

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

October 30, 2023 – 5:35 p.m.
Remote Meeting (via Zoom)

Presiding: Comm. Nakima Redmon, President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools
Khalifah Shabazz-Charles, Esq., General Counsel
Boris Zaydel, Esq., Board Counsel

Comm. Eddie Gonzalez
Comm. Jonathan Hodges
Comm. Dania Martinez, Vice President

Comm. Della McCall
Comm. Kenneth Simmons

Absent:

Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz
Comm. Valerie Freeman
Comm. Manuel Martinez

Comm. Redmon 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:

**Special Meeting
October 30, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.
Remote
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.

PRESENTATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

**2022-2023 School Self-Assessment for Determining
Grades Under the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights (ABR)**

Dr. Newell: At this point, I would like for Ms. Payne and Mr. Cozart to address the self-assessment that we were working on for the anti-bullying.

Mr. David Cozart: Good evening. I would like to thank the Board and the community for giving us this opportunity for Ms. Payne to present our 2022-2023 school year school readings. At this time, Ms. Payne will begin her session.

Ms. Nicole Payne: Each year we are to submit the self-assessment scores that the schools grade themselves on in terms of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. I do believe you have the backup with all the scores for the schools. The district has their score from an average of all of the scores from all of the schools included. The schools rate themselves on seven different indicators – process, implementation of the HIB policy, procedures that are in place, and the activities that they also have in place for harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Thank you.

Comm. Redmon: Are there any questions or concerns for Ms. Payne or Mr. Cozart?

Comm. Simmons: Is that all of the information?

Ms. Payne: That is all of the information. The schools assess and score themselves. We collect that information and then we actually input it for all the schools within the district.

Comm. Simmons: Okay. Is there information on what those scores are? It can be overall or an average of what the scores are per school.

Ms. Payne: The district average is 72. Last year our district average was 66. It's on a scale of 78 points.

Comm. Simmons: Okay. This information was sent so I can review it.

Ms. Payne: Yes.

Comm. Gonzalez: All we have is the schools and their ratings and maybe I missed it. What am I looking at, as it relates to the scores? When I look at a 76 versus a 74 versus a 67, how far off are those numbers? What is the rating based on? I don't have any metrics that show me what this means. What are we looking at looking at just numbers?

Ms. Payne: The total assessment, the top score that we can receive for each school, is 78 points. Each section is rated from 1 to 3. At the end, they tally up. I can send you the rubric so that you can be able to see the areas and what the specific questions are for the schools to rate themselves. For example, Core Element #1 has to do with harassment/intimidation approaches and other initiatives and there's a total possible points of 15. I think what will help is if I send you a blank rubric so that you can see in which areas the schools are rating themselves. Again, it's a score from 0 to 3 and they were to just reflect on their practices. That's what the numbers differentiate. They're able to see the areas in which they may need further support. That's what we would try to do from a central office perspective, to look at these scores and see where the schools need additional support. It's a self-reporting structure.

Comm. Gonzalez: That would be helpful if you could send over the rubric so it can make a little bit more sense to us as we look at this. When is this due?

Ms. Payne: It is due October 31. The state has granted an extension to December 29.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm just trying to understand why we're meeting today on this. This seems like the only thing on the agenda. Is it because we're late on submitting this? Is it because we didn't have information? Is it because it's just an item that was missed? What happened that we're having this meeting now to submit this if it's due tomorrow? I would have just hoped to have more information to fully understand this a little bit better. I appreciate the presentation, but I still have a lot of questions. I haven't had a chance to review the rubric to have a better understanding so I can ask more intelligent questions as regards the various schools. For example, School No. 6 is graded at a 53. I'm sure we all know that School No. 6 has its own set of issues. There are just too many questions that I have to rush this through a hasty process not having all the backup information. I'm just curious to know what's going on. What happened? Where do we have to improve so that we don't have to go through this for the rest of the year?

Comm. Redmon: Comm. Gonzalez, I will give you an answer after the rest of the questions are asked. I will come back to your question.

Comm. Hodges: That's part of my question there so I will wait for the answer.

Comm. Simmons: I guess I'll be joining Comm. Gonzalez and Comm. Hodges in waiting for the answer to part of my question. In this self-assessment, are there questions about reporting bullying instances or the process for reporting? I ask because Dr. Hodges and I were asked about that process. It seems that folks don't understand the process. If folks don't understand it, instances may not be reported as often as they occur.

Ms. Payne: The rubric does have a question about procedures, but this is a self-reporting rubric. The schools evaluate themselves. Core Element #7 says HIB Investigation Procedure. The school follows the BOE-approved policy on HIB investigation procedures which provide for...and then there's a list. Core Element #8 is HIB Reporting. The school has a procedure for ensuring that the staff member reports. There are different questions and indicators under each core element. Core Element #6 is School Level HIB Incident Reporting Structure. There are questions or areas in which schools have to reflect on their reporting procedure, their investigation procedure, and their overall reporting of harassment, intimidation and bullying. We train the anti-bullying specialists on how to do the investigations. Principals are supposed to cover the procedures at the beginning of the school year. We also provide Onspire, which also has training sessions that teachers are to log onto and also receive the HIB procedures, how that works, and how to identify it.

Comm. Simmons: Is there any training or anything offered at a back-to-school night, or something sent out to parents to explain to them the process for reporting? A teacher has a process that they go through. Is there a process or training for a parent so that it gets to the teacher?

Ms. Payne: Parents and everybody have access to enter incidents into the portal anonymously from our district website. There are several links that can get parents to enter the information in and that's basically what they need to do, to just let us know. Once that is entered into the portal, it is then sent to the school to the anti-bullying specialist and then the investigation will begin. To answer your question, I don't know what each school does individually in terms of instructing parents in what to do. The information is available on our website, so parents can go and find out what is bullying and what raises it to a founded or unfounded case. But I'm not sure what schools are doing directly with parents.

Comm. Simmons: Maybe Dr. Hodges can expound a little more. He and I were somewhere last week and there were a number of questions about the process on bullying. I did explain that it was on the website and that there was a portal, but many of the parents didn't know anything about that portal, where to go, and what to do. I think they basically try to speak to a principal or report to a teacher, but based on what we are hearing, nothing happens after that point.

Ms. Payne: I would caution with that because we get a lot of incident reports in HIB. Sometimes I think what parents are looking for are consequences and if the consequences don't align with what they may have had in their mind, we get this perception that they didn't do anything as a school. At least on a basic level, even if it's a violation of the student code of conduct – because that is what could happen, there could be students that have conflicts – it may not rise to the level of harassment, intimidation, and bullying. The schools are resolving issues as they occur whether it's student code of conduct or those sorts of things. We really have two prongs here. There could be harassment, intimidation, and bullying, and then there could be a code of conduct issue, and then it could be both. Maybe there is some way we can embed something so that it is much more direct. Maybe we could provide that at back-to-school nights so that parents can understand. Again, that's at the individual building levels. I would not be able to control that, but I can make a recommendation.

Comm. Simmons: I think that recommendation needs to be made just so that we cover ourselves. If we don't know what individual schools are doing, when we get approached it's hard for us to say that they're doing it if we don't know. If it's done districtwide where there is a mandate and then there's a way to follow up and make sure that schools are doing it, I think that's probably a good recommendation.

Mr. Cozart: Good evening, everyone. Just to reiterate, this is a school-by-school initiative. Some schools will take the first opportunity during back-to-school night to have a session regarding HIB. They will run that through the principal as well as the HIB specialists. But it varies because each school has a different agenda. What we can ask from the district level going forth is that we mandate this to be part of the first two sessions of parent meetings. That we can mandate at the district level. Initially it all depends upon each school and that's also reflected in each school's rating. When the schools take their self-assessment, they are giving us what we think is an honest assessment of themselves. When we have a school rating themselves in the low 50's, high 50's, or low 60's, that tells us that they are being honest, and they actually need the help. Then we try to figure out what tools and resources we can provide to them. But they were honest enough to say they need help in different aspects. Going back and forth regarding HIB and conflict and the bullying component, this has been an ongoing concern every single year. We have parent meetings and parent trainings regarding it. We had the district committee leading the changes as well as videos that were produced by local students as well as national programs we had in place. Every year we have the same discussion. Some parents are looking to know what happened. In some cases, we are not able to tell you what happened except that something did occur. The victims of confirmed bullying are the ones who have the opportunity to transfer. That's part of the SSDS form. The person who has a confirmed bullying case is afforded the opportunity to transfer to another school. We had to ask that question for them. Sometimes it's a mere question of parents not agreeing with these results. But all a parent has to do is basically say the incident happened on this date and put it in the portal. Right away it triggers an automatic response for us to investigate. They don't need to know all of the kid's information. Just indicate something happened at a certain location and that will give us an opportunity to start the investigation at the school level.

Comm. Hodges: I certainly agree with Comm. Simmons because this continues to be an area of concern for parents. "My child is being beaten up by such-and-such" or "They're teasing or harassing my child and I complained, and nothing happened." They don't understand. I think it would be helpful for them to hear that on more than one occasion and have it explained to them what the result of the investigation will be. It won't necessarily get back to you, but there will be an investigation. They need to hear that more than once or twice during the school year. When it's their child, whatever you're saying goes out their ear. They want something done about their child. They need to understand what the process is and they clearly don't because that continues to be an area of contention among parents and you'll get it. When any kind of meeting comes up, that's what comes up. There was also one thing about a teacher. They wanted to know what happens when a teacher supposedly harasses their child or whatever. There needs to be a clear understanding in their minds of how this behavior will be treated and categorized if and when it occurs. That needs to be set in their minds as well as the teachers. That shouldn't be a process that's chosen by a particular principal. That needs to be a districtwide approach, so everybody does the same thing and there are no discrepancies. If so-and-so doesn't think it's necessary or doesn't want to be as honest as somebody else, then it won't happen. We know how that works. There should be a guaranteed approach across the board. Every building is doing it so there are no discrepancies, and the parents have an understanding of what to expect if there's a problem with their children.

Ms. Payne: I also advise the anti-bullying specialists to let parents know. The law says we don't have to let them know until the Board meeting. I think that's a little bit lengthy and I advise anti-bullying specialists to use the language that at the building level this has been the decision. It still has to go to the Board for final approval. Sometimes because of the timing of when Board submission cutoffs are required, if we had an incident on September 29 the cutoff for submission for October is before that point. If we have things that are happening after the fact, I advise the anti-bullying specialists as a matter of customer service and care and concern for our parents to just let them know at the building level this is what was founded. It still has to go before the Board to have a final decision. That helps parents to be able to navigate. I would like to know more immediately, if it was my child, what did you do? What happened? We can't share consequences, but we can let them know the findings. We can say that at the school level, it's either founded, unfounded, or not enough information. The law says we don't have to do that, but I think in consideration of how we're trying to be in Paterson that is key and important. When teachers are implicated in harassment, intimidation, and bullying, I usually have to do the investigations because most of the anti-bullying specialists are in the PEA and the law says you cannot have a member of the same union actually conducting the investigation. If it is a teacher involved, I usually request either the principal or myself to handle those investigations. That's the way we've been working with that when teachers have been involved in situations. Sometimes these matters just really need to have a principal, parent, and I've been in the middle of some of those situations to help mediate. Sometimes parents feel that the principal could be biased in a situation just because of how they're feeling, not that that is happening. I also offer my services because most parents may see me as an outsider because I'm not in the building. I'm a central office employee and they appreciate that mitigation to help them work through it so we've done that a couple of times in previous years.

Comm. Hodges: I just think it would be helpful if they were as informed as possible since this is not a rare event in our schools. There should be a consistent process by every principal in every school, so the parents hear it and they hear it enough times to get familiar with the approach. There are going to be interactions that are unfortunate

during the school year and the parents need to know that's not a bullying incident. The more informed they are, the less you'll get misunderstandings about what's going on.

Comm. Redmon: Dr. Hodges, is that the conclusion of your questions?

Comm. Hodges: Yes.

Comm. Redmon: Comm. Gonzalez, to answer your initial question, this was brought before us tonight because when it was first presented most of us were at the New Jersey School Boards conference. This was the earliest that we could get this on our agenda. It was presented to me by the administration. This is the reason why we are having an emergency meeting on this tonight. I was unaware of the extension to December. I was just told that the actual deadline was for the 31st.

Dr. Newell: President Redmon, if I could clarify one thing. Based on what happened last year, an extension was given, and the information was submitted. However, we lost seven points for QSAC. Even if it is completed, what I do not want is to give up what I think are achievable points. We know that QSAC is hopefully a few years down the road, but it is my intention that things should be submitted on time and not risk getting penalized for a late submission even though it has been granted an extension.

Comm. Hodges: Since it was granted, is there a way to get the points back?

Dr. Newell: What we've been trying to do is avoid waiting until December 22. If we can get it approved tonight, we will not get penalized for a late submission. As long as we can get it to the County by tomorrow, the 31st, we will not be penalized for any late submissions.

Comm. Hodges: Thank you.

Comm. Gonzalez: Just to wrap this up as it relates to not being penalized for late submission, when was this expected to be due? I understand we were out, but was this supposed to be due any time prior to us leaving? What is the usual submission for this on a yearly basis? When was this supposed to be submitted?

Comm. Redmon: It was just brought to my attention last week. Last year, as Dr. Newell said, it was submitted in December. Unfortunately, I never got anything that was presented to me for submission, or we would have had it at our actual regular meeting. It would have been presented at our regular meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening, Board. I do not have a relevant comment at this time. I just was not able to see it on the livestream. Thank you.

Ms. Greta Mills: Hello, everyone. My name is Greta Mills. I am here because I am trying to get some clarity about student behavior in the district. Other teachers have called me, and they want to know...

Comm. Redmon: I'm sorry, Ms. Mills. Hold on one second. Can I ask all Commissioners to mute themselves because Ms. Mills cannot be heard clearly? Can you start over Ms. Mills? Please allow her additional time, Boris.

Ms. Mills: Several teachers have come to me and they're getting emails. Some principals are asking for things to be put into Infinite Campus. Others are saying fill out the OCR forms for student behavior. What is going to be the district policy that everyone has to follow when it comes to student behavior? Even for myself, I've been attacked by a student. I was just threatened today by a student that I am going to be slapped. Am I putting this in Infinite Campus or just filling out paperwork? How is this stuff being addressed? There are still teachers who want to know what they are supposed to do with their things if they are unable to have locks on the doors or cabinets so they can keep their things safe where kids can't get to the things that they have. Different schools are doing different things. Since we have Infinite Campus, it should be one set policy for all so when you go into one building it's not one thing and go into another building it's a different thing. What's going to be the consistency on how we are handling Infinite Campus if we have something in place, but we are not using it? Thank you.

Mr. Zellie Thomas: My name is Zellie Thomas. I am speaking on behalf of Black Lives Matter, Paterson. It has taken me a while to come up with the words to express how I feel. As a person who has been involved in Black Lives Matter since it started, I've dealt with a lot. Just by saying the phrase 'Black Lives Matter' we have gotten a lot of pushback, a lot of threats, a lot of harassment from people who did not like the things we were saying. Even in the beginning, there were many people who were saying All Lives Matter instead of just saying Black Lives Matter. We had to educate people that saying Black Lives Matter wasn't about saying that any other lives didn't matter, but for all lives to matter Black lives have to matter as well. Through that education and hard conversations, we have seen a big shift happen in public opinion. This has happened through all things throughout history that people initially have opposed, whether it's slavery or Jim Crow laws. It took people to risk being threatened and risk their lives in order to stand on the side of the oppressed. I think it's very important for the school district to not be silent on what's going on in Palestine right now. The City of Paterson has the largest Palestinian population on the East Coast, and we service so many different students who are hurting. They feel silenced, unheard, and unloved when these conversations are not being held in the schools or the school district is not saying anything about these things. It's very important for us to not be in a neutral stance and say the best thing is not to say anything because that's how oppression continues and that's how violence continues. It's going to take us to be courageous and to say something because that's when real changes happen. Not everyone is going to like what we say, but at the end of the day when history moves on...

Ms. Rania Mustafa: Hello, everyone. Thank you for the time today. I just want to introduce myself. My name is Rania Mustafa. I am the Executive Director of the Palestinian-American Community Center. Over the last few days, I have been in contact with Superintendent Newell. Thank you for your time today. I just wanted to echo Zellie's points. Paterson has one of the largest Palestinian American communities, likely the second largest in the country. A lot of our community members are really hurting, feeling alone, and are not being seen right now. I appreciate and thank Dr. Newell for putting out the statement on the website this morning, but we need more. I think there needs to be a clear effort of putting out this message to all the parents, teachers, and students. There needs to be some concrete support that's being made and given to these students. I want to point out that specifically in School No. 9 there is a young girl named Dania Abufalis. Her father is an American citizen stuck in

Gaza. As you can imagine, she and her family have been going through the unimaginable waiting to hear from her father. Many of our community members have either lost members in Gaza or have been waiting by the phone to just hear from families and friends. I think it is very important that Paterson, the Board of Education, and the Superintendent continues to support their students outwardly by telling administration what's happening in Palestine and in addition by providing their students with the opportunity to have some extra time, if needed, to gather all their emotions. Teachers also should be given additional mental health leave, and honestly to feel supported. I have been hearing from countless parents, teachers, and students that they are feeling very abandoned and unseen, and I think that this needs to change. This is not okay. Thank you.

Ms. Safa And: Good evening, everyone. I am going to talk as Rania said about the Palestinian kids and what they are going through in the schools. I am a mother. I have kids in the school, and they've been affected by what's going on in Gaza and Palestine. They didn't see that much support or recognition about what's going on or sympathy. One of my kids told me they saw a bus calling us animals and I think we are treated like animals. I didn't want him to feel this way. I tried my best to explain to him that it's not that way. We are human beings, and we are going to still be human beings because this is what we represent as Palestinians, as Americans. Whatever you hear at school doesn't mean that everybody at your school means to say that to you. I didn't see anything going on to support our tragedy that's going on over there because everybody is affected, especially the Palestinian community here. Most of the kids in the schools have families over there. They have friends and cousins. I talked to my cousin while she was under the bed because she's scared to be hit by a rocket, a bullet, or whatever it is. It's been taking over our hearts and feelings. Our kids come first. We need at least emotional support, like a moment of silence in the school just for the 7,000 that have been killed and murdered over there. Thank you.

Ms. Thuraya Zeidan: Hello. Good evening. As an educator in the New Jersey public schools for over 11 years now and as an advocate for students who are forced into marginalization, I just want to address the district's contribution to the erasure of the Palestinian identity. At least 20,000 Palestinians live in this community and over 96% of people who are Palestinian identify as Muslim. We know that New Jersey has one of the highest Muslim populations in our public schools. This is important to note because of the heightened genocide in occupied Palestine, particularly in the city of Gaza, including the murder of over 8,000 Palestinians in the last 23 days. Since the genocidal massacre has been intensified, in that time the school district did not acknowledge the community in which they are supposed to be serving. The community is grieving and mourning while also facing trauma at the constant mourning that we are experiencing. The school district is not being asked to have expertise on international affairs. However, the community is asking that the experience of students, teachers, and staff are acknowledged. We did see the statement that the Superintendent released this morning. It does not make mention of the word 'Palestine.' It was not representative of the truth or the reality that the global community is experiencing. There is mention of services that are provided to students. What are those services? How can students access these services? This is a time to center Palestinian voices and to show up for people even when it's several weeks late. Our students and staff deserve to be seen and heard in difficulty and not only in selective recognition when we celebrate culture. Finally, I'd like to leave us with the reminder that when we serve a community, we ask the community what they need, and we do not ask people who have positions of power what the community needs.

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

RESOLUTION FOR A VOTE:

Resolution No. 1

WHEREAS, the Board of Education and the State District Superintendent support N.J.S.A 18A:37- et. Seq. by prohibiting acts of harassment, intimidation, or bullying (HIB) of our students grades Pre-K thru 12, and

WHEREAS, a program has been developed to grade each public school and school district's efforts to implement the Anti- Bullying Bill of Rights Act (ABR) (N.J.S.A. 18A:17-46). A guidance document has been developed to help school district staff fulfill their responsibilities under the Commissioner's program, and

WHEREAS, the ABR grade for each school will be determined primarily through a self-assessment of the school's implementation of the ABR using the attached tool titled School Self-Assessment for Determining Grades under the ABR (Self-Assessment) (Appendix A); and

WHEREAS, the Self-Assessment must be made available for public comment and approved by the district board of education, the chief school administrator will be required to certify the electronic submission of each school's Self-Assessment and Statement of Assurances (Appendix B). The school district's grade will be the average of the grades of each school in the district; and each school's grade must be posted on the District's and schools website. The 2022-2023 district ABR grade is 72 out of 78.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education has reviewed the Self-Assessments for the 2022-2023 School year and that the public was given advance notice of the Self-Assessment and an opportunity to ask questions and provide input,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Education affirms the chief school administrator's decision in accordance with the law.

It was moved by Comm. Hodges, seconded by Comm. D. Martinez that Resolution No. 1 be adopted. 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
- Downtown Special Improvement District
- Celebrate Paterson

Comm. Valerie Freeman

- Self
- Family

Comm. Eddie Gonzalez

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

Comm. Jonathan Hodges

- Self
- City of Paterson

Comm. Dania Martinez

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Ilearn Schools
- Paterson Arts & Science Charter School

Comm. Manuel Martinez

- Self

Comm. Della McCall

- Self
- City of Paterson

Comm. Nakima Redmon

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

Comm. Kenneth Simmons

- Self
- Family

EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was moved by Comm. Hodges, seconded by Comm. D. Martinez that the Board goes into Executive Session to discuss issues that warrant confidentiality, as consistent with NJSA 10:4-12 for matters of Attorney/Client Privilege, Contracts, Legal, Litigation, Negotiations, Personnel and Student Matters. The minutes will be made available to the public upon request when the confidentiality of the subject is no longer warranted. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board went into executive session at 6:19 p.m.

It was moved by Comm. Hodges, seconded by Comm. D. Martinez that the Board reconvenes the meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board reconvened the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

It was moved by Comm. Hodges, seconded by Comm. D. Martinez that the meeting be adjourned. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard L. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Mr. Richard Matthews
Business Administrator/Board Secretary