps and gowns because it was their personal belief and issue. It got shut down. Here is what I will say. I would hope that we revisit it. I also will hope that we can still make some type of arrangement to get the caps and gowns if it comes up in the April meeting. There is more than one way to do it. We do what we want to do. Not everybody buys their uniforms at the same place. Caps and gowns can be bought on Amazon. There are so many ways to do it. I hope that we can revisit the issue because the parents want it. There are parents who want their eighth-grade students to walk in caps and gowns and I think we should honor the wishes of parents. If the parents come and say they don't want it, that's another thing. But I know the parents that I encounter really want caps and gowns. Comm. Redmon, it did go to committee and got shot down. It didn't happen, but then again, we didn't talk about it after it got shot down. It did go silent after that. That had to happen early on in the committee.

Comm. Redmon: We discussed it in the meeting where the parents came in February. The next policy meeting had to take place at the end of April or beginning of May. We discussed it then. Like I said, policy doesn't meet every month.

Comm. McCall: It got shot down though.

Comm. Gonzalez: It's interesting because if it happened immediately after that or a month or two after, we all had dialogue at many different events about this and no one mentioned it. Everyone was in favor of it. When parents and others who advocated for students in front of my face with some of you who are now saying what you're saying, you were all saying you were going to support this and have a policy meeting on this. No one ever told me that this was ever done. If there was conversation, then that conversation wasn't fully vetted out.

Comm. Martinez: Let's all slow down and take a breath. Let's not talk above each other.

Comm. Gonzalez: Point of clarity...

Comm. Martinez: Hold on. Point of clarity doesn't mean that you get the floor. Let folks talk. This is not a dominant conversation of one person. Comm. Freeman and Comm. Castillo-Cruz would like to talk. Let's afford them the opportunity to speak as well.

Comm. Gonzalez: But they're cutting me off in the middle of me having the floor and I just started after Comm. McCall.

Comm. Martinez: They haven't spoken and I'm giving them the opportunity to speak.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm in the middle of my sentence and she cut me off.

Comm. McCall: In all fairness, I think that could have been the time, Comm. Gonzalez, when you were out on your leave. It was mentioned in committee. It was a quick report. Let's just call it what it is. The way it was said was like, "We're not doing this. We'll talk about it another time." It was discussed but I don't think you were here. I think this is when you had your surgery. Honestly, it didn't come back up. Then the committees changed because of the November election. I understand you're bringing it up now. I will tell you I will support it when the opportunity comes. Let's just find out how we get it back. I'm hearing it's in policy. It will go to policy.

Comm. Redmon: It's actually on the agenda for policy. We had gotten packets two weeks ago for policy. It gave us all the updates from the state and the agenda for policy is on there so we can have that full discussion. I don't have an issue either way. It can go back on and we can vote it up or down. What I don't appreciate is when it's being told that this never went back to committee, and I know it did. Before we make a statement to the public, let's make sure that statement is correct.

Comm. Gonzalez: It is correct. I'll clarify later.

Comm. Redmon: The statement was not correct because you just said it never went back to policy and it did. We have to own up to what we say. When we sit here at the microphone and we're talking to the public, you have to make sure that you're telling them the truth. I can stand behind what I just said.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm standing behind what I say.

Comm. Redmon: When I was sitting at the table as your president, I can take ownership to that. It was asked to be brought back to policy. We initially brought it back to policy and I gave it to the chair. Comm. McCall and I were members. When Comm. Simmons and Dr. Hodges started to break down why the policy was changed, and they gave everything that needed to be said on it. Again, the report was given right after the next meeting. It was probably not a full, detailed report, but it was given to the public. Just don't say it was never brought back to committee. Again, I respect what you're trying to do to bring it back up to us and make us vote it up or down, but there's a proper process to do it. Don't make false statements to the public. I'm not going to back that up.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: In the big picture, caps and gowns is very small. It's 10:00 and we're tired. However, at the end of the day we have to all be respectful of each other. We're a team at the end of the day. We will have our disagreements. At the end of the day, we are all super busy. We all have lives. We all have work and families. It's up to us. When I want something done, I'm a pain in the neck. It's because this is what I envision. That's why we have our emails. We're allowed to forget. We have a leadership change. We have Board members that are no longer here. We have a

different committee. I honestly don't give a hoot about caps and gowns in the sense that it's not needed for students. I voted in favor of the policy at that time, but I'm not married to the policy. That's what I mean by it. At the end of the day, what I am married to is process. I'm big on process. A lot of the times, that's what my argument is, process and communication. Forget us. I don't care how I feel. It's not fair that we have a conversation with parents. Eighth graders that did not know they could potentially get a cap and gown now have to have the idea of a cap and gown, find the money, and put it in in time. As an entity, I'm not sure we're allowed to make purchases like this from Amazon. I don't know how many students there are. 2,000? I think that's the most important part and that's what I see from here. I'm not in policy. The accusatory demeanor is not something you guys want to do at the end of the day. At the same time, it's the timing. Had this conversation happened in January, it would have been a very different situation right now. Policy is brought back. Great! Give me the information. I don't think anyone was necessarily married to the idea of removing caps and gowns forever. It was a great idea at that moment. I stand by my vote there. We're willing to have the conversation, but let's do it in a way that's fair. We don't want to tell parents they could potentially have it and then have it not come in time. Then we have parents here at the podium saying, "You promised me caps and gowns. We paid for caps and gowns. Now I'm going to have to return cash." It gets very complicated very quickly. It's a time of year when we're starting testing. It's a very complicated time of year to begin with. Let's just be mindful of the way and the tone because it's not a battle. We're all here serving the same kids. If we're not battling outside entities, we can't be battling each other on small things.

Comm. Freeman: I just want it to be duly noted that from my understanding the policy came into place based on a couple of parents stating that it is the only time they saw their child graduate. There are more than a couple of parents in this district. If our job is to listen to the parents, that's what we must do. We all can agree to disagree. That policy was created based on a couple of parents making that statement. There was another parent who came to the meeting last year and she said the same thing. That touched me a different way because it means something to the students to put on a cap and gown. For the parent to come and say that she thought that was the only time she would see her child graduate, I got myself off the dais and I walked back and spoke to that parent. If that is your only expectation of your child, shame on you. It makes the child feel good. It gives the child something to be proud about. As minute as some people may think it is, it makes the child feel good. In my opinion, that's what matters. We walked in eighth grade caps and gowns. We had autograph books. We had the little rings that make your finger rusty. We all had that. Just think back to when we were there, and a Board made a decision to take away the caps and gowns. I know when I was in school, the way parents participated was deep and they would have turned this Board out. We all know that. Don't look at it as something minute. It may be minute to you, but to that child who worked hard to deserve that cap and gown it means everything. That doesn't say he or she is going to stop at the eighth grade. When you hear a parent speak not so positive about their child, encourage the parent to change her mind and thought process. The expectation for everybody in this district should be for the students to do the very best they can. We are to encourage them to continue to do the best. By no means make them feel that an eighth-grade cap and gown is going to be only cap and gown they wear. That's my opinion on it. We can agree to disagree, but that policy was based off a couple of parents coming to that microphone and saying that crazy statement. There's no way my child is going to stand next to me at that podium when I'm speaking to the whole televised community and I'm going to say this may be the only time that I see Johnny with a cap and gown. Absolutely not! I have better expectations for my children, and we have to change the mindset of these parents in this district. If you don't encourage your own child, why do

you expect anybody else to encourage them? In Family & Community Engagement we will be working very hard to get parent participation up to par because it is definitely needed. The mindset must change. I'm all for caps and gowns. It gives the students something to be proud of. Let's not be so quick to want to take it away. We can agree to disagree. It's on policy next week. Let's see where it goes. And guess who's on policy?

Comm. Simmons: So that there's clarity, that policy was not based on a couple of parents. It was a recurring theme.

Comm. Freeman: How many? I want numbers. We have over 30,000 parents here.

Comm. Simmons: It was a recurring theme. The policy didn't change overnight. It took a long time. The policy to change graduation for eighth grade to moving up ceremony did not change overnight. It took some time, but it was a recurring theme. When you talk about parents encouraging their children, the thought was to change the mindset. There were a lot of parents saying that this is probably going to be the only time to see their children graduate. It was something I heard in the community often.

Comm. Freeman: Guess what?

Comm. Simmons: I can make the same argument on their other side. 15 people showed up to say they want caps and gowns. How many eighth graders do we have? How many of them are fine with what they have? It's a moving up ceremony. We can go back and forth on that all night. I have asked Cheryl to move the policy meeting to earlier next week. I've asked General Counsel to find out if we can waive second reading. She's going to research that. If we can, we will take that vote at the regular meeting next week.

Comm. Gonzalez: If I can, I just want to clarify something. It's not to be disrespectful. From my perspective, when I'm in the room with Board members along with other individuals and I ask questions about this very topic and I'm being told that it's going to be put on the policy committee and there's a meeting that had already happened – by the way Cheryl, I want to know if I was on that meeting – because even when I had surgery, we were doing a lot of the remote stuff. I was still attending the Board meetings. I do want to know if that was discussed and if I was present. It has not been brought to my attention, but many months after that we had been to numerous conferences, and this was brought up and no one has ever said that there was any kind of discussion about this. However, there were audience members that we would bring up who actually had these conversations with some of you. In my presence you said we're going to bring it up and discuss it so you guys can have it. It was said word for word and I'm still waiting. Out of respect, I wasn't on the policy committee before. I trust that if Board members say something they're going to follow through. That's why I have not brought it up. I'm waiting out of respect for those Board members who were on that policy committee. I'm on the policy committee now, that's why I'm bringing this up. We don't have time. If we can ask the Superintendent to begin doing that research now before anything comes into play, there's nothing wrong with asking. We don't need to put her in handcuffs and say she can't even ask and get quotes or proposals. We're not voting on it until everything is properly done, but there's nothing to hold her back from asking and expediting the process. That's all I'm saying. I want this to be done, if possible. All of us as Board members should be fighting for our kids to do this. Parents came out very clearly. I wasn't there when that happened. I was there when a lot of parents came out to say the opposite. I can only go based on that. That's all I'm advocating for. I'm not saying parents didn't show up at some point and had some

conversations. Not one single parent since I've been on this Board, and even when I was on 15 years ago, has ever said that. To Comm. Freeman's point, if anyone says that it's our responsibility to educate them and tell them they have to raise the bar and do better. That's all I want to say.

Comm. Martinez: In closing, no one is refuting that we should have the opportunity to revisit it, discuss it, and eventually vote on it. That's what we do. It's a democracy. Everyone gets to vote. If those conversations happened in conferences with Board members, have a conversation with those folks in policy or on the side. My resistance and what I didn't appreciate was you getting out here in public and saying that no one is doing that and you're the only one talking about it. It's like you're throwing us under the bus. That's not the case. We operate as a unit. If you felt that way, talk with the folks in policy. Don't do it in public to make it look like we're not doing our job and you're the only one who's on this. That's what I don't appreciate. This is a Board. If you felt like no one was following through on it, pull them aside and talk to them. Don't do it in public and say nobody is doing their due diligence. You guys said this and that. That's where I resist. I defend this Board. We're a unit. When you single out everyone on this Board and say that you guys are not doing it and you're the only one doing it, I have a problem with that.

Comm. Gonzalez: I never singled anybody out. I gave you a heads up before we started that I was going to do this. This wasn't a surprise.

Comm. Martinez: I said that's awesome. Do it. What you didn't say was you were going to call out the Board members and say that you're the only one doing this and no one else is following up. You threw everyone under the bus.

Comm. Gonzalez: No, because they're saying something opposite of what they told me.

Comm. Martinez: You talk to them in private. Don't belittle them in public.

Comm. Gonzalez: Which I have.

Comm. Martinez: That's the point. You still don't see that.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. Freeman that the meeting be adjourned. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:01 p.m.



Mr. Richard Matthews
Business Administrator/Board Secretary