

**MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION  
BOARD GOVERNANCE TRAINING/RETREAT**

October 19, 2024 – 9:00 a.m.  
Administrative Offices

*Facilitated by: Deborah L. Keys Write, National Board Governance & Equity  
Consultant, The Write Keys 2 Consulting, LLC  
Dr. Shawn Joseph, Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates (HYA)*

Presiding: Comm. Kenneth Simmons, Vice President

Present:

Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Rodney Henderson, Deputy Superintendent  
Dr. Silindra McRay, Executive Director to the Superintendent

Comm. Valerie Freeman  
Comm. Eddie Gonzalez  
Comm. Joel Ramirez

Comm. Mohammed Rashid  
Comm. Nakima Redmon

Absent:

Comm. Oshin Castillo-Cruz  
Comm. Manuel Martinez, President  
Comm. Della McCall

Comm. Simmons read the Open Public Meetings Act:

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

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

**Board Retreat  
October 19, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.  
Administrative Offices  
90 Delaware Avenue  
Paterson, New Jersey**

to be published by having the date, time and place posted in the office of the City Clerk of the City of Paterson, at the entrance of the Paterson Public School offices, on the district's website, and by sending notice of the meeting to the Arab Voice, El Diario, the Italian Voice, the North Jersey Herald & News, and The Record.

## **INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS BY DR. SHAWN JOSEPH & MS. DEBORAH KEYS-WRITE**

- Board leadership matters
- The public has a strong perception of what's working and not working in the school district
- The Board needs to convey a strong message to the community that their concerns are being acknowledged and that there is a concerted effort to remedy educational deficiencies
- The Board must provide the direction the district needs, even with limited resources
- In the next 90 days the Board will strategically narrow down top areas where it needs to double down its efforts

## **REVIEW OF COMPLETED AUDITS**

- Paterson Public Schools employees and community stakeholders - students, parents, guardians, business leaders – participated in the survey
- 45% of parents and 10% of alumni perceived the quality of the overall educational experience in PPS to be adequate
- 65% of community stakeholders felt the quality of the overall educational experience in PPS is inadequate
- All community stakeholders agreed that the top three district priorities were safety, hiring good teachers and administrators, and preparing students to be college and career ready
- PPS staff felt strongly that technology is integrated into the classroom, the district engaged with racial, cultural, and socioeconomic groups, teachers personalize instruction, employees are held accountable for high standards, and teachers are given support
- PPS staff agreed that top priorities for the district are hiring and retaining highly skilled teachers and administrators, preparing students to be college and career ready, providing a safe environment, providing educational well-rounded experiences, and addressing social and cultural needs

## **FINANCE AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS: Key Findings**

- Develop standard operating practices that align to best practices and legal requirements
- Improve oversight and increase transparency where necessary
- Update systems that are outdated, duplicated, and/or inefficient
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of the district

**9 Areas:** Business and financial services, federal programs, procurement and disbursements, transportation services, central registration, central stores, food services, department of technology, and facilities management

### **BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES: Findings and Recommendations**

- Budget process & priority setting process
- Enrollment projections, staffing methodology (Salary), non-salary resource allocations
- Budget forecasting & transfers
- Financial reporting systems
- Grant budget management
- Stronger controls with the stipends process
- Planning fiscally for inequities in salary guides
- Charter school growth trends
- Fund balance policy

### **FEDERAL PROGRAMS: Findings and Recommendations**

- Siloed decision-making
- Relying on federal funds for district operation contracts
- Lack of spending on construction projects with federal funds
- Improvement in program evaluation
- Other recommendations

### **PROCUREMENT AND DISBURSEMENTS: Findings and Recommendations**

- Vendors developing bid specs or scope with department leads
- Quasi purchasing department and enhancing buying power
- Scorecard changes may be allowable but require consistency across the bidding process
- Rebidding expiring contracts with an agreed upon schedule aligned to Board schedule
- Usage of cooperative purchasing and master agreements
- Legal review of Board item
- Disparity study minority and women-owned small business enterprise policy
- Managing cash disbursement by avoid overriding payment term

- Other recommendations

### **TRANSPORTATION SERVICES: Findings and Recommendations**

- Leadership transition
- Creation of standard operating procedures
- Billing accounts receivable for aide in lieu of transportation for nonpublic schools
- Courtesy busing and policy adherence
- Financial planning is siloed with transportation financial planning
- Special education routing and costing
- In-house transportation pilot

### **CENTRAL REGISTRATION: Findings and Recommendations**

- School level versus central registration
- Comprehensive central registration service center
- Cross-training with other staff during peak months
- Business administration and finance with direct reporting responsibility for central registration

### **CENTRAL STORES: Findings and Recommendations**

- Hazard and safety issues with spacing in warehousing
- Antiquated record retention system

### **FOOD SERVICES: Findings and Recommendations**

- Food service inventory management
- Community eligibility provision shift
- Operations deficits
- Ensuring adequate staffing for nutrition
- Item-by-item awarding and bidding for non-commodity bids

### **DEPARTMENT OF TECHNOLOGY: Findings and Recommendations**

- Legacy systems
- Inefficiencies of supporting both windows and mac operating systems

- Multiple email systems
- Reporting structure with direct alignment to superintendent
- Need for collective training or SOP on systems when onboarding
- Device inventory counts
- Support with administrative privileges, downloads, and cybersecurity

## **FACILITIES MANAGEMENT: Findings and Recommendations**

- Financial planning is siloed with operations financial planning
- Warehouse spacing for facilities management
- Comprehensive maintenance plan
- Market and experience salary review
- School Dude work order management and aging of work orders
- Underfunded capital, long range planning and facilities assessment
- Middle school model and facilities planning

## **COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS**

Comm. Gonzalez asked what the source for the data was just presented. The information was gathered through use of key reports, district data systems, internal and external controls, documents, interviews, meetings, and focus groups.

The Board needs to publicly express appreciation for the community.

The Board in the past has requested certain action be taken, but it's not carried out. As an example, the Board has requested the administration to go paperless.

The Board has a responsibility to model the behavior it is requesting from the administration.

## **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Findings and Recommendations**

1. Establish regular, clear, and two-way communication channels between schools and families
2. Encourage and provide resources for families to support their children's learning at home
3. Ensure that engagement efforts are inclusive of all families, regardless of their background, language, or socioeconomic status
4. Offer programs that educate parents about the school system, child development, and effective parenting strategies
5. Create a variety of volunteering opportunities that fit different schedules and interests
6. Involve parents in school decision-making processes through committees, advisory boards, and focus groups

7. Foster strong, respectful relationships between school staff and families
8. Provide resources and support for families facing challenges such as financial difficulties, health issues, or housing instability
9. Implement systems for gathering feedback from families about their engagement experiences and the effectiveness of the programs
10. Recognize and celebrate the contributions and achievements of families and students

## COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

Comm. Redmon mentioned that many parents feel marginalized because of language and cultural differences. They may not be aware of all the services and benefits offered by the district. Partnerships, better networks, and education will help parents feel more included and supported.

Comm. Freeman said there are issues with some of the staff in the Family and Community Engagement Department. The entire department needs to be revamped.

One of the recommendations is that the Department of Family and Community Engagement should be overseen by a different executive.

The responsibility of the Board is **to ensure** that staff is being evaluated and that teachers and administrators meet the qualifications outlined for their positions.

The Board should express clear directives to the Superintendent so she knows how to proceed.

Dr. Joseph: Sometimes Board members protect ineffective people. They don't allow the Superintendent to evaluate someone because of some nepotism issues. You create a conundrum because you put the Superintendent in a political situation. We know this person has been ineffective for years, but I can't evaluate this person because if I do, Board members are going to come at me on something crazy. But then we keep complaining why no one can get hired here for 10 months. We have ineffective human resources departments, and we can't get anything done. We just sit around shrugging our shoulders when we know the answer. I tell districts if you want to move forward, you have to put the people aside because the children count more.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: To your point, there's nothing legally that can be done. We just waste time venting. If we don't do the steps you're talking about, then the person stays, and we don't have to waste time talking about it. If the policy is to protect people because of who they are, then understand that you're going to have ineffective people and let's not even waste time talking about it.

Dr. Joseph: I tell boards that if you have someone that you like and you just want to pay \$150,000 to, then keep them there. But allow the Superintendent to put some people under them who will do the work and know that you're just paying an extra \$150,000 for nothing.

Comm. Simmons: People report to those who are afraid to hold them accountable. I tell the folks at this dais, do what you have to do. If they call me, I'm going to say you're not doing your job. It's not my problem. I have to go to work every day and do my job and no one is protecting me but me. If you're not doing your job and you're not where you're supposed to be, we see the results. Because you're not doing your job, we don't have effective family and community engagement.

Ms. Keys-Write: We are bringing you guys down into Superintendent space. These are very good observations and your frustration is heard. What is this Board's expectation? Is there an expectation that every staff member is evaluated? In every state it's the law. Teachers, principals and Superintendents must be evaluated. That's what the Board should be asking. You don't need to see them. The other expectation is HR. When was the last time we updated job descriptions? But you're expecting people to do this with requirements from 20 years ago? The Board is not paying attention. You have to ask the Superintendent about the process we have in place to update these job descriptions. Then the Superintendent will know that's an expectation. We're going to get to the point where it's not about the people. We are not attacking people. We're attacking systems that do not serve you well in this district. If you don't allow parents to be on committees, they're going to come to your Board meetings and spray it all on you. It could be taken out of context but think about what you could have done proactively. Obviously, they're concerned enough that they're coming, thinking that the only place they have is the Board meeting, which is not the place to come. It's to go straight to the source. You're ensuring that it's getting done. If the Board is not ensuring, then they will sit there and make \$150,000 because the Board is not expecting them to do more. The Board ensures that the district is run properly. That's a big job. You don't run the district, but you ensure that it's properly run. If you don't even know what's going on in all these different departments, you should be asking the Superintendent what's the plan. We are hearing in the streets that this is going on. That's the space the Board should always been in. That's how you deal with things below the line. You didn't hire all these people, and you may feel some don't need to be there. But how are you going to deal with that? Superintendent, what's the expectation of your staff? Do you evaluate them? Are they doing their job? That's how you address those folks you feel shouldn't be there. They're thinking, until they tell me I'm unqualified, I'm just going to sit here because the Board is not doing their work. What have you been doing? I'm going to leave it at that.

Comm. Freeman: There used to be a parental advisory board here. I don't know what happened to it. There was a parental advisory board that we sat on. We met with the Board and when it was time for the budget, they discussed with the Board. It was very effective because you felt involved and like you had a say. Before it got out to the parents, the parental advisory board got it first and got to understand a little bit about the issues. Then it went out to the community. I don't know what happened to that, but I thought it was very effective. My heart is with parental involvement because when I brought my kids here, I knew I had to get involved. When I met Ms. Anna Taliaferro, she took me under her wing to places that I had never been before. We collaborated with other urban districts, went on parental conferences outside of the State of New Jersey, and Title I conferences. She made sure parents and teachers got to go. I don't see these things happening and they were effective. Her title was Parent Coordinator. We did and learned so many valuable things. I asked the parent one thing, and they can't answer it. That's a problem for me.

Ms. Keys-Write: This shows you how much work needs to be done. In our future spending time with you, you will be able to say what do you need to see. What happened to this parental advisory board? This is what the Board is expecting. She's

going to figure out how to do it. That's the deeper dive that you're going to have to take in future sessions. That could probably help some of the challenges that you're having. If the Board is supposed to educate the community, how are you doing that when you're not allowed to get involved?

Comm. Redmon: All of us sitting here have to have some ownership. We see the issues and when we come up with a plan it's frustrating when things change because this or that person talked, this person said this, or this person is afraid to say this. It gets frustrating when we can't do the job of a Board member. All year long we put plans in action and when we get ready to move it forward, because someone didn't get a phone call or didn't understand what was going on, there's no accountability on the Board level. I can see how the Superintendent would be confused about what the Board's direction is. She's getting many different directions from different people. She might go ahead with an action and the rest of us don't support it.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: That's what I was going to say from a legal perspective. In fairness to the Superintendent and those people who have to execute, everybody calls the Superintendent and has their own thoughts. What you just said sounds really great, but I know the Board won't come together and agree to have a program together. The next question is never asked. It just becomes this great discussion you had. The next person says something different instead of just being in agreement that you want a certain program back. Now you act with your power. Honestly, individually none of you have power. It's your collective. I notice there's very rarely a collective Board movement. What are your goals and in what way do you want to bring it? If enough of you feel you need to bring a program forward, you need to request of the Superintendent to bring it back online within the next school year. You just used your power, versus one person calling her and asking her to do one thing. It's just one Board member, so she doesn't know if she should direct her resources to that. Then Nakima calls, versus you using your power to say this year you're going to agree on this agenda.

Dr. Joseph: I tell boards over and over that ineffective people will get you fired. Ineffective people will get the Superintendent fired because nothing gets done. Ineffective people will get Board members off the Board because the community will keep negative perceptions. You don't change perceptions with ineffective people. The longer they sit there, and you sit there and don't do something about it, the longer perceptions don't change, and you stay where you stay. When I was superintendent, I was in a situation where I brought someone in and he did some inappropriate stuff. He came to me and asked what he should do. I told him to quit before I had to fire him. When this comes up and I have to make a decision, I'm going to have to fire you. It might be better for you to quit so you don't have that firing in your application. I was very direct because it's me or him. It's going to come up and if I protect him, then the board is going to evaluate me. If I can't handle him, then they're going to handle me. It's very clear. If that was the board's friend, they would have to let me do my job to handle that person. Those are the tough decisions we have to make sometimes if we want to move forward.

Ms. Keys-Write: The Board has to empower the Superintendent. The Superintendent has to be able to ask if this is the will of this Board. You guys have to get together and figure out if this is something you want so she doesn't have eight different directives. That's all she needs.

Dr. Newell: That's also what I was going to say. It's also going back to the norms to understand how it should be done based on what Ms. Shabazz said. I understand it's

different leadership from what folks were used to. There were nine different phone calls coming from nine different people and there was a lot of communication. Is this the will of the Board?

Ms. Keys-Write: It goes back to Board process. Once it's advertised, why are you changing the agenda? When you come to the meeting, if you want to change it, you do it publicly.

Comm. Gonzalez: I agree with practically everything that has been said. Obviously, it goes a lot deeper. Everyone knows me. I don't sugarcoat things. There are issues in this district that I think everyone knows what's happening behind the scenes. To a certain extent, decisions are being made behind the scenes that don't even come before the Board. To your point, the Board has to be held accountable. That's my biggest frustration. A lot of things happen behind closed doors. We are all held accountable at the end of the day, whether it's for good or bad. One of the biggest challenges is just getting politics out of the school. I don't doubt that there are efforts along the way to try to curb those issues, but it still happens. We have to get to the point where the kids are truly first. If I had it my way, when there's a resolution put forth it's supposed to indicate what goal it's attached to. Sometimes I read through, and I don't make that connection. Although it's there, it doesn't always reflect. And there are resolutions that don't always have clear outcomes as to what the expectation is for the Superintendent. We may agree between the vendor and the school district that we're not going to pay more than this amount. Where is the goal that if this is not met, we get some of our money back or we terminate the contract? I don't always see that. Maybe the discussions are happening. Maybe there is other documentation through legal that we're not getting. I'm not sure. I don't always see that when I get the documents.

Ms. Keys-Write: Again, it's the power of the Board. Even when vendors come in front of you, what are you doing for us? That's what you should be thinking. What are our kids getting from you? I know exactly the conversations vendors have about school boards. They're looking at your budget. They're not necessarily doing what's in the best interest of children. You're at that point where you can hold them accountable. What are the outcomes? How's this going to benefit us? What are you giving to our kids? That's how much power the Board of Education has to set the district in the right direction so that people coming to you have respect for this district.

Comm. Gonzalez: We actually had a conversation about evaluations and how they didn't match certain expectations. The evaluations have to be updated. We need an update on that. We acknowledged there were some deficiencies in certain things. What is the next step? What's going on? There may have been committee discussions. I'm not on personnel.

Comm. Simmons: We never gave her a directive. It was just a conversation. We need to give her a directive.

Comm. Redmon: I'm glad you brought that up here. We talked about it. We sat through a Donaldson hearing. A lot of the stuff that the Board was asked to do there was no feedback for. The evaluations don't match what was being told to the Board at that time. How can you effectively get rid of an employee, and you don't have any documentation to back it up? You also thought that the evaluation process was not good. Everybody is either highly effective or not effective at all. There's no in-between. We wanted to make sure that when we do the next Donaldson hearings that we had criteria. The Board never made a decision.

Comm. Gonzalez: Even though the full Board is in executive session, I thought we gave that direction. You're saying we didn't. This is the stuff that we have to figure out.

Ms. Shabazz-Charles: Everyone talked, but no one said, are we doing this.

Ms. Keys-Write: Keep in mind the process you have of committees. The Board should know about the information before it goes to committee. Things don't go straight to committee because the Board as a whole needs to say that. There could be sometimes where we slip stuff to committee, but the Board has no idea. We have to look at your structure. The Board is the one who says it goes to committee, not the chair of this committee. I don't know what your process is, but that's something else we will have to talk about. That can get you into trouble too.

Comm. Gonzalez: We take notes of every meeting. I think that we should have a section on there just so that Board members are very clear. Once you do your minutes, have at the bottom clearly what actions are going to be taken based on the discussions that happened. If I don't see something in that action, I know that we haven't agreed to it, need further discussion, or whatever the case is.

Dr. Newell: It should basically say, 'the Board has directed the Superintendent.' Is that what you're saying?

Comm. Gonzalez: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: He's asking whether we're in agreement to give the Superintendent that directive to give to Cheryl.

Comm. Redmon: I would say yes.

Ms. Williams: For committee meetings?

Comm. Gonzalez: For any meeting. We may decide we should do this at the other meeting and that would lead to further conversation or direct action.

Comm. Redmon: The initiative should be that we're going to decide that we're going to tell the Superintendent to tell Cheryl.

Comm. Rashid: Sometimes actions need time. After a meeting, it is quite impossible to meet the action right away. It's going to take time. We have a right to know what's going on in the action. We would like to know what's going on.

Ms. Keys-Write: It goes back to the questions of the Board. The Superintendent knows she has to close the loop, but you expect to hear something. If the Board is just loopy-goopy and nobody knows...No. You close that. Now there is an expectation that she follows up with.

Dr. Joseph: The Roanoke Virginia School Board on their agenda have a section called the 'Board work' or 'Board action', with due dates and who. On each Board meeting they come back and check on updates, so they don't lose stuff.

Ms. Keys-Write: The Board has a calendar so you can keep track of what you're doing. There are some templates I can drop in your Google folder. You don't have to recreate it. There are boards who keep track and have one designated person who loves

spreadsheets. Know that there are tools you can use so you can hold your Superintendent accountable.

#### **SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Adopt Epstein's Framework
2. Set clear metrics
3. Resource allocations and alignment
4. Policy alignment
5. Decision-making involvement

#### **LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Realign the Family Engagement Office report to a chief academic officer or a department of communications based upon the strategic focus of the district
2. Consider joining America's Promise Alliance
3. Develop a family engagement scorecard
4. Utilize family engagement personnel to support home visits and improving truancy within the school district
5. Invest in a translation hotline
6. Launch a parent university in collaboration with key non-profit organizations and university support

#### **GIFTED & TALENTED : PROPOSED ACTIONS**

1. Test all 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students instead of a random selection
2. Ensure advanced learner opportunities embedded in all schools throughout the curricula
3. Teachers and administrators should be able to provide advocacy statements for students as part of the selectin process
4. Data from the CogAT assessments should be used to provide enrichment opportunities for all students, not just for Gifted & Talented
5. Students should be cluster grouped in their neighborhood schools
6. The second-grade class at Paterson Academy for the Gifted and Talented may be phased out due to low enrollment
7. Middle school should offer advanced courses in ELA, math, social studies, and science. Opportunities should be offered for advanced creatives

## **COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS**

Comm. Simmons expressed the district's plan to expand the Gifted & Talented program to have one classroom in each school. The way students are selected has been an issue in the district for decades.

Comm. Redmon recommended that the Superintendent look for ways to expand the program throughout the district.

On the issue of budget, the Gifted & Talented teacher must have a specific certification, which is covered by the district.

Comm. Simmons stated that this Gifted & Talented program may have to be piloted and then grown over time. Also, appropriate schools would need to be selected first.

Dr. Newell stated that everything has to be woven into the long-range facilities plan. In trying to be efficient with resources, this is an opportunity to weave in Gifted & Talented with special education under the same effort.

## **GOAL: IDENTIFY 3 PRIORITIES FOR EACH AUDIT**

The district needs to implement and evaluation process for the performance of all types of vendors in the district, whether educational vendors or facilities vendors

## **NEXT STEPS/REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS**

1. Board will type up the Board's work in the area of policy, budget, and KPI's based upon the information that you completed
2. Board will put a summary of the PowerPoint and audits on their website
3. Dr. Newell has been working to engage the unions and keeping them abreast
4. In 90 days, the administration will come back with the KPIs moving on the work
5. Comm. Simmons recommended that the Board capture pictures and videos to post on the website so the public can see the Board's work
  - Compared Board work to a cruise ship turning around. It's slow, but once it turns does, before you know it, it's out of sight
  - Board work is a slow process and a lot of work, but once the district turns around, progress will be steady
6. Ms. Keys recommended that the information on the website be user-friendly and reiterated that modeling from the top is super important

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

No speakers.

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

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

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