

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

March 25, 2026 – 6:08 p.m.  
Central Office (First Floor)

Presiding: Comm. Joel Ramirez, President

Present:

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

Comm. Valerie Freeman  
Comm. Della McCall, Vice President  
Comm. Alex Mendez  
Comm. Hector Nieves

Comm. Mohammed Rashid  
Comm. Kenneth Rosado  
Comm. Kenneth Simmons  
Comm. Corey Teague (Remote)

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

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:

**Special Meeting  
March 25, 2026 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 TAPinto, the Arab Voice, El Diario, the Italian Voice, the North Jersey Herald & News, and The Record.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you all. At this time, I'm going to turn it to the Superintendent for her report.

**REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

Dr. Newell: Thank you, President. Good evening, everyone. Thank you for being here. As we are introducing the budget for the next school year, I want to be open and direct with you from the very beginning. Developing a school budget is one of the most complex and challenging responsibilities that we have. This year, we are facing unprecedented fiscal headwinds. Between rising operational costs, shifting enrollment and increased healthcare costs, we were confronted with a massive gap between our

projected revenues and expenses. Left unchecked, this deficit threatened the very stability of our operations. Ignoring it was not an option. As a district, we must deal in economic realities. Faced with these hard realities, our administrative team rolled up its sleeves and audited every program and school through a lens of efficiency. We looked at programs, positions and contracts. Additionally, our guiding principle was to keep cuts as far away from the classroom and direct student instruction. Not only did we look at programs, we looked at ourselves in central office with a question of how can we consolidate administrative functions, revisit vendor contracts and we also looked at structural overhead. Because of this exhaustive work that the team led by Ms. Gray endeavored, we were able to see significant cuts to our baseline operating budget. Ms. Gray and the team will discuss in further detail when she presents. It has not been easy choices made. Many of them represent real sacrifices. We made difficult decisions and we are focused on protecting our core academic programs. We're introducing a budget tonight that is balanced and fiscally responsible. I want to thank our business office, principals, staff members, administrative team and cabinet who helped us find these efficiencies. To our community, I know our budget season can cause anxiety. Ms. Gray will present these numbers tonight, explain the why behind our choices and continue to build a future our students deserve. Thank you and at this time I will turn it over to Ms. Gray and her team to present the budget.

## **PRESENTATION OF THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL DISTRICT PRELIMINARY BUDGET**

Ms. June Gray: Thank you, Dr. Newell. Good evening and thank you for allowing me to present the preliminary budget. This is our mission and vision. Our work continues to focus on supporting the whole child and preparing students for future success. This budget aligns directly with that vision. These are some of the district accomplishments and student successes. We had academic growth. We're seeing real measurable progress across the district, improved attendance and higher test scores. Students are achieving at higher levels. Students are earning college credits, certifications and career credentials. This is the kind of success we want to continue. The budget priorities were safe and secure schools. Our priorities remain focused on a safe environment, strong instruction and student supports. We are also committed to continuing to expand opportunities while ensuring equity across the district. Every decision in this budget reflects a student-first approach and responsible use of our resources. As Dr. Newell stated, this is not an easy process. We started this back in October. We worked very hard. We took a thorough look and approach in building this budget. We reviewed all major cost areas to find savings and improve efficiencies. We looked at staffing, contracts, insurance, supplies and all of our operations. The goal was to protect the classroom while being responsible with our resources. Our fiscal environment is very challenging. We are facing multiple financial pressures all at the same time. Costs are rising, especially in special education, transportation and benefits. State aid is limited. Federal funding has been reduced. We have no remaining fund balance. The local fair share actually is below adequacy, and this creates a challenging situation. We depend on local tax levy, state aid and federal aid. We had a loss of one-time recurring revenue. We also have no assigned fund balance to support this budget. These are the revenues. You can see most of our money comes from state and federal sources. Our tax levy is at 8%. Other sources were reduced, which we used last year. The budgeted fund balance, which we contributed last year, for 2026-2027 is zero. From 2025-2026, we were at \$768 million. We have \$774 million. It's only a change in our revenue, actually of \$5 million that we have to spend. This is just an illustration of the revenues by percentage. In the pie chart you can see 86% comes from the state. This is a history of our state aid. This provides the context of how the state aid has changed over time. The cap limits our growth even as

we continue to increase. We can see it's going up and down. We had an outlier in 2024-2025 when the ESSER II funding sunset. For 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 we have been capped at 6%. The compounding impact of the cap is from 2025-2026 we lost revenue of \$13 million. This year we lost \$7.2 million. That's \$23.3 million over two years being capped at 6%. These funds would have helped offset the rising costs, which we don't have to relay to the local taxpayer. This just shows how the tax levy has evolved over time. Local funding has had to adjust as other revenue sources have become limited. That's the history of the tax levy and where we have been in the past. You can see it's high. With Covid we were able to come down and now we're on a slow incline back to where we were pre-Covid. Now I want to talk a little bit about the local fair share. I know it's difficult to understand. It's the state's way of estimating what a community can contribute to its schools. Right now, Paterson is contributing significantly less than the amount. Even with this increase of 8%, we are still below the state calculated share. There is a \$78 million gap between the current levy and the local fair share. This is just an illustration of what I just said to you. You see we have a \$78 million gap the state is saying that the local community can afford to contribute. This is a little hard to read, but I will go through it. This shows the household impact of the tax levy increase. At 8%, the tax levy is relatable. The average impact to the homeowner is \$143. This is based on average home assessed at \$194,000 and that's from the DCA tax viewer. This is a change from one year to the next. The household impact represents about 1% of the homeowner's overall property tax bill. We understand that any increase matters and we approached this really carefully. The 8% tax levy supports essential costs that we cannot avoid. This includes salaries, benefits, special education, transportation, utilities and safety. This is not an expansion budget. It is designed to maintain existing programs and services. These are the expenditures for salaries and benefits, charter schools and non-salary, what goes to the school-based and central office. The majority of the budget is dedicated to staffing and direct student services. Approximately half of the budget is allocated to salaries and benefits. The remaining supports charter schools at 24%, operations, facilities, special education, academics and instructional resources. We had an increase of approximately 945 seats for a new charter school, Paterson Prep Charter, which has increased us by \$27 million. Charter school tuition is required costs and must be included in the budget. These expenses are not discretionary. This is the charter school history from 2020-2021 through 2026-2027. You can see how it has significantly grown over the years with the total cost and enrollment. We are currently at \$188 million. This budget reflects responsible planning and continued focus on students. It maintains instructional programs, supports safe environments and sustains the progress we have seen. We will continue to look for efficiencies and advocate for fair and adequate funding. Are there any questions?

Comm. Ramirez: Any questions from the Commissioners? I just want to clarify. Of the \$37 million that we're receiving in additional state aid, \$27 million is being absorbed automatically by the growth that was authorized by the charter schools.

Ms. Gray: Correct.

Comm. Nieves: Are we paying the same rate? Has that rate changed as far as per-pupil that we pay to the charters?

Ms. Gray: It changes based on enrollment. There's a formula used to calculate for the charter schools. It incorporates the tax levy in that number, so it does change annually.

Comm. Nieves: What was that total number?

Ms. Gray: \$188 million.

Comm. Nieves: And the total number of students enrolled?

Ms. Gray: 8,888.

Comm. Nieves: How many this year that we lost to them?

Ms. Gray: There's a difference of about 1,200.

Comm. Nieves: We lost 1,200 additional students?

Ms. Gray: They were allowed to have an additional 1,200 seats.

Comm. Simmons: That number has increased to 1,800.

Ms. Gray: Right. It may be a formula that's used for the charter schools, but I didn't see the growth at 1,800.

Comm. Simmons: We lost 1,900 students last year. 800 of those students went to charter last year.

Ms. Gray: I think it was 805 last year.

Comm. Nieves: 1,000 were unaccounted for? We don't know where 1,000 students went?

Comm. Simmons: I don't know if that's tracked. We know 805 went to charter. We lost 1,900. I don't know if we track where the other 1,100 students went.

Ms. Gray: 945 went to the Paterson Prep this year.

Comm. Simmons: I mean from what we lost last year. We know the number of students that went to charter. Where did the remaining 1,000 go?

Dr. Newell: The question is, are we tracking? We do know that some students have left the district. But for that gap I would have to get in touch with guidance to see what they have and who is a transfer.

Comm. Simmons: It would be beneficial to know. We always know the number that goes to charter. Someone can correct me if I'm wrong, but over the last five years I think we've lost...

Ms. Gray: I have a chart.

Comm. Simmons: I mean total for us, our loss, because everybody is not going to charter. What are we at, 22,000 students? I think that's the last number I heard.

Dr. Newell: Last year we had about 7,600 going to charters. In December there was approval over a certain time period for 1,750, and within that is about 1,200 for next year. That gives it about 8,800.

Comm. Simmons: For the total charter enrollment.

Dr. Newell: For next year, yes.

Comm. Simmons: We know the number that is attending charter. The last number I heard for our enrollment was 22,000.

Comm. Ramirez: One second. Could we check the volume on the live? I'm getting text messages from the public that they can barely hear us.

Comm. Simmons: The last number I heard for our total enrollment was 22,000. That was currently. Maybe three years ago that number was 24,000 or 25,000. 4,000 students didn't go to charter. Where are the other students? Are we tracking that?

Comm. Ramirez: Dr. Newell, I know we discussed this a few months ago. We should start having some type of exit questionnaire. When a student chooses to register out or port themselves out to another district, we can ask one or two questions to the parent so we have a better idea of why they're leaving. That could help us.

Comm. Simmons: If they transfer, we would typically know that because we have to send paperwork.

Dr. Newell: Right. We also know that we have some students who go back home overseas. I can dig into that and get that information.

Comm. Ramirez: Any other questions on the budget? I know it's a lot of information.

Comm. McCall: One of the things that was most important to me was to ask a few questions concerning our students and the things that I feel are so dear to our district. In this budget, are there any instructional reductions towards our students? Will our students see anything that is going to be considered taken away from them in this budget?

Ms. Gray: I would say no. We didn't touch any instructional programs.

Comm. McCall: Does that include our arts and music programs?

Ms. Gray: Yes. We did not touch that.

Comm. McCall: What about our field trips?

Ms. Gray: That's there as well.

Comm. McCall: I know we're looking at increasing the percentage to 8%. Will that 8% keep us at bay where we won't have to look at any layoffs in any part of the district? Does that secure us in a place where financially we will be able to maintain what we have right now?

Ms. Gray: We have made some changes with attrition to salaries based on the changes with the middle school model and closing of the schools. We have done a lot of work and we will continue to do that work. That's a difficult question to answer right now because we are still making changes, but we don't look to have many effects to salaries.

Comm. Ramirez: I guess what Comm. McCall wants to know is do we have a RIF in this budget.

Ms. Gray: We will have some attrition.

Dr. Newell: Right now, HR is working with the budget department to see as best as we can how to minimize any type of impacts on staffing. That is something that Mr. Rojas and the team for the next three or four weeks is going to be digging even further into.

Comm. McCall: So it's fair to say that the prioritization of the reductions will be really thought for because I don't want to see our children or teachers coming out of classrooms. I definitely don't want to see any disparities in our programs that our kids have. I know that because the federal level of funding has been reduced so tremendously. Whatever programs we do have in place that can be met in this budget I definitely want to see that happen. I went through it with a fine-toothed comb and that was my biggest concern. I see some cuts here and there, but it didn't make sense to me because I'm not an expert at this. It just concerned me about our kids being short-staffed. For a long time, I see that happening. We go into the classrooms and remove teachers. Schools become less efficient because we're using subs because we don't have teachers or classrooms are oversized. I'm just hoping that we don't see that in this budget.

Comm. Nieves: I know you mentioned closed. We're repurposing those schools. Closed is such a strong word. We're repurposing, correct?

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. Mendez: I just wanted some clarification regarding other sources when it comes to revenues. This looks like a \$6 million decrease. Could you just get into the weeds of it on what that might be?

Ms. Gray: Last year we had \$6 million that we used from carryover for preschool. We don't have that option this year.

Comm. Simmons: I did hear that there's going to be some attrition. Do we have any idea what that projected number is?

Dr. Newell: Not at this time, Commissioner. We are trying our darndest to make sure that it's as minimal as possible. Assistant Superintendent Rojas and his team are going to be going through all those numbers.

Comm. Simmons: Do we have a worst-case scenario?

Mr. Luis Rojas: The current standing is based on this budget. The worst-cased scenario, if it's voted down or if we're cutting other stuff, is we're going to have to cut more staff. That's the reality. How many? There are some bumping rights that will happen. I would say maybe a couple of hundred worst-case scenario, total with administrators, schools and central staff, everybody.

Comm. Rashid: Salaries are very sensitive. We know we have a shortage of teachers. I'm on the same page as our vice president. We can't make teachers frustrated to come to this school. It's a very sensitive decision. We can't afford an additional shortage of teachers in our district.

Mr. Rojas: The exercise that we're looking at now as a result of this budget is to have every classroom position being filled. We're looking first at doing a right-sizing. There are some positions that we may not need. If I have two kindergarten classes that are 10

and 10, we can do away with one kindergarten class and put two together. Things like that are what we're looking at where at the end of the day the schools and staffing are not affected.

Comm. Rashid: If you saw the neighboring districts, we have the most salaries. These things need to be calculated very smartly because we don't want to lose our teachers.

Mr. Rojas: When I recruit and when we assign salaries, very rarely do we assign a teacher that comes to Paterson a salary at Step 1. We offer competitive salaries and we step up to the plate when we need to. Trust me. We don't let anybody walk away for a few thousand dollars. If they want to teach in Paterson, I try my best to meet their salary.

Comm. McCall: When you talk about this worst-case scenario, how are we going to prioritize where we start? Is there going to be a formula or some type of plan, whether it's administration before instructional? Will it be looking at what other positions we have that can be consolidated? I'm always going to go back to this. Our kids can't afford to be tackled without the staff that we need in our classrooms.

Mr. Rojas: I agree.

Comm. McCall: I'm just hoping that in this process that we really prioritize how we do this worst-case scenario. I do not want to see any of our classroom staff touched before we look at other avenues that can be consolidated. I don't want to really see anybody go, but we have to make our classrooms top priority to be saved.

Mr. Rojas: That is our priority, Commissioner. We looked at that and we made our schools our number one priority. I will tell you that everyone is going to share in this piece, meaning all the way down from central office where there are some positions that are being considered. Administrative positions are thrown in there as well. Everyone is taking their piece of the pie to assist. But at the end of the day, our schools are tight with the staffing that they need. We are taking care of what we need to ensure there is a classroom teacher in front of a classroom full of kids. In the past when we would RIF, you need \$5 million and you're just cutting down the line. That's easy work. We didn't do that work. We did the work to actually look to see where we needed extra bodies. Take this person and push them back into the classroom. There are things that we're doing to not affect the classrooms. We've been working for weeks locked in a room. This is not a simple project. This is very difficult. It's a trickling effect all the way down the line. It's a domino effect. You mess up one way here and it affects somebody down the line. This has been looked at by our team. We're not taking this easily. This is something serious. We tried our best not to let one person go, but the reality is the money just doesn't allow for that to happen.

Comm. McCall: Piggybacking on what you just said, how you guys have spent so much time on this, thank you for the time that you've put in. Is this all being done on your regular time? Do we need you guys to come in for more time? This was well planned out. I read it. I went through it. But I want to make sure that our classrooms are not part of the pie that has to get sliced. If anything, it needs to be crumbs. Our kids deserve everything that other districts get. Our kids' education has to become priority. We just made this small movement, which I'm very grateful for, but we don't need to see our kids go backwards because there are not enough teachers in their classrooms or teachers are not being affected because they're all leaving us because they're afraid of a RIF. I want to make sure that as we do this, they're not a slice in that pie. They need to be the crumbs. Whenever we're making these decisions, let's not slice there. Let it

be crumbs because we can't afford it. We don't meet all the standards as it is. To see them have to wonder how our classrooms are going to be operated is a big concern.

Mr. Rojas: When I say crumbs, we're talking about overages, extra folks at a building that aren't necessarily needed. We've moved them into other vacancies and other opportunities. Then you cut that vacancy. There are different ways for us to look at this and not affect the school. We can give them a teacher and remove a vacancy in some instances. There's money being removed, but not a body. It's not an easy shell game sometimes. You have certifications where they can actually work and where their expertise is. This is really looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Comm. McCall: Thank you for that because that's clarity. If I'm a parent sitting at home watching this, I'm wondering—you're already talking about the choice programs and how does this affect our regular programs. We can't allow anything at this point to interrupt their educational needs.

Mr. Rojas: And we agree on this side of the table as well.

Comm. McCall: Awesome.

Comm. Teague: Thank you for the presentation. I'm sure we already submitted our IDEA grant last year for this upcoming year. How much did we apply for and how much are we going to get? What will those numbers look like going forward for our special education?

Ms. Gray: It's about \$6.5 million that we are expecting for IDEA.

Comm. Teague: What sort of impact realistically are we looking at with that beginning in September?

Ms. Gray: We use the IDEA to help support out-of-district tuition.

Comm. Teague: Okay. Are we looking at any cuts in that area? Is everything pretty much going to be streamlined?

Ms. Gray: Everything is pretty much streamlined. We've been talking with Ms. Coy and streamlining processes and seeing what we can do to bring kids back in-district as well.

Comm. Teague: Thank you.

Comm. Ramirez: Any other questions? Thank you, Ms. Gray, Mr. Rojas, Katori, Kenya, Mr. Gaines and the whole team. I know we have our work cut out for us and the sentiments of the Board are certified teachers in every classroom. Our students are the priority. All the extras, we don't need them. I appreciate your hard work, Madam Superintendent and Dr. Henderson. I appreciate your leadership guiding this team through this process. Thank you.

Ms. Gray: Thank you.

## **RESOLUTION FOR A VOTE:**

## Resolution No. 1

Adoption of the 2026-2027 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 2026-2027 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 March 27, 2026 deadline; and

WHEREAS, the 2026-2027 preliminary budget supports 2025-2030 Strategic Plan "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow" Goal 3: Ensure Operational Effectiveness and Fiscal Stability were we will strengthen leadership practices, improve operational efficiency, and maintain financial stability to support student learning and growth; and

WHEREAS, the 2026-2027 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 January 7, 2026, 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 \$350,000, for all staff and board members for the school year 2026-2027, 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 2026-2027 Preliminary budget submitted by Dr. Laurienne W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools. The budget reflects an increase in the local tax levy, the use of a CAP adjustment for increased healthcare costs, and the use of \$514,977 in available Banked Cap 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 Record/Herald News in accordance with the form suggested by the State Department of Education and according to law.

<u>General Fund Revenue</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Local Tax Levy Included</u>
Local Sources	\$ 93,686,599	\$ 85,686,599
State Sources	\$ 661,704,220	



Comm. Ramirez: Thank you, June and Madam Superintendent. Yes.

**The motion carried.**

**Paterson Board of Education  
Standing Abstentions**

Commissioner Valerie Freeman

- Self
- Family
- Paterson Cares, Inc.
- Paterson Community Health Center

Commissioner Della McCall

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Educational Staffing Solutions (ESS) -Substitute Teachers

Commissioner Alexander Mendez, Jr.

- Self
- Family
- Passaic County Board of Social Services

Commissioner Hector L. Nieves, Jr.

- Self
- City of Paterson

Commissioner Joel D. Ramirez

- Self
- City of Paterson
- Passaic County Community College
- State of New Jersey

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

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

Mr. Charles Ferrer: Good evening, Charles Ferrer. Since we're just talking about the budget, I'm going to lean my comments towards the budget. I was looking at the charter school's 8,888 students and the \$188 million going there. When I divide that by 8,888 students, it comes out to \$21,166.67 going to charter schools. I know for a fact when it comes to the students that remain in Paterson, we have to factor out what our special needs students get. That could be anywhere from \$20,000 to \$100,000. What is the real number for our general education students that remain in Paterson Public Schools? It's not \$21,000 for each student. That's unfair because of the way our elected officials at the state level so choose to do the budgets. We have to have those conversations. That has to change because at the end of the day, thorough and efficient education still stands strong over any other law that we have added – charter schools, Christian school or whatever school. Thorough and efficient education is still the real law and we're missing that. Does the budget include students that might choose to attend a charter school due to the closing or repurposing of their school? Is that factored into this budget? If there are 1,800 in those 4 schools, I can strongly feel at least 500 are going to do something different. Based on what I saw here, they don't have to just go to a charter school in Paterson. I saw Clifton in there. I saw Englewood in there. There are options out here that could cause us some major problems that we're not factoring in. Those are concerns. I commend Mr. Rojas for the great job he and his staff have done. But I hear it all the time from those who have the time to retire. You think you have them as a teacher next year, but they might be gone through July and August. For those who were looking to come back, they might be considering using July and August for their 60 days and going somewhere else. A lot of teachers are bringing this up. The ones that got hit at the end of the year who came in, got a class ready, prepared all summer long, and then found out after the first Board meeting that they were no longer going to be in the first grade. They were now going to be in the fifth grade. They were no longer going to be in a high school. They were going to be in an elementary school. Those people have in back of their minds, "If they do that to me this time, I'm done." What does that do to our children? It leaves them with a vacancy. We have to think about all of this when we're doing this. That's what reality really is.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you, Mr. Ferrer. Madam Superintendent, if we can get those answers to him. I think they're very valid points and information that the community needs to know.

Ms. Soniya Shabazz: Hello. I'm Soniya Shabazz and I'm a parent of two children that go to Norman S. Weir. The politics of this meeting are concerning. I heard Comm. McCall talk about her concern for the loss of teachers, but you are for the closing of 4 choice schools that are currently and have been the highest performing schools in the district. How does that make sense? You all have had two months with this information and when you asked the gentleman to come up and give you information about RIFs, he could not say. He cannot tell you how many people he thought would be RIF'd or let go. Have Rice notices been issued? I'm sure they have not been because you don't even know who you're letting go, which is insane considering the fact that you have had over two months with this information. You continue to repeatedly say that you start teachers with great salaries here in Paterson. That is false. The teachers are leaving Paterson because of the pay. They have not gotten raises in years. I have fellow educators that I'm very close with who are working in this district for over 10 years

making less than \$65,000 a year. That is insane and they left. Each teacher is all leaving. You're saying that you have all of these educators and they're making all this money, but that is all lies. You guys have to be held accountable for the lies that you're telling in these meetings. You don't have true data. You just get up here and say whatever you want to make it look like you're actually working, but you're lying to us. You repeatedly say that children are your top priority. Then closing a school should be halted because displacing our children will affect their education immensely. My children attend Norman S. Weir. Based on the NJSLA scores for Paterson there's not one public school other than School No. 28 that will provide them with an education close to or better than what they're receiving. Why would you do that to our children? Why would you do that to any of these children? Displacing children is not okay. You're going to have a higher number of funding going to charter schools so you're still going to be losing money. The choice school parents will not put our children in these public schools in Paterson. Why would we do that if we see the scores and that they're not performing well? Some schools are performing under 10% proficient on NJSLA. If I have a student who is scoring all 5's, why would I even think about putting my child in a school that they're not even performing over 10% in the district, let alone the state? Dr. Newell, you are not from here. You don't understand the culture or the climate.

Comm. Ramirez: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to interrupt you. Do not address the Superintendent.

Ms. Shabazz: I've heard this already, Joel.

Comm. Ramirez: It is the policy.

Ms. Shabazz: Most of you guys are from Paterson. You guys have to fight for our children and for this city. You cannot let people who are not from here come here and tear up our city.

Comm. Ramirez: Ms. Shabazz, your time is up. I apologize. Thank you. We all live in Paterson.

Mr. Chris Small: Good evening, everyone. I'm Chris Small, 47 Manor Road. I'm an educator, teacher, coach and accountant. I'm also an advocate for the youth in the City of Paterson. I'm here today to respectfully request under the School Board procedures and Robert's Rules of Order a motion for reconsideration. Any member can introduce a motion, but typically it must be made by a Board member who voted on the prevailing side that won the last vote 6-3. I'm pleading and asking which member of this Board will stand with the community and make that motion. I can speak to so many valid reasons as to why, as so many others already have, but before adding my perspective, I'd like to speak directly to the Paterson Public School System and whoever is responsible for this decision to close and repurpose schools. The timing seriously couldn't be any worse. Other than it not being the right timing legally and logistically, and not to make things political as these things are out of our control, we are literally a country and world at war right now. From Russia and Ukraine to Israel and Iran, to the US currently sending thousands of marines and troops to the straits of Harman, literally superpowers of NATO allies and the global economy is at risk. Gas prices, grocery prices, the cost of living, unemployment, unaffordable housing, and unfortunately, a potential recession or the possible start of World War III is at stake. It's bad timing internationally, not to mention domestically. All across the country we have states in constant conflict with the current administration and ICE from California, Minnesota, New York and New Jersey. We have ICE at airports right now. We can't act like we don't see it. ICE is in North Jersey, Hudson, Bergen, Passaic Counties and cities from Hoboken to Paterson, and

it's negatively impacting our students, parents and families at the moment. This is bad timing. Locally, we currently have a big election coming up on May 12. We have four people running for Mayor and 16 people running for City Council. Honestly, nobody knows who or what is going to happen next. With all this unknown and uncertainty, I think now is not the time to make such an unprecedented and unwarranted move of closing and repurposing the schools. As anxiety, doubt and panic are at an all-time high, why at a time like after the holidays and one of the worst winters we've seen in years, with snow removals and cars being towed, we have appraisals and taxes going up and people are financially struggling. This is the time when you tell us the schools, without any notice or consideration, are being closed. With demands and changes to register students and all this has to be done by September, I think this is not in the best interest of our students and this can't be considered long-term planning. In Paterson we have such diversity with different cultures, languages, countries, religions and faith. We have military families, families in the armed forces and law enforcement. We have first- and second-generation immigration families. All those things need to be considered. I didn't even touch on the education part of things. This is just the worst time ever and we as a community are calling for this Board to really consider this vote before moving forward. That's all. Thank you.

Ms. Helene Anderson: Good evening, School Board members. Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Helene Anderson. I reside at 85 Presidential Boulevard in Paterson. I'm a lifelong resident of Paterson. I would like to thank Mr. Rojas and his team for referencing the budget and giving us a short or brief report on what he thinks will be an incurable thing that we don't have. I think it will be very reckless to say that all the schools are covered, and all teaching positions are going to be filled. They are not. Right now, I am working at School No. 20. I work with the SPED population and children with autism and multiple disabilities. I do feel that we need to make sure we have every teacher in each classroom. Right now, we are almost at capacity with our students in the class and we are lacking a certified teacher. I'm in the room with another IA and we are working to make sure these students are educated. However, it comes at a major mental task. No one is looking at the fact that special education brings in more money to this district than any and we always lack supplies. I'm going to the dollar store and spending my own money to get supplies. I'm going beyond the classroom to get things that my students need. When I speak to my administrators, I hear that we have a budget and we have this and that. That's not good enough. Our students come first. There are a lot of classroom behaviors that we have to deal with. We now have two behaviorists in the building, but we have too many behaviors for those behaviorists. We also have an excessive amount of ESS staff. Who is training the ESS staff to deal with the population that we have to deal with? They are not ready and trained to deal with what we have to deal with on a regular basis. It becomes almost chaotic. I don't think we need to do budget cuts. I'm not good with numbers, but if I'm looking at a budget right now being on the inside, I'm looking at how I'm going to get the fire out. By doing that I think we're going to need to supply our children with the things that they need in their classroom to help them be successful adults. I'm also looking forward to an answer from the ESS person if this is a hindrance or some kind of inside job to actually take jobs away from Paterson employees. All of us are employed by the Paterson Public Schools. We are instructional assistants, security guards and cafeteria workers. We are all together under ESP. Sometimes I feel like there may be some underlying privatization that may be going on. We can't afford to lose any more people from Paterson Public Schools, nor can we choose to lose any people from this community who come to work every day with our students. Thank you for listening to me.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you, Ms. Anderson, for your service. Madam Superintendent, if we can have someone connect with her and get some answers.

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

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

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