MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
BOARD GOVERNANCE TRAINING/RETREAT

March 14, 2023 – 5:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting (via Zoom)

Provided by: Deborah L. Keys Write, National Board Governance & Equity Consultant

The Write Keys 2 Consulting, LLC

<u>Presiding:</u>   Comm. Nakima Redmon, President

<u>Present:</u>
Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, Superintendent of Schools

Comm. Valerie Freeman
Comm. Eddie Gonzalez
Comm. Jonathan Hodges

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

<u>Absent:</u>
Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz
Comm. Manuel Martinez

Comm. D. Martinez read the Open Public Meetings Act:

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

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

> **Board Retreat**
> **March 14, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.**
> **Virtual**
> **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.

BOARD GOVERNANCE BEST PRACTICES: THE COHERENCE FRAMEWORK

Reflective Question: What is your greatest hope and fear about the governing team's ability to ensure all students receive the best educational experience in the Paterson Public School System?

- The hope is for all students to be on grade level and to be qualified to compete with other students in surrounding districts. One fear is that students will lose interest in their education because of the lack of support in the home.

- Another fear is that the children will not get the education they deserve. Board member does not want to fail the children of Paterson. The hope is to move the children forward and that they receive the same resources as other students throughout the state.

- Hope is that the Board and district leadership can keep student success and academic achievement at the center of all its decisions. The fear is that the administration will lose sight of its true focus – to keep children first.

- Hope is that the Board develops a guiding blueprint for all members, both present and future. The fear is that students don't receive the equitable treatment they deserve when it comes to funding and facilities.

- Hopes that the Board continues in its work. Fears that the Board loses sight of what's important and the progress that has been made thus far.

- It is the hope that the children in Paterson get the education they deserve and a system that helps to support and provide for their educational needs. It is a fear that politics will continue to interfere with that process, as it has for quite some time.

- The Board has to make sure that it brings new Board members up to speed.

- Wishes that external politics stay out of education.

Politics is not going to go away, but the Board should learn to deal with it collectively. Part of that is protecting the Superintendent and including all stakeholders in the conversation.

- Inclusion for new Board members is important. Meetings help the Board share information and be on the same page.

- Wishes for more transparency. Hopes to be informed and kept up-to-date as issues are happening. Each Board committee should be more communicative and specific about matters discussed. Wants further dialogue and more open discussion about the issues discussed in each committee.

- President agrees to do a better job at being more communicative with all Board members. On the other hand, if individual members have concerns, they should feel free to approach the leadership and express their thoughts.

- In past Boards, more time was dedicated to discussing items in and out of committee. A way of compensating for that lack right now is to call individual committee chairs and get more information directly from them.

It's a challenge for the Board President to communicate information in a way that's balanced and meets the expectation of all Board members. It's also important for the Board to trust the work that the committee members do and the decisions that they make.

- Some Board members feel they don't really know where fellow Board members stand on issues because there's very little real dialogue. This makes it difficult to know whether the Board is really united on any given topic.

Is the Board utilizing meetings in the best way? Are they structured to maximize time and get into meaningful exploration of the issues?

- The Board should remember to present its questions and concerns through the proper channels. In the past, there was a history of Board members approaching district staff members directly. As a result, staff members felt intimidated. Requests should be made through the Board Secretary or the Superintendent.

- The purpose of a workshop meeting is for the Board to discuss, dialogue, articulate, and raise questions pertaining to the issues at hand. Everyone comes together and receives the same information, from the same person, at the same time, and in the same way. There is no confusion about what was heard. It is time-consuming to seek information in any other way.

- One Board member feels that workshop meetings are not the venue to vote on resolutions. Workshops are held solely for discussion of matters which will be voted on at the regular meeting.

- Members from the public prefer to attend regular meetings because they expect to hear the Board vote on issues at this time.

It's permissible for the Board to vote on items during the workshop meeting, but there needs to be a clear understanding of this by the entire Board. The public will be better educated about the inner workings and decision-making process of the Board by attending workshop meetings, as opposed to attending regular meetings.

- The President stated that the public is always informed when action will be taken by the Board at a workshop meeting. Actions coming from the administration are disseminated to all Board members simultaneously.

- Great effort has been made by the President to ensure that resolution items coming from the administration are received in a timely manner and with the proper documentation.

- City Council workshop meetings are set up differently than Board of Education workshop meetings. Votes can be taken at Board of Education workshop meetings.

Intersect District Leadership and Board Leadership

- The decision-making process is not 'one street.' The Board may start out thinking alike, but may have divergent opinions and strategies on how to arrive at a solution.

- Board members find themselves in a position of making decisions, not just for children, but for their parents as well.

- Diving into deep conversations during committee meetings will reveal core issues that may not be apparent on a written resolution. This is why conversations, questions, and dialogue are so important during workshop meetings.

The Board must lay out the expectation for each committee chairman and then trust that person to ask the proper questions and do the appropriate amount of due diligence in their role.

The Superintendent has established processes and procedures for disseminating information to Board members. Most requests for information are satisfied within 48 hours.

The Coherence Framework

- Focusing direction.
- Cultivating collaborative culture.
- Securing accountability.
- Deepening learning.

Coherence means a shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work.

- Key driver in shifting behavior.
- Requires new ways of working together, trust, shared leadership, sustained focus, and commitment to collaborative inquiry.
- There is an overlap between curriculum and instruction.

Distractions to coherence:

- Balancing individual core values.
- Micromanagement or accountability.
- Representing consistency.
- Having single agenda.
- My way or the Board's way?
- The rubber stamp conundrum.
- Confidentiality.
- Trustee leader or follower.
- Handling trusted professional expertise.

BREAKOUT GROUP ACTIVITY

Topic: Distractions to Coherence

Group I: Sometimes outside influences can distract the Board from accomplishing its objectives. If not careful, this can become a problem for the Board and district administration alike. The administration follows the trends that the Board sets, and this causes them to make poor decisions. Influences are not always political. At times, community activists feel they know more than the school administrators and attempt to influence Board to adopt their point of view.

Group II: Confidentiality is a major issue on this Board. Commissioners at times have been known to divulge confidential information to the community and this puts the entire Board in a difficult position. The press at times pressures the Board to comment on matters that they know are confidential. If Board members give in and comment, the press will print the information and this casts the Board in a bad light. Always being a

follower causes problems on the Board. When decisions made by the administrators are causing the district to go in the wrong direction, it is important that Board members step up and become leaders, not followers. It's okay for Board members to disagree if they feel in their heart that bad decisions are being made. Some Board members have special expertise in a particular area. It shows trust on the part of the rest of the Board to allow him/her to take the lead in certain situations.

Group III: Having individual agendas and insisting on one's personal point of view can be distracting and have a divisive effect on the Board.

ETHICS MATTER: THROUGH THE LENS OF GOVERNING

What is Ethics?

- The moral correctness of specified conduct; moral principles that govern a person's behavior or the conducting of an activity.
- For School Boards, ethics could be defined as a set of unwritten rules developed for interactions with the people around them.
- Finding a way to capture and agree to these rules amongst fellow Board members is key to successfully working together.
- Ethical behavior and decision-making of Board members matter to those who elected them.

Core Activities Related to Board Service

- Adhering to Board roles and responsibilities.
- Following law and Board policy.
- Using best practices.
- Navigating the rocky road between getting along, going along, and doing what's right.

Honoring Chain of Command

- Role of Board of Education: Responsibility is to oversee the education of students.
- Role of Superintendent: Responsibility is to ensure the smooth and ongoing day-to-day operation of the district.

    o For an educational or classroom issue, the chain of command begins with the teacher, moves to the principal, and then to the superintendent.
    o Athletic issues begin with the relevant coach, move to coordinator of athletics or director, then to superintendent.
    o Transportation issues should initially involve the bus driver, contractor, transportation manager, and then the superintendent.
    o Board members should view themselves outside of the chain of command rather than at its apex.
    o If superintendent cannot satisfactorily resolve a matter, Board policy dictates that the individual can then bring the matter to the Board as an "appeal" mechanism.

Board's Response to the Community

- Encourage community to first take the matter up with the initial point of contact, i.e., teacher, principal.

- Advise community of the chain of command while treating them with respect and understanding.

- Be careful not to second-guess the decisions of employees or administrators.

Four Ethical Imperatives - Moral, Legal, Pragmatic, and Perceptual

- An approach to determine how to act ethically is evaluating decisions or actions based on the following four imperatives:

  o <u>Moral</u> – Doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Making it easier for people to do what they know is right.
  o <u>Legal</u> – Doing the right thing because there are penalties for doing the wrong thing. Making sure people understand the laws, policies, and procedures.
  o <u>Pragmatic</u> – Doing the right thing because it is good for the district. Avoiding the counterproductive behaviors that occur when people experience "Ethical Conflict."
  o <u>Perceptual</u> – Doing the right thing because it is important for people to know we are doing the right thing. People need to know they can rely on the district's values in the absence of precedent or policy.

BREAKOUT GROUP ACTIVITY

Topic: Scenarios #1-3

Group I: (Scenario #1) It could be unethical if a Board member used a process that was not openly accessible to everyone else in the community. To use one's position as a Board member to "pull strings" behind the scenes would be considered unethical.

- <u>Outcome</u>: While this is in the best interest of a child, you're still utilizing confidential information for personal gain.

Group II: (Scenario #2) The meeting was upsetting, but the Board members expressed to the family member that they were not allowed to discuss any details. Not easy to do. The press or other Board members may try to pressure Board members to disclose what went on behind closed doors.

- <u>Outcome</u>: This is a matter of respecting confidential information. Keep the discussion to those involved. Reach out to Board President to share any concerns.

Group III: (Scenario #3) A person should disclose what their conflicts are. If they don't, there is a possibility ethics charges can be filed against them. Board members should not use social attachments or personal connections to influence the awarding of contracts.

- <u>Outcome</u>: Although not an immediate family member, it is still appropriate to disclose at the outset that you are related to or know someone who would be impacted by the Board's decision. The Board as a whole can then determine if it is appropriate for you to participate in the discussion and vote.

Unity of Purpose

- Our vision is of a governance system, School Board and superintendent, working together as a cohesive, unified team with a common vision driven by a shared moral imperative.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

It was moved by Comm. Hodges, seconded by Comm. McCall that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be opened. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.
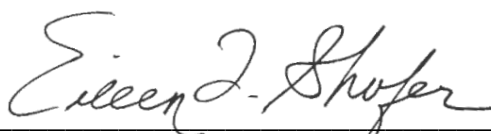
No speakers.

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

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

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