

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

March 20, 2025 – 6:14 p.m.
Central Office (First Floor)

Presiding: Comm. Eddie Gonzalez, President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Rodney Henderson, Deputy Superintendent
Bryant Horsley, Esq., Souder Law Group

Comm. Valerie Freeman	Comm. Mohammed Rashid (Remote)
Comm. Della McCall	Comm. Kenneth Rosado
Comm. Hector Nieves	Comm. Kenneth Simmons
Comm. Joel Ramirez, Vice President	Comm. Corey Teague

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:

**Emergency Meeting
March 20, 2025 at 6:00 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.

MOTION TO HOLD AN EMERGENCY MEETING

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Rosado that the Board hold an emergency meeting. On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: No.

Comm. McCall: No.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Yes.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Teague: No.

Comm. Gonzalez: Yes.

The motion carried.

Mr. Horsley: Unfortunately, under Board Bylaw 0162 and the Open Public Meetings Act NJSA10:4-9, in order to proceed with an emergency meeting, three-quarters of the members present must vote to approve proceeding with the meeting. There are nine members present. You need seven members to vote yes to proceed. Unless there is a motion for reconsideration, you cannot proceed.

Comm. Teague: I move we go into executive session.

Comm. Freeman: Second.

Mr. Horsley: There is no motion to go into executive session because there is no meeting. You would actually have to commence the emergency meeting before any formal action is taken.

Comm. Teague: I withdraw my motion.

Comm. Simmons: I'll reconsider if we go into executive session immediately after we open.

Mr. Horsley: It sounds like you want to reconsider the vote to hold an emergency meeting.

Comm. Simmons: I'll reconsider the vote to hold an emergency meeting if and only if we are going into executive session immediately after the vote.

Mr. Horsley: You'd have to make a motion for reconsideration. Since the first motion failed, you'd have to first make a motion to reconsider. If that motion passes, then you'd have to deal with the original motion to open the emergency meeting. Then someone would have to do an amendment to open it and go into executive session. If you want to reopen an emergency meeting, someone who voted no would have to ask for reconsideration. That would have to be seconded with a roll call.

Comm. Teague: I'm calling for reconsideration.

Comm. Simmons: Second.

It was moved by Comm. Teague, seconded by Comm. Simmons that the Board reconsiders the motion to hold an emergency meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Mr. Horsley: It's my understanding that you want to amend the emergency meeting. Somebody would have to file a motion to proceed under the emergency meeting. After that's first and seconded, you'd have to do another motion to amend it to add the executive session.

It was moved by Comm. Nieves, seconded by Comm. McCall that the Board amends the present motion include an executive session immediately after the meeting begins. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

It was moved by Comm. Teague, seconded by Comm. Freeman that the Board proceeds with the emergency meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Mr. Horsley: Just so the public and Board is aware, because we're in an emergency meeting, there's only one agenda item that we're considering and that's the preliminary budget. Any closed session discussion has to be only as it pertains to either legal advice or private or confidential matters pertaining to the preliminary budget. We can move into executive session now.

It was moved by Comm. Simmons, seconded by Comm. Teague that the Board goes into Executive Session to discuss issues that warrant confidentiality, as consistent with NJSA 10:4-12 for matters of Attorney/Client Privilege, Contracts, Legal, Litigation, Negotiations, Personnel and Student Matters. The minutes will be made available to the public upon request, when the confidentiality of the subject is no longer warranted. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board went into executive session at 6:17 p.m.

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Nieves that the Board reconvenes the meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board reconvened the meeting at 6:51 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Mr. Hamza Dar Alsheik: I'm a fourth grader at School No. 9. I'm here tonight because I want to express how disappointed I am with the way some of you are treating us. When a parent comes up to speak, I notice that too often have your heads down or looking at your phones while they are talking. If you are giving a presentation, you would expect their full attention. Why shouldn't we expect the same respect from you? This is taught in first grade. It's sad that grown adults don't know manners. Please remember that the parents are here because they care about the students. The least they deserve is to be heard and respected. Thank you.

Mr. Hasan Dar Alsheik: I'm a fourth grader at School No. 9. I'm also Hamza's twin brother. Parents come to these meetings because they care about us and want to help make things better for us. They deserve to be heard and respected just as much as

anyone else would expect when they are speaking. I believe that by showing them proper attention we can build a better community where everyone feels valued. Thank you.

Ms. Omaira Martinez: I'm here tonight as a proud parent and a concerned member of this community. I'm deeply disappointed by the Board of Education's recent attempt to label parents who oppose the middle school model as racist. Let me be clear, we're not the ones dividing this community. In fact, we're the ones fighting to keep it together. For years, our children have grown up learning side-by-side with peers from different backgrounds. They have built relationships, shared cultures, and celebrated their diversity. We have always embraced the melting pot that makes Paterson so special. Now this Board is trying to fracture the unity by spreading harmful and false accusations. We're not against diversity. We're against the poorly planned, rushed, and ill-conceived model that will disrupt our children's education and wellbeing. This is not about race. This is about common sense and protecting our children's future. Do not use accusations to distract the real issue. We are here to advocate for all children regardless of their race, religion, or language. The only division I see is coming from those in power, not from the parents fighting for their children. We will not be intimidated by false claims or distracted by lies. We will keep standing together as one diverse and united community to do what's right for our children. Also, please provide us with all the documents for the middle school model, including minutes and the votes where the model was approved. Thank you.

Comm. Gonzalez: Let's check the sound because I think we're getting folks saying that they don't hear us virtually.

Ms. Asma Sheik: Good evening. I'm standing before you as a parent who is opposed to the baseless and inflammatory accusations being made by the Board. Suggesting that parents who oppose the middle school model are somehow racist is offensive. We are not the ones trying to separate children. The Board is. The very model you are forcing through will separate students based on their grade level, isolate siblings, and break apart neighborhood schools. That's not diversity. That's fragmentation. We have always valued and embraced the diversity of our schools. Our fight is not against any group. It's against a reckless plan that disrupts our children's education, creates transportation hardships, and disregards community input. Using race baiting tactics to silence valued concerns is both shameful and desperate. We will not let you turn this into a battle of race or culture. We are here fighting as one – black, White, Latino, Arab, Turkish, Bengali, and many others. Don't mistake our unity for division. The only people showing division here are those who refuse to listen to the parents they were elected serve. We would like to have all the records, including minutes, for the middle school model. Thank you.

Ms. Sanan Ramadan: Good evening. I'm here tonight, not only as a concerned parent, but as someone who values the rich diversity of this city. I'm deeply troubled by the Board of Education's recent claims that those of us who oppose the middle school model are somehow racist. This is a blatant and shameful attempt to silence parents with false accusations. Let me be clear. Diversity is not a talking point for us. It's our reality. Our children learn alongside classmates from different cultures, backgrounds, and languages every day. We cherish that. We watch them share lunches, trade holiday traditions, and build bonds that cross racial and cultural lines. It is insulting for the Board to paint us as anything other than parents fighting for the best educational environment for all children. We are speaking out because this model is flawed, not because we are against anyone. We want a school system where students succeed together, not one that shuffles them around with no regard for their stability or wellbeing.

Let's talk about safety. The district is asking us to send our children further from home without providing transportation. That means more students walking long distances in all kinds of weather, crossing unsafe intersections, and facing unnecessary risks. For families without cars, this creates a major hardship. How can the district claim this model is about equity when it makes it harder for some children to even get to school safely? We also refuse to accept the district's attempt to separate students by language through these so-called magnet schools. This approach is not about improving education. It's segregation in disguise. Forcing students into language-based schools will limit diversity and isolate children, stripping away the close integration that makes our schools so special. We have already seen how empty the district's promises are. We have spoken to teachers at the current middle school, and they have told us firsthand how the district promised improvements but failed to deliver. Eighth graders are sitting in classrooms designed for kindergarten students. Teachers are stretched thin and students are reportedly engaging in inappropriate behavior in hallways without proper supervision. This is the reality of the middle school model – overcrowded, chaotic, and poorly executed. We know that k-8 schools provide more stability. Younger students look up to older students and older students take on leadership roles. This creates a calmer, more connected school environment. By ripping them apart, you're destabilizing their learning and emotional security. Stop using race as a weapon to deflect from your poor decision-making. We stand united as a diverse group of parents and no amount of false labeling will divide us. As said before, we want proof through the minutes of everything for the middle school model. We checked and we didn't find anything. Thank you.

Ms. LaTonya Easter: Good evening. Before I even start with what I'd like to say, I want to say it saddens me to hear the parents and students speaking about discrimination and diversity when this country had schools that were segregated. What I'm hearing is that we want to go back to segregation? That's not acceptable. The administration needs to do better. It really saddens me to hear that. I'm a homeowner and I'm upset to hear that you want to raise our taxes 6%. Dr. Newell, I want to address you and the rest of the administration. You especially are making over \$300,000 a year. That doesn't include any of the bonuses. This is a significant increase in salary compared to the previous Superintendent. I know you have better qualifications and a doctorate, but this is still a lot of money and it's really taxing the citizens in Paterson. You have a massive background that suggests that you are able to solve problems and yet you're taking the easiest and most destructive way out by raising our taxes. Do you realize that our taxes have been significantly and continuously increasing, yet our services keep going down? Our taxes are going up. Our homes are being devalued. We are trying to just stay above and live. It may not mean anything to you, but it does to me and other homeowners. Yet, your resolve and desire is to bleed us more. Many of us don't have an annual income anywhere near \$300,000, let alone even \$100,000. I have a suggestion. If you really care, let's begin with your salary cut and where the previous Superintendent was. Also, when we're talking about taxes, maybe some of you up there haven't heard that there are a lot of people recently who have just lost their jobs for nothing else. Now you're talking about increasing our taxes again. What are we supposed to do when someone has lost their job and they're just trying to provide, put food on the table for their children, and buy books and school supplies? Where are they getting that money from? Yet you want our taxes to increase. It doesn't make any sense. There has to be a better alternative for you to come up with than increasing our taxes. With the education that all of you have, to say that the only way to do what's necessary is to raise our taxes...the taxes keep going up, but you have schools that have mold in them and are coming down. Our taxes keep being raised, but where is this money going? Is there somewhere that I can see a breakdown of exactly where our money is going? I'd like to see that.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm sorry, but your three minutes were up. I gave you an additional two minutes. There is going to be a presentation. If you stick around, you will see all that.

Ms. Easter: If you give me a good minute, I'll finish this up. Dr. Newell, just prove me right that with your massive background and the massive salary that you receive you're able to come up with a much better alternative to solve any problem without penalizing me and the rest of the citizens of Paterson by increasing our taxes. Again, where is this going? A 1% increase may not matter to you and may not affect you, but it does me and the rest of the citizens in Paterson. Thank you for your time.

Comm. Gonzalez: There are folks still saying they can't hear virtually.

Ms. Teresa Ramirez: Good evening, everyone. I've been coming to the Board of Education for the past three years trying to transfer my kids out of School No. 4 due to the safety and conditions of my kids. My daughter has a medical problem. She was attacked three weeks ago. This is the third week my kids have not been in school and I'm not going to send my kids to school due to the safety and concerns of School No. 4. Mr. Smith has never made any complaints or allegations towards my kids. I will not say my kids are innocent, but when you bring a toy gun to school, you're supposed to call the cops and parents. Mr. Smith never called me. Three years ago I came crying to the Board of Education, begging to transfer my kids out of that school. Three years later my daughter with one lung is attacked in the school. No security guards were in the building. When I went to the school, no security was there. The teacher didn't inform me. I found out from my son that my daughter was attacked. I don't want my kids in School No. 4. I refuse to put them there. Once again, this is the third week my kids have been out of school. I don't know if the Board of Education wants me to receive a DYFS case. I don't know what they want me to receive. I just want safety for my kids. When I drop you off at 8:30 in the morning until 3:00, I need to know that you're safe. School No. 4 doesn't have any safety. I made a police report on Ms. Gonzalez because she has gone into my daughter's pockets to take her property. Her words to me were, "I know your mom." I had to let her know she wasn't my daughter's mom, and Mr. Smith is not my son's father. I am the parent. I will do what I have to do with my kids. When something happens with my kids in your school, all I need is a phone call. I never got one. I get information from kids of what goes on in the school. My kids don't go outside. My daughter had a fight three Mondays ago. She went to the store on Saturday. Guess what? The girl that attacked my daughter in the school was outside my house. No one knows where I live at all. My mother just finally found out where I live and I've been there for three years. She's my mother. I know School No. 4 has given that information out. Mr. Smith has a tendency of having a conversation with me about other kids and other situations that they go through. He has done the same to me and with my kids' family. I don't talk to my kids' father whatsoever. Nobody from his family should know what grade my kids are in right now. He doesn't speak to them. Mr. Smith called by baby father's cousin to talk about me and my daughter and what was going on in that school. My daughter is embarrassed and does not want to go to School No. 4. I refuse to send her.

Ms. Greta Mills: Hello, everyone. I'm a teacher in the Paterson Public Schools.

Dr. Newell: Ms. Ramirez, we have someone who will speak with you.

Ms. Mills: I'm here in reference to rodents. I've had multiple teachers come to me this week screaming and upset because the rodents are running around in the classroom

while the kids and teachers are there. Feces is left on the desk. What's happening with the cleanup? There needs to be a massive cleanup. They need to exterminate that building because the rodents should not be running around in the classroom. They shouldn't be running around the building. But to think that they are okay with being in the classroom while the teacher and the students are there is an issue, unless you know how infested it may be. It's on every floor and all they did was put down a trap in one room because she refused to go back in. Even before I came here, they are standing out in the hallway. They're just running rampant and that shouldn't be. That is unhealthy. The Board of Health needs to be there because that is some nonsense. Secondly, there are no screens on the windows. Now the summer is here, and stuff is flying in the window. You have to put some screens up so the bugs are not flying inside. I said something about the flooring. I almost tripped. The boards are lifting. The floors are cracking. What happened to the money that the district received? Right after COVID we got all this money to fix the buildings up. What happened? They left School No. 10 out? I'm trying to understand. The floors look a hot mess. They're unlevelled and have holes everywhere. Why weren't they picked for remodeling and fixing up? I don't know. Then you took the \$17 million for Aetna. Because that's your choice, that's what you get to do. Why are you firing teachers now? Why do you need to let go of 35 teachers? Where is the money going? Why are you letting go of teachers? Why won't you put supervisors back in the room? Everybody is asking what the alternative is. Put the supervisors, data specialists, and reading specialists back in the rooms because we need small class sizes. Break this down. You can go into one of those high schools. You don't have to rent this building anymore. You can save millions of dollars by making sure you have teachers in the classrooms. You still didn't put an art teacher in there. There are other schools that don't have art or technology teachers. There are alternatives. You're refusing to do those alternatives outside of just packing them all into a classroom. There's a teacher being tormented in fifth grade. She's crying almost every day because certain kids are picking on her. The woman just started last year and they're picking on her daily. They are purposefully going in the classroom and taking things out of her desk. The older kids come down and bust into her room. They can't even lock the door anymore. There has to be something done to help this woman besides writing her up and blaming her because the kids are fighting. It's not fair to her. I'm going to keep speaking on it because it's not my first time telling you. It's not fair. We can't keep a teacher if she's going to be tormented. You can't do that. You can't keep blaming her. The child was kicking the door just before I left. I said, "Why are you kicking the door." They said, "You're not my teacher. Mind your business." Who are you talking to? The other teacher tried to say something to him. The woman is at the door trying to hold the door shut. She's kicking on the door. What are the cameras for? Stop these kids from tormenting this woman. It's enough. The parents have to be held accountable too. They are tormenting her and it's not fair.

Ms. Sofia Abdalla: Hello. I'm in the third grade. I just want to say I love being with the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. They help me and make me feel safe. Please don't change my school. Thank you.

Councilman Alex Mendez: Good evening, Board President and Paterson. It's a great pleasure to see my former colleague here. I came to speak against the tax increase that we are planning to implement in the City of Paterson. I would like to encourage all my Board members to please vote against the 6% tax increase. Paterson has one of the highest taxes in the State of New Jersey and the nation. Our homeowners are struggling as it is. That increase will pass also into the tenants. Once we increase the taxes on the homeowners, the tenants will get a higher rent as well. I would like to make a recommendation. It's important to look at the supervisors and directors. When I was a Board member, we didn't have that many directors and supervisors. We have to

do more with less. Just look around those administrative positions. We need more teachers in the classrooms. I know we're living in a very difficult time, and we have to do more with less. Because of the agreement we have with DCA and the \$27 million that they gave to the City of Paterson to balance the budget; we're obligated to increase that 2%. But 6% is impossible that our homeowners will get that hit. Look at all those positions of directors and supervisors. We need teachers in the classrooms. Vote against the budget. We have a great meeting with our Board President to have a shared services agreement meeting with the Board of Education and City Council. We're looking forward to finding some savings within the city working in collaboration. This is the time for us to come together and work together for the benefit of the City of Paterson. Please think about the homeowners and the residents of the City of Paterson before you approve that 6%. Thank you so very much. Have a good night.

Mr. Javier Nicasio: Good afternoon. As an educator, I understand the need and the want to increase the budget and have more funds. The reality is a huge tax hike hurts the family. A huge tax hike makes it so that parents can't put food on the table. A huge tax hike makes it so that they can't go on that trip they're planning or put gas in the car to get the children where they need to be. The reality is while you might think a tax increase is going to benefit the School Board, it's actually going to do worse for our students. It's not just the homeowners. It's going to affect the residents and tenants who are living in those two-family homes. My parents are immigrants and working class. They purchased their home here working three jobs. They're still working three jobs and they're in their 60s. The reality is that this tax increase is going to destroy the family. We also have to think about what the City Council is doing. We are taxing homeowners, working middle class people. Yet developers, millionaires, are getting massive tax abatements. We're paying our fair share. Every year our taxes are going up and the developers are coming into the city building 40 unit apartments and then putting all of those kids in our schools. We don't have the funds because they're not paying the taxes for it. I understand the desire to want to increase the taxes, but the reality is we are paying our fair share as working middle class people. The developers are who we need to be looking at. Thank you.

Ms. Marian Watkins: Good evening. I'm here tonight in reference to the budget. I happen to know that in all these schools there are still students who don't have teachers. They have substitutes. They're doing virtual studies. They're sitting there. I don't understand why when something happens the mentality is to go to the bottom. You're putting teachers at the bottom of the rung. They're the most expendable. It's not right. They're the only ones working with our children. Nobody else has an effect on them. I don't care what you do. They're not directly involved with our children. You're getting rid of the people who are supposed to be helping our students. I don't understand the philosophy behind this. It's no knock on anyone because everybody works to get to a certain position. I did myself. But there are too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Thank you.

Mr. Akkheem Dunham: Good evening to the Board members. It's good to see you all. I want to start with that because a couple of nights ago I attended a meeting with Dr. Gray, and I expressed how I'm appreciative for everyone in this building. I told her a story about a teacher named Ms. Downing. I can't remember her first name, but she was at School No. 30. She wasn't my teacher, but she took me out of class because I had trouble reading. I can vividly still say what she used to say. If anybody here knows what a chrysalis is, it's that thing that the caterpillar is in before it gets its wings. She was an academic support specialist. I'm told that we don't have that position any longer. Her job was to pull students out of class who had a struggling time. I was a bit of a student, to say the least. She took us all out of class, those students who had a bit

of a problem. She hit me with a ruler one day. I went home and told my mom and grandmother, and they looked at me and said, "What did you do?" I get that our world is changing, but I kid you not. There are some things that mom can't tell you. There are some things that grandma can't tell you. There was a teacher named Ms. Downing, and she had this way to put each student who had an issue into their own space while we were in a classroom with each other and helped us learn what we were supposed to learn. Proverbs 22:6 says to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it. Education is not just a budget line. It is a God-given and ordained responsibility. When we fail to properly be stewards of the resources meant for our children, we are failing a divine mandate. If cuts must be made, let them start at the top, not in the classroom. Teachers are not just employees. They are called to shape young minds, to plant seeds of wisdom and knowledge. Instead of protecting them, decisions are being made that prioritize systems and hierarchy over humanity. Jesus rebuked those who placed burdens on the people while refusing to bear the weight themselves, Matthew 23:4. Likewise, our children should not suffer because of mismanagement, nor should their educators be sacrificed while excessive administrative costs remain untouched. That is not just about fiscal policy. It's about justice. If we truly believe that children are a gift from the Lord, Psalm 127:3, then we must fight to ensure that every dollar is used to equip, empower, and educate them to sustain unnecessary oversight. May our leaders be reminded to whom much is given, much is required, Luke 12:48. Let us be faithful stewards, putting students and classrooms first. I came here tonight with the Word because that's something that the people can't argue with. Most of my compassion comes off as a bit of a fire. All I'm saying is what thus says the Lord. Why do people argue with me? I'm talking about what matters the most, our children. Our educators are here to shape their minds. Thank you for having me.

Ms. Sandra Miller: Good afternoon. I'm a homeowner and I can't afford any more taxes to be taken out. My grandson is autistic and they're taking away the teachers that they need. Children can be cruel. One teacher cannot control a classroom that's overcrowded with students. If students are being bullied, you can't blame that one teacher because they have to give the attention to everybody. If you have the aides in the classroom to help, it would be a better situation. I'm a homeowner and I don't want to lose my home. I can't afford to keep paying these high taxes. Thank you.

Ms. Ernestine Goodwin: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm a resident of the City of Paterson. I don't particularly have children in school, but I do have a niece and nephew. My concern is the budget and its increase. The landlord is going to raise his taxes. That means my rent is going to go up. I'm on a fixed income. I'm sure that you have a Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents. Is there any way possible that some of these people can be moved elsewhere rather than to keep going up on people's taxes? We're at the point now where enough is enough and something needs to be done. Thank you.

Ms. Jamie Matari: Good evening. I'm a resident of Paterson. I'm Co-Chair of the Stony Road Neighborhood Network. I'm here on behalf of my neighbors to express our strong opposition to raising taxes. Before asking taxpayers for more, the district should focus on fixing internal inefficiencies and making better use of existing resources. Once those issues are addressed, we can revisit this conversation. Thank you and have a good evening.

Comm. Gonzalez: There is going to be a budget presentation. I ask that you stay so you can hear what's going to happen.

Ms. Luz Torres: Good evening. Once again, you know I'm against the middle school model. Tonight, I would like to address Mr. Horsley. I have a question. It's a fact that the decision was made at the local level for the middle school model affecting Dr. Hani Awadallah, School No. 9, School No. 8, and School No. 3. Because it was made at a local level without state involvement it can be rescinded. What specific steps must the Board take to reverse this decision? What legal or procedural barriers, if any, would prevent such action?

Comm. Gonzalez: We're not going to go back-and-forth with questions. That has to be addressed at the end if you want to speak to anyone.

Ms. Torres: He cannot answer me even though I'm addressing him?

Comm. Gonzalez: No. We're not going to have a dialogue.

Ms. Torres: Can he answer me at the end?

Comm. Gonzalez: Through the administration.

Ms. Torres: Can you pause my time?

Comm. Gonzalez: Finish and we will give you an extra minute.

Ms. Torres: You can answer my question. Can he address me at the end?

Comm. Gonzalez: Put everything in an email and send it to the administration.

Ms. Torres: I have. I got no response.

Comm. Gonzalez: There's a procedure to this. You have another minute.

Ms. Torres: I'll ask another question. What is the justification for pushing forward with the middle school model despite overwhelming concern from parents, students, and educators? Given the district's budget constraints, and more broadly, the uncertainty surrounding the federal education policies, including President Trump's recent executive order aimed at dismantling the Department of Education, how can the Board justify subjecting students and teachers to such a disruptive and potentially harmful transition? The Board has a duty to represent the voices of the citizens, taxpayers, parents, and school administrators, as well as to advocate for the needs of students in the district. How can the Board justify an action when the people you serve are voicing serious concerns about the transition and its consequences? We have repeatedly requested to access official records, impact studies documentation, construction plans, and budget reports that demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of this plan. Yet, the Board has consistently refused to provide transparency or responses to our questions, as you just so perfectly executed. If the plan is truly in the best interest of our children and the community, why is there such resistance in sharing these critical details? Since you won't answer my questions, I will wait for Bryant Horsley.

Mr. Eddie Ruiz: Good evening. Hopefully you don't hate me yet. I know I spoke to some of you personally on the side on Monday. I appreciate the time. I still find myself here because I told Mr. Ramirez directly it doesn't really affect my son. He's going to be in the same school. He does have an IEP and that's my concern. What guarantees can you give me that it won't affect him? You can't give me a guarantee. I know the only guarantee we have in life is death. I completely understand that. As Board

members, there should be some guarantees. Despite that, I find myself here speaking out. This fight is not just for my son. It's about every child in our community who will be impacted. I'm here for my nephew that's in third grade. He comes to me with worried eyes asking me, "Who's going to walk me to class or be there when someone is bullying or bothering me? What if I get hurt? Am I going to be here all alone?" His fears are real. He's not alone. I'm here for the Russian father in our school who doesn't speak English and had no idea what was happening until we communicated through Google Translate. Imagine his frustration, confusion, and helplessness. I'm here for every parent regardless of background, race, or religion who have spoken to me, expressing their fears and frustrations over these changes. These parents feel unheard and like decisions are being made without their voices, input, and consideration for their children who will bear the weight of these choices. This is not just a policy. This is about people. This is about the children's wellbeing, their sense of security, and ability to thrive in an environment that should uplift them, not disrupt them. Are we truly doing what's best for our children? Are we making decisions that reflect their needs, voices, and futures? Are we pushing them forward with a model that leaves them feeling abandoned and uncertain? It's not just a fight for one student, one family, or one school. Comm. Simmons, I want to address something you said. You stated that it's the responsibility of every municipality to educate its children and that we want better outcomes. Yet, we don't want to pay for it. Over the last five years, we have raised taxes. Have we seen our education get better? Yet, our children continue to fail. Last year taxes were increased 5%. Yet, all the Superintendents got an increase of 3%. Was this funding truly invested in improving education? Or was it used to pad pockets? If higher taxes would directly translate into better schools, improving resources, and higher student success rates, the conversation would be a lot different. What we see is a continued decline in educational outcomes and lack of accountability of where these funds are actually going. Investing in education means prioritizing our students, ensuring that they have the resources, support, and quality teachers they need to succeed. Instead, it seems like the burden consistency falls on the taxpayers' pockets and the parents, with little changes for the children we're supposed to be advocating for. Thank you.

Ms. Maritza Davila: Good evening, everybody. I'm here with reference to the middle school model. I went to a website and you guys need to go in. If you see all the predators that are surrounding our kids and you're expecting our kids to walk to pick up their kids from the other side of town. There are so many around us. You don't understand. I couldn't even sleep last night. You guys are sleeping at home in your beds with your pillows with no problems and worries while we have to worry. I have my grandson that comes to me when I come from a PTO meeting asking me, "Did we fix it? Are we still going to stay at Dr. Hani? I want to play basketball for Dr. Hani." His cousin graduated from Dr. Hani, and he wants to do that. You say you are thinking for the kids, but you are not thinking for the kids. I'm sorry. We are not here to hurt the kids. We are here to help them. Instead of trying to make this model, look at School No. 15. The parents are complaining about the kids being abused. She was just saying her kids are being bullied. Let's work on that and not worry about something that's already fixed. There's no problem with the schools. They are fine. Get the extra teachers. Where are they? You're getting them to quit because they don't want to work with you guys. Come on. Let's get it together. Let's stop dividing and show unity. Let's start showing our kids what they need to learn to survive. Sit in your seats and make better decisions. We have to do it. Let's stop playing. You guys have enough money. Now you're going to come and tell me you're going to need money because you want to do this middle school model. No. It's not that way. There are kids that need a lot of help. Special education kids are being abused in pre-k. I'm here at every meeting and I don't see anything being done. You guys need to get it together. You're getting paid good money.

Come on. Let's work for our kids. They might not be your kids, but they're my grandkids. My kids did well the way the school system is now. That's one of them right there. The ones that's here every day, that's one of my sons. Think about that.

Ms. Michelle Kinchen: Good evening. I'm very overwhelmed. Thanks for hearing me. I'm a homeowner, but I'm also an educator. I'm here to talk about the taxes, which I'm totally against. I understand that we need it in order to improve our schools, but it does affect us. The taxes are going up, but salaries aren't. My request to you guys is to hear the parents because the decisions you make affect the children. What affects the children now comes into the classroom. The educators now have to deal with that as well. I am an educator. We are not just educating, but we then become counselors. I enjoy my job. I enjoy what I do. I've always wanted to be an educator. I come from Paterson, and I've always wanted to pour into our Paterson children. We know our kids deal with things. I hear you say that we're moving children. Are we really preparing them for the move? Or is this something that's just going to happen? We have to be mindful of the decisions that we make and think about how it's going to affect these children when you're making a move. Thank you for hearing me out today. I just pray that our children are first when you're making the decisions you're making.

Ms. Victoria Oquendo: Good evening. While I was sitting there, an idiom came to my mind, and it was "trimming the fat." It means reducing or eliminating unnecessary cost, resources, or personnel to improve efficiency or reduce waste. I just wanted to leave that with you. There's a lot going on here. I've been coming to these meetings since I was a child with my mother. I applaud you parents for being here. You don't know how important it is to sit at these meetings. I couldn't stand my mother for bringing us to these meetings and we fell asleep in the chairs. She went to county meetings and every meeting there was. She knew what was going on. As you can see, even though we don't know what's going on, it's still going on. Do you know what I'm saying? My grandson goes to EWK. We're not allowed in the building. Everyone has to stand in front of the door and wait for someone to come get you and walk you to your child's class. That is not working. That's not district policy. It's causing parents to become late. I'm involved in my grandson's education, and I don't even know who the new principal is because he hides like a little mole in his office. I'm serious. There's a lot going on and I can't even walk my grandson to the door? It's bad enough I don't know what's going on in the classroom, and he can't tell me because he's non-verbal. How do you think I feel about that? I'm listening to all this going on and I don't hear anything about family and reciprocity. When you get something, you're supposed to give something. You're definitely getting something and I don't see the children getting anything, which is the reason why you're there. Our children are your business. If we didn't bring these children to these schools, you would have no business, or the next set of children. I'm going to the school every day to drop my grandson off. I don't care what new policy he conjures up overnight. You need to talk to him. You need to think about your taxpayers. Everything is going up, but our services are shrinking. I go to the store, and I have to bring my own bag. I'm paying for inflated food. I have to bag my own stuff. Come on. I don't know about you, but I'm fed up. Everything has its tipping scale and you're going to tip the residents over with this next tax increase. It's time for you to start looking in your budget. I remember over the years looking at the budget and I saw a lot of little lines that said 'incidentals' with millions sitting in it. I don't know what incidentals are, but I see some incidents where you need that money. Thank you.

Ms. Maria Rosario: (Spoke in Spanish) Something is going on with the student registration. How is it possible that you're asking for an ID registered to the house? A lot of parents, like myself, don't have an ID with my home address. Who am I supposed to register my child on Monday? Another thing, many of us parents want to know. We

want the votes from the 2021 school model to be made public. I feel disrespected by some of the people on this side of the dais who sometimes go as far as falling asleep during the meetings. Also, you're telling the audience members to be quiet. I feel disrespected by this. With respect to the proposed location for the middle school, I believe that Dr. Hani is too small. I was just there recently at a meeting. During this meeting, you are talking about money that you don't have. How are you going to bring bigger kids into this school with smaller kids? Where are you going to get that money from? I expect my questions to be answered tonight because I feel that oftentimes, I get left up in the air. Thank you.

Ms. Nicole Fuller: Good evening. I felt compelled today as an educator, especially when I heard that there are possibilities of cuts to educators. Being an educator here in Paterson and growing up here, I remember what it was like to go to school here. What we have now looks nothing like what I remember. It is so sad to have children without teachers in language arts and math. Then we are taking assessments, and we are wondering why our children can't pass them. It's not their fault. It's our fault. We are failing our students, the adults. They don't make these decisions. We do. I'd like to think that I understand the budget, but when you're talking about our precious children, people don't want emotion to come into play, but they have to. We talk about trauma, SEL, and how our children are adapting and coping. But then when we make decisions, all of that goes out the window. You have teachers that want to be here, but there are people who are running them out. We already have a huge teacher shortage. I had a high school student one day when her teacher was out say, "Can you give me some work?" You have to understand that us teachers and support staff feel like we are always the first ones to be cut. We are the ones on the battlefield. We are the ones dealing with the students. We are the ones feeling their pain. We are the ones trying to educate them so they can go out and compete in this world that is super tough. We are failing them. We as educators do not make the decisions. The district administrators make the decisions. We are required to execute the plan. When the plan fails, we should not be the ones held accountable. We didn't make them. We are just doing what we are told. If you tell me to do something, I have to do it or else I may get written up or a little check by my name. Even if it doesn't make sense, you have to do it because that's what you're being told to do. I know it's tough. I know this is a budget. This is not corporate America. These are real lives. These are real people. We are not putting out the best quality product that we can put out into this world, but we are all benefiting from our children. Everybody benefits from them. If we don't have any children, none of us have a job. I make sure to let my students know how important, how valuable, and how much I appreciate them each and every day that I go into my classroom. I feel like listening to these children is very important. I will leave it there. You can't raise taxes. All of this is going to hurt us further.

Ms. Trenace B.W.: Hello, everyone. How are you doing? When I come to the podium, I'm never a disrespectful person. At the same time, this community does not appreciate the disrespect that you guys are giving them. All we have heard since we have been here is failure. Our kids are failing. Our teachers are failing them. Some of the parents are as well. Parents, you have to take accountability as well. Discipline your children. Only God knows where they will end up if you don't. Principals are failing. What are the supervisors and managers doing? I never like to call out names, but we have a Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and Assistant Superintendent. Are all of them needed? Maybe that's where the cuts need to go. If we can't afford to lose teachers, maybe some of these people need to go back to the classroom so nobody loses a job. Why allow folks to lose their jobs if it's not necessary? That also means you get demoted, but at least you have a job. Look at how many people are losing jobs with no pay at all. Paterson residents, especially those who have been in their homes forever,

are losing them to these tax increases. 8% is too high. 6% is too high. 4% is too high. I heard one of the Commissioners say if its 2%, people will be cut. There's no need for the cuts. Move people around and put them in places that are needed. This way, you will still have some income coming in. That might mean losing your title, but you don't deserve that pay if it means other people have to lose their job. We don't want folks to lose their jobs. Move people around. Keep jobs. Remove them. Get rid of some of these titles, especially if they're not necessary. We have a Superintendent. Why do we need other Superintendents, whether they're Deputy or Assistant? If we don't need them, we don't need them. Put them somewhere else. Thank you.

It was moved by Comm. Teague, seconded by Comm. Ramirez that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be closed. On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: Normally we won't do this at this time, but I have to. I hear you loud and clear. Trust me. It's not an easy job to sit here and try to do what we are doing. I hear the cries and I feel you, but there is one thing that I have to say. I hear the parents from Dr. Hani, School No. 8, School No. 9, and School No. 3 and when you speak about sexual predators. I live in one of the worst wards in the city, the first ward. They're up and down the street. Sexual predators are all over this city. I am not going to say what you can't do. I'm asking you not to paint a picture as though they can't reside in your area, that where you live is better than my area, or that my kids have to go to school in the area in which they live. I hear you. Trust me, everybody who knows me and what I stand for, I am for the children down hard and wholeheartedly for decades now. This position does not make me who I am. I've been who I am before this position. One thing I can't allow anyone to do is make accusations as if I am a racist. A middle school model was adopted in 2020 during Covid. I'm not going to say I wasn't here, because I'm here now. What I do now makes the difference. The rhetoric that I'm hearing now about us being racist, I'm not a racist. My children are half Muslim. My husband is Muslim. I don't have a racist bone in my body. They're Muslim and also half Puerto Rican. When you come up to this mic, you don't know us. You don't know me. When you say these things, I get a little offended. I have to make it clear I understand your pain, but by no means make it seem as if this is what we really want. As far as taxes go, I feel your pain. I really do. But just as you can come to that mic and say what you need to say, I want to express how I feel. I respect you and I respect everybody. You have a right to say what you want, but you also have to have that respect. If somebody up here disrespects you, you have a right to call them out. But please don't lump us all into one every single time you come up to that mic. I'm not like the rest of them up here. I must work with them, but I'm not like the rest of them. I'm a very different breed. Trust me. I appreciate you all coming out because this is what's needed. This is how you get the things you want done, by your presence. Just like Ms. Marion and Ms. Watkins said, if there are no children in this district, they don't have a job. None of the teachers or administration have a job because the children is what brings the money into this district. That's all I ask. If I offended anybody by what I have said, that's just what it is. I don't want you to lump me up into that because that's not who I am. Continue to come out and fight. Force us to tell you the things that you want to know. It is your absolute right. My vote is yes. Someone said that the Board was painting a picture that we are racists.

Comm. McCall: I approve that message, Comm. Freeman. My vote is yes.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Yes.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: Yes.

Comm. Teague: I was told by the NJSBA to reach out to legal about what could be done about the middle school model. They said I could make a motion to rescind it, but I don't know if I would have the support. Legal counsel made it clear to me that I could make the motion. I know right now we are in a motion. I can make the motion, but I don't know if I'm going to get the support up here. For this, I will say yes.

Comm. Gonzalez: Yes.

The motion carried.

Comm. Gonzalez: I'm sorry. This is an emergency meeting to only discuss the budget. That's what the emergency approval from the county was. I know that's not what you want to hear, but by law that's what we have to do.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Newell: Good evening, everyone. I would like to begin by addressing the district's current financial situation. I will also speak to the work that has been done. I do hear what the community has been saying. To begin with, the district experienced a staggering \$19.2 million reduction in projected growth revenue compared to what we had received in the prior fiscal year. This financial blow put the district at a tremendous disadvantage. We were forced to consider cuts and a tax increase. I just want to go through the work that we did. In addition to the \$19.2 million reduction, the district was impacted by several budgetary increases from the last fiscal year. Some of these were shared at Monday night's meeting and the BA will be going into further detail. Our charter school costs have increased by \$12.6 million. We have gone from \$148 million to \$160 million. That is money taken automatically off the top. Out-of-district costs have increased by \$17.3 million. To send our students out-of-district for the support they need has gone up by \$17 million. PCTI has gone up by \$4 million. To combat some of these challenges, cabinet level administrators were directed to evaluate their department's proposed budgets for the 2025-2026 school year and identify areas where a 10% reduction could be made. I was very clear that these reductions should be made without significantly impacting student services and educational quality. Each department lead was tasked with evaluating and eliminating all non-essential expenditures that do not directly contribute to our core mission, evaluating all areas where operational efficiency could be enhanced and expenses could be reduced, prioritizing spending by ensuring essential programs that directly support student achievement are maintained, and collaborating across departments to continue identifying solutions and cost-saving strategies. This was a very difficult process that we have started since December, but it was necessary in order to maintain the quality of academic services and educational programming we offer our students. While speaking of services and programs, I do want share with you some of what the district currently offers to students and families free of charge that we do not want to touch. Breakfast and lunch is served in every school. After-school snacks, and in some areas dinner, is served to students in special programs. Additionally, student electronic devices, such as Google Chromebooks, have been made widely available and when the devices need repair, the district pays for all replacements and repairs. Dual enrolment course fees

are paid by the district. All AP exam fees are paid by the district. We offer free music programs, such as the Paterson Music Project, which we pay for so that our students can have the arts for free. I know a lot of you have heard about Credit Recovery because I've spoken about it in the first year. For all high school students who need it, it's free. Certification programs, because we want our students to be equipped, for example, the phlebotomy, are free. When we have college tours and academic field trips, we pay for those because we do believe our students need to be exposed and that they know that college is an option for that. We pay for that. PSAT and SAT testing are paid for by the district because we know that they need to be ready to take those to go to the next level. The Dance Residencies that we have are paid for by the district. Enrichment opportunities for elementary and high school students are paid for by the district. These are just a few of the programs and services that are in jeopardy of being reduced or even cut if the proposed preliminary budget is not approved. I want to talk further about that. One of the areas we determined we need to make adjustments on was the list of Superintendent priorities. We developed a plan to expand the district's Gifted & Talented program, to return a professional development department, and also to expand the fine & performing arts across the district and more. While these are still the district's priorities, we've had to place them on hold temporarily. At Monday's budget meeting I did propose a 6% tax increase. At this time, I would like to provide more information regarding the reason for my recommendation. After working with staff over the past several months in developing the budget, I was hoping that our state aid numbers would be comparable to last year's numbers. As I mentioned, we got \$19 million less than what we received last year. This has necessitated an effort to identify areas where we can make up the difference without imposing a large tax increase. To put things into context, while we received \$54 million in state aid last year, we also had a 5% tax levy. This allowed the district to maintain, and in some cases enhance, the quality of academic services we provide. This year the district received \$19 million less than we did last year, which translates to \$34 million in state aid. This significant decrease in funds, combined with millions in budgetary increases, as I mentioned at the top of my report, has placed a tremendous strain on the district's resources. We understand the constraints that tax increases place on members of the community. The alternative, further budget cuts and reduction in services, would have a more detrimental impact on our students' education. As you know, the preliminary budget proposed on Monday was voted down. It is imperative, however, that we approve a preliminary budget as required by law. That is why my recommendation at this time is for a 4% increase. Proposing a 4% tax increase instead of the original 6% shows sensitivity. I am listening to the community's concerns while also trying to address the large budget gap that we are now faced with because of what we did not receive. We are now utilizing fund balance. This is a strategic approach to avoid larger financial pitfalls and maintain control over the district's budget submission, which is due. I would like to emphasize that the decision to increase taxes and implement budget cuts is not one that I take lightly, but it is necessary for the continued operations of this district. We spent so many hours going through the budget lines to identify areas where we could adjust our numbers in a responsible way. My team, led by the School Business Administrator, Ms. June Gray, knows that my expectations are extremely high and that I will hold everyone accountable for the work that they have done in this process. The preliminary budget we have is in the best interest of the academic needs of our students and families given our financial constraints. Finally, it has also come to my attention and mentioned here some concerns regarding special education. I would like to clarify that there were no budget cuts to special education programs or staff members. At this time, I will turn things over to Ms. June Gray as she will continue to present the preliminary budget and speak on the budget impact.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL DISTRICT PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Ms. June Gray: Good evening, everyone. On Monday, I presented the preliminary budget with the 6% tax increase, and we had a balanced budget. Tonight, I'm going to go through the budget impact and where we are at the 4%. As Dr. Newell had addressed, we are in a structural deficit. This means that our revenues are not increasing as quickly as our expenses. As our expenses continue to rise, just like yours do within your household, the revenues aren't matching for us as well. Last year, charter schools were \$147 million and went to \$160 million, which is an increase of \$12.6 million. Technology has increased from \$14 million to \$18 million, an increase of \$4 million. Out-of-district tuition has increased by \$17.3 million. We also had a loss of revenue. This is a federal fund that we had. It went from \$1.7 million to a mere \$200,000. That's a \$1.5 million decrease. The district is currently in a position where we are using our savings. We have \$20 million of excess surplus. That money was generated during COVID. We used \$35 million last year. We only have \$20 million to contribute to this year's budget. We also have increased our capital reserve. To avoid further cuts in this budget, we are willing to use \$3.6 million of unassigned fund balance. What does that mean? It's the unreserved balance that we have which is considered savings. We would like to use it for emergency purposes. However, we feel that we would be able to regenerate those funds within the budget to get us back to a 2% balance, which we are required to do. Additional budget impacts that we are faced with – contractual obligations. Our collective bargaining agreements continue to increase. Legal settlements. Transportation costs. Aging infrastructures. We have 32 buildings at or near 100 years old. The maintenance costs on those alone are exorbitant. We have increases in our fixed costs – leases, utilities, insurance, and our debt payments. These all affect the money that we talk about. Where is the district's money going? These are things that we have to do and continue to do as we operate the district. Dr. Newell spoke of the district priorities. This is a list of the district priorities that we had planned. We still have some that we are doing. We are working on the cosmetology expansion. There are some that will be put on hold, but some are already in progress. As we continue to move on, we may have to shift our priorities a little bit to see where we can continue. We were looking to expanding and we will do our best to get the resources where they need to be. When we started this whole process with the budgets that were submitted from all the departments, we have cut central office administration by \$34 million. Commissioners have been provided details. Also, school-based expenditures by \$1.7 million. We went through an exercise where they were instructed not to touch things that would directly impact student achievement. We looked for non-essential things that could be cut that would not impact student learning or decrease the programs that we are used to having for the children. Where are we now? We have a balanced budget at 4% tax levy. We have no further budget reductions, which means we have not touched any staff. We will not have any layoffs. We are utilizing our unassigned fund balance. This means that the district is contributing its own savings so that we do not have to lay off any staff. We also want to show the local fair share versus the budgeted tax levy. The district is prepared to offer our savings. The local fair share is a state calculation of each district's ability to support its school through the local tax levy. According to this, the district can raise its tax levy above the 2% and that's where we are to get to a tax levy cap. This is what the State of New Jersey says that Paterson can afford based on their income and tax rate. The local fair share for Paterson is actually \$160 million. We are currently budgeted at \$79 million. That is \$181 million below the local fair share. The homeowner investment in our school district will be a \$8 monthly increase to what you already pay at 4%. This is what the district is prepared to do. Utilizing our unassigned fund balance puts us below the 2% cap. These are emergency funds that the district should have for emergency and unexpected needs. The district always has unexpected emergency needs. State regulations allow

for up to 2% of the total budget to remain unassigned. Anything over that goes to support the budget. Current unassigned fund balance is at \$14.5 million. We are using \$3.6 million of that to address the budget deficit, preventing further cuts to essential programs. Our unassigned balance will be at \$10.9 million, which is dangerously low. We are prepared to monitor what we're doing, be accountable, and restore us back to the 2% by attrition through the budget that we currently have. We want to ensure that the funds are spent strategically without creating future deficits. That's important to us and that's what Dr. Newell was speaking about. She will hold us accountable for what we say we can do. Avoid depending too much on one-time revenue to cover ongoing expenses. Our fund balance can get depleted if we continue to tap into it for expenses that will be reoccurring. Maintaining our fiscal responsibility while addressing our immediate needs. Use of our unreserved fund balance versus additional cuts is not an easy solution. We went back and forth, but in order to avoid many additional cuts and impact to our students, we elected the use of our unreserved fund balance. Ensuring our long-term financial health with the district remains our first priority. Thank you

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you for the presentation. Are there any questions from the Board?

Comm. Nieves: I want to clarify on the record that no teachers will be laid off with this 4%. Is that correct?

Ms. Gray: No layoffs.

Comm. McCall: I heard that there are no teacher layoffs. I want clarification on programming. None of this is going to affect any of our programs and educational pieces that are in place now. I heard you say something about Credit Recovery. I heard you mentioned some programs that may have some significant changes due to this new budget. I just want to get clarity on it. I heard Credit Recovery. I know in this district Credit Recovery is a big program because so many children who don't pass their classes through the regular school year have that opportunity to go back to graduate. Am I correct?

Dr. Newell: I did mention Credit Recovery. I listed about 15 things that the district currently offers free of charge and Credit Recovery was one of them.

Comm. McCall: Will that remain free?

Dr. Newell: That's what I listed. Yes.

Comm. McCall: I just want to make sure I understood it. This budget will not affect any of our special education programs as well.

Dr. Newell: We were very clear that special education would not be touched.

Comm. McCall: Okay. I just wanted to make sure that the public understood that.

Comm. Ramirez: Ms. Gray, thank you so much to your team and the Superintendent for all the hard work you've put into this budget and to meeting the demands of, not only the district, but the community who we all represent. This is the preliminary budget, correct?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: The final budget is due in May.

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: We have some time still. We are awaiting the final budget from the state that the legislature will be fighting for to hopefully restore some funding to districts like ours.

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: I'm hopeful that the right thing is being done. Thank you for your work.

Ms. Gray: Thank you.

Comm. Simmons: I want to piggyback on Comm. McCall's question with regards to programming. I know that you talked about the things that are free. There are some district priorities that affect student achievement. Some of those things are going to be put on hold.

Dr. Newell: Yes, for now.

Comm. Simmons: With regard to the tax levy, I'm upset that Council President left. I want people to understand that whatever the percentage is here does not necessarily equate to an increase in what you pay in your taxes, unless the City Council wants to pass it on to you. What the district is asking for is, based on the taxes that the city already collects, give us a little more. The city can do that if they pass on some of the money that they collect in tax abatements or pilots. So that people are clear, with tax abatements and pilots, 95% of that money goes to the city, 5% to the county, and none of it comes to the school district. If the city wants to, they could pass that money on to us thus alleviating the need for the school district to have any tax increase. Us saying we want to increase whatever that is, is not necessarily passing it on to homeowners. It is the city who decides that they want to pass that on to homeowners. We don't make that decision. We don't increase property taxes. We're only saying to the city to pay a little more. We see where the state says we should be. We're \$81 million below where we should be. That's because the city just simply doesn't pass it on to the school district. I wanted to make that clearer.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you for that clarification because that is an important part of this presentation.

Comm. Teague: The state is the one that calculates the aggregate property value and income of Paterson residents, the same state that illegally underfunded us for over 20 years. They're going to tell us that we can afford this when Paterson's poverty rate is 23.6%, which is higher than any other place in the state right now. Poverty is high in Paterson. For the state to come back and tell us we can do more when they have been doing less is quite embarrassing when they haven't even done their part. They have illegally underfunded us for years. Granted, last year they did something, but we're going back. If they never had illegally underfunded us years ago, we would not be here right now. In 2008 I was one of the community members who stood up against Chris Christie because he continued to flat-line the district because he was not here for equality or equity. He wanted to make sure that districts like ours were underfunded. This problem started in 2008. For the state to come now and say in their estimation we can afford it, how can you say that when you have illegally underfunded us for years? That's pretty bold to do. That's where I'm at. I want to know who this expert is who can

tell us how much money we're making in this city. Every day I'm helping parents that are being put out of their homes and helping people put food on their tables. I don't have much money. Unless I'm in a totally different world here, I don't know what's going on. What the state is saying, they don't live in this city and they don't feel the pain that we feel here. It's easy for them in Trenton to come here and say we can afford it. Are they living here? Are they dealing with what we're dealing with? Is anybody from the state living in Paterson right now who can come here and tell us this is why they feel we can afford to pay this? I haven't seen anybody yet. I appreciate Ms. Gray, the Superintendent, and the district. But the state has a lot of balls. I hate to put it that way because I know we have children here. The state has a lot of guts to tell us what we can afford when they have illegally underfunded us for years.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you, Comm. Teague. Are there any other questions?

Comm. Freeman: We said we had cuts in personnel. Where does the money go? You talked about cuts in personnel salaries. Where did the money go?

Ms. Gray: Are you looking at the non-salary piece?

Comm. Freeman: I'm looking at the detail. When you were giving your presentation, you spoke about cuts in personnel.

Ms. Gray: I said no cuts in personnel were made. We were working with Ms. Tsimpedes and Mr. Rojas so that no cuts were made.

Comm. Freeman: I'm talking about personnel. Let me look for it. You mentioned it while you were speaking. Central office and administration.

Ms. Gray: That's the detail list that you have.

Comm. Freeman: What the community wants to know is where did the money go in these reductions? You said there was a reduction in central office and administrative.

Ms. Gray: Administrative non-salary.

Comm. Freeman: Okay.

Comm. Simmons: Can you explain what that means so the public understands what the non-salary administrative reductions are?

Ms. Gray: Non-salary means that it's the non-salary portion of the budget. We did not touch any salaries or benefits. Things that we use for operating expenses—those are the things that we were asked to reduce for non-essential items that did not affect programs or trickle down to the children. It's nothing to do with salaries. We kept our after-school programs and stipends are included as well. It's just to maintain the operation. That would be the operational side and the school.

Comm. Freeman: It was reduced to get to the 4%.

Ms. Gray: The 6%.

Comm. McCall: If this was to reduce to the 6%, what was the reduction to get to the 4%?

Ms. Gray: We used the unreserved fund balance.

Comm. McCall: You took the difference out of the unreserved fund balance to make it balanced.

Ms. Gray: Correct.

Comm. McCall: When we talk about these budget reductions, can you just give us an example of what that is? Was it that we're not going to have colored ink on the copiers?

Ms. Gray: Some things like that. We did look at supplies as well. We had \$6.7 million in the budget for Ms. Tsimpedes' textbook adoption. She went back and was able to negotiate a three-year deal where she could pay it over time. That took \$4 million right off the top of the budget. We only had to leave \$2 million remaining in the budget. Kudos to her and her team. We didn't just cut. We strategized and we made plans to reduce the budget. We did spend time and collaborated to get to where we were.

Comm. McCall: If we did that \$34 million reduction, it just gives me some encouragement that there may be other things that we can look at. Next year when we get ready to get to this point, we don't have to be here. We can already have said we were able to not use this, so let's see what we can do without next year. Nobody wants to see reductions. I don't because I feel like when you start reducing, somewhere down the line it will affect our kids. If we were able to find \$34 million, I would ask to our administration that we continue to look at these cost-savings. We're not talking about \$34,000. We're talking about \$34 million. It gets to me that had we just said yes in the beginning, then this \$34 million might have still been around somewhere just doing what it does. I'm going to charge this Board to do better. This is a lot of money. I want to say to you, Ms. Gray, thank you for these reductions. Thank you, Superintendent, for whatever sacrifices that have to go. We get a lot of money in this district and to not even have 25% of our kids passing, somebody has to be held accountable. It is not fair to our children or this community. All we're doing is setting this community up to fail even more. When kids can't read or do certain things, it's going to affect the quality of this city. I pay a lot of taxes. I might be up on the top five. It really makes me feel good to know that we saved \$34 million, but if there's another \$10 million somewhere, please help us save it.

Ms. Gray: We will.

Comm. Gonzalez: The sentiments have been heard. I've had the privilege to work with this Board and the Superintendent as of January and one of the first conversations we had was to cut. We've said it in many meetings. When we had presenters who wanted to partner with the school district that weren't current partners, we said cut. I've heard 'trimming the fat' in the audience today. That's what we said. We said we were going to work together to trim the fat. You're hearing this \$34 million. It started at over \$140 million. As of January, we had cut that amount of money and we're down to the last nickel before it dramatically impacts any of our programming or teachers. Ms. Gray, your team, and the Superintendent, we were going back and forth a little bit. The original recommendation was 8%. Now they're proposing 4% because the Board did not pass that. We do understand that we're also responsible to the taxpayers. Not all of them have children in our district. They've had children in our district, but they're still our taxpayers. We rely on them. They vote for us. They put us here as well. I had shared that with the administration. She received that information loud and clear and we did work to make sure that the departments looked further, whether it was color ink or not, to find the money to get to this point. The other balance to that is that we have children

that we have to serve. There's increase in costs, inflation, and the contracts for the staff. Every year they get a slight increase and it's not like the teachers are getting paid a lot. We have to support them as well. We can't just not vote for anything because our increases are going to surpass what we currently collect. I do commend the department, the Superintendent, and her team. I commend this Board for working collaboratively to get to this point. I hope that we do the community and taxpayers well by moving this forward.

RESOLUTION FOR A VOTE:

Resolution No. 1

WHEREAS, the preliminary budget submitted by the Superintendent of Schools, be affirmed, and approved by the Board of Education for the 2025-2026 school year; and the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary be authorized to submit the preliminary budget to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval in accordance with the statutory deadline; and

WHEREAS, the 2025-2026 preliminary budget was prepared consistent with the district fiscal Policy 6220 addressing budget preparation, with primary consideration given to educational priorities identified by the Board and Dr. Laurienne W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education recognizes school staff and Board members will incur travel expenses related to and within the scope of their current responsibilities and further recognizes travel that promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district; and N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.1 et seq, requires the Board of Education to establish by resolution a maximum travel expenditure amount for the budget year, which the school district shall not exceed; and

WHEREAS, the travel expenditure maximum resolution was approved on March 17, 2025, with an annual maximum amount per employee of \$1,500 for regular business travel pursuant to the provisions of N.J.A.C 6A:23A-7.3(b); and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby establishes a maximum travel expenditure amount of \$250,000, for all staff and board members for the school year 2025-2026, with an annual maximum amount per employee of \$1,500 for regular business travel and related expense reimbursements; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education approve the 2025-2026 Preliminary budget submitted by Dr. Laurienne W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools, which includes an adjustment for use of SDA banked cap in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-10.1(b) available for 2025-2026 to support the general fund as reflected herein; and the School Business Administrator/Board Secretary be authorized to submit the preliminary budget to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval in accordance with the statutory deadline; and to advertise said preliminary budget in the Herald News in accordance with the form suggested by the State Department of Education and according to law.

<u>4%</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
<u>General Fund Revenue</u>		
		\$
Local Sources	\$ 87,294,985	79,294,985
State Sources	\$ 624,588,888	
Federal Sources	\$ 215,951	
Budgeted Fund Balance	\$ 23,680,196	
Withdrawal from Cap Reserve	\$ 8,608,670	
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	\$	\$
Total General Fund	<u>\$ 744,388,690</u>	<u>79,294,985</u>
 <u>Special Revenue Fund (net of operating budget transfers)</u>		
		<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
Local Sources	\$ 783,751	
State Sources	\$ 68,199,101	
Federal Aid	\$ 30,443,170	
Transfer from Operation Fund:		
Pre-K Special Education	\$ 3,964,304	
Total Special Revenue Fund	<u>\$ 103,390,326</u>	<hr/> <hr/>
 <u>Debt Service - Fund 40</u>		
		<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
	<u>\$ 604,875</u>	<u>\$ 604,875</u>
 Grand Total Revenues	 <u>\$ 848,383,891</u>	 <u>\$ 79,899,860</u>

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a public hearing be held at the District Administrative Office, 90 Delaware Avenue, Paterson, New Jersey on Monday, May 5, 2025, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the budget for the 2025-2026 school year.

It was moved by Comm. Nieves, seconded by Comm. Ramirez that Resolution Nos. 1 be adopted. On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: Until we find out what the state is going to do and what monies we're going to receive, if we're going to receive anything, I have to say no.

Comm. McCall: No.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: I feel the pain of the taxpayers. I've owned a home in this city since I was 24 years old. The last five years before I rejoined the Board we had double-digit tax increases. I'm not one to support tax increases, but I know I have a responsibility to make sure this district operates. My vote is yes.

Comm. Rashid: No.

Comm. Rosado: As a homeowner, tax increases affect me as well. My vote is yes.

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Teague: I'll say it again. I cannot support any tax increases for the residents. I'll take the heat for it. I can't support anything like that. I can't speak for anybody else, but I'm out here every day with the public. I know how people are suffering. I know what people are going through. I have to look at myself in the mirror at night. I can't support this. I said no.

Comm. Gonzalez: Before I vote, I want to say that it is important that everyone understands that if we do not pass this today, by law we have to have this submitted tomorrow. They gave us an extension. I need everybody to understand what you're cheering for. Listen to this. If we do not pass this today, it goes to the county tomorrow. The county doesn't care. They can raise it up 8%. They can raise it up whatever they want. You saw that spreadsheet that said that they can raise it as high as \$70 million. The county does not care. You're applauding that. You need to understand that the county is going to dictate what our taxes are going to be. We're losing control when we say no. When we did not pass this the last time, we requested the county for an extension because we wanted to handle this in-house. We don't know what they're going to do. You can't wait for the state. The state is like the caveat at the end of the day. If they want to give us a little more, great. The county right now will get this and if it's not a balanced budget tomorrow, they can do whatever they want with it. It's out of our hands. You complain about 4%? Good luck. It will be much more than that I'm sure. And staff cuts? They can cut whatever line items they want. Do you want to give up the power that we currently have today and save where the work was already done? Or do you want to rely on someone else who doesn't live here? This is my third year of my term, and I didn't vote for taxes. But I understand that right now, with who we have at the highest office with federal cuts and other things that have impacted this community and will continue to impact, he's just started and three months in he's already making major cuts. We don't know what's going to happen. If we do not pass this tonight, we're actually telling the county it's yours to decide. Good luck. My vote is yes.

The motion did not carry.

Paterson Board of Education Standing Abstentions

Commissioner Valerie Freeman

- Self
- Family

- Paterson Cares, Inc.
- Paterson Community Health Center

Commissioner Eddie Gonzalez

- Self
- Family
- New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC)
- Community Charter School of Paterson

Commissioner Della McCall

- Self
- City of Paterson

Commissioner Hector L. Nieves, Jr.

- Self
- City of Paterson

Commissioner Joel D. Ramirez

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Passaic County Community College

Commissioner Mohammed H. Rashid

- Self
- City of Paterson

Commissioner Kenneth Rosado

- Self
- City Housing Authority
- City of Paterson
- Paterson Restoration Corp.

Commissioner Kenneth L. Simmons

- Self
- Family

Commissioner Corey L. Teague

- Self
- Paterson Police Department
- Paterson Policing

Mr. Horsley: I'm going to ask that the Board make a motion to enter into executive session for the purpose of providing legal advice.

OTHER BUSINESS

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Teague that the Board goes into Executive Session to discuss issues that warrant confidentiality, as consistent with NJSA 10:4-12 for matters of Attorney/Client Privilege, Contracts, Legal, Litigation, Negotiations, Personnel and Student Matters. The minutes will be made available to the public upon request, when the confidentiality of the subject is no longer warranted. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board went into executive session at 8:52 p.m.

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Nieves that the Board reconvenes the meeting. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

The Board reconvened the meeting at ? p.m.

Comm. Gonzalez: Comm. Rashid, is there a wish to rescind your vote?

Comm. Rashid: Yes. After explaining the legal issues, I understand that if we do not decide tonight, the state will increase double digits. I've been a Paterson resident a long time. It's tough for me too. I want a motion to reconsider my vote on the budget tonight.

Comm. Gonzalez: Second.

It was moved by Comm. Rashid, seconded by Comm. Ramirez that the vote on the budget be reconsidered. On roll call members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: No.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Yes.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Teague: No.

Comm. Gonzalez: Yes.

The motion carried.

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Rosado that the Board approves the adoption of the preliminary 2025-2026 school district budget. On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: No.

Comm. McCall: No.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Yes.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Teague: No.

Comm. Gonzalez: Yes.

The motion carried.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you to my colleagues who supported this so that we don't give over power to any other entity to do our job. Thank you so much.

Comm. Teague: Make sure that it's known that this is the group that ran their campaign on not raising taxes.

Comm. Gonzalez: We didn't in the first two years. Thank you.

Comm. Teague: You raised it in the first two years.

Comm. Freeman: I try to walk away without saying anything. I'm not going to allow someone who was totally against it, who was shooting for 0%, to act like you weren't against teachers being laid off or anything of that nature. You were shooting for 0% to 2%. Let's make that real clear. We can say whatever we need to say here. That's what it was. The Superintendent asked for 6%, which we really need to be at 8%, so we're forced hands. Then you encourage someone to change their vote. This is the direct result of people being voted into positions who know nothing about what is going on. I'm making that statement and I'm standing on that statement. Any time teachers' jobs and student services are in jeopardy, I'm going to always vote no. You were gung-ho two years in a row. You voted budgets down. This year miraculously we're voting yes. With that being said, we need to close this because it's ridiculous.

Comm. McCall: I made my vote and it should be accepted for what it is. Mr. President, you have to be careful how you say or do things. I'm offended that you make this public feel that I'm irresponsible with your comment about my vote. That's wrong, Eddie. That's dead wrong. I will tell this community that last year I was the deciding factor to get the budget approved. I caused scrutiny from this community and people that you guys had called me. For you to do this tonight, that's wrong. I still love you, but you're wrong. Let our vote be our vote. Let my vote be my vote. If my vote is yes, let me go to sleep with a yes. If my vote is no, let me go to sleep with the no. I was not being irresponsible tonight. It was my vote no. I heard the constituents. I heard their cry about taxes. I also understood that you had the five votes. It's not my fault that you didn't have it when you thought you had it. Now you have it. Good night, everybody.

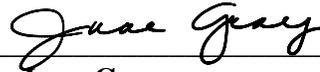
Comm. Ramirez: Thank you to everyone who came out tonight. Thank you, Ms. Gray and your entire team. Thank you to the Superintendent for making this happen for the community. This was the preliminary budget. The final budget must be adopted in May. We still have some time to find additional cuts and to advocate to our legislators to make sure that they restore the funding that the Governor's budget cut for Paterson Public Schools. Thank you very much.

Comm. Gonzalez: Before I vote, I do want to apologize for that last statement. It is passionate and hard dealing when we're talking about trying to balance a budget where we have taxpayers who can't afford a dollar more. Then we have to also balance the other side where we have to provide services to our students. What I don't want is to clearly turn those decisions over to another entity. It's correct. I think Comm. Freeman

stated that I didn't vote for the first two years. 0% is what I wanted now. I stated it publicly here that I didn't want to vote for taxpayers. The reality is that neither the county nor the state is going to give me what I want, 0% or 2%. I have to then be realistic and say if 4% is the next best thing, I'd rather 4% than 12%. That's the reality of where we are. I do apologize for saying some of these things that I just said, but I say it with passion because I'm also a taxpayer. I'm paying over \$15,000 for a single-family house. I don't have anybody else helping me with that rent. I don't have any tenants. I know and many of you know that I'm blessed, but not many people have what we have. Every single dollar hurts. If it hurts me, I can only imagine what it hurts everyone else.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 p.m.



Ms. June Gray
Business Administrator