

# **MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION BOARD RETREAT**

July 5, 2023 – 5:30 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

Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz  
Comm. Valerie Freeman  
Comm. Eddie Gonzalez  
Comm. Jonathan Hodges

Comm. Dania Martinez, Vice President  
Comm. Manuel Martinez  
Comm. Della McCall  
Comm. Kenneth Simmons

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:

**Board Retreat  
July 5, 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.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Comm. Redmon: Thank you everyone for joining in today. This meeting is just a brief introduction with the new Superintendent, Dr. Newell. We will hear her concerns, the expectations for the Board, and any questions.

Dr. Newell: It's so nice to see you all. Thank you for the time to meet with me at the end of the day. I certainly appreciate it. Today has been a full day in a good way. Cheryl and I started off about 7:00 this morning. Cheryl has been so good at scheduling the different meetings. I'm just very happy to be here. I really hit the ground running. I started having meetings with different cabinet level members. We also had a central office meeting to meet all the different individuals. As I told central office, further on I will be meeting with every single individual just to really see what is their motivation,

what is their 'why', and to get to know the people who I'll be working for. Today has been a day of getting to know everyone. Tomorrow we're meeting with the rest of the cabinet members. We have some who are not here. We also tragically had a youngster who passed away. I was talking to Mr. Price about that. He was shot. I'm not sure if you all heard about that. We've been making sure that we are getting any information that has been coming in. We're hitting the ground running. One of the things I have asked the cabinet members is we have to look at the data. They will be pulling a lot of that data for us to start going through everything. That's pretty much it in a nutshell. It's an honor and I thank the Board for giving me the opportunity to return home and get some things done. Thank you.

## **VISION FOR THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR**

Comm. Redmon: Do you have any visions for 2023-2024?

Dr. Newell: I have a 100-day plan. I want to be very open about the fact that I want to start meeting with everyone and going through the data. I can say certain things that I definitely know I want to look at and what my direction is going to be. Top of mind is student achievement. Unfortunately, we've had COVID and some setbacks. Paterson Public Schools in terms of achievement, we definitely know that we have some very talented individuals here. Our test scores are not necessarily reflecting that and so I need to get into that data to see what has been going on, how we are deploying staff members. Top of mind is student achievement. I'm also very concerned about safety, security, and social/emotional. I'm meeting tomorrow morning with our BA. We're scheduled three hours tomorrow because I'm jumping right into the budget. I also have facilities concerns. Mr. Mapp knows. He and I have spoken already today. We met very briefly because we also need to be digging into what some of the facilities issues are. It's hard to escape when some of our schools have been all over the news. Those are the four main areas that I want to be looking at. In terms of taking action, I can't at this moment. I just want to dig into the data, meet with everyone, and see what's out there for me to go through. Then we can have a further conversation.

Comm. Redmon: Do any other Board members have any questions?

Comm. Simmons: First, let me just welcome you back to the district. I know your work ethic. I think myself, Comm. M. Martinez, and Comm. Hodges were the only three that worked with you in the past. I want Board members to understand the type of person you are. I know we're used to Ms. Shafer being a hard worker, but we have made a great choice and we have another hard worker. We have to make sure that we do our part as well. I know you mentioned student achievement, which is at the top of my list. I'm pretty sure it's at the top of the list of all Board members. I'm looking forward to making sure that we move that needle. We've come a long way, but the pandemic set us back. If you've been watching our meetings, we have been saying that we can no longer use the pandemic as an excuse. I don't want you to get scared.

Dr. Newell: The pandemic came up a lot today and I had to say understood, completely respected, but we need to pivot from that now. I'm just telling you that I've also done a level setting. Of course, we understand the pandemic, but that can't be everything all the time every conversation. So, thank you.

Comm. Simmons: There are a lot of things and I'm sure you'll see it as you continue to do your assessment. There are some cultural shifts that need to happen. In all honesty, there are some changes that will be welcomed and some things that Board members want to see. We are here to support you. I'll speak for the Board if no one

will say it. Our job is to hold you accountable. In us holding you accountable, you will hold your staff accountable. Those are the kinds of things we need to move the district forward.

Dr. Newell: Absolutely. Thank you.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Welcome back. I second everything Comm. Simmons said, even though I am of the mind to let you remember where all the restrooms are first. Before we get into the weeds of it all, it's your first day in and there's a lot of information gathering that you have to do. You have to get to know the buildings again. Things have changed. You have to get to know the staff, those who were there and all the new staff. The Board members around the committee have the opportunity to hear from you. Those of us who came in for that second meeting at William Paterson got the opportunity, but we have three new Board members who haven't heard from you so if you can do a little bit more of an in-depth introduction. I know you'll have the time to talk to them individually, but just so that they have an idea of who they're speaking to, set the tone, and have further conversation to know more than just your name. Welcome back. It's great to have you back. Comm. Redmon and I came in the year you left. We had a small opportunity to work together. Welcome and we are here to support you. We will have many conversations to come.

Dr. Newell: Definitely. Thank you.

Comm. M. Martinez: Welcome back. Echoing the sentiments of Comm. Simmons and Comm. Castillo-Cruz, I'm really happy. I feel like it's the dawning of a new day and fresh energy and new ideas. The district is primed to hit the next plateau. We've taken some major strides over the last years and have gotten to a respectable place. That being said, we still have a lot of work to do. Through the selection process we all felt collectively that you were that person who can take us there and work hand-in-hand with us. Welcome. Thank you for being here. Della, I like your shirt.

Dr. Newell: Thank you.

Comm. D. Martinez: Welcome back. I'm excited to have you here. I look forward to working together. I echo all the sentiments of my colleagues, especially what Kenny said about accountability. I think that's very important for us. One of the reasons why I felt you were a good candidate for our district was because of the emphasis you placed on our students' education. I think that's so important. You mentioned reading and math strategies you were going to use to bring our students up to par. That's something that our students struggle with. The innovative strategies that you will bring to our district will make a huge impact. I'm very excited about that. I'm excited to see the new changes. Just keep in mind all the hard work that we have done these past three years of obtaining local control and maintaining further. I think that's so important, as well as changing the image that other places have of Paterson.

Dr. Newell: Thank you. When I was here the last time for six years we were under state control and it's not something I aspire for us to go back to. I will be working very hard to make sure that is all the way back in our rearview mirror. There is lots of work to be done and great work that has been done. When I had the central office meeting today one of the things, I emphasized was building on the work that my predecessor did. I don't come in and just dismantle. If things are working, we're going to tighten up and improve. If things are not working, then that's something that we have to really strategically think about abandoning because it's not working. Wholesale dismantling

what's been done is not my style. Acknowledging that there has been a lot of hard work done over the years and we're going to build on that work.

Comm. Redmon: Does anyone else have any comments, concerns, or questions?

Comm. Hodges: I do want to apologize. I'm still having electronic problems. I'm forced to use the phone. Dr. Newell, welcome. Most of my colleagues have said a great deal of what I wanted to say. I wish you the very best of luck. As you know, I'm a very difficult person. I have not changed one bit. You know how hungry I used to be when I was here and I'm only hungrier because of the time I've put in and the relative amount of success that we've had over that time. My concerns are considerable. As I look at the tail end of my career here, I don't want to leave without seeing a major improvement in the educational outcomes of these students. I'm very anxious to see a major leap in what they have, what they're capable of doing, and what we offer them. They deserve it. It's long overdue. As you can recall, what these students are actually capable of is nowhere near what we're giving them and asking of them so far. I look forward to helping you in any way that I can going forward. Don't get upset about my difficult pressure. You've seen it before.

Dr. Newell: I'm used to it. I've seen it before. I've lived it. I survived it.

Comm. Hodges: Good luck.

Dr. Newell: Thank you.

Comm. Freeman: Welcome aboard, Dr. Newell. I'm one of the newer School Board members here and I look forward to working with you to move this district forward. It's good to know that you know some of the district from being here previously. That's a plus. You know some of the things that we need to work on to get our students up to par and where they need to be to compete with the other students outside this district. I do look forward to working with you. Congratulations and welcome aboard.

Dr. Newell: Thank you so much, Comm. Freeman.

Comm. Gonzalez: First, I want to apologize for not being on camera. You may have heard I had back surgery so I'm not in the best appearance at the moment. Like everyone else has mentioned, I welcome you to the district. I didn't have the opportunity of working with you. I believe I left the Board four months before you came, but I only heard great things about it. We briefly spoke previously, and I wish you the best. Paterson is not an easy place to do this kind of work. I think the Board is on par with what I'm going to say. We've come a long way. I'm not just talking about getting back local control. We would love to see great communication between the Board and the administration. A key point is to always make us aware of the obstacles you face. We all know what some of them may be in our community. We just want to make sure that you're free to do the work that you're hired to do with little distraction and influence from outside of this Board. I really hope that this year in September we see strides and success. As most Commissioners have already stated, we have a long way to go. The pandemic is no longer an excuse, but we are where we are. I want to let you know that I believe this Board is going to work very hard to do whatever it is you recommend and to make sure you're successful in doing what you need to do. With that said, welcome.

Dr. Newell: Thank you, Comm. Gonzalez.

Comm. McCall: I want to welcome you, Dr. Newell. I know that we have high expectations of you. I'm looking forward to taking this district to another level and allowing us to give our very best to our children. I'm really excited to know that your concern about special education is one of the priorities. I'm looking forward to seeing that department go to another level. Welcome. I don't have a lot to say. I'm just excited about being here and that we are all looking for great things.

Dr. Newell: Thank you, Comm. McCall.

Comm. Redmon: I think I got everyone. Again, Dr. Newell, I would like to say welcome back to Paterson Public Schools. This is going to be an exciting year. We're going to keep you steadfast and moving forward to push this district fast and in a hurry. We know we have a lot of things coming at us. We have our strategic goals due. We also have the goals that the Board would like to see you accomplish and the district goals. We're going to be meeting regarding our goals around what we need to hold you accountable for and what we see the district being in the future. I wish you nothing but the best. You have me here as your Board leader. You can always reach out to me to make sure things are being done correctly between the Board and you.

Dr. Newell: Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: I wanted to ask Dr. Newell how she would prefer that the Board communicate with her.

Dr. Newell: The way I have done it in the past with my prior Board is that was a decision that was decided on amongst the Board. I would meet with the Board President, and they would distribute the information. I am open to however your structure is and I will follow your lead. I'm open to speaking individually or to one who will be the ambassador for everyone else on the Board. How we communicate, I'm open to your decision.

Comm. Redmon: Once the Board gets together again, we will have that discussion and we will let you know how the communication will go.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

No speakers.

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

## **NEXT STEPS**

Comm. Redmon: I asked at the last meeting that each Board member list the goals they would like to see the district achieve. If you have not done so, please submit them to Cheryl. Once we get that established, we can set up a meeting. We were planning to meet on the 12<sup>th</sup>, but I think that date will change. I'm going to have Cheryl poll the Board for a date in July so we can talk about the district goals and the next steps for the district.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: I'm the General Counsel along with my firm and we are super excited to have you here and work with you. Obviously, you can call me and figure out how we move forward. I wanted to introduce myself and tell you it's really great to meet you. We're excited that you're here.

Dr. Newell: Thank you.

Comm. Redmon: I want to ask all Board members to make sure they have their district goals to Cheryl as soon as possible. I'll have her poll the Board for the upcoming dates for the discussion on the district goals and next steps. Thank you again. I appreciate you guys jumping on this meeting tonight. Hopefully we will be moving this district forward and making sure that our students succeed in this new era. Thank you everyone and have a nice evening. Stay cool and safe.

Comm. Simmons: We will move this district forward.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**It was moved by Comm. Simmons, 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 6:07 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard L. Matthews" with a small flourish at the end.

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Mr. Richard Matthews  
Business Administrator/Board Secretary