

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

December 14, 2020 – 5:50 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. Oshin Castillo-Cruz  
Comm. Jonathan Hodges

Comm. Manuel Martinez, Vice President  
Comm. Nakima Redmon

Absent:

Comm. Joel Ramirez  
Comm. Corey Teague

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:

**Special Meeting  
December 14, 2020 at 5:30 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.

Comm. Simmons: We will jump right into it. Please pardon our tardiness. As the Superintendent stated, we were in a fiscal committee meeting, but we are here now. Madam Superintendent, we can jump right into it.

**DISCUSSION ON COST SAVINGS STRATEGIES**

Ms. Shafer: Thank you, Mr. President. Good evening, Board members. I hope everyone is doing well. If you remember back last year when we were developing the

budget for the 2020-2021 school year, we had a cost savings strategy meeting in February. At that time, we thought that was probably a little too late to start looking at cost saving strategies and so we moved it up to tonight. What you are going to hear tonight is about nine different cost saving strategies that we are looking at. Mr. Matthews is going to go over the cost savings for this year. I want to just remind everyone that in August we were hit with a \$16 million budget shortfall because of COVID and because the state was having some fiscal difficulties as well. That plays into the cost savings this year and I think once we remind you about it, you'll all remember what we did. We have about nine cost saving strategies to present to you tonight. Some of them have specific dollar amounts. Others are still in the process of being researched and so we didn't want to give you a number that wasn't accurate. Once we go through our cost saving strategies, we certainly want to hear feedback from you on them, but also any ideas that you may have as it relates to a cost saving strategy which could help us build our budget. On Wednesday night, you are going to hear about our budget gap and what it looks like right now. These are all preliminary numbers. Right now, we are looking at \$50 million. That is very preliminary and very conservative at this point and that's if everything remains the same. It does not take into account any additional state aid, anything additional from the federal government, or any type of COVID money coming in. That is just with everything remaining the same from the state and the federal government. I'm going to ask Deputy Peron to start off with the High School Restructuring and then we'll go down the list. If at any point a Board member wants to ask a question, we'll be more than happy to answer those questions.

Ms. Peron: Thank you, Ms. Shafer. The strategy is for High School Restructuring. As I had reported out at the Board workshop and at the Instruction and Program meeting, the first phase of High School Restructuring deals with the reorganization of the administrators. The current plan, how we're going to work on this now, is that we are going to consolidate administrators, specifically the principalship, at each of the two comprehensive sites, Eastside High School and John F. Kennedy High School, and also at the International building. We are looking to consolidate administrators and that would be approximately five positions in which there would be a cost savings for the salaries and benefits. An approximate value is about \$500,000, but that is just a very rough approximate value. When all is said and done, when we transfer and reorganize administrators we would have to be specific with each of the salaries and benefit costs and then we would have a more solid figure to report to you. As of now, the current plan in place would be reassigning high school principals and then taking a look at what that would end up on the bottom line for salaries and benefits. Part two of High School Restructuring has to do with the curricular and the programmatic end of it. If we would have any cost savings there, I'm not sure how that would look. We haven't really gotten into that because we also have to take into account any needs for facility restructuring or anything that we would have to do to the physical space at the schools in accordance with the programs that wind up being created. Preliminarily, \$500,000 is the total cost savings that I will report out of High School Restructuring. Are there any questions? Thank you.

Mr. Richard Matthews: Good evening, Commissioners. We are working on all of our leases. We have a bunch of different properties that have been on long-term leases. We are spending over \$5 million a year on leases. One of the things that I am looking at is working with some owners who are willing to sell their properties. We've met with a few of those owners. Based on what's happening right now in the financing world where you can get rates around 2.4% or 2.5%, we have annual costs in properties that exceed over \$2 million. We're gathering the right amount of data regarding getting information on properties in terms of their most recent appraised values and working with some

owners who are willing to sell their properties to Paterson Public Schools. In terms of a leasing strategy, it's more long-term. It is not something that is just for one budget cycle. It's obviously going to be the term for the lease that we have to do financing through. These numbers are going to be an annual recurring savings that we could pump into other programmatic things. In terms of what I'm putting forth as an opportunity for us to save money for the next fiscal year, it's about \$1.4 million on some properties that I feel we could definitely push through. My challenge is going to be the timing of it in terms of getting financing and getting a close date in time for the 2021-2022 budget. Some of these conversations and some of these things have been moved down the road a little bit. I'm going to do all that I can to nudge this thing across the finish line for 2021-2022. The other item that I have as a strategy, maybe I can share a screen with you and let me talk through it for a second. We were hit with a \$16.3 million state aid reduction. We looked at some different options in terms of how we balance our budget being that we were hit with a \$16.3 million reduction. We chose to go the non-salary route, not affecting staff, laying off people or furloughing people or anything like that. We had a couple of categories. One was the charter schools. The charter school number was \$75 million. The state came in and on their own they reduced the contribution for tuition to charter schools by \$2.4 million. Then we had our contract with Pritchard. Based on the 74 virtual days we had already baked in Fridays as virtual, we were able to reduce their budget by \$2.2 million so that new budget number is now \$7.9 million. We did the same thing with security on the virtual days. The budget was reduced in security by \$2.4 million so their new budget now is \$4.3 million. With transportation, we did a similar thing. That's how we got to the \$16.3 million to balance out the budget. Up until 74 days, it's not a true savings. It's just the budget is now being reconciled and the budget is being matched. Once we reach day 75, and our average daily cost for non-salary is about \$180,000, after day 74 then we start to have excess surplus or money that can go to fund balance. Not until we exhaust those 74 days do we save money. School had been closed since September. We are in day 65 or 66. Again, once we reach the 74 days, then we start to recoup. I must say that in the COVID environment there are some items that we are spending more money on. The \$16.3 million, we got there through budget reduction and through non-salary. Had we impacted our staff and reduced staff to balance out the budget, on day one those items in non-salary would be incremental savings. Being that we did it through the virtual days, that doesn't really start to kick in until we hit day 75. That's it regarding my lease purchase and the built-in remote day. Are there any questions?

Comm. Arrington: What are the chances that we'll be able to buy these buildings for the 2020-2021 budget?

Mr. Matthews: As I said earlier, we are looking at all of our leases. We've had active conversations strongly with two of them. I would not say that across the board we are going to be able to do something in 2021-2022. I feel confident that one will fall and possibly two.

Comm. Arrington: You know my concern. I just feel like that rental rate is triple or quadruple to what we are paying in some of the other comparable buildings.

Mr. Matthews: We are paying \$1.2 million in that building. That guy has met with myself and Ms. Shafer on a couple different occasions and he's really hot to trot. We just got the updated appraisal today. We are moving forward with it. I feel the best about that one.

Comm. Arrington: Thank you, Mr. Matthews.

Comm. Hodges: Mr. Matthews, 75 days starting from when and ending when?

Mr. Matthews: Starting from the first day of school in September.

Comm. Hodges: This past September?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Hodges: When will that end?

Mr. Matthews: Around January 10 or January 12. Something like that. I don't have the exact drop-dead date. It's around mid-January. I have to look at my calendar and count them off again.

Comm. Simmons: Does that exclude any days that we would normally be closed for holidays?

Mr. Matthews: It's school days. Those are the days that we have those services - security, transportation, facilities, Pritchard. Those are the days that non-salary has been excluded from regular day-to-day operations.

Ms. Shafer: To answer the question differently, any holidays would have already been excluded in the number. What Leon is saying is that if we have 20 school days in September, which eventually makes up 180, then it's only those 20 that he would be counting for that particular month. The holidays have been excluded already.

Mr. Matthews: Right. One more item I had was on a remote day as part of a strategy. I realize the kids have definitely missed being in school and in-person learning and there's definitely a loss of learning with kids being remote. In terms of a strategy, we might be able to bake in some days into the 2021-2022 budget. That's where I'm giving \$175,000 per day as a strategy. It all depends on how we want to do the year next year. We may not want to do remote days. We don't know what the world is going to look like. In terms of a strategy, we do have a remote day as something to look at regarding the 2021-2022 budget. For instance, if we were to do 41 days at \$175,000 a day, that's about \$7 million we would save. If we were to do every Friday, everything was back to normal, everyone had the vaccine, everyone was 100% ready to come back and we said we don't want to impact staff because maybe we are proficient at the remote and we choose to do it as a strategy, that's something we would have to discuss further with your approval. That's something to put on the table to say we are looking at as an option.

Comm. Simmons: I like that idea, especially if it's going to be planned out and put in the calendar. Like you said, if it's something like remote Fridays at least we'll know what those days are.

Mr. Matthews: That's it for me. I'm working with Lance. I know Lance is on the call regarding the centralized purchasing for school supplies. Lance, you may want to jump in. We've done a lot. We don't have a number to attach to it yet because there are still some things that we have to put together before we can assign a value to what that number is going to be. Lance, do you want to jump in and talk about the centralized purchasing and what we're looking to do?

Mr. Lance Gaines: Good evening. This strategy was to look at how we could possibly achieve a cost savings by centralizing the purchasing function. Currently, schools and

departments are given a budget allocation. They do their own ordering of supplies and supplies are shipped direct. This strategy is looking at if we housed the purchasing function in one central location, a central office, we standardized various lists of supplies, school supplies, would we be able to achieve a cost savings by monitoring inventory, tracking the inventory, and assigning certain cap thresholds to certain schools based upon some sort of historical value of what they normally purchase. The only way we are looking at achieving a cost savings is to implement some sort of an inventory management system where we will be able to track by location who is ordering what, who's buying what, and where the supplies are going. If that's not practical, we are looking at possibly leaving the function as it is now and possibly putting caps on the various locations spending at different times of the year. For instance, a school would be allocated their budget and they would only be able to order up to maybe 25% or 30% of their supply line from the months of May through October. Then we will reassess their budgets at that time and maybe push up their thresholds at a later time. It's something we've identified, roughly \$2 million in supplies throughout the whole district. At this time, we don't know how much we could save by switching to a centralized purchasing model. Right now, we are looking at what that looks like and what we would need in terms of an inventory management system and staffing to deliver supplies if we house those supplies at the warehouse. We are at the very beginning stages and we are looking forward to having some further information for you as we move along. Are there any questions?

Comm. Arrington: Thank you for the update, Lance. I'm just using pencils as an example. If somebody orders a pencil from School No. 10 and somebody orders a pencil from School No. 21, are they paying the same negotiated rate? Are they ordering it from the same vendor or different vendors? I'm kind of confused when you say centralized. UPS is a big company. I order my supplies through the same system as somebody in California for a negotiated rate through CDW. Is each school paying a different rate for same item?

Mr. Gaines: That's a great question. Our negotiated rate is already centrally negotiated. We set up these master contracts with our various suppliers. School A and School B, in essence, are paying the same price. However, there's no way for us to track excess inventory, over-usage, or overspending. That's what this strategy is really designed at. Let's say one of our main suppliers is W.B. Mason. Each school is going to pay the same price. We just have no idea what schools are ordering, how many pencils, are the pencils really needed and things like that. I think the goal of this strategy and discussing it with the business administrator is if there was a way we could bring all of that into one location, monitor that inventory, and then release it out to the schools as needed. We may be able to achieve some sort of a savings by not overspending or overusing.

Comm. Arrington: Do we have any trends on all of the schools as far as their supplies and when they exceed that? You're saying they're spending within their budget. We just don't know if they really need all of these items they are buying.

Mr. Gaines: Correct.

Mr. Matthews: That's true. Let me just jump in real quick. We don't allow overspending. We want to be able to manage their spending. For instance, some schools would start to order for the following fiscal year in May. We want them to have their supplies in. We would push them to get their orders out. Some schools will look at last year's numbers and just spend up to the number. We want to be able to say School No. 1 can only spend up to 25% through October and move their percentages up as

they go along. Maybe by the time we get to March or April, you are still fully stocked in your supplies and you don't have to order any more. We don't want to have everybody order for the year in May, June, and July. We want to control that spending and we're looking at having the spend come through purchasing, as opposed to every school ordering pencils, but they might go to Staples and Mason and School Specialty. Purchasing will have the best price. There are some schools that have the same opportunity to spend but they might spend another nickel more. Mason has paper cheaper than Office Depot. We're still ordering paper and we still need to negotiate a price, but maybe we'll order all the paper from Mason, all the pencils from School Specialty, and all of the erasers from Office Depot. By centralizing that, we can get the best price. They all have the opportunity to get good pricing. We can manage it down to the best price for very similar and like items.

Comm. Arrington: I can tell you what's happening. Like you said, everybody has a budget. If you don't spend it, you lose it. That's why a lot of us have shifted to zero-based budgeting. You have to justify everything because you have that culture where you spent \$100 last year. Don't spend \$75 because you are going to lose \$25. That's why I'm a fan of zero-based budgeting. Do we have authorization limits for individuals? As a manager, I have a certain authorization limit. Anything that exceeds that goes to my director. Do we have a cap on each individual based on their level?

Mr. Gaines: You mean like managerial thresholds.

Comm. Arrington: I'll use an example, like an administrative person at School No. 21. He or she has a \$100 spending limit. Anything over that goes to the principal or is it just no spending limit on whoever is ordering supplies?

Mr. Gaines: There is no limit. However, each administrator at their location or school is a part of the approval process. A staff level person, the secretarial staff member, can put in a requisition for any amount. That requisition would still have to be approved by the building administrator or department administrator. Then it comes down to Central Office for further approval, be it the assistant superintendent or another cabinet level member, purchasing, and then ultimately the business administrator. There isn't a way for a small or large dollar PO to be entered and approved without all those various levels of approval in our financial system right now.

Comm. Arrington: I would start to think about maybe a zero-based budget for supplies. I think having a dollar limit makes people want to spend their full amount because you don't want to lose money the next year. Thank you, Lance and Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Gaines: You're welcome. Were there any other questions?

Mr. Matthews: Next up we have Assistant Superintendent Coy regarding High School Special Education Teachers Excess.

Ms. Joanna Tsimpedes: I'll be filling in for Ms. Coy this evening. She has another engagement. Good evening, Commissioners. There are two strategies Assistant Superintendent Coy has under her. The first one is high school special education teachers. As we are looking at schedules, we're realizing we have to do a better job at containing our students. Rather than have them spread apart, we need to maximize our teacher assignments and scheduling. We need to maximize periods and maximum student capacity per teacher. We also need to review the current schedules against the student enrollment and the supports they are to receive. We have to ensure that the instructional assistants are appropriately assigned to the classrooms that are

designated for them. At the end of the school year, we need to begin to phase out the teacher overage based on the twelfth grade numbers versus those of the students incoming. This is a process that's going to take us through this school year. Ms. Coy has started to do the work. We want to be strategic in how we place teachers so that we don't see special education teachers with only a handful of students but with the number appropriate as per their I&P and as per code. That is the first strategy that our Assistant Superintendent Coy has. Are there any questions regarding that? The second one is regarding bedside. Since we are in remote instruction at the current time, it avails students to participate within the class that they are scheduled in so you do not have to have bedside separately. For the next school year, depending on if we start with a remote model or if we start with a hybrid, if we start with a hybrid, we can allow the students who are to be on bedside to continue to partake in the current teacher's classroom rather than have a separate teacher assigned to them after hours. That would work until we are all 100% back in-district. Based on the audit that Ms. Coy conducted, there are only seven students who are considered medically fragile, have never attended school, and would need to continue on bedside. That would give this district an annual cost savings of \$400,000 by having bedside remote as long as we have some form of hybrid instruction. Are there any questions regarding the bedside model?

Comm. Simmons: If we don't open in a hybrid model in September, it wouldn't be that amount of savings?

Ms. Tsimpedes: It wouldn't be that amount because we are looking at returning back in September based on some type of model, a hybrid if not everyone has been vaccinated and we still have some sort of pandemic. Most likely, we will have an amount of students that would be Cohort C, whose parents might be hesitant to send them back if we are not 100% free from the virus. Those students would partake in the Cohort C model. This is only if we are opening up with a half in-person instruction if we had Cohort A, B, or C still occurring in the fall.

Ms. Shafer: In addition to that, what Cheryl has also talked about is students that are on home instruction would now have a device. Just like they are now, they would be able to tune into the class. Even if we had everybody back, whenever that is, or the hybrid, they would still be part of the class. They would get a full day of instruction rather than with bedside, where you only get an hour for general education and two hours if you're special education. It really would be better for the student and they would be able to do this either way, whether we had the hybrid or everybody was back.

Comm. Arrington: How many students fall into this category of home instruction or bedside?

Ms. Shafer: We would have to get that from Cheryl. I do know that over past couple of years it was over \$600,000 for 'X' number of students. You could have bedside for the entire year depending on your situation or you could have it for a couple of months or whatever the case might be. What she did this year was all of those students, whether they are on bedside or not, have a device. Whatever classes they were going to be in, rather than have to have a teacher come to your home for an hour, they now are following their schedule remotely. This runs the gamut of students with different disabilities. It could be that somebody broke their leg. It could be somebody that has cancer. There are different situations that we are dealing with.

Comm. Simmons: With that, we would just need to make sure that every classroom is equipped with a webcam.

Ms. Tsimpedes: Yes, and that's what we are working on now. The webcams are in and we are waiting. For every classroom, they'll be outfitted. We also have to make sure whether it's a general education or a special education student that they are in the appropriate setting. We have a different variety of reasons why students are on bedside.

Comm. Hodges: How comparable is this kind of assistance to in-person assistance?

Ms. Shafer: Certainly, in-person is always the best but when it comes to bedside, a student only receives one hour a day of in-person and that's it. This would give a student a full day of being remote, which is better. We left some money in the account. Like I said, it was north of \$600,000 for the past couple of years. It might be a case-by-case situation where you may have to have a teacher go twice a week, once a week, or five days a week. We would have to look at it case-by-case, but for the most part those students that are home now are able to attend class with their classmates and their teacher with a full-day schedule.

Comm. Arrington: I was reading something earlier today about some schools are considering having a "virtual school" just for this population to have that consistent class time for students. That's very interesting.

Ms. Shafer: Let me tell you one quick story. We have a student who has sickle cell and she's been out for a number of years. This at least gives her an opportunity to be in class with her classmates. She's been isolated for a couple of years now. Granted, some days she might not be physically capable of getting on all day, but at least it will give her interaction with classmates to see kids her own age and be able to interact and not be so isolated. We have situations like that. Like I said, we have ones where kids maybe broke a leg or did something and they're not able to come to school right away and they need bedside.

Comm. Hodges: Do you anticipate this being a permanent process that you want to initiate?

Ms. Shafer: Yes. Again, like I said, the savings of \$400,000 is not the total account. We know that with everything there is always a specific situation that may need something else.

Comm. Hodges: There has to be some sort of comparison made or something done to make sure that the assistance is comparable.

Mr. Matthews: Ms. Shafer, we jumped over Ms. Vainieri. Lisa, are you on? Do you want to do bus transportation?

Ms. Lisa Vainieri-Marshall: Good evening, everyone. I hope everyone is safe and well. My transportation is just a one-time savings. Once the new Don Bosco is open in September, it will cut down on the 18 buses that we were using last year to transport students from School No. 27 and School No. 5. That cost was \$825,000 and that would just be a one-time savings cut from my budget. Are there any questions?

Comm. Arrington: Is it a one-time savings or is it annually?

Ms. Vainieri-Marshall: It's annually, but it's going to happen once. It will be taken from my budget and then that would be it. I should have phrased differently.

Comm. Arrington: It's been a long day for all of us.

Ms. Vainieri-Marshall: That's that. Are there any other questions? Thank you.

Mr. Matthews: Next up, we have Mr. Rojas with vacancies.

Mr. Luis Rojas: Good evening, Commissioners. Tonight, my cost savings strategy would be based on personnel, depending on the number of vacancies we have at the current time if we make the decision to eliminate some vacancies that are deemed non-essential. If the Board wants to go that route like we proposed last year there's an estimated cost right now of \$2 million based on our current vacancies. Any vacancies that we cut would be an estimated \$65,000 per vacancy. If the Board does decide or if we do decide as a group, that's one of the cost saving strategies that we can look at moving forward. That cost saving strategy would be moved forward into any budget unless we have to create a fund because of additional students into the district.

Comm. Hodges: What's an example of non-essential personnel?

Mr. Rojas: That's a good question, Commissioner. That would be any classroom that we may be able to combine. Maybe we take a look at class sizes in the district and we are able to reorganize a few classes. I hate to give a label on a specific position. As an example, let's just say we have two elementary classrooms and kindergarten classrooms that can be combined into one. That's probably one position that could be eliminated.

Comm. Hodges: I thought we had a large number of classrooms that had over 30 students in them and we were looking to decrease that problem. Wouldn't this exacerbate that situation?

Mr. Rojas: Possibly and that's why this is just an option for discussion purposes. Personnel are going to be the biggest hit to any budget. It's the biggest cost-driver. If you're looking for a cost saving strategy moving forward, personnel would have to be discussed and on the table as an example and as an option for us to at least have a conversation about it.

Ms. Shafer: Let me also say that kindergarten would not be one that we would want to do. Sometimes at the middle school you have departmentalized classes and your classes are not at 24 or 25, but they are less. Or you have an elective at the high school that's small in class size. You would be able to combine those types of classes so that you yield a position. You're not going to eliminate the person that you yield. You are going to put them in another position and then you'd be able to eliminate the vacancy. It's eliminating the vacancy only once you go through all of the different scenarios as to whether or not you can either combine a class or classes because they have few students in them. That's what we mean by something that would be non-essential. We would certainly not be looking at doing that to increase classes above 30. We have enough of them already.

Comm. Simmons: We are looking at vacancies. Since March, we've been hybrid and Central Office has been producing on a skeleton crew. In my head I'm thinking business and I'm thinking something different. If we've been operating with a skeleton crew and producing for the most part, can we begin to look at what we don't need at Central Office?

Mr. Rojas: Yes, Commissioner. I want to be clear. When I say vacancies, I am not talking about just classroom teachers. I'm talking about all vacancies across the board, teachers and non-teachers alike and not necessarily aides or assistants or other non-classroom or non-school supporting positions. I'm also including Central Office vacancies, Central Office positions, and those non-essential positions. You're exactly right. We have been working on a skeleton crew so some of those office positions could be looked at as part of the overall strategy and discussion.

Comm. Simmons: I don't mean just vacancies at Central Office. If you've been home since March and you've made no attempt to come in and we've been producing, we talk about cuts often and normally we begin to look at those cuts with teachers. We could begin to look at those cuts in Central Office.

Mr. Rojas: I don't want to mislead anyone. Those folks are producing. They may be producing from home. They may be doing items from home that they would normally do in the office. The work is still getting done. It's just not being done in a square cubicle. It's being done from an office in their house, in the living room, or wherever they are set up. The function and their job responsibilities are still being performed so that the district can operate on a normal basis. If they weren't producing work at home, I think we would really be behind the eight ball.

Comm. Arrington: Does the \$2 million savings include the stipends or would the stipends reduce that \$2 million?

Mr. Rojas: That's not including stipends. You're talking about under "Issues or concerns with this strategy" where the mention is extra responsibilities?

Comm. Arrington: Yes.

Mr. Rojas: No, that's not included. That's just hypothetically if we have to eliminate a position that's deemed non-essential and those responsibilities may still be there. Someone's complete job description let's say is deemed non-essential, then maybe 50% can be done by a person. That was just for discussion purposes. Depending on the position that we do eliminate, there may be some discussions about somebody taking on extra responsibility. This is just for discussion purposes. That \$2 million does not include stipends.

Comm. Arrington: I'm not used to stipends in Corporate America. If a \$30,000 job gets eliminated, it might not be a \$30,000 saving for us. It might be \$20,000 because we might give out a \$10,000 stipend.

Mr. Rojas: Possibly. You are eliminating health benefits as well. Ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) seems kind of high. I would say you are correct in your math. That's a rough estimate.

Comm. Arrington: I know last year we talked about some different strategies with substitutes, merging classes, having a class go to the gym somewhere, and some costs savings with substitutes. I know COVID changed everything. Is that something that is still on the table for 2021 when we eventually get back in the building?

Mr. Matthews: We had reduced a subline based on that strategy. The \$16.3 million that I just went through was on top of the strategy we had already implemented for where we were doing the high schools and the substitutes there. Luis, do you want to maybe touch base more about the subs?

Mr. Rojas: You hit that right on the head. That line was already reduced this year. We did talk about strategies as to taking a look at what an individual building that you utilize the year before and using that data to pretty much provide them with a line they can use moving forward or for this coming school year. Obviously, we haven't used that at all. I presented to personnel this afternoon and we are roughly about \$300,000 spent in that line. We are way under budget as far as personnel this year. Obviously, COVID throws a completely different wrinkle in there. Nonetheless, those are some strategies we have implemented and will probably look at moving forward.

Comm. Arrington: This is all pre-COVID. One good thing that has come out of this is the one-to-one devices. I don't know the inner operations of schools. Is it necessary to bring a substitute teacher to sit in that class where a student can just go to another classroom and do their work in Google Classroom?

Mr. Matthews: This is not an exhaustive list. This is a preliminary list. There's a plan that's being developed and will be put on the table for a future meeting that we just didn't bring today. The sub thing is still something we're already looking at. Some other things you may have seen before will be before you at another meeting. We just wanted to get through it a little bit better before we bring it back to the table.

Comm. Arrington: I think now the devices have created another opportunity for us.

Comm. Martinez: Regarding the employees who have been working remotely from home, seeing this through the lens of a building administrator, how are we gauging, monitoring, tracking, and keeping metrics on the work they are producing from home? With teachers, there are different metrics. We can log on to their classrooms and check the work they're doing with the scholars. How are we gauging the production we're getting from the folks who are working remotely from their homes?

Mr. Rojas: At the end of the day, every employee is required to provide a daily work log of the duties that he or she performed from home. The administrator reviews those documents or logs to determine the amount of work they are doing at home is in accordance with what they would normally do if they were sitting at their desk. For the individuals coming in to work and actually showing up, a log is not necessary. I will tell you that a log is required of all employees up to the Deputy Superintendent. This is not something that my secretary would have to perform or my subordinates. This is everyone down the line from the Deputy Superintendent down. If we are working remotely, we are to provide a log. I have provided logs personally to Ms. Shafer even when I'm working on those days that I work remotely. To answer your question, it's a daily work log. That's how your attendance is monitored as well. If you don't produce a log, you get marked absent for the day. Essentially, it's just as simple as a work log that you turn into your administrator for review.

Comm. Martinez: Then that building leader would then verify that the listings on that log were indeed taken care of. That's the way it works.

Mr. Rojas: Correct. I'll give you an example. For my staff in HR, there are call logs, return calls, emails, paperwork, the folks they sat with on a virtual Zoom meeting to go over, they're dependent paperwork and things of that nature, and hiring packets. All of those essential functions that are now being done remotely they provide a work log and backup to support they are working from home.

Comm. Martinez: Thank you.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Those individuals who really can't work from home or the job they do is difficult to do from home, how are we working with those individuals? I know in my office there are some people that just can't. Are they being reassigned to pick up other tasks? Are phones being redirected to them? How does that work?

Mr. Rojas: For those individuals who cannot work remotely, which are very few people, they are in the building. For example, a school secretary for the most part can't work remotely. They support the building and the principal. They have to see parents and the like. You really can't do that from a remote environment. Those individuals are required to be in the office and that's where the COVID protocols kick in. Make sure they are social distancing, wearing their mask, and they keep parents at bay and things of that nature. They are in the building when the principals are in the building. When those principals are remote, they may not be in the building and they take tasks home with them. They perform those tasks at home, such as calling parents and things they would normally do in the building. There aren't too many people that we have found besides custodians and folks like that. Those folks are in the building. COSA employees are in the building because they can't perform those duties from home. They maintain a socially distanced environment and they continue to perform their functions.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Just one more question. I know it's a little difficult when you're in the building as opposed to when you're out. Material is still being reviewed by the supervisor before it goes out. Whether it's presentations, information being put out, meeting time with parents, or anything the school district is sharing with the community, that's still being approved by the supervisor before going out. Correct? I know that sometimes timelines get a little crazy.

Ms. Shafer: Yes. Everything is being reviewed by a cabinet level administrator. If it's a school function, then it goes through the assistant superintendent. If it's something in Central Office for any of our presentations, it comes to a cabinet meeting.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Perfect. That's it for me. Thank you.

Comm. Arrington: I know at one point we talked about economy of scales with some of the other local schools in the area and buying supplies together. Is that something that's still on the table that we are looking at?

Mr. Matthews: I really wanted to expand food service because that's something we really need to do in terms of increasing our revenues. Because of the pandemic, our food count is down. Typically, in a day we might feed 25,000 kids, but now we're feeding 10,000 to 15,000 kids a day. We've had some talks regarding doing food service for other school districts. Supplies haven't really happened. Things just haven't really moved fast enough. Lance and I have had that conversation and we need to pick it up again.

Comm. Hodges: Would we be receiving some sort of service charge for that, administrative cost?

Mr. Matthews: In our conversation with them, they said we would definitely have to charge them a fee. I did send out an email today to invite them to our next fiscal meeting so that could come before the committee.

Comm. Arrington: I guess, Dr. Hodges, it would give some economy to the scale. They are buying 50 widgets and we're buying 100 widgets. Now, you're buying 150 widgets together hopefully at a lower negotiated rate. It could be a win-win for everyone on paper.

Comm. Hodges: Yes.

Mr. Matthews: We've had that conversation in committee as well and we will meet with Lance to see how that's evolving.

Ms. Shafer: That concludes the cost saving strategies so far. This is pretty much an introduction. We are going to refine these numbers and look at more strategies. We would ask the Board now if you have any ideas for cost saving strategies that we have not discussed. We'll certainly look into it and see if it will yield us some additional funding.

Comm. Arrington: The first thing on my mind is Church Street and coming up with a plan for that. I feel like it's just sitting there.

Mr. Matthews: Church Street is on my board as well. I will definitely bring that to the next meeting. The person that's giving me the update for AHA was the same person that did the last appraisal for Church Street. I will definitely bring that up at the next meeting.

Comm. Arrington: I don't remember off the top of my head. I think there are some other properties we still have.

Mr. Matthews: Yes. All of our leases that we are looking at as far as properties that we own like 45 Smith Street, there's a plan to keep it in place and rehab it. We are looking to start that work in January. Neil is going to report out on 45 Smith Street. Obviously, there's Church Street and the rest would be leased properties. Anything else that we own has already been accounted for.

Comm. Arrington: The last thing I had was just researching bus transportation for athletics. Everybody knows I attend a lot of athletic events. I do see more and more surrounding districts have their own buses for athletics and for special education, but let's just start with athletics. Is that something maybe we can do some research on to see if there's any benefit to us owning our own buses for athletic transportation and field trips? I do have teachers complaining to me that you have a field trip to Jersey City or wherever but now you have to raise money for transportation. It would be nice if we had a couple of buses around for transportation for field trips. Let's at least start with athletics.

Comm. Hodges: Didn't we purchase two buses? That was an issue with the planetarium as well. We were supposed to get two buses so we can initiate that kind of travel. The problem is going to some of these places like Liberty Science Center is that we could not go before the people arrived at school and you had to leave before the buses were needed to carry kids home after school. It shortened the time for those trips and made it rather inconvenient if you had to go someplace. It was lengthy. We had talked about having the district purchase some vehicles just for those occasions.

Mr. David Cozart: Good afternoon everyone. That's correct. In the past, we've looked at the purchasing of school buses for transportation, specifically for field trips as well as for athletics. The issue we had was that in purchasing the buses for athletics, we had to

have a secure driver. It's not going to be a current coach. The issue that came up at that time was purchasing the buses, storing them, and having personnel to man as well as to repair them. It came out to be cheaper for us to continue to use existing bus companies on an as-needed basis. That was the issue that came up about 3 or 4 years ago when they asked about transportation for the athletic games. We have the minibuses, but we didn't have the large 54-passenger buses. Some of the schools you mentioned have their own bus companies or own buses for the district. That's why they were able to transport their people using their own staff members, which we don't have those employees. That was the issue we had with the athletics.

Comm. Arrington: One of the two schools I spoke to today, I don't know what the guy does there, but he said he got a stipend for driving around on the weekend. I guess he has a CDL and he does transportation as a stipend. If we had to research it, that's fine. I attended a conference in October and I think it was South Brunswick or a couple of other districts have converted over to this method to save some money.

Mr. Cozart: In our district, we have a few coaches who were able to drive the minivans and the small 26-passenger bus. Again, they were also coaches, but they weren't able to drive the large buses according to our schedule we would need. At that time, we were told we would actually have to hire multiple people to serve in that capacity, as well as find a space for them to actually park and service the large buses other than the minibuses we already have on site.

Comm. Arrington: I won't belabor that one. That was just a couple things I had.

Comm. Hodges: What is the cost of transportation for the athletics and field trips? Can we get that information down the road?

Comm. Arrington: I would love to see the research that was done previously on this. Like Dr. Hodges says, do we have a presentation or report that shows some of this detail?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, we'll get it to you.

Comm. Arrington: Again, it might not work for us. It's just an idea. That's all.

Comm. Hodges: Those problems with the field trips are still going to continue.

Comm. Arrington: Yes, it does.

Comm. Hodges: We need a potential fix for that, if nothing else.

Comm. Arrington: I agree, Dr. Hodges.

Comm. Martinez: I'm not sure if there are any more comments or anything from any of the Commissioners. While I am encouraged that we are having this conversation at this time and encouraged to hear some of the proposed saving strategies that have been shared this evening, I know we are a long way out. I'm not trying to be an alarmist. We are quite a way out and there are still factors and variables that we have to take into consideration. Assuming that everything we put on the table today did come to pass, that still leaves us with a very significant gap to close, assuming all of things that were put out here today do come to fruition. I want us to be mindful of that. It somewhat feels a little bit like Groundhog Day. It feels like every time we revisit budget discussions, we come back to the table with the significant gap and the strategies to try

to close that gap. It feels redundant. To use that example, we've taken out the scalpel and we're trimming little things here and there. If we are ever going to get out of this systemic hole that we find ourselves in, we have to start making some serious wholesale changes. Just about every year that I've been on this Board, and I'm coming on my eighth year, it seems like we revisit this. We are always picking and pulling little items when the actual hole is terribly significant. I would just ask us and remind us to just be mindful of that as we go through this exercise. Until we're willing to make some of the tougher, wholesale, bigger changes, we're going to keep doing this every year. It's happening again because we have \$50 million that we have to close. I've heard half a million here or a million potential there. Assuming all those things take place, we still have a way to go before we're going to close that gap. We have to start looking at some of those bigger ticket items now if we are going to close that gap. Unless there are any other questions or comments from any of the other Commissioners or the other cabinet members, then we do have to entertain public comments. If there are any comments right now, I'll entertain those. If not, we'll go into public comments.

Ms. Shafer: Mr. President, just a comment about the snowstorm that's coming so that everyone is aware. There is a storm coming Wednesday into Thursday. We will continue to be remote. We'll be remote through the storm. We are preparing students and teachers. A correspondence is going out in a little while and you'll get a copy of it. The teachers will post the assignments just in case anyone loses power. Tomorrow, the teachers will go over the assignments so that the students know. If they want to write it down, they can have it on their phone just so that we can keep the teaching and learning moving forward through the snowstorm. We are going to get a storm Wednesday into Thursday and we'll continue to be remote. Friday will be meal pickup. Our priority is to make sure that the meal sites are shoveled out and the parents and students can get to the site to pick up their meals. Again, we are giving enough meals for the weekend so we want to make sure they are able to come out and access those sites.

Comm. Martinez: Thank you, Ms. Shafer. Bye, snow days. Kids and teachers will no longer have that excitement of going to bed and waking up knowing they have a snow day. We are virtual now. There's no such thing anymore. Sorry! Are there any other comments at this time?

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**It was moved by Comm. Arrington, 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: How many speakers?

Mr. Zaydel: We have two speakers registered. Only one is online right now. We'll allow Ms. Rosie Grant to speak two minutes beginning now.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Thank you, Boris. Good evening, Commissioners, Madam Superintendent, staff, and community members. Thank you for this opportunity. This was a very informative meeting. Thank you, Madam Superintendent, to you and your staff. I am amazed at the \$3.3 million in projected savings. I understand that some of this is as a result of being remote and there are certainly some efficiencies we've learned from working and learning remotely that can be applied here as well. One caution in my history around central purchasing was the slowness with which supplies got to schools when we were doing it even before Dr. Hodges was on the School Board.

I know there are still districts that are doing central purchasing where this tends to be problematic. I ask that you pay attention to that as we move into the central purchasing. This budget still does not provide for the additional costs that will be incurred because of COVID-19. I know the number we are trying to get to is \$16 million in cuts, but it's probably \$16 million plus according to the math that I'm doing here. I look forward to hearing more conversation about what else will happen as we work to close the budget. I encourage you, Board members, to continue to ask if this budget provides for a thorough and efficient education for our students. That is the bottom line. If the answer is not a resounding yes, then we do have to keep up our advocacy to make sure that the state provides us with the needed funds. Related to funding, the SDA recently released a list of their next projects and the Paterson Catholic building is on that list. However, they have no funding. I invite you to join me in advocacy. Anyone who's interested, please reach out and call me. I will give you some details so that we make sure the Paterson school stays on the list and that the SDA get the funding they need in order to do these projects. Thank you so much. That's the end of my comments.

Comm. Simmons: Thank you. Boris, did the other speaker happen to make it on?

Mr. Zaydel: No, she did not.

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

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

Comm. Simmons: I think that was about it, unless any other Board member had any additional comments.

Comm. Redmon: I saw some of the strategies. Are we talking about cutting some of the staff in personnel?

Comm. Simmons: If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Rojas talked about vacancies. Mr. Rojas, if you don't mind, would you recap for Comm. Redmon?

Comm. Redmon: Not vacancies. I got that. I understand that. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the other positions, promotions, and all of that stuff.

Mr. Rojas: No, Commissioner. At this point, we weren't talking about that. We were talking about non-essential vacancies.

Comm. Redmon: Will we also be able to put everything on the table? Are any of the Board members opposed to that? Will that be a proposal that we can look into? Would any of my Board members have any problems with that?

Comm. Simmons: No, I don't.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: No.

Comm. Arrington: No.

Comm. Redmon: I'm just asking for the next time we meet to talk about some more strategies. Will that be on the table? This is to the cabinet.

Mr. Rojas: Absolutely, Commissioner. We will definitely do that.

Comm. Redmon: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: I think we are done here.

Comm. Martinez: Mr. President, if this is it, then we can just end it. I'm not sure if this is Comm. Castillo-Cruz's first meeting back since becoming a mom. Can we take a moment to formally congratulate her and welcome her back? I know you are probably not sleeping at all. Good to have you back. We've been in touch. I know how things are going. Welcome back officially, mom.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: That's why I couldn't remember your last name.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: Please. You guys haven't given me a break. Thank you. I appreciate all of you. Thank you all for the support, especially because I've been away for a few meetings. I'm trying to catch up. I'm caught up already. I've had some good news and some news that I don't like. I don't like coming back for the budget, but I guess we're here.

Comm. Simmons: Great. You can have I&P back. It's not that it hasn't been a pleasure working with Assistant Superintendent Tsimpedes, but you can have it back.

Comm. Castillo-Cruz: I love my committee. If I can still skip the meetings, then I'll be happy. Thank you.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**It was moved by Comm. Martinez, 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 7:12 p.m.