

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

Saturday, May 31, 2025  
9:26 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
John F. Kennedy High School  
61-127 Preakness Avenue

Presiding: Comm. Eddie Gonzalez, President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Rodney Henderson, Deputy Superintendent  
Albert Buglione, Esq., Special Counsel

Facilitators: Dr. Shawn Joseph, Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates  
Ms. Deborah Keys-Write, Educational Consultant

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

Comm. Kenneth Rosado  
Comm. Kenneth Simmons  
Comm. Corey Teague

Absent:

Comm. Mohammed Rashid

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:

**Regular Meeting  
June 11, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.  
John F. Kennedy High School  
61-127 Preakness 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 TAPinto, the Arab Voice, El Diario, the Italian Voice, the North Jersey Herald & News, and The Record.

## **WELCOME AND OVERVIEW**

## **UPDATE AND REVIEW OF AUDITS/IDENTIFY FOCUS AREAS**

### **Human Resources: Streamlining Processes**

- Onboarding Improvements
- Clarified Hiring Processes
- Electronic PTF System
- Consolidating Standard Operating Policies and Practices

### **Human Resources: Staff Mobility & Recruitment**

- Lateral Transfer Policy – Updated SOP allows for transfers of staff to high-need schools
- Annual Recruitment Plan

### **Gifted & Talented: Challenges and Limitations**

- Limited Opportunities - Advanced learning opportunities for grades 2-8 only available at Paterson Academy for the Gifted and Talented.
- Inequitable Access
- Lack of Alternatives

### **Gifted & Talented: Short-Term Improvements**

- Enhanced Identification
- Local School opportunities
- Teacher Development

### **Gifted & Talented: Long-Term Vision**

- Expanded Locations
- Elementary Enrichment
- Middle School Advancement

### **Instructional Program Audit: Strengths**

- Curriculum Implementation
- Technology Integration
- Student Growth
- Personalized Instruction

### **Academic Services: Teacher Input & Data Literacy**

- Teacher Input Mechanisms – Textbook committees, curriculum feedback surveys and novel selection input opportunities.
- Data Literacy Initiatives

### **Business & Financial Services Improvements**

- Strategic & Fiscal Planning – Update policies
- Legal Review
- Budget Forecasting
- Fund Balance Policy

### **Family and Community Engagement: Core Values**

- Communication – Ensure families are included in school policymaking and educational practices.
- Collaborative Decision-Making
- Inclusive Practices
- Support Systems - Effective communication in diverse languages spoken by the community, more consistent home learning support, strengthen parent university modules, heighten awareness of educational offerings.

## **PRELIMINARY SPECIAL EDUCATION REVIEW REPORT**

### **I. Background**

- Stakeholder Perceptions – Includes central office special education leaders, principals, teachers and parents
- Stakeholder Beliefs
- Profile Analysis
- Insights and Recommendations

### **II. Methodology**

- In-person and virtual meetings with central office leadership
- Focus groups with school leadership
- Parent focus groups in English and Spanish
- Survey to general and special education teachers
- Onsite instructional walkthroughs
- Review of student achievement data and special education budgets
- Special focus on out-of-district placements

### **III. Preliminary Findings and Recommendations**

1. Limited connection to national best practices – Establish formal ties with appropriate organizations to enhance instructional practices, professional development and leadership insight.
2. Lack of special education advisory committee – Form a Special Education Advisory Committee in accordance with the IDEA to facilitate parent engagement.
3. Teacher recruitment and retention challenges – Increase compensation to attract and retain qualified special education professionals.

4. Inadequate professional development - Expand professional development in reading and math intervention, general education curriculum content.
5. Insufficient collaboration between general and special educators – Implement training for general and special education teachers to foster shared responsibility.
6. Limited Behavioral Intervention Support – Provide training in evidence-based behavioral strategies.
7. Outdated terminology and practices – Discontinue use of the term ‘mainstreaming’ and adopt inclusive language aligned with current educational equity standards.
8. Increased need for mental health supports – Expand access to school-based mental health services.
9. Insufficient central office support – Enhance the capacity of the central education office to provide coaching.
10. Technology access gaps – Invest in technology and adaptive devices that enable students with disabilities to fully participate in instruction.
11. Substandard autism programming – Redesign programs using best practices of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and create and design sensory rooms.
12. Inefficient EIR program design – Redesign the EIR (Emotionally Impaired Resource) program to reduce class sizes and integrate robust mental health services.
13. High rate of out-of-district placements - Develop and expand high-quality in-district programs.
14. Facility compliance gaps – Conduct a facilities audit and ensure all buildings comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
15. Weak parent and community engagement - Strengthen communication and collaboration with parents and community partners to build trust and transparency.

#### **IV. Next Steps**

The final report will include deeper analysis, comparative data and actionable priorities for the district.

#### **V. Questions & Answers**

Comm. Teague asked about the impact on special education as a result of the decisions being made by the current national administration.

Dr. Mason responded that she serves on the National Committee for Learning Disabilities, an organization that advocates for children with disabilities and ensures that their educational rights are not denied or eroded. She stated that parents can play a key role in this endeavor. Disabilities in children transcend all races, socioeconomic groups and political affiliations. Therefore, all forces must unite to advocate for children with disabilities.

Comm. McCall asked for a timeline for the Board to implement the outlined recommendations. She asked whether any positive aspects of the district's program stood out to the auditors. She inquired about how the district could have been better

informed about existing national programs and organizations that support special education.

Dr. Mason responded that staff members were positive, professional, open and enthusiastic. She observed a great deal of talented teachers in special education classrooms, some of whom were uncertified. Implementing the outlined recommendations will take time. Some of the factors which will impact the timeline are research, planning, funding, facilities and level of community involvement. Once Ms. Coy engages with the national organizations she has been introduced to, she will have better access to tools, resources and networks throughout the nation to support the district's special education work.

Comm. Gonzalez inquired about the number of focus groups conducted by the auditing team and the number of parents who participated in the surveys.

The team visited four schools in the district. Those schools were strategically identified because they had a critical mass of special education students and programming. The schools visited were STEAM High School, Eastside High School, MLK Middle School, and School No. 2. The team was divided into two groups. Parents were contacted ahead of time via email, text messages and phone calls. About five parents from each school were part of the focus groups.

Dr. Newell reiterated the importance of professional development and parent involvement. It's important to build formal structures that make parents feel they're part of the district's work. It's important to form a committee and bring it in line with best practices. The special education department should be connected nationally to emulate national best practices. The cost of out-of-district placements is alarming. The per-pupil cost for an in-district special education student is approximately \$20,000. The out-of-district cost for the same child is upwards of \$100,000.

Comm. Simmons outlined some of the factors which contribute to this steep cost. In-house district staff often lack the specialized training needed for some special education populations. Facilities is also an issue. Many buildings are outdated and require significant funds to bring them up to the standard needed to facilitate special education programs. Several buildings cannot be upgraded at all. Additionally, there are laws dictating how special education students are housed among the general population.

Comm. Rosado asked about the minimum number of students that could be housed in a school, given that the district is not permitted to have an entire school dedicated solely for special education students.

Dr. Newell answered that not all special education students are the same. There are different levels of disabilities. Most schools do not have elevators. The maximum number of special education students that can be housed within one location depends on the age, classifications and specific laws and guidelines dictated by the state. She recommended a concept called economies of scale. Considering Paterson is one of the largest districts, it should be allowed to send its special education students to a single centralized location. This would allow for more focused attention and prove more cost effective in the long run.

## **FIVE LEVERS FOR ACCELERATING ACHIEVEMENT – DR. RODNEY HENDERSON**

Test scores show the district has reached a crisis. Administration must take immediate action to not only maintain but accelerate student achievement.

### **Lever #3 - Staff Capacity**

- Focus on small group instruction

### **Lever #4 – Principal Capacity**

- Principals and building administrators have been trained to be more data literate and utilize such to drive instructions, modify lesson plans and respond to current student performance
- Allows principals to lead data meetings at a deeper level
- Walkthrough tools have been modified to look at small group instruction

Dr. Henderson pointed out that recent data demonstrates increases in the areas of high school ELA and math. This is extremely encouraging, and the district anticipates seeing similar growth at the elementary school level. There has also been a marked improvement in the chronic absenteeism rates.

Dr. Newell stated that efforts are being made to ensure that incentives are provided to parents of non-compulsory children in the City of Paterson, namely three years of age and younger. This population of children need to begin their schooling as early as possible.

Comm. McCall encouraged the administration to share as much of the positive data as possible with the parents and the community. This would motivate them and reinforce their efforts to help their children continue to excel academically.

Comm. Gonzalez encouraged the administration to look at individual school data and see how it compares with the overall district picture. Attention needs to be paid to the reasons why specific schools may be struggling.

## **PATERSON SCHOOLS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

### **Development Process Overview**

- Foundation - Built upon 'Paterson, a Promising Tomorrow'
- 5 Levers Plan
- Audit Findings - Feedback from 1,700 + stakeholders
- Community Engagement – Two community forums on the strategic plan

### **The 5 Levers for Student Achievement Leaders**

- Human Resources – Mr. Luis Rojas
- Data Literacy – Ms. Luis Valentin
- Staff Capacity – Dr. Elizabeth Caccavella
- Principal Capacity – Dr. Cicely Warren
- Parental Support – Mrs. Natalia Frazier-Thompson

## **Mission and Vision**

- Nurture the holistic development of every student, equipping them with critical skills for future success and engaged citizenship.
- Create a vibrant, inclusive school community where empowered students have diverse opportunities to learn, grow and thrive.
- Evidence of higher expectations is seen in nine students who have received college degrees while still in high school.

## **Strategic Goal 1: High-Performing Workforce**

- Attract and Retain - Increase new teacher retention by 15% over three years
- Competitive Compensation – Achieve market competitive salaries by 2027 in accordance with union salary guides and collective bargaining agreements
- Streamlined Processes – Reduce hiring time by 20% and digitize 100% of HR processes
- Professional Development – Increase staff participation by 25% annually.

## **Strategic Goal #2: Data-Driven Decision-Making**

- Improved Outcomes – Enhance student achievement.
- Informed Decisions – 30% more schools using data effectively.
- Financial Literacy – Workshops for 50% of staff and 20% of parents.
- Digital Platform – Budget and requisition management system.

## **Strategic Goal #3: Instructional Excellence**

- Needs Assessment – 100% of staff participation in identifying professional development needs within first year.
- Observation Framework – Revise and implement new observation rubric aligned with district goals. Revise existing teacher evaluation system.
- Effective Practices – Increase teachers demonstrating effective instruction by 20% over three years.
- School Partnerships – Connect exemplar and developing schools, with 50% participation within two years.

## **Strategic Goal #4: Leadership & Financial Stability**

- Financial Management – Professional development for 100% of leaders.
- Data-Driven Decisions – Using metrics to guide resource allocation.
- Collaborative Practices – Sharing best practices across schools.
- Leadership Networks – Regular meetings with 100% participation.

## **Strategic Goal #5: Family & Community Partnerships**

- Increased Participation – Boost parent involvement in school events by 30% over two years.

- Communication Plan – Implement comprehensive multi-channel approach within one year.
- Translation Services – Provide at all events and for key documents in top languages.
- Program Awareness – Increase Gifted & Talented program awareness by 25%. Update identification process for Gifted & Talented students.

### **Next Steps to Finalize the Strategic Plan**

- Gather Feedback – Post draft online for stakeholder’s input.
- Develop Action Plans – Create detailed steps with timelines and responsibilities.
- Establish Monitoring – Implement quarterly reviews and data collection systems.

Comm. Teague inquired about closing the gap regarding parents who feel the district is not communicative or responsive to their needs.

Dr. Newell responded that some parents often claim the district is not being responsive because they are not happy with the answers they have received.

Comm. Gonzalez reminded Board members to follow proper procedure when fielding phone calls from community members. It's important to direct them to the proper channels and not provide them a means to circumvent the system that has been put in place.

Dr. Keys-Write reiterated to Board members that they can use such opportunities to engage community members on a higher level, perhaps to enlighten them on the laws and statutes that have a bearing on the decisions that Board members and the administration must make. She asked Board members, particularly new ones, how they process the torrent of new information that is being presented to them during the retreat.

Comm. Rosado answered that he tries to absorb as much as he can but also looks to seasoned Board members for guidance.

Comm. Nieves converses and communicates with fellow Board members. If he doesn't understand a particular aspect of his responsibilities, he will ask the right questions.

Dr. Keys-Write remarked that the voice of the entire committee is valuable, not just that of the chairman.

Comm. McCall asked how can the Board work collaboratively when it feels like it's divided.

Dr. Keys-Write conveyed that acknowledgment of any perceived division in the Board is an important step in rectifying the situation. Communicate openly and honestly about individual concerns. Take ownership of how one's own actions might be contributing to the friction and be willing to make adjustments. She desires to do a future, more detailed workshop to address this specific topic.

Comm. Gonzalez reiterated that the administration is making great efforts to disseminate information to parents in all the critical languages. The Board is about to embark on a new long-range facilities plan and it's vital to incorporate all the lessons

learned from the previous plan. This involves listening and responding to parent feedback.

### **DISC ANALYSIS TTI**

Dr. Joseph emphasized that the power of the Board is to help the organization focus. Additionally, in the event of Board conflict it is key to learn the art of compromise and negotiation. The Board has a good balance of personalities.

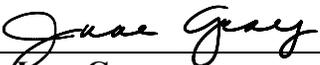
### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

No speakers

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

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 p.m.

  
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**Ms. June Gray**  
**Business Administrator**