

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

September 14, 2026 – 5:40 p.m.  
Remote Meeting (via Zoom)

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. Alex Mendez  
Comm. Hector Nieves

Comm. Mohammed Rashid  
Comm. Kenneth Simmons  
Comm. Della Wilder, Vice President

Absent:

Comm. Kenneth Rosado  
Comm. Corey Teague

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

Comm. Ramirez 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  
September 14, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.  
Remote  
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.

Dr. Newell: Good evening, everyone. Tonight, we will be doing a presentation on the proposed goals for School Year 2026-2027.

**GOAL SETTING SESSION**

Dr. Newell: The purpose of the goals is to really frame how we will be moving forward as a district. The baseline, everything that we do, is to really improve our outcomes for

students. We have four measures that we normally look at. We have a focus where we prioritize the most important needs of our students and our schools. Then we look for alignment. We know that things must be aligned between leadership, the resources that we have, and the initiatives that we have defined. Next, we have to figure out how we will be measuring what we have put in place throughout the year. Finally, the fourth is really accountability to update and share our progress and the responsibility with our students, families, and larger community. This is something that is done throughout the year. The purpose and development of district goals, as defined by the New Jersey School Boards Association, is to provide a foundation for a myriad of things, including our policy development, some of the programs, the evaluation of the Superintendent, and on and on. Additionally, we also have something that has been carved out, which is for the goal framework. That includes what the district goals are and that is concurrent with what the School Boards Association has outlined as a part of the foundation, the Board goals, the personal goals of the Chief School Administrator, and finally merit goals, which are always optional. Not everyone does merit goals. One of the things I want to do is a quick overview of the key district accomplishments from July 1, 2023, the start of my tenure, to present. You all received an additional packet, a 14-page packet, which is a full packet of all the accomplishments that have been seen over the last three years. To highlight some of the accomplishments, we have been focusing on academic excellence and really offering more opportunities to our students. To drill down a little bit further, we can look at our proficiency rates. We see that we have increased from 2024 to 2026 for NJGPA, our Graduate Proficiency Assessment for the English language arts component. For the math for our high schoolers, we have increased from 11% in 2024 to 29% in 2026. So, we have really gone up quite a bit from 11% to 29%, 17 points. Finally, for our NJSLA, we see that we have also been outperforming what the State has provided and over the years I have been updating you with how we have been doing in terms of our assessments and what our student achievement numbers are. In terms of our AP exams, we are also pushing to advance what our students are learning and really just having them be prepared when they leave Paterson Public Schools. As you can see, we have increased from 90 to 185 Seal of Biliteracy recipients from 2023 to what we just saw at the end of June during graduation. We have also increased the percentage of our students who go to STEAM symposiums. We know that it is key and critical for them to have that exposure while they are here in the district and so we have also been very intentional about making sure our students have more access, and we have also included an increase in our Maker Spaces across the district. In terms of college and career readiness, we know that it's college, career and whole child support. We want to make sure that when our students leave Paterson Public Schools, they have gained stronger career pathways, we have provided them with enhanced industry experience, and really just as much access as possible to academic and wellness supports. In terms of college and career readiness, we see that we have increased our career and technical education pathways and they span healthcare, engineering, education, business trades and more. We also have over 300 students who have completed and gotten their industry credentials. I think we saw during one of our activities where we honored our students that they have received their certificates and licenses in culinary arts, construction, public safety, healthcare, etc. We also have three college credit pathways, including PCC. As you know, we have graduated some students before they even graduate with their high school diploma. We have the Aspiring Educators Partnership with William Paterson University, which is really an awesome program if you ever get an opportunity to sit in and see some of the work that they are doing. In terms of our graduation and student supports, our graduation rate, as Chief Academic Officer reported in our prior Board meeting, has increased from 75.2% to 76.7% and we have now gone up for this year. The scores came in very recently as reported to 77.5%. We see that the trajectory is moving forward and we are really just making sure our kids are ready to graduate and be

successful members of society, trade, college, career or whatever they choose to do. Finally, our Focus 21 participation, as you know we are 21<sup>st</sup> Century grant and we have full-service community schools. We have increased our enrollment in those activities and we have also increased enrollment in our healthcare and really expanded across our community sites. I wanted to just address our professional growth and community engagement. Regarding educator development, we really have been pushing for our educators to enhance their skills. We now have 52 teachers who have participated in the New Jersey Climate Change Collaborative. We have 20 teachers who completed the Graduate Credit Cohort in Gifted Education. As you know, we are expanding the scholars' program across the district, and we have 5 ELA supervisors who have earned their trainer certification. That is really critical because it expands their capacity to provide professional literacy development within the district, so they can really do train-the-trainer model. Additionally, in terms of getting the word out, and that is something that really has been a focus of the Board, we are making sure that we are getting as much information out there as much as possible. We do understand that our community must be informed and so we have increased our newsletter editions from 11 to 37, so we have now gone up by 26 in terms of the editions. We also have more annual press releases overtime, going up from 18 to 35. In terms of our Instagram following, kudos to the team because on average our monthly views have now exceeded approximately 841,000 views. The next few slides will be really drilling down into what the 2025-2026 goals are and then we will be looking at the Board's submissions of their ideas for goals and how these were synthesized into proposed 2026-2027 goals.

#### **A. District Goals**

Dr. Newell: The three goals, as you recall, were the Five-Year Strategic Plan, the Middle School Model continuation, and the Districtwide Data Dashboard. The Five-Year Strategic Plan was entitled Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow. This was based on a lot of stakeholder input and all of it was synthesized into measurable priorities, we have action plans, and we have been implementing. The Middle School Model, as you know, has been really just doing the cohort model pre-k-5 or k-5 and then 6-8 structure. The District Data Dashboard, we did the pilot where we installed our infrastructure and the displays across the 9 high schools. One of the things we want to do is really make sure that using these three goals from 2025-2026, the objective was to make sure that we were strengthening our student pathways, providing more transparency, efficiency and ultimately equity. Everything that has been done at this point has been making sure that all of these are synthesized. A completed strategic plan has been presented, the phase of the Middle School Model has been presented, and then the Districtwide Data Dashboard as well. The next few slides will be a summary of the recommendations from the Board of Education. In reviewing what was submitted by the Board members, there were quite a few that were overlapping and so I will just go through them and then we can talk about pulling from that for the district goals for 2026-2027. The Board feedback on the 2026-2027 priorities as submitted by Board Commissioners was school safety and security, maintaining safe, welcoming schools, complete inspections and corrective work while monitoring incidents, school climate and urgent work orders. There were additional themes that were raised by Board members and I will get into that in a little bit, but the second was graduation and achievement, so increasing and improving student performance and graduation outcomes, expand literacy and after school opportunities, with added support for students who are struggling. The third one, and there were definitely some similar themes across everyone, is chronic absenteeism. Reduce chronic absenteeism through school targets and tiered interventions. Address the barriers and report progress by school and student group. This is something that we have been looking at because it is very concerning. Our chronic absenteeism is

over 30% so approximately one third of our students are considered chronically absent. Additional themes as I mentioned that were brought up by Board members also tie in with the three overarching themes – student wellness and supports, counselor and social worker capacity, mental health services and tiered systems of supports, family engagement and enrichment, clear family communication, meaningful input, and expanded after school programs, oversight and accountability, a consistent scorecard with baselines, targets, responsible leaders, barriers, and corrective actions. These all are interconnected and they feed into the three overarching Board priorities that were provided by the Board Commissioners. The Board feedback informed the development of the proposed district goals that I will go into in the next slide. The Board district goals established a focused direction. They focus on continue progress and student success, and that is what is our north star, making sure that we are putting in place goals that will assist, promote, push, encourage and ultimately provide student success. Proposed goal number one is to enhance school safety and security for students and staff. Why does this matter? This was something that was a consistent theme among Board Commissioners. Students learn best and staff perform most effectively in schools where they feel protected, supported and prepared. What is the district focus? To strengthen prevention, emergency preparedness, access controls, communication and consistent response practices across the district. What is the intended result? The intended result is to really have a safer, more orderly learning environment with fewer disruptions and stronger confidence among our students, our staff, our families and our larger community. Proposed goal two, as I mentioned we have been incrementally increasing our graduation rate. We were at 72.5% and we are up to 77.5%. So, the proposed goal number two is to increase the graduation rate. We do know that a diploma represents successful completion of the district's academic program and expands access to college, training, and employment. What is our district focus? It is to monitor progress towards credits and graduation requirements, identify students who are off track, and coordinate timely academic and counseling support. The intended result is for more students to complete high school prepared to pursue a productive next step, whatever that next step is - if it's college, a trade, career, work, or the military. The third proposed goal is to reduce chronic absenteeism. Why does this matter? We know that regular attendance keeps students connected to instruction, to trusted adults, and to the services and supports that they need. When we have students in front of us, we can make sure that if they are in any type of need, we are here, we see them, and we can provide that support. We can keep track of their progress. Our district focus is to really use the attendance information to identify patterns early, engage our families, and address any barriers that come up that prevent our students from coming to school on a regular basis. Finally, our intended result is fewer students miss significant instructional time, it provides stronger achievement, it provides stronger connectedness, and it also leads to increased graduation outcomes. The next steps from adoption to implementation and accountability are (1) the Board considers the proposed district goals, which have been sent over; (2) action plans are developed and we define the strategies, who is responsible, the timelines, and the measures of success; (3) and finally we provide progress updates. We report implementation progress, key milestones, and outcomes. Moving forward, if adopted by the Board of Education, the next step would be to develop detailed action plans outlining the strategies, the responsibilities, the timelines, and measures of success for each goal. As in previous years, the district will provide the Board with periodic updates on implementation progress, key milestones and any outcomes throughout the school year. At this point, I would welcome any discussion and feedback on what has been presented.

Comm. Ramirez: Would any Board members like to comment or ask questions?

Comm. Wilder: I do have a question concerning the chronic absenteeism or lateness. Do we see any of that being part of the middle school model where kids are taking their younger siblings to school, or is this just overall lateness?

Dr. Newell: Lateness or not showing up at all?

Comm. Wilder: The lateness.

Dr. Newell: We can definitely track that as a part of this work. I think that's also something that we capture so that can absolutely be tracked.

Comm. Wilder: One other thing about the chronic absenteeism is that I just want to make sure that our parent and community engagement department is really helping us in that avenue. Sometimes we know that not every parent is home and I just want to make sure we're doing our part by making sure parents are aware that their children are not there. I know we don't have truancy officers, do we?

Dr. Newell: Yes, we do.

Comm. Wilder: How are they going to play a part in this process?

Dr. Newell: We have an attendance team and they are deployed. We have folks who are at the schools. We also send messages. There are three different tiers. Tier I is 1-4 absences, Tier II is 5-9, and Tier III is 10 plus. The system auto generates RoboCalls, letters are sent, but there is also the Get Your 180, which is an attendance campaign that the attendance department is working on. Family and community engagement is also working with the attendance department just to make sure that parents understand that every day the student needs to be in school. The Get Your 180 campaign you will see because that is something that is being pushed. We also have what are called ARC Committees, our attendance teams, and they get together and come up with initiatives. These are staff members within each school and they try to figure out what they can do to get our students motivated and what initiatives they can bring forward that will make students want to come to school.

Comm. Wilder: Thank you.

Dr. Newell: You're welcome.

Comm. Simmons: I see that we're talking about the action plan being presented in October. What I wanted to know is will the action plans include numeric metrics and I'm asking that for a reason. Largely when parents and stakeholders see hard numeric metrics that helps to show what our successes are. If those metrics aren't met, it helps the Board and the administration focus on what we need to prioritize, what we need to budget for, and how we get the extra supports to those areas.

Dr. Newell: Yes, for example, right now our graduation rate is 77.5% and so we can put in place a percentage increase over time. We also have to make sure that we are also reasonable with whatever numbers we do come up with. Additionally, when we talk about chronic absenteeism, right now we are over 30%. I think we're at about 33-34%. We can work on getting those percentages down to a certain number that we try to meet as a district. Absolutely!

Comm. Simmons: Thank you. I know in some of my proposals it's ambitious, but largely because of what the metrics have been if we look at NJSLA from 24-25. I know

we don't have 25-26 yet, but if we just base it on what happened in 24-25 where we made some modest increases and we project that for 25-26. I don't want to be overly ambitious, but I also don't want us to settle for less than what we can achieve.

Dr. Newell: Right, understood. I think one of the things too is we have presented the Five Levers and those have within it KPI's. All of that is part of the work that we've been doing and everything is infused. It's not separate and apart. I do hear what you're saying. I think also a challenge, and Ms. Tsimpedes did present it at last Board meeting, is that they have now changed all the metrics for NJSLA. We can't do apples to apples anymore. One of the things we have to also navigate is there are different tests because we now know that it's NJSLA-A, the adaptive portion, so we also have to work with that and I would welcome the Board's input on how we will move forward with that.

Comm. Simmons: Great! I think that test has changed probably 5-6 times over the last few years.

Dr. Newell: Yes, absolutely. It keeps on changing, but whatever they're doing, which is fine, we also have to stay focused on the instruction, so I absolutely understand what you're saying. We have put in place, before any of these changes happened, with the work of Dr. Henderson, Ms. Tsimpedes, Ms. Coy, and assistant superintendents over the schools, our own KPI's, Key Performance Indicators. We also put numbers in and that's how we gauge our performance.

Comm. Simmons: Thank you.

Dr. Newell: You're welcome.

Comm. Ramirez: Everyone did receive...

Comm. Freeman: Slow and steady. I just want to say that we're moving in the right direction slow and steady. Some people may not be happy with where we are and may think we should just be Speedy Gonzalez, but I believe in slow and steady. As long as we're making the increases and continuing what we're doing moving forward, I think we're going to be in a good space. As we all know, you can't please everybody. You just have to stay focused and stay the course with all the distractions. I'm pleased with the fact that our graduation rate has gone up, that our reading scores are going up, and that our math scores are going up. I know we don't like to think about previous people in place, but I don't remember things like that going up before. I'm going to always speak about it and acknowledge the fact that the increases are happening now. I'm pleased and looking forward for it to continue to go up and increase. As long as it's moving slowly, we might get a little faster but slow and steady is always better than not moving at all.

Comm. Ramirez: Thank you, Comm. Freeman.

Dr. Newell: Thank you, Commissioner.

Comm. Ramirez: Everyone did receive, Madam Superintendent, the proposed goals in an email so if we do agree to move forward with this it will be presented for a vote at the October meeting. If there is any additional feedback, I suggest that you forward it over to Cheryl so that the Superintendent can then prepare something for us before we vote on it.

Comm. Simmons: Through you to the Superintendent, before we vote will the action plans be presented as well?

Comm. Ramirez: That will be the next step after we adopt the goals.

Comm. Simmons: Okay.

Dr. Newell: I would like for the Board Commissioners to review the 14 pages of good work that the district has been doing for the last three years, echoing what Comm. Freeman has said. It's 14 pages but it is good stuff. We are moving in the right direction incrementally, but we have been working on putting those strong structures in place which I think are critical.

### **A. Board Goals**

Comm. Ramirez: Absolutely. I know that we also have Board goals on the agenda. I know that we started this work back in 2025. Cheryl, can we have the Board self-evaluation module resent to the Commissioners? I know that NJSBA worked with us and that is where we need to begin in order to set the Board goals. I know the Board goals are not mandated by law, but they are a good best practice to have as we work through self-governance. I would ask my colleagues to please complete the Board self-evaluation so that in a very near future meeting we can take some time to discuss the results of that and set some governance goals for the Board. It can be professional development, how we're going to be holding the Chief School Administrator accountable, and things of that nature. NJSBA has a lot of resources on their website to guide us through that process. We can also have the NJSBA rep come in and speak to the Board. So please reach out to me if you would like that. Cheryl, can we get the portal reopened with the Board self-evaluation? Colleagues, if we can take the next two weeks to do this I would appreciate it. I know under previous leadership we did not complete that process, but I would like to complete that process. I think it's important, like I said, for best practices and for us to hold each other accountable so that we can hold the administration accountable.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening Commissioner, Dr. Newell, staff and community. Dr. Newell, thank you for your presentation. It is indeed good to see and celebrate those incremental gains and there is a lot to celebrate. To the Board, as you begin your goalsetting, I wanted to challenge us to think not only about what we want students to achieve, but also about the conditions we must create for them to achieve it. I heard quite a bit of that in Dr. Newell's presentation. For the last several years, PEF has raised many of the same priorities and they remain important, but tonight I wanted to sharpen them into four areas. First, make authentic family and community engagement part of how this district does business. Not simply informing families after decisions are made, but engaging students, parents, educators, and community partners early enough for their voices to shape the decisions. We saw during last year's conversations about the redistricting and school changes that people will participate when the issue is meaningful to them, the information is accessible, and they believe that their voices matter. Second, make school climate and student wellbeing priorities. Paterson has invested significantly in Restorative Practices, healing centered

engagement, and attendance. Now we need consistent implementation across schools and we need to measure whether suspensions, chronic absenteeism, and other indicators are actually improving. Third, make third grade literacy a community-wide goal. We are seeing improvement. PEF and Paterson Reads will continue doing our part from Talk, Read, Sing with our youngest children, to Summer Literacy and the 50-Book Club. But I would love to see the Board declare that every sector of this city has a role in getting our children reading on grade level. The city adopted that three years ago, but we are still waiting for action. Finally, protect and expand the support surrounding the school day. Our Children, Our Schools statewide policy agenda calls for a greater investment in community schools, after school and summer programming, healing centered approaches, and safe adequate school facilities. Those are state asks, but they should also be Paterson's priorities. So my request tonight is simple. Set goals that are smart, measurable, publicly reported, and big enough that achieving them will require all of us. I also request a copy of today's documents if they aren't already posted online. PEF stands ready as always to be a partner and sometimes a friendly agitator, that's our role in getting us there and getting our kids there. Thank you.

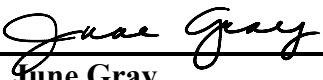
**It was moved by Comm. Freeman, seconded by Comm. Rashid that the Public Comments portion of the meeting be closed. On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.**

Comm. Ramirez: Before I ask for adjournment, I am going to again remind my colleagues to please participate in the Board's self-evaluation so that we may have our Board goals before the holiday season arrives. January 2027 we will have our Board best positioned to move this district forward, so I ask for your cooperation on that. As Madam Superintendent is assisting us with the district goals, we need to do our part and adopt best practices to position Paterson in a better trajectory. As Comm. Freeman said, we are slow and steady, but we are moving in the right direction. Thank you for all of your hard work, to my colleagues and Madam Superintendent and her team.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

  
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Ms. June Gray  
Business Administrator/Board Secretary