

MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET HEARING

May 4, 2026 – 6:16 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 (Remote)

Absent:

Comm. Corey Teague

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

Comm. Mendez 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:

**Budget Hearing
May 4, 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.

PRESENTATION OF THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

Dr. Newell: Good evening everyone and thank you for being here. Tonight's meeting includes the public hearing and adoption of the proposed budget for the 2026-2027 school year. This meeting is an important step in our annual process and we appreciate the opportunity for the public to hear how we got to this point. Before I invite our School Business Administrator, Ms. June Gray, to present the budget in detail, I'd like to briefly highlight the work behind it. The 2026 budget reflects a careful and deliberate effort to

achieve balance without relying on reserves. Throughout the process we reviewed spending patterns, identified inefficiencies and focused on ensuring that resources are directed towards essential programs and services.

Comm. Ramirez: Excuse me. Can we have security? I'm okay with what's going on, but banging on the window is not okay. For the safety of the Board members, I need everyone to be backed up from the windows. Those windows are very thin. If they are cracked, the Superintendent, the Deputy and the Board members are at risk. I hope everyone can understand that.

Dr. Newell: We also worked to make the most of our available funds by reviewing contracts for savings and moving eligible costs to grant funding, including Title and IDEA programs, where appropriate. In addition, we examined our day-to-day operations to find efficiencies, such as reviewing transportation routes, managing substitute coverage more effectively, and evaluating staffing in certain support areas. Cost containment measures were implemented as well, including reductions in overtime and stipends, a 25% decrease in administrative supply budgets, and limitations on capital funding, along with efforts to manage rising insurance costs. This was a collaborative process. We worked closely with principals, department heads and our leadership team to identify savings and earlier this year all administrators were asked to reduce their budgets by 10%. As we look ahead, we will continue to strengthen the budget through hiring controls, program prioritization, energy-saving efforts, vendor consolidation and maximizing grant opportunities, all while continuing to prioritize the needs of our students. Overall, this budget represents a balanced and responsible approach that supports our students while maintaining fiscal discipline. At this time, I'll turn it over to our School Business Administrator, Ms. June Gray, to walk us through the proposed budget in more detail.

Ms. June Gray: Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to present the 2026-2027 school year budget. This budget reflects a commitment to our students while navigating a challenging financial environment. It reflects careful and responsible decision-making. Board of Education members, thank you for your support. Our work continues to focus on supporting the whole child and preparing students for future success. This budget aligns with our mission, vision and core values. We have seen real measurable progress across the district, such as improved attendance, higher test scores and students achieving at higher levels. Students are earning college credits, certifications and career credentials. This is the kind of success we want to continue. Our budget priorities remain focused on safe environments, strong instruction and student support. We are also continuing to expand opportunities while ensuring equity and access across the district. Every decision in this budget reflects a student-first approach and reasonable use of our resources. We took a very thorough approach in building this budget. Our budget development process is a year-round effort. It begins in September and continues through June with ongoing analysis, discussion and decision-making. Throughout this process we take a closer look at all major cost areas to identify savings and improve efficiency. We review past spending patterns to spot areas of overuse or inefficiency, and we continue to conduct trend analyses to anticipate future cost pressures so we can plan and align reductions responsibly. It is important to note that not all budget reductions are actual cuts. Some are as a result of process improvements or shifting costs to a different funding source. We examined key areas such as salary and benefits, vendor contracts looking for opportunities to renegotiate and reduce costs, such as insurance rates, like Dr. Newell said, administrative supplies and our overall operations. This is a collaborative process with district leadership continually reviewing staffing to balance efficiency with effectiveness. We leveraged attrition where appropriate and regularly assess school and department

staffing to minimize any impact on classroom instruction. Importantly, this work doesn't stop once the budget is submitted. It's an ongoing effort focused on preserving staff positions and protecting the classroom while maintaining fiscal responsibility. Please keep in mind that we are managing multiple financial pressures simultaneously. Costs are increasing while the funding is not keeping pace. We have the local tax levy, state aid and federal aid. We have loss of one-time revenue and no assigned fund balance to support this budget. Our funding comes from state aid. Right now, all three areas are constrained or declining. It also illustrates how the loss of fund balance impacts the overall revenue available for the budget. As you look at this slide, you can see our state aid increased \$37 million. However, we don't have \$32 million budgeted fund balance that we contributed in 2025-2026, which left us with a gap for 2026-2027. This is just an illustration of our revenues. This slide shows the breakdown of our revenue sources change from 2025-2026. You can see how dependent we are on our state aid and local funding. State aid is 86% and 11% of the tax levy makes up our whole budget with the federal and other resources. This is the history of the state aid over years to see how we have grown. We have the \$37 million and \$655 million. \$704 million is what we have this year, which is an increase of the \$37 million. This provides a context of how the state aid has changed over time. The 6% cap that the state instituted in 2025-2026 continues to limit our growth even as costs continue to increase. This is just the compounding impact of the cap. The state capped our state aid at 6%. Last year we lost \$13 million. This year it was \$7.2 million for a total of \$20.3 million that we did not receive from the state over two years. These funds would have helped to offset the rising costs. However, the local tax levy is below adequacy level and is incorporated into the state aid formula. This is the history of the tax levy. This shows how the tax levy has evolved over time going up and down. Local funding has had to adjust as other revenue sources have become limited. As shown, the rate had decreased and will now need to rise to offset the use of fund balance in 2025-2026, which took us below the 2% required unreserved fund balance. We are working to increase our fund balance by generating that revenue in our 2025-2026 current budget. The local fair share is 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, it is still below the state's calculated local fair share. There is an estimated \$78 million gap between the current tax levy and the local fair share, indicating it remains below adequacy levels. For the average household the impact is about \$144. It represents 1% of a homeowner's overall property tax bill. We know that any increase has an impact. We did not take this lightly. We have remained mindful of the community throughout this process. While an increase is necessary, we make every effort to limit its impact. It could have easily reached double digits. The 8% tax levy increase supports essential costs that we cannot avoid. This includes salary, benefits, special education, transportation, utilities and safety. This is not an expansion budget. It is designed to maintain existing programs and services. The majority of the budget is dedicated to staffing and direct student services. This is a breakdown of our salaries from year to year. You can see we also had the \$27 million increase in charter schools this year. Our school-based and central office had to make adjustments with the loss of revenue. We just made sure that we kept existing programs intact and didn't touch student impact. Approximately half of the budget, 47%, is allocated to salaries and benefits. The remaining funds support charter schools, which is 24%. Operations, facilities, special education, academics and instructional resources are 29%. This is a list of all charter schools with enrollment. Charter school tuition is a required cost that must be included in our budget. These expenses are non-discretionary. We serve as a pastoral entity for Paterson resident students. This is just an illustration of what we had for the charter schools from year to year. This budget reflects careful and responsible planning with continued focus on students. It preserves our instructional programs, supports safe learning environments and sustains the progress we are seeing across

our schools. We also recognize the concerns around potential staffing reductions. Those concerns are real and important. That process is still being thoughtfully evaluated and will continue even after the budget is approved. Looking ahead, we remain committed to finding efficiencies and advocating for fair adequate funding for our schools while doing everything we can to preserve and protect as many positions as possible. Thank you.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you Madam BA and Superintendent. Are there any questions from the Commissioners?

Comm. Mendez: I did have a question regarding the impending layoffs. A couple meetings ago we were at about a 200 figure. I wanted some clarity to the public as far as where we are now and what efforts we've made to dwindle that number.

Ms. Gray: We've made a lot of changes. We have been working diligently. Right now, we're at 39. Luis is here and he can speak further, but the number has reduced significantly.

Comm. Ramirez: Mr. Rojas, if you could come forward to provide clarity. Comm. Mendez is inquiring about the actual number of bodies that we would be eliminating through this budget.

Mr. Luis Rojas: When I was here a couple of weeks ago, the estimate was a couple hundred. As we sit here today, it's roughly around 39 teachers. As a result of the middle school model and through attrition we have been able to save about 72 teaching positions on top of the 39 that are being cut, unfortunately.

Comm. Mendez: Are there any specific departments or grade levels that are currently looking at a greater rate of layoff than others?

Mr. Rojas: Yes. Unfortunately, the greatest category on the teacher side is going to be elementary teachers, k-5.

Comm. Mendez: How much notice will they be given of the impending layoff?

Mr. Rojas: The letters are going out to the staff on Monday, May 11. It's getting processed. It's up for the Board's vote on Wednesday and the letters will go out on Monday. They have to go out before the 15th by statute.

Comm. Mendez: Just for clarification, these layoffs would be effective at the end of the calendar year. Is that correct?

Mr. Rojas: Yes, on June 30.

Comm. Mendez: Thank you.

Comm. McCall: I hear 39 teachers. What other areas of the administration and within our district are going to be affected as well?

Mr. Rojas: We have cut in this district close to over 300 positions, vacancies and bodies. The majority of them are vacancies. We were able to save a lot of positions using vacancies that were no longer needed as a result of some moves, the middle school model and attrition. We are looking at roughly 15 positions on the administrative

side, 109 on the non-certificated side, meaning anything from central, non-central and non-certificated at the school level, and at the building, 72.

Comm. McCall: When you say 'building', explain that to me.

Mr. Rojas: On top of the 39, there were 72 that were pushed into vacancies. Only 39 teachers were actually cut. Out of a total of 208 teaching positions that were cut, 39 were actual bodies.

Comm. McCall: How do these 39 teachers affect our students in their classroom settings?

Mr. Rojas: Because of the middle school model, we had combined classrooms. We're taking two buildings and combining classrooms into one. The 39 or so teachers that were not necessarily needed for that transition are the ones being let go. All our classrooms for next year are projected to have a teacher in front of them at the beginning of the school year. It's 89 bodies that this district will have less next year than today on the non-certificated and the teacher side.

Comm. McCall: You gave me 39 teachers and 15 administrators. Where is the other balance that gives me 89 bodies in total?

Mr. Rojas: The non-certificated number is the one you're not giving back to me. I'm going to give you total numbers. On the teacher certificated side were 208 total positions. On the non-certificated side, it's a total of 109 positions. On the administrative side it's 15. Those are cuts. Those are bodies and vacancies that were eliminated.

Comm. McCall: I want to know bodies.

Mr. Rojas: Bodies from the teacher side were 39 and from the non-certificated side were 50.

Comm. McCall: That's the number I'm looking for.

Mr. Rojas: There were 89 total bodies.

Comm. McCall: Thank you.

Comm. Ramirez: Any other Commissioners have any questions? I think this has been very clear. I just want to thank you, June, Luis and everybody who worked so hard. I know in the beginning when you said 200 teachers many of us, believe it or not, lost some sleep. Thankfully, for the responsible decision-making of the administration and this body as we move towards this middle school model, it's only 39 positions. In the fall every single classroom is going to have a certified teacher in front of them.

Mr. Rojas: We have a teacher slotted for every classroom, with the exception of some special education and bilingual classrooms. For all of the classrooms we should have a teacher in front of them.

Comm. Ramirez: If we have retirements and individuals who decide to relocate and go to another district, will those 39 have an opportunity to be put into some of these positions?

Mr. Rojas: 100%. I anticipate that this number is going to be less by June 30. You have to draw the line somewhere. We have a Board meeting. I have to present documents to the Board. There comes a time where you have to draw the line and say this is the number cutoff for today, but it doesn't mean that the work stops. The work continues every day. As we get resignations, retirements and folks move on, we do try to gain people back. We will offer these positions to these individuals and hopefully they want to stay in Paterson.

Comm. Nieves: Are the folks you're speaking of going to be on a priority list?

Mr. Rojas: Yes. Before I start bringing anyone else in, we offer it to these people first.

Comm. Nieves: How do you set the priority list?

Mr. Rojas: It's going to be based on certification, need and location. If I have a resignation at School No. 1, I'm going to try to keep a teacher that was in that building. I have to look at cases one-on-one, but we will try to save as many as we can. That's the goal.

Comm. Ramirez: How many tenured individuals?

Mr. Rojas: Zero.

Comm. Ramirez: Nobody tenured?

Mr. Rojas: Nobody. These numbers are all non-tenured people.

Comm. Freeman: How many non-certified positions are being cut that were just recently hired?

Mr. Rojas: I'm not sure I understand.

Comm. Freeman: In January. If some of these teachers have been here for two or three years and you have a new hire coming in in January, are those new hires being fired?

Mr. Rojas: I'd have to look at the list. I'd be lying to you if I told you yes or no. I'd have to look at those numbers. We looked at so much data that I'd have to look at that answer.

Comm. Freeman: That's important to me because if you have somebody here three or four years and they're on this list and you have somebody coming in January that's not certificated and they retain their job, I don't think that's fair. We can have a conversation on that. Somebody has been here two years, and you have a new hire coming in January and they're still working, I do understand the salary may play a big part of it, but the new hires have not been here. I'll have a discussion with you one-on-one about that.

Comm. McCall: Is the 8% tax levy guaranteed to happen if we decide on it?

Ms. Gray: Yes. The 8% is factored into everything that we have done. We worked off 8%.

Comm. McCall: If we don't do 8%, then we're looking at a larger number of layoffs.

Ms. Gray: Yes.

Comm. McCall: When we decide to let these 39 teachers and 15 administrators go, what if an administrator just got here but we're letting go a teacher who has tenure...

Ms. Gray: We have no tenured.

Comm. McCall: I used the wrong word. I apologize. We're letting go of someone who has been here for a while. Are we in a position to say that through this process we can justify that? A lot of times I get this from the public. If I'm not saying it correctly, somebody correct me. A lot of times our administration has a more safety guard than our teachers. I don't have anything against administration, so don't send me an email in the morning. I want to make sure that our kids are the priority in this budget. I want to make sure that the teachers we need are adequate before we let anyone go. I also want to make sure that it's fair. I live by that because at night I want to go to sleep with a clean conscience knowing that I did my best to try to make this not so good situation the best we can have. I ask that question because I see that the administrative number is less than half of the number of teachers we're letting go. I also want to make sure that these teachers are not needed. I think that's what I want to say. You're telling me they're not because of the middle school model. Is that what I heard?

Mr. Rojas: They are not needed as a result of the middle school model, correct.

Comm. McCall: Okay. I just want to make it clear. Thank you.

Comm. Nieves: What would it take to retain all those employees that we're letting go?

Ms. Gray: A higher tax levy.

Comm. Nieves: What would that tax levy be? Give an estimated number.

Ms. Gray: An estimated 15%, which will be another \$5 million on top of what we are already charging. You would be going from \$79 to \$91 million.

Comm. Ramirez: If we do retain, where would we put these individuals? Mr. Rojas, would we have a classroom for them?

Mr. Rojas: I don't think so. Right now, we are where we need to be as far as personnel and financially for these positions as far as our plans for next year.

Comm. Ramirez: Any additional questions or comments? Thank you very much.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AND HEARING ON THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET

It was moved by Comm. Mendez, 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.

Mr. John McEntee: Good evening, everyone. President Ramirez, members of the Board and Dr. Newell, thank you for the time. Before we address the budget, I want to acknowledge that this is Educator Appreciation Week. Across Paterson our teachers and educational support staff are currently doing the heavy lifting of educating our

children with passion and resilience. It is profoundly unfortunate that any discussion of even one single Paterson educator or even around the State of New Jersey is centered around potential layoffs this week. Our staff is extremely dedicated. We are all looking at the same reality today, the potential loss of PEA hard-working members. These potential layoffs impact lives, careers and the very success of our students in the district. Because of these layoffs, in a few days there will be employees making plans for how they will keep their utilities on, how they will put food on their kitchen tables. I know this is not a position anyone on your side of the table care to be in. It sounds like you are facing an impossible choice, trying to maintain the quality of education while managing a budget that is being hollowed out by forces outside of your direct control. It feels like we're being asked to solve a math problem that has no solution under the current New Jersey legislation. We have to talk about the fiscal cliff that we are all staring at. This is the direct result of the expansion of charter schools, specifically under former Governor Murphy's tail end of his administration. When state law allows a significant portion of our per-pupil funding to be diverted to charter schools without requiring those charter schools to operate under the same fiscal constraints as our district, it creates a systemic imbalance. That imbalance is currently being paid for by our staff but ultimately all of our students. However, I'm not just here to voice a complaint this evening. I'm here to do the hard work along with all of you. My goal is to find a path where we can preserve the integrity of the Paterson Public Schools without hurting those who choose to send their children to charters as well. I'm officially proposing that the PEA and your Board form a joint task force, not to manage the decline of our district, but to aggressively rewrite the narrative at the state level. We need to demand a legislative review of how these funds are diverted. If we approach our partners in Trenton, not as two separate entities, but as a united front representing the students and educators of Paterson, we become impossible to ignore. We don't have to keep fighting over the scraps of a broken formula. We can change the formula itself. Finally, Board members, you hold the gavel, but we hold the community's trust. Let's stop managing this crisis and start solving it together. I am ready to lead this charge alongside you. My question is simple – will you join all of us and make this a top priority of your administration? I really appreciate your time. Have a wonderful evening. Thank you very much.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you, Mr. McEntee, for your leadership and partnership. Madam Superintendent has taken note. We can schedule something for next week so that we can meet with Mr. McEntee. I will appoint a small committee on our end from the Board members and we will have this conversation. Thank you.

Mr. Charles Ferrer: Good evening. Between Comm. Freeman, Comm. McCall and John, you just stole everything that I was going to talk about. I'm going to go in a different direction because it is about making sure that whatever we're doing is equitable and fair across all levels. I want to add a couple of things that also need to be brought to the table. The funding formula needs to be changed in this manner – the first thing that gets taken care of right off the top is our special needs population. After that happens, the money is equitably and fair across the board to Tech, the charters and Paterson Public Schools. They should not get a dime more than what our children get here. Our children are not the have-nots. In that discussion we have to bring in our elected state legislators to make sure that they pass that legislation that will fix this problem. In that charter school number, were Passaic County Tech students counted in? Is that another line item? That's a different line item. It's so important that it's done this way because of those 8,888 students, when you divide that figure it comes out to almost \$22,000 per student in the charter schools. This means after they get theirs, then we have to take for our special needs population who didn't ask for the hand that they we're dealt. This means that our general education might get \$10,000 per student

or less. It's not fair. It's not right. Yes, those kids in the charter schools are Paterson residents for the most part, but we should all be treated the same, equal, not different just because they decided to go there and our students decided to stay here, where they would get a better education. Nothing against charter schools, but the proof is we're educating students much better here. You took what I needed to say, but that's how we have to address this issue. Everybody has to be at the table because the elected officials on the state level have to put forth the legislation. Lastly, is there an estimated factor in this budget for what we are hoping we might get on the federal level? We understand what we're dealing with there. I was just wondering if there's a number in there for that.

Comm. Ramirez: We don't have that, but Ms. Gray will connect with you once she gets that information.

Mr. Ferrer: We were also talking with the congresswoman that hopefully when we flip and change the makeup in November, we can pass legislation that says that number has to come to you earlier because you can't make a true budget without the numbers on the federal level. Thank you very much.

Ms. Helene Anderson: Good evening, everyone. My name is Helene Anderson. I am a born Patersonian and I have been educated through the Paterson Public Schools. Tonight, I want to speak about that 109 that Mr. Rojas was speaking about. We are called ESPs, Educational Support Professionals. We play a key role in ensuring student success and their impact is even stronger when there are clear explanations, values and opportunities for professional growth throughout their careers. ESPs are classified into nine categories according to the National Education Association. They include para-educators, which are IAs and PAs, custodial staff, Allied Health, security, transportation, food services, skilled trade, technical and clerical. ESPs keep our students safe, engaged, healthy and learning but have been underappreciated and underpaid for far too long. The NEA has 10 articles called the NEA and ESP Bill of Rights. I'm going to talk about four of them. The first one is fair compensation. One job should be enough. We should have this room filled, but a lot of people have second jobs because one job isn't enough to maintain financial independence. Number two, recognition and respect. ESPs play a vital role in the educational team in our students' lives inside and outside the classroom. They keep our schools running and our students safe, healthy and ready to learn every day. Number three - a safe and healthy work environment. ESPs deserve to have a safe and healthy workplace that is free of violence, including physical, verbal and emotional abuse, and free of exposure to hazardous materials. Number four - protection from privatization. I know we've all heard this acronym, ESS. This company has been paid a lot of money through you guys for them to come in who are not quite qualified to work with our special services. We need to check on that. We need to be protected from privatization. ESPs should be free of the threats of privatization that risk the stability of the school community, silence the voice of communities, and further undermine the value of services they provide in their jobs. As a proud union member of the PEA, ESPs are the pulsing heartbeat of Paterson Public Schools. Without ESPs, where would we be? Who has our babies' backs? Who will be their support system? Let's face it, these layoffs, right-sizing and repurposing of schools to balance the deficit is just so unfair at the cost of members' livelihoods, pensions, insurance or to protect their families. No one should deserve this. One job should be enough. Thank you.

Ms. Daria Chinni: Good evening, Superintendent, members of the Board, our community and my fellow colleagues. I'm here to discuss the upcoming layoffs to our staff members due to our impending budget deficit. I understand the fact that things are

more expensive these days and it costs a tremendous amount to run a school district. In fact, I can't even fathom the amount of money it takes to run a school district. But do you know what I don't understand? How are we managing our money? How much are we paying these Onspire consultants that come into our buildings and occupy time that can be used for more meaningful tasks that need to be done? How much do we pay annually for the ongoing Onspire training that wastes hours of our time every year? The hiring of more supervisors and retired leaders brought back at exorbitant amounts of money - a very top-heavy district. Do we really need seven assistant superintendents nearing or over \$200,000 a year? It all needs to stop. Here's an idea – let's face the fact that some supervisors shouldn't really be supervisors for numerous reasons. Put them back in the classrooms since they're the experts. Let's start with math and ELA coaches in each school. No travel, extra teacher and student support daily. You can pay them at a teacher's salary. It's a win/win/win for everyone. These are only some of the things I can think of. Are there other corners we can cut? There has to be answers without affecting the livelihoods of our staff members and the education of our students. Life is expensive and if you have kids, add more to the expense sheet. People cannot afford to lose their jobs while we feed money to the corners that seem extra within our schools. As in the past, are you going to RIF approximately 300 positions and then host a job fair to hire more teachers with incentives? What a slap in the face for the staff members that you are going to let go that you write letters to and claim you appreciate what they do. Are the teachers who stay behind going to have to double or triple the work to make up for the teachers we're going to lose? Again, where will that time come from to complete those tasks? Are we planning to increase class sizes which will affect student learning and increase the amount of work we will be asked to complete? I personally think that at a time when it is so difficult to get and keep staff in our district, our administration should do whatever is possible to keep the staff we have. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Anna Pincham: Good evening to Dr. Newell, President Ramirez and all the Board members. My name is Anna Pincham. I am an ESP for the Paterson Public Schools. I just want to share a story with you. When you think about cutting ESPs, IAs and PAs, it's a very bad decision. They make up a lot. We do a lot in the classroom. I travel an hour to get here in the morning. I get up at 4:30 a.m. just to get into Paterson to greet the students and love on them. When Ms. Pincham is not there, my students the next morning are saying, "Where were you? Were you sick?" They need that. They need to be stable. They need to see the same face every day. They need a teacher and IA in the classroom because the teacher can't do everything. ESPs play a strong background. I am a student of Paterson Public Schools. I went to Eastside High School with Joe Clark, and I had veteran teachers that made me into the young woman I am today. I need you to not look at numbers. Of course, we have to look at the budget. When you look at us, don't look at us as a PC number. Don't look at the students as a number. Look at them as human beings and the loss of the teachers that will not see them anymore. Every time you do something different, it changes them too, especially with special education. They need to see the same face every day. I worked with autistic children. They need to see consistency, a routine. When you think about us and you think about removing us, you're removing some valuable people in education. Please think before you do this. This hurts a lot of families and our livelihood. I know well back in 2015 when 400 of us were cut how devastating it was to me. I subbed until I got my job back. When you think about cutting valuable staff, please don't think of us as a number. Think of us as human beings educating the students, loving on the students, making them stable and safe. Thank you for your time.

Mr. Sasha Wolfe: Mr. President and ladies and gentlemen of the Board of Education, my name is Sasha Wolfe. I work for the New Jersey Education Association and I'm proud to represent members of the PEA and the Paterson Food Service Association. I'm not here to take potshots at your unenviable task of trying to decide who the winners and losers are for next year's budget. I am here to challenge you to think more creatively about how we can call back those valuable resources that you lost. I can read between the lines of the budget presentation. There are subtexts in there not being said. How much of lost revenue is going to payments in lieu of taxes for developments in this city? How much revenue is being lost because students are too scared to come to school because they fear raids by ICE? We have increases in state aid, but it's not enough. What are we doing to invite and encourage key state legislators to come to the schools to see the effects of those cuts firsthand? This challenge is given to you not just to put on your lap. NJEA represents 200,000 members throughout the State of New Jersey. We work in Paterson. We have connections in Trenton. We are willing to work with you if you're willing to take up that invitation. Again, I encourage you to think creatively about what we can do to ensure that the children, staff and parents of Paterson get all the revenue they deserve to ensure that there is quality education for all. Thank you.

Mr. Steve Beatty: Good evening, Mr. President, Madam Superintendent and members of the Board. My name is Steve Beatty. I'm a resident of Bridgewater. I'm a proud high school social studies teacher for 25 years. I'm even more proud to be the President of the New Jersey Education Association. I just want to echo the concerns of my friends, colleagues and fellow union members as we know how difficult this is. We're looking at over 92 examples statewide of districts facing similar situations, closing schools, selling schools and firing employees. Our deep concern and frustration is in the elimination of these upwards of 89 jobs. They're not just numbers on a spreadsheet. They're people who support our most vulnerable students. They're counselors who guide children through crises. They're staff who keeps our schools safe and clean. When you cut that, we cannot be allowed to lose the opportunity that every student has in seeing themselves and their educators and finding programs that show them a way forward. Let's be clear what this means in fewer terms. Larger class sizes. I heard you say that there will be a teacher in front of every class. How big will those classes be? I know when I had a class of 30 students it was a big difference between that and 20 students. Reduced access to programs that engage students and keep them connected. Staff that is already pushed to the limit in so many ways is now beyond their breaking point when they must cover larger classes and do more with less. It's not an abstract policy decision. It's going to affect the quality of the education here. We want to work with you to solve these problems. We must also speak about what is underlying here. We know about the pilot programs and the school funding formula. We're here to work with you to push the Governor, as she said, to look at the funding formula in partnership for how we account for rising education costs, out-of-district costs, charter schools and placements that are taking the money out of where it is needed the most. We know that the draining of these resources in our classrooms and schools is causing inexorable damage, and we realize that it's a choice. We make choices, but it's a constrained choice. It's a difficult choice and there are consequences. The community here that we represent and I'm proud to be part of around the state understand that we want to be a part of that and work together pushing for real solutions around healthcare. We can work together. You want to talk about school consolidation? Let's talk about healthcare consolidation so we can really drive down the cost as well. The people here that are facing these layoffs, they're not part of the problem. They are the solution. They are the backbone of this district. The students will feel the impact of their absence. They're not statistics. They are children with dreams and potential and we want to make sure that every child has access to a great quality public education taught by great quality

public educators. I urge you tonight to reconsider the path. We can work together. Fight harder. Demand better. Stand with your educators and students. Once these positions are gone, the damage will not easily be undone and the cost will be paid by those that least can afford it. Thank you.

Ms. Jeanette Sosa: Good evening, Dr. Newell and esteemed Commissioners. I know your task is very difficult. I offer my prayers to all of you. I know this is not an easy decision. Given that, have we considered the fact that there are online platforms that are unnecessary and that cost a lot of money? I don't know if we're in the middle of a contract with them. I would really like to know how much of that is in that budget. I am willing to be a part of this task force. I'm willing to go to Trenton. I'm willing to go to Washington D.C., if necessary, to fight and advocate for our students' rights and equity. When we talk about equity, we have to really talk about the fact that there is a lot going on in the homes of our students. There's a lot going on that some of these teachers have not seen for themselves. I'm here speaking on behalf of so many immigrant parents and students here at Eastside High School and throughout our district. We have more than just these kinds of problems that are affecting the finances and we haven't even uncovered the surface. I'm willing to be a part of this task force. I wanted to also piggyback off Comm. Freeman and Comm. McCall. Thank you so much for saying what you said about the fact that there are 39 bodies, but how many of these are in other positions? How many of these 39 bodies will have worked their fingers to the bone? They have certifications. They are in universities. They're already spending this tuition money and they've been here for over three years. Are we really looking at their efficiency first? Are we really looking at how efficient they are in their jobs? I know teachers that stay until 5:00 p.m. and they don't get paid for that. I know teachers who may get hurt because they stopped a big fight. I don't see any of them suing the district or anybody. I'm here to pray for you guys to make a wise decision. Thank you.

Comm. Ramirez: Please don't speak too close to the mic. I'm getting messages that it's being muffled on the livestream. Thank you.

Ms. Lynn Hazelman: Good evening, Board members. My name is Lynn Hazelman and I've been a teacher in the Paterson Public Schools since 2013. I've seen the district evolve. Before we were as technology-driven as we are today, I was one of the three teachers who helped bring Google into our classrooms. I'm the only one still here. That should say something. What it says to me is that the people who built this district are not the ones being retained or valued. Instead, I'm standing here as someone who contributed to moving this district forward, who was promised compensation for work and was not only denied that compensation but faced actions that felt punitive at the time. The district chose to take out a cost of changing 30,000 emails, making students remember how to spell "@students.patersonschools.org" instead of "ppsstudents.org" rather than honor a commitment to a teacher. That is not about resources. That is about other priorities. It doesn't stop there. We are consistently losing experienced high-impact teachers, people who know our students, built relationships and go above and beyond every single day. Meanwhile, we are hiring less experienced individuals, sometimes at a significantly higher salary. That is just inconsistent and inequitable. Let's be clear about the impact. When you lose experienced teachers, you lose course offerings. You increase class sizes. You reduce opportunities for students. This is not theoretical. This is happening. In 2022, the district introduced bonuses to recruit teachers during a shortage. Now those same teachers are approaching tenure and are discussing cuts that may affect them. What message does that send? That the district recruits in crisis and then discards when convenient? Now let's talk numbers. The Superintendent salary increased from \$287,000 in 2024 to \$293,000 in 2025, a 2% increase. A new teacher earns about \$63,000. A veteran earns about \$105,000. In

2017 to 2025, the salary increase for veteran teachers went from \$96,700 to \$104,000, less than 1% per year. Why is leadership consistently rewarded at a higher rate than our educators who are actually delivering instruction? More importantly, are you going to help us? At this point, the message is clear. Teachers are expected to give more and more, stay longer and do more with less while being valued less. If we want strong schools, we cannot keep operating this way. Respectfully, the district does not have a teacher commitment problem. It has a teacher retention and respect problem. Until that changing, nothing else will change. Thank you.

Ms. Felicia Eason: Good evening. My name is Felicia Eason and I'm currently employed at Alexander Hamilton Academy as an IA lifeguard. Tonight, I'm voicing my concerns and thoughts on the closing of my site Alexander Hamilton Academy, reduction of staff for the 2026-2027 school year, and some observations as a 20 plus-year employee. The closing of AHA functionally eliminates my position, directly affecting the ability of Paterson students to learn to swim, compete in swimming and possibly become lifeguards. My school and Norman S. Weir are the only two schools in the district that offer swimming. This life skill has had an immeasurable positive effect on the city and its residents. I'm sad to see the shortsightedness of this decision, which will alter and may end the ability of the city to staff its schools and teach its residents how to swim and basic water safety. As a city resident and politically interested person, I understand budgets and how they're funded. I do wonder when the decisions are made to cut staff and reorganize schools, does the Board really get a true overview of all the different inputs and how removing one part, while a cost-saver, may become a long-term loss overall? The financial drain of the charter schools and the revolving door back to Paterson Public Schools is also worrisome. AHA was a charter school the district had to take over because of mismanagement. Is there any accountability for the Board to hold charters equally responsible to educate city students? Or are they just leeches that feed off the city's coffers and leave behind what doesn't benefit them? I have been employed by this district through four years no contract, multiple state-provided superintendents, return to local control, various Board members and two major layoff cycles. Never have I see morale among the staff as low as it currently is. No subs, discipline issues, seemingly random mandates, lack of resources, and mismanagement of funds. They recently painted murals, bought new furniture, installed a SWAG room and more in my building over the last two to three years. Now we're set to close. Did anyone find out how much money we just put into something that won't be used as it was designed? Just an estimate, it's in the range of hundreds of thousands of dollars in sound equipment, screens, etc. That could have been used to pay staff or buy supplies. Thank you for your time.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening, Mr. President, Commissioners, Dr. Newell, Dr. Henderson, Attorney Buglione, staff and community. I do want to start by thanking the teachers for being here today and for all that you do. Without teachers, we have no education system. I want to share that appreciation. I did notice in the budget that although enrollment increased, when we look at full enrollment from last year to the current year, we're still downsizing dollars. That leaves us with less per-pupil that we can spend on our children. I've also noticed through my tenure here that this budget does not provide a thorough and efficient education. We are restricted by the money that we get from our local tax levy, the state and the federal government. In my 42 years in Paterson there are only been a handful of years that we have had enough money to do the things that we needed to do for our children. We celebrated the School Funding Reform Act when it was passed. We celebrated Abbott when we won. But we did not see the money. The federal government has never fully funded Title I and has never fully funded IDEA. How do we improve student outcomes given all this? I'm saying this to highlight that I understand that School Board and administrators are

grappling with how to balance the budget with the funds that we are given. I want to invite you, as you have been invited before, to join the PEF, PEA and others in advocacy at the state and federal levels. I looked at the Title dollars that we are getting this year. They're less than last year and last year was still not full-funding. I know that after-school programs are being cut. There are a lot of things in this budget that we're not seeing upfront until we looked more deeply and read between the lines. Please do outreach. We need the funding for Title I and IDEA. Those lines are cut in this current budget as well so we're getting even less than we've gotten before. Please take us up on this offer, either to sit at the tables at the state and federal level, or to talk with our legislators. They have the power to give us the money that we need in order to give our children a rounded education. Finally, I want to thank the business administrator and her staff. This is kind of a thankless job, and I appreciate the work that goes into it because that's how I started my career, in the accounting field. Thank you for this work. I've seen business administrators fired over Paterson budgets because the Board didn't like what was presented. Let's lift that up as well. Please do your best to bring us the funds that we need for a thorough and efficient education. Thank you.

Ms. Marian Watkins: Good evening to everybody. Laying off teachers seems to be your solution for everything. You said every class is going to have a teacher. Last year, my great granddaughter was at School No. 26. She didn't have a science or math teacher. She's in high school and struggles with algebra because she missed a whole year with a teacher. A teacher is not what we need. We need the whole body. We're already dealing with a shortage. Back in the 1980s, my daughter went to School No. 13. At School No. 13 you did not graduate. She was sent to School No. 24. The students at School No. 24 did not accept the students from School No. 13. There were fights and bullying. Back then you didn't have gangs and kids with knives and guns. With all this rearranging, are you really thinking about the impact it's going to have on these students going to a new environment? Our kids are not accepting anymore. I've actually had children come to my house to fight my daughter and I pressed charges. That's back in the 1980s. I hear that everything is for the children, but I'm confused. How can this function be for our children? If you are thinking about children and have to have a layoff, do it the right way, across the board for everybody. The last ones hired are the first ones fired, regardless of the job. All this management we have, I'm sorry, some of them need to go back in the classroom. We don't need all these managers and supervisors. Then you get rid of people that are directly involved with our students. If we're really concerned about the children, let's start making decisions that are really in the best interest of our children. Thank you.

Mr. Charles Wilson: Good evening, everyone. I'm sitting here thinking about the cuts. I'm not thinking about the cuts just for me. I'm thinking about the children I serve in the City of Paterson. They deserve more. They deserve the best. They don't deserve any cuts from anybody in the Board of Education. Our kids need us. I can't tell you how many uniforms and sneakers I've bought. I've fed them. I've had to bring food to school for them. If you cut teachers you're going to cut services. The BA is gone. Where is she? My mother always said, "Watch what they don't tell us." She said every classroom will have a teacher, but they didn't tell us how many students we were going to get. When you put over 30 kids in a classroom, somebody is going to miss something. We went from big classrooms and then they said we needed smaller classroom sizes. It was supposed to help. What's going on? The small classroom sizes went out the door now? What kind of curriculum are we going to get? Where is the money for that? We're closing four schools down. Where is that savings going? Nobody is saying where that money is. Where did the money go for School No. 3? I don't hear anything now. The money is here. It's what we do with the money. I don't think that we should ever use kids for money. Our kids need us. We elect each and

every last one of you to do a job. November will be back. Your job isn't safe all the time. You came to Friends of Education. What kind of friend are you? I'm going to be real because my kids are hurting. Our kids need us. They depend on us. We are parents and counselors. We are food providers and learning providers. We pay for graduation. I've been working for 32 years in Paterson. I've been an instructional assistant for all that time. I don't make a lot of money. I see my kids' needs and they're not going to go lacking. I think you need to re-examine that 39. You keep saying 39 certified, but I have 104. It's 59 certificated, 39 teachers and 15 administration. That's 104 people. We need those people.

Ms. Nicole Fuller: Good evening, Nicole Fuller. I sat here and had something written down that I wanted to say, but I'm just going to speak from the heart. Unfortunately, we understand the crisis that our city, state and entire country is in. The one thing that we have to be mindful of is how we are affecting the children. At the end of the day, we always talk about children first. If you look around Paterson, the children are hurting. You see it in the streets every day. We work with the children. We hear the plight. We hear the pain. We understand the trauma. There's a lot of trauma in this city and the kids bring it to school. Guess who has to bear it? We do and nobody else - the people who are in the classrooms providing instruction to the best of our ability with a whole lot of resources, supposedly. In actuality, a lot of the stuff that we're using is not beneficial. At some point, when do we look at the whole picture? When do we educate the whole child? If anybody gets an email from me, it always says I'm committed to educating the whole child. Not a piece of the child, but the social and emotional. Like they say, we're buying kids food. I have a little girl that doesn't have clean underclothes. Do you know that? Probably not, but we do. She did not have a coat. She was freezing. Who got her a coat? We did. These are the people you're saying you don't need? Really? If you don't need us then who do you need? We're the warriors. We're on the battlefield. We're feeling this pain. We're going to the bathroom trying to fight back the tears and dealing with children who are coming to school with such hurt. When you guys make these decisions, don't exclude us. Bring us to the table. We are the ones that know what's going on. We know how these children are affected and what we're dealing with. No one wants to lose a job, but some of the fat needs to be cut and it should not be cut on the backs of us or our students.

Ms. Lynn Schweighardt: Good evening. I want to thank everybody who spoke because I agree with everything. I'm looking at the numbers - 39 teachers and 15 administrators. On one of the slides they presented they were talking about the achievements of our students. Some of them have CPR, EMT and other wonderful achievements. It's not the administrators that are helping those students achieve that. It's the teachers in the classroom and the IAs that work with them. Personally, I really think that it should be 39 administrators being let go and if we have to, 15 teachers. Not the way they're doing it. Recently I know that an assistant superintendent left, I'm not sure why, and then they replaced her. You're closing four schools. Why did we need another assistant superintendent? The district is so top-heavy. Again, all of these administrators are not teaching the children. They are not in the classroom with them every single day knowing about their difficulties and life stories. They just walk around the building and complain that we're wearing jeans or flip flops. Concentrate on the students. We need administrators coming and saying we're doing a great job, the kids are showing up, they respect you and talk to you. It's really hard to get respect because in the world we're living in now that doesn't exist. You say teachers aren't needed but the point of a school system is to educate. The teachers are the ones doing the educating, not the administrators. Of the 39 teachers being let go, how many are special education? I know for a fact that there are classes of special education students in the district who have not had a teacher this entire year. They've had a sub. There is

no special education teacher. When it's said that every classroom will have a teacher, let's clarify that. Are they just having a body? To be a sub you do not need a certification. You need 30 college credits. Are they trained? Do they know the subject material? I worked at School No. 21 for 13 years. I speak Spanish. I don't look it, but I'm fluent. We've had teachers cover bilingual classes where the kids don't speak a word of English. Guess what? The teachers don't speak a word of Spanish. You put a non-special education teacher in a classroom with special education kids and it's a waste of space, time and money. They don't know how to handle special needs children. I've worked with them. I have a special needs grandson. You need a special type of person, not just a sub. We need a teacher in every classroom. We need a certified teacher that is certified to teach that material. Let's get rid of some of this top-heaviness where they do nothing to actually educate the students, which is what we're all about. Thank you.

Ms. Michele Kinchin: Good evening. My name is Michele Kinchin. I'm a resident and homeowner in Paterson. I'm a taxpayer and educator who is deeply invested in the future of our city. I work here. I worship here. I shop here. I see our children at community events. I tutor them without pay because I see the need. But here I am along with my colleagues, facing the possibility of being unemployed. What are we doing? As I reflect on that question, my response is we are failing our children. It is not their fault that the adults responsible for their education are failing them because of the decisions that we are making. Here we are cutting 200 employees from the educational system, most of whom are probably educators who play a major role in their academic and personal lives. Here we are now with overcrowded classrooms relying on substitute teachers to fill in where there are no permanent educators. How can we expect our students to receive the best education possible under these conditions? With these cuts, this current situation will not improve. It will only get worse. I pray you are strategizing for a plan that will make things better. When and if you do, please share it. Our students, educators and community deserve transparency and reassurance. Before making drastic changes in our schools, I urge you to ask yourself one question – will this benefit our children? If the answer is no, then it's your responsibility to find a solution. Our children are suffering. They are being failed by adults who are supposed to have their best interest and invest in their future. When reading the school district profile, it states that the district is committed to preparing students for post-secondary education and careers. How committed are you when you are cutting the very jobs that will be preparing our students? We as educators are preparing our students to be productive citizens in this world. Our children are our future and we have an obligation to prepare them for a better tomorrow. Thank you.

Ms. Maxine Hamett: Good afternoon, everyone. It's my first time here before the Board of Education. I've heard stories and I have my speech. I came up through the ranks. I was a substitute and then I became an IA two years ago. Now I got my certification for teaching. I asked myself what I wanted to do. I emailed Mr. Rojas and said I have a vested interest in Paterson, and I want a job here as a teacher because I want us to win. That's the reason I chose Paterson. Paterson didn't choose me. I chose Paterson. When they said 39 people would be laid off, some people were relieved it's not 200. But I'm still worried about my job because it's impacting me and the kids that are here. I was in that classroom when the certified teacher wasn't there. I provided that stability for those kids in that classroom. I'm a single mother. It not only impacted the students when you're going to lay off 39 people. It's last in and first out. I've been laid off in the private sector so many times. It's like I'm numb to it. This affected me because I chose to be here and work in this district because I want us to win. Some students who needed speech therapy didn't have it because we made cutbacks. Now we're cutting back further into that, depriving these students. What is the workforce that

we're going to look forward to in 10 or 20 years? We're still going to be a part of that statistic. We're still going to be marginalized. If we do not take stock of it right now, we're going to find out the charter schools are going to get more and more funds. I didn't believe in the public school system at one point. I have to be honest. When I took stock and looked at the curriculum, I said this is a perfect curriculum. I took my daughter out of private school and put her into a public school. If I'm working in it, I believe in it. It has worked for her. She is like all the other students here in Paterson. When you have a child who's crying for food, you can't throw away the breakfast because you know this is what they will have to eat in the night. You're cutting 39? Think about the lasting impact of it.

Ms. Kimberly Reardon: Hi, my name is Kimberly Reardon. I've been listening to everybody here tonight and they've all raised excellent points. Something that I've always had a concern about is why the higher-ups get bonuses for our hard work. Why are assistant superintendents and everybody else getting bonuses when it's what we're doing in the classroom? Where is our bonus? If you don't want to give us a bonus, you shouldn't take a bonus. Maybe hold that money for next year's budget and we won't be in such a deficit. That concerns me. I buy 1,000 pencils every year. I buy 500 erasers. I buy 100 notebooks. I buy 100 pocket folders for my students. I will never hear a child say they couldn't do their work because they didn't have a pencil. Here is your pencil. I don't get mad or upset. You need a pencil? Come get it from me. It's all out of my own pocket, a single mom living over an hour away because I can't afford rent around here at all. I literally live on the border of Pennsylvania and New York. It's an hour and twenty minutes in every morning. It's exhausting. I come in here and I work my hardest. I love my kids. My security guard outside my room who is not a Paterson Public Schools security guard went halvesies with me on \$300 for clothes for two of our kids this Christmas because they needed clothes. They came in dirty every day. The clothes were old and torn. I can't tell you how much I've shelled out of my pocket for my students. I don't complain about it, but I'd like to make you aware of it. I don't think anyone up here is aware of how much money we shell out every single day on top of working unpaid until 5:00 at night and weekends. Then we have to hear we get two months off. Let's talk about the curriculum being rewritten every year. Why are we paying someone to rewrite the curriculum and change the order of what we already do? So we can justify giving someone a job in the summer? It makes no sense. We lost grant money in my school in 2026 because our Title I program didn't get approved and put through the minutes for over three months because of a department here at 90 Delaware Avenue that didn't do their job. My understanding is the person who was in charge of it retired and nobody in that department could pick up that person's slack. We lost grant money. If you don't use the grant money this year, you don't get it next year. There are so many things wrong. That new assistant superintendent that was hired, that's the salary for two seasoned teachers. That's the salary for four IAs. We don't need it. Cut the fat at the top, please.

Mr. Angel Merchan: My name is Angel Merchan. I live at 46-48 16th Avenue. I used to be at AHA and then I went to PCTI. When I was much younger, I was moving on to fourth grade. I went to School No. 6 because I couldn't go to AHA, which is where I originally wanted to go. During that time, I didn't get accustomed to it. I felt that there was nobody for me. One day I had a situation where one of my classmates grabbed me around the necktie and choked me. I almost fainted and bumped against the closet, and nobody did anything for me. My mom noticed a red mark around my neck. We were desperate to get help but nobody from the district helped us. It was really hard. Nobody from the investigation could help us. We went to the district, and nobody there even helped us. I can't remember her name, but one superintendent helped us and she

got me to AHA. It was great at AHA because I felt safe. I felt like I found a community there and great teachers who actually taught me. I apologize if I'm sobbing right now.

Comm. Ramirez: That's okay. Take your time.

Mr. Merchan: I find it disrespectful to every teacher and student here who went to AHA. To feel genuine fear going to a different school where they might suffer a similar situation or worse, does that not cross your mind? They might still deal with it, even in sophomore year. I had to go to PCTI to get therapy for that. Does that cross your mind? Or it doesn't? Teachers are so helpful. They mean a lot to me. Seeing their jobs at risk because of your improper spending is very disappointing. I want you guys to think about that. Thank you.

Mr. Marcos Merchan: I feel deeply saddened by the decisions you are currently making, decisions I simply do not understand. However, I would like to know why you are granting privileges to people who are not from this district, people who live on the streets selling drugs and doing criminal things, and people who come merely to occupy a space within our city's facilities. I am referring especially to the items on your agenda regarding closing of schools in order to open shelters. That's incredible. How can you close a school and open shelters? For what reasons? This leaves the destiny and future of our most valuable children at the mercy of an uncertain fate. Yet, if it is still possible, if you will seize the opportunity to give our children a chance, it will be the most beautiful experience we could witness in Paterson. Regarding the facilities that have already been targeted by this plan, I beg you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ our God Almighty, that you will reconsider your stance and halt this decision. Otherwise, opportunities for our youth will become increasingly scarce. Regrettably, our politicians and leaders who are running for Mayor of Paterson have failed to mention education. They never mention education. What they mention is only garbage and other things. They never mention our education. What's going on? I think there's some business going on with the garbage in Paterson. I don't know. What happened? Education is the very cornerstone and bulwark of truth. A quality of education should be one of the most critical pillars addressed in this work plan for Paterson. I sincerely hope that you will not inflict further harm upon the many parents and teachers who depend on this job. These are their jobs. This is their future. They have to feed their families. Please reconsider. Paterson has enough taxpayers. We have enough money, not only to pay teachers, but to open other facilities for our education and the future of our kids. Thank you very much.

It was moved by Comm. McCall, 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.

RESOLUTIONS FOR A VOTE:

Resolution No. 1

WHEREAS, the Superintendent of Schools submitted Paterson Public Schools' FY2026-2027, preliminary budget to the Passaic County Executive County Superintendent of Schools for review and approval on March 27, 2026; and the FY2026-2027 budget was approved by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools on April 21, 2026; and

WHEREAS, the 2026-2027 final budget supports the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow" Goal 3: Ensure Operational Effectiveness and

Fiscal Stability – where we will strengthen leadership practices, improve operational efficiency, and maintain financial stability to support student learning and growth; and

WHEREAS, the final budget was advertised in the legal section of the Herald News on April 27, 2026, and presented to the public during a public hearing held at 90 Delaware Avenue, Paterson, NJ, on May 4, 2026, at 6pm.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education adopt the FY2026-2027 final budget submitted by Dr. Laurienne W. Newell, Superintendent of Schools; which reflects an increase in the local tax levy that includes the use of a CAP adjustment for increased healthcare costs in the amount of \$4,290,737, and the use of available Banked Cap in the amount of \$514,977 to support the General Fund as reflected herein

	2025-2026 Pre-Budget	1-Feb YTD Actuals	2026-2027 Budget			
Maximum Travel	\$312,751	\$ 68,458	\$350,000			
General	Budget Fund		Local	Tax	Levy	included Revenue
Local Sources	\$ 93,686,599	\$			85,868,599	
State Sources	\$ 661,704,220	\$				
Federal Sources	\$ 439,492	\$				
Total General Fund	\$ 755,830,311	\$			85,686,599	
Special Revenue Fund (not of operating budget transfers)			Local	Tax	Levy	included
Local Sources	\$ 703,439					
State Sources	\$ 60,373,754					
Federal Aid	\$ 30,230,418					
Transfer	from	Operational				Fund:
Pre-K Special Education	\$ 4,154,226					
Total Special Revenue Fund	\$ 95,461,837					
Debt Service – Fund 40	Local	Tax		Levy		included
Local Sources	\$ 605,250	\$			605,250	
Grand Total Revenues	\$ 851,897,398	\$			86,291,849	

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent of Schools hereby fixes and determines that the amount of money necessary to be appropriated for use in the public schools for the 2026-2027 School Year is \$851,897,398 of which \$86,291,849 is the local tax levy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Superintendent of Schools will authorize the reallocations and modifications needed to present a balanced FY2026-2027 budget with an adequate amount of funds to provide for a thorough and efficient education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Superintendent of Schools shall hereby submit to the Commissioner of Education of the State of New Jersey the budget statement

certification, form A4F (Certification and Report of School Taxes, 2026-2027 School Year) and supporting documentation as required by statute and code; and

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

It was moved by Comm. Simmons, seconded by Comm. Rashid that Resolution No. 1 be adopted. On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Freeman: Pass.

Comm. McCall: Pass.

Comm. Mendez: Pass.

Comm. Nieves: Pass.

Comm. Rashid: Pass.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Simmons: No.

Comm. Freeman: These decisions are some of the hardest decisions that we have to make. I hear everyone out there. When we're elected, we're elected to do things fiscally responsibly. No one needs to lose their job and I understand that. If we don't do what we have to responsibly, I need for you to tell me what you want me to do. How do you want me to fix it? The money is not here. We hear the chatter in the community about corruption and mismanagement of money. Come here and sit and read that budget page by page. I'm challenging you to come and read the budget page by page. You will see where the money is going. In the beginning of this, our BA told you the bulk of the budget is salaries and health insurance. We have to fight. I agree with John. I fought so many times down in Trenton for full funding and so people wouldn't get laid off. I remember when the 200 teachers were laid off because I was in Trenton fighting so that we could get the money. If Trenton is not releasing the money, to ask me to not vote for this is not responsible. It has nothing to do with me wanting people to be laid off. That's not what I want. The way this country is moving right now nobody can afford to be without a job. One person who would know that is me. I sit here and I volunteer. Since everybody thinks that I don't know what goes on in the schools, I beg to differ because I've worked in the school system. I've worked at Eastside and School No. 12. Just like you went into your pockets for children, so have I several times, but that's neither here nor there. If it's in your heart, you're going to do it regardless. Anybody who would know how it feels to be without work is me. I'm about to be transparent as possible so that you'll understand my stance. I have not received one dime of money, no currency, since April 2024. I guess you ask how I'm doing it. God provides for me. I'm not saying that for pity because I don't want your pity. I want you to understand that when you elected me here, you elected me to do what's right and fair. I'm not about to say let's raise these taxes 14%. Absolutely not! In doing so, this saves jobs. It also puts hardship on homeowners and the elderly. They are tapped out and I do understand that. I do understand where you're coming from. Please don't ever think that I don't understand because I've been where you are. I'm in it right now. It's only by the grace of God that I'm still here and still able to do the things that I do. I don't take what I do lightly and I don't want you to think that I do. We talk about the school closings and the phasing out. I'm affected too because my granddaughter is affected and I'm going to keep reminding people of that. You think because my granddaughter is

affected that I'm going to say let's not close these schools. It's the right thing to do right now where we are. The money is not coming. Is the state going to give us the money? We have no idea. They're still transitioning. We have to understand. I invite you all here to come and look at the budget. It's going to take you almost all day because you have to go page by page and then you will get a full understanding. Then you have people in the community saying we have money and we're just using it wrong. Then they talk about the administrators that are in this building. Some administrators are principals right now. Some are assistant superintendents. Some are supervisors and things of that nature. They came up as substitutes when I worked at Eastside High School. You cannot take away what they have done to get where they are and deserve that salary. You can't take that away from them. Are we low paid? Do we offer our teachers higher salaries? No, and we need to work that. We have to work on that because we are losing teachers because we don't pay like the others pay. What money are the others getting that we are not getting? Like John said, we have to come to the table together. We have to do this together and collectively. We have to put pressure on our legislators in Trenton, state and federal. You have to be willing to go all the way to Washington because that's where the major cuts are coming from and there's absolutely nothing we can do. I struggle to get healthcare because of my underlining conditions. I'm going to say this because I don't want anybody listening out in the public or sitting right here to think that Comm. Freeman does not care. I care about the kids. I've been about the kids. I'm going to always be about the kids. Regardless of how you think or feel about me, it is not going to change the things that I do. Please, when I say this understand it's a hard decision, but we have to make hard decisions. I do hope that as Mr. Rojas said, the people who are going to be let go will be the first ones called back. I'm going to pay attention to that very carefully. When you say it, you have to mean it. The fiscally responsible thing for me to do tonight is to vote yes. This budget has to be passed by the 14th. If we don't pass it, it's going to go to the County Superintendent, and she can do as she pleases with it. She can cut whatever she wants. She doesn't have to ask us another time. I need you to understand that I'm voting yes because it is the fiscally responsible thing to do. It's one of the hardest things that I'm doing tonight. I understand how it feels to be without a job. I truly understand. It's by the grace of God that there's a roof over my head and my children have food to eat. This is not an easy task for me. Please don't take it lightly or make it seem as if I don't care because I do. I do understand. Tonight, my vote is yes.

Comm. McCall: I passed because I needed to find out what it would take to keep everyone. To be a responsible individual who was elected by the people, I cannot put a 14% or 15% cap on a tax levy for the homeowners and individuals here. Cheryl, my vote is yes. I wish that this percentage could be lower, but unfortunately, we are faced with a dilemma throughout this entire state. I think that at this point this is the best that we can do for this city and for our children. I will hold this administration responsible with bringing back our teachers, if it's possible. I also will hold you responsible for what you do with the budget from this point on. We cannot spend money carelessly. Programs and different things that come across our desk, we cannot say yes to everything. I think it has to be looked at. There are some things that we've wasted money on. The swim instructor just messed me up. She really got to me about some of the things that we have approved in this district and hundreds of thousands of dollars that we've spent. My eyes will be very open to everything that comes across a vote. Don't be upset with me, Paterson, if my vote is no on things that in the past might have been okay. Every dollar and cent has to be accounted for. My vote is yes.

Comm. Mendez: First, I'd like to thank everybody for coming out. I'd like to thank the administration as well as my colleagues for giving me bits and pieces of information to tie the entire picture up for me. From what I'm seeing here, we're conflicted. Our hands

are very much tied. Once again, I don't hold it against my colleagues if you voted one way or the other. At the end of the day, we're all making a very tough decision for our community. On one end there is about \$5 million to recoup in order to keep everybody. With the 8% increase on the tax levy, we are increasing the average escrow account by \$143 a month. However, on the other end I've been very conflicted with the middle school model ever since the beginning. I've been very conflicted on the changes happening in this district. With respect to my colleagues in the administration, I can't conscientiously vote yes on something like this. As of now, Paterson, my vote is no. Thank you.

Comm. Nieves: John, I understand you're looking for a partnership. I think it's time to take the fight down to Trenton. I'm willing to partner up with you even if I have to rent a couple of 52-passenger vans or buses. That crowd that was out there tonight, we need to bring the same crowd down to Trenton. Bring the salsa. Bring the band. Bring everybody. Make some noise. Cause some traffic issues. We need to bring that fight to Trenton. At this time, I have to be responsible and vote yes on this.

Comm. Rashid: First of all, I want to thank everyone who came here tonight. I was a college teacher in my country. I ran the election to improve our city for the next generation. I have two daughters. I have a long journey in the public schools. I understand your pain. To lose a job is not easy. For all of us sitting here, the people gave us the mandate to improve the education for the next generation in our town. We serve as volunteers. I have a five-year-old granddaughter. When I was coming here, she asked me in Bangla, "Where are you going? Please play with me." But I am here. We understand why we are here, but we need to have some kind of tough decisions. If we have a good enough flow of money, then we can keep our teachers. Those 39 teachers are the backbone of our town. I know. Don't think we are making an unfair decision. If you were in our shoes, then you would understand what kind of tough decision this is. Tonight, my vote is yes.

Comm. Ramirez: I want to thank my colleagues for sharing something very personal. This is not easy. As Comm. Rashid said, we're volunteers. We don't get paid for this. Every week and month we attend meetings upon meetings in order to have the facts and make these decisions. When this conversation started, it was over 200 teachers. I remember what happened when we last RIF'd hundreds of teachers. We've never recuperated. We can't do that again. Everyone who knows me knows I'm extremely against raising taxes on the homeowners of this city. There are only 23,000 of us left, myself included. I'm paying into this. At 24 years old I decided to buy my house in Paterson and not leave. Right after grad school I decided to invest in this community. Being here is an investment in this community. We're one of 13 states that don't pay their School Board. I'm not asking for money. I don't want us to be paid. In the end, I want to know that I'm giving back to my community by serving here, by taking insults, by being yelled at, at the supermarket. I'm serving this community. You were not at the supermarket, but you've been at other places and I appreciate you. All jokes aside, this is difficult. We don't want anybody to lose their jobs. We've all been on that end, I believe. After Covid, I ended up being home for a year. It's not easy. It doesn't feel good. But when you sit here and you have to go into those meetings and you see the real breakdown of these numbers, as Comm. Freeman pointed out, the incredibly large part of our budget goes to salaries, insurance and charters. I hope they don't come after me, but it's the truth. The state increases our aid by \$37 million and \$28 million goes out to the charters right away. It's not easy. Superintendent, thank you. I know you've taken a beating. I know people come here to the mic and call out your salary. Everybody deserves to earn a living and when you get a PhD like this woman right here and you've put in the work, you deserve to earn a living. Superintendents throughout

the state make about the same amount of money. There are people in smaller districts who make way more, but very few have the responsibilities and challenges of Paterson Public Schools. Thank you, Madam Superintendent, because I know it's taken a toll but you're still here. Thank you to your entire team, June, Luis, Joanna, all the assistant superintendents and Cheryl, the wind beneath my wings. To everyone who sits in this building and feels unappreciated and has been attacked throughout this process, I'm sorry, but I thank you. I'm sorry for the attacks. Sometimes we take it to heart, but I know you're doing your best. I've been a product of Paterson Public Schools from pre-k at School No. 14 all the way to graduating from School No. 3, which broke my heart to have to close. Every time I look at my diploma, it hurts me. Every time I drive past Main Street and I see that it's an empty building, it hurts me. I live here. I know the struggle. I'm still in contact with my grammar school teachers. You guys are phenomenal. You guys shaped who I am. My parents didn't have to tell me. I knew I had to go to college. Why? Because of the teachers at Paterson Public Schools. If anyone remembers, I was a part of the Future Teachers Club. I tutored from fifth grade through the eighth grade. I tutored the kids in first grade. Some of them are supervisors at our high schools today. I don't want you to think that we take it for granted and we don't care about you. That's why we fought so that this number today wasn't 200 positions in the classroom. Thank you. My vote is 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

Resolution No. 2

WHEREAS, the Board of Education of the City of Paterson adopts an annual operating budget funded in part by local tax revenues; and

WHEREAS, the Paterson Public Schools' approved budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year includes \$85,686,599 in Fund 10 (General Fund) and \$605,250 in Fund 40 (Debt Service Fund), resulting in a total local tax levy of \$86,291,849; and

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

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 54:4-75, the municipality is required to remit school tax proceeds to the Board Secretary according to statutory timelines; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education is required to submit a formal request to the City of Paterson setting forth the schedule of payments for local school taxes for the 2026-2027 fiscal year;

WHEREAS, that the municipality shall remit to the Board Secretary, within forty (40) days after the beginning of the school year, twenty percent (20%) of the moneys due from school taxes; and

BE IT RESOLVED, that thereafter, and prior to the last day of the school year, the balance of money due for school purposes shall be paid in such amounts as may be requested by the Board of Education, with each such payment to be made within thirty (30) days of the request; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Education of the City of Paterson hereby approves the following school tax payment schedule for Fiscal Year 2026-2027, to be submitted to the City of Paterson:

School Tax Payment Schedule

- Due August 15, 2026 (20%) \$17,258,370

- Due on the 5th of each month for ten (10) months
(September 2026 through June 2027 - \$6,903,347.90) \$69,033,479

TOTAL GENERAL FUND LOCAL TAX LEVY \$86,291,849

It was moved by Comm. Mendez, seconded by Comm. Rosado that Resolution No. 2 be adopted. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. 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

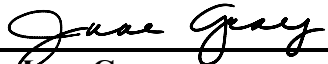
- Self

- Paterson Police Department
- Paterson Policing

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.



Ms. June Gray
Business Administrator/Board Secretary