

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

March 2, 2022 – 5:35 p.m.
Remote - Zoom

Presiding: Comm. Kenneth Simmons, President

Present:

Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Susana Peron, Deputy Superintendent
Khalifah Shabazz-Charles, Esq., General Counsel
Boris Zaydel, Esq., Board Counsel

Comm. Vincent Arrington
Comm. Emanuel Capers
Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz
Comm. Jonathan Hodges

Comm. Dania Martinez
Comm. Nakima Redmon, Vice President
Comm. Corey Teague

Absent:

Comm. Manuel Martinez

Comm. Simmons read the Open Public Meetings Act:

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

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

**Special Meeting
March 2, 2022 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.

Comm. Simmons: If Board members will indulge me, I know that the Superintendent has Dr. Paul Persaud on. We do have a resolution that we will vote on later around the mask policy. Because he's here, I think the Superintendent wants him to go first.

DISCUSSION ON MASK MANDATE

Ms. Shafer: Thank you, Dr. Persaud, for being on our meeting. I know how busy you are. I also want to thank you for partnering with us to help get all our staff and students

vaccinated. We certainly appreciate that partnership. On March 7 when the Governor announced he was going to lift the mask mandate, I had asked Dr. Persaud what he thought the school district should do. I'm going to let him explain what he told me. If you have any questions, I'm sure he would be happy to answer them. Dr. Persaud, do you want to give us your opinion on the masks?

Dr. Paul Persaud: Thank you very much Superintendent, Commissioners, and Dr. Hodges. I think the question is, what should the Paterson School District do? Should we continue enforcing masking or not? The question can be answered yes or no, but I think it's a little more complicated than that. If you give me the time to address some of the issues that we need to consider, I would gladly do so. One of the issues that is very important when it comes to whether you continue masking or not is the COVID-19 community activity level, the spread of the virus. Right now, in Passaic County, as with many other counties in New Jersey, it's at a moderate level. A moderate level does not require masking as per the CDC and the state. However, there are other considerations, and this has to do with our schools. One of them is the ability of the school to maintain physical distancing. That's a very important factor to consider. Another factor is the ability to regularly screen our students and teachers. The vaccination rates of our students and teachers are also very important, as well as the ability to exclude students who are positive or may have been exposed to COVID-19. Those are some of the considerations. There are also considerations on behalf to the family. Are there family members who may be immunocompromised or at risk of serious illness? Those are some of the considerations we have to consider when we decide whether to move forward with masking. Using a mask is also important. There is a proper and improper use of masks. I'm sure you've seen a lot of people walking around with their nose uncovered or their mask below their chin. That is not uncommon. There are factors. I don't want to go through everything. It's going to take some time to do that. Those are some of the important factors that I mention there. As you can see, the school district has to make some decisions when it comes to things like physical distancing and all the other factors I discussed. As of March 7, the state is removing all mandatory use of indoor masking. Where do we go from that? My recommendation at this point in time would be to maintain masking, but not mandatory. In the event of an emergence of a new variant or an outbreak in one of our schools, then you will have to revert back to masking. Masking is still a very important layer in public health protection against COVID-19. Those are the things we have to consider at this point in time. I don't know if there are any questions, but I think I would end there and wait to see if there are any questions or further discussion of this.

Comm. Hodges: Dr. Persaud, nice to have you. 84% of our teachers don't live in Paterson. They're coming from the surrounding communities. I imagine many of the surrounding communities are going to go unmasked. What kind of impact will that have on us? Their schools are going to be unmasked. Where is the greater risk? Is it from the people coming from the other communities? Or is it from our students coming into contact with these unmasked teachers?

Dr. Persaud: That's a great question, Dr. Hodges. I knew you were going to be asking these questions. It's important because I don't know what percentage of your teachers is actually fully vaccinated and boosted. I don't know that. That's something the school would know. I can tell you that in the 5-11 age group, only 27% of our kids are vaccinated. In the 12-17 age group, it's 85%. That's a very important point you raise. I don't really know what percentage of your staff is vaccinated. That would factor. As I mentioned earlier, among some of the important factors to consider is the vaccination rate of teachers and students.

Comm. Hodges: What's the current rate of hospitalization at St. Joseph's Hospital?

Dr. Persaud: I don't have that on hand. Hospitalizations are down. Serious illnesses are down. Death rates are still pretty high. I don't know the hospitalization rates. You may want to check with St. Joseph's on that.

Comm. Hodges: At this point, you're telling the community that they can basically walk around without masks.

Dr. Persaud: These things may look very simple. Obviously, the state administration, the Governor, and the State Health Department are going to be lifting masking in schools as of March 7. They have put it under consultation between the local health department and the local boards of education to decide on this. I have stated the factors that are important to consider. If the Board reviews those factors, then they would probably be in a better position to make a decision going forward. I know our vaccination rates in Paterson are pretty good. We have one of the highest rates in the state. Unfortunately, our booster rates are way behind in Passaic County. When it comes to race and ethnicity, we know that we need to do a lot better when it comes to vaccination with certain population groups.

Comm. Hodges: Blacks and Latinos are trailing in vaccinations.

Dr. Persaud: Yes, especially Blacks. Those are some factors that we need to look at also. This is no easy decision to make for me to say yes or no to masking. I question myself sometimes. What is the answer here? I do not think this is an easy yes or no answer. I think this requires more in-depth discussion and a consideration of all those factors that I mentioned earlier. If there's an outbreak in a school, you're going to have to revert to masking again. It's not unlikely that you may have an outbreak in a school. We don't know whether there will be an emergence of new variants in the near future. There are a lot of things to consider here and ultimately the School Board and the Superintendent will have to make a decision. But the factors I mentioned are the factors that need to be considered.

Comm. Hodges: Thank you. You're saying that we have a moderate level in the city?

Dr. Persaud: We have a moderate level in the county. The data is reported at a count level. I can tell you that our case-count in the city has also dropped tremendously. Our 7-day average of positives that have been reported is about at 22 cases per day. That may not include those who use home testing kits, for example.

Comm. Hodges: Superintendent, is there an opportunity for us to consult with the hospital to find out what their rates of infections are?

Ms. Shafer: Sure, we can find out. The only thing is the mask mandate is being lifted on Monday. We would then have to do some type of a phone call vote as to what we want to do here.

Comm. Simmons: Let's keep the mask mandate in place, even though it's going to be lifted on Monday, because we do have other meetings later this month. Let's keep it in place until we can gather the other information from the hospitals.

Comm. Hodges: The concern I have is for the elementary schools. You said they were at 27%, Dr. Persaud?

Dr. Persaud: The 5-11 age group is 27%. That's receiving at least one shot. That's not a fully vaccinated rate.

Comm. Hodges: But their infection rate is also low, is it not?

Dr. Persaud: As an age group, based on data over two years kids, even though they're infected, most of the time they're either asymptotic or have mild symptoms. I don't know anything other than that.

Comm. Hodges: I agree with the Board President. Let's inquire at the hospital as to what those numbers look like and then we can make our decision on Wednesday.

Comm. Arrington: Are we proposing that we're not going to vote on this tonight?

Comm. Simmons: My proposal was that we keep the mandatory mandate in place until we gather the other information and then we can make a decision at a later meeting. We have several more meetings this month.

Comm. Arrington: It expires on March 7. We're saying our mandate will continue?

Comm. Simmons: Yes. That's the proposal, until we can gather additional information.

Comm. Arrington: I prefer to vote on it up or down. That's my personal opinion.

Comm. Simmons: Anyone else have any other questions, comments or concerns?

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I agree with the Board President's recommendation.

Ms. Shafer: I just want to let the Board know that at this point Elizabeth, Newark, East Orange, South Plainfield, Hillside, and Plainfield are all going with the mask mandate. Jersey City is not, and neither is Montclair. Those are the ones that we have at this time.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Even in the preliminary conversations, at one point I recommended that we look into keeping the mandate at least until after spring break when people come back from vacation. Two weeks after that, we can reassess what it looks like from then. I think we might have additional data to help us make that decision two weeks after spring break.

Comm. Simmons: Anyone else?

Comm. Teague: Is the mandate really being followed? There are parents and teachers reaching out to me almost daily saying that there are students and staff members coming into the classrooms and taking off their masks or pulling it below their nose. Is it being enforced?

Ms. Shafer: Yes, it's being enforced. If you can send them to us, especially if you know the schools, we'll speak to those principals. I was in a couple of schools today and everybody had their masks on.

Comm. Teague: I'll send that to you.

Comm. Simmons: Thank you, Dr. Persaud, for your input.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Ms. Shafer: Before we move on, I would just want to take a moment to acknowledge the ensuing crisis in Ukraine. For nearly a week now, Ukrainian people have been under attack and subject to a war of destruction that has resulted in many deaths, including children. Meanwhile, more than 650,000 people have left Ukraine, which is expected to be Europe's largest refugee crisis of the century. Despite all the violence and destruction, the will of the Ukrainian people remains unbroken. They have demonstrated strength and resolve as they fight for their country and struggle to keep families safe. I ask that the Paterson Public School community keep everyone who has been affected by this crisis in their prayers. Join me in a moment of silence for all who have been injured and killed to this point.

Moment of Silence

Ms. Shafer: Thank you. I just want to give a shout-out and congratulations to the Eastside High School girls' basketball team and their coaches for winning the county championship game. Congratulations to the Eastside boys' basketball team and coaches for making it to the county semifinals. Congratulations to the Kennedy boys' basketball team who made it to the county finals. Tonight, we have the state basketball tournament going on at Eastside High School as we speak. The girls at Eastside are playing Bloomfield at Eastside and the boys are playing Bloomfield at Bloomfield at 6:00 tonight. Union City is playing Kennedy at Kennedy tonight at 5:00. Tomorrow in Atlantic City we have our heavyweight wrestler from Eastside High School, Arthur Edmonds, who will be wrestling in the state tournament. Congratulations to all our student athletes and their coaches. At this time, I'm going to ask Mr. Matthews, our Business Administrator, to talk about the district priorities and see if any of the Board has additional priorities they would like to add to the budget. I know we have asked the Board about this before, but we wanted to just cycle back to see if they had any other suggestions that you would like to see.

DISCUSSION ON THE 2022-2023 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET PRIORITIES

Mr. Richard Matthews: Good evening Commissioners and community. As Ms. Shafer said, we have been before you regarding the 2022-2023 budget priorities and we wanted to circle back one more time and revisit the priorities. Some of these have spilled over from prior years and are going into 2022-2023. We wanted to reach out to the Board once again to see if there's anything else that you have considered. I'll just briefly go through some of the items that we have for 2022-2023. High School Restructuring has been planning for the last two or three years and that's obviously in the 2022-2023 budget. It's ongoing. Graduation rates are a spillover from prior years. We have textbook curriculum, Supervisor of Instruction, 4 year college rate, 2 year college rate, learning loss is in it, professional development, social/emotional learning, Equity and Social Justice, parent training, dual enrollment, financial literacy, and AP courses. On the operations side, we have food service, continuing the COVID-19 protocols, contact tracing, facilities, upgrade windows, AC and HVAC upgrades and repairs, acquisition of buses to address the transportation situation, investment in Capital Reserve, which means we're putting money aside for items that are not in the budget but for major cost items that we can draw on those reserves for, increasing the number of Board guards, and obviously anything that we put in we want to make sure that it's sustainable long-term. Tonight, all I have is just this one slide and we want to entertain any ideas or thoughts for 2022-2023. Some things that you may come up with are going to be great ideas that we can put in. Some may be planned out for future

years. Having said that, I'm going to open the floor for any ideas, recommendations, or suggestions regarding 2022-2023 district priorities.

Comm. Teague: Mr. Matthews, I'm already working on some protest signs, if you know what I mean.

Mr. Matthews: Okay, I got you.

Comm. Hodges: I'm not sure what that means, but...

Comm. Teague: I'm going to let you guys know, but offline.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I'm not sure we want to know what that means.

Comm. Teague: There are children watching this. Stop that.

Mr. Matthews: You want to know, but not right now.

Comm. Hodges: I'm still concerned about hands-on activities for students and a full complement in a variety of areas. I'm looking for internships. Where are we going with our computer programming and computer language courses? How advanced are we with those? Those are two areas that I'm still hoping that we can develop extensively. It gives students things to do in the building and it enhances their learning when they're using what they learn directly. I'm really looking to see that we can develop those kinds of experiences for our students. That means a lot of clubs and after school programs trying to complement our curriculum with hands-on practices. You have someone in the science department who has some practice in doing those things.

Ms. Shafer: Ms. Peron, I do see the high school internship program. Do you want to talk about what that is going to look like?

Ms. Peron: At this time, all of that is being fleshed out. Each of the pathways will include as appropriate an internship or some type of apprenticeship program involved in it. We are currently working on curriculum. As Dr. Hodges stated, the hands-on learning component of the curriculum is being revamped. We are currently working on labs and workspaces in classrooms and setting them up to provide those hands-on learning activities that should be going on in terms of engineering, development and creation. Each of those pathways in all the different high schools will have an internship program, a mentoring program, and an apprenticeship, if that can happen. We're also trying to develop partnerships with higher education and even in the community so that students can be provided with opportunities to experience taking what they learn in the classroom to real-life experiences and complementing their learning in the classroom. It will be a part of it, the curriculum aspect of those pathways and courses. We have been meeting with all the principals. We have meeting with academics. Academics held individual meetings with all the principals to discuss courses that needed to be revamped, revised, some that are just outdated, and any new courses that are going to be offered. All of that is in the works. There are postings that are going out. I know that the department of academics is working on it, as well as each of the different content areas within academics so that we enhance the curriculum at the high schools.

Comm. Hodges: I'm very glad to hear that, but it doesn't tell us exactly what we have planned in terms of numbers for kids, different types of programs, and that kind of thing. I'll wait for you to put together a more comprehensive discussion on it.

Ms. Peron: We have an update coming up. We will be able to outline more of the courses and talk about the intricacies and the details of what's being offered at the pathways, what's different, and what's being revamped. We also need to talk about staffing, teachers, and the challenge of recruiting the right types of professionals that we need in the classrooms, the ones we have. Also, we're taking a look at where there needs to be some movement as well. We're going to be discussing that in our upcoming updates to the Board.

Comm. Hodges: I'm still looking for purposed clubs and opportunities. I know we were doing some computer languages in the elementary school. I'd like to know how far we are advancing with that, what grades that's going to and how comprehensive that training is. When students get to high school, they can take a bigger jump in their understanding and their practices with those skills. I'll wait to hear those discussions.

Ms. Peron: Okay.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Did we start hiring teachers, professors, and instructors for the new pathways as of yet?

Ms. Peron: We have postings out. We are in the process of interviewing different candidates. We've already interviewed, and we have many more interviews scheduled during March. That's all up and coming. I can say that we did hire one pathway coordinator. She is new to the district, an external candidate. Our postings are out. Our recruitment efforts are out, and we are currently interviewing. I can't say that I have hired a teacher yet because we are still in the process of interviewing for cosmetology, construction trades, engineering, and things like that.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: In the budget, have we included a salary that would be comparable to enticing individuals in that field to come and teach in Paterson?

Ms. Peron: In terms of salaries and negotiations, we abide by the PEA contract. It's just not something that you can decide ad-hoc. It has to be complimentary to experience, degrees, certifications, and things like that.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I know the original idea was to have folks that were experts in their field. You obviously don't have a salary number exactly, but you may add additional dollars to the line item for if you potentially need it.

Ms. Shafer: Let me just say that it is based on experience. What we have done and continue to do, even now during the shortage of teachers, is what's called breakage. If you don't fill a position by July 1 or September 1, you accumulate those additional dollars. It's also vacancies that haven't been filled in a timely way because you can't find a particular candidate. All of that is what's called breakage and that gives you the opportunity that if you need to give someone more money because of experience or exactly what you're talking about, Comm. Castillo-Cruz, that's where you can get that funding from. The answer is yes, we have that money available with breakage.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I understand. It's the reality. It's unfortunate. We're always going to have positions. To be 100% fully staffed is rare. It's what we want, but it's rare. I understand breakage and vacancies and in the time of the year that you hire folks and you haven't paid them a salary for 'x' number of months so you have additional funding. I just want us to prepare because these are new pathways and if we're going to go in the direction of really hiring experts in the field, I think we need to think about adding that to the actual budget line item to appropriate those numbers just

in case and not wait on breakage. At the end of the day, depending on how the year goes, you may or may not have enough to fulfill those positions. Or you may not have enough to offer someone who is a great candidate for the position, but we don't have a salary. We've lost a lot of folks to salary. I just want to make sure that if we're really focusing on these pathways that we are making sure that's taken care of in the budget as well.

Ms. Shafer: We can certainly do that.

Comm. Hodges: I concur. In the past, we have had a practice of putting people in positions because the positions were available, not the requisite skills. They got the job because they were on our staff, and we just plugged them in. Then they didn't have the expertise to deliver what was needed educationally. Those people who have those particular skills should be helping to design those programs that we're trying to pursue, instead of just being put in place because they happen to be available on our staff and don't have the expertise. We have plenty of those in our district. We definitely need to hire people who have those skills who can then bring those skills to bear during the designing of these programs. That's what their expertise will deliver to our district and that has got to change. We can't just put together programs and not have the staff who have the requisite understanding of how they should be directed. We have to really turn that approach around. That has been a major concern through the years basically due to our funding, but also some of our practices in terms of fitting staff in place because we have the staff available instead of skills available as part of that staff.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I absolutely agree with Dr. Hodges.

Comm. Arrington: Is there any money in the priorities for science labs? I'm not sure where we are with our science labs. I know some of them are kind of outdated. Are all our science labs current and modernized now? Is there any money to start addressing that?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, there is money for science labs in the budget. The original number that we had in there we think we have to revisit because we don't believe it's enough money that has already been allocated. We're already scrubbing through those numbers to come to a more realistic number. The number that we had in there is probably too low. There is money in there, but it's being revisited because the number has to be pushed upwards. It's not realistic.

Comm. Arrington: That would modernize all of our science labs throughout the district.

Mr. Matthews: Not all.

Comm. Arrington: For some of them.

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Arrington: It's definitely a move in the right direction. We have a nice new one with Joseph A. Taub online now. It's just nice to get them all and give our kids the tools to succeed.

Ms. Shafer: Joanna, I know you've been working with Sara on this. Can you add to that?

Ms. Joanna Tsimpedes: We are starting first with the labs that we don't have enough of. We have to add additional labs at Eastside. We're also looking at the STEAM building. Because it's a STEAM hub, it needs specialized labs. We are looking to create across the district a standardized lab for the different sciences that we have. If go into our new schools, such as Hani, School No. 16, and Joseph A. Taub, you see that the labs there are advanced. They have everything that every lab should have. But it's going to be a progression of time to get all our labs into that area. The labs are costly. You have to bring in an architect at times if you have to change things into the lab. Then it's the infrastructure. Right now, we started off with the high schools because of the fact that we need to ensure our students have the correct labs for their lab sciences. Then we're going to start looking at the other facilities across the district, inclusive of engineering labs. That's another piece that falls into the loop when you're looking at pathways. It's not just science labs. You have to capture the engineering labs, which require a specific set of materials and resources that normal labs don't have in them.

Ms. Peron: Just to add to that conversation, we do have a contractor now that we are working with for the Eastside labs. We are standardizing the STEAM hubs, as Ms. Tsimpedes said. That work is already established. We do have the development and the drawings for them. That's underway, but as Ms. Tsimpedes responded, she gave you the order of the first labs and the labs that are currently being worked on. The lab at International High School is being refurbished and we're adding an engineering lab there as well.

Comm. Arrington: It sounds like high school is the priority. Thank you.

Comm. Hodges: Are we planning at least one Maker Space per building? That would be ideal, at least one Maker Space per building. The requisite training for our staff would make that an effective use of the space and the training for our students.

Ms. Tsimpedes: With regards to the Maker Space labs, the problem is a lack of space in buildings to have this. We need classrooms versus Maker Space labs because we have physical homerooms that need spaces. We have had schools in the past with Maker Space but had to give them up due to having even a medical sick room. These are requirements from the state that we have to have these rooms set aside because of COVID. The wish is that every school had a space available. Some principals are trying to make do where they expose the students via programs after school or even through our Saturday programs that we host. In reality, I can't say that every building has and it's due to lack of space. We need every space for our classroom sizes as they increase. You all know that our classrooms are increasing in size. As developments happen around the City of Paterson that means more students are coming in, which means that classrooms that were denoted for extracurricular, whether it's music or art, have to be given up to actually facilitate core courses. That's something we are working on, Dr. Hodges, as we look at the long-range facilities plan and maximizing spaces in buildings.

Comm. Hodges: Can we have a list of the schools that do and don't have Maker Spaces?

Ms. Tsimpedes: Sure. The majority does not have, but I can provide that to you.

Comm. Hodges: Thank you very much. That's a consideration for funding and also a concern for the facilities plans moving forward. I know that's something that we have to be putting in and be very conscious of as we develop our long-range facilities plan. The

curriculum should direct what our facilities look like in the future. We're going to have to pay attention and plan accordingly.

Ms. Tsimpedes: The academic team has met with Neil from facilities to discuss the needs. When you look at the long-range facilities plan and going to a middle school model versus an elementary, one of the things we are tasked with is to ensure that we have the correct room outfitting for those buildings, inclusive of the extracurricular pieces that the students should have exposure to. That is definitely a conversation that is being had between facilities and academics.

Comm. Hodges: We have to marshal the funds to make sure those things are happening. That's why I'm bringing it up here in this budget priorities conversation. Some consideration has to be given to how our curriculum should look and the requisite facilities to accommodate them. The planning has to occur ahead of time.

Comm. Simmons: Anyone else? Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

It was moved by Comm. Castillo-Cruz, seconded by Comm. Redmon that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be opened.

Comm. Hodges: How many people from the public do we have on tonight?

Mr. Zaydel: We have one registered public speaker.

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

Mr. Casey Melvin: Good evening, everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to present to you. I want to go into a program that I'm offering. My name is Casey Melvin. I'm the Field Operations Director for the Paterson Healing Collective, a violence intervention program. We just recently delved into prevention. As a result of that, we received a community-based violence intervention grant. With the support of the district, we would like to create an after-school program that we would like to call a healing space program. This program will be geared towards adolescent and adults, as well as a holistic program that we want to present to the family. We want to provide healing services and the whole gamut. I don't know if you guys are familiar with Mr. Akbar Cook, the principal in Newark, who has done some magnificent things with his after-school program. We want to simulate that in Paterson. We want to target the first and fourth wards, preferably School No. 28 and School No. 6. We want to target individuals who are classified as individuals who are likely to fall into the negative side of things. That's our target market. We want to provide mentorship, entertainment, music, and games. We also want to have intentional conversations regarding healing and dealing with trauma. We have a budget. We have a small amount of funding that we can start the program off with. It's going to be on Fridays every two weeks after school from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. We're going to employ our own staff. We also are going to provide guest speakers to come in and talk about finances, employment opportunities, and the whole conversation around healing and providing alternative services and resources to members of the community. We're primarily targeting the first and fourth wards in the City of Paterson.

Comm. Simmons: Madam Superintendent, I know you've been in contact with Mr. Melvin and you've worked with the Healing Collective. Can we bring them into one of the committees to have further discussion about this program?

Ms. Shafer: Yes. You'll see on the agenda for a vote. They are going to be working at Kennedy High School with 10 students and at the Al Moody Academy. We have been in conversations about School No. 6 and School No. 28, but it does need some planning. We wanted to start that in September. We have been in discussions, but we can certainly bring them to a committee meeting.

Comm. Simmons: We can bring them to a committee meeting and then maybe at a future meeting have them do a proper presentation during the presentation portion of the agenda.

Ms. Shafer: Okay.

Comm. Redmon: I would like to thank Mr. Melvin for inviting a couple of the Commissioners to their meeting last week. We sat on the panel to listen to some of the Healing Collective's perspectives from our students. I would like to give a thank you to the students who participated in that forum. It was very informative and hopefully we can move forward with this program in conjunction with the Healing Collective.

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

RESOLUTION FOR A VOTE:

Comm. Simmons: Is everyone in favor of moving this resolution forward tonight?

Comm. Arrington: I think we should vote it up or down.

Comm. Hodges: I'm interested in knowing Comm. Arrington's concern about postponing it a week to get more information from the hospitals. My concern is Dr. Persaud put a lot of things on the table for us, which we don't have information about. That's part of my hesitance for moving forward. I know that the population we have in this city is not as responsive to the vaccinations as other communities around the state. As a result, their vulnerabilities are much higher. If you have teachers who are going to be living in communities where they have removed their masks, then whatever exposure they have in their communities will be brought here to our students. Transmissions can go back and forth. I'm just looking for more information before we move forward. I recognize that the rates are dropping across the country. Comm. Castillo-Cruz did bring out the idea of waiting until after spring break. That does not seem unreasonable to me. I'm wondering what your concern is so that I can be enlightened.

Comm. Arrington: It's a tough decision. If the Governor's mandate ends on March 7, what are we basing our extension on? On what are we basing our enforcement of extending the mandate in the schools?

Comm. Simmons: The Governor's mandate is typical of anything that has come out of Trenton during the pandemic. He has left that decision up to the school districts, which is why you'll see some districts doing mask-optional and some keeping the mandate in place. The reason for the recommendation to postpone it for a week is based on the information that Dr. Persaud gave. We will keep it in place until we receive the additional information.

Comm. Arrington: I'm okay with moving it until next week. I'm just asking. Our mandate is based on what the Governor wrote and it ends on March 7. What are we basing that enforcement on?

Comm. Simmons: It's still up to the school districts.

Comm. Arrington: I'm fine with waiting. I just feel like it's some normalization for the kids. I know you get calls from the parents. These kids basically haven't seen each other's faces in two years. It's just the socioemotional side. It has nothing to do with science. You know I'm a data guy. I'm with you, Dr. Hodges. This is probably one of those socioemotional decisions. I'm fine with us agreeing with the body and delaying the vote.

Comm. Hodges: I hear you. That is a major consideration. The only problem I have is our population here in Paterson. I'd like to know what's going on in the hospitals. I know the rates are dropping across the state and the country, but I don't know what that means for our students. The 27% of students who were vaccinated between the ages of 5-11 is a big issue. That's going to be where we're going to be most vulnerable. Again, those students are primarily asymptomatic in their presentations, so we won't really know what's happening until more adults become infected. That's a concern. I'm just being safe. That's all I'm looking at because of where we are as a community. People are not wearing masks.

Comm. Arrington: I'm going to be part of this historic moment of you and Oshin agreeing. I want to make sure I do too. It's an emotional decision, but I understand what you and Oshin are saying. We should look at more data next week.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: The weather is still all over the place. People don't know if they have a cold or if they might be contracting the virus. Usually in January and February people don't gather as much. I understand the week, but what would this look like when folks are gathering for spring break, Easter, and some of these family events? It's not necessarily warm yet, so they're gathering in closed quarters. What would that mean for Paterson as well?

Comm. Arrington: As you know, PCTI is removing the mandate. A lot of counties are removing it. Let's see what the data tells us next week. I'm on board.

Comm. D. Martinez: I think we should wait on voting since there are so many concerns and questions. Commissioners are asking for data. I also strongly believe that it should be optional for families to decide whether or not they want to mask their child. Spring is coming and the holidays, but in the past during this time our numbers have gone down drastically, and we haven't seen a spike during Easter and spring break. Most of our spikes have been during the fall season in combination with the flu. I think we should wait, and it should be optional. I don't think we have the right as a Board to decide or tell parents what they should do when the Governor has lifted this mandate. Thank you.

Comm. Hodges: The problem with having it be optional is that you really don't have it at all because the people who decide not to do it potentially are exposed. It just makes more sense to have a districtwide policy where everybody is following it, as opposed to just having some follow it. Then it doesn't make any sense for the people who are not following it. If they're in the majority, then why have it at all? It would be better to have one standard throughout the district. If the information from the hospital says the rate is diminishing drastically, then we can dismiss it uniformly throughout the district and try to work it through social distancing as best as we can in our schools. I do understand and

I don't want to put pressure or remove the guidance of the parents. In terms of health, a parental decision does not necessarily suit the needs of other students in the district when their exposures can result in the potential exposures to other people. That's why the Board is asked to make a decision for the whole district, as opposed to just for certain students. That's my view as a health care professional, not as a Board Commissioner. Their decision will affect other students. That's the concern. I would make sure that the rates are substantially low in terms of hospital presentations so that we can then be on firm footing, particularly since you have other districts in the state who are still maintaining their masks, like Newark.

Comm. Simmons: Newark and Elizabeth are the main two.

Comm. Hodges: These are all minority districts and that's where the vaccination rates are still low. That's the consideration that I'm making. I do understand your point in terms of parental guidance. But as a health care professional, I can't leave it up to them because of the needs of the entire group. That's what I'm looking at.

Comm. Capers: Like Comm. Arrington, I don't want to miss this historic moment to agree with my colleagues. I think we should wait until we get the data to look at the hospital rates and to see where that's at. Then we can make a decision from there. I do agree with Comm. Hodges. I don't like the optional. Either you do it or you don't. I think until we get the data, we should hold off. I think it's another week. Am I correct?

Comm. Simmons: Yes.

Comm. Capers: Let's wait another week and let's make our decision from there.

Comm. Arrington: Dr. Hodges, to your point, I've been talking to a lot of the teachers and administrators over the past week or so. Some of them are going to keep their masks on. We have teachers out there with health concerns. There are going to be some people who are going to keep their masks on even after we lift the mandate. I do hear what you're saying, Dr. Hodges.

Comm. Hodges: I understand that they will.

Comm. Arrington: I agree with Dania Martinez. We'll see what the data tells us next week.

Comm. Simmons: We will revisit this next week. The mandate will still remain in place after March 7.

Ms. Shafer: We will send something out to all staff so they know that until they hear from us, they will continue to wear the masks. We will keep the partitions as well until we have the vote next week.

Comm. Simmons: Okay.

MOTION TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS LEGAL MATTERS

It was moved by Comm. Redmon, seconded by Comm. Capers that the Board goes into executive session to discuss legal matters. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board went into executive session at 6:48 p.m.

Comm. Hodges: Cheryl, do we have that number of people?

Ms. Williams: Yes. It was 33 viewing.

Comm. Hodges: So, we don't know how many of those were parents or whatever? It would be like 12 or 10?

Ms. Williams: There were 33 viewers.

Comm. Simmons: Is that the live stream?

Ms. Williams: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: That's through the live stream link. If people go to the website and watch, does it capture that number also?

Ms. Williams: I will check with Paul.

Mr. Zaydel: Yes, it does.

Comm. Hodges: So, we're saying there were 33 people from the community who watched this?

Ms. Williams: Yes, 33 logons because you can have more than one person at a location.

Comm. Hodges: I'd appreciate knowing moving forward what that number is each time. Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: It's recorded. Do we have stats or metrics on the number of times that a meeting is viewed after the live stream?

Mr. Zaydel: We would have to check with Paul on that.

Comm. Redmon: It looks like we have five Commissioners on.

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

The Board reconvened the meeting at 9:03 p.m.

Comm. Redmon: I would like to thank Mr. Valentin and his bilingual students at School No. 21 for their booklet that we received yesterday.

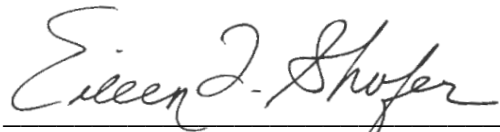
Comm. Simmons: Yes, absolutely.

Comm. Redmon: Thank you guys. The booklet is very nice. Appreciate it.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eileen F. Shafer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, M.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools