

MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET HEARING

May 5, 2021 – 6:00 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. Dania Martinez

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

Absent:

Comm. Jonathan Hodges

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 notice of this meeting:

**Budget Hearing
May 5, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.
Remote - Zoom
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.

REPORT OF THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Comm. Simmons: Before we get started, I just wanted to make a brief comment about our last meeting. I received some emails and some commentary on the Board's behavior at the last meeting, that there were Board members on their phones, eating, or talking during public comments. I don't recall seeing very many Board members whose faces were actually on camera. I do recall one and I will speak with that Board member when time permits. The second thing is that there was some confusion about whether

or not we were going to vote on the reopening of schools. I just wanted the public to understand that when the agenda is posted, if there is an item that is going to be voted upon, that item typically shows up as Resolution Items for a Vote. However, there was an agenda item that said there was going to be Board discussion. What complicated that discussion last week was that the Board is currently in litigation and there has been an unfair labor practice complaint filed against the Board. When we went into executive session, we literally went into executive session to discuss that complaint and nothing more. Although some of that complaint is around reopening schools, that's what we were in executive session for. When we came out of executive session, there were complaints that we were laughing when we came out of executive session. I want people to understand that when we are in executive session, typically there are intense conversations. There was no way for us to know that there were still people waiting for some type of decision. Typically, when we come out of executive session at the end of the meeting everyone is gone. I will take ownership in the fact that we did not address the public. We just adjourned the meeting. So I will apologize to the public for that on behalf of the Board and we won't let that happen again. But I do want people to understand also that we take this seriously. If we come out and we are laughing, it's us trying to lighten the mood because the conversations can be so intense. I think I speak on behalf of all Board members when I say that we pride ourselves on being totally committed to this job, but also not looking like other bodies in the city. I know I'm going to get a lot of phone calls about that. When we fight, we fight behind closed doors. That doesn't mean we don't get along. There are nine people with 18 different personalities. We try to get along in public and do what's best for the children and the district as a whole. Again, I will apologize for any misunderstandings that the public may have perceived. There was no item on the agenda for a vote last week. There was discussion that was complicated by the actual litigation that the district is currently involved in.

Comm. M. Martinez: Mr. President, if I can just echo your sentiments and say that the intent of last week's meeting was simply to discuss the findings. There was never intent to actually vote. For those who were waiting for a vote or a decision, apologies across the Board. Again, it wasn't the intent to mislead anyone. And it certainly wasn't the intent to be laughing and joking when we came out of the meeting. It was a heavy conversation we were having and by the end of it we were a little bit stir crazy, for lack of a better word. We do at times have to try to remind ourselves and bring ourselves down. We were caught in a funny moment when it came across, but there wasn't any intent in any way, shape, or form to belittle the process or to have folks waiting. So, apologies across the Board for that misunderstanding and I just wanted to clear that up. Thank you for doing that, Mr. President.

Comm. Simmons: Thank you for your comments as well.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Ms. Shafer: Thank you, Mr. President. Good evening, Paterson Board of Education members and the Paterson community. I just have a couple of announcements. This week is National Teacher Appreciation Week. In our district, we have some new teachers to the profession, and we also have some seasoned veterans. None of us expected what we have gone through over the past 13 months, but our teachers here in Paterson are the best. They faced these challenges with dedication and professionalism and by doing everything they could to help our students and their families. We know that every time a student gets accepted into college, there are many teachers who worked over many years to help that student achieve success. One thing we'll never forget is that very moment of a teacher's success, but there are many

countless more that are unknown to us. To all our teachers, for all the times you developed virtual lessons and engaged your students, for all the times you gave your students a chance to express themselves, for being there every day for our students during a school year like none other, please accept our deepest and sincere gratitude. Thank you for everything that you do and will continue to do for our students. We had two students from the program of Gifted and Talented make it to the National History Day finals. Those finals are June 9 through June 13. It's a virtual contest and we want to wish them the best. It's Nuha Choudhury and Christina Salazar. Both of them are from the Gifted and Talented Program. This week, under the direction of Director Tamisha McKoy, we kicked off the district College and Career Week. Many of our staff are wearing their alumni apparel. The students are dressing for the occasion as well. We had virtual college tours for our students as one of the activities, and there are many activities that they are participating in. Each day was dedicated to a career field. We had technology, medical, which included health and nursing, education, criminal justice, and legal studies. All of this is going on this entire week in the district for all grade levels. Thank you, Ms. McKoy, for everything that you've done. I do want to give a shout-out to Lizandaa Alburg who is the teacher at the Gifted and Talented Program where these two students are the finalists. We have the COVID-19 vaccines now available to students. It's on our website. If the parents fill out the registration form, then we will gather that information and we'll send it to St. Joseph's Medical Center. They'll be able to get the vaccination at Dr. Hani Awadallah School. For all the parents, it's up on our website. Complete the form and we'll take it from there. St. Joseph's will schedule you for an appointment for your child 16 years of age and older. I just read today that the FDA is going to approve the vaccination for students that are 12 years old and older. Stay tuned and we'll put that information out as well. Last week, the district administration, teachers, some of our parent coordinators, and about 50 of us engaged in a two-day workshop called Courageous Conversations. It's part of the district's initiative to root out systemic racism from our schools, departments, facilities and everywhere in the district by engaging in honest conversations about race, history, white privilege, and many other topics that often don't get talked about. If you remember, this is a long-range plan for us to have a social justice advisory board where it would be a safe place for anyone in the district to report any type of racism or inequity issue and for it to be addressed without any type of retaliation. I certainly want to thank Assistant Superintendent Cicely Warren and Dr. Tyeshia Hilbert, Vice Principal at Dr. Frank Napier School, for working with me in order to bring this Courageous Conversation to the district. This is just the beginning of workshops that we'll have in the district and it will extend to other staff members as well. I just want to say to the parents and to the staff that safety has always been my priority and it will continue to be. I want you to know that we are working on addressing the remediation of the findings in the district from the safety walkthroughs. Our facilities department started on that right after the walkthroughs took place and they have been working steady, even over the weekend, to address those issues. Mr. President, that concludes my report unless you wanted me to introduce Corey.

Comm. Simmons: I just have one more thing to add. I just want the public to be aware that beginning next month with the workshop meeting, the Board meetings will be in a hybrid fashion. The Board members will be physically in 90 Delaware, for those that can make it. I know there are a few Board members who will not. Those Board members will be remote, along with the public and the Superintendent's cabinet. We will begin those meetings. Because of where we are headed, we want to lead by example so we will begin meeting in a hybrid fashion with our workshop meeting.

Comm. Capers: I second that, Mr. President.

Comm. Simmons: Comm. Teague, are you ready to give your report on the findings and school readiness from your committee meeting?

SCHOOL READINESS COMMITTEE REPORT

Comm. Teague: Yes, I want to give the Reader's Digest version. Is that okay? Good evening Paterson parents, colleagues, Superintendent, and administration. Yesterday, we had our initial meeting with the School Readiness Committee. It was recently established, not just for the COVID reopening, but it's going to be an ongoing committee designed to address or receive reports about some of the issues in the schools that are being addressed. Yesterday, we spoke about the difference between making sure that our schools are COVID-ready versus some of the issues that were in the building that have been lingering for a little while. A lot of them have been fixed as well. Here's the thing, folks. There are two separate issues that have been comingled over the past few months. What we need to understand is that although a light fixture might not be working or a doorknob might not turn all the way to the left or right, that's not particularly the same as saying it's unsafe for COVID-related issues. When I went to John F. Kennedy, and my colleagues can verify it with me, that table had to be seven or eight feet long and it was packed with PPE equipment. They had more equipment there than they had at Hackensack Hospital when I went. I think the district has gone above and beyond in terms of making sure that our schools are safe in terms of CDC requirements, social distancing, making sure that there are going to be temperature checks when students and staff enter the buildings, and making sure that throughout the day they are keeping up with what's going on in the building. They also have rooms designated for students who might not be feeling well or who have a temperature that is 100.4 or higher. There are a lot of steps that have been put in place. I get it. It's a very nerve-racking time. Everyone is extremely nervous right now. It's mentally taxing because we have been going through this since March 2020. I get it. I have special needs children so I understand firsthand what we are dealing with mentally. I want to make sure that the community is aware that those are two issues, making sure that the school buildings are safe according to CDC guidelines versus making sure that there may be an issue with a door or an issue with a knob or there's an extra box in the hallway and things like that. We are not negating the importance of any issue. I want to put that on record as well. There's no issue that's too small in our book. However, the focus and the primary goal at this juncture was to make sure that if we walk in those buildings tomorrow, those buildings will be equipped and ready to take on staff and students in a way that will be safe for everyone in this COVID environment that we are still having to deal with. Just a few minutes ago, I think the Superintendent alluded to the fact that there are now vaccines available for students. I also want to point out the fact that today Governor Murphy lifted the restrictions that have been in place for a very long time. On the 19th, I believe that there are even more restrictions being lifted as well. We are trending in the right direction. We don't want to get this mindset that we are okay where we are and we want to stay in the situation we are in. We want to tread the other direction and get to a point where we can get back to some semblance of normalcy and I believe that's what's happening. The district has taken major steps and I don't use that term lightly. They have taken major steps to make sure that our students and staff are going to be safe in those buildings, and even that's going to be a process. It's not going to be everybody pushed into the building at one time. There is a process even for that. I want to make sure that everyone is aware. We are on the ground as Board members. We are holding the district accountable. We are making sure that they are letting us know what's going on and they are. They have been completely open with us. There has been no red herring or hidden agenda. They have been letting us know everything from soup to nuts about what's going on in our buildings, what needed to be rectified, what needed to be fixed, and what needed to be taken care of to

make sure that we are comfortable as Board members. Remember, at the end of the day, we have to report back to you as a community. We needed to be able to be comfortable with the situation and Ms. Shafer and her team has gone above and beyond to make sure that's possible.

Comm. Simmons: Comm. Teague, there were some concerns that the Board members had and there were some pictures floating around. Can you speak about that?

Comm. Teague: Yes. Unfortunately, there were some pictures that were floating around. That's the ironic thing. Folks will call me and say you can't believe everything you see on Facebook. You have to double-check it. This is one of those times as well, folks. There were pictures posted that are not even current. I'll just say that. There were pictures that were posted. Some were current and some were past. It was all mixed in there together to create this pervasive sense that because the floor may have a stain on it, then that means the building is unsafe for our students to enter. Or because a wall has a crayon marker on it, that's means the whole building is unsafe and we don't need to go in. That sends a pervasive sense of worry when in all actuality a lot of those pictures were just posted. They didn't even give us the direct information of their location. They just posted and said take a look at these pictures. See what we mean? The buildings aren't safe. You have to do your homework like you all usually tell me. Make sure you do your homework and don't believe everything you see on Facebook. This is one of those times when you have to take that word to heart because a lot of that took place in this particular instance. It's unfortunate, but it happened. That's one of the reasons we formed the School Readiness Committee, so that we can address those issues with the district and make sure they are taken care of if necessary and that's being done.

Comm. Simmons: Thank you, sir. Madam Superintendent, we can move right ahead to the budget presentation.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Ms. Shafer: At this time, I'm going to introduce our Business Administrator, Mr. Richard Matthews. I want to thank everyone including our principals, central office staff, and his budget team who put together this year's budget.

Mr. Richard Matthews: Thank you, Ms. Shafer. I'm pulling up my presentation. Good evening, Commissioners, students, parents, staff, and Paterson community. Tonight, I'm going to be presenting the 2021-2022 budget for Paterson Public Schools. The total operating budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year is \$552,597,618. I would also like to mention that this budget reflects no reduction in personnel. This budget actually reflects additional staffing and investments in facilities, technology, reading specialists, and nursing supervision. Goals of the budgeting process - the budget team and administration want to make sure every school can operate and have the necessary funding and tools to operate their schools. We have provided a budget that is equitable and based on enrollment in school demographics. You will see slides later that break down school allocation. When you see schools with higher numbers in allocation, it reflects the enrollment numbers and the school demographics. For instance, regular education, special education, bilingual are things that we've talked about over the last couple of years that we will be putting into the budget going forward. Finally, we want to just make sure that we increase our fund balance and deal with our structural deficit. 2021-2022 major priorities - year to year, priorities change. With the pandemic, these are the areas that we focused on. We not only have had a learning loss, but a widening learning gap for kids in districts such as ours. There are many interventions built into

this budget to address student learning loss. We want to make sure that our schools are clean, and I appreciate Comm. Teague's report. We also want to make sure that everybody is safe in the environment and that we can move forward and provide the kids with the education that they deserve. These are items that we have all been familiar with over the past couple of years - salaries, health benefits, special education, transportation, and facilities. I'm going to show you a slide later on that's going to give you a breakdown on what the cost impact is of these key cost drivers. Salaries are the big blue piece on the pie chart, \$249 million. Typically, every two weeks we are doing \$12 million in payroll. Health benefits are \$85 million. That is a net number, not a gross number. Out-of-district tuition is \$18.4 million, transportation is \$17 million, facilities budget is \$23 million, and security is \$3.4 million. I might want to mention that the security number of \$3.4 million is lower than typical in the operating budget, but there's an additional \$2 million in the ESSER grant that's covering the rest of that security budget. You have \$87 million for charter schools and \$20 million for PCTI. These cost drivers represent over \$500 million on a budget of \$552 million. Here's the chart trend analysis of charter schools over the last six years. As stated previously, charter school numbers are 5,470 kids and the budgeted number for this year is \$87 million. In this next slide, there's a lot of red but it's trending in the right direction. We were well over \$100 million last year in adequacy. That means the amount of money we invest as a tax levy in state aid, our total budgeted adequacy for 2021-2022 is \$492 million. What the state says it takes to operate is \$588 million. I will talk about that number in the next slide regarding S-2. Right now, as far as revenues, we are \$95 million below where we need to be for fully funding the district and the staff. This gap has closed in the last couple of years, and I'll speak a little bit about this slide here, which is S-2. It is basically saying that in the year 2025, districts like Paterson that have been underfunded for the prior eight to ten years, in fiscal year 2025 we'll be fully funded. The adequacy number will continue to drop as we continue to make investments in our kids as a local entity in Paterson Public Schools. There's light at the end of the tunnel. You are not hearing as much talk about the fiscal cliff anymore and that's good news. We are definitely moving in the right direction. A little bit about taxes and adequacies. Basically, a district is increasing taxes by 2%. Under the new law, we are allowed to tax up to our adequacy number. Local fair share is an important piece of this whole adequacy number and raising your taxes and investing in the kids year-to-year is a very important thing. This is a contributing factor to getting to full adequacy and we've done our part over the last couple of years in making that investment for our students. I would like to thank the Board of Education for giving us that support and that vote of confidence. For fiscal year 2021-2022, the actual homeowner impact as far as an increase on a per-day basis is 43 cents on a home valued at \$190,000. This is an investment that we are making into our kids, and we really appreciate that confidence and support you are giving to us. For 2021-2022, there are a couple of things regarding budget highlights. We got \$29 million in additional state aid and that's great. We have equity in funding for all students. As mentioned to you earlier, we are allocating money to schools based on the school's demographics - regular education, special education, and bilingual. You'll see in the later slides that there are some schools that get more money. That's how we do equitable funding because we are doing it based on the student enrollment and what the population looks like. Good news - no reduction in human capital. Every year we are coming to you guys saying we have to make cuts. It just feels very good to be able to produce a balanced budget and we are not talking about laying off staff and increasing class size. We have also increased key personnel. We closed the digital divide this year and we have to now be able to support these devices in the district. There's a lot of work regarding setting computers up, getting them prepared, and getting them ready. There's a lot of maintenance, repair, and upkeep that has to go on. We had to staff up that department so they can handle the demands that are being placed on them. Obviously, with the COVID environment that

we are in, we've beefed up our nursing supervision staff. Facilities - there are still great demands that are being placed on that facilities staff and they are running really hard almost every day. They are working many weekends and many nights. I'm there with them. I see what's going on. We have to continue to invest in that department for us to be able to keep providing a safe environment for our students and staff and keeping the buildings healthy and clean. The goal is to have healthy buildings and that's one of the things that we'll talk about down the road in future meetings. The facilities staff is doing a bang-up job down there and we have to continue to invest in that department. We are going to be adding additional science labs and technology for all staff and students. Those are some of the key budget highlights this year and this allows us to address those major priorities. This slide is a breakdown of our revenues in terms of a bar chart. You get to see what we are doing as far as tax levy. \$61 million comes to the district from the City of Paterson's investment into students and staff. State is \$476 million, there's \$17 million from federal sources, and there's \$8 million from other sources. There's \$5 million in miscellaneous, such as extraordinary aid. Expenditure side here - this is a year-to-year change. As you see, salaries and benefits are \$319 million. Remember, the other slide showed \$249 million, but this now salaries plus benefits. That's why it's \$319 million. The charter school number is there and \$12 million is school based. The \$133 is central office non-salary, which is transportation, security, and custodial. That's all baked into that central office non-salary number, which is now \$133 million. The net expenditures are \$552,597,618, which is the same as our revenues year-to-year. That number has changed 6.63%. This is a bar chart of the prior, which is just a repeat. You can see it in a graph from. This here is a school allocation by category. What you see here is school salaries are at \$199 million. Large equipment is at \$3.3 million. You see other non-salary. That number includes textbooks, travel, field trips, transportation, and purchase services. All that stuff is in that category. That's how the school numbers are broken out. The rest of these slides are pretty much every school, what the allocation is for the year, and their percent to the total school-based budget. I'm just basically giving the number by school. As you see, School No. 1 gets \$3 million and School No. 2 gets \$7 million. Remember, that number is based on the enrollment and demographic. Every school is not the same, but it's equitable funding based on the demographics. That's something that three years ago we said we were going to do and this is the third year of providing equitable funding by school. This is just giving you the school number and what they are getting on a per-school basis. It's just that simple. I was told to keep this brief and now I'm open for questions.

Comm. Capers: Thank you for the presentation, Mr. Matthews. You said the highlights are facilities, technology, and nursing. Is that all due to the COVID money we received? Or is that money we budgeted for and put into the different areas?

Mr. Matthews: This is non-COVID money. This is money that comes from the state every year. We received \$29.4 million from the state. This has nothing to do with COVID. That's in a separate category. That's not really part of this budget. This is all total operating local money. COVID money is in Fund 20 and those are different categories that have different restrictions on how the money gets spent. This is not COVID money. This is all local funding from the state, from the investment in the City of Paterson, using our reserves and miscellaneous revenue, and those items. Nothing here is COVID money.

Comm. Capers: If this is not COVID money, the upgrades that we are doing to facilities and technology, is it sustainable? Do we have to cut nursing and technology come next budget year? Is this a sustainable budget? We did this other years when we had all

these increases and then the following year the state cut us and we had to cut all these different programs. Is this sustainable?

Mr. Matthews: We believe that S-2 will fully fund us by the year 2025 and we will continue to invest into our kids. As long as we can maintain our revenues and cost controls, it's sustainable.

Comm. Capers: Are we on track?

Mr. Matthews: We are trending in the right direction.

Comm. Capers: The fund balance you were talking about, what's that amount?

Mr. Matthews: We ended the year at 2%, which is what the statute requires. It actually has changed and they are asking us to get to 4%. We have done some spending freezes and some other things to cost down so that we can get to the 4%. We ended last year about 2.1% and this year we are looking at 4% as a fund balance. I'm going to give that report at the Board meeting on May 19.

Comm. Capers: The dollar amount?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, I do my final fund balance projection at the last meeting in May.

Comm. Capers: Can you send the Board a copy of the whole school-based presentation as well?

Comm. Simmons: This entire presentation was sent to the entire Board.

Comm. Capers: I didn't see it. Sorry.

Comm. Arrington: Thank you for the excellent presentation, Mr. Matthews. I guess this is a request to the Superintendent and Mr. Matthews. Is it possible to get a breakdown of the central office non-salary? I would just like to get a better understanding of what that \$133 million consists of. Is that possible?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Arrington: Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND HEARING ON THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

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

Comm. Simmons: Just to remind speakers that you will have two minutes to speak. Once your two minutes are up, Boris will disconnect you nicely. So let's be mindful of our time to make sure we get our points across.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Thank you, Boris. Good evening, Mr. President, Board, Madam Superintendent, staff, and community. Mr. President, thank you for addressing the concerns expressed by members of the public and for your apology to those who were harmed, real or perceived. In recognition of National Teachers Week, I want to thank all

our teachers for everything that you do. It has been a very challenging year and I want you to know that Paterson Education Fund appreciates your efforts. Congratulations to Ms. Alburg and to the students who were honored and named in Ms. Shafer's report. I encourage you to keep up the good work. Ms. Shafer, thank you and your staff for attending to the issues that were found on the walkthrough. Although they may not all have been COVID related, they did raise some health and safety concerns and so I appreciate your attention. I look forward to our children and our staff returning to buildings that are all around safe regardless of COVID pandemic. My last comment is to you, Mr. Matthews and your staff. We are looking at an increased budget of \$11 million. This is more money to spend than we've had in a very long time, probably in history, except for the time we had the makeup money. Thank you for presenting this and I look forward to increased outcomes and increased well-being for our students and the adults who serve them. Thank you.

Ms. Jillian Farrad: Hello and good evening everybody. I would like to start off by saying thank you to all the teachers for all your continued hard work. Has there ever been any plan for special needs children to get in-person education during these times? I have two special needs children who are suffering and having a very hard time learning from home. My daughter has gone completely backwards. She is not even talking anymore. If this is something that can be discussed, if special needs children can go back even if it's for a couple days a week for a couple of hours just to get some kind of in-person education, I think it would be beneficial. This past year it's been detrimental to them. It's very upsetting that all the students have to go through this. That's my main concern right now. I think that a lot of parents can relate. That's my concern and my question. Thank you.

Ms. Mercedes Davidson: Good evening. A picture is worth a thousand words. There are no more impactful words than the pictures that are available. We have all seen them. Adequate facilities are important for the safe running of schools. To say that a doorknob is not good or a crayon is oversimplifying the matter. Please, not even the smallest detail should be taken for granted. We don't know what impact they will have in a COVID environment. We are not ready. Keep that in mind. Thank you very much.

Ms. Greta Mills: Hello. I'm Greta Mills. Happy Cinco De Mayo to everyone and I want to say shout out to all the teachers out there. Please don't downplay the issues with the windows at School No. 26. The windows do not open high enough to get the air, especially if we're not having fans and air conditioners. If you are not willing to sit in that classroom with me when it's hot and having sweat coming down your face and your back, don't downplay that because it's not a good feeling to be in a hot classroom. That sick room was 100 degrees. That's very serious. The screens in our buildings were torn, missing, and had no grids on there. With that little 2.5 inches, stuff can be thrown out the window and has been thrown out the window, and I've said that before. Those things are not minute and having air is very important. I've been saying for years how important it is to be in an environment where you can breathe. Kids have issues with asthma and stuff like that. It's not good to be in a hot classroom like that. Those things are very important to me and to my students. I'm pretty sure a lot of parents will let you know that. There are kids that have passed out in my classroom. My room gets very hot with no air. Ms. Shafer, can you send us something with some guidance on the attendance when we have students who haven't been to school for 100 days, 90 days, or 140 days. What is going to be the policy? What is going to happen? We need some guidance on that.

Ms. Monifa Mears-Greer: Good evening, Board Commissioners and Ms. Shafer. Thank you so very much for allowing me to speak. I'm speaking in reference to the reopening

of the schools and I just have one suggestion. We happen to have a heating unit in our school that we were told can produce heat and air. For years it has not occurred. We are just trying to understand why we are unable to have air. We are in a COVID pandemic and unfortunately we are unable to breathe in the classrooms. Our classrooms are extremely hot during the months of September, October, April, May, and June. If we were to return in June, it's going to be extremely hot for us. We have technology, we have face masks on, and the motions of moving about to do our work is going to be extremely difficult for us to move on and really learn to the best of our ability. I'm just asking if there is a way we can have the air circulate through using those heating vents. Thank you so much for allowing me to speak.

Ms. Nandi Nelson: Good evening, everyone. My name is Nandi Nelson and I am the founder and owner of Social Behavior Learning Solutions. I have nearly a decade of industry experience in various settings and capacities having had the pleasure of providing services to individuals with special needs as a social worker and behavior analyst. My experience also includes international and domestic teaching, speaking, and consulting experience. The need for quality services coupled with my passion for working with special needs individuals inspired me to create Social Behavior Learning Solutions four years ago. At Social Behavior Learning Solutions, we currently provide ABA therapy, social skills routes, parent training, and behavior intervention services to children and adolescents in the home and clinic day setting. I am very proud of the work that we do and find it so rewarding and remarkable to see my clients meet their full potential when provided with the right tools to succeed. I believe we'd all agree that the impact that COVID-19 has had on our nation puts children with special needs at great risk for regression. After speaking with Comm. Teague, I'm thrilled to know that your district is as passionate as I am about helping special needs individuals and continuing to work with these individuals to prevent regression. I would love to learn more about your objectives and find a way to work with the Paterson School District to support your goals toward furthering the development of children with special needs. I strongly believe that services my company offers can support your initiatives and I have a few ideas that I would love to discuss at the appropriate time. One idea I would like to explore in particular is offering a summer program with your school district that provides social skills groups, behavior intervention support, and parent training. I would appreciate the opportunity to share my services with your district and I'm thankful for your consideration. I look forward to continuing our discussion and answering any questions you may have. Thank you again for the opportunity and if there are no questions, I hope that you all have a wonderful evening.

Comm. Simmons: Boris, before you call the next speaker, is the speaker before Ms. Nelson still on the line?

Mr. Zaydel: The speaker before Ms. Nelson was Ms. Mears-Geer, yes.

Comm. Simmons: We just need to know which school she was referring to.

Ms. Mears-Greer: I'm from School No. 26.

Ms. Shaye Brown: Good evening, Superintendent Shafer as well as Commissioners. I'm going to keep this brief. I'm beyond words of how on edge I am about what to do with my children. I have been calling in almost every meeting. I am a teacher. I'm also a mother of a seven-year-old with autism and a ten-year-old daughter. I'm on edge because you guys are not giving us a date of return. I feel like we are in limbo. I want to come back. I'm a special education teacher and I love teaching. But I'm also a parent and that is my primary role. I wrote to Superintendent Shafer as well as Mr.

Rojas. I received a reply email from Ms. Gonzalez. My son is supposed to be in Cohort A, which would be on Monday and Wednesdays. Tuesday, Thursdays, and Friday I will not have coverage. I'm a single mom. I'm head of my own household and to tell me that I will have to take an unpaid leave, you are now affecting my life, my kid's life, and my ability to take care of myself and my children to have a home. To tell me that I would just get an unpaid leave upon return to school because I'm asking to work remotely three days a week, we need to be a part of the conversation. I work hard just like every other teacher in this district. I want to give a shout-out to Dale Avenue staff, Ms. Caitlyn, Ms. Santa, Ms. Lana, and Ms. Byrne. The staff there has been amazing with my son. But to put me in this position and tell me to find daycare, you cannot just find daycare for children with special needs. I totally empathize with the first parent that spoke. I can understand that. Please understand what you are asking of us. Thank you.

Ms. Nikki Baker: Good evening, Board members, Superintendent Shafer, cabinet, community, teachers, and staff. I echo all the callers on the issues of the school building again. Our working conditions are our students' conditions. I empathize with Ms. Brown and the parents because I also went through that before my children were grown. Kudos to that! What I didn't get last time was a moment of silence for our beloved colleague who passed away untimely. I'm going to ask if the members of the Board and cabinet will do that for Ms. Juana Figueroa. She passed away peacefully at her home with family and friends surrounding her on April 25. In that last Board meeting, I asked for a moment of silence and it was a big disarray. Thank you for the apologies, but it was not a good look. Ms. Figueroa leaves her beloved daughter, Tanya, and her family, friends, and colleagues. A funeral service has been posted by our PEA page and through friends and colleagues who were close to Ms. Figueroa. Anyone who knew her knew how dedicated she was to the end to her students, her daughter, her family, and everyone around her. Any time you spoke with her, she had a smile. She was always talking about her students and I know this personally before the pandemic when we were able to meet up and see each other. We don't want to do her family, our colleagues, or her memory a disservice. She was a special education teacher. Even though she's an assistant, we still teach and we have passions for our children.

It was moved by Comm. M. Martinez, seconded by Comm. Capers that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be closed.

Comm. Redmon: Are we going to do the moment of silence?

Comm. Simmons: Yes, I was going to do it after we close public portion.

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

Comm. Simmons: Board members and staff, if you would join me in a moment of silence for the passing of Ms. Figueroa.

Moment of Silence

RESOLUTION FOR A VOTE:

Resolution No. 1

WHEREAS, the Paterson Board of Education ("Board") previously authorized the Superintendent to analyze the science and data to continue remote learning during the 2020-2021 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined that PreK-12 schools can safely reopen for staff and remain open if they strictly implement prevention strategies that include universal and correct use of masks and physical distancing, handwashing and respiratory etiquette, routine cleaning and sanitizing, air quality monitoring, and contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine; and

WHEREAS, the District has installed air purifiers in all classrooms and offices; and

WHEREAS, in addition to implementing these strategies, the District has made vaccinations available to all employees and students 16 years and older; and

WHEREAS, the District has also designated a medial sick room, and established daily health screening requirements and temperature checks; and

WHEREAS, the District proposes to reopen schools for all staff to report in person on Tuesday, June 1, 2021, as per their contractual time, following the current schedule Monday through Thursday, with Fridays being remote, and self-contained special education students grades PreK-12 and newcomer students from New Roberto Clemente School and School No. 15 returning to in-person instruction on June 8, 2021, from 8:20 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; and

WHEREAS, this schedule allows for all staff to become acclimated to the new normal in a school setting; and

WHEREAS, the District has several layers of PPE protection: masks, double masks, face shields, student partitions, teacher/staff partitions, air purifiers, air scrubbers, thermal scanners, wall mounted hand sanitizer dispensers, and spray disinfectants in all classrooms; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education approves the recommendation of the district administration to reopen schools for staff to report in person starting June 1, 2021, Monday through Thursday, Fridays remote, and self-contained special education students, grades PreK-12, and newcomer students from New Roberto Clemente School and School No. 15 returning to in-person instruction on June 8, 2021, from 8:20 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., adhering to the implementation of COVID-19 prevention strategies.

It was moved by Comm. M. Martinez, seconded by Comm. Teague that Resolution No. 1 be adopted.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Madam Superintendent, are you going to put something out on how this is going to be shared with staff and the community as parents try to get back in the swing of things?

Ms. Shafer: Once the vote is taken, we have letters going out to the principals, staff, and parents. Then we will be having community forums. The letters will go out tonight as well as a press release.

Comm. Capers: Virtual community forums?

Ms. Shafer: Yes, virtual community forums.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I'm assuming the letters are going to be bilingual, correct?

Ms. Shafer: Yes.

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

**Paterson Board of Education
Standing Abstentions**

Comm. Arrington

- Self
- Family

Comm. Capers

- Self
- 4th and Inches
- Westside Park Group
- Insight
- Jersey Kids

Comm. Castillo-Cruz

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Transportation
- Downtown Special Improvement District
- Celebrate Paterson

Comm. Hodges

- Self
- City of Paterson

Comm. Dania Martinez

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

Comm. Manuel Martinez

- Self

Comm. Redmon

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

Comm. Simmons

- Self
- Family

Comm. Teague

- Self
- YMCA

OTHER BUSINESS

Comm. Simmons: Does anyone have anything to add for the good and the welfare before we proceed to close?

Comm. Teague: I did hear some parents and teachers on the line with special needs children. I want to make you aware that I am a Board member and a parent of special needs children. It's been extremely difficult trying to navigate as well. But as I've said before, and I stand by it, the district has gone above and beyond. I'm not just saying this. I actually went with them and I've seen the process as we all have as Board members. Rest assured, despite what you might hear in the street, the district has gone above and beyond. Go to some other districts. I know some districts right now that haven't given their teachers anything at all. Forget about PPE equipment. Nothing at all, period! When you look at what our school district has accomplished in the few months that they had to prepare compared to some other districts, it's the difference between night and day.

Comm. Simmons: I just want to clarify the resolution item. Madam Superintendent can speak to it as well. The return to school is for all staff, not just staff for special needs students.

Ms. Shafer: We have it all explained in the resolution and in the letter. It is for all staff starting on June 1. It is full days for staff and for students it's 8:20 to 1:30. The students coming in are self-contained special education students, pre-K to 12, and our newcomer students at the New Roberto Clemente School and School No. 15.

Comm. Capers: If other students want to come back, let's say sixth graders, will they have the option for a hybrid? If regular education students or seniors that want to get together at a hybrid level since it's their last year in school so they can get back to some type of normalcy? What is the prom and graduation plan as well?

Ms. Shafer: Let me answer the first one. At this time, we are phasing in. We are having the teachers come in for a full week. We have Memorial Day in there. That's why teachers are coming in on Tuesday, June 1 and they will come in for five days. Students will come in on the 8th and that will be a hybrid. The next phase is our summer school program which will be open to all K-5 students in-person. We are also going to take a look at eighth graders and seniors in order for them to be able to graduate. As far as the prom goes, we will not be having proms. We are in discussion about having some other type of a celebration for the seniors. We are just starting to work things out and we will be able to present it to you at another time. Graduation will be outdoors for the high school students and for eighth graders, where they can. When it can't, it will be virtual and we have asked principals to have conversations with the parents before decisions are made.

Comm. Capers: The answer is no to a hybrid level for seniors, eighth graders, or regular education?

Comm. Simmons: Yes.

Comm. M. Martinez: I was on the fence as to whether or not I wanted to say something this evening regarding our vote. I'm going to be brief, tactful, and polite. I wouldn't respect myself moving forward if I didn't say what I have been feeling for quite some time. We expect pushback coming after what happened tonight. That comes with it and that's somewhat expected. But I do want to go on the record as saying this district has gone beyond above and beyond in preparing our buildings to ensure that they are safe for our young people, for our staff, for the families, and for everyone involved. I can't overstate that enough. We've heard a lot of concerns about the safety and welfare of our students. Our students have been suffering because they haven't been able to get back into our buildings and into a sense of normal learning, keeping into consideration the times that we are living in. I don't want to make blanket statements and have this apply to all of our staff members. Our teachers do go above and beyond and they work hard. But it's unfortunate that the small percentage of teachers who have been fighting so hard to stay remote have been the voices that have been heard the most and have had the most impact in the decisions that have been made not by us, but by folks who represent them. Again, this is me talking. If anyone takes issue, which I'm sure they will, please direct them at me. Don't direct this at anyone else other than me. I'll take that. Our teachers should have been back in the buildings a long time ago, simple and plain. What our teachers do when they are not on the clock is their prerogative. They can do that. I know as a matter of fact, you know as a matter of fact, we all know as a matter of fact, that the majority of our teachers have been living their lives safely. Some of them have been getting on planes, going on vacations, going to restaurants, malls, stores, and families. They are living their lives. That's not to sound judgmental. You can do what you choose to do on your time. But to imply for one second that you are not able to come into a place of work to teach our children and that it's unsafe to come into an empty building and do what you are supposed to do when this district has gone above and beyond is shameful. That's not everyone. I'm not making a blanket statement. That is not everyone. For the small percentage of teachers who voiced those opinions and the folks who took those opinions and blew them up it's sad. To those teachers who wanted to get back in the building for all this time, I applaud you. We hear it. We know that the teachers have been wanting to come back for quite some time and it's a shame. No one is judging what you do outside of your school time. That's your life and you choose to do it. But to imply for one second that we are putting you in an unsafe position by asking you to come to work is ridiculous. You go to malls, hop on planes, live your lives, and do everything that you can. But to come back to work we are jeopardizing your lives and your safety. Going to malls, restaurants, living your life and hopping on planes is not? But you can't come to work? I'll stop there. I thank the teachers in advance for their dedication, for what they've done, and what they will do. Have a good evening.

Comm. Simmons: On that note, I will say Happy Teacher Appreciation Week to all the hardworking teachers.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 p.m.