

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

June 30, 2014 . 6:41 p.m.  
Administrative Offices

Presiding: Comm. Christopher Irving, President

Present:

Ms. Eileen Shafer, Deputy Superintendent

Comm. Chrystal Cleaves, Vice President  
Comm. Jonathan Hodges  
Comm. Errol Kerr

Comm. Manuel Martinez  
Comm. Kenneth Simmons  
Comm. Corey Teague

Absent:

Dr. Donnie Evans, State District Superintendent  
Comm. Wendy Guzman  
Comm. Alex Mendez

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

Comm. Martinez read the Open Public Meetings Act:

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

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

**Special Meeting/Executive Session  
June 30, 2014 at 6:30 p.m.  
Administrative Offices  
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. Irving: I want to note for the record this evening Dr. Evans will not be with us. Acting in his capacity will be the Deputy Superintendent Ms. Shafer. Welcome.

**MOTION TO GO INTO CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS  
PERSONNEL/SUPERINTENDENT'S EVALUATION SUMMARY  
AND NEGOTIATIONS FOR A DRAFT PLAN REGARDING  
LOCAL CONTROL**

**It was moved by Comm. Martinez, seconded by Comm. Cleaves that the Board goes into executive session to discuss personnel/Superintendent's evaluation summary and negotiations for a draft plan regarding local control.**

Comm. Hodges: Mr. President, has Mr. Mendez resigned?

Comm. Irving: Yes, he has.

Comm. Simmons: He should have been called.

Comm. Cleaves: He was called.

Comm. Hodges: He was called.

Comm. Irving: His resignation ends literally the time we finish with executive session. But he's not even here now so even when we get out of executive session it won't matter. It's very weird. For the record, he wanted to be here to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation and look around.

Comm. Cleaves: His resignation is effective today.

Comm. Irving: He submitted a letter.

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

The Board went into executive session at 6:45 p.m.

## **RECONVENE**

The Board reconvened the meeting at 8:14 p.m.

## **INTERVIEW SESSION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE VACANT SEAT ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Comm. Irving: I want to welcome everyone back and thank you. We had a very good executive session. I want to thank the Board for a very thorough conversation on the Superintendent's evaluation and negotiations. We are reconvening. I want to welcome all the potential candidates who are here this evening. I want to thank you all for your time, energy, and effort in being here. I want to briefly just go over the process. For those who may not know who I am, my name is Christopher Irving. I'm the President of the Board. To my immediate left is Corey Teague who is one of our colleges on the Board. Comm. Ken Simmons, Comm. Manny Martinez, Comm. Chrystal Cleaves is the Vice President of this Board, Errol Kerr who will be up momentarily, and Dr. Jonathan Hodges who's our senior member on the Board. This evening we will be conducting interviews to fulfill the six-month vacancy left by Commissioner, soon-to-be Councilman Alex Mendez. That person, if and when selected this evening, will fulfill that role until January 2015. They, of course, will have to run in the November election for the vacated spot as well, but that person will sit in that capacity until after the election. The way the process tonight will go is we will invite all the candidates to join our Deputy Superintendent Eileen Shafer in the adjoining room. We will call each candidate one-by-one to come out. There will be a series of questions the Board will ask you. You will have one to two minutes to do a brief introduction and state your purpose and cause for why you want to serve on the Board. Then you will get between four to five questions from the Board asking you a range of questions about your ability and interest to join us.

I'm going to ask all the candidates to please follow Ms. Shafer to the parent resource room. The first candidate is going to be who?

Ms. Williams: Mr. Ken Abuassab.

Comm. Irving: Mr. Abuassab, please have a seat and we will wait until all the candidates are in the back. Mr. Abuassab, I want to welcome you this evening. Thank you so much for expressing your interest to be a part of the Board. Cheryl, if you can start the clock. This session is going to last about 10 minutes or so. We've looked at your resume and the Board has some follow-up questions for you. The first question that I will ask is just for you to briefly in about two minutes introduce yourself and tell us your reasoning for joining the Paterson Board of Education.

Mr. Ken Abuassab: Good evening everybody. Peace be upon you. My name is Ken Khader Abuassab. I've been a resident of Paterson since 1980. I have a full family with five kids. All my kids went to Paterson Public Schools from kindergarten to high school. I graduated one from William Paterson and the other is nursing. Two are joining nursing schools right now. All my life since I came to the United States I'm involved in many community activities including elections, youth activities, and a lot of volunteering. I like to be involved with helping people that needed help where it's needed and fairly presented. I like to make sure I get the chance to talk on behalf of my community that has been presenting at least through 15 years after I ran for the council for sixth ward in 1992. In 1994 I ran for council-at-large. Since then I've been involved in the community activities. Now I'm involved on the state level, which is representing the Attorney General's committee member. We are 10 in New Jersey State. I'm also a member of the Interfaith State Council for New Jersey State.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Mr. Abuassab: I think they need to get the parents and families more involved in the decision-making with their kids' future to make sure that they are on the right track and the parents will help a lot in their houses to make sure their kids are up-to-date with those levels.

Comm. Hodges: Do you understand the role of the Superintendent? Describe the role of the Superintendent.

Mr. Abuassab: The Superintendent of any public school is in charge of all decision-making after voting on any programs or budgets that the Board approves after meetings to make sure the public is aware of all the decisions that the Board is taking. After that, the Superintendent will follow up with those decisions that the Board voted on and make sure the public schools are running correctly from books, staffing, cleaning, maintenance, and all that other stuff.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? How do you propose, as a Board member, to address some of those challenges?

Mr. Abuassab: I think one of the challenges that I've been involved with in some of the round tables at the Board of Education is the absenteeism. The Superintendent lost some millions of dollars last year because of absenteeism of the kids. I think they need incentives to make sure the kids are coming daily to school to make sure they're not counted as absent. That will prevent them from failing and all the money that's coming

for each child from the state or the taxpayers throughout the county comes fully to teach the kids.

Comm. Martinez: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Mr. Abuassab: I think unqualified teachers will limit the teaching of any grade from kindergarten to the high school. We have to make sure we are selective and do interviews periodically to each teacher. Secondly, we have to make sure that schools are equipped with the right equipment such as air conditioning and heating to make sure the kids are sitting in the classes comfortably. Third, giving them all the materials that are needed to learn and improve in classes and make sure their homework is done. Fourth, I will say to make some incentive or something for the kids to come in every day such as music lessons to be improved in the Paterson School System. I think that's what we are lacking right now.

Comm. Cleaves: Could you or would you support a Board decision that you were not in favor of?

Mr. Abuassab: No. I will always be fair with my vote and if I'm not in support I will not be in support.

Comm. Irving: Thank you, Mr. Abuassab. We appreciate you taking the time. If there are no other questions, Ms. Shafer is going to take you in the back. You have the option of staying. We will deliberate and then render our decision later on this evening. If you head out we'll let you know who will be the final candidate selected. Thank you very much.

Mr. Abuassab: Thank you. I have to go and break my fast.

Comm. Irving: Ms. Williams, who is the next candidate?

Ms. Williams: Ms. Escha Bates.

Comm. Irving: Good evening and welcome. My name is Chris Irving as I said before. I have introduced you to our colleagues. Just so you know, we have a series of questions for you. This process is going to take roughly 10 minutes. We've looked at your resume and we have follow-up questions based on that. I will start out with the first question. What I'd like you to do is just simply introduce yourself to the Board. Please tell us who you are and what is your motive for wanting to serve on this Board of Education.

Ms. Escha Bates: Good evening Board members. My name is Ms. Escha Bates. I am a mother of six children, two of which are college graduates. One graduated from Temple with a degree in communications. The latest one graduated this past May from Farleigh Dickinson University in science. All my younger children are currently in the Paterson Public Schools, except for my 17-year-old who's at PCTI. I believe in the system. I believe that it's a good system that we have here in Paterson. I also believe that it can be a better and stronger system that can serve all of our children with all the diversity, differences, strengths, weaknesses, and special abilities that they have. I'm excited to potentially be a part of that process. I love education. I love teaching my children before they enter school. That's with reading and creative ways. I'm motivated to get them to learn when they're not feeling like it. I believe it's an exciting process and I'm hopeful and just excited to see how far I can go and what I can offer to the Board

with my gifts and talents. Right now I just want to see what I can bring that can possibly enhance what you already have.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Ms. Bates: I would have to initially say forgive me. I'm unfamiliar with QSAC at this point, so I'm unable to answer that.

Comm. Irving: Thank you very much for your honesty.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? As a Board member, how do you propose addressing some of these challenges?

Ms. Bates: If I'm understanding your question, some of the fiscal challenges within the school system are, being a parent first, is a lack of a lot of things that I used to have when I was in school with the arts and music. Those things are very important. They continue to be important based on what we've done in the past to get monies to actually appropriate. I don't know how the School Board has gone about trying to secure funds, but I would continue to work with that and possibly research more ways that we can get funds to serve the purpose of bringing certain things back like art, music, and other things that we need for our children academically to grow.

Comm. Martinez: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Ms. Bates: I believe that a lot of our children still suffer from a lack of being exposed to the basics - reading, writing, and arithmetic. A lot of them are behind the level that they should be in those areas. I really feel that those things are important. They were important in my day and they remain important. We need to find a way to motivate and encourage these children so that we can get them up to par and be competitive with not only within the community itself, but with other counties. I feel that there is something that needs to be done. Again, forgive me, but I thought I would be prepared. However, I know the things that I am passionate about and it is education. I know that children need to read, write, and comprehend what they have before them. Each child is different just as each of us is different and we really need to see how we can work this to get them on board as one. I hope that answers that question.

Comm. Simmons: Can you describe for me your understanding of the role of the Superintendent?

Ms. Bates: I believe that the Superintendent's job, for one, is to oversee each school within the city and make sure that the needs of not only the children, but the staff are met with updated material and the latest technology and bring that to our students. I know there are other obligations that he's responsible for, which I'm not privy to at this time. Again, forgive me for that. I am committed to finding out and to be aware of the function and everything else that I need to be regarding the Superintendent and the Board of Education.

Comm. Hodges: Frequently, a Board member or members strongly disagree with a decision that the Board has made. Can you still support that decision even if you strongly disagree with it? Can you stand with the Board in agreement if you strongly disagree with the Board's decision?

Ms. Bates: If I were to strongly disagree with the Board's decision I believe that I would respect that decision being that it was a decision of the whole. If I had a disagreement with it, I'm sure I'd be able to voice my opinion at the time of discussion hopefully to get more clarity and to become enlightened as to why the decision was made. But yes.

Comm. Irving: Thank you so much for volunteering to come down here and take part in this process. You have the option of hanging out in the adjacent room until we make our decision. It may be about an hour or so. Or we will notify you first thing tomorrow morning of our selection this evening. It's your choice. Thank you for coming this evening.

Ms. Bates: Thank you sir and thank you Board members. I will be leaving at this time. I'm sorry.

Comm. Irving: If you get it, you'll find out in social media.

Ms. Bates: I appreciate the opportunity that each and every one of you has afforded me.

Comm. Irving: Good evening. As you know, my name is Chris Irving and my colleagues are here. We are going to begin with a series of questions that we're going to ask you. Before we do that we're going to ask you to please introduce yourself to the group and please state your motivation for joining the Board of Education.

Ms. Oshin Castillo: Good evening, my name is Oshin Castillo. I actually wanted to join the Board because I'm a product of the Paterson Public Schools. I was raised here. I came when I was three years old. I've been here all my life. I actually went into school wanting to do criminal justice because I've always wanted to come back and do something for my community. Going into school I started being a Sunday school teacher. I actually had the opportunity to go into college and that's where I saw the difference. I had an organization where we came back and I always came back home. I came to different schools to speak, such as School 27 and School 18. They were all schools that I went to so it was easy for me to come back with the organization. I saw what the schools and the kids needed and I wanted to come back and help. I did political science and communications in college because I think that will give me more of an edge on how to come in and cause a change and be a product of change. I think our students need something else in the City of Paterson. Going into a school in Teaneck you see how people ask, "Where are you from? From Paterson!" What's the problem with Paterson? A lot of people see that and it's because I feel that kids don't have a morale coming from these schools. I want to bring that. I want to find a way to help them come up knowing they can go to college and do something better for themselves. At the end that will be better for the city as well.

Comm. Irving: We're going to give you about 10 minutes or so to answer a series of questions from our colleagues.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Ms. Castillo: It's something I would have to do a lot more studying for. I think that the main thing that they need for the schools to have better control is a better communication between not only the teachers and the Board and more of a direct contact with the students. I think that would be a difference because you don't know to

a degree what the students are going through and what they are thinking. I think that would make a change.

Comm. Simmons: Can you describe for us your understanding of the role of the Superintendent?

Ms. Castillo: Actually, going to school I have to say people used to mention the Superintendent and I was like, "uh?" They didn't play a role growing up while I was in school. We didn't see much of them. We really didn't know what they did or who they were. They were some figure up there that somehow we thought made some type of decision. Now looking back into it, I see that the role they play with the schools and the administration is trying to run the school properly. They help to choose the staff and things of that nature. From a student's standpoint, I don't think they still play much of a role.

Comm. Hodges: Frequently, a Board member or members strongly disagree with a decision that the Board has made. Can you still support that decision even if you strongly disagree with it?

Ms. Castillo: I think everyone has their opinion, but I believe even if I stand on an opinion I don't agree with I can try to show you why I don't agree. But if the whole Board decided on something it was for a reason. So it's my job to understand why you're choosing or why you're deciding on a subject. If there's something with which I don't agree we can see if there's something that can be tweaked. But overall there's definitely something I'm missing as a Board member because there are nine.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? As a Board member, how do you propose addressing some of those challenges?

Ms. Castillo: As I mentioned before, there's a lot more learning that I need to do and things that I need to get updated with exactly all the challenges that the Board faces. From what I've seen, now that the Board has some power that the government has granted it doesn't make things any easier. It just gives you more work to do. From an economic standpoint the Board can do a lot of things because if the Board expands to the community to the degree that they not just notify parents of school but involve the community I think that would help. A lot of people are willing to help the children and see their kids succeed. Economically something can be done if you involve the community as a whole.

Comm. Martinez: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Ms. Castillo: The main one is not educational, but self-esteem and morale. I think that's a problem that we have. It's more outside of the school. Crime has a lot to do with it. Kids are easily getting pushed out of school into crime. The second is an economic standpoint. I worked while I was in school. A lot of kids find it necessary to go out and work and do things like that and that's also dragging them down. A lot of schools aren't creating a way that these kids can go to work and be at school at the same time. I had to work while I was in school. There are some schools outside the City of Paterson that accommodate you to do that, but the schools in the city don't. I think if you accommodate these kids to go out and work or have a certain grade to go out and work and help them find a job that would help. Another thing will help a lot is even the teachers themselves. Going to school in Paterson sometimes can be a little interesting, especially with the teachers that are coming from outside of the city. They don't

understand a lot of our students. They don't understand what they're going through, so it's easy for them to either give up or to not focus in on the needs. That may not be just on books, but if you just sit down and talk to them while teaching the class there are simple things that will make a child wake up. It's not necessarily what they see in their cities or towns.

Comm. Irving: Ms. Castillo, thank you so much for coming. We have several other candidates we need to interview. You have the option of waiting in the adjoining room until we complete the round and we make our selection this evening. Or you can head home and we'll notify you first thing tomorrow morning of the person who's selected. It's your choice.

Ms. Nelly Celi: Good evening. How are you?

Comm. Irving: Good to see you. Just so you know, this process is going to last about 10 minutes or so. We've looked at your resume and we have some follow-up questions for you based on that. We'll begin with you telling us a little bit about yourself and your motivation for joining the Board. Then we have about four or five questions that my colleagues are going to ask you in your time with us today.

Ms. Celi: Good evening, Commissioners. I'm here applying for the position of Commissioner for the vacancy being left by Alex Mendez. My reason for wishing to be a part of this Board is simply because I have been working with the children and families and the community for over 20 years in various capacities. I was teaching at St. Anthony's many years ago when I was five and then I worked for Tri-County for a while and lately with the Girl Scouts for over 16 years. In various capacities I have worked with the children, families, and community getting to know them and what their needs are. Whether it was the path I chose or not, I don't think it was one that I chose but it seems for the past 20 years I've been going down one road and that is families, communities, children and finding ways to help them reach their goals and find their voice. I think that's so important that they tell their story. That's been my goal for the last many years, to allow the children to tell their story. Everyone tells their story differently, whether it's a song, a dance, a Commissioner. Whatever choice they make we need to provide them the tools so they can accomplish that and they can find their way. We all found our way because someone helped us and guided us down that road. I think we as a community are responsible for the children because they will someday sit in these seats and make the decisions for us. I'd like those decisions being made by educated individuals who will do what's best for us when we can no longer make those decisions for ourselves. If we don't take the time and make it a point to give these young children, the parents, and the community the tools they need to be successful later on we will be facing much greater problems, issues, and social agendas than we are facing now. I think we need to stop it.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Ms. Celi: I believe there are several others. I know right now we have operations. I think there are four more that we have and I can't honestly say that I know all of them. Governance, personnel, policy, and finances would be all things that we would need to be able to have in order to take complete control of the Paterson Board of Education.

Comm. Martinez: Can you describe for us your understanding of the role of the Superintendent?

Ms. Celi: In my opinion, the role of the Superintendent would be to guide, set the standards, and work with the community, families, and parents to assure that the administration and those that he chooses and puts in positions will lead the Paterson Board of Education and the school system down a path where the children will learn in compliance with the laws set by the state and also make sure that he provides the children, the faculty, the teachers, and the administration everything they need to fulfill their roles to the best of their abilities so that the overall picture can be successful.

Comm. Hodges: Frequently, a Board member or members strongly disagree with a decision that the Board as whole has made. Can you still support that decision even if you strongly disagree with it?

Ms. Celi: I think I've come to the Board meetings in the past and voiced my opinion against something that may have been said or done or an action that was being taken. I think it's important to voice our opinion. That is why you're elected and you're representing the community. It is important to voice that opinion and say it clearly whether you do it behind closed doors or in public. But it is more important to work together as a team for the whole. I might not agree, but it doesn't mean that you're right and I'm wrong. It just means that I need to look at things from a different perspective. I can make my opinion and statements clear so there are no misunderstandings in the future, but then look at what's being accomplished. If there is no medium and the general population says that this should be then work with that and work towards accomplishing the bigger picture and not my own personal agenda.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? As a Board member, how do you propose addressing some of these fiscal issues?

Ms. Celi: I can only say that I know some. You have a much greater understanding than what I have of what the fiscal challenges and what are the shortcomings. There are possible cutbacks from the Governor. I think that's something that needs to be addressed. There's state funding. More importantly, we need to look at what we have. Coming from a not-for-profit for many years you have to do more with less. Throwing money at things isn't necessarily the problem. I've learned that through having bad cars. You keep throwing money and you hope it keeps running, but it doesn't. So you have to look for alternatives. What are we maybe not using the money the most wisely on? I know that sometimes we tell principals they have to order because this is the amount of money they're given, \$1,000 per se. They need to use it or they will lose it. Next year they won't have it, so they just go spend the money because they don't want to lose it next year. If you have this candy and if you don't eat it now you're going to lose it, you're going to eat it even if it makes you sick. Maybe it's finding a better way to utilize that, looking at what we can cut back on and finding other ways to use the procedures. We're rich in resources, we just have to identify them and use them to benefit us and the children as a whole and not necessarily financially.

Comm. Cleaves: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Ms. Celi: I'm against state over-testing. I don't think it proves anything. Not that we're going to eliminate them altogether. That's my opinion. I think teaching to the test is a problem. I don't think we allow the teachers the ability to give our students the creativity and the ability to go outside the box because we're so focused on the testing that we have to pass because we want to look good in front of the Governor and meet the standards that are put before us. I think that's a problem. I've heard of incidents where the teachers don't have the books or schools don't have the teachers when they started

in September. These are issues. If you open up a school and you don't have the teachers and the manpower to actually lead the classrooms with qualified individuals we're just setting them up to fail. Then we ask why they failed and we blame other people for it. So those things have to be put in place. For whatever reasons it might have happened, I'm not saying this or that. It's just that these are things that we need to look at to help whoever is making those decisions to make sure that they don't happen again or how can we prevent it or put in place processes or procedures to make sure that we're successful and that children are given the tools to be successful.

Comm. Irving: Thank you, Ms. Celi. At this time our time is concluded together. We want to thank you so much for taking the opportunity to apply for this vacancy. Your answers have been great. You have the option of hanging out in the adjacent room until we finish and we will go into executive session to deliberate and come back. Or you can certainly head home. We thank you so much for being here.

Dr. Lilisa Mimms: Good evening.

Comm. Irving: I want to welcome you this evening and thank you so much for applying for the vacancy. I want to let you know that we're going to give you about 10 minutes or so to have a discussion with the Board. We've looked at your resume and had this conversation amongst ourselves about the résumés. Now we're giving you the opportunity to answer additional questions. Can you please share with us a little bit about yourself and what your interest is in applying for the vacancy for the School Board?

Dr. Mimms: Good evening and thank you for this opportunity to be considered for this opportunity. My name is Dr. Lilisa Mimms. I'm a lifelong resident of the City of Paterson. I have matriculated through the educational process of Paterson through grammar school, high school, and also attending Passaic County Community College. This proves that the educational process in this community does work. I have been a liaison in our public school system working in bridging the gap with community partnerships to ensure that we have community efforts that are being done within the school system. I also have children that have attended the Paterson Public Schools. I was heavily involved with parents in increased participation rate with attendance. From a community perspective, I'm one of the pastors in the community. Our church has adopted high schools and grammar schools for the last six years where we've allowed volunteerism and tutorship to some of the students in the schools that were failing in some of the classes such as language arts and math. Some of those students have graduated from grammar school and high school. We've provided scholarships to some of the high school graduates over the past four years giving them laptops, tablets, and printers so that they will be successful in college. I'm an advocate for parents, educating them on the IEP process so they're very familiar with understanding what that process entails and what's needed to ensure that their children get a quality education in the Paterson district.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Dr. Mimms: With my understanding of NJQSAC and working on several boards, I believe that it will need to gain some leverage in the area of governance. Governance is a very important issue when you're doing Board policy because there are executive limitations that have to go on in that procedure. There are some Board and Superintendent relationships that have to take place. Linkage is very important to engage the community so that we can build and foster healthy relationships.

Comm. Martinez: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Dr. Mimms: Since we're governed by NJQSAC and we're in five functional areas, I think one of the things that will limit is not having a high-quality education for our students. I think that the improvement with the facilities we've noticed or identified in some of the schools that some of the buildings need to be painted. There are some improvements as far as health issues in some of the buildings that will affect the learning process. I think that we need to continue to identify those teachers that are teaching our students. We also need to increase parent involvement so the parents are engaged in the learning process and continue to help our teachers in the instruction time.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? As a Board member, how do you propose addressing some of these fiscal issues?

Dr. Mimms: When it comes to fiscal responsibilities there are a lot of pieces that are engaged in that with evaluations and making sure that we reallocate resources appropriately. One of the things that you will need to do is to read and research those items appropriately making sure that we're following the standards and the guidelines that are put before us. Then in those procedures we can work together collaboratively as a team to make sure that we give what's needed based on the policies and guidelines that we have to adhere to.

Comm. Hodges: Frequently, a Board member or members strongly disagree with a decision that the Board as whole has made. Can you still support that decision even if you strongly disagree with it?

Dr. Mimms: If it's something that I strongly disagree with and I have some facts surrounding my decision, I will definitely stand on my decision.

Comm. Cleaves: Can you describe for us your understanding of the role of the Superintendent?

Dr. Mimms: His role is to oversee and to govern the school district with the oversight of the Board Commissioners. Based on the guidelines, vision, and direction that is set here by Commissioners it is given to the Superintendent. Therein it is adhered to and it is enforced throughout the school district for our teachers, parents, and students.

Comm. Irving: Thank you, Dr. Mimms. That concludes all the questions that we have. We thank you so much for coming this evening and submitting your resume and being a part of this process. You have the option to hang out in the adjacent room until we make our selection, which should be in about a half hour or so. Or you can head home and we can notify you first thing tomorrow morning who has been selected.

Dr. Mimms: Thank you so much for your time.

The Board took recess at 9:06 p.m.

The Board reconvened the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

(Tape did not record interviews of Mr. Mohammad Ramadan and Mr. Joel D. Ramirez)

Mr. Flavio Rivera: The predecessors have started the process, you guys have continued the process, and we're heading in the right direction. I want to be part of that. That's why I'm here today. I bring a strong financial background. I have 10 years of experience in government and finance. I also have a good understanding of school finances. I also understand how tough this school district has it without being able to increase the tax levy for the City of Paterson, having stagnant state aid, and having to manage your budget through the use of surplus. It's very difficult and I applaud the administration and the Board for doing more with less.

Comm. Teague: What area of QSAC would the School Board need to regain in order for them to have more control over the schools?

Mr. Rivera: We need governance. We need to govern ourselves. That's the reason we're here as Board members. There's not a lot to say. I'm a man of few words. That's my number one choice. I wish I could say finance, but I know better. I know the importance of being able to govern yourself.

Comm. Simmons: Can you describe for us your understanding of the role of the Superintendent?

Mr. Rivera: There are many roles that the Superintendent has. Unlike county and city government and the situation we're in here in the district, the Board doesn't approve the budget, the Superintendent does. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but that's one of the roles he serves. He's also the head of the whole district. A lot of the decisions come from him. He's the leader.

Comm. Hodges: Frequently, a Board member or members strongly disagree with a decision that the Board as whole has made. Can you still support that decision even if you strongly disagree with it?

Mr. Rivera: The reason I'm here is that I'm a team player. A lot of times disagreeing doesn't mean it's the worst thing. A lot of times it's just your opinion of what could be better. That's why we're a body of nine. That's why we have nine people here thinking together. That's why we have workshops, to discuss a lot of these matters. That's why you have the administration as a resource. You actually need to sit down and think what's best for the community and all the students as a whole. To answer your question, if it's not harmful to the district and to the school, I would support something for the betterment of the district.

Comm. Martinez: Can you please name four issues that limit the improvement of academic achievement in our district?

Mr. Rivera: From being a substitute about 10 years ago, I noticed that the behavior in the schools is an issue. Also, the differences in the way some of the schools are run. Unlike a teacher, a substitute gets to go to different schools and you see how a school that's located less than half a mile's distance with the same demographics the environment inside the school is totally different. This is a very difficult question in a way, but it starts with discipline and we need to have control of the students in the classroom. If not, it's very disruptive. Usually a lesson that can be taught in maybe 45 minutes takes longer for a teacher because of all the distractions and everything else. I guess discipline would be number one.

Comm. Kerr: What are some of the fiscal challenges the district faces? As a Board member, how do you propose addressing some of these fiscal issues?

Mr. Rivera: First of all, as a Board member, I know not all information is public information, but I'm going to have the administration as a resource. I'm also going to have all the information needed to do my analysis and research. Just off the top of my head, as a resident of the City of Paterson I know we have contractual issues that we have to face. I hope we put money aside for that situation and I'm sure we did. We're a responsible district. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the main issue that the administration has is that for whatever reason, I know a lot of times it's political, our tax levy in the City of Paterson has been the same since I started working there 10 years ago. Also, we don't have much control of the state aid that comes in. So when you're putting together a budget you have your revenues and appropriations, which are your expenses. The district has a problem. Expenses continue to go up. Your state aid is stagnant. You have the same tax levy. So now you depend on surplus, which is very tough. If it's not available then you have to look for properties to sell and things of that nature. Again, it's remarkable what the district can do with so little. It seems like a lot. The budget is huge. But again, expenses go up every year.

Comm. Irving: Mr. Rivera, as I've told the other candidates, you have the option of hanging out in the adjacent room in the back. The Board is going to go into executive session in a second to deliberate and have some discussion. Then we'll come back and render our decision. From there the Deputy Superintendent will swear in the next person to fulfill the term of Alex Mendez over the next six months.

Mr. Rivera: I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

#### **MOTION TO GO INTO CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS FILLING THE VACANT SEAT ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**It was moved by Comm. Martinez, seconded by Comm. Cleaves that the Board goes into executive session to discuss filling the vacant seat on the Board of Education. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.**

The Board went into executive session at 9:38 p.m.

#### **RECONVENE**

The Board reconvened the meeting at 9:52 p.m.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

No speakers.

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

#### **ACCEPT NOMINATIONS FOR CANDIDATE TO FILL VACANCY ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Comm. Irving: I want to thank all the Board for deliberating and I want to thank all our candidates for showing up here this evening and having a conversation. We were very impressed by many of the conversations that we had with the candidates. I think folks by and large were sincere. They were well-informed, but most importantly they truly cared about the hope and status of our community. Cheryl, can you do a roll call and go around and we'll ask each Board member to select their candidate and/or choice. I'd now take nominations for candidates to fill the vacancy on the Board of Education.

Comm. Martinez: I'd like to nominate Flavio Rivera.

Comm. Hodges: Nelly Celi.

Comm. Teague: Lilisa Mimms.

**It was moved by Comm. Cleaves, seconded by Comm. Martinez that the nominations be closed. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.**

Ms. Williams: The first person nominated is the vote. Once you reach the majority, that's the person. You don't have to do the others.

Comm. Hodges: What do you mean the majority?

Ms. Williams: You take the vote on the first person nominated. Once the majority is reached for any candidate it's over.

Comm. Hodges: What number is the majority?

Comm. Irving: It's the majority of the Board.

Ms. Williams: Right, the majority of the members present.

Comm. Hodges: That's four.

Ms. Williams: Right.

**On roll call all members voted as follows on the nomination of Mr. Flavio Rivera.**

Comm. Teague: No.

Comm. Simmons: Yes.

Comm. Martinez: Yes.

Comm. Kerr: No.

Comm. Hodges: No.

Comm. Cleaves: Yes.

Comm. Irving: Yes.

**The motion carried.**

Ms. Williams: Flavio Rivera has been appointed.

Comm. Irving: Congratulations Flavio. Can you please come forward? We're going to have the Deputy Superintendent administer the oath of office. When someone wins

Ms. Williams: It doesn't say when the day is.

Comm. Hodges: He's got fingerprints and all that stuff he's got to do.

Comm. Irving: That comes after. Let's swear him in.

Comm. Hodges: Let's wait until the public meeting to do it.

Comm. Irving: This is a public meeting. Please swear him in. Thank you.

### **SWEARING IN OF NEW BOARD MEMBER FLAVIO RIVERA**

Mr. Rivera: I, Flavio Rivera, do solemnly swear that I will support the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the State of New Jersey and that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same and to the government established in the United States and to this state under the authority of the people, so help me god. I, Flavio Rivera, do solemnly swear that I possess the qualifications prescribed by law for the office of member of a Board of Education and that I will faithfully, impartially, and justly perform all the duties of that office according to the best of my abilities, so help me god.

Comm. Irving: Congratulations Flavio.

Comm. Hodges: The reason I had the most trouble with question 16 is there have been times in this community when the Board collectively made inappropriate decisions. Because the majority made the decisions, if the decisions were both wrong and illegal then if you stand by them then you are associating with wrong and illegal decisions. That's not every decision. That's something that I had to go down to the School Boards Association and ask about in my training to make sure that we can legally do what we were trying to do. There are Board majorities and the ethics are clear what you're supposed to state. As I explained to them, and I went to the lawyer, I was elected to do a certain thing, which at that time was to get rid of the Superintendent of Schools. I made it very clear why I was running. The Board was 7-2 majority in favor of the Superintendent and everything that he put before us, many things of questionable value. In those instances you're being asked to pay for legal bills which don't have any basis. You're being asked to agree to construction costs which were later determined not to have been done. You can say you can stand by the Board's decision, but not when you know it's wrong. This is why I take the position I do. I don't do it every single time that the Board and I are in disagreement. As you can see, I voted no against most of the. But there are instances when you must stand by your position.

Comm. Irving: Fair enough.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.