

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

April 12, 2023 – 6:14 p.m.  
Joseph A. Taub School

Presiding: Comm. Nakima Redmon, President

Present:

Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Susana Peron, Deputy Superintendent  
Bryant Horsley, Esq., Souder, Shabazz & Woolridge, LLP

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

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

Comm. Gonzalez 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  
April 12, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.  
Joseph A. Taub School  
202 Union 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**

### **Career and College Week**

Ms. Shafer: Good evening Board Commissioners, staff and Paterson community. At this time, I'd like to call on Ms. Tamisha McKoy, who is our Executive Director of Counseling, to talk to us and give us a presentation about Career and College Week. You have the PowerPoint on your table in front of you.

Ms. Tamisha McKoy: Good evening Commissioners, Superintendent Shafer, and Deputy Superintendent Peron. I'm with you tonight to present on the district's College and Career Week, which takes place May 22 through May 25. College and Career Week is an annual event which takes place within the district and while we all know that these activities are planned throughout the district (inaudible), there is a special emphasis during this month. We like to ensure that all students are receiving additional services. As you can see on the agenda page, I will share with you four different elements – college and career readiness, the primary goals of college and career week, highlights from previous years as well as those that are in plans for this year, and finally I will (inaudible) these measures. It is the district's mission to ensure that we are preparing students for a college and a career of their choosing. This encompasses post-secondary colleges, trades, vocational, military, and in some instances, we are also creating pipelines where students can enter directly into the workforce. We create subtopics for our college and career week that consist of climate and culture. In this category, those activities spell out the traditions that we would like to see within all our district schools. They come by way of announcements, reiterating student expectations, door displays, bulletin boards, partnerships with the community and families, and reinforcing attendance. The climate and culture are the expectations that create (inaudible). One of the three categories I stated previously was educational activities. A large amount of our schools decided to host virtual field trips and college trades. Something that I shared earlier that is not so much the case this year is while we learned several things from virtual sessions as far as the number of students, we are able to impact and were able to receive that exposure, we were able to primarily have guests come into our schools virtually. A large number of the presentations and hands-on activities were virtual followed by guest speakers and various student engagement activities. Next, we have climate building activities consisting of wall displays, dress for success, thematic game activities, such as Jeopardy, and team building activities. We tried to stir up the students' excitement. So, it's not the traditional stand and deliver, teacher-student activities, but the entire collaborative school-based teams consisting of members from the school counselors, child study team, administrators, lead teachers really worked together to prepare several activities for the students. We established that while the week is May 22-25, our schools have a Google Drive where we spell out the expectations and they have until May 1 to go into this Google Drive to list the specific dates and types of activities. The assistant superintendents monitor those activities. We did it that way because we would like to share that information with you and other district stakeholders in the event that you would like to take part in or shadow those activities and experience the plans for yourself. Some of our schools plan really robust career fairs and guest speakers. It's also a wonderful experience just to see our student leaders and ambassadors take the initiative with learning about their careers, personalities, and how that aligns with our career clusters that we offer in our district high schools. We don't leave the onus exclusively on the schools. We do support them by arranging partnerships and field trips. I listed just a few of the guest speakers who have already confirmed their ability to present, share, and spend time with our students, inclusive of registered nurses. We have a dynamic speaker that's coming and doing a tour with all our high schools and middle schools, student empowerment tours, and engineers. We meet with these individuals in advance. We vet them to ensure that they understand our goals, mission, and challenges and that they are authentic and relevant, so the students really are inspired and motivated by their presentations. We also have scheduled a field trip at Liberty Science Center where the students will meet in-person a female heart transplant surgeon. She talks a lot about her journey and the work she does. In addition, there's a virtual field trip in collaboration with Liberty Science Center and Hackensack University Medical Center where our students will see a live robotic surgery take place. They will be virtual, but the surgery with the robot will be live so we're looking forward to that experience as well. Finally, on our sustainability

page, while we highlight the week of May 22-25, we do know that these activities don't start or end there. I want to list some of the resources that are needed to maintain said activities, including our high school choice process. We're in the process of implementing a career exploration course for all sixth graders. With that, our two middle schools, Taub and New Roberto Clemente, are both adopting a middle school scheduling model that resembles the high school model. We did implement this model last year with New Roberto Clemente and this year we're working with Taub administration to have a middle school travelling model. We have our pathway choice tour. The Division of Secondary Education went to every single elementary school that has eighth graders to explore the course offerings within our high schools. For the first year we have our freshman seminar course. In previous years our eighth graders would go into high school their freshman year and immediately choose their career pathway. We decided to create a curriculum where we walk through all the career pathways available to them so that our students are making a more informed decision and will not go into their pathway until their sophomore year. Following that, we have our partnerships. There were way too many to list, but those are the categories that our district partnerships fall under, and they are robust and many. Finally, our post-secondary plans, under accelerated programs we have advanced placement, dual enrollment, several partnerships to create pipelines for vocation and trade programs, our pre-college programs, and career fairs. We had our first transition fair for our special education population this year. That summarizes the district's efforts for College and Career Week, but again these are ongoing activities that happen throughout the school year. I will take any questions that you may have at this time.

Comm. Simmons: I'm looking at the areas where folks come in and do the presentations. When we look at the pathways that the students choose, do we have articulation agreements with any of those?

Ms. McKoy: We do. There are several. They're listed on our website. We have P-Tech, IBM. There are several partnerships to strengthen the career pathways that not only lend the students to enrolling in a college, but some of them lead to students earning certificates immediately upon graduation in addition to earning dual enrollment credits for these courses.

Comm. Simmons: I know Dr. Hodges like AP, but I prefer articulation for a reason. It promotes the ability to gain those college credits. With AP, a student could not pass, or the college could just not take the credit. I don't want to pick on Dr. Hodges. I'm glad to see we have more articulation agreements.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thanks for the presentation. After these programs are presented throughout the years, do we have any tracking mechanism to see who actually attends college? It's one thing to apply and get accepted, but how many of our students actually continue through that process? There's a high rate of dropouts in college. Do we have any mechanism to track or do some follow up to see where they are in the next two to four years?

Ms. McKoy: We have Naviance, the college and career platform. They do track the student enrollment, those who attended college during the first year and those who stayed during that fall semester but may not have returned or continued the second semester. It does not capture the major that the students enroll in. We do capture post-secondary plans, but it doesn't necessarily speak to the major. If a student was in a career pathway in high school, we don't track if that student continued in that pathway in college.

Comm. Gonzalez: Is that for the four years?

Ms. McKoy: For the four years.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you.

Comm. Hodges: You mentioned faculty involved in it. I'm assuming those are teachers.

Ms. McKoy: Yes.

Comm. Hodges: What kinds of activities do they engage in during the week?

Ms. McKoy: Due to the sheer volume of career week, it is a schoolwide endeavor. The core teams within our schools prepare the activities and the teachers execute them in the classrooms. If it's a career fair, then students are travelling room-to-room and the teachers are simply supervising the students. There are a lot of outside vendors that come in during this time. Sometimes our teachers are presenting to the students as well. Sometimes district-level supervisors are presenting. To answer your question, the teachers take part in whatever activities are planned for students. If it's an interest survey, it's the teacher facilitating student conducting or completing.

Comm. Hodges: We've had conversations in the past about having teachers wear college jerseys and changing the bulletin boards to reflect an interest in college so that the child is immersed in that environment, and they can see themselves. The teacher is a big role model for them. I was just wondering whether we could encourage teachers to do things along those lines and transform the classroom, at least for that week, into an environment that reflects some sort of immersion.

Ms. McKoy: That visual representation is important. This year I sent a blanket letter to any and every college that's in Naviance. To my surprise, I've been receiving a lot of paraphernalia, pens, stickers, mugs, and t-shirts from colleges all over. I even had one company donate tons of pennants and flags from Greek organizations and the Ivy Leagues. The schools don't know it, but they'll be receiving a lot of gifts to serve as incentives for students and drum up the atmosphere and create visual exposure for students.

Comm. Hodges: Thank you.

Comm. M. Martinez: Dr. Hodges, just to expand on that, something that can also be effective is instead of using traditional ways of identifying a classroom, they can be named after colleges, such as Harvard, Rutgers, Seton Hall. It embeds a sense of normalcy when it comes to talking about being a college student and being affiliated with colleges. It's a layup, but it's so easy to do.

Ms. McKoy: That excitement is in the buildings. After that week, the schools upload artifacts. We can't make it to every school, and I don't know what every school is doing. It is a busy week. We're all travelling and visiting. But the principals do upload pictures, videos, and recordings of their Google Meets. We have that evidence from last year and we are continuing that practice for this year.

Comm. Simmons: Just to expand on what Dr. Hodges said about faculty participation, do we get participation from our technology department, the business office, and the operations aspect of the district?

Ms. McKoy: We do. I don't know exactly what everyone is doing, but I can tell you even at 90 Delaware we have a whole slew of activities that we're participating in. Last week we all changed our Google Meet backgrounds to represent our dream careers or alma maters. We try to be very strategic as a districtwide initiative.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I want to give kudos to the administration. Last year I was able to pass through one or two of the schools and I did see a lot of the pictures. The excitement really started with the faculty. Most of the faculty members were excited and engagement was felt in some of the buildings. It's an exciting week because some students don't have the expectation of what it will be until they walk in. Career week sounds nice, but until the faculty creates excitement and emotion for it a lot of the students don't get engaged in it. I did have the opportunity to see them in person in a few of the schools. You felt it as soon as you walked into the building. I do want to recognize that. It's changed and you've added so many things to it. I do want to give kudos to the administration and the faculty for really being motivated and doing it with excitement.

Ms. McKoy: Thank you.

Comm. Redmon: Thank you, Ms. McKoy, for your presentation.

Ms. McKoy: Thank you for your attention.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

Mr. Sebastian Mejia: Good evening, Commissioners. It's excellent to see you all this evening in person. Firstly, I wanted to applaud you all for your display of decorum and professionalism. I'm a big fan of how this body carries itself. I might not always agree on some of the decisions that are made on that side of the dais, but I think many of the governing bodies in our community can learn from how you guys conduct business. I wanted to start off by saying that. I also commend your consistency when it comes to transparency and your commitment to having these meetings be accessible to people of all different ethnic backgrounds. As I know, these meetings are translated into various languages. We're in a multi-ethnic community, one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the country and you all are leading the way when it comes to having access to people of all backgrounds. That being said, I want to stress the importance of having these meetings be in-person moving forward. Our children and our schools are in-person. The City Council is in-person. I think that a serious conversation needs to be had amongst the community and the Board to have every single one of these meetings in-person, in a hybrid model, and on cable access so long as it's within your budget and makes it accessible to our seniors. I understand the convenience of having things on our cell phone. I use my cell phone and laptop all the time. Some of our seniors who may have grandchildren in the school system want to know what's going. They might not be as tech-savvy as some of the younger generation to go on the computer and use the cell phone. They know how to turn on the public access channel. I do want to implore you all to take that into consideration. I want you guys to be in-person. We have an empty house for the most part. If you all make that decision as a body to be in-person moving forward, members of the community will of their part to create awareness and have a packed house. I want to see a community in every single one of these governing bodies to be interacting with our elected officials. I worked

remote during the pandemic as well and I understand the convenience. I'll wear a blazer from the waist up and I'll be in pajamas. I understand that. The pandemic is over. The children are in school. Other governing bodies are in-person as well. I implore you all to do the same. The other point I wanted to stress was an issue that several members of the community and law enforcement have brought to my attention. Seniors are let out early during the day. Do they need some sort of a work permit to be let out of the building earlier than normal? I see many of our high school students outside chilling at 1:00 p.m. and they're up to no good, unfortunately. I'm bringing that to the attention of the Board, and it should be looked into. I don't know if there's somebody from the truancy department. It's a serious issue because if they don't have jobs, they shouldn't be out at 1:00 in the afternoon going wherever they want to do. They should be in school. They're still students. They're still minors. They're still within the Paterson school system. If they don't have a job that they have to be at, an idle mind is the devil's playground. We all know that. We have to make sure that if they're out of the building. They're doing what they're supposed to be doing, either at a job or volunteering. If they don't have a volunteer program or a job, they need to be in the school. Thank you all for your time and attention this evening. Once again, I congratulate you all on your decorum and professionalism. Sebastian Mejia. Hopefully, I'll be fifth ward councilman in 2024. Thank you.

Comm. Redmon: Mr. Mejia, stay there to make sure we give you some of the answers that you asked for.

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

Ms. Shafer: Thank you for your remarks. I did want to inform everyone that this is the first meeting that we have translations with our live stream in Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, and Turkish. I want to thank Paul Brubaker for putting that together. Going forward our meetings will be live streamed in those four languages. Some of our seniors do have jobs and they leave any time after 1:00. No one leaves before that. If there are certain schools where you're seeing crowds of students, let Ms. Warren know the schools and we will certainly look into that. We do have seniors that are leaving and going to jobs and internships.

Comm. Redmon: Mr. Mejia, thank you again for your comments. This body really appreciated what you're saying. We work diligently together to make sure we conduct ourselves as adults and get the mission of the school district across. Thank you again for your comment. We have been back in-person ever since January. We're making a conscious effort to be in-person. Our regular workshop meetings here are in-person. For April, both meetings will be in-person at this location. We meet again April 19 at 6:00.

Comm. Hodges: While it is commonly thought and believed that the pandemic is over, it is not. It's of concern to me in particular. I've pushed very hard to maintain our Zoom presence. I get the reports from St. Joseph's as to the new cases that are being admitted as well. It's not just children. We have found that the number of viewers by Zoom is larger than the attendance that we receive in the buildings. That's why, in part, why we've maintained the visibility by Zoom. We have not had the consistent number of people present in the audience, as you can look around and see, as we have had on Zoom. I'm the one that asks at every meeting how many people we have on Zoom. I make it a point of asking that question because I want to know whether our community is able to watch us and participate. We're very conscious of the need to be present. In

fact, I wish more people would come to the workshop meetings where things are supposed to be discussed than to the voting meeting, which is not really as consequential in terms of information that goes to the public. I appreciate your comments and I do understand that, but there are other reasons. There's more attendance on our Zoom meetings than there are at in-person meetings.

Comm. Redmon: Mr. Mejia, we have 41 viewers watching now and three people in the audience.

Comm. D. Martinez: I want to say thank you for your comments. I really appreciate that. As a Board, we work very hard, and our work is very unappreciated and criticized. When we get compliments like that, it's overwhelmingly nice. It's good to hear that there are people out there who are paying attention and seeing us for the good that we do. Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: I'm going to echo the sentiments of my colleagues by thanking you for the comments. It's ironic that he brought it up, but last night I was flipping through the channels and went to Channel 77 to see if the Board members were there. There is old content there. Dr. Irving was the president. I don't know if it was taped in the past. I know we have newer equipment where we taped it over and sent a copy. I don't know if the city's equipment is updated so that they can receive a digital feed. If we can find that out maybe, we can send over a digital feed so they can update.

Comm. Hodges: It was videotaped before.

Comm. Simmons: I don't know if they have updated their equipment.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: We had this conversation a month ago and someone inquired about our meetings not being viewed on Channel 77. I know there was an equipment concern or translation from what we used. We had also gone into our virtual feed through Facebook and our website. We saw a lot of folks tuning in through there as well. I think the conversation about giving more of our seniors the ability to see on Channel 77 of the pure nature of them being used to it is very important. It's something we need to look into. I think we have been managing back and forth trying to figure out what is the best way to provide access to families. Parents come home with their children and sometimes it's difficult for them to leave. We have tried some meetings in-person and some fully virtual. At every virtual meeting we have seen, not only more viewers, but more parent concerns during public portion. There are meetings where there are very few and there are meetings where there's a whole slew of people signed up to speak. We have to continue monitoring what works best for our students and parents. Right now, we know we have viewers, but how do we make that interactive with those folks who can't come here because they get out of work late or have children. I have a two-year-old that I have to put to bed soon. I understand. How do we make it interactive with those families? When we had the one-on-one, it gave the opportunity for folks to see us virtually and for the public to come here. I'm not saying that was the long-term, as Comm. Redmon said. This month both meetings were in-person, but we have to continue to monitor what provides the best access and how interactive we can get with families. It might not be the way everyone is used to having meetings. We have to continue looking for our best options until we find what fits best. We need to stay open for a change for a while until we go back and forth. So far, we have seen Zoom is a good option. It's working. How do we do more with that? I think that's where we are now. Thank you for your comments as well.

Comm. Gonzalez: I like the hybrid model. You stated there were about 41 people viewing. Is there notice to them? Is there an active link for those 41 folks to sign up to speak?

Comm. Redmon: No. When we send the notice out you have a link. Those people would have to call in through our link and they will be recognized through our information.

Comm. Gonzalez: Was that link sent out?

Comm. Redmon: Yes. It was advertised.

Comm. Simmons: When you see 41 people online, that's the livestream. Via the livestream there is no way for them to participate in the public portion. I think they can send their questions in.

Mr. Paul Brubaker: Good evening, Commissioners. Just to clarify, you all know that by law every public meeting has to have a public notice. On those public notices, which are in the care of our good clerk Ms. Cheryl Williams, those notices clearly say that these are the times and dates of our workshop and regular meetings. In order to participate in meetings that are held in-person, one needs to be here and sign up at the door. This is the setup we have tonight and that's why we had Mr. Mejia participate in the public portion. For the regular meetings, which are held virtually, there is the instruction that we have become accustomed to during the pandemic, which is to register via email. The email address is on the public notice. The person monitoring the public notice is our attorney Mr. Boris Zaydel. As you all know, he manages the public portion based on the people who have signed up. For virtual meetings, the opportunity to sign up ends an hour before the meeting is scheduled to begin.

Comm. Gonzalez: For the next regular meeting, are we doing a hybrid where people are going to be allowed to log in virtually as well? We're going to do that in-person.

Mr. Brubaker: There will be an in-person meeting.

Comm. Redmon: The meeting is advertised for in-person. It's going to be the same setup that we have tonight.

Comm. Gonzalez: We're not going to have this online version where people can make comments.

Comm. Redmon: No, because we're meeting in-person this month.

Comm. Gonzalez: That's my point. Are we going to get to a point where it's hybrid so when we meet in person there's still that option of having it virtual for folks who can't attend but can still submit questions or notices to speak. That's what I'm getting to. I'd like to see a hybrid model where we can do both. Is that possible for the next meeting?

Comm. Simmons: I understand what you're asking. Based on the way the next meeting is set up, the only way that they will be able to participate is to be here. There is a livestream available. People will be able to view it, but they won't be able to participate.

Comm. Gonzalez: I understand that's the current setup. We have technology. We can figure out a way to do hybrid. Can we do both meetings? Is there the technology to



host both in-person and virtual meetings where folks who are viewing this have the option of making a comment or have some public portion for virtual attendees.

Mr. Brubaker: Yes, anything is possible. I think that it has certain implications. Perhaps we can issue a brief report as to what kind of issues that raises if we were going to have almost like a radio call-in show where people are calling in questions remotely or issuing comments. I wanted you to be assured at the moment that the public is aware by way of public notices and the additional efforts of the communications department to put things on the website and on social media posts. Given certain topics like the major issues that we will be examining next week, an email blast.

Comm. McCall: I guess I was most concerned about the legal piece of it. Can we do both? I think that's something for legal and not for tonight. It's something to think about. To do both, I personally feel it can become a little taxing to the process. I wanted to make sure that it was legal. I know in some incidents we couldn't do both. I'm just putting that out there to legal to find out. I want to make sure that our integrity stays intact. It is a different process. When you do the ZOOM meetings, I notice that we do get more parents to sign up to speak, as opposed to coming to our meetings. At the last meeting we had over 100 speakers. I think we got through 50 of them because they started to dial off. I guess we were answering their questions, or their questions were being asked. I would ask through our president to see if that is legal. That's just a request from me.

Comm. Simmons: I've done it. You would have to have two different technologies and it becomes extremely difficult to manage. You're meeting in-person. You'd be doing a Zoom, and someone has to manage that. The problem becomes how you choose who speaks and when they speak and whether or not we have the sound capability for the folks who are communicating through Zoom so that we can understand them, and they can understand us. It becomes extremely difficult to manage technologically. To your point, it can be done. It's just extremely difficult to do.

Comm. McCall: Thank you.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I think it has come. We had conversations six months ago. There's another entity that allows the community to send their questions is they come via email. As they're streaming it, those questions get answered. That may be an option. Just as they register for virtual, they give folks the opportunity to submit their questions. There are many options that we can try, but we're going to have to try a few of them to see which one works the best. I know before the pandemic we tried to do some livestreaming with the comments turned on. That didn't go very well. It wasn't because of the questions, because it was difficult to interact, but because of the community involvement. It started other discussions and things that were inappropriate. I don't know if you guys remember when we did Facebook live with Kemper. That didn't go very well for a while. We did it for a few months and we tried to work it out. At first it started well, but then it went left on us. We had to make that change. At that point, turning off the comments created another stream, and we were back to square one. I think we have to try different things. In the public notice we can say if you have questions, please send them via this email. This body or the Superintendent can answer them as she does. When folks are watching the stream, they have questions and I think the Superintendent can tell you her office gets emails and phone calls as well from parents who have concerns or questions. That's something that's already happening. The Superintendent has a policy of always having her door open and answering those concerns. We have to navigate as we move forward, which are going

to be the best options to be as interactive as possible while still being able to maintain a level of decorum and getting the business done.

Comm. Hodges: Perhaps we can put a message that if you have questions for the Board that you want aired at a Board meeting, please submit them to whatever it is and that way we can have someone read them here during the meeting for the public. That would be an opportunity to be heard. The Board and the community would hear it as well. Though I'm curious as to if it's possible, why we can't find a way to do it. I'll leave that for you to look into down the road, Mr. Simmons.

Comm. Simmons: It's extremely difficult to manage.

Comm. Hodges: Not with your skill.

Comm. Redmon: We will leave this discussion to technology and see what we can work out.

Comm. Hodges: We can put the message on for them Board questions to be submitted so we can address them and find a mechanism to get that done.

Comm. Redmon: Dr. Hodges, a lot of parents do email Cheryl. Throughout the day we get emails, and we try to direct them before they even come to the Board meeting.

## **REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT**

Ms. Shafer: I have a short report. I think everyone knows that one of our nurses from PANTHER Academy P-Tech was hit by a truck prior to spring break. I'm happy to report that she is home. She is walking. Her cognition is excellent, but she does have a long road of recovery ahead. On behalf of her family, I want to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers. I also want to announce that our preliminary budget that was sent to the county was approved. You'll hear more about that at our next meeting. I want to give you a transportation update. At our last meeting there was a discussion around American Star. They had some issues at the state level, but they were not banned from bidding on other specs that were out there from other school districts. We wrote a letter to all the parents whose children are on those buses. If they wanted to take their child any of those buses, they could and they would receive a \$5.67 per day transportation contractual fee for bringing their children to school. We sent this out prior to the break and at this time we have not heard from any of the parents. Again, I just want to let parents know if they do not want their children to ride on the American Star buses, they can sign up at our central registration transportation department for parent contract and get paid a daily rate of \$5.67 and bring your child to school. That concludes my report.

## **RESOLUTIONS FOR A VOTE AT THE WORKSHOP MEETING**

### **Resolution No. 1**

Whereas, the Paterson Public School District approves the payment of bills and claims dated through April 12, 2023, beginning with check number 236167 and ending with check number 236238, in the amount of \$9,851,541.20, and direct deposit number beginning with 1651 and ending with 1672;

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.

**It was moved by Comm. D. Martinez, seconded by Comm. M. 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

## Resolution No. 2

WHEREAS, The Paterson Public Schools District caused an annual audit of the district's accounts and financial transactions to be conducted by a public school accountant for the 2021-2022 fiscal year pursuant to NJSA18A: 23; and

WHEREAS, said "Annual Comprehensive Financial Report" and "Auditor's Management Report" for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2022, were filed in duplicate with the Office of the Commissioner on March 15, 2023, pursuant to NJSA 18A: 23-3; and

WHEREAS, a presentation of the audit with discussion of the district's fiscal status, audit findings and recommendations was made to the Board and public by members of the audit firm of Wielkott & Co., P.A., at the board meeting of February 8, 2023; and

WHEREAS, the presentation included a public discussion of the audit results including the district's overall financial position, reserved, unreserved and excess surplus fund balances, funding of worker's compensation and compensated absences, food services' operations and the three (3) audit findings and three (3) recommendations, that are addressed in the Corrective Action Plan; and

WHEREAS, that the annual audit and CAP for the year ended 2022 be accepted and placed on file. The audit report is included in the financial section, of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, and that the following corrective action plan be implemented:

AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION	CORRECTIVE ACTION APPROVED BY THE BOARD	METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	COMPLETION DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION
Finding 2022-001: There were some instances in which expenditures were charged to the incorrect budget account line. Recommendation 2022-001: More care should be taken to ensure that expenditures are charged to the correct budget account line.	More care will be taken to ensure that expenditures are charged to the correct budget account line. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requisitions will be reviewed for correct budget line prior to approval.</li> <li>Transfers will be initiated to move funds to the correct code.</li> </ul>	Ensure that budget accounts are compliant with the State of NJ Chart of Accounts and expenditures are reviewed during the requisition process.	Richard L. Matthews - SBA June Gray – ABA	On-going - March 2023
Finding 2022-002: Four Household Surveys were not available at the time of the audit. Recommendation 2022-002: All Household Surveys should be made available for review upon request.	Household surveys will be made available for review upon request. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training will be provided to staff in the collection of surveys.</li> <li>Increase communication with parents.</li> </ul>	Ensure designated officials at schools collect all completed surveys and maintain copies. Training for the collection of surveys will include follow-up instructions. Email reminders to schools to follow up with missing surveys once distributed. Post	Lenny Moore, Deputy Director of Management Information Systems Assistant Superintendents	On-going – May 2023

<p>Finding 2022-003: Four students were not recorded properly on either the application, school register or roster reports when verifying the District Report of Transported Resident Students (DRTRS). Recommendation 2022-003: Better care should be taken to ensure all students are documented correctly in the transportation application process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow up with schools to collect missing surveys.</li> </ul> <p>Better care will be taken to ensure all transported students are documented properly in the transportation application process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team members will verify each other to ensure input of the correct codes during data entry.</li> <li>Conduct final verification process before auditor's review.</li> </ul>	<p>to website and Robocall as reminder.</p> <p>Transportation Team members will ensure school codes are correct when entering data into the DRTRS. A second person will check the codes to ensure accuracy. The Business office will conduct a final verification to check codes before audit.</p>	<p>Lisa Vainieri, Director of Student Assignment Services and Transportation</p>	<p>On-going. Final check each year upon submission of the DRTRS -March 2023</p>
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NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Paterson Public Schools Board of Education accepts and approved the "Corrective Action Plan" for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2022; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School Business Administrator be directed to forward to the County Superintendent the minutes together with two copies of the ACFR Synopsis, two copies of the Corrective Action Plan and certified board minutes adopting the above items; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall take effect upon its adoption.

**It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. M. Martinez that Resolution No. 2 be adopted.**

Comm. Hodges: We usually have a presentation by the group that does this. I was wondering why there wasn't a presentation by the auditor.

Comm. Redmon: The presentation was done back in January and Board members got the entire audit a couple of months ago.

Comm. M. Martinez: Committee was virtual.

Comm. Hodges: It's been a long time.

**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

### **Resolution No. 3**

Recommendation/Resolution: Approve a partnership with Rutgers Cooperative Extension for SNAP Gap program at School 24.

WHEREAS, Goal Area #1: Teaching & Learning of the Paterson Public School District's Strategic Plan - A Promising Tomorrow is to create a student-centered learning environment to prepare students for career, college readiness and lifelong learning;

WHEREAS, School 24 wishes to partner with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to implement the SNAP Gap project, an initiative that will help food security researchers

understand why families whose children qualify for SNAP and free and reduced meals are not enrolled in those food assistance programs;

WHEREAS, School 24 agrees to assist in Rutgers Cooperative Extension in organizing parent focus groups for this initiative and, in exchange, School 24 will receive up to \$66,000 in grant funds from the Rutgers Cooperative Extension; and

WHEREAS, School 24 will use the grant funds to provide stipends for two (2) staff members who will serve as site coordinators for this project, and remaining grant funds will be used to provide stipends for additional staff as needed to host events, and for SNAP Gap materials, supplies, food, incentives, parent transportation, and services to support the promotional events.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Paterson Board of Education approves this partnership with Rutgers Cooperative Extension and authorizes the Superintendent or her designee to take all action necessary to effectuate it.

**It was moved by Comm. M. Martinez, seconded by Comm. D. Martinez that Resolution No. 3 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

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

**Items Requiring a Vote**

Comm. McCall: Some of the resolutions didn't really indicate what schools. In the future I'm asking that we have that spelled out just so we know where these services are going to be rendered. For example, I&P-9 refers to an agreement with Matthew Bellace, PHD Presentations. It says something in the package. Will this be all high schools, and can we see a schedule? This item said 'high schools' but not where and when. I know that might be a little picky here, but I just want to know what schools are getting what and when they're going to get it. I&P- 10 said three schools but not which schools. I'm asking that be a little more clear. That's something I would like to have so that I know which schools these programs are being implemented in if I'm questioned by the community. Thank you.

Comm. Freeman: On O-21, has Dr. McWilliams started doing professional development with Juneteenth?

Ms. Shafer: He hasn't come in yet. Once this is approved at the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, then he can start.

Comm. Freeman: Thank you.

***Instruction and Program***

Comm. D. Martinez: I'll report at the next meeting. We met yesterday, but I don't have my thoughts together. I'll report next week.

***Operations***

Comm. D. Martinez: We met today. We discussed the items up for vote. One of them that I'm excited about is preparing our teachers for driver's education starting in tenth grade. That will provide opportunities for our tenth graders to get their permits and divers licenses.

***Fiscal***

Comm. Simmons: Fiscal meets tomorrow.



## ***Personnel***

Comm. Redmon: Personnel met on Monday. Items discussed were vacancies. We also talked about substitute services. We talked about the upcoming job fair. We can check our website for the date. It has been advertised. We will be talking about a job fair. Our vacancy rate was still at 56. It might be different because they change day-to-day.

## ***Governance***

Comm. M. Martinez: The governance committee met last week and discussed an ongoing situation regarding litigation. If there are any further inquiries about it, we can discuss it at an appropriate time.

## **Committee Report**

### ***Facilities***

Comm. M. Martinez: Facilities is meeting next week.

### ***Family & Community Engagement***

Comm. D. Martinez: We will be meeting on Monday.

### ***Policy***

Comm. Simmons: Policy has not met yet.

Comm. Gonzalez: There was an email that went out. I just want to reiterate in the last meeting we had a person joined our Zoom and wanted to change the policy to allow caps and gowns for eighth grade graduation. I don't know if that's in your policy for this meeting. Are you going to have it tomorrow?

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Redmon: No. Policy hasn't been set.

Comm. Gonzalez: We can just add that to the agenda so we can discuss it.

Comm. Hodges: We've already discussed that for eighth grade before and the Board decided that they did not want to have the caps and gowns because it was not a graduation but a promotion. We wanted to encourage people to have graduations in high school, to go the full 12 years. That was a major discussion years ago. Make the graduation be what it's supposed to be, a major transition. Eighth grade is not a graduation. It's a promotion to the next stage of their education and we came to that conclusion. We wanted to put a stop to that misunderstanding. We used to have eighth grade graduations.

Comm. Gonzalez: I would like to revisit that. We have new Board members and new discussions. I did hear some of the arguments in the past. I differ with some of them. That's why we should have a discussion on it.

Comm. McCall: I have received a lot of calls concerning that. If that is going to be the case, a lot of our schools are using caps and gowns to take pictures for the eighth

grade. It's a double standard there and that's something we need to look at. If caps and gowns are not going to be symbolized for eighth grade promotion, then why are we allowing the children to take the pictures in caps and gowns and then we're saying no to the process of them wearing them at the promotion ceremony. I do think that's something that we need to look back at. I received several calls about that. Parents say it's okay for their child to take a picture in a cap and gown symbolizing this transition, but on the actual day of the ceremony they're not allowed to wear them. If we're going to be standing on the fact that the policy states that, then we need to look at all the functions of it. As a parent, if you sent me a picture home with a cap and gown, my expectation would be that they would wear them at the ceremony.

Comm. M. Martinez: Dr. Hodges, while I do agree with the premise that it's more of a moving on as opposed to a graduation, for the sake of nostalgia I thought it was a harmless activity. I wouldn't be opposed to revisiting the discussion. I understand that there is a policy in place, and I can see the pros and cons. If there's a way of leaving it in the hands of the respective schools to determine whether or not they want them, I think that's worth a discussion. Just for the sake of nostalgia, I don't see the harm in putting on a cap and gown. But I do agree with your premise. Eighth grade is not the plateau. You don't want to hit eighth grade, graduate, and that's it. You want to move on.

Comm. Hodges: I do understand that, but unfortunately some people don't push their children to get past the eighth-grade ceremony. That was the reasoning behind changing it. It became a big deal. You're graduating in eighth grade, but your child doesn't get to twelfth grade. The discussion is fair, and we can also make it clear what our intentions were and why we changed that policy. They did have eighth grade graduations in the past and the concern was, is that going to be what a graduation is supposed to be. I'm willing to have the discussion, but I was concerned about that issue. I'm still concerned about that issue because of the mindset of far too many people about that being the graduation and twelfth grade not happening for so many kids.

Comm. M. Martinez: I agree, but the notion of revisiting the conversation is fair.

Comm. Freeman: When this decision was made, were the parents surveyed? And did the majority of the parents agree?

Comm. Simmons: It was a big, in-depth conversation. I think we had something short of a public hearing, but there were a lot of folks. As Dr. Hodges was saying, for a lot of folks graduation in eighth grade was seen as finality. We had parents literally standing here and saying, "This might be the only time I see my kid graduate." We can't have that mindset.

Comm. Freeman: Did the majority of the parents say they're not going to see their kid graduate past eighth grade? I find that hard to believe.

Comm. Simmons: But the majority of the parents aren't saying let them wear caps and gowns either. It was a conversation and based on the folks that were here there were more people okay with us making it a moving up ceremony. It wasn't something that was just done in a meeting without parents.

Comm. Freeman: I think it does need to be revisited.

Comm. Simmons: I'm okay with revisiting the conversation.

Comm. Freeman: I need to share all my phone calls and emails because it's quite a few parents. From what I understand, there are some schools that are having caps and gowns. If that's the case, we need to find out. If it's a Board decision, then it needs to be unanimous throughout the whole district. School No. 30 can't do it, but AHA can do it.

Comm. Simmons: That is not supposed to be the case. If there are schools that are doing that, then we need to let the Superintendent know.

Comm. Freeman: That's why some of the parents are calling. They don't understand how this school can do it and that one can't.

Comm. Simmons: There shouldn't be any school that is having a graduation ceremony with a cap and gown. There might be some schools that are allowing students to take pictures in caps and gowns, which should not be the case either. If we know about those schools, then we need to let the Superintendent know. That means the building leader is choosing to do their own thing and that we can't have.

Ms. Shafer: This happened about a year ago. We met with the principals in June, and we told them for this year. We met with them again in August and we told them. We sent out numerous communications in the fall. We told them they needed to meet with their parents and tell them that the pictures would not be in caps and gowns and that the eighth grade moving up ceremony would not be in caps and gowns. I've had a dozen parents call me and I told them if they want a picture in a cap and gown, then they can take their child to another photographer, but the ones that we're doing in school would only be with the stall and not with the cap and gown. If anyone knows of schools that are taking pictures in caps and gowns, I would like to know tonight before the meeting is over.

Comm. Gonzalez: I have spoken to some Commissioners who have some knowledge about what it was before. Part of the reason was financial. I have heard many reasons, including the fact that they couldn't afford the caps and gowns. If that pertains to some of the parents who don't have the money, it's more difficult for parents to not have a cap and gown than it is to have a cap and gown. Why? They're going to have some kind of graduation or promotion, whatever you want to call it. There are parents who are going to have to go out and buy new clothes for individuals because now they're going to have to compete with the next kid who just showed up in a suit, shirt, and tie. Versus a kid who is going to school with sweatpants and sandals because they can't afford anything. I think a cap and gown would cover all that and everyone is unified. We ask our children to go to school in uniforms for the same reason. I have strong opinions about this. I really want to revisit this, the sooner the better so we can pass a motion so that we can allow the schools to do so this year. I thought it had something to do with the pandemic or something to that effect. This is a new Board. We do have new Commissioners with new opinions on it. I respect the debate. I want to know more about what the debate entails specifically. As of right now from what I know, that's my stance on that. I have had numerous conversations. I'm not speaking because of just one parent. I inquired with other parents to see what their feelings were. I spoke to some Commissioners about what the reasons were. Some of them didn't even know. They just said they forgot the details of it, which is fine. We're not going to remember every single vote that we had in three years. That being said, I think it's worthy of some discussion because parents are adamant that they want to do this. It is a cost-savings for them. We're saving kids from being embarrassed. They are going to graduate and have some kind of ceremony and they all want to take pictures whether it's with or

without a cap and gown. There's a cost involved with parents, and I think it's a more economical thing to do.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: If there are some schools that are having the pictures with the cap and gown and having graduations, we should first identify which schools they are. What is the concern of the parents? Is it really that they want a graduation with cap and gown? Or is it that some schools were having it and others weren't and it was unfair? It doesn't necessarily mean that they want their child to have a graduation. They just want it to be equitable across the board. That is the first question I would have. I know there's an expense there because parents were purchasing caps and gowns, and eighth grade graduation rings as well. They had eighth grade proms as well. It became an expense as if they were graduating from high school. I also do remember that when we were having the original discussion, we observed what neighboring schools were doing as well. Most of the neighboring schools at that time were doing promotional ceremonies in kindergarten and eighth grade. In high school then, we would talk about the cap and gown, ring, diploma, and proms. A lot of parents would actually save for all that. That's where the highlight was and that was a lot of the conversation I remember having during those discussions. What would we rather do? If that has changed, we will open the conversation and we will go from there. I think that we need to determine what the actual concern is. Is it the graduation with a cap and gown that in four years these kids will maybe have a picture of somewhere? I don't know if anyone knows where their eighth-grade graduation pictures are. Parents have them, I'm sure. Moms and dads will save them forever. What we're promoting is the high school, graduate from there, and go on to a two or four-year university or trade school. In sixth grade we're already talking about pathways for education. We're starting to have those conversations in middle school going into high school. It's keeping that trend of not needing a diploma to go to high school, but they do need one to go to college. Some parents don't mind. They're used to it. Some folks completely forgot we ever had caps and gowns. We need to determine what the real concern is and what would the financial burden coming back to parents. It's an understanding for them to have of what this all means. As a district, what is it that we want to push our students towards doing? If Wayne, Pompton Lakes, and Woodland Park are having promotional ceremonies, that was a conversation of pushing them towards success and finishing high school. What do we want to as a district push our students to do? The narrative that existed was their child was going to graduate. It may seem shocking because it was shocking to us when many parents said it during the discussion. They said it really may be the only time I see my child graduate. It may not have been all parents. If it was 100 out of 5,000, that's still 100 students that need a narrative change and we all need to work together to do that. We can open the discussion, but we need to put all those things into perspective as well.

Comm. Hodges: That's what brought the message home to me, the idea that this was going to be the graduation in their lives. I had a big problem with that. They also had the eighth-grade proms. I'm sitting here saying, "Wait a minute. You're missing the whole point." You want to go the whole 12 years. You want to plan to push your child all the way through. If you're having this big ceremony here in eighth grade, what is your planning to move forward? When they told me that this would be the graduation, I said we have to change that mindset and try to channel them to going through to get their 12 years in and get a diploma. They can have their 12<sup>th</sup> grade prom and move on to some other career or college education. A lot of parents said that this was going to be it and that was worrisome to me. I definitely remember that conversation. It wasn't last year. It was several years ago. We had it in the policy committee. That was why we had changed it, because it was being done throughout the district. They were having these eighth-grade proms and graduations. We were asking, "What's going on

here? What is the mindset that says this is going to be it for my child?" The conversation is good. Maybe the conditions in this town have changed. Maybe we need to see what parents think about it now. That's what I was shocked by and concerned and that's primarily why I voted to put an end to those, particularly the eighth-grade prom.

Comm. Redmon: We can revisit in policy. For this year, it's going to be too late to try to change a policy midstream. If we're going to try to change or update this policy, it should be effective for next year. At this point, schools have already laid it out and parents were notified. This wasn't new. Parents were notified earlier during the year. I understand the sentiments of what's going on, but for this school year this should not be changed. The discussion can be had in policy.

Comm. McCall: I understand the sentiments of this year. However, when we were at our last meeting and the parent asked for us to at least talk about it and explore it, I didn't know it was going to come up tonight. I was going to wait until we got behind closed doors. Is there a uniform policy for graduation? Or is it they can't wear caps and gowns, but they can get dressed up to come to their graduation? The reason I'm asking this question is because our purpose as a district years ago to go into uniforms was to stop the opportunity for kids to have different types of clothes so that children would not be bullied and have the opportunity to be equal. If we're going to go with the policy of no cap and gown, is the uniform going to be required for graduation? I hear a couple of things. I hear that one of the reasons is because we want to see children continue to reach for the high school opportunity. I don't have a problem with that. If we're not going to be consistent on the uniform policy that's already in place in most of our schools, then we're still opening up another door by allowing children to wear their own clothing. Some of our children come to school with Alexander McQueens for graduation. You're talking about a \$700 or \$800 sneaker. I've seen it even at the eighth-grade level. I just want to be clear that if we're going to go this year with no cap and gown, what is the other option for all children to be equal? We're taking them out of uniform for that day to get dressed up for a ceremony that we're all saying is just a moving on ceremony. I agree with that, but is there still going to be other standards in there? I got about 25 phone calls about this one topic after that one parent brought it up at that last meeting. If I got 25, there were other Commissioners that got phone calls too. It is a concern out there. Parents want to know why this decision was made. I don't know if they were here or not. I wasn't here. I was just made aware of it, but I do think that it is a conversation that has to come back to the table. Do I agree that we stick with what we have this year? I don't. The parents that are calling me are doing so about this year. Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: The premise for not being able to do it this year is twofold. It's April. We have to have two readings for the policy, so we probably wouldn't get the policy passed in time. Number two, typically those items are already ordered. Trying to order them, gather parents to give money, and have the schools place those orders is probably not going to happen in time for this year. If the Board decides to change, then it would have to be something that is changed for next year. In the policy it does spell out what students are allowed to wear for graduation.

Comm. McCall: Can I have a copy of that policy? Thank you.

Comm. Freeman: I do understand that it is too late for this year. With the amount of calls that I got, it's warranted that we revisit. Of course, it's too late because June is graduation. I do understand that. It is a concern for parents. I don't know when this happened, but it's a concern this year. If we just revisit it, whenever it goes from there, I

think parent participation should be a priority in this matter. We're not paying for it. The district is not paying for it. It's the parents. If the parents are okay without a cap and gown, I stand down. I am totally for parents being well engaged in this. The policy was changed. You say you had parents here saying they won't see their child graduate from 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Even though some of them said it, I find that disheartening and sad. If a parent feels their child is not going to make it to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, taking away a cap and gown is not going to change their mindset. It has to be revisited. Parents have to get involved. If we can get Kemper and his team together to put something out for next year so that we can have this, that's all I'm asking. I know it's too late for this year, but we all sat here and graduated with caps and gowns. We all graduated with autograph books. We all graduated with those fake rings that turn your fingers green. It meant something to me as an eighth-grade graduate to have a cap and gown, to walk across the stage, and to get the diploma in my hand. It gave me something to look forward to going into high school. Maybe that has changed. I don't know, but it made me feel good. We just need to revisit it and see where we go from here. Thank you.

Ms. Shafer: Right now, the only two schools that I know of are School No. 13 and AHA. Are there any other schools that anyone knows where students took eighth grade pictures with a cap and gown?

Comm. McCall: That was one of the schools on my list.

Comm. Freeman: AHA is one. There are two other schools. I'll get them for you today. I'm waiting for them to text me back. If I get them before I leave, you'll have it.

Comm. Gonzalez: I did read the two-page policy on this. The cost of wearing a cap and gown versus not is something to discuss. I hear a lot about what was discussed. I wasn't privy to it because I wasn't here. The discussion was whether a cap and gown was going to determine if a child is going to move on or if they think psychologically that's it. I have too much confidence in our school system and our staff that has worked with these children for eight years. We just heard about career services and promotion. That should determine whether they're going to go to the next four years, not a cap and gown. That's just my opinion. In my culture and family, it was never a thought to say that we have a cap and gown and now we don't have to go to high school. This is just my personal experience. I've never heard of any such thing. It's not that it doesn't exist, but I've never had a call or any discussion with anyone saying that they wish the district got away with caps and gowns. I find this to be an interesting conversation. It's not to say that there aren't valid arguments for such reasons. I also want to caution. I don't want this Board to penalize the two schools that have taken pictures with caps and gowns because in the policy it does not say you can't take pictures with caps and gowns. This policy does not talk about caps and gowns, except the last line of the second page. The first paragraph says caps and gowns are prohibited. That's the only line in the whole two-page policy that talks about caps and gowns. It actually talks about what students should wear. It does not reference anything about schools not taking pictures. I would just be careful about going back to them and saying they should not have done this because it's not on the current Board policy. There might have been emails that had different sentiments, but as it relates to policy, I didn't read that. I don't think that's in the policy. I just want to be careful. Maybe they were getting around it. Maybe they were trying to be creative to support their parents that wanted it and said let's take a picture instead. I don't want this to come down as a hammer on these schools that try to get around this and satisfy their parents, if that was the case. I don't know.

Ms. Shafer: The communication that went out from my office and at about four principal meetings was very clear about caps and gowns. That's why I'm concerned. If we have four schools out of about 36, something is wrong. We will address it as soon as we get the other schools.

Comm. Hodges: I have witnessed a lot of concerning things on the part of parents. I sat at a home school meeting when the teachers introduced their English books that they were going to use during the school year to the parents and the students who were in the meeting. There were two English books that were going to be used. A parent stood up and said, "That's too much for my child. My child can't do that." They said this in front of the child. That child has told that child they don't have to do this because I'm telling you that you can't do that. We had a meeting at John F. Kennedy when we raised the issue of having a GPA requirement for athletics and extracurricular activities. We wanted to have a C+ average by senior year. Parents came to the microphone and said in front of their child that their child couldn't do that. They could play basketball. They could play football. But they could not do a C+ average. That says to the child you don't have to aspire to doing that because you can't. I was shocked that you would create that kind of atmosphere where you're telling your child that you can't do a C+ average. People did these things. In fact, Mr. Moody put an end to all that conversation. He said how can you sit there and say you can't do this? That's what's done by parents in front of their children in this community. I actually raised the issue because I wanted to talk about academics and sports. I wanted the discussion, but I was shocked that parents would do that. I was stunned. When I heard parents saying they were going to have an eighth-grade prom and that their kids may not get to a high school graduation, this was sort of the same thing and some of that is still out there. Part of our responsibility is to encourage kids to go through high school and to excel academically. I'm willing to have the discussion. I'm willing to talk to the parents. I don't want you to be surprised when you hear what parents will say in front of their children and tell people why they want these things done. It's happened and it is very surprising. It can be stunning. A group accused me of discriminating against their children. I was given a letter of citation.

Comm. Freeman: Did the passing grade level go up?

Comm. Hodges: We wrote the entire thing and then subsequently a Board member changed it back. It's now a 2.0. It was 2.5 by senior year. That was the purpose. It was to encourage you to work hard as a senior to play sports and to engage in extracurricular activities. It was written and put in place.

Comm. Simmons: Dr. Hodges, I think we changed it back to 2.4 by senior year, which is a C average.

Comm. Hodges: It's a C+ average.

Comm. Freeman: I know about GPAs and grades. I just asked the question. This needs to be revisited and let's see.

Comm. Simmons: We're going to revisit it.

Comm. Redmon: Policy chair, can you get this together so we can have this discussion?

Comm. Simmons: Comm. Gonzalez wanted to have the discussion in the future, but we just had it tonight.

## ***Technology***

Comm. Simmons: We talked about an update on the information that was shared with us in the prior meeting about the reorg and where they were. A couple of things that I'm glad they're doing. We see the technology department moving forward with some certifications. We see employees getting some certifications in specific programs and software. Michael Gonzalez passed his EDU certification from Amplified Administration Course and is now an Amplified Admin Chrome Specialist. As you know, we have thousands of Chromebooks. There are going to be more folks certified in that area so that we can address dealing with damaged Chromebooks. We have someone in-house, and it helps with not having to send them out for repair and being able to do it onsite. Mr. Saleh, who is the Director, is now certified in cybersecurity. This is refreshing to hear because we have had some issues in the past with cybersecurity. Those things are being addressed now in technology. The department is progressive. They're being proactive. There was a cybersecurity audit. That information will be shared later. He just touched on it and said there were some things he would share in our next meeting. Eventually, that information has to be discussed in executive session because it is security related. The department is moving forward. They are purchasing some more technology to help staff become certified in different areas. They're purchasing tools to help develop our staff in-house. They get the certifications they need, and it helps the department move forward. We talked about the compendium that he has been asking for...

Comm. Hodges: For over 15 years.

Comm. Simmons: For over 15 years. The compendium is a searchable database that will have academic programs, contracts, and any other information that the Board has to vote on or make decisions on. Dr. Hodges has been asking for a searchable database for all that information to be input into so that when it's time for us to approve things we can have the information ready. We do that now in fiscal. We receive the contracts that are going to be renewed about six months in advance. It would be nice if they were in a database. It is a huge undertaking. We just have to figure out how we get it done because all that information has to be put into a database. It first has to be built and then all that information has to be put in it. Dr. Hodges, I'm sure you want to add to that.

Comm. Hodges: It gives the Board an opportunity to look at what's going on and review these programs that we're voting for. How well are they used? Where are they used? Who's benefitting from them? It can be at your fingertips. All you have to do is just put the field search and away you go. It's great for the administration as well because during budget meetings people input the information and you can see what's what and who needs to do whatever. It's 15 years in the making. I'm hoping before I leave it will be done. It will be of benefit to the district.

Comm. Gonzalez: We just had the operations meeting earlier and I had some questions about that. That came up. Would it also have data on the successes of programs and specific stats of their accomplishments from prior years? There are a lot of renewals and it always sounds good when someone does a presentation. The sound bites are amazing, the presentations are colorful, but they have been with us four or five years and I just don't know if they were successful or not. Would this have all that data as well?

Comm. Hodges: Yes.



## ***School Naming***

Comm. Redmon: The school naming committee met on March 22 at 4:30 p.m. Presiding was Comm. Simmons. Dr. Hodges and myself were present. Ms. Tsimpedes was the staff member. We discussed the naming of the media center at 90 Delaware Avenue after Christopher E. Lewis. Mr. Lewis was a part of this district. He also worked in technology for many years. Ms. Tsimpedes talked about the blueprint and once it's completed what it would be used for. This is something this Board can do to make sure that every person at 90 Delaware Avenue will always remember Mr. Lewis for his services throughout this district. The meeting concluded. The resolution will be brought forth at the April 19 meeting. Are there any other questions, comments, or concerns?

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

**It was moved by Comm. M. Martinez, 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 8:02 p.m.

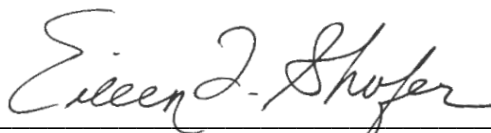
**It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. M. Martinez that the Board reconvenes the meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.**

The Board reconvened the meeting at 8:55 p.m.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, 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 8:59 p.m.



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Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, M.Ed.  
Superintendent of Schools/  
Board Secretary