

**MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
BOARD RETREAT**

February 4, 2025 – 5:36 p.m.
Central Office (First Floor)

Presiding: Comm. Eddie Gonzalez, President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Rodney Henderson, Deputy Superintendent
Khalifah Shabazz-Charles, Esq., General Counsel

Comm. Della McCall
Comm. Hector Nieves
Comm. Joel Ramirez, Vice President

Comm. Mohammed Rashid
Comm. Kenneth Rosado
Comm. Corey Teague

Absent:

Comm. Valerie Freeman
Comm. Kenneth Simmons

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

Comm. Gonzalez read the Open Public Meetings Act:

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

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

**Board Retreat
February 4, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.
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. Gonzalez: We're here to convene to talk about the district goals. With that, we have an Update on District Audits first, on Instructional Programs and Human Resources, and this will be provided by Dr. Shawn Joseph.

UPDATE ON DISTRICT AUDITS

Instruction and Program

Dr. Shawn Joseph: Good evening, Commissioners and Dr. Newell. It's great to be here with you to talk about the work that's been happening with Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates in Paterson Public Schools. We were commissioned last semester to support the district in taking a deep dive into its practices in a multitude of areas, including operations and finance, family engagement, the Gifted & Talented program, human resources, instructional practices within the district and your special education program. We met in late October with the previous Board prior to the Board election and during that time we, as a Board, spent a Saturday doing a deep dive into the operations update, the family engagement update, and the Gifted & Talented update. From that session, the Board worked to understand the audits that were done and also help prioritize for the district areas of focus. The audits had lots of recommendations, and the Board recognized that you can't do everything at once in terms of addressing the issues that were identified as it relates to having appropriate resources, putting a plan in place, and executing. The Board prioritized in the areas of operations and finance, family engagement and Gifted & Talented. These were areas where they wanted the district to begin to prioritize and move forward so that work has been ongoing. Tonight, I wanted to share with you the findings from two additional audits – instructional practices and human resources. I'll take the next 20 minutes or so to walk you through at a high level the findings. I believe you have a copy of the actual audits in your possession. This presentation is just an overview or quick summary of those findings. The presentation that I have up now is the instructional program audit and I'll talk about the process, findings and recommendations of this audit. I actually conducted this audit. I'm Shawn Joseph, Assistant Professor and Director of the Superintendent Academies at Howard University. I'm a former superintendent in Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee and the Seaford School District in Delaware. In term of process, we sent a survey out to all district staff, and you had 1,116 teachers respond to the survey, giving feedback. We conducted six one-on-one interviews with senior district leaders. We also had nine focus groups and engaged 158 teachers from across the district. Then we worked with our parent company ECRA to analyze math and reading performance across all schools in Paterson Public Schools. We grouped the findings into headlines. The first headline would be the focus on supporting all students. There's a strong commitment to supporting diverse learners despite resource limitations. It's clear you have tremendous challenges with limited resources, but you have a very committed faculty working to meet the needs of your students. Ensuring academic preparedness - while students are making growth, more must be done to ensure all students are academically prepared for the next grade level and post-secondary success. As I go through this report with you, we found that students are actually making one year's growth in many of your schools, which is what is expected. The challenge is you have many students who come very behind and so the challenge for the district is to figure out how to not just have one year's growth, but to accelerate growth for students. Supporting teachers and retention - there are strong existing systems such as accountability and professional development that support teachers and a need to improve job sustainability and satisfaction. Improving communication and coordination - the district has to increase communications between central office and schools in order to improve coordination of key systems such as curricular implementation. When we look at the teacher survey, an area of strength was teachers believe that in Paterson you do a good job integrating technology, personalizing instruction, that there is accountability, and that there is a diverse workforce. In terms of mixed opinions, the social/emotional learning support for students and work-life balance and job satisfaction - you had mixed reviews about how well people thought that was happening. In terms of areas of growth, we talked about academic readiness ensuring that all students are academically prepared for the next grade level and post-secondary

success and that all schools have safe learning environments for students and staff, that there is a need to continue with the effort to recruit high-quality teachers and administrators. In the one-on-one interviews, we included the STEAM math director, director of bilingual learning, director of assessment, director of curriculum and instruction, director of science, and the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. They found that increased communication and collaboration between central office and school-based leaders was needed to improve curriculum implementation and professional development. There was a need to develop and consistently implement systems to support teaching and learning, such as a teaching and learning framework, working to strengthen your teacher evaluation system and having clear tools for instructional look-fors. Also, there is a need to improve the collection and use of data to drive instructional decisions. As we did the nine focus groups with the 158 teachers across different grade levels, in terms of strength teachers shared that there was collaboration and under Dr. Newell's leadership they have more voice than they have had in the past. They also discussed there was a commitment to professional development in recent years and you are working to increase your parent engagement initiatives, and there is a focus on student needs and a recognition of the resource challenges that you have. Some of the challenges that teachers identified were limited resources, inconsistent practices, the need to improve employee morale, the need to continue to get more parents involved in overcoming the barriers that keep parents from schools and working to support the very diverse learning environment that you have there. Many of your buildings are very old and need to be modernized, and there are weather challenges that impact the quality of instruction that they are able to deliver. Our parent company ECRA reviewed your data and Paterson serves a high number of students who are below grade level requiring schools to grow students more than one grade level per year. In general, students are making expected levels of growth in both English and math with a few exceptions by grade level and student group. There are significant variations in growth by school. As you look at the report that I sent, it actually breaks down by each school where students are making expected growth and where there are opportunities for continued growth. As you look at the chart, it illustrates that in ELA there were only two schools identified that had what we would consider unsatisfactory growth, meaning they're not growing as expected. You had one school that was growing in ELA lower than expected, but the majority of your schools (36 of your schools) were growing students at expected growth or higher level growth. This data is important because you can drill down to look at those schools where you have higher than expected growth and see what's happening within those schools to hopefully take those strategies and see how they can be applied in other schools to get that level of growth. The good news from this chart in both reading and math is there are only two schools with unsatisfactory growth, seven schools with lower-than-expected growth and 30 schools that were growing at expected or higher than expected rates. The majority of your students are growing at expected rates and that's reason to celebrate. Again, the big challenge you have is expected growth won't get you to hitting the state standards if students are coming in below the standards. How do you prioritize your work and resources to ensure that more schools are actually doing better than expected growth? That's the challenge that Paterson has as you look forward. We broke recommendations down into three different categories – teaching and learning, teacher recruitment and retention, and system resources. We discussed that there is a need to establish a professional development unit to support high-quality job-embedded professional development for teachers throughout the year. One of the things teachers noted was that the professional development had been inconsistent. In speaking with the district, you all had taken away your professional development unit in prior years, prior to this administration. It's really important to think about in future budgets how you begin to rebuild the professional development unit because with the need that you have in terms of the student support needs it's really going to be

important to support your teachers in helping with that acceleration. The district needs to develop a teaching and learning framework to clarify the instructional expectations at the classroom level. Thinking about your systems and looking at what the expectations are for classes in terms of the instructional piece is work that needs to be done collectively. Establishing a professional development calendar for mandatory training for principals, assistant principals and instructional staff is important because excellence doesn't happen by accident. It happens by design and so working to ensure that training is mandatory will require resource and collaboration with the unions to get those types of calendars done so teachers, instructional staff, principals and assistant principals are getting the training that they need to help accelerate as you seek to do. Establishing monthly half-day curriculum update meetings with principals, supervisors, and reading and math specialists to ensure consistent high-quality training to ensure curriculum implementation is being done properly. Continue to refine the interdepartmental meetings to ensure that curriculum leaders and assistant superintendents are planning, prioritizing and working on implementation of curriculum. Just looking at the structures that you have to make sure the right people are meeting together to plan and implement high-quality learning for your staff. As it relates to teacher recruitment and retention, one big challenge you have is your vacancies. It will be hard for you to really accelerate learning with the amount of vacancies that exist. I know it's something the district is working hard to address, but your vacancies in reading, math, special education and ELL need to be addressed to ensure that students have access to high-quality teachers in these critical positions. The district should continue to establish the cohorts that you have with local universities to address teacher shortages, such as the bilingual teacher cohort that you currently have at Montclair State University. Recognize and reward teacher contributions to work on morale and retention. You might consider offering foreign language courses to your staff to support their ability to communicate with your district's diverse student body. As it relates to systems and resources, continue to address the resource gaps focusing on materials for English language learners and special education students. This is particularly true for your sheltered ELL classes and self-contained special education courses. A number of those teachers were in the focus groups communicating their desire to have the materials to meet the needs of those diverse learners that they serve. Standardizing grading policies and discipline enforcement across the district would be important, along with continuing to refine data processes to enable principals and teachers to drill down to the student level and align interventions with targeted needs. At this time, I'll stop and answer any questions that you may have. Again, this was just to be a high-level overview of what you have in a more detailed report.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you for the presentation.

Comm. Rashid: Hello, Dr. Shawn. How are you, sir?

Dr. Joseph: I'm well. Good to see you, sir.

Comm. Rashid: On the teaching and learning section, you mentioned establish a professional development calendar of mandatory training for principals, assistant principals and instructional staff. Isn't this already mandatory?

Dr. Joseph: The staff can elaborate, but it's my understanding it could be because of resources or your contract. When teachers are trained outside of the day or if you don't have the appropriate number of professional development days there will be a cost associated with that training. It's not just Paterson. There are many districts across the country that might offer training in the summer and it's optional. Then you have a percentage of teachers who don't attend the training but it could be important.

Comm. Rashid: Is this your observation? Do we need the mandatory training badly?

Dr. Joseph: For those essential trainings, particularly in reading and math, how do we go about training all teachers? That bears a cost usually. It's worth the conversation to see what those costs would be in working with the unions to get those built in. A lot of times with those types of trainings there has to be collaboration with the unions, and they're typically negotiated in the contract.

Comm. Teague: Dr. Joseph, thank you for the presentation. When you initially made it in October, I wasn't here at the time so my questions are not going to be about last year. Given the new climate that we're dealing with and this whole anti-diversity movement going on in our nation's capital, will that impact things within our district like Affirmative Action and things of that nature? Will that have a direct impact? Or is that something for a different discussion? I know the last time you were here you did the audit in October. My questions are all about going forward being that we're in a totally different space right now.

Dr. Joseph: Now Board leadership and state guidance is going to be critical. States have more power than ever. Though you have national calls, the power really lies in the state and with the local district. As you're working with Dr. Newell to refine your vision, mission, core values and beliefs, if you're a community that believes in diversity, equity and support, then at the local level you have the power to empower Dr. Newell and her team to execute in that way. The power is going to be at the state and local level now more than ever.

Comm. Gonzalez: I want to be mindful that we have a 6:15 cutoff for this presentation. We would like to go into the next one.

Comm. McCall: I see here you have the systems and resources, and you talk about focusing on materials for special education students and ELL. Was it brought to your attention that they didn't have materials, or there's a lack of materials? In any educational setting, in order to teach children, you have to have what you need to get the job done. Seeing this brings an alarming feeling in my spirit about the fact of us not having the materials or not having enough of them.

Dr. Joseph: In the focus groups teachers talked about that Paterson does have lots of materials and rich materials in general for most students. There were some teachers in specific self-contained environments, particularly in ELL and special education, where they did express the need for specific resources for the extreme needs of those particular students. We're in the process of completing a special education review now, so we will have more detail, specifically about special education once that's completed. Overall, Paterson has rich resources to support students, but your diversity is so great that meeting the needs and making sure everybody has what they need and working with teachers is worth further exploration.

Human Resources

Dr. Joseph: For the Human Resources audit, we used one of our HYA colleagues, Jeremy Grant-Skinner. He is the former Chief of Human Resources in the School District of Philadelphia, Houston Independent School District, Baltimore City Public Schools and Syracuse Public Schools. He has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in looking at large complex systems. We completed a survey, and it had 1,700 respondents. He was in the district for 10 weeks. He interviewed over 30 central office

staff. There were 15 focus groups held. He looked at data from 2017 to 2024, your human resources data, policies and artifacts over the course of those seven years. He looked at three additional documents, which included your collective bargaining agreement, 2024 educator evaluation task force report, and a national report by a group called TNTP on a teacher and student dashboard. There were 12 findings, and we organized them into four categories – building on the strengths of the human resources team, addressing the challenges in recruitment and retention, streamlining and updating processes, and communicating a clear strategy. The human resources department has a strong foundation and committed professionals who are striving to perform their roles effectively. Teachers and leaders frequently expressed a strong connection to Paterson's community and are motivated to serve your student population. Two-thirds of the human resources team has been in the district for five plus years, which is a strength. 70% of current teachers have been teaching for five or more years. There's a positive perception of the work ethic and effort of your human resources department. Many of the teachers were drawn to Paterson Public Schools because of your rich diversity within the community. Many staff members stay because of their connection to the students and community. Teacher retention continues to be a major challenge in Paterson with attrition rates consistently outpacing hiring in recent years. Newly hired teachers are often leaving within a few years. Teacher salaries are lower than some of your neighboring districts, likely inhibiting the district's teacher recruitment efforts. New teachers experience inconsistent support and mentorship, which affects their integration into your district and keeping them. Despite progress, there are still large gaps between the diversity of your teachers and student population. Your turnover rate has doubled over the years. The gap between Step 12 teachers in Paterson versus Newark by 2026 is about \$20,000. If I'm a starting teacher in Paterson and I work 12 years and started in Newark and work 12 years, I'd actually make \$20,000 more there so that's pretty significant. 49% of your teachers hired in 2020 and 2021 left after three years, which is a significant statistic. One of your strategies has to be to keep the teachers in the district. With the national shortages in teachers, you don't want to invest in teachers for three years and then they go and take that knowledge and training somewhere else. The question becomes how you keep them longer. Then you had over 1,000 teachers who have left the district over the last five years. The salary increase a new teacher will make after five years of service is only about \$1,250. There's a huge gap where you have 48.5% of your teachers with diverse backgrounds, but 95% of your students have diverse backgrounds. These are some of the challenges that will require Board attention and support in terms of looking at ways to increase salaries and strategies for recruiting and retaining your teachers. The district's hiring processes are not as clear, efficient or consistent as they could be leading to hiring delays or failures that frustrate candidates and hiring managers. There's a reliance on outdated or underutilized systems and paper-based processes which slow down human resources and adjacent operations while increasing risks of error. Staff have experienced a lack of personalized communication, including around key transitions, leading to feelings of being undervalued and unheard. This requires Board attention simply because it's a resource issue. A lot of your practices and processes would require a financial commitment from the Board to be able to start moving so many papers and having so many people touch things as you go through the processes. Your standard operating procedures for recruiting, hiring, and onboarding may have conflicting information. It's something that needs to be looked at. Despite the shift to DocuSign, everything is still printed because of outdated recordkeeping. There's a lack of personalized communication in assignments, changes, and resignations. We captured some of the voices of teachers and principals as we went through the process. One principal shared that when they initiate a personnel transaction form, if they do not follow up, they don't get feedback. Another employee said, "I hear from teachers that there is a lot of paperwork and then they have to wait a long time, or they haven't called me in and they need this or that." In

terms of a communication strategy, the human resources department lacks clear useful goals, metrics, and structures for planning, executing and monitoring the shared work. The district's recruitment activities were inefficient to meet the hiring needs of the district and are not always aligned to a recruitment strategy. Stakeholders across the spectrum recognize that a comprehensive teacher recruitment and retention strategy is really important. There is a plan being worked from but you want to continue to refine that plan because the need to fill vacancies is so great. As it relates to communication, there still were reoccurring issues related to changes and updates being shared, which might lead to miscommunication or misunderstandings. You can strengthen the value proposition of the value of coming and teaching in Paterson Public Schools. Of the survey respondents, rank, hiring, and retaining quality teachers was a top priority. Of those 1,700 people who completed the survey, universally everybody identified your recruiting and retaining quality teachers as a top priority that the district has to focus on. Ensuring that your standard operating procedures happen in a way that people are collaborating and communicating and coordinating is going to be important. Of the people surveyed, 100% placed hiring and retaining quality teachers as a top priority. Across all of your groups, people recognize that recruiting high-quality people is something that the district has to really focus on. In terms of next steps, we identified 20 short-term and 12 long-term recommendations centered around addressing these issues. As you look at the actual report, all of those short and long-term recommendations are there. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you again for the presentation.

Comm. Teague: I've been mentioning for a long time that there's a serious problem with human capital in the district in terms of how teachers are treated. I've been saying this for the longest. I'm just going to stay in my corner. I've been saying it for the longest, but this report shows that there is a real issue there. It's more than just finding qualified teachers. We have to treat them right when they get here. That's why they're leaving, because they're not being treated right. They're being targeted when they want to come forward and bring information to the Board about things that are really happening in the building. They're afraid of being attacked and having things done to them. I'll leave it there.

Comm. McCall: When you look at this report, it also shows our inconsistencies. I personally know people who have left this district that were good for the district. Because of the way they were treated or building situations that they put in with themselves, we lose good people. Just like any job, when you leave there should always be an exit interview, but a lot of them are afraid to give the true meaning of the exit because when someone calls for a recommendation they're going to be blackballed. I'm more concerned after hearing this audit. We have to make sure that when we get teachers, we try every way possible to retain them. There has to be some follow up with these new teachers. People don't just come and get the experience and want to leave. We know money plays a factor, but in some cases we have seen teachers be let go that may need just a little bit of training or some type of way to show them a better way of teaching or having that professional development available. I hope as a Board that we really follow some of these recommendations and hold folks accountable, because that's where the biggest problem comes in. We just have to make sure in some way that we take these recommendations. This was good to hear him say how they responded. This is a bit watered down, but there is no need to hire people that we're not going to take the recommendation. My hope is that after today we take these recommendations and make sure they're implemented so we can be a better district.

Comm. Ramirez: Dr. Joseph, thank you very much for your work and your team's work on putting together these audits. In personnel I know we're going to be diving into this. In instruction and program we're going to be diving into the program review. To Comm. McCall's point, Paterson Public Schools has had a history of hiring consultants, collecting data, doing surveys and not acting upon it. I think we are at a point where we have Board members and a Superintendent that is data-driven who is going to be empowered by this Board to do what she needs to do to make things right in Paterson Public Schools. As chair of personnel, I'm going to be meeting with our committee, the Superintendent, and Mr. Rojas to look at these recommendations, and it's the same thing with instruction and program. We really have to stop spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on collecting data and not doing anything. I was here once before and I saw all of the money we spent on collecting data and consultants and nothing came out of it. We are in a good time with good people here right now. I am thankful to HYA for this report because I think we're going to be able to make significant changes in Paterson Public Schools under the leadership of our Superintendent who I keep saying we will support as she makes these changes. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Dr. Joseph: You have very capable people in Paterson Public Schools and that is evident from your Superintendent on down. I think the challenge of the Board right now will be to continue the work that you started in October with asking yourself the question where do you focus. Because of years of things building up over time, now that you've done this audit you've got a lot of recommendations, and I think you have to acknowledge everything won't be solved tomorrow. You have to look at your resources and capacity to execute a strategy, but collaborating and prioritizing as you started to do in October as you look at these reports is going to be critical. Of all the things, what are the three or four things that are most important, and then establishing key performance indicators to begin to address those things. As you address things, you pick up others. Laying this out will probably be a two to three-year process where you're identifying those areas, resourcing, putting a strategy, executing, and then picking up. You don't want to try to do too much too fast and that's why a lot of times these reports stay on the shelf. People get them and then they get overwhelmed because they can't do everything at once. They don't do what you did as a Board in October, laying out the priorities, putting a timeline, getting updates, and establishing key performance indicators. You're in great position with your Board leadership and Dr. Newell to collaborate to do that and work to execute.

Comm. Gonzalez: Once again, thank you for the presentation. I would add that this is a summary of a very intense process. The details are much thicker than this. What you're seeing is a brief summary of what these recommendations are. There was a lot of work going into this since October with all the various departments. There were a lot of discoveries and things that we know we need to improve on. We've heard it through previous and current Board members, community, and staff that have come up to the podium. There are a lot of things that we are improving upon. In addition to that, everything has a cost. You can't just do something without taking away from somewhere else so that balance is going to take some work to do. For those who understand the accounting side of things, when we talk about Newark getting \$20,000 for staff, they also have double the budget that we do. They have \$1.5 billion. Obviously, they're going to have a little more to contribute towards their salaries. We would love to do that, but the reality is that the budget doesn't provide for something like that at the moment. We are also taking measures to make sure that we are fiscally responsible. We are currently having discussions to cut where needed to make sure that we're looking for the future not knowing what the state is. Comm. Teague had mentioned with the new climate that we have we don't know what kind of dollars are going to come our way. There's going to be a new governor coming in November. We

don't know what the status is with state funding. There are a lot of discussions and worry and concerns that we have, but we are very diligent in going through every line item to make sure that we're reviewing in every single department what is absolutely needed and what those extras are that we have been used to spending. Comm. Ramirez had mentioned contracts and things of that nature with outside sources. Do we absolutely need this? Can we discuss doing a lot of in-house training? There are a lot of intelligent staff members who can assist the Superintendent to do a lot of the professional development training for our staff so that's a cost saver. There are so many other measures that we are really going through for everything this district is putting out a lot of money for. I don't want to have a conversation later in the year about why we are discussing budget-saving measures now. The measures have to be taken today so that we can realize those savings before the vote comes before the Board to approve our budget down the road and we will continue to have that discussion with the community to get their input a well. There's a lot here. This is not all of it. This is just a little piece of it and there is still a major function that hasn't been audited yet and that's special education. We just had a meeting on special education. There's a lot of money in that department alone that we have to look at. There are a lot of things we have to discuss internally to make sure that we're actually providing all the resources to the kids that need it but also making sure that we figure out a better way to manage the population so that we can be fiscally responsible and make sure that we provide that in-district as much as possible. There are a lot of kids that are being sent out-of-district and it's very costly. I thank you again for your presentation. You did a phenomenal job in presenting and doing the work behind the scenes. I reiterate what we see here today is just a small summary. There are a lot of details here and I really thank the team for doing the work that you did.

Dr. Joseph: Thank you. Thank the Paterson team for all of their support and hard work.

GOAL SETTING SESSION

Comm. Gonzalez: We're going to get into the goal-setting session now. This is where you'll hear a little bit about what was going on. This is an introduction to some of the audits that took place, but now we're going to discuss some the goals that the school district had from October and last year carrying into this year. Then after that we'll have the public comments session. I will be requesting through the Superintendent and administrators overseeing the implementation of the audits updates on what has been completed as well as a timeline for when the total completion will occur. This is for Gifted & Talented, family and community engagement, finance and business operations, instructional programs, and human resources. There were two goals presented to the Board. Everyone should have their sheet. If you don't, let us know. Cheryl will get you a copy. These are proposed goals. Goal #1 is actually the continuation of the 2023-2024 systematic audits in the areas of teaching and learning, facilities, communication and connections, and social-emotional learning to identify deficiencies and build out solutions. Implementing completed assessments by focusing on increasing opportunities for students to graduate with dual enrollment with a focus on equity and equality. Enhance small group instruction and Foundations K-12. An update on progress towards the goal will be presented at the March and May 2025 Board meetings. The administration will present the final audit on special education in May 2025. That's the last one we have to do and the update on that will occur on May. There are a lot of departments. There's a lot going on. When we talk about these audits, it's really turning over every rock and stone in those various departments to see how we can do each thing better. Where do we save? How can we improve? Where do we need to expand and add money? There are good things happening in the school district that we should be expanding. There are others that haven't been worth the

investment, and we need to reevaluate them. We talked about evaluation tools that would further assist us in identifying programs that we have been just having routinely but not checking to see if they're working. Is it really presenting a positive result for the children? Who's evaluating that? Why do we keep bringing on folks and spending money in certain cases that may not show a significant investment in our children? We're going to evaluate all that and create an evaluation tool that will determine that. We've been working with XYZ company or vendor and they're phenomenal. Everyone is talking great about them. These are the outcomes. We should definitely bring them back and there's an evaluation process for that. Or it could be the other way around. It could be that these folks have been around, but we haven't really seen significant changes. Maybe some slight changes. Maybe there's another vendor that does something like it but better. We need to start looking at all these opportunities for our children because I truly believe that our kids deserve the best. We have to seek out who are the best vendors for our kids. It's not just because it feels good or it's comfortable because they have been with us for a certain amount of years. We want to finally see results and that's from every vendor and contractor no matter what it is that they're covering. We're really trying hard to be fiscally responsible and that may mean that we have to cut some vendors from our list. Maybe we do some of these things internally. We will evaluate that with the Superintendent's team. I highlight that because there's a lot of work that they're doing. It's still a goal for her moving into this year because there's a lot to do there. This is not something you're going to do in a year, as you heard from the presenter. It could be two to three years to actually get to everything. If we attempt to say we want the Superintendent to get to everything, we're setting her up for failure. We have to strategically go department by department assessing every single department as it's related to this audit. Obviously, there are going to be tweaks to it and there are things we're going to add to it, but that's a continuation of that goal. Are there any questions from any of the Commissioners on that first goal?

Comm. Teague: I heard you mention about possibly pulling vendors. I just want to make sure that isn't going to be drawn along the lines of race. I'm going to be very honest with that. We want to make sure we have an honest conversation, and we can't let that conversation shift towards one thing or another. There needs to be some balance across the board. I want to make sure we understand that. Yes, there may be some situations where we may have to go with a different vendor. We want to make sure the qualifications are there, and it's not just based on, "I know you. We're friends. We're from the same community. Let's pick you and get rid of the other." I'm just going to put it out. That can't be the basis of it. It has to be based on the data and what they are able to produce.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you. That's not a qualifier. Race is not a qualifier in any of these discussions. I do not care who the vendor is. I just care that they can do the job. That's the goal. Let's be very transparent. We're taking politics out of this school system. We're taking those previous political affiliations out of the school system. That's my goal. I'm not affiliated with any particular group or anything like that, whether it's preferences. We're just going to do the best that we can in identifying the best vendors and that's through a process controlled by the Superintendent, her administration, and the state. There are RFPs and RFQs that are going out which are going to be required to go out to find these bidders and they have to be state-approved. They have to go through the process. This is not nitpicking who you want. That's exactly the opposite of what we're doing. We're trying to do exactly that. I said it in the beginning. I want transparency and accountability. The accountability starts with us making sure that we do the right thing, whether it be vendors or anything that we do. This Board is involved. Nothing gets done without the Board vote. Everyone would

have equal access to all the information. None of this has anything to do with gender, color, background, or favoritism. I don't care. I don't vote by myself. This is Board. Everybody would have an opportunity to share their concerns or ask questions about any particular vendor.

Comm. McCall: I've been asking for this information since I joined this Board. When we talk about areas of teaching, learning, and facilities, there are a lot of programs that come to our district. Some require pay and some don't. We have not evaluated these programs to see if they are worth being in our district. I think every after-school program should have some type of collaboration with the educational process that is going on in the schools. That's why you want them. It's supposed to be an enhancement to what we're already doing. I've asked several times, and I still never got it. I want to know all of the after-school programs that operate in and outside our district. I want to know the growth and the assessment of each of these programs. I want to know is it working for our kids. If it's not working, then we need to either help them to help us or figure out what we need to make it better. I'm hoping at some point, since we're talking about learning and facilities, that we implement more of these programs throughout the entire district. It is very unlevelled when you're talking about some schools that are doing great, and we have some that are failing terribly. We look at it and see that one school has all this support and enrichment and the other schools have very minimal. They have to get the community involved to even have the little that they have. We're talking about transparency and bids. I'm talking about the free stuff. Everything somebody gives you may not be good for you. We need to really look at our supplemental programs and see are they helping us. Are they moving the needle? Are the kids getting better test scores? If they're not, then we have to reevaluate them. This will be my third year and maybe the seventh time asking for this information. Mr. President, you're saying that we're going to be very transparent. This is not the first time I've asked for this. This entire Board needs to see what's working and what's not. If something is close to working, how do we help to make it better?

Comm. Gonzalez: Thanks for that and I second that. In our first year prior to Dr. Newell arriving in I&P we had requested that. That was something that was triggered by other conversations at the time in evaluating our schools and how they performed. We had a list of all the schools and where they were individually. A question that arose from that was that we saw certain schools doing well and others that weren't too far off. What resources did they have? It might be something as simple as after-school programs offered in those schools and then comparing them to the other schools that are in the general vicinity. You're part of a similar neighborhood and you get the same kind of kids. You can come from different parts of the city and there are different resources available, not just throughout the school district but also non-profits or whatever. We wanted to see and identify why certain schools are doing better. I think it was the report in comparison to one of the charter schools. We used the best charter school in Paterson as our baseline. It was 11 schools that did better than that particular charter school and I was wondering why those 11 schools did better and others fell short. There is a full analysis that will happen. This wasn't when Dr. Newell was here, but that question was posed back then in my first year and I still haven't received it. I'm sure we will get that information now. It's going to let us know what Comm. McCall is requesting, to see how we get all of our schools performing great. Maybe certain schools started a pilot program. Maybe there are some vendors that are really performing well in a school and really bringing up those grades for those students. Maybe we need to expand that contract. That's something I feel we need to invest in and get to expand their program so it can spill across the district. Those assessments are all part of the audit. It's part of this assessment in everything that we do to make sure that all of our children are getting the right resources that they need. Dr. Newell, did you want to add anything?

Dr. Newell: I will be presenting next month. We will give an update on these, just bringing forward further information. I do hear the request and we will be looking into it to provide it to you.

Comm. Gonzalez: The second goal is reducing chronic absenteeism. Examine trends by comparing the past three years, and implement strategies to promote daily attendance, outreach, and in-depth review of Lever 5. The completed action plan with timelines will be presented at the March Board meeting. An update on progress towards the goal will be presented at the March and May 2025 Board meetings. It's without question that we have to look at making sure that kids are in classrooms. If you're not in a classroom, you're not learning. We have to look at reasons why individuals are not coming to school. We have to understand the home dynamics. We have to understand what's going on at home, but also how we can assist in that process, making sure that our various departments are all working collaboratively and are communicating resources that are available for families and individuals. At the end of the day, we need these kids inside their classes and learning. Not just in class, but if there are things going on at home. If a child doesn't eat before he goes to school, their mind is not right in the first period. If there are things like domestic violence and homelessness, kids' minds are not right. They're not going to learn. We have to really take an interest in what's happening outside of the classroom and more into what's happening in their homes as well so we can fully assess what the demand is from our children and how we can assist. That may require us partnering with outsiders and other agencies to come in and assist us as well. Are there any questions from Board members?

Dr. Newell: I echo. We do know that if students are not in the school building, they will not learn. We have seen the numbers come down over these last few years, but we can definitely work on being very focused on getting the numbers even lower. At the end of 2023-2024 we had seen good results. I don't want to misquote, but I think we were up to 90% in terms of our average daily attendance, keeping in mind that the state's requirement is 96%. Even though we have made progress over time coming out of Covid, we know that we have quite a ways to go. That number I quoted, I'm not sure if it's 90% or 91%, but it's definitely not at the 96%, which is what the state is requiring of all districts across the state. We know that we have a lot of work to do. We have to incentivize our kids. We know that there is fear in the community right now. Comm. Teague alluded to what's happening nationwide. We also want our kids to know that they are safe and can come to school. The update will bring different strategies and incentives that we're putting in place for our kids to come to school.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Ms. Darlene Morris: I have a prepared speech but before I do that, I want to ask some questions with regards to the audit. Can we separate that? Comm. Gonzalez, you said other school districts have billions of dollars to better utilize for their schools. I want to bring to your attention that for years I spoke with the Charlotte Mecklenburg school district. They have a non-profit organization that's huge. They bring in over \$500 million a year to their school district. I gave her name to the then Superintendent and the BA because she was willing to work with us to help us get a non-profit so that we can bring in millions of dollars to help us get to billions. No one ever called her because

I followed up with her three separate times and I still have her phone number. I don't know if she is still with that school district, but when I was going to visit my sister she said I could come and she would talk to me. With regards to programs that can help children, Sharon Eason and I did a program when Aubrey Johnson was assistant superintendent, and we had a big problem at School No. 4 where children were beating up other little children. They smacked this little Spanish boy so hard that he was shaking, and I got so angry that I came down and spoke with Aubrey. We put together a Boys-to-Men Program that was so effective that the kids didn't want to leave. Nobody picked it up and took it on because at that time you were developing relationships with parents and children to find out what's going on in the home. With regards to communication, it's love and concern. I can point to a plethora of initiatives that I initiated. One is right there. I met her as a parent in my school. She's still a friend to me today. I sent parents to get jobs. She not only got off welfare, but she bought a home, a new car, and now she's off welfare. It's relationships. You have to care about people in order to be effective. Unless you talk to people and let them know you really care... Another parent from over four years ago called me just last Friday and I made an appointment with a principal to come in and talk to her. We were effective in getting things done. You have to care. Every single week I get calls from people still and I've been out of the district for over two years. That's what I wanted to bring with regards to that. I really feel some kind of way because these children deserve so much, and we have it to give. There are people who care and love these children and don't get the opportunity to utilize their gifts and goals for these children to the best of their ability. That's all I have to say about that. Comm. Teague and Val brought up some issues with regards to the committees. It seems as though all the neophytes got the heads of the committees. I want to read this, and it will say what I want to say. It's infuriating to watch individuals who claim to care about education of children run for office only to use the position to further their selfish ambitions or at best the interests of their own ethnic group. We can pretend that we don't see the direction of things going on now, but I've been seeing it clearly for years and I've been speaking out on it. I ask you to be a part of our action team when I was at School No. 28 before it became a Blue-Ribbon school. We worked hard. You never came to any of the meetings. I certainly called and sent emails trying to get that done. It blows me out of the water how you can show concern. I don't see how you can walk past a child and not address them. People walk past 50 kids and never say one word. Why can't we look out for one another like we did for the Civil Rights? The blood of Black people was spilled on the streets for every single one of you to sit there today. We didn't fight just for us. We fought for everybody. We practiced diversity, equity and inclusion. Today it seems as though it is not being benefitted back to us. When I look at the fact that not one Black person on the School Board is good enough to be head of a committee, that speaks volumes also. That says that you don't have the confidence of the Board when it comes to Black people. You look at Madison K, for instance. That was put in a predominantly Spanish-speaking area, which is fine. Why don't we have one in the predominantly Black area? We know Black boys are at the bottom of the rung. What happens with them? I remember one time there was a workshop for working and it was just done in Spanish. I don't know if it was ever done in English. I wanted to see a lot of Black parents out here because we have to make sure diversity, equity, and inclusion includes us too. It doesn't feel like it. I can bring up plenty of examples of things. You're talking about ESL, but we know that Black boys are at the bottom. What special program is in there for them? We need people that care. When I worked at School No. 4, I had some of the best. They would work at night and they didn't have to. I went to School No. 13, and no one would work with me at night. I didn't understand that because at School No. 28 and School No. 4, all you had to do was ask a teacher and they would stay at night and help you do programs for the parents. We had one of the best PTOs there. You have to let people

be honest and say what they want to say without being offended and we will really get things done. Thank you.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm not going to respond after every person, but I want you to stay so we can have that dialogue afterwards.

Mr. Errol Kerr: Good evening, Board. Let me say congratulations to the new Board members and to you, Mr. President, for your ascension to the presidency. To Superintendent Newell and Deputy Henderson, good evening. I must congratulate the Board on the presentation this evening. I think it was a great presentation. There are so many things inside that presentation that jumped out at me. I'd like to address a few things before I take my seat. Building on the strength of the team, the team is not just one individual and sometimes the Board does not see eye-to-eye with the Superintendent. Therefore, there is a break. But it's a team. The Superintendent and the Board work hand-in-hand in order to develop effective strategies to address the needs of the students of this city. It was important to hear the presenter speak about the team. I'm also part of the team. I'm Paterson through and through. It's important for me to address you this evening as part of that important team. We talked about Newark, and you addressed it, Mr. President. Newark has over \$1 billion to address their educational system there. We don't have that. When we talk about recruitment and retention and the extra \$20,000, it is understood but we have to address the needs of securing properly trained teachers in our district. What do we do? Do we raise more taxes? If we're going to talk about recruitment and retention, the other side of that equation is paying for that. We have to decide how we approach this. I can tell you that the average taxpayer in Paterson cannot take more in terms of taxes. I would implore the Board to not just go out there and complain that we don't have this and that. Talk to the Superintendent and the Board President and you guys come together and see how well we can address the resource piece of the operation of this district. For years I've been talking about the hemorrhaging of our budget because of charter schools. Nobody took me seriously then and I'm sure now you're not going to take me seriously. When they say you get half a billion dollars, right off the top \$150 is taken out. You don't have half a billion dollars to address the needs. Paterson is not a monolith. The students are diverse. Therefore, that budget has to be divided into so many buckets to address the needs of the district. This is causing a lot of pressure, and we are not getting the support of our parents. I wish our parents were more involved in the structure. We are not seeing parents coming out to meetings like these or to report card night. I have grandkids in this district and sometimes I stand in for my daughter and son-in-law. I'm not seeing the representation of our parents. We have to find a way of engaging them, letting them come out, and be a part of this. Resources are here. They are you and I. We just have to do a better job.

Mr. Charles Ferrer: Good evening. Mathew 15:18 states that things that come out of the mouth come from the heart and these things defile a person. Luke 6:45 states that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The reason I'm saying this is because when I looked at this committee list, I originally thought there were only six committees, and I saw that there were 12. The democratic thing to do was every Commissioner chairs a committee and then you put everybody else's name in a hat and pull out three. Whatever names those are, that's who chairs those committees. It's not as when you say, I should have talked about Latino majority and not dominance. It's not about race. It's about representation. Nine people of different backgrounds and some of your veteran Commissioners don't get a chair. The last statement I'm going to jump to says, "I'm not going to let them narrate my story." It's not about your story. It's about the story of these children. You were all elected, not by one group of people, but by people from every group. To come out here and try to play something, come on now.

I've been doing this a long time. Let's not bring what's in Washington down here. You pulled off the agenda a couple of weeks ago voting on the business administrator. You can't find one better than who was recommended. I love the fact that you read all the ethic codes and all that stuff. Make no mistake about it. If you try to bring in somebody who's one of your friends, you won't have to guess who will file the ethics complaint. You're looking at him. I know most of who your friends are. This is not a game. This is serious business. I had a staff member call me today who was getting ready to retire because they're getting ready to transfer her from a third-grade special education as an IA into a pre-k. It's not something that's conducive for her. This is why people are leaving. People are doing things just to be doing them. That's not what it's about. Education is not that difficult. My son went to a Catholic school. He had a grammar book from day one. He's a great reader and writer. What do we have for some of our children in the lower grades? We have a program that reads to them and then when it's time to take the test, they can't use it. What we should be doing is forget the program that reads to them. We have to teach them just like we learned ourselves – to read. It's just that simple. Whatever you say comes from the heart. If you're not into the Bible, then maybe you don't believe that. If you call yourself a Christian, the Bible doesn't lie. Have a good evening.

Comm. Gonzalez: I would recommend you stay so we can clarify the situation.

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

OTHER BUSINESS

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you to everyone who came out to speak. It's important that we do get more people to come out and share their opinions whether we like it or not. It's your right to come up to the podium, speak, and share your opinions with us. I am an open book. People who know me know that I am open book. I do want to take this opportunity to clarify some things because it's obvious that what you all read in the papers is not the truth and not the whole story. You read a fine line, and you run with it, which is okay. Everyone has their own prerogative and does whatever they feel based on what they hear, see, and who they speak to. Let me clarify something in reference to the committees. I stated it before and I will do it again in public. Wherever you want me to be, I'll say it because it is what it is. I am a Christian. I'm a Catholic and I do read the Bible. January 2 was the meeting when the newly elected Commissioners were sworn in. I was nominated as President. It happens every year. Everybody does this. You start to ask who is going to take on the leadership for the following year. You advocate and go to your colleagues. At the end of the day, you count your votes to see if you have it or not. If you don't have it, the likely thing is not to run. Otherwise, it's going to show a division. If two or three people are trying to get that position and you don't have the votes, it's going to show the public that it's a divisive group. I had six votes before even finishing calling other Commissioners. You need five to become President. I reached out to folks. There was only one person out of the group who called me back before that vote took place the day before and that was Comm. Teague. I reached out to him, Val and McCall. We were texting back and forth. At the end of the day, we never got that opportunity to speak. The reference to dominance, at the Puerto Rican Flag Raising in August there were close to 100 people in the audience. It was a 2-hour event, and I was hosting. There were many pioneers, people we spoke about who did the first thing for the first time. The first Board member in the City of Paterson that was Hispanic, and he was there celebrating with us. The first Hispanic Council member in Teaneck who now became the first Hispanic Mayor was there. There were a

whole bunch of firsts. There was a list. There were about four or five speakers before me who gave their own list of folks. They were all present. The theme was celebrating individuals who broke that glass ceiling. Nellie Pou was also there and we said if she's elected and wins, she will be the first Hispanic who will represent us in the whole state. Then I said there are three candidates who were with us. The point with that theme was if those three get elected, it will be the first time that we as a Hispanic group are the majority on this Board. It's just stating a fact. It had no ill meaning behind it. It's something to celebrate. I've been at many different cultural events for individuals who are not Hispanic who have achieved great things, and we celebrate with them. Why can't we be celebrated if that was the case? That was the theme and that's it. Where I messed up was instead of saying it would be the first time we had the majority of the Board, I said 'dominance.' I admit that's the single word in the two hours of the event where I misspoke and used that word, but dominance not in the fashion of dominating. I meant to say the majority. There are some people, honestly, who may not even like that. I can't help that. We are the majority of this city and school district, and we need representation. Why do I say that? Because it was important that we get representation. In that November election we had two Hispanics who weren't running again, Comm. Martinez and Comm. Castillo-Cruz. They weren't seeking reelection so we would lose two representatives in a district that has 75-80% Hispanics in the school district. That's over 70% in the school district and 67% in the city as a population. We need representation for the same reasons you need representation. There are a lot of kids who come in from other countries who don't speak the language. Their parents are not familiar with the culture. They're not familiar with the system. They don't know who to call. We get those calls. You think I want to receive that many calls from parents who don't speak English? It's really hard. We really do get those calls. That's a real thing. We need representation as well and I will never apologize to have representatives on this Board who also represent us. Someone took that one word and went to town with it. I know my history. He referenced the papers where I said I'm not going to let them narrate my story. I'm born and raised in this city. I grew up in the projects on Governor and Carroll Street. No one is going to talk to me about me being divisive. Are you kidding me? I was the only Puerto Rican family there. Most of my friends at that time were all African American. We were hanging out in the streets probably doing things that we shouldn't have been doing. The fact is no one can tell me after 20 years of working in this city helping youth getting into college, paying for books out of my own pocket, teaching them to become true leaders. You referenced the boys leader program. We have Paterson Youth Council. I've mentored over 350 high school students directly because I'm involved in that program. No one can narrate my story. The thousands of families per year that I helped wearing my other hats from all nationalities... The nonsense of it being a racial thing, it's not. Let's talk about that for a second. There are standing committees and ad-hoc committees. The chair people of those committees have to work well with the President. If I'm getting bashed on social media or in public with certain individuals, you think I want that person as a chair that I have to rely on? I'm not going to be in all the committees and if they have a meeting, that person has to share with me what was spoken, who said what, what the outcome was, and the recommendation so that we can put it on the agenda to vote on as a full Board. Like I said, when I call people, they don't call me back and we don't communicate... I'm an open book. Despite all that nonsense, I still reached out to those very people. Comm. Teague was the person who actually recorded that video that got all this stuff going. He's the only one who responded to my call. I reached out to her as well. We met the day before. I didn't ask him for his vote. I told him I had the votes to get the presidency, but I respect everybody's vote. I'm not asking for it, but I appreciate it if he supports me. The point of that meeting was simply one single thing, and he can vouch for me if he wants to, what's important to you. If you have an opportunity to make change, what is that one important goal that you have in your heart

that I can help you with this Board? He shared that with me. What did he say? Special education was his number one thing. I said, "I got you." I didn't leave with a quid pro quo or anything like that. I respect you. We discussed the video. We put that aside. It's over with. This is about business. This is about getting something done for the nearly 29,000 students. I don't have time to entertain Facebook. I don't have time to reply to a negative post. I don't have time for that because then I'm not doing my job. I'm so transparent and people who know me know that's not me. I had plenty of leaders in the African American community who said disregard them. I respect them because if I mention their names, those are your true leaders that you respect. I'm not here to change people's mind or what their view is. I'm stating my fact. He came out with the video that started all of this, and I still sat with him. Knowing that I already had the votes I still sat with the man. A few said that no one had committees. He said he wanted to at least have a co-chairmanship.

Comm. Teague: Not a co-chairmanship, a chairmanship.

Comm. Gonzalez: You did say co-chair first. I gave him two. I gave him special education. Special education is under I&P. He's co-chairing with Comm. Ramirez. I&P talks about a lot of different things. He had the chairmanship for anything non-special education. It's the same group of people. When it came to special education that was all his because that's what he requested. Not only did I give him that, which already defeats the argument that I didn't give African-Americans any chairmanship, I gave him another.

Comm. Teague: Call the question. Now you're lying. You called me and you said it was my video so let me state my fact. I showed up to that event to support your community. I was there to support. I went live the entire time because I wanted to show that I was there to support. The conversation switched and said we have three people here. We have another person in the audience. If all three get it, then we will be able to dominate in this city. You just said yourself that we're 65% of the population. 80% of the people that I assist in this city are Latino. I don't turn Latinos away and say because you're not Black I'm not going to assist you with special education or in your home or with issues you're dealing with. Most of the people I assist are Latinos. They come to me because they can't reach you all.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you for that. I also never said don't vote for him, her or this culture. I'm not here to transform your mind. I'm telling you the facts. You do what you want with them. We have a lot of work to do. From the bottom of my heart, I'm a Catholic person. I would never, have never, and will never discriminate on the basis of race, gender, or any of the above. I have never. You can easily get lost in those details when you see just one or two lines come out. I would say the same thing. When you understand the facts, you have an option. You can still believe that, or you can say there was something else to this. The other Commissioners, Valerie Freeman and Ken Simmons, didn't vote for me. They're not working with me. When I call and they're not calling me, you're putting that face as if you know this. I reached out to them even after all the nonsense and no response. The only question I had was what's important to you. I'm giving you the facts, so everyone understands what really happened. Take whatever you want from it. I need to appoint individuals who are going to pick up the phone, take notes, and understand what's going on. We're going to push the school district's agenda further. It's not about him, he, she or groups. I'm not interested. I'm too busy for this. I don't have time in my life. This needs to be clarified, but other than this, I don't have time for this. It needs to be stated for the public to understand, but I'm not going to spend a minute trying to convince you. I'm just telling you this is what it is. You take what you get from it. He didn't even ask for this, but I also gave Comm.

Teague the chairmanship of family and community engagement. I also put him on joint government, which everybody wants. I gave him more than he even asked for. He was the only person who responded to my call. Everyone has a fair shake. I have thick skin. I don't have time for that nonsense. Comm. McCall and I had an understanding of what happened. I'm not going to speak for her, but things were cleared. When people begin to understand and communicate and talk face-to-face, they understand and say things are different from what they thought they were. That's the bottom line here. I respect everybody. I love everybody. I work with everyone. There's none of that in my fiber. I'm not here to convince anybody. I just want to state the facts.

Ms. Morris: (Comments were made from the audience and were not heard on tape.)

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.



Ms. June Gray
Business Administrator