

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

March 17, 2025 – 6:12 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. Valerie Freeman
Comm. Della McCall
Comm. Hector Nieves
Comm. Joel Ramirez, Vice President

Comm. Mohammed Rashid
Comm. Kenneth Rosado
Comm. Kenneth Simmons
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:

**Special Meeting
March 17, 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.

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Newell: Good evening, everyone. While this is a special meeting, I did want to highlight one of our students, Ms. Solaris Paul. On Saturday, March 8, 2025, Ms. Paul, a senior at John F. Kennedy High School, made history by becoming the very first Paterson Public Schools student to win a New Jersey state wrestling championship. Ms. Paul competed in the 165-pound division and dominated the finals with a 7-1 victory that earned the 2025 NJSIAA state title. We want to take some time to acknowledge her incredible achievement this evening. Her victory is a testament, not only to the tremendous talent she possesses, but to what can be accomplished in athletics through hard work, commitment, and discipline. I'm also proud to announce that recently Ms.

Paul has been selected to represent New Jersey in the 51st Annual Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic which will be held on March 29 at the AAHN Arena at Peters Township High School in McMurray, Pennsylvania. This trip is on the Board agenda tonight for approval. As a part of the recognition, we have prepared a very brief video just so you can see highlights from this competition. Please enjoy.

Video Presentation

Dr. Newell: Well, done! Next, we have Chris Perez and Karen Whitsel who have also won awards. We will also be highlighting them at a later point for the Distributive Education Clubs of America, DECA. They will be representing the district. Congratulations to Mr. Perez and Ms. Whitsel. We will be highlighting them at a further point. Finally, I want to speak on the strategic planning process. The Board has decided that we have to continue with the strategic planning work. We will be sending out reminders that on Wednesday, March 26 from 3:30 to 5:30 and on Thursday, April 10 from 5:00 to 7:00 we will be having our strategic planning sessions. At this point, I would like to introduce Ms. June Gray, our School Business Administrator, as she delivers her presentation on the preliminary budget.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2025-2026 SCHOOL DISTRICT PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Ms. June Gray: Good evening, I will be presenting the preliminary budget without a firm tax levy number. We will go through the presentation and at the end we will have that discussion, and you will decide what it is we're doing moving forward. I'll just go through the presentation and let you discuss it from there. Paterson Public Schools serves about 29,000 students. We face many challenges as an urban school district. However, our main objective is to educate the whole child. That's what we're trying to do with this budget. We have incorporated things that will educate the entire child based on what we feel academically the child needs to move forward in today's society. I want to give a public appreciation to my budget team and the Superintendent's cabinet for all the hard work they have done. They have worked really hard with me. Anything that I ask, I get it done. I have Cecilia Daly, the Budget Manager, Katori Walton, Comptroller, and Interim Assistant Business Administrator, Lance Gaines. I appreciate them and they work very hard. Anything that I need is there. Paterson Public Schools is committed to providing a thorough and efficient education. That is something that we should do and it aligns with federal and state standards. Our budget ensures equitable access to a high-quality education essential to student support, services, and modern educational resources. Given the challenges, we aim to prioritize our strategic investments in highly educated staff, to maintain optimal class sizes, and support student learning, curriculum enhancements that align with state standards and prepare students for college and career success, special education services, bilingual programs, and intervention supports to meet the diversity of our population. We have safe school facilities that foster a conducive learning environment, and we want to invest in our capital improvements. Also, technology upgrades and digital resources to enhance 21st Century learning. As far as technology, we are looking to purchase new online E-Form platforms to begin eliminating paper, creating automated workflows, and streamlined operations. We want to upgrade our wireless access across all school buildings and implement artificial intelligence tools for educators. As far as our buildings, we look forward to trying to do preventative maintenance along with upgrades to our capital projects. Some of those are Eastside High School bathroom renovations, boiler replacements, roof replacements, and other capital investments for next year. We received \$35 million this year. Last year we received \$54 million. That is a \$19 million decrease from one year to the next. We are using \$28 million of our own money and a

lot of the expense goes to charter school, which we are paying \$160 million. The next screen is a visual of our state aid, how we have increased and decreased over the year. In 2024-2025 we are at \$583 million and went up to \$618 million. We received \$54 million last year, which is a deficit as well. This is the enrollment versus the cost for charter schools. As you can see, charter schools are increasing annually. We are losing students, and we have to find a way to retain them and provide an education that will make kids want to stay. This is the list of all the charter schools by enrollment. We have 7,963 students going to charter schools. The two largest pieces of revenue we have are state aid and the tax levy. When we get our aid from the state, we have a local fair share which is depicted in my state aid document on the next page. I would like to talk about it before we get there. The local fair share is the state's calculation of each district's ability to support its schools through the local tax levy. Any district can increase its tax levy up to the local share even if it exceeds 2% tax levy cap. On the next screen you will see that's a source document coming directly from the state aid. The state says the local fair share that the district can afford is \$160 million. When the state figures our state aid, they already have a calculation of what they feel the district can afford. That will affect our state aid moving forward. Any SDA district, which we are, can increase its levy up to the local share even if it exceeds to 2%. The tax levy cap for Paterson as of FY2026 is \$125 million. That's what we have in bank cap, allowing the district the ability to levy an additional \$47.3 million above the 2% tax cap. Aggregate property value and income residents in the City of Paterson are the main components in determining the local cost share. This is where the cap banking eligibility is. This is also a state document that says the bank cap available for use for 2025-2026 is the \$47 million. These are state documents that we don't do anything with. We don't have any input. It comes with our state aid. When we get the budget DOE document, these are preloaded. I know the concern of the community is the tax impact. I understand that it can create hardship for those homeowners. However, the current rate is \$1.2 million and that's the current liability of \$2,410, which is currently where the taxpayer is based on the 2023-2024 assessed value. Once we get the 2025-2026 value, that number will change. However, we have done projections based on the net valuation. These are the numbers that we have from the DCA. You will see that the average residential property value is at \$195,151. At 2%, the current tax liability will be \$2,484 with a homeowner annual impact of \$73.77 monthly. 4% goes to \$2,509, \$98.46. I did a comparison at the bottom. It comes from the DCA. The tax statement is based on our rate. If you look at the bottom, you'll see it has the county property taxes along with the city and local. The next slide shows where we are at the different tax rates. We have petitioned to the state, which I have put forth a resolution for, to transfer from other funds \$6 million. That will reduce us down. We can balance at 8% with the unreserved fund balance. At 6% we can balance with the \$6 million, verifying with the auditors that anything below this number is risky because we have a budgeted fund balance of \$14 million. We can balance using unreserved fund balance of \$2.1 million at 6%. Using the same \$2.1 million fund balance we still have a gap of \$1.5 million and \$3 million. That's pretty much it for me. I'll take questions.

Comm. Freeman: At the 2% levy is there a possibility of teacher layoffs?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Freeman: Can you give me a number?

Ms. Gray: We did an average, 36 layoffs.

Comm. McCall: Does that also include the number of vacancies? What is our vacancy right now? Do you have that number?

Ms. Gray: We reorganized so that we wouldn't have to touch bodies. We pushed some teachers into vacancies. We tried to identify as many as we could. I'm not exactly sure of the number. Luis has that. However, it has reduced significantly with our push-in.

Comm. McCall: This is filling all the vacancies and we will come up with 36 teachers laid off.

Ms. Gray: Right, because we already went and cut non-essential vacancies on the PCR.

Comm. McCall: What are other cuts besides teachers with this percentile? I know that's a big question to ask, but I want to be able to understand. Not only am I losing teachers, what else are the children going to be missing?

Ms. Gray: Support services.

Comm. McCall: Are any of those support services dealing with special education that we're already not adequate in?

Ms. Gray: We are rethinking the related services and trying to renegotiate contracts. We went line by line. There's a possibility that it may. We have moved resource teachers and placed those into special education classrooms. We looked at different things that we don't have to cut. We are down to the bare bone. We went line by line working collectively with the Superintendent's cabinet so that they can talk about their respective areas collaboratively. They have pretty much given everything that they feel is sufficient for them to operate.

Comm. McCall: Does that also include supervisors, those folks in other positions that are eligible to go back to the classroom? Have we considered any of those folks being available to go back to classrooms? It's not going to affect their salaries because we can't do that. Has that too been considered?

Ms. Gray: It has been considered. Actually, we've talked about the supervisors. Ms. Tsimpedes also expressed that she really doesn't have enough supervisors to spread among the district. Sometimes when we start pushing supervisors back into the classroom it creates a need in another area.

Comm. McCall: That would be part of support services.

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. McCall: Does it affect our athletic department and day-to-day operations? I know I'm asking a lot, but if you don't ask then you don't know and nobody tells us. One of the things that I was hoping that we would get was a list line by line of what the cuts would be. On that list, how drastic is it? It's not just coming from your office, but from administration saying that if we lay off these 36 teachers, these are the schools that are going to be affected. Or if we lay off these 36 teachers, this is what's going to end up happening to our students. I love numbers, but I also like reality. I feel like we don't talk about the reality when we start doing these numbers and suggesting what we should and shouldn't do. At the end of the day, I'm still upset that we still have schools that are not getting what they need based upon the area where they live. I will not sit around and accept all of this without knowing that there is going to be some equity across the line of education here in the City of Paterson.

Comm. Freeman: Does the alleged \$17 million savings for changing insurance reflect in here?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Freeman: Do we have a guarantee that we are going to save \$17 million?

Ms. Gray: Yes. If all things remain the same, yes. It's based on claims, when they did our claim history and trend analysis for in-network usage. Based on that, we should see savings.

Comm. Freeman: I don't like 'should see.' I like guarantees.

Ms. Gray: Everything has to remain the same.

Comm. Freeman: Another concern of mine is nurses.

Ms. Gray: I didn't touch nurses.

Comm. Freeman: Do we have a nurse in every school?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Freeman: Will substitutes be affected by this?

Ms. Gray: We're trying to change the way we do substitutes. We're going to try to allocate the numbers to the schools so that we can manage it more effectively. We see that we're going over budget for the substitutes. We want to get a handle on it and manage it better. That's why you see us reallocating the money. If we fill our vacancies, the substitute contract should come down. That's where we are. We can't fill our vacancies and still increase our substitute usage. Something has to give.

Comm. Simmons: I thought I heard earlier that we were cutting the vacancies.

Ms. Gray: Once we place into the vacancies, we get everybody shifted to where they are with moving around class sizes. We are trying to fill as many vacancies as we can.

Comm. Simmons: How long have we had the current vacancies?

Dr. Newell: We've had a struggle filling the vacancies. We have been whittling it down. It's been a year or so.

Comm. Simmons: I'm a pragmatic. If we've been struggling with filling them for more than a year, I can't bank on us filling them within the next year. I know there's a shortage in there and there's a lot of competition between districts. I know that becomes a struggle. I'm concerned with the substitutes because I know that the company has been filling. They have been doing what we hired them to do, which is why that number has gone up.

Ms. Gray: With this exercise we have taken where we can place into the vacancies and eliminated those positions that we have freed up. We have been filling vacancies and reducing some positions. Vacancies will be gone once we fill them.

Comm. Simmons: My concern is filling the vacancy.

Ms. Gray: The number has reduced from where we started.

Comm. Simmons: It still exists, and it's taken more than a year to fill them. I see us going down that same track. It's a number that I can't bank on. Based on everything we need, what the Board has asked the administration to do, knowing we want to give our students better, what do we need for us to get to where we need to be?

Ms. Gray: 6% to 8%.

Comm. Simmons: I need a solid number.

Ms. Gray: 8% would be number using the unreserved.

Comm. Simmons: If we have to cut bodies, is that only teachers?

Ms. Gray: We will go back and look at the PCR and that decision will have to be made. I wouldn't make that decision alone.

Comm. Simmons: I don't envy you. I know folks don't like talking about the tax levy. It affects me too. We want a lot of things. We want our children to be better. We want them to receive the best education possible. But we're also saying we don't want to pay for it. That just simply doesn't make sense to me. Based on what I saw here and what I pay in taxes, what I contribute to education is 1%. It's incumbent upon every municipality to educate its children. When you have an educated school, you attract business. All of these things go hand-in-hand. It's not our responsibility to come up with ratables for the municipality. That's not our role. Our role is to educate students and give them the very best. When we say we don't want to pay for it, to me it just doesn't make sense. Again, I'm saying it as a taxpayer. My taxes are extremely high, but I'm willing to make an investment because that's what I see it as, an investment. I'm willing to make the investment. I'm looking at all the parents here because they have concerns. These are the types of investments that we have to make so that we can address the issues. If we're not willing to do that, why are we here? That's it for now.

Comm. Ramirez: The non-salary budget items that you sent to us, I want some clarification on a few of those. On page 3, we have \$591,000 for community services and programs for students and families. Do you have a breakdown of what that is?

Ms. Gray: That's for Full-Service Community Schools.

Comm. Ramirez: There's also \$50,000 for Brooklyn Nets coaches.

Ms. Gray: That's probably the match for the Taub-Doby Grant.

Comm. Ramirez: We have to match that at \$50,000?

Ms. Gray: For the students to go to the Nets game. We do have a portion of that.

Comm. Ramirez: How many students does that benefit?

Ms. Gray: It's the Taub-Doby league. It's a lot.

Comm. Ramirez: Is that through recreation? On page 5, purchase for professional services and it says we're awaiting results of RFP for part-time service providers for \$2.5 million. What is that?

Ms. Gray: That was a reduction. Instead of using full-time, we figured we could get part-timers to do the same work at a cheaper price.

Ms. ????: The \$2.5 million is for special education related services.

Comm. Ramirez: There's a line for \$422,000 for renewals of different software, including Infinite Campus. Have we looked into an audit to see if there's redundancy happening? I get complaints from different teachers and administrators about why we have different software that does the same thing. Have we looked to see if there's any redundancy in some of this software and how maybe we can save money by not renewing all of them?

Ms. Gray: Software will go through Mohamed in addition to what Ms. Tsimpedes has.

Comm. Ramirez: Correct, but as the Business administrator you can have these conversations with them and look into them.

Ms. Gray: We've had these conversations with Mohamed and Ms. Tsimpedes.

Comm. Ramirez: Has anything...?

Ms. Gray: We didn't see any redundancy.

Comm. Ramirez: At all?

Ms. Gray: No.

Comm. Ramirez: The people in the buildings are saying there is redundancy. There is software that we're using that does the same thing. I think we should take a deeper dive into that.

Mr. Mohamed Saleh: That line specifically is for our MIS department, which is Infinite Campus and all the different modules that come with it. That line year over year was reduced. There was a module that we were paying for. We saw very little usage, so we decided to strip it back. That account line actually was reduced this year.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you so much.

Comm. Gonzalez: In reference to the redundancy, I do recall having a conversation in some committees in reference to the various platforms that we use in facilities, technology, and other departments like custodial. We're looking at tracking individual work order assignments, where they are, and how long it takes them to get their job done from point A to point B. There are similarities between all these departments. We did discuss you and others to begin having that conversation. Have you had a meeting with the other department heads to discuss that very topic?

Mr. Saleh: We have not. However, I have started to look into the cost if we move from one to the other. Each department has its own needs. Whether their cost may change depending on the number of customizations, it would be hard to tell. We would have to have further conversations with each department head to see what their needs are.

Comm. Gonzalez: That would have been helpful if we had it already. I think that we still should go that route. The idea here of tracking individual work orders is consistent across the board. IT might need a different module that does it a little bit different task. Facilities might have something slightly different. These platforms are large enough to handle many different uses. It's about having that dialogue so we can consolidate. Subscriptions for every department become expensive when you start to analyze how much we're spending as it relates to user fees. That's just an idea of what you can do so we can have that as an option.

Comm. Ramirez: On page 10 of the same document there's \$118,000 for consultants used for administrative searches and Board training. Is there any way that we can look into NJSBA conducting those training? I know we have a membership to NJSBA and they do searches for cabinet members and all kinds of positions. And they conduct training. I know we are already paying membership for NJSBA. Is there a way that we can save this \$118,000, which is two teachers' salaries?

Ms. Gray: It's not just NJSBA. We have other trainings also and other certifications.

Comm. Ramirez: I'm on page 10. It says Board training and administrative searches. I know many other districts use NJSBA for all Board training and searches.

Ms. Gray: We have in there, character education and leadership development program and consultants.

Comm. Ramirez: NJSBA can do that. NJSBA does all that and we're already members. We already pay quite a bit of money for that as well. That's a redundant expense right there if we can use NJSBA instead of all these other consultants.

Ms. Gray: We're going to check.

Comm. Ramirez: I hate to be a penny pincher.

Ms. Gray: That's okay.

Comm. Ramirez: On the same page, there's \$100,000 for grant writing and other purchase services. How much money are we getting in grants from this contract?

Ms. Gray: We've actually received like \$2 million in grants. It does pay for itself.

Comm. Ramirez: That's things we need to know. We receive \$2 million in grants based on this contract. I'll rest there, Mr. President.

Comm. Teague: Ms. Gray, thank you for the presentation. I know we're using the word redundant, and I hate to sound redundant. Circling back to the national scene, when this budget was put together, I'm sure it didn't take into account the events of January. I'm pretty sure of that. Am I correct? Did they take into account this new administration that came in?

Ms. Gray: Are you talking about the federal?

Comm. Teague: Yes.

Ms. Gray: We have added some things back in being scarce with being heavily reliant on the federal funds.

Comm. Teague: That's the part that I'm worried about, the services that we rely heavily on for the federal government to fund. We see how things are going on that trail. Are there any measures in place in the event that the governor sends a letter saying Elon Musk said we're going to abruptly cut all these services to school districts across the country? Do we have anything in place to cover that, whatever those expense might be that rely on federal funding?

Ms. Gray: IDEA is used for tuition. That is a major concern. Title is used for school-based budgets. I think that's why we went forward when we were doing this budget, and we cut as much as we possibly could. We use the word 'cut' loosely. When we say 'cut,' we're making reductions. For example, we had originally \$7.2 million in the budget for our textbook adoption that we have to do for next year. Ms. Tsimpedes and her team were so reluctant with that. They went back and were able to negotiate a three-year deal where we don't have to pay for it up front. We were able to reduce her line. When we say cut,' it's just not cutting. We're strategically doing things to make it reduce.

Comm. Teague: Right. It's not like the Department of Government Efficiency.

Ms. Gray: There's a price for efficiency. We're doing the best we can. That's one of the efforts that we have made. When we use the word 'cut' loosely, we're just reducing based on the work that we have done and strategically planning for future things that we can do better. We have reduced and we plan to put things in place that we can do better. That's where a lot of the reductions have come from.

Comm. Teague: There was recently some legislation that I saw today about special needs children and new regulations that they're trying to implement for the buses. It hasn't gone before the full senate yet. Should that pass, would that affect the budget in terms of how many children get harnesses and things of that nature? I just saw that today. Depending on how that goes, are we prepared for that if they were to say starting September 1 every single student needs a harness?

Ms. Gray: A lot of the harnesses are provided by the bus company.

Comm. Teague: Okay. I'll get that message back to the parents. That's all I have for now.

Ms. Walton: Regarding the \$118,000, that's our contract with HYA. It's a general description of what they do for us. They also provide workshops, training for the Board, and they help with our strategic plan.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you. NJSBA does the same thing.

Comm. Simmons: The reason we use vendors outside of NJSBA is because it doesn't work for us. It doesn't work for urban districts. It really doesn't speak to our challenges. That's the reason we go outside of NJSBA. It's the reason we didn't use them for a search. They just don't address our challenges. I'm listening to a lot of this. When we talk about technology and utilizing different systems, we can buy a different system that does it all, but I can guarantee you if you go to any school district, you'll find that the technology and the facilities department have two different systems because they have different needs. You can purchase a system that encompasses it all, but you only see

those systems in the corporate space. You can use something like ServiceNow, but it's going to cost you millions of dollars. It just doesn't make sense. I think what we should be doing is let the professionals do their job. Our job isn't to tell them what to do. We tell the administration what we want to see. We've had this training. Our job isn't to tell them how. What I'm hearing is a lot of 'how' and you're crossing the line. We have to stop with the telling them how. I might not agree with it, but if they can justify it, let them figure out the 'how.' We're crossing the line and telling people what they should purchase. That's not our role. We're just crossing the line.

Comm. Gonzalez: For the record, I don't think anybody gave a directive. I think we're looking at what's presented to us and identifying some potential cost savings. If they ask the questions, these are answers that we absolutely need. Maybe it's something that hasn't been looked at. Maybe it's a rock that hasn't been turned over. I think it's fruitful for everyone to have a discussion and review the documents the fiscal department sent to us for these very discussions. I don't think anyone is telling anyone to do whatever. I think we're just offering suggestions and ideas that could help mitigate some of the issues we're facing.

Comm. Simmons: That should have been a conversation before tonight.

Comm. Gonzalez: Okay. We're here at the moment. Are there any other questions?

Comm. Simmons: So you have a habit of shutting down conversations. That should have been a conversation before tonight. Tonight, we're supposed to vote on the preliminary budget. We're not supposed to be doing this right now.

Comm. Gonzalez: Understood. With that said, I think there are a lot of folks who still have questions. I want to be respectful of all the Commissioners who have questions or ideas that may come up in conversation after the presentation. It's everyone's right to have their opinions. It's your right to have your opinion as well. I'm not shutting down any conversation. I just want to make sure that we get through this so that we can actually put a vote on the floor tonight.

Comm. Simmons: It appears to me that the document that Comm. Ramirez is reading from...I don't have it.

Comm. Gonzalez: It was emailed to everyone. Everyone should have those documents.

Comm. Simmons: If it was emailed, then email your question. Today isn't the day to have this conversation. I don't understand why these questions weren't asked ahead of time.

Comm. Gonzalez: I just feel this is the proper platform to have a discussion. This is a public forum, and we want the community to know the questions that we're asking. The taxpayers are going to hear whatever the rate is and are going to be understand that we did our due diligence and asked these proper questions and pushing back wherever we can. I will be upfront. I am not in support of raising taxes. In the last two years I have not raised taxes for the taxpayers. I am willing to do 2%. That's my own personal opinion after reviewing the documentation. I know numbers have been thrown out for 6% to 8%. That was the recommendation. My personal opinion is that we can do better, and we can look for more ways of finding cuts. How many times have we had parents and folks come up to the podium asking us to put our supervisors back in the classroom or get folks who are not really working in the classroom so can fill up some of

these vacancies that are being recommended? The community needs to know that we're having these conversations. It's okay to have this dialogue and to make sure that the community knows who is asking for what and if there's a way for us to reduce the amount of taxes. I think it's fair to say that most of us here understand the needs of the community as it relates to who pays how much for their properties. There are, unfortunately, too many homes in this city that don't have an extra dollar to put on the table to feed their children. We have to consider that as well. This is impacting us across the Board. We do have a responsibility. It's a fine line because our responsibility is to service the children. But at the end of the day, we are here to also represent the folks who put us here. It's very important that we don't take that lightly. There is a fine balance and a tug and pull until we come to the middle and decide on what the percentage is going to be. I'm cognizant of all the issues and I understand that we are asking for a lot and we have to also pay for it. I think a lot of taxpayers would argue that they're already paying for it and not getting the services. We have to look further and find cuts wherever need be. Before we touch a teacher, I would recommend that we look at other supporting staff that are not teachers per se to make sure our teachers are not impacted. That would directly impact our students. That's my personal opinion on the matter. We can agree or disagree. Do we have any other questions?

Comm. Simmons: With these cuts, if it's a 2% increase, how do you function? How do you get this done?

Dr. Newell: We would have to go back with the team, but it is very clear that we would have to look at some cuts in staffing.

Comm. Simmons: Typically, at this juncture we come to this meeting because we're going to vote. We already know what that number is. How much work does it take to go back and put all this information?

Ms. Gray: It's going to take a lot of effort, and we have to have a balanced budget on Wednesday to the county.

Comm. Gonzalez: Have you prepared anything for 2%, 4%, or 6%? You said you have to go back. I'm curious to know if you already have some of those things worked out.

Ms. Gray: We have to go back and look at what we already have. I don't want to say because we have to look at the staff. At 2% we're still looking at about \$3 million.

Comm. McCall: That \$3 million would be the deficit that we would be facing. We were saving \$17 million on the last meeting. Is that already calculated? It was for coverage.

Ms. Gray: It was already incorporated.

Comm. McCall: I'm trying to understand it here. If we're given \$17 million back and we fill all the vacancies besides the 32...I have to agree with Comm. Simmons. This budget is based on the 6%, 7%, and 8%. I would have felt more comfortable seeing all of the process. We're really giving a false narrative to our public. We already know this number gives us a deficit, but we don't see the extreme number with the 2%. I'm having a problem with that because the 2% is probably going to give us more teachers laid off.

Comm. Gonzalez: The 2% is here.

Comm. McCall: The questions we've been asking are based on the proposed budget. In the presentation we saw all that. According to this, these numbers are based on 6%, 7%, and 8%. With the 7% you're telling me that there's a possibility that 36 teachers will be laid off. If this body votes tonight for 2%, what is that number? What is the number of teachers we're going to lose? What is the amount of money we're going to lose for special education? What is the amount of money in special resources? I want a real narrative here. I want to be able to look and compare apples to oranges. This is not allowing me to do that. This is not giving me a real clear picture. Last week the Superintendent said that her recommendation was between 6% and 8%. Today we're sitting here and I already know just because of what we have been through the last two years that many of us on this Board don't agree with those percentages. We need to be honest to our public and tell them the truth. How many teachers are we going to lose if we vote on a 2% cap? How many dollars in special education are going to be taken away with a 2% cap? I would have loved to see all the variations. I don't have that. I want somebody to help me understand what these numbers are really going to look like and how it's going to affect. We're already failing. I don't want to put our kids in a worse situation. We should be doing a better situation, but we have to have reality here. We have to be real about this. Mr. President, that's what my concern is tonight. This number of loss is based on a higher percentage. I want to know what the 2% looks like. The public needs to know. You guys have all these signs up talking about the middle school. You're going to be concerned about the school if we don't give you real numbers. Those papers are going to come down and you're going to bring up new papers that are going to say, 'my kids aren't learning.' I hate to be so boisterous about it, but I have to because that's why they put me here. I will not go to sleep tonight comfortably knowing that our kids... We're trying to save money. I get that. At the same time, I'm worried about how that small percentage is going to educate our kids that are already behind. What is the percentile of our kids passing? It isn't 20%. Is isn't 25%. We are in the teens. I want real numbers. I don't want to prolong this meeting, but we have to get realistic. Parents and taxpayers, those that you really care about, I don't want a tax increase. I am not going to sit here and lie to you. I also don't want the future that's going to probably take care of me when the time comes not be educated enough or not have enough kids left because they're not here because of whatever circumstances because they don't have a quality education. I just need somebody to answer some of those questions. What is the reality with 2%?

Dr. Newell: Are you asking what is the proposed budget gap?

Comm. McCall: You said to me that in order for us to be halfway okay we have to be somewhere between 6% and 8%. I know some of my colleagues, including myself, want to know what the reality is with 2%. The truth of the matter is that if this budget does not pass tonight, we have to come back. Nobody is telling us what those real number are at 2%. Mr. President, you even said you don't want to see anything above a 2% increase. You have the vote. Because you have the vote, how is that really going to impact us? I want to know what is this 2% going to give and deliver. Is it going to totally fail us? Is it going to get us halfway through? Are we going to have to have 40 teachers as opposed to 36? Let's just be real about it. If we're looking at a 2% increase, what is that going to give us? I was hoping tonight that I would have a proposed budget that gave me a couple of variations. I know the presentation did it, but it didn't spell it out the way the questions are asked. When Comm. Ramirez started going through these numbers and asking questions, this isn't based on 2%.

Comm. Freeman: Is this based on 2%?

Ms. Gray: That's the total budget.

Comm. Freeman: It's not based on 2%.

Ms. Gray: That's the total budget that we have put together.

Comm. McCall: When I asked how this budget would affect us, I was told that we were looking at 30-something teachers being laid off. We'd lose resources and support services. It's going to hurt special education. I want to just know. If we only get 2% from the city, what are we looking at? If we only get 4%, what are we looking at? If I can't get the answers, my vote is no. I need to know what we need, how much we need, and how is it going to affect. We have to vote tonight. We haven't had a discussion about this, only those that are in committee. There's been no discussion after committee about the recommendations or whatever. The only thing I heard last meeting was about the supervisors going back into the classrooms. We haven't had a real conversation. We have to make decisions that are going to affect our future of this city. If we don't do that, then we're right back where we started. I don't need to be here. If I'm setting these kids up to fail, I will step down before I hurt a kid. I wouldn't let anybody hurt my kid.

Comm. Gonzalez: This doesn't reflect any percentage. That's just a budget for 90 Delaware. That's non-salary. That doesn't represent the percentages. That's not what you're looking at. You're looking at strictly the budget for 90 Delaware non-salary. Everything you said about the various teaching positions, we don't have that across the board for any of the percentages because that's for them to decide. We have to decide on a number. They have to decide how to get there. That's operations. We're not getting into the 'how.' What you're looking at is just showing the non-salary budget. We need to come up with a number and then they will go back and figure out how to get it done and present a balanced budget. I share your sentiments.

Comm. Nieves: I have a question for the line items for parking tickets. Is that actually parking violation tickets?

Ms. Gray: That's parking tickets for schools that don't have parking. We provide parking tickets.

Comm. Nieves: On the line item for professional services, is Universal Protection our third party security company?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Gonzalez: Any other questions?

Comm. Teague: I'm looking at this and was listening to what Comm. McCall was saying. When we go out to the public and we're walking through the streets, they're going to ask us the 'how' and what was our reasoning behind this. I'd also like to know what are we looking at. If we vote for the 2%, what are we looking at in terms of what's going to be lost, gained, and stay the same? It's just for point of information so we know what we're voting on tonight.

Comm. Gonzalez: Are there any other discussions before we vote?

Comm. Simmons: What are we voting on?

Comm. Gonzalez: That's what we're going to put on the table right now.

Comm. Simmons: What the administration recommends is what we vote on. We don't get to choose that.

Comm. Gonzalez: I disagree. I think it's what the Board decides to vote on.

Comm. Simmons: We get to vote, but we get to vote on the recommendation. We don't get to choose what it is.

Comm. Gonzalez: I think that we might need legal counsel's opinion on this. What was recommended before was 2%, 4%, and 6%. That's what was presented in the last meeting that we had in-person here. It's also represented on here as well. All of those are on here based on prior discussions and what the Board had recommended as far as percentages so they can prepare for them.

Comm. Simmons: You said what the Board recommended. It is not what the Board recommends. It is what the administration recommends. The Board has the right to vote it up or down. It is not what we recommend.

Comm. Gonzalez: The Board had suggested the percentages based on what we have discussed prior and that was a 2%, 4%, and 6%. At the end of the day, the Superintendent had recommended 6% to 8% after the fact. The Board came out of committee saying 2%, 4%, and 6%, just like we did last year when we discussed to have the percentages that were going to be presented to the Board to vote on. That's what we did.

Comm. Simmons: That's not what we did. When you get to this point at this meeting, you have a percentage and all the numbers.

Comm. Gonzalez: There's no percentage at this point.

Comm. Simmons: But there should be. I'll simplify this. Madam Superintendent, what is your recommendation?

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: It's sort of a hybrid. I don't want to go into too much detail. This is very much public knowledge and people can Google it. The day-to-day operations and how those things will be impacted and affected come from the administration. The administration would be the one to say here are what the impacts would be. We've assessed all of the above and these are our recommendations based on what we believe would suit the residents and the school district the best. The Board has the ability to then agree or disagree. The assessment of what things will happen, what the administration thinks would be best from a budgetary perspective comes from the administration. It is their responsibility then to convince the Board of their recommendation based on their assessment of how the money will impact the services. At which point, the Board determines if they agree and has a right to be collaborative in saying here are some areas that we think you did or didn't look at or where are our priorities. The Board discusses priorities based on what they deem appropriate. The administration takes that and looks at it and based on your priorities and the money, here's what we can and can't accomplish and this is how much it costs. The Board can then go back and say they approve or don't approve.

Comm. Gonzalez: If the Board agrees to a percentage, what you're articulating is that the administration, as it relates to operations, has to determine what is necessary to get there, if we disagree with the 6% or 8%.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: There is no voting mechanism for the Board to say 2% is the number. The Board can only say to the administration, "We don't like your number." Only the administration can come back with a number.

Comm. Gonzalez: We don't have that luxury of back-and-forth.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: That is a day-to-day operation within the purview exclusively of the Superintendent and those who help her make that decision. The Board either ratifies or not, but there is no mechanism for the Board to make the number.

Comm. McCall: Just to go back, last year when we were doing the budget the recommendation it came from administration, and they gave us a number. We then could vote it up or down. When everybody else voted and it came back to me, I was the deciding vote. I think that we should go ahead and vote accordingly on whatever the recommendation is. We can move this meeting forward and come back. It's not our privity to say what the day-to-day operations are. It should be suggested by the Superintendent like we did last year. That's what we did the two years that I was here. When Ms. Shafer was here she recommended, and we do it that way. We should not be saying what that percentage is. We need to vote it up or down.

Comm. Freeman: Would the Superintendent give us her recommendation so we can vote?

Dr. Newell: Based on various meetings looking at the budget lines and working with the business department and the BA, it is 6%.

Comm. Gonzalez: Okay. We're going to take a vote. I need a motion.

Comm. Simmons: I still don't know what the numbers are.

Comm. McCall: She just gave the number.

Comm. Simmons: No. We have to have all the numbers in the resolution.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: That is correct. The resolution that we're voting on has to have all the information contained.

Comm. McCall: There's no resolution on the numbers that we would have been voting on at this point?

Comm. Gonzalez: Correct. To my understanding, we were going to vote on a percentage, not on the line items. Again, that's for them to figure out when they go upstairs and then come back with those line items that are being cut.

Comm. McCall: You can do that in one night?

Ms. Gray: We're going to go back and do the resolution for the 6%. I had multiple resolutions prepared.

Comm. Gonzalez: Just so the public understands, this is not just happening now. There have been many discussions as it relates to the percentages for months. There is data. It's not like they're going to go and do this now. They have the data.

Comm. McCall: You said this has been going on for months. The other non-committee members...

Comm. Gonzalez: This is administrative leadership going through all the budgets, not all Board members. Fiscal got it. We took it out of fiscal and presented it to the committee.

Comm. McCall: I'm confused. I'm not trying to be funny because I really want to understand. So the public doesn't think we had this information for months and now we're playing wishy-washy, it's been in committee for months.

Comm. Gonzalez: No, the working on the administration, department heads, and staff. We knew the budget was going to happen. I said at every Board meeting that we have to cut. The administration had conversations with the department heads and all the various players within the district to look at their line items to see where those cuts are going to come from. That's not information that I have. You're not getting anything different than I am.

Comm. McCall: I got you. Thank you for clarity.

Comm. Gonzalez: We did have a presentation in fiscal, and we took it out of fiscal and presented to the full Board at the executive session meeting. That's the extent of the presentations for the budget. To give credit to the department, they have worked on all the various percentages. They have those numbers. They have to go get them and tighten them up based on our recommendation.

Comm. McCall: We wouldn't have been able to vote anyway. Is that what I'm hearing?

Ms. Gray: You can vote. We're going to get a resolution.

Comm. McCall: That didn't make sense to me. I just want to be sure before I rescind. If we can vote, we vote. If you're telling me there's nothing to vote on, then we shouldn't even have a vote.

Ms. Gray: We can vote. We're going to have a resolution for you.

Comm. Gonzalez: Comm. McCall, to make it simple...

Comm. McCall: It's not really making it simple. I want to make sure. I feel like we put a motion out there for nothing because there was nothing to vote on. We were ready to take a vote and I was going to vote no. There really was no vote. Let's go back. I will rescind my vote.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: I think I understand where some of the confusion lies. The Board is not able to, on its own, insert the number. That has to be from the administration asking you to vote on a percentage. As far as this resolution that we have here, if we have the numbers, we can amend the resolution to include the number. If the only thing we're missing is the resolution that says, "6% equals so many millions," then we can move on with that resolution orally and amend it. I want to be clear; we are not able to insert the number as a Board member. We can either vote their number up or down and then make recommendations. For example, many of you have said you're not going to vote on 6%. You are within your legal rights to say, "I don't like 6%. See what else you can do." The Board is not able to say 2% is the number we're including. If our only issue is that the resolution isn't ready because it doesn't have the 6%

number, if all the Board members are satisfied with what the number is based on the documents you have received, we can move forward with the vote.

Ms. Gray: If you can move on with the meeting, I can get that resolution.

Comm. Simmons: Can she do it verbally? Can you give us the number for the revenues and the general tax levy?

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: Let's talk best practices. We have a lot of people here who would like to speak during public comments. Candidly, I think we have enough time to allow the resolution to be updated and voted on before the meeting is over, if we are prepared to move forward.

Comm. McCall: So that number would be based on the recommendation of the Superintendent.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: Only the administration can make that recommendation. The Board can only vote it up or down and provide insight on what things they'd like the administration to consider. The only thing the Board would be doing is hearing what the recommendation is, understanding what the implications of the recommendation is, and then making a vote yes or no and advising why they're voting that way. At which point, it leaves it to the administration to make modifications to the extent that they can. I'd like to remind the Board that March 19 is our deadline. If we are voting on it tonight, my recommendation considering the time is to update the resolution accordingly and vote on it before the night is over if we're going to move forward.

Comm. Gonzalez: We do see a lot of folks here to speak. We're going to allow the audience to come up and we will revisit this.

Comm. McCall: I withdraw my motion.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Comm. Gonzalez: I know everyone was here when we saw the video. I don't know that she actually saw the video. We had a one-minute video on the Solaris Paul. Can you stand up? She's our champion from Kennedy High School. She did something that hasn't been done in Paterson for Kennedy High School and all wrestlers. Ms. Paul, I would ask that you get on the microphone there and say a few words please. I would also acknowledge the coaches and everyone who supported her throughout the career.

Ms. Solaris Paul: First off, I want to say thank you. I've received so much support from the City of Paterson. It's been wonderful. It took me four years to get to this point. I've worked so hard. I did this for my city. I hope the support continues. I'm a senior and I'm going to graduate soon. I'm not the only wrestler at Kennedy. We have a whole team of guys. I have two coaches who have worked with me for the past four years to get me here. I hope the support from the City of Paterson continues. I hope they continue to support the Kennedy wrestling program. Hopefully we will have more girls next year and we can grow this program. I want there to be more girls standing up here with state medals, placing in state championships, making a name for themselves, and putting the City of Paterson out there. I hear a lot that Paterson isn't known for

wrestling. I want more people out of Kennedy and Eastside to be up here from Paterson showing people that our city is so much more than whatever they hear. This means a lot to me. I'm glad I can represent my city.

Comm. Gonzalez: Congratulations. Let's give her a round of applause. I would invite the coaches to come up as well to say a few words. We saw you in the video excited.

Coach: Thank you so much. We really appreciate this. This is truly an honor. It's a very difficult thing to achieve. She really pushed herself. She's a very talented young girl, very good in school, and a nice kid. It's truly an honor and we thank you for putting this together. It was very nice of you.

Mr. Anthony Vasquez: We just received the pictures from the photographer out there and I told her not to post me crying. I look horrible. She's been working extremely hard. My wife is here with me as well. My wife Belkis was also the coach for wrestling. We tracked Solaris down. After she's done with us, she continues to go and train somewhere else at Cordoba. She has a long night. She will take a taxi and a bus and makes it back to Paterson around 11:00 at night. As coaches, we cannot do much. It's what they do when they are not around us to stay focused and continue to build on their skills that will get them the gold medal. The hard work she put in on her own beyond what we could do, she was dedicated. When I started working in Paterson back in 2014, Comm. McCall was one of the first persons that I met. I told her about this little dream of wrestling in Paterson, and it's blown up. I want to thank the city and the parents. We have a program for the little kids through Paterson Recreation that's in motion. We have about 40 little wrestlers. This year we would have had two girls at state. One of the other girls, Trinity, got stuck on the bottom and was pinned real quick. She and her brother are coming. She won't be the last. She works with Trinity. All she did in state was talk about another young girl from Eastside. She's going to be working with us in the program with the little kids giving back her knowledge and experience. Thank you. The City of Paterson is amazing. You guys are great. This is Solaris Paul.

Comm. Gonzalez: Thank you to the coaches. You put in a lot of hard work and grind as well. Thank you to the wife. You always need that better half to support as well. Thank you for all you've done for this student. We're looking to see what's next.

Mr. Vasquez: It was tough travelling with Solaris. We always needed a female. Since my wife is a coach as well she always traveled with all of us.

Comm. Gonzalez: Congratulations to all of you. Thank you so much.

Mr. Abdulrahman Alkhudari: I want to remind you about all of the great things about our current k-8 model at School No. 9. Right now, we are part of a school community where we feel safe and supported. Younger kids look up to us and we feel a sense of responsibility to be good role models. Teachers know us for years, not just a couple of months. They understand our strengths, struggles, and personalities. This helps them support us, not just as students, but as people. The middle school model will take all of that away. Instead of being part of a tight-knit school, we would be thrown into a place where we are just another student in a sea of kids. We would lose our leadership opportunities, our connections with teachers, and the comfort of a school that feels like home. If the k-8 model is already working, why change it? Instead of making students adjust to the middle school, why not invest in making our current schools even better? Let's keep what makes our school special. Thank you for your time.

Mr. Khoulood Abdelhadi: Good evening. I'm here tonight, not just as a concerned parent, but as a part of the community that has always stood by you. We are families who vote for you, support you, and now we are asking you to stand with our children. I'm here tonight to firmly say that I'm against moving forward with the middle school model. I understand that Ms. Tsimpedes has worked on this plan for years. Just because something looks good on paper doesn't mean it will work in real life, especially when it puts our children's lives and education at risk. Now I hear you talking about raising taxes 6% to 8%. Are you also claiming that if the district only gets a 2% increase in funding it will force teacher layoffs? How is it fair to raise taxes on parents and homeowners who already bear so much while also threatening to cut teachers, the very people who workday in and day out to educate our children? You are talking about putting more pressure on families who can barely make ends meet, all while pushing through an expensive rushed plan. If you really care about community, then listen to us. Stop trying to fix the district by hurting the very people who you rely on. If we have to pay more taxes, we want to see the money used to improve schools and not inflate administrative costs. I also want to remind everyone that the largest cities in New Jersey, Newark and Jersey City, both used mixed k-8 middle schools. They don't force the one-size-fits-all approach because they know that not every child and community is the same. Why are we in Paterson rushing into a model that even the biggest districts in our state don't fully adopt? We need to cut back on unnecessary administrative positions. Newark and Jersey City, with their larger populations, manage with fewer assistant superintendents and directors than we have in Paterson. Why are we spending more on administrative salaries when the money could be better spent on teachers, counselors, and real support in our students' education? We don't need more supervisors and directors. We need more teachers in classrooms. We need more support for our kids and a safer and more stable learning environment. Our kids deserve better than to be treated as a financial experiment. We should not have to pay more in taxes, risk our children's education, and accept a middle school model that's not ready just to fill the pockets of unnecessary administrators. This is not just about numbers. This is about our children in the district. Tonight, I'm asking you to slow this process down, work with us, and listen to us. Our children's future depends on it. We have always been there for you. Now we are asking you to please be there for us, for our children of this district. Thank you.

Ms. Tameem Alkhudari: Good evening, members of the Board of Education. I'm in the fourth grade at School No. 9. I'm here today because I'm really worried about the changes you're thinking about making to our schools. I don't want to leave my school, teachers, or friends. This place feels like my second home and the thought of having to leave makes me really sad. Right now, I feel safe and happy at my school. I know my teachers and they know me. They help me when I'm struggling and cheer me on when I do well. My friends are here too, and we've been through so much together. We've laughed, learned, and grown up side by side. If we have to move to a new school in sixth grade all of that will be taken away from us. Starting over in a new school sounds really scary. What if I can't make new friends? What if the teachers don't understand me like my teachers do now? What if I feel lost and alone? I'm just a kid and this feels like too much to handle. I'm not ready to say goodbye to everything I know and love about my school. Please think about how this will affect kids like me. We're not just numbers or part of a plan. We're real people with real feelings. This school is our safe place. It's where we've built our lives. Don't take that away from us. Thank you for listening to me. I hope you will think about how this decision will make us feel and choose to keep our schools the way they are.

Ms. Wafa Alamayreh: Good evening. I'm here tonight as a parent. I beg you to please listen to us. This middle school model you are proposing simply will not work. First, our

children's safety is at risk. Transitioning without proper support can lead to serious social and emotional challenges. Second, many of our schools are not equipped to meet the unique needs of middle school students. They require specialized support, counseling, and dedicated staff. Finally, parents have been left out of the conversation. Decisions that directly affect our community are being made without our input or transparency. Superintendent and Board members, please pause and rethink this plan. If you truly care about the future of Paterson children, you must reconsider this matter. Thank you.

Ms. Asma Sheikh: Good evening. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm here to respectfully ask you not to move forward with this model. I truly believe it will hurt, not help, our community. First, this model is being pushed without listening to the families and students it will actually affect. Where are the voices of the parents? Where are the students' opinions? Before making such a huge decision, you should be reaching out, having a real conversation, and making sure the community understands what's happening. That hasn't been done. Second, this model will separate families from the schools they trust and rely on. Our kids need stability. They need to know where they're going to school. Parents need to know their kids are safe and supported. Moving kids around will force families to go through a confusing process and it is only going to cause stress and uncertainty. Third, the way this whole process has been handled makes it very hard to trust that the model will work. The registration process was confusing and poorly organized. If something as simple but important as registration wasn't done right, how can we trust a much bigger change like this will go smoothly? We need to focus on fixing what's already broken, improving schools, helping teachers, and making sure students are learning, not creating more problems with a model that doesn't fit us. I'm asking you again to not move forward with this model. Let's work together on real solutions that respect and support our families. Why does Newark have 63 schools but only four assistant superintendents? Why does Paterson have 35 open schools with seven assistant superintendents and one deputy superintendent? These are the questions you should think about. Thank you.

Ms. Hamza Daralsheikh: I'm a student in this district. I want to say that I don't think this middle school model is a good idea because it feels like no one asked us what we think. We're the ones going to school, but no one asked us if this is what we want or if we think it will work. I think it's moving too fast. There are so many things that still need to be figured out. We hear teachers talking. We hear parents are worried and we are worried too. Please take more time to figure this out. Talk to the students and ask what we think before making a decision that will affect our lives. Thank you.

Ms. Omaira Martinez: Good evening. I'm here tonight to express deep frustration and concern over how the reregistration process for the middle school model has been handled and how it has unfairly impacted many families in our community. Let me remind you that this was not optional. You forced families to reregister their children, families who had already proven residency and submitted paperwork when they first enrolled. We were told this process would run from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Yet, families were turned away as early as 11:00 a.m. This is unacceptable. There was a gentleman knocking on the door at 12:30 and they refused to let him in. Second, you know very well that School No. 9 has a large Arabic speaking community. Yet, there were no translators to assist families who needed help. I personally watched another parent, not an employee, trying her best to translate for others. This is not her job. It's yours to ensure families can communicate and access services. Third and perhaps most upsetting, I witnessed staff telling families without a driver's license that they couldn't register their children. Many families don't drive. Does that mean children can't attend school? Since when is a driver's license the only valid form of ID? One parent new to

this country was told she couldn't use her passport to register. A valid government-issued passport is a legitimate form of identification. How are we welcoming and supporting immigrant families when we deny them like this? What message are we sending to our families? If they don't speak English, don't drive, or are new to this country you don't deserve access to an education? That's what it felt like. You have a responsibility to fix this. You need to provide translators in Spanish and especially Arabic. Accept valid forms of ID, including passports and non-driving state IDs. Communicate clearly and respectfully with our families. We deserve better. Our children deserve better. As a community, we expect action not excuses. Thank you.

Ms. Sunan Ramadan: Thank you for giving me the time to speak. I'm here today because I do not agree with this model you're trying to bring to our district. It didn't work in other cities. It did not work in Passaic, so it's not going to work for us. Our community has different needs. Instead of helping, this model will bring more confusion, problems, and frustration to our families. We already saw it with the registration process. You made everyone reregister, but the process was a disaster. Families didn't get the right information. There were no translators to help those who don't speak English. People were left waiting, confused, and worried about their children's future. That's not fair. If this model was supposed to improve things, why are we already struggling? If we're having this much trouble now, how bad will it get later? I'm asking you to please not move forward with this model. We need real solutions that fit our community, not something forced on us that has already failed elsewhere. As you can see, there were Arabic-speaking people who had to leave this meeting because you didn't provide translation. Why can't you provide translation for the Arabic community? Why can't you have the Assistant Superintendents come here and translate? Once again, Ramadan Mubarak. I have never attended so many Board meetings in one month the way I have during the month of Ramadan. Virtual or not, this month is about spending time with family. It's a shame that this is the only opportunity you're giving us to voice our concerns. If you think for a minute that we are not going to show up, you are very wrong. Get used to our faces because you will keep seeing us. Thank you.

Ms. Luz: Good evening, everyone. I'm going to be very honest with you. I've prayed a lot because I didn't know what to say. I'm really baffled that I sat here and watched for 20 minutes as the budget was scrutinized line by line. I've been seeing cuts from the district and it brings me to this middle school model. You had a budget with programs, but I did not see this for the middle school model. I want you to know that when this came out in 2021, the kids that were in the school at the moment are in high school today. If those parents were notified at that time, it didn't matter because we are here today and our parents didn't know. Our parents found out in the beginning of February through a text message in our PTO. It was not from the district, city, or state. It was through PTO text messages, which is very wrong. Fast forward, we're being pushed into this model and I want to ask the Board. I would love to give up my three minutes for each and every one of you. Comm. Freeman, did you receive a plan from the middle school model?

Comm. Gonzalez: No rebuttal. We will let everybody ask questions. It's not a dialogue.

Ms. Luz: I saw you go back and forth for 20 minutes, and I am convinced you have bum-rushed and bulldozed. I've seen you dominate over this Board and not let anyone talk. You'll say, "I have the floor," and not let Comm. Freeman or Comm. McCall talk. You barely let Comm. Simmons talk here. I love your speech about how kids are important and it's about them. Yet, nobody knew that it was about the 2% that they were voting on. It's exactly what's going on with this middle school model. You pushed this on us. We had no idea what was going on. Our community is asking you to stop. I

have a question for Ms. Shabazz-Charles because she's the lawyer for you guys. Right? I want to know how this can be resent. Clearly it was in 2021 when people were fighting for their lives. Why is it that the Board cannot see with all these budget cuts that we're adding more to our financial strain by doing construction on Dr. Hani and restructuring and moving everyone around? You're already losing teachers at Dr. Hani. Teachers have already left because they're afraid for their future. You cannot see the impact this is having on our kids and our community, even though you have kids here crying and begging. You have people constantly emailing and calling you and you cannot see how impacting this would be? The district is telling you to leave it to the professionals because that's what they know. We're the professionals in our homes. We know the needs of our children. Most of our children have IEPs that clearly state they do not do well with change. School No. 3 still has no building. They're still struggling. Dr. Hani doesn't want the change. School No. 9 doesn't want the change. I don't know if you are aware, but School No. 8 is struggling bad. Academically they're doing very poorly. Last year they did not have a nurse. For a whole year and a half they didn't have a principal or vice principal because their secretary ran all their work. I think this really needs reconsideration. I know for a fact that the Superintendent can simply make the change, make the call, and rescind this. Clearly, this decision was made in a very dangerous time and this needs to be changed. I know you can do it.

Mr. Eddie Ruiz: Before my time starts, I want to answer Mr. Ramirez' question about parking. There are about 20 teams with 15 kids. That's a total of 300 kids. I don't take the tickets. I pay for my own tickets. Good evening, everybody. First, I want to acknowledge the exceptional job Mr. Cozart and Mr. Kemper did on the recent forum, not at addressing our concerns, but at completely avoiding them. The vague answers we received on critical issues like uniform policy, student safety, and pick-up and drop-off procedures made me question whether this was the same level of effort and commitment being given to our children. If it is, it makes me wonder and understand why our kids are underperforming. Let's talk about uniforms. We were told that uniforms were the decision of or at the discretion of each school. The problem is parents are struggling to afford multiple uniforms for their children attending different schools. Wouldn't it make sense both financially and logistically to implement a unified uniform policy across these three schools? That's a simple solution. Yet, I just answered a question that somehow requires a \$200,000 salary to figure out. Meanwhile, on the topic of preparation, how is it that this middle school model has been around 10 years and yet we don't have a 'frequently asked questions' section? It makes no sense. There goes the transition to the middle school model. How much money is it going to cost? As we can clearly see, we're in a deficit. We can't even figure out the numbers to keep our teachers here, but we're going to spend money on a middle school model and different accommodations. There's a playground that needs to be removed and additional accommodations need to be made. Do we even have the budget for this? Are we going to continue to move blindly ignoring financial constraints while our children's education and safety take a back seat? This wouldn't happen in Bergen County. Do you know why? When parents and community members demanded answers about an author's cancelled visit about a book, the board listened. They overturned it. Why? Because they took accountability. They understood their community. They respected the community, parents, and students. Yet, here we are, parents and community members, raising concerns about the children's education only to have our voices ignored, our questions dismissed, or our trust undermined. Mr. Gonzalez, everybody always says I wasn't here when this model was voted in. In that ordinance, is there any language stating that this could be halted, rescinded, or revoked?

Comm. Gonzalez: We're not going to go back-and-forth. I'll talk to you afterwards if you stick around.

Mr. Ruiz: I know the answer to that. I'm just asking the question in public. Thank you.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening, Mr. President, members of the Board, Madam Superintendent, Mr. Deputy, staff, parents and community. Today I wanted to share Paterson Education Fund's recommendations for budget priorities. I was not a part of the discussion, but we did develop these with some input from the public. We had public forums. They have not changed over the years because we still want the same things for our kids. Before I do, I want to say that there's not enough time to give public notice for another budget meeting. If the budget is not passed by you and you don't present a balanced budget, the County Superintendent gets to decide. We don't get a redo. I hope that some resolution will come this evening, whatever it is that you decide. First, how does this budget provide a thorough and efficient education for Paterson children? If it does not, then it does not meet the court mandate and the New Jersey constitution that says we must. Does it meet the goals outlined in the current strategic plan? Does it provide for social and emotional wellness for children and adults? Are there programs to improve student outcomes? Is it needs-based programming? Will our kids get arts and music? Have all the necessary local facilities responsibilities been covered? We can no longer have overcrowded classrooms. We want to make sure that we continue the things that work, including Full-Service Community Schools and expanding those until we get to all schools. We need teachers teaching in their core subject areas and putting the best teachers in front of the kids who are failing so that they have the opportunity to succeed. We need more nurses, guidance counselors, and social workers in every school. We made a big investment in technology as we went into the COVID pandemic shutdown. Those are now obsolete. I know that the district is struggling to repair and upgrade them, but we want to make sure that's in place. Finally, I want to invite you, Board members and community, to sign up to testify at the legislative hearings to see if we can get some more resources coming to Paterson for our children. Thank you.

Mr. Errol Kerr: Good evening, Mr. President, Board, and Madam Superintendent. Let me just take a minute to congratulate those young kids who came to the podium. It was such a wonderful presentation. I'm so proud of you. Sitting there listening to the presentation I would like to tell folks that everything must be placed in context. The discussions that we have been having have to be placed in the context of our school funding. It's not what it used to be. A lot of things have changed. I'm not sure we're even taking into consideration the federal government adjustment in terms of how they're going to address education at the state level. I saw 1,000 folks from the Department of Education were cut and that's going to affect a lot of what we get flowing into the district to address the education of our kids. This budget did not address it at this time. I'm sure going forward it will have to be addressed. I see some signs here about community. Beautiful. The community is all of us. It cannot be just part of the city. If we're going to discuss our education in a financial context, then everybody has to realize that we all have to bear a part of the burden. There is no segment of our city that is going to be able to escape the harsh reality of the present time. I'm a taxpayer and my taxes are over \$15,000 a year. I'm hearing that we might just have to raise the levy for schools by 6%. That's going to affect me. I don't have a child in the district going to school, but it's going to affect me. We have to reshape how we approach it. Some supervisors might be forced into the classroom. We can't say you're sacrosanct and we can't touch you. Everybody must reorient themselves to the reality of what we face. No person in this district will be able to escape the reality of this. I want to commend you guys. I know it's a tough job. Commissioners, you're getting paid a lot of

money. Continue doing the good work. Although the budget is not adequate, as Rosie said, we still have to work with what we have. I'm with you. Continue doing the work.

Comm. Gonzalez: He made a joke, but for the record we do not get paid.

Ms. Zully Piedrahita: (Spoke in Spanish) Good evening. I have a few comments to make tonight. How are we changing something that functions to something that does not function? I'm hearing that you're talking about money that you don't have. I see that you want to waste money that you don't have. I saw tonight how you fought for money that you really don't have. I'm concerned about the traffic accidents going on. How do you want parents to walk 10 blocks for your own wellbeing and not that of the parents? I'm concerned because certain family members of the Board of Education members went to school to threaten a parent. Is this a school district or a gang that we have hide from? This is something very grave that someone would go and look for the parent to threaten her. We are scared to be threatened. I don't know if you take this into consideration or not. Did you know about this episode? You had to know. You never want to hear us out.

Ms. Maritza Vargas: Good evening, everybody. I'm concerned about the budget meeting. This is crazy because you are a committee, whatever you want to call each other. I don't even see the relationship in you guys. This one doesn't know this and this one doesn't know that. How are you supposed to help our community and our children when you're all lost? You don't know what's going on. It doesn't make any sense at all. We're here worrying about a middle school model. School No. 8 used to be a middle school in the 1960s and 1970s. Do you know why? My sister graduated from School No. 3 and went to School No. 8 for sixth and seventh grade. Unfortunately, we had to get a phone call from St. Joseph's Hospital. We had to get my sister because she was beat up in the middle of the bridge between Marshall Street and Main Street. Are you guys ready for that? We weren't ready for that. When I went to School No. 3, it was from pre-k to eighth grade. I want to know what happened to that money that you took. I called Trenton and talked to Taina Pou and she said they knew from the beginning School No. 3 was not going to be opened. Where did that money go? Like she told me, you guys can rewrite it. You guys can do it. I talked to Luisa, and she told me the same thing. It could be rewritten. It was done during COVID. Parents did not know what was going on. It's not fair that we're going through this now. This is my point. We need to get it together because I'm not going to stay still. I'm moving because I believe in Almighty God, and he doesn't like ugly. You put your heads on a pillow and we're talking about different religions. I don't care. I get on my knees, and I have to pray for my grandkids every night. It's true what they're saying. I have kids who go to school in Newark. We had a conversation with the Board of Education in Newark, and it was amazing. I come here and it's embarrassing. I'm embarrassed. I pray for you guys every night so he can open your eyes. Remember that, I'm going to be praying for you guys. God doesn't like ugly. It's uncalled for what happened at Dr. Hani Awadallah when that parent went to hit another parent.

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

Comm. Gonzalez: We're going to take a 10-minute break and give the Board members an opportunity to review the documents that we just received. Then we will reconvene.

Comm. Freeman: This does not take 10 or 15 minutes to read. Absolutely not!

Comm. McCall: Can we extend it for a little longer? Make it 25 minutes.

The Board took recess at 8:33 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 9:02 p.m.

RESOLUTIONS FOR A VOTE:

Resolution No. 1

Recommendation/Resolution: WHEREAS the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the Five-Year Strategic Plan "Paterson-A Promising Tomorrow." Recognizing traditions and diverse community partnerships. The Paterson Public School District is to provide an academically rigorous, safe, and nurturing educational environment; by meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of our students as we prepare them for post-secondary education and career.

WHEAREAS, The Paterson Public Schools is committed to providing student enrichment through various programs, initiatives and wishes to provide students with the opportunity to learn beyond the traditional school atmosphere; and

WHEAREAS, John F. Kennedy Athletics student athlete Solaris Paul is the New Jersey State Wrestling Champion at 165lbs. This is the first state wrestling champion in the City of Paterson.

WHEAREAS, Solaris has been selected to represent New Jersey in the 51st Annual Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic. This event will be held March 29, 2025, at the AHN Arena in the Peter's Township High School McMurray Pennsylvania.

WHEAREAS, she will be accompanied by her JFK wrestling coaches. Coach Jason Brandt and Coach Anthony Vasquez. Request for hotel accommodations for JFK coaches to stay at Hilton Garden Inn Pittsburg/Southpointe the fee per room is 460.65 per night. The check- in date is Friday March 28, 2025. There is a welcome banquet meal ticket price of \$47.00 per person attending on Friday evening March 28, 2025. There is a general admission of \$15.00 per person attending estimated travel expenses including meals, \$250.00. Total funds requested \$804.65

WHEAREAS, attached you will find details about this event which include hotel accommodation and detailed information regarding the event itinerary.

BE RESOLVED, our school desires to compete in interscholastic sports, which foster the positive values of sportsmanship and teamwork through fair play.

Resolution No. 2

Whereas, P.L. 20.07, Chapter 53, approved March 15, 2007, requires that school district travel expenditures include, but not limited to, all costs for transportation, meals, lodging registration or conference fees to and for the travel event; and

Whereas, P.L. 2007, Chapter 53, requires school district travel expenditures to include costs for all required training and all travel authorized in existing school district employee contracts and

school board policies including but not limited to professional development and other staff training, required training for new school board members and attendance at specific conference authorized in existing employee contracts; and

Whereas, P.L. 2007, Chapter 53, requires a school district to establish annually, in the pre-budget year, a maximum travel expenditure amount for the budget year and also requires listing the maximum travel amount established for the pre-budget year and the travel amount spent to date; and

Whereas, the Paterson Public School District established a maximum travel expenditure amount of \$250,000 for the 2024-2025 fiscal year in its 2024-2025 budget of which \$28,298 has been expended as of December 1, 2024; and

Now Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Paterson Public School District establishes a maximum travel expenditure amount of \$250,000 for all funds including federal funds in the 2025-2026 fiscal year; and

Be It Further Resolved, that pursuant to the provisions of N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.3(b), an annual maximum amount per employee will not exceed \$1500 for regular business travel only for which prior Board approval is not required.

Resolution No. 3

Recommendation/Resolution: Receipt of approval from the State of NJ Department of Education to transfer \$6 million of Early Childhood Carryover Funds to the General Fund:

WHEREAS, the School Business Administrator acknowledges the receipt of approval from the State of NJ Department of Education to transfer \$6 million of the 2024-2025 Early Childhood Carryover Funds to the General Fund; and

WHEREAS, the School Business Administrator will transfer Early Childhood Carryover Funds from the Special Revenue fund with an inter-fund transfer to the General Fund; and

WHEREAS, these funds will be appropriated to the general fund as Early Childhood Revenue and appropriated in accounts that support Kindergarten staffing and programs per our request on March 10, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the appropriation of Early Childhood funds will be allocated to the following Schools with Kindergarten programs to the salary accounts as indicated below:

SCHOOL	TEACHER ACCOUNT	INSTRUCTIONAL AIDE ACCOUNT	TOTAL
	15-110-100-101	15-190-100-106	
School #5	478,938	313,707	792,645
School #6	248,425	146,406	394,831
School #7	213,134	94,552	307,686
School #10	144,205	118,213	262,418
School #12	192,837	86,417	279,254

School #13	152,255	117,928	270,183
School #15	246,432	143,252	389,684
School #19	211,850	92,588	304,438
School #21	214,650	112,542	327,192
School #24	211,192	98,324	309,516
School #25	210,192	83,262	293,454
School #27	372,060	172,710	544,770
School #28	218,280	142,581	360,861
MLK	179,647	99,100	278,747
EWK	207,650	96,475	304,125
DALE AVE.	330,867	307,779	638,646
TOTAL	3,832,614	2,225,836	6,058,450

WHEREAS, the remaining amount in the Early Childhood fund will be sufficient to address previously established priorities for Early Childhood programs; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Paterson Public Schools acknowledges the approval to transfer \$6,000,000 from Early Childhood carryover funds to the General Fund, and appropriate in budget accounts summarized above to support Kindergarten staffing and programs as agreed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall take effect upon its adoption pending formal State approval.

Resolution No. 5

WHEREAS, the 2025-2026 Preliminary Budget for the Paterson Public School District includes Budgeted Withdrawal from the General Fund Capital Reserve Account for Excess Cost/Other Capital Projects; and requires a separate statement of purpose in the advertised budget, and

WHEREAS, a withdrawal from the Capital Reserve has been budgeted in the Recap of Balances, and

WHEREAS, a copy of the board resolution must be submitted to the County Office with the budget. Districts should refer to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-14.1 subsection (h) for specific requirements for capital reserve withdrawals, and

—
 WHEREAS, included in the general fund appropriations, budget line 620 is a withdrawal from Capital Reserve Other Capital Projects in the amount of \$8,608,670 for Other Capital Projects which represents expenditures for construction elements or projects that are in addition to the facilities efficiency standards determined by the Commissioner as necessary to achieve the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Board of Education approves the withdrawal from Capital Reserve for Other Capital Projects which represents expenditures for construction elements or projects that are in addition to the facilities efficiency standards determined by the Commissioner as necessary to achieve the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, in the amount of \$8,608,670 for the 2025-2026 school year.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, this resolution shall take effect upon adoption.

It was moved by Comm. Ramirez, seconded by Comm. Nieves that Resolution Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5 be adopted.

Comm. Simmons: Are Resolutions 2, 3, and 5 associated with the budget?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

On roll call all members voted in the affirmative, except Comm. Freeman and Comm. McCall who voted no. The motion carried.

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

Resolution No. 4

Adoption of the 2025-2026 Preliminary Budget for submission to the Passaic County Executive County Superintendent of Schools for review and to establish the Annual Maximum Travel expenditure.

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 reflects an increase in the local tax levy and use of CAP adjustment increase SDA district local share 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.

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.

<u>General Fund Revenue</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
	\$	\$
Local Sources	88,831,521	80,831,521
	\$	
State Sources	624,588,888	
	\$	
Federal Sources	215,951	
Budgeted Fund	\$	
Balance	22,143,660	
Withdrawal from Cap	\$	
Reserve	8,608,670	
	\$	\$
Total General Fund	<u>744,388,690</u>	<u>80,831,521</u>
<u>Special Revenue Fund (net of operating budget transfers)</u>		<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
	\$	
Local Sources	783,751	
	\$	
State Sources	74,199,101	
	\$	
Federal Aid	30,443,170	
Transfer from		
Operation Fund:		
	\$	
Pre-K Special Education	3,964,304	
Total Special Revenue	\$	
Fund	<u>109,390,326</u>	
<u>Debt Service - Fund 40</u>		<u>Local Tax Levy included</u>
	\$	\$
	<u>604,875</u>	<u>604,875</u>
	\$	\$
Grand Total Revenues	<u>854,383,891</u>	<u>81,436,396</u>

It was moved by Comm. Freeman, seconded by Comm. Simmons that Resolution No. 4 be adopted. On roll call all members voted no, except Comm. Simmons who voted 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

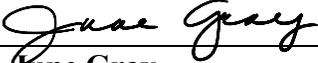
Commissioner Corey L. Teague

- Self
- Paterson Police Department
- Paterson Policing

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.



Ms. June Gray
Business Administrator