

**MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
BUDGET HEARING**

May 11, 2020 – 4:30 p.m.
Remote - Zoom

Presiding: Comm. Kenneth Simmons, President

Present:

Ms. Eileen F. Shafer, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Susana Peron, Deputy Superintendent
Boris Zaydel, Esq., General Counsel

Comm. Vincent Arrington	Comm. Manuel Martinez, Vice President
Comm. Emanuel Capers	Comm. Joel Ramirez
Comm. Oshin Castillo	Comm. Nakima Redmon
Comm. Jonathan Hodges	Comm. Corey Teague

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

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 11, 2020 at 4:30 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: Tonight is the budget hearing. So that people understand, on Friday we took a vote to pass the introduction of the budget. Tonight is the hearing for the budget. Afterwards, we will be able to make suggestions, the administration will be able to make changes for the things that we suggest, and then there will be a final adoption for the budget on either Wednesday or Thursday depending on how long it takes to make the suggested changes. We can jump right into it. Before we do that, Friday was a little weird. I just want to make it clear that we're all politicians, but this is not the place to bring up political issues. Yes, there is a municipal election going on and people can support whomever they want to support. We as a body are going to remain respectful towards each other. It's one of the things we went over in our retreat. It's

one of the norms that we've adopted and we want to make sure that we continue to stick to those norms. We're going to be respectful. We can keep the politics outside of what happens here and outside of this meeting. If that happens, I will ask Boris to shut your microphone off. You are forewarned. Your microphone will be shut off.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Ms. Shafer: Thank you, Mr. President and thank you all for being here. As you know, we started this budget process with a \$63 million budget gap. We met numerous times with the Department of Education and each time we were chipping away at that \$63 million. Last time we met with the DOE was in March and our balance was around \$20 million. At that time, they had talked about being able to possibly fund us additional money. Unfortunately, at that time the COVID-19 hit and school closures have been since March 17. In the meantime, we had met with all of our department managers and we were chipping away at that \$63 million and in non-salaries we cut the budget by \$21.9 million. At that point, there's really not much left. We are at the bone. I think everyone knows that due to underfunding and cost drivers continuously going up, we're never going to get to the point, until we are fully funded, that we're going to be able to balance the budget without making programmatic cuts or RIF. Our cost drivers continuously go up, as well as PCTI and charter schools. With all of those cost drivers going up, each year we need to be fully funded in order for our children to get a thorough and efficient education. It's been a difficult journey in putting the budget together. We did have a Board retreat where we went over a number of cost-saving strategies. Some of you gave us cost-savings strategies to look into and we did that. That evening we went over all the cost-saving strategies. Some of them yielded a significant amount of cost savings. Either others were going to cost us money or it was something that we were not going to do. At this point, I'm going to turn it over to our Business Administrator, Mr. Matthews, to go over the budget presentation. At the conclusion of that we will take any questions that you might have.

Mr. Richard Matthews: Good afternoon Commissioners, cabinet members, Paterson Public Schools employees, and community. Tonight, I'm going to go over a budget public hearing presentation. A lot of this stuff you saw on Friday. Some of it is a little bit different in terms of trying to break down and unpack some of the tax situations that have been discussed over the last couple of days. We have our Board of Education members – Mr. Simmons, President, Mr. Martinez, Vice President, Mr. Arrington, Mr. Capers, Ms. Castillo, Dr. Hodges, Mr. Ramirez, Ms. Redmon, and Mr. Teague. Thank you for all you do for our community and pushing us forward to make Paterson Public Schools a 21st Century learning environment. I thank all the cabinet members for their support during this whole budget process. Recognizing our proud traditions, diverse community, and partnerships, the mission of the Paterson Public School District provides an academically rigorous, safe and nurturing educational environment by meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of our students as we prepare them for post-secondary education and career. Our vision is to be a 21st Century leader and to prepare them for future-ready leadership. Paterson Public Schools is an SDA district, formerly an Abbott district. For the last seven years we have been underfunded according to the School Funding Reform Act. The district has seen enrollment growth over the last decade a little more than 1%. We've had increases in state aid for the last couple of years. As stated earlier, our expenses have been outpacing our additional revenues. Our state aid projection for fiscal year 2020-2021 says we will receive an additional \$24 million in k-12. As Ms. Shafer said, during the past year we have been doing a lot to put this budget together. January 22-29 we've had budget forums at the Palestinian Recreation Center and at St. Luke's Baptist Church. As far as that \$21.9 million goes, we did central office budget reviews. There were monthly meetings. We

went line by line through every department. Even after the initial \$14 million we did an additional \$7 million in cuts. We met with all the schools and principals and talked about the weighted funding formula. We wanted to increase their per-pupil cost based on bilingual students. The first year we gave them additional money based on special education and the next year we gave them money based on bilingual kids. The budget team meets sometimes twice a week. We've met every week just developing strategies and going through some of the budget cost saving ideas and thinking of ways to brainstorm to come up with creative ideas on how to make this budget work. Obviously, there's oversight. The finance committee meets on average twice a month during this whole budget process. We were bringing forth ideas to the finance committee about what we're looking at as far as closing the gap. We just kept them updated on some of the things we did to close the gap and also received feedback and oversight from that committee. Board presentations were done as well to the community to explain where we were, what's going on with the budget, what our revenues and cost drivers are looking like, what we are expecting as far as enrollment per-pupil costs. All these different things were discussed at these Board presentations. There was a Board budget retreat where we introduced 24 different budget strategies. Some realized savings and some did not. Some are still on the table to get a tweak. We've also met with central office downstairs talking about the budget and what's happening in the process. We've been talking about some of the key issues out there regarding the feedback we got from the community budget reviews and what's happening during the current 2019-2020 budget that we have to look at and go forward. We gave presentations to the state back in November. We gave them what our gap was. We discussed what our game plan would be to close the gap. At that time, we talked about reducing that non-salary \$21 million, which we got to. We talked about some tax situations, bank cap, and what we're going to do to boost up our revenues. All this was discussed in February as well. Some of our game plan was already implemented and we started having those month-long central office budget reviews. They saw that there was progress made from the time we met in November. Back in February they saw there was progress. We met again after we received our state aid in early March. I think at that time we knew we were getting \$24 million and that we were still going to experience such shortfall. That's when the discussion was going on about giving us some additional funding to help close that gap. We talked about Chapter 67 Phase-In. It's a seven-year period where it's been recognized that we have been underfunded. The plan was to get us over a seven-year period to be fully funded. In the current year we received \$24 million. You see in the last bullet point the underfunding from the state was \$104 million. 23% of that number came to \$24 million. That's what we received for this year. This is a Board chart of what we received from 2017 to the current year. You will see that the big blue piece is the equalization aid, \$418 million. The orange is \$24.5 million. That's special education. Security is \$12 million. Transportation is \$7 million. There are four categories that break up your aid. These are the numbers for this year in terms of percentages. You see the little incremental growth over the last couple of years. The state looks at our demographics, our median income, and our ability to support the local school budget. For 2020-2021 our local fair share is \$107 million. This is what the state is saying that the City of Paterson should contribute towards the education of their students. Our number for 2019-2020 was \$47 million. They're saying that we're permitted to tax an additional \$58 million above the 2% cap to get us to our local fair share, which is \$107 million. I'm going to go through it later on, but you will see in our 2020-2021 budget we're proposing a \$54 million tax levy. We'll talk a little bit more about that later on. We know Paterson Public Schools is currently underfunded by both the State of New Jersey and local tax levy. The state is underfunding us and we're underfunded by what we should have contributed as Paterson Public Schools. The district's revenues are not increasing as quickly as the expenses. Every year we produce a flat budget. We have these large gaps of \$70 million because our anticipated

increases in expenses are far exceeding what we can expect in terms of revenue. For the 2020-2021 budget, \$24 million was received by the state. \$12 million goes to the charter schools. Salaries and benefits account for 60% of the total budget. Charter schools and PCTI combined is 16% of our budget. Those costs go up year over year. Even going back seven years ago, they were projecting the fiscal cliff. We are now living in that fiscal cliff. The reality of having your expenses outpace your revenues without having a fund balance is what the fiscal cliff is. That's the world that we're living in right now. Charter school enrollment is up 2,554 kids since 2016. For 2020-2021, we had 5,135 kids enrolled. The increase is 517. Our charter school payment for 2020-2021 is \$75.8 million. The increase is more than \$12 million. That's an increase of \$12 million and we took in \$24 million in state aid. This chart is a little busy, but I want to talk about it a little bit. This is county taxes from 1991-2015. It's the school and county taxes over the same period. From 1991 through 2015 Paterson Public Schools raised taxes \$2 million. That's less than 1% on an increase over a 25-year period. The average annual increase is \$85,947. Our average annual increase for a 25-year period on a budget of \$550 million was \$85,947. In the first column there is the county tax. Over that same period of time, the county raised their taxes \$27 million. That was a 20% increase. On an annual basis, the average increase was \$1.1 million. The third column is the City of Paterson. Over that same 25-year period they raised their taxes an additional \$107 million. The percent of increase from 1991 to 2015 was 79%. The average increase year-to-year was \$4.4 million. Between the county and the city what we increased over a 25-year period was \$85,000 a year. It's really less than 1% over a 25-year period. People talk about their taxes being raised and schools are getting blamed for their taxes going up. I've been at meetings and I hear talk about us raising taxes. This is a 25-year period that says that we have raised our taxes \$85,000 a year. I don't even want to call it a tax increase. It's an investment in the education of 29,000 Paterson Public School children. It protects our revenues and decreases our dependence on state aid. You're going to see in a later chart that 85% of our revenues come from the state. The economy has been devastated because of COVID-19. After the recession of 2008 we went flat for seven years. We can pretty much expect to go flat for the next seven years. We know it happened in 2008. This COVID-19 has devastated this economy and we can expect that the state aid will be flat for the foreseeable future. We have to invest in our kids. We have to do this levy. It's really important that we increase your revenue so that we're less dependent on the state. It protects our revenues year over year and we get the compounding effect when we start to raise taxes over time. Last year we picked up \$6 million in revenue and now we're asking the City of Paterson and the 29,000 people who pay into this tax pool to contribute \$7 million. I'm going to talk about what that really means. We talk about a 14% increase in terms of what will hit Paterson and the 29,000 people that participate in paying these taxes. The real increase to the average household is roughly 2%. The real increase to a person who is going to pay \$241 a year and \$20 a month is 67 cents per day. I called my mother today and got her taxes. She's paying \$9,000 a year in taxes. Her taxes have gone up \$240. I'm asking her to pay 67 cents per day so that the kids of Paterson get \$7 million. We're asking 29,000 people, on average, to pay less than a dollar per day. It comes to about a 2% increase to the average household. We want local control and we're going to get local control. I don't think asking our people to pay 67 cents a day is too much. There have been a lot of good things that have happened in Paterson Public Schools over the last couple of years. We have more kids in grades k-5 reading at or above grade level. More students have gone into college. More kids are going into AP classes. Graduation rate has gone up to approximately 80%. Before we started raising taxes, our graduation rate was 50%. I want us to look at it as an opportunity and an investment in our kids. I believe this is really important for us, not just for this year, but for years to come. State aid is going to be flat going forward. We know what happened after 2008 and we can expect the same thing to

happen from 2020 going forward for the foreseeable future. True increase on an average person is going to be 2% and 67 cents per day. This chart here is what we have been talking about for the last couple of months. 2019-2020 was \$47 million. We're asking for \$7 million for 2020-2021. The state number has gone from \$439 million to \$467 million. Our net changes in revenues are going to be \$21 million, which is a 3.9% increase. We keep throwing out that 14% when the real increase to the average taxpayer is about 2%. 67 cents per day is what we're asking people to pay. We're asking 29,000 people to share in that \$7 million. I think it's a great investment for our kids. We see the benefits of that investment in terms of what's happening with our reading levels, AP, college acceptances, and graduation rates. It's a pie chart of what we've already seen. These are salaries and benefits. These are the changes year over year in terms of expenses. We've talked about charter schools. That number for central office has gone up only \$426,000. That's where a lot of our cuts have come from. It's been a shared pain to balance out this budget. These are the things that we did to balance out the budget. We got \$24 million. We're asking for the \$7 million investment in our kids. We reduced non-salary 21.9%. We feel that reduction is much too large and we want to address that in other conversations that will happen after this presentation. We've reduced the vacancies by \$6.1 million. These moves allowed us to submit a balanced budget as part of the preliminary budget. We feel there's more work to be done. We'll see what comes up in conversation. In terms of budget cost drivers, these are the real numbers in the 2020-2021 budget in terms of what the real costs are. Salary and benefits is \$313 million, charter schools are \$96 million, transportation, special education, substitute costs, legal, and security. These are real numbers that are in the budget. I will entertain any questions, comments, recommendations, or suggestions.

Comm. Simmons: Mr. Matthews, I know you guys worked over the weekend. Were you able to come up with any additional savings or any additional plans?

Ms. Shafer: Let me just go over what we came up with and then we can take some questions. As Mr. Matthews said, this was a difficult budget to put together and the last thing we wanted to do was eliminate teachers. You all know that I've been vocal about class sizes, over 30 students in a class. To eliminate teachers would mean that class size would just continue to go up. As the class sizes go up, student academic performance is at risk. We did take some drastic steps. We closed two schools. We did some other cost-saving strategies that we had all discussed at the retreat. Right now, we know that \$12.1 million will be coming to the district for COVID-19. We wanted to take \$3.6 million to get every student a device. That leaves us with \$8.5 million. We wanted to keep \$1 million for any of the PPE equipment and sanitizing that we are going to need to do when we're ready to reopen. You know that Neil and his staff sanitized all the buildings once we closed. They sanitize every time someone is in the building, but we're going to have to do thorough sanitizing during the summer. That brings us down to \$7.5 million of the COVID money. According to the regulations, you can use that money for special education, technology, instruction due to any learning loss, and also for staff. We wanted to take some of the technology, the special education, and the online instruction and move that to the COVID funding. That would free up \$7.5 million in the current 2020-2021 budget. We could then put the teachers back with that \$7.5 million. We also looked over the weekend at what additional cuts could we do. We looked at summer transportation because summer school will have to be virtual. We looked at our security spend over the summer. We have close to \$1 million in breakage from retirements. Those retirements came in from the time we struck the budget and sent it to the county up until today. We also looked at some non-salary lines that we can cut back on. We're going to look at our reading specialists that are in the budget and put them in SIA funds. Because we now are going to invest in one-to-one devices

and every student will have it, we can reduce some costs in the classroom as well as some supplies and eliminating PIRs. We're really taking a hard look at what else we would be able to cut at this point to save the teachers. Some of those cuts that I just spoke about give us another \$4.5 million. When you add the \$7.5 million with the \$4.5 million, we can bring back \$12 million worth of teachers. That means we can save a little over 200 teaching jobs. We were going to RIF 243. As retirements come in and we begin to develop some more breakage, we'll be able to bring those teachers back as well. Those are some of the things that we looked at over the weekend, and that is what we can do at this point in order to get over 200 teachers back in front of the students when we return.

Comm. Simmons: What is the RIF number right now?

Ms. Shafer: That number was 243.

Comm. Simmons: What is the number of people that will be RIF'd?

Ms. Shafer: About 40.

Comm. Simmons: You anticipate with retirements that you'll be able to bring some of them back?

Ms. Shafer: Yes. From the time that we sent the budget to the county, which was on March 16, from that point until today we had 41 retirements. We average about 200 retirements a year.

Comm. Castillo: How many retirements a year?

Ms. Shafer: 200.

Comm. Hodges: What does that do to the class sizes?

Ms. Shafer: If we bring these teachers back?

Comm. Hodges: Yes.

Ms. Shafer: That will keep our class sizes what they are right now.

Comm. Hodges: But you still have lost 41 teaching staff.

Ms. Shafer: From those 41 teachers, we had \$1 million in breakage. As folks retire, we're going to be able to take the breakage and use it to bring back those 40 teachers.

Comm. Castillo: There will probably be a little over 40 teachers retiring anyway. We'll have all 243, which was the original number. Basically, after all is said and done by September, it will be a wash and we wouldn't have technically laid anyone off because we're bringing back the 40 that you'll be Riffing.

Ms. Shafer: That's correct.

Comm. Castillo: Nothing will change in the classroom.

Ms. Shafer: Right. Unfortunately, we will have to give these individuals their notice. Right now, there's not too much hiring going on because of the virus. As we get

retirements that come in and have breakage, we would start calling people back so that we don't lose a lot of time.

Comm. Castillo: Just to make sure we're clear, it will be about 40 teachers getting the pink slips in May or June, whichever date it is that you do it. Then potentially all 40 of them will be returning for August and September.

Ms. Shafer: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Ms. Shafer, I know that the high school restructuring plan that had been presented was going to yield over \$1.7 million in savings. Was that taken off the table? Why wasn't that considered?

Ms. Shafer: We talked about this at the retreat. The original plan was that we were adding positions. We were adding pathway coordinators for each academy. That was four at Kennedy, three at Eastside, and we were adding one coordinator at each location. The teacher coordinators would have accounted for the dean of students. When we did the math, there was an increase and not a savings. We went back and we said what if we had only two pathway coordinators and not the CTE coordinators? It was still an increase. If you remember, I said to the Board rather than eliminate the principal of operations, if we could have an executive director but someone that could manage the discipline. Right now, that's what we've been able to manage much better than it's been for a while. We gradually keep getting better at it. That was also an increase. That's when we were at the retreat and it did not make it as one of the cost-saving strategies.

Comm. Teague: Good evening, Ms. Shafer. I wanted to ask about the teachers. I just came on a second ago and I heard you mention something about 40 teachers. Can you explain that again so I can hear what you were saying about that?

Ms. Shafer: Sure. We are getting \$12.1 million in COVID funds. I had said to the Board that we want to use \$3.6 million of that so that every child has a device in the school. Once we do that, we are also keeping \$1 million for sanitizing and PPE equipment for when we do come back. That left us with \$7.5 million that we can put back into the budget. We're going to take items out of the budget and use it for COVID, like special education expenses, instructional online expenses, and technology expenses. Then we would be able to bring back \$7.5 million worth of teachers. In addition to that, we went through the budget over the weekend and made some additional cuts. Right now, we're looking at \$12 million that we could bring teachers back with. The original RIF was \$14.6 million. We're looking at \$2.6 million worth of teachers that we can't bring back yet. We can bring back over 200 teachers. Then as retirements come in, with breakage we can bring back the remaining teachers.

Comm. Capers: Thank you for that, Ms. Shafer. Is the COVID funding state aid?

Ms. Shafer: It's federal.

Comm. Capers: It's the federal we were waiting on?

Ms. Shafer: Yes.

Comm. Capers: I just didn't understand this acronym. You said that we're going to save on PIR resources.

Ms. Shafer: Professors-in-residence.

Comm. Capers: We're not going to be using those?

Ms. Shafer: Right. We looked at everything in the budget and what's more important is that teachers are in the classroom. We looked at field trips. We didn't want to eliminate all the field trips for the students. We looked at everything that we could possibly do to cover teachers' salaries.

Comm. Castillo: I'm not sure if it will even translate to next year. I know it's something for this year's budget, the money that isn't currently being used to pay the school bus companies. I do know that there's a contract. I don't know if the Governor put something out saying that we had to go forth with those contracts or is it available money that we may have moving forward. Do we know anything?

Ms. Shafer: I'm going to ask Boris to speak of it. They did provide some guidance and it's a little negotiable, but I'll let Boris talk about it.

Mr. Zaydel: The law that was passed in April requires districts to continue making payments to contracted vendors. It requires them to obtain evidence of insurance coverage that covers business interruptions. A lot of transportation contractors don't have such coverage, but the money that we pay them has to go towards paying payroll costs and fixed cost obligations. However, a lot of vendors have laid off their drivers. They haven't been able to provide certified payrolls. The restriction on that is that we can't pay them until they provide certified payrolls. Once they do, then we can begin to renegotiate the agreements with them based on how we want to use them for the rest of the school year.

Comm. Castillo: Our school year ends on June 30. It's the middle of May, give or take a few days. If they haven't been able to submit the payroll or any evidence of them paying staff, is there a time limit as to when that will occur? Is there something that's pushing it for a time so that they can pay their employees? What about if they don't provide that documentation? The question then becomes a two-fold. How much money do we possibly have available or in funding to pay the contracts? If they don't provide that documentation, then what leeway do we have to then use that money to bring back the 40 teachers if breakage doesn't end up working or for additional funds on things that we can use? Will it roll over to the next budget cycle? I just want to know what happens if they don't provide the documentation by mid-May.

Mr. Matthews: Boris, can I jump in? I'm sorry. Nothing that happens with 2019-2020 money regarding payment or non-payment to the contractors helps us in the 2020-2021 budget cycle. If money does fall out, it helps in the following budget cycle 2021-2022. It has no impact to the 2020-2021 budget in bringing back teachers or not. Let's understand that it's zero impact to 2020-2021 financially.

Mr. Zaydel: There hasn't been any guidance from DOE regarding time limits. However, there's some concern about unjustly enriching certain vendors who are asking for 100% of their previous contract even though they are no longer paying employees and have benefited from PPP loans and other government stimulus funding.

Comm. Hodges: My question goes to Mr. Matthews. Why does that not impact next year's budget?

Mr. Matthews: First, the auditors will be doing our budget in the July/August timeframe. When they look at our books, they might say we might have to roll over liability to pay the expenses that were not paid through the COVID-19 virus. It will be on our balance sheet that the money has to be paid, but that's yet to be determined. It doesn't financially impact the 2020-2021 budget. It will impact the following year's budget. The auditor can come in and say: "You didn't pay your cleaning company \$4 million." I want you to put a liability in for \$4 million. If he says no, then you don't have to pay \$4 million. You pay \$2 million and then it falls out and becomes excess surplus. It has no financial impact on 2020-2021. Is that clear?

Comm. Redmon: Yes.

Comm. Castillo: Granted, I think Boris explained that there isn't really any type of information. Is there something that we can do with that funding for this year even if it is to help purchase the technology if we get some sort of direction? If by June 1 or June 15 they haven't produced any documentation, then we have two weeks to possibly use that money to purchase devices. I don't even know if it's necessarily possible, but it is for this current budget cycle. Is there any leeway to use that additional money that we have or that possible excess surplus?

Mr. Matthews: We are going to use the federal money for the devices. There's a couple of ways to go about the federal money. There's a county grant that's coming out that's reimbursable up to 100%. But for what we need to give all our kids devices we're using the federal stimulus money for that. That's where that's going to come out of. We're really still fighting hard to get through the 2019-2020 year. We don't really want to spend any more money than we have to spend in 2019-2020. I hope I answered your question.

Comm. Simmons: I don't think you did.

Comm. Redmon: With everything being restructured, what is the total savings for this year's budget proposal?

Mr. Matthews: Everything being restructured?

Comm. Redmon: Yes, with all the changes as far as the 40 teachers being eliminated. Most of the money is coming from the COVID money, just to make sure I understand.

Comm. Simmons: The money is being reallocated. When the COVID money comes in, it will be replaced. Did I say that correctly?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Redmon: Basically, we're just borrowing it for some time and then we're going to put it back?

Mr. Matthews: No. We're not moving positions into the grant. We're moving items that come under the grant under social/emotional learning and learning loss. A lot of the things that are under that \$7.8 million are not positions. It's going to free up money so that we can put teachers back into the budget. That's freed up money.

Comm. Redmon: It will be like technology, special education, and all that stuff?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Comm. Redmon: Okay, I understand.

Comm. Teague: On Sunday I was approached by a county official, a pastor. You all know him. He was asking me did the Board reach out to Pascrell or anyone on that level in terms of funding for Chromebooks. I told him I would bring it to the Board. I'm just going to present that here. He asked me that question Sunday afternoon in passing outside. I told him I would bring it to the Board. That's why I asked that.

Comm. Castillo: I know the \$12 million is part of that COVID that he's been fighting for. We were just waiting on the announcement and allocation, which we finally have from the congressman and the senators. There is an additional bill from Senator Menendez that could bring additional relief to the municipalities as well as the school districts. That's something that we will be waiting on as well.

Comm. Simmons: Right. There are a few bills in congress now with respect to school districts and technology. We're just waiting for that process to run its course.

Comm. Arrington: Thank you, Mr. Matthews. Madam Superintendent, thank you for all the work you and the BA are doing. Is there any additional state or federal funds that are available? I think Comm. Teague mentioned something. Did we exhaust all the federal and state opportunities out there to help us out?

Comm. Simmons: He asked if there were any additional opportunities for federal or state funding that the district pursued outside of COVID.

Comm. Arrington: That question is for Madam Superintendent.

Ms. Shafer: We did ask a grant writer to look and she has been doing that. At this point, we have exhausted everything that has become available to us. Like Comm. Castillo said, there are still some bills out there that could yield district money. I did have a call from Corey Booker's office. I think the senators were working together. I think it was about the COVID money that was going to be coming in for devices.

Comm. Castillo: There is definitely additional money. I don't know the exact name of it. It's a second round of the CARES Act, but more for municipalities and districts. I know it's something that the senate and congress has been working on. I think it passed one house and it's in the other house right now that would potentially bring relief to municipalities as well as school districts. It's something that we will see. We will see it throughout the summer. Since the state is not passing their own budget until September because they're waiting on some of that additional funding as well, we might see additional shifting of dollars, grants, and opportunities start to open up.

Comm. Arrington: Would that money go into the 2020-2021 budget?

Comm. Simmons: I would imagine since it comes during the 2020-2021 cycle, it will go into the 2020-2021 budget. Mr. Matthews can correct us if we're wrong, but I think that's where it would go. That's when it would come in, during that cycle.

Comm. Castillo: He hasn't jumped in. That means we're right.

Ms. Shafer: I think you heard Leon say that the county has some money. They're just putting the guidelines together now. It's money that's going to be available to school

districts. They're just not sure whether we have to apply through the city or directly to the county. That's all about what you've done and being reimbursed.

Comm. Simmons: Comm. Arrington, were you done?

Comm. Arrington: I think so. The budget is due Thursday. Do we know if anything is going to happen before then?

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Arrington: Thank you. I'm done.

Comm. Hodges: I guess my question has been partially answered. Is that additional funding that they were trying to send our way all closed off now?

Comm. Simmons: Yes, it is. He asked if after our meeting with the Commissioner in March, that additional money that they were trying to help us get is off the table. The answer is yes. Right now, I know that the state is working on securing the \$24 million allocation. They are working to protect that money to make sure that districts get what they said that they would allocate.

Comm. Castillo: We won't know that until after they pass their budget in September.

Comm. Simmons: Correct.

Comm. Castillo: It's an allocation we should have gotten now. Since they moved their budget cycle to September, it shifted all the dollars that we may get.

Comm. Simmons: Correct.

Comm. Hodges: We don't know the answer to that yet.

Comm. Simmons: Yes. In the conversations that I've had, yes. We know the answer to that. Not for the \$24 million allocation, but for that additional that they were working towards.

Comm. Castillo: Unfortunately, if our budget would have been extended to August or September we'd be having a different conversation, as opposed to us staying the same and the state being off. We have an additional gap of communication on what could potentially be coming to Paterson.

Comm. Capers: Are the teacher cuts for non-tenured?

Ms. Shafer: They have to be non-tenured.

Comm. Capers: Are we cutting any non-tenured principals?

Ms. Shafer: Yes. We only have two non-tenured principals right now. Because we closed Urban Leadership Academy and School No. 14 and those are tenured principals, we needed to find two places. Those two principals will go back to being a vice principal.

Comm. Capers: How many principals do we have on assignment?

Ms. Shafer: Right now, we have one. We started with three. Vivian Gaines retired in December. One is the principal of SOIT and then one is the principal of the suspension hub. We have one who is on assignment who assigned to two schools right now for Fine & Performing Arts.

Comm. Teague: Ms. Shafer, when will those notices start going out for the layoffs for the teachers? There are some that have asked so they can prepare for it.

Ms. Shafer: Those will go out May 15. They can go out up until the end of June. We're going to be sending them out May 15.

Comm. Simmons: If there aren't any other questions, I'd like to go into public portion because I think we have two speakers.

Comm. Castillo: I have one question, but I can wait until after.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

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

Ms. Rosie Grant: Thank you for this opportunity. Good evening Commissioners, Madam Superintendent, staff, and community members. I want to just put a pinpoint in the fact that we've cut \$63 million. Kudos to Madam Superintendent and her staff for doing this diligent work, but we're still \$63 million less than we had hoped for, for this school year. I thank you for putting that \$3.6 million to devices from the COVID funds. That's a desperate need. We don't know how our kids are doing until we can get them online because we can't see them in person. We also can't give them any new content. They're not learning new content. They're revising and reviewing until they have devices in their homes and they're connected. Thank you for that. Ms. Shafer, I followed your conversation and explanation of the teachers carefully. I think that if we have the average 200 retirements that you're expecting, it's great that we will be able to bring back the teachers that are RIF'd. According to my calculation, that means we still have 160 to 200 positions that will be eliminated because we're not filling all the retiring teachers' positions. If I have that wrong, please take the opportunity to explain further, but my calculation says we're still looking at a reduction in teaching force because we're letting go of retirees. They're all there now. If 200 retire, we're still 200 less. I've been looking at what categories are being reduced compared to last year. The professors-in-residence you explained, but there's also regular program instruction, special education, community service programs, health services, occupational therapy, support services, and school-based budgets. That's down \$734,000. State projects and Title I have reductions on their line items. I just wanted to raise that awareness. I know we have to present a balanced budget, but the fight is not over. We need the community to join in and take this fight to Trenton to the feds for full funding of the School Funding Reform Act, of all the Title programs, and IDEA. They're all underfunded and have been for many years. I also want to say given where we are with this I'm disappointed that more people aren't registered to speak. I hope that more people will take the opportunity to offer their thoughts and opinions to this conversation. Thank you.

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

Ms. Shafer: Thank you, Rosie, for your comments. When I talk about retirements, I talk about breakage. If you retire and you're making \$100,000, we start a teacher salary at \$60,000. The breakage that we would get from that retirement is \$40,000. We're filling the retirement position, but we're taking the breakage and calculating that to bring teachers back. Based on the salaries yesterday when we were here, we had 41 retirements. We're going to fill those 41 positions, but the breakage yielded us close to \$900,000. That is going in to help bring teachers back. We're not eliminating the retirees. We're bringing them back, but we're taking the breakage between the salary of the retiree and the starting salary of a candidate. That varies. If somebody is at the top of the guide to retire and then you bring someone in that has some experience, it could a savings of \$40,000 or \$30,000. You take that breakage, add it all up, and you're able to bring teachers back.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Comm. Castillo: Do we know how much it will cost to fix Smith Street for YMLA to come into that school?

Ms. Shafer: Is Neil on the line?

Comm. Castillo: I just wanted to know what the plan is, if any. I haven't seen the building in about a year, but last time I did it was not in good condition. I know we're moving YMLA from Prospect Park into Smith Street. I know there are currently 49 students with the potential of a few more. I know the building is in very bad condition. How in the world will we have that ready if schools we're to open in September? What would be the additional cost to that?

Mr. Neil Mapp: What was your question?

Comm. Castillo: What would be the cost to fix Smith Street? I know we're bringing YMLA back into that property. I haven't seen the property in a while, but last time I did see it I know it was in really bad condition. What would be the additional cost in fixing that building up? I know that there are 49 students right now with the potential of a few more. What would be the cost of fixing up Smith Street to be student ready?

Mr. Mapp: We haven't come to that determination as yet because we're still trying to get a scope of the remedial actions that have to take place. There is a significant amount of asbestos abatement that needs to take place. PTI, who is our vendor, has been out on two occasions to verify their findings. When we know that, we will know how much of the building we have to tear apart and then how much we have to put back. We know we have to do some roof work, which is upwards of about \$80,000 right now. Then we will have to do some masonry work, which is around the same amount. If we have to tear all the walls out down to the studs and rebuild it, you're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars to put that building back together.

Comm. Castillo: It could potentially cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, \$200,000 at a minimum.

Mr. Mapp: Yes.

Comm. Castillo: Clearly, we're having financial issues right now, so let's put that to the side for one second. Even if we had the money, would it be ready to open in September if we had to knock walls down and get a new roof? We know how the

system works and it doesn't necessarily work very quickly. If we had to do all this work, would it be ready in September?

Mr. Mapp: The scope of work that we anticipate having to do we could not accomplish in three months. We're looking at a December opening for that location.

Comm. Martinez: Where would they be housed until December?

Ms. Shafer: We're going to use temporary swing space at School No. 14.

Comm. Martinez: School No. 14 was one of the schools we were looking to close for cost savings. Now that's back on the table.

Comm. Redmon: I think we're all on the same page with that one. According to your budget, School No. 17 and School No. 14 were supposed to be uninhabitable. When did we put that back on the table?

Ms. Shafer: Do any of you remember?

Comm. Simmons: I think recently there was vandalism at Smith Street. The option was to either renew the lease in Prospect Park month-to-month until December or house them temporarily for two months in School No. 14.

Comm. Redmon: What is the cost for the month-to-month lease at Prospect Park?

Ms. Shafer: Leon, do you have the numbers?

Mr. Matthews: We sent a letter to the archdiocese to cancel services effective June, and then I was told to get a month-to-month. I offered them 40% of what we were paying right now. They were open to that.

Comm. Capers: How much is that?

Mr. Matthews: \$8,500 a month. That's what I offered them and they were agreeable to that. I told the guy we're still exploring other options because I knew that the swing space was on the table. It's still on the table with the archdiocese for that amount of money.

Comm. Redmon: What was our current lease payment?

Mr. Matthews: \$20,000 a month.

Comm. Redmon: We went down to \$8,500 a month for month-to-month.

Mr. Matthews: Right.

Comm. Redmon: What is the cost savings if they go to School No. 14?

Ms. Shafer: You would save the lease.

Comm. Redmon: We would be saving \$8,500 a month.

Comm. Castillo: There are so many concerns with the conversation. It's just not fair. Now we're moving them to Smith Street. Now we're maybe moving them to School No.

14. Now we're maybe keeping them in Prospect Park. God knows what we're doing with this entire school. It could potentially cost us an additional \$24,000 to \$30,000 if we stayed at Prospect Park. That's without counting transportation. Even if you go to School No. 14, that's another conversation of what we would do for transportation for these students that live across town. All these conversations and cuts we just made to the budget we're potentially adding right back on. What is the plan to handle this situation? It's nothing about the school. I think that if we're going to keep the school, at least let's do it right as opposed to having all the swinging back and forth and not knowing where these kids are going to end up in September. We have 49 students in a building and now we don't even know where they're going to go?

Ms. Shafer: After we had the cost savings retreat we were moving them to Smith Street. When Neil went in to do a walkthrough at Smith Street, someone had gone in and stolen all the copper piping, which resulted in a roof leak. That's where you have the water damage. He said that he could have it ready for December. That's when we went to look and see what the monthly lease would be, knowing that we had some financial restrictions. Then we said we have School No. 14 just to use as swing space and save on the lease until they could go in in December.

Comm. Simmons: Is any of the damage covered by insurance to Smith Street?

Mr. Mapp: It depends on how much it is. If the deductible is greater than \$50,000 it could be covered.

Comm. Simmons: If the damage is greater than \$50,000, it's covered.

Mr. Mapp: Mr. Matthews can verify that.

Mr. Matthews: \$50,000 is the cutoff.

Mr. Mapp: I'm not sure if the piping that was taken amounts to \$50,000 in terms of replacement materials and labor to reinstall it.

Comm. Hodges: Have you anticipated this cost in the current budget?

Ms. Shafer: We already had the moving costs in the budget because they were going to Smith Street. Instead of incurring those costs, it would be going to School No. 14.

Comm. Hodges: You've already planned for that.

Ms. Shafer: When the budget was struck, we had planned for Smith Street.

Comm. Castillo: We haven't planned for fixing Smith Street. As we're allocating the finances to move, which is in the budget, what we didn't have planned is fixing up Smith Street. That's an additional cost that we're bringing up to be ready for September. That's my concern.

Comm. Capers: You're saving money on the swing space.

Comm. Castillo: You're not saving money on swing space because the lease had already been taken off for this budget. He's not adding additional money for the swing space. What is being added is an additional financial burden to fix up Smith Street?

Comm. Teague: What happens with the parents from School No. 14 who were told that the building wasn't really a place where the kids could continue to be there?

Ms. Shafer: We understand that, but we didn't plan on this happening at Smith Street. It's one of those things. Neil went in and that's what he was confronted with. It's temporary.

Comm. Simmons: I think the logic is if you're using School No. 14 as swing space and you're not paying on the lease in Prospect Park considering the conversations we were having around finances it was easier to just swing them into a space that we owned and didn't have to pay anything for.

Comm. Castillo: What wasn't budgeted for was fixing the building.

Comm. Simmons: I think at the time the thought was that you couldn't just move into it.

Comm. Castillo: About a year ago it had water damage.

Comm. Martinez: This is something that we've had on and off the table so many different times. I know there's a lot of sensitivity around this topic, but the exorbitant costs we're incurring is... I'm trying to find the correct words here.

Comm. Hodges: It has been voted on and discussed.

Comm. Martinez: What's that?

Comm. Hodges: Keeping the school. The concern is the additional cost. Madam Superintendent, do we have the ability to sustain that cost?

Ms. Shafer: The cost to repair the building?

Mr. Mapp: We have to defer some capital projects in order to get those done if we're not going to add anything to the budget.

Comm. Castillo: Those other capital projects included what, other roofs?

Comm. Redmon: That's what I was going to ask.

Comm. Martinez: We're robbing Peter to pay Paul. We're essentially taking money away from other projects to steer it towards this project which is something temporary.

Comm. Castillo: I just want to know what those projects were. Were they roofs? Were they something big?

Mr. Mapp: They range from masonry repairs to labs to wheelchair lifts, retaining walls, and windows at School No. 2. We were going to begin the first phase of the exterior paint at EWK.

Comm. Castillo: I'm sorry. I don't mean to be harsh and I do gratefully believe in all of our kids and that we should be doing the best for them. I've been one of the people that praised Young Men's Leadership for all that they've done, especially in the last year. At the same time, taking away from other capital projects that are equally as important in schools that have 700, 800, and 900 students in them that need them to then fix up Smith Street for 49 students, you might as well have left them at Prospect Park. You're

taking capital projects from one group of students that were budgeted for, whether it's those who unfortunately have disabilities and need lifts and retaining walls for some schools. To me it sounds a little crazy and it seems like it wasn't planned properly. I think we're doing a disservice, not only to Young Men's Leadership, but to other students as well.

Comm. Redmon: Will Smith Street be their permanent home? They keep moving. If we're going to do all this pouring of money into that building, are they going to be there?

Comm. Castillo: They moved because they couldn't expand.

Comm. Redmon: Each year we are moving the school. Now, we're going to put more money into this building. Are they going to stay there? Is this school even going to exist?

Ms. Shafer: We want to bring them back to Paterson. This is the only available space that we have so this would be their home.

Comm. Castillo: Would they have the ability to expand? The reason we moved them out to begin with was because the place wasn't big enough for them to add additional grades and classrooms. Or will we be back in that same position we were in a few years ago?

Comm. Redmon: Two and a half years ago.

Ms. Shafer: Right now, they would be able to fill every classroom to the max for each grade level, one classroom per grade level.

Comm. Capers: What's the max?

Ms. Shafer: The state max is 24.

Comm. Castillo: That's 24 kids per grade level.

Ms. Shafer: Correct, grades 3-8.

Comm. Martinez: Looking at the current enrollment numbers at YMLA, they're shy of 50 students in the whole school, which means in grades 3-8 there are 50 students. I'm not a math wizard, but that's easily less than 10 scholars per classroom. When you're looking at that ratio, less than 10 scholars to a classroom compared to our other schools in the district that are 30 plus, where is the equity there? We're putting a lot of time, resources, and energy. Again, if the funds were not the issue, then it's a moot point. But with the funds being what they are, we're putting a lot of resources into the school to keep the classroom size under 10 when every other school in our district is popping at the seams. It hardly seems equitable and it hardly seems right. I know we've had the discussion about having to really look at the possibility of closing the school. I know that's uncomfortable, but I have to say it on record right now. The cost just keeps going up and up and it's not equitable. I know we've heard the arguments of the parents and the scholars who were there. In an ideal world we can keep a situation like that, but we are far from ideal. It's not fair. If there are 50 kids in the district, then what about the other 30,000 with 30 plus students in the classroom? How do we look at those families and say we're going to keep your child in a classroom of 35 plus but we're not going to touch them? They're going to have five kids in a classroom.

Comm. Arrington: What is the max number of students that YMLA can hold? How many students are in the pipeline being interviewed by Principal Medley?

Ms. Shafer: I'm going to ask Cicely Warren. She's on the line.

Comm. Castillo: The maximum is 144.

Comm. Arrington: How many students are currently being interviewed by Mr. Medley or his team?

Ms. Cicely Warren: Good evening. There were 40 applicants. 26 have confirmed their attendance for next year and interviews are still underway. There are 53 students currently enrolled.

Comm. Martinez: Assuming that those who are being interviewed and everything works out, what's the projected number if we currently are at 53?

Ms. Warren: 26 have been admitted and confirmed attendance for next year.

Comm. Martinez: On top of the 53?

Ms. Warren: Yes.

Comm. Castillo: Is the 53 counting the 8th graders that will be leaving?

Ms. Warren: No, it's the current enrollment plus 26. That's where we are right now.

Comm. Castillo: 79.

Comm. Arrington: I do hear some of the arguments and I do understand. We did ask Mr. Medley and Ms. Warren to do a job and that was to improve that school. We've seen the test scores improve. For me, I have a problem with shuttering the school when we've asked them to make the school better and improve the enrollments. We've seen the scores go up and enrollment is going up. Now we're discussing shuttering the school. It's my position that we've asked Ms. Warren and Mr. Medley to do a job and they've done it very well. I understand the money situation completely, but I'm completely on board for her. It seems that we have a bright spot there. They're doing well. Just to close it, I have to process that one. That's all I have to say about that.

Comm. Capers: Just to reiterate, Mr. Arrington just took the words out of my mouth with what he just said. He hit it right on the nail. Just like what Mr. Matthews said earlier, we're raising taxes to make an investment in education. Whatever it takes, we ask the district. The Board voted to fix this school and this school had a lot of bumps and bruises. It's a turnaround school right now, the district did what they were supposed to do, and it's going in the right path. I believe this is a small investment in our black and brown students in our district. It's a specialized school. It's not a school that's close to a regular education school. It's a magnet school so boys of color can focus more because they learn different in the classroom. I'm totally for this school. What the district didn't do in the past was really invest in the school and give the school the resources it needed to be successful. They were always thrown around with little resources and no expectation. The Board put expectations behind the school and the district delivered. Now they're asking for a space to be in long-term where they can grow and is their home. It's our obligation to do what we have to do to give it to them. Yes, it's a budget crunch, but we have buildings for swing space that we can put those

guys in until we can figure out our numbers. I agree with Arrington. It's a lot to digest to give up on them because the district, the school, and the students did a lot of work to get where it is. To give up on them just for a couple of dollars, I think that's wrong.

Comm. Teague: I definitely understand where Comm. Castillo is coming from and you as well, Mr. Vice President, in terms of the financial basis. It's hard for me too. When we actually saw the presentation from them at the retreat and I went to the school and saw how they interact with the students and I'm hearing students about how it's affected them at home and changing their overall life. That's a tough one for me too. We're in a situation now that we've never been in before. Let's just face it. This pandemic has pushed us to the brink of places that we've never been. I know we need to have some discussions that are not going to be easy at all, but this is a real tough one. That's all I want to say.

Comm. Hodges: The true value to me of that school is the model of success that is demonstrated. That does not exist anywhere else in the district other than at School No. 28. The primary purpose of that school was to develop the model for teaching those kinds of students. They're on their way to developing that model which we can better export to the rest of the school district. That's the true value of the school to me, not just the individual people who are being taught there. It's the overall model that we need to benefit from. One of the things that I focused on during that presentation was the model of achievement. This is for the Superintendent. This \$62 million has not improved us educationally, Ms. Superintendent, has it?

Ms. Shafer: The \$62 million gap?

Comm. Hodges: Yes.

Ms. Shafer: No.

Comm. Hodges: We're losing educationally across the board. To turn around and further hamper a progressive model is not necessarily in our best interest.

Comm. Martinez: Comm. Hodges, I agree with your statement that this is a model that we would love to see replicated throughout the district, but think about what that entails. This is an ideal situation. This is what we would see. We would see less than 10 students in a classroom with the amount of resources that they have made available to them in that classroom. I do not disagree with that. I would love to see every school, but that is not the reality. The reality is that the overwhelming majority of our scholars are in the complete opposite of what's taking place here. I'm seeing both sides. You want these young men to have those opportunities. You want the families to get that fair shake. But what about all the others kids who are not getting that fair shake? How do we justify to them that we are going to keep 35 plus kids in your classrooms but in those classrooms five or six is okay? How do we justify that? I do understand the position that everyone's taking. It's true, that is the model and I would love to see that. How do you right that? How do you right five or six kids in one classroom in one building and then you're getting 35 plus in every other building in the district?

Comm. Castillo: I want to make this very clear. I've been a fan of YMLA for a long time. I was the second one after Comm. Simmons to say that I would love to see an academy or a magnet school dedicated to young women in that nature in the future. It's something that I would love to see in the future to give young ladies an opportunity to learn about themselves and grow in a different way. I would love to expand it to actual buildings so more young men get the opportunity to do so. I've been an avid supporter

of that for a very long time. My concern comes because of the poor planning of this year. We are moving kids around from Prospect Park to Smith Street to School No. 14. The students, principal, and families at School No. 14 and School No. 17 have also done everything that we've asked them to. They've had great accomplishments in those buildings. Those kids didn't want to leave their schools or their principals or anything of that. Yet, we asked them to leave their buildings and scatter to different schools. We just have to be very mindful because the parents of YMLA might be very upset. I know for a fact that the parents of School No. 14 and School No. 17 are still very upset that they had to move their kids out of those schools they also chose to put into. We just have to be very mindful of that aspect. That's about 300 students that were removed out their building and out of their magnet, maybe a little less than that. I just want us to be very cautious of those conversations as well. Those schools aren't less of a model or less important and the stability of those kids weren't any less either. That's something very important. Like I said at the beginning, if we're going to keep this school, then at least do it right. Granted, I know Prospect Park was a lot of money, but at least they had a space that they were used to. Now we want to move them into School No. 14 which we said wasn't an equitable school for any student that was there. Now we're moving them in there which, excuse my language, but it sucks because it means that we aren't necessarily thinking about their well-being. Then we want to move them possibly in December. We all know how our construction works. It could be December or January. It could be a minimum of three months to again put them in another school. We have a total of possibly 79 kids starting in September. My goddaughter has 32 kids in her kindergarten class. It's definitely a variable. If we want to put money into the school and see it grow, then we're doing a disservice to them as well. We're neither here or there.

Comm. Capers: Are we just doing month-to-month in Prospect Park because of the budget constraints?

Comm. Redmon: Comm. Capers, you have to back off of your screen because you're shaking your screen.

Comm. Capers: If we had to extend it, and not rush it all the way to January, can we do another year in Prospect Park? More funds are available so we don't have to rush and, like Manny said, rob Peter to pay Paul and really do an investment. I'm a product of an all-male school. I'm raising daughters and I'm raising a son. In our community, this type of program and a magnet school is really needed. When Don Bosco left Paterson years ago, a lot left with it. Now Paterson Public Schools brought this style of program back. In the beginning, we failed that school as a Board. Now we are pouring the resources in. Now the school is moving and the Board is telling them to go in a different direction. It's really a black eye to the parents, the kids, and to the administration that did that hard work, working long hours with the students. The students are paying more attention to their education because they got out of those other schools and into a more specialized school in a smaller learning group. Like the Superintendent said, the school is growing. They're having more. It's going to expand. I don't see closing it or getting rid of the school. We have to continue to invest, invest, invest. We just told taxpayers we have to invest in our kids. The Board has to invest in our kids and the programs that we do have. I think we just have to look at it differently on where money can come from, what donations we can get to help, and what grants are out there to help. We have a bunch of developers out here. This is a good program. We have to think outside the box. Let's charge the district and Superintendent with another task, not to get rid of the school, but how to find money to get this up and going.

Comm. Castillo: It's funny how everyone wants to find the grant dollars to do it, but when I proposed to fix Church Street and Smith Street almost two and a half years ago, it was turned down by this same Board.

Comm. Teague: I wasn't on here then.

Comm. Castillo: Minus Corey Teague and Arrington. Everybody else was on the Board to fix these buildings.

Comm. Martinez: Nobody wanted it then. We're a team and if it is the will of the team, then I'll go along with it. We can't have it both ways. In one breath, we're saying that this budget is not reflecting what we want and it's not enough. But we're not willing to make the tough choices at times. I hate to break it down this way because it's tough to put a number on a child's education. But in this seat, this is part of the task that we are given. We have to look at these tough decisions and we have to look at it this way. What we are spending per scholar at YMLA is twice as much as what we are spending on every other scholar. While it's great for the students at YMLA, I'd be remiss if I don't say it's not fair to the other students. We're saying that our budget is not right and we need to do this and that. We can't have it both ways. You want it this way. You want to double down and spend the money on YMLA, but you don't want to cut the other places, but this okay. It doesn't shake out.

Comm. Castillo: That's the most important part. I get it. We're all here to fight for the kids at the end of the day. But it's easy for some of us to not want to make the difficult decisions when it serves us best. We don't want to close Young Men's. None of us do. None of us want to close any of the schools. Honestly, I don't want us to close School No. 14 and School No. 17 either. I wish we could put some money in those buildings, fix them up, and turn around and put more kids into them because Paterson is growing. We have our influx of students. Our rate of students and the number of students that we have each year grows. We have new development in the city that we have no control over with new housing coming in. We are going to need School No. 17 and School No. 14 to get done because we're going to need the space. We already need half of the space. We don't want to make these decisions. Then again, some of us are conscious enough to understand that this isn't necessarily what we want to do, but we have to vote for this budget. There's some that want to vote no on the budget, including that the vote no for the budget might dismantle the whole thing and they might get rid of the school anyway. We can't pick and choose what we want to vote on and what we want to fight for if we're not fighting for the whole thing, for all of the students, and making tough decisions the entire time. It's very easy to say I want to do this and I don't want to do that. But when it comes to the overall, we don't want to have this conversation. Mr. President, that's my peace for the day.

Comm. Teague: I haven't been here in a while. What's the story with the Newcomers school? Are they still open and functioning? If we're going to cut, let's go with everything.

Comm. Castillo: Excuse me?

Comm. Teague: We have to start cutting.

Comm. Simmons: Hold on. We're not going to make this into something that it's not. We're not going to make this more than what it is. The Newcomers Program has nothing to do with this conversation.

Comm. Castillo: Let me tell you, there are Hispanic kids at Young Men's Leadership. It has nothing to do with race. The fact that you want to do that is very disrespectful.

Comm. Teague: I didn't say anything about race.

Comm. Castillo: The Newcomers Program?

Comm. Teague: You're talking about making tough decisions.

Comm. Simmons: The Newcomers Program has nothing to do with this conversation.

Comm. Castillo: It's also not in its own building. It's mixed into another building at New Roberto Clemente because they lost their building a few years ago. That was cut as well. The program for the high school that was never activated was also cut last year. If we are talking about equity, yes everyone has been cut. Why don't we get our facts straight before we start talking all of this nonsense?

Comm. Teague: It's not nonsense. Let's have a conversation about everything if we are going to talk.

Comm. Castillo: I agree. Let's put it all on the table, just like Newcomers was put on the table and decisions were made. We weren't happy about it.

Comm. Hodges: I just wanted the Board members to respond to the chair's direction, which is not happening. That's all I want.

Comm. Capers: I agree. Let's keep with the direction of the Board. I don't think this is a race thing. The Young Men's Leadership Academy does service black and brown students. They service our young men from this community. I'm just not on board. We have to make an investment. The Board failed this school in the past. We already voted to keep it going and give the school the resources and the district delivered. Now we're talking about turning our backs on the district after we told them to deliver. I just think that's wrong. I think we have to find another way and keep that going.

Comm. Hodges: Hopefully, we're not going to be in this same condition forever. The reason I voted no on the budget was because overall, as the Superintendent has just stated, this represents a decrease in our ability to produce a decent learning experience for our students. That's why I voted no for the budget. I'm not calling for the closing of YMLA. I'm not calling for the closing of School No. 28 or any programs that are successful. I'm looking at a program that is successful and I want to increase it and hold it over this very difficult time to make it stronger moving forward. Perhaps we can move it into another building when Don Bosco is completed. There are potential possibilities. If we lose the school altogether, then that's all precluded from us. All I'm saying is let's keep it going. Let's accept the improvements that are going on there now and let's move forward with it.

Comm. Arrington: We all know the data on some of our males is not as strong in our district. Like Comm. Hodges said, we see a model here that's starting to work. We know it's going to cost us money to keep it open and just to throw it away now I think is a disservice for the community. We're seeing a model that's starting to work and we're seeing some scores improve. Let's keep this model going and roll it out to other schools. That's my position.

Comm. Capers: The reason I didn't vote for the budget was because of what the Superintendent stated earlier. The budget didn't reflect a quality education for all our students, especially during this COVID time. Like Comm. Hodges and Comm. Arrington said, it is working. In Paterson every time something is working, we're always trying to do something to change it or take it away. Our children in the community know they need that. The Board voted once to keep it going. Now we're trying to give them a permanent home. Let's invest in our children and young men, especially coming from an urban district in an urban neighborhood. Too many of our young men don't have these resources in their regular schools. They learn differently. I'm a product of one. I can tell you I stand by this. I know this model works and it's working in our Paterson Public Schools. We need to keep it going.

Comm. Martinez: I'm in complete agreement with everyone else who says the model that we've created at YMLA is ideal. The amount of resources made available with so few scholars in the classroom and the quality of teachers is the model. Every year that I've been on this Board whenever it comes down to budget time, we are always faced with the same thing. All we do is kick the can down the road and wait for some more money to come in to put the Band-Aid on top. This is why, because we don't want to make these decisions. Every year we are faced with the same things and we say we will deal with it next year. We get a bag of money from the state, put the Band-Aid on what's really going on, and kick the can. A year later, we're facing the same thing. How long have these problems been facing us? For quite some time and guess what? If I'm alive and here next year, if we don't start making the changes that we're not willing to make now, one year from today we will find ourselves right back in the same place having the same conversations like we did last year and the year before. We always talk about it, but we don't do it. We say we have to do what's fair for the kids, but how is it right that we're investing so much money in 50 scholars? Forgive me for putting it this way. I know it sounds awful. How is it right that we're investing that much in 50 scholars in one academy when every other school gets the short end of the stick? We don't want to make that tough call, so guess what? We kick the can down the road and next year we're faced with another deficit and we're facing the same thing. We'll put it off again. Guess what? It will happen again next year if we don't start making the tough decisions. We do this every year. Is it working at YMLA? Yes. Would we like to see that model of 5-7 students in every classroom? Of course, but tell me how that's fair for the other 29,950 students who don't get those resources? We're going to do what's in the best interest of those 50 scholars in one academy on the backs of 29,950 kids. This is why we're inherently in the position that we are every single year, because we don't want to deal with that. We don't want to take the heat. We don't want to make the tough decisions. We kick the can and next year we will have the same conversation and give the same rationalizations of why we should be doing it. But it's not going to change because we won't change our process. We will be right back at it. Tell me if I'll be wrong. Mark the words. It's May 11, 2020. Mark my words. Put this on the record. We will be back here next year having the same conversation like we did in 2019, 2018, and 2017 right down the line because we won't make the tough calls. We'll be right back at it.

Comm. Teague: In terms of the YMLA, the model works. The person who is working with that model there is doing a very good job. Isn't there a way that we can train these principals on the same model so they can model this to their students? I don't think getting rid of this program is going to suddenly transform the district into a beautiful place when we're already dealing with these issues. How is taking that school out going to fix what we're dealing with right now?

Comm. Martinez: I'm agreeing with you. You're right. This is symbolic of what we don't want to do in the district. This instance is a symbol of the decisions we never want to make and why we always end up right back. Let's say we got rid of YMLA. Is it going to fix the budget deficit? No. It would help, but think about it. If we made another tough decision, it would help. If we made those little decisions, they would all pile up and be something big. But we don't want to make the little decisions along the way. We just kick the can down the road and we end up where we are year after year.

Comm. Capers: This conversation started with a question from Oshin about the cost. Where is this going? What is on the table here? What are we talking about? We can keep debating about the program and whether to keep it or not. What are we doing? What are we charging the district with?

Comm. Simmons: It's a conversation. So that we can end this debate, all of the points are very well taken. Can we also find out what it would look like if we did single gender classrooms throughout the district? How would that work if you did single gender classrooms? I don't know what it would cost to train teachers. I know teachers have to be trained specifically to teach single gender.

Comm. Hodges: A different approach would be to expand the school. With Don Bosco coming on in 2021, we could move the school in and make it part of that school.

Comm. Capers: Say that again.

Comm. Hodges: You can convert a portion of Don Bosco into a male academy.

Comm. Simmons: Like Gifted & Talented is at School No. 28.

Comm. Hodges: Exactly.

Comm. Teague: That's something there.

Comm. Hodges: Hold on to it and get us past this difficult period. Then when we have more building space, we will have better options.

Comm. Capers: I'm 75% with you, Comm. Hodges. I went to an all-boys school. I think differently. When it's just young men learning from each and growing with each other it's just a different world. If you haven't experienced it, you don't understand it. If you're not raising a son, you don't understand it. Putting your son in a young men's academy and where the program is heading is a great thing. You need to take it out of the school to make it work, not integrate it. Now you're working backwards.

Comm. Simmons: I think by now we all know you went to an all-boys school. We're extremely aware.

Comm. Teague: I just want to clear something up. Comm. Castillo, I wasn't trying to take aim at any race. I want to clear that up. I'm just shooting ideas like we're all doing. I'm just getting back. It wasn't directed to any group. Moving the kids to Don Bosco and maybe putting them upstairs, if that's going to save the program, then fine. At least we know it's still intact and they're still getting what they need to receive. If we move them to Don Bosco, will that cut the cost to educate them every year? Will that cost remain the same?

Comm. Hodges: You increase the class sizes.

Comm. Teague: Comm. Martinez said it was almost double from our public school students. Is that right? I don't know if Ms. Shafer can answer that.

Comm. Simmons: Comm. Martinez said it was double, but I'm not sure they're prepared to...

Mr. Matthews: On a per-pupil basis it's significantly higher by more than 20%.

Comm. Castillo: I started this conversation at the very beginning saying I still believe in the program. I just think that we continue to do a disservice by constantly not having a proper plan. Financially we allocate a larger number to students in that academy. Knowing that, we move them out to Prospect Park for financial reasons to move them into a building that is falling apart. Then we move them to another building that we just told 150 kids it wasn't good for them. That's one of the biggest problems. We have 49 kids jumping around without a permanent home. If you want to build structure, that's the worst way to start. They'll probably be in a school until December or January at the latest and then they have to move again. Now they're moving twice in one school year on top of it all. That's a disservice to the young men there alone. That's how I started this conversation, on how that's a problem. We have a semi-plan for them because things aren't done fully. We're going to keep them, they're going to go. We had the conversation about not having the program as its own because we talked about moving the program within another school to save money and see if can have additional support. If we want to bring in the Newcomers Program, they're in New Roberto Clemente in another school. That's about 300 kids we have additionally at New Roberto Clemente. We're not going to talk about that problem. We talk about moving maybe 79 students within another building to not get rid of the program and still be able to say we've talked about creating single gender classrooms so all students have the same opportunity in every school. We've had all these conversations in my five years on this Board, but we have not come out with a strategy for any of them.

Comm. Hodges: What you really want is for the Superintendent to develop a solid strategy and plan for the school.

Comm. Castillo: That's what I've been asking for a long time. We have a principal for 49 kids. We have additional staff. Mr. Medley has done a great job adding additional students. We have 26, but it doesn't consist of a building. If we're going to make this into an academy and magnet school and we all really care about this program, then let's do it right. If we're not going to do it right for whatever reasons, then let's think of restructuring it into schools so that all schools have that opportunity. I've heard of kids wanting it and parents not being able to drive them or they have an issue with the morning buses. How about if Dr. Hani, School No. 16, School No. 15, and NRC all had single gender classrooms? I don't know what that would look like. I'm just putting it out as an idea. It will give all students the opportunity to participate, instead of just a select few. If we want to help our young men, then why aren't we looking for ways to help a large number of them?

Comm. Hodges: Let's assign the Superintendent with the responsibility of coming up with a more formal plan for improving the school.

Comm. Simmons: That's what I was going to say, Comm. Hodges. At this point, the Superintendent and her cabinet can come up with a strategy for the program and get back to the Board.

Comm. Hodges: Including increasing the size of the student body in the program.

Comm. Simmons: We'll just go in circles for the rest of the night.

Comm. Martinez: I appreciate the dialogue. I know we get into it, but I appreciate you all.

Comm. Simmons: Madam Superintendent, is there anything you wanted to add?

Ms. Shafer: No. We'll certainly look at a strategy for the program, both for their own building and growing it or in single-gender classrooms throughout the district.

OTHER BUSINESS

Comm. Simmons: Board members, I know you've talked a lot and I know that you like to talk this evening. Is there anything additional you wanted to add? I've heard from some of you I've never heard from before.

Comm. Teague: I just want to publicly apologize for the last meeting. I wasn't trying to get street with Comm. Redmon or Comm. Martinez. We have our dialogue.

Comm. Redmon: Hold on, Comm. Teague. We're not going to do this over this public meeting.

Comm. Teague: I did that publicly.

Comm. Redmon: What you can do is give me a call at my number and we can talk about it offline.

Comm. Teague: We can talk offline. But I always feel like if you do something publicly, you should also apologize publicly.

Comm. Simmons: She's good with you not doing it publicly.

Comm. Redmon: I answered your question, but we're not going to do this here. We're going to end this meeting and move on to the next thing.

Comm. Castillo: We can apologize to all the newcomers we have in this district – Hispanic, Arabic, and Bengali – for a comment that was way out of line and very disrespectful. I think those children and those families are the ones who deserve the apology from Comm. Teague.

Comm. Simmons: Yeah, that's not going to happen.

Comm. Hodges: What's the next step, Mr. President?

Comm. Simmons: The Superintendent is going to come up with a strategy for the program and get back to the Board, including growing the program.

Comm. Hodges: We have a meeting on Thursday, but we haven't offered any real changes to the budget other than what the Superintendent put on the table.

Comm. Simmons: Before we adjourn, Comm. Teague this is your last opportunity to apologize.

Comm. Teague: Like I said, my comments were not directed towards the Hispanic community at all. All my neighbors are Hispanic and they know that. Anybody who knows me know that that's not my style. I was asking a question about different programs since we were discussing programs. There was no ill intent with my comments. You all who know me know that.

Comm. Castillo: Newcomers is not a Hispanic community. Newcomers Program is the Bengali and Arabic community as well. Newcomers Program is a program for a child who does not speak the language.

Comm. Teague: With all due respect, I know what the program is.

Comm. Castillo: The students that you represent and those families are the ones who need the apology, not the Hispanic community.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.