MINUTES OF THE PATERSON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING

November 2, 2026 – 5:56 p.m.
Central Office (First Floor)

Presiding: Comm. Joel D. Ramirez, President

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

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.
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> In accordance with the provisions of this law, the Paterson Public School District has caused adequate and electronic notice of this meeting:
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> **Special Meeting**
> **November 2, 2026 at 5:30 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.

Roll Call
Comm. Valerie Freeman: Present

Comm. Alex Mendez: Present

Comm. Hector Nieves: Present

Comm. Mohammed Rashid: Present

Comm. Kenneth Rosado: Present

*Comm. Kenneth Simmons: Cheryl, because this is the first I am looking at the agenda and there is only one item on the agenda, and this is the first meeting where this has been discussed, I need to recuse myself.

Comm. Ramirez: We are having the Public Hearing.

Comm. Simmons: Right, but I still need to recuse myself. So, I need to recuse myself on the record.

Comm. Ramirez: Comm. Simmons is recusing himself on the record.

Ms. Williams: Not on attendance?

Comm. Ramirez: You can be present on attendance.

*Comm. Teague: Present.

Comm. Della Wilder, Vice President: Present.

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

*Comm. Simmons leaves the meeting.

*Comm. Teague leaves the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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

Comm. Ramirez: For those who are coming here for the first time, you will have three minutes. Please state your name and address for the record, as per district policy.

Mr. Ernest Rucker: The last time I came to the Board of Education to support a Superintendent was Frank Napier. As you all know, that's been a very long time ago. I understand quite a bit of the controversy that's been going on for the last few months. I'm here to support this Superintendent for various reasons. Let me start with number one. The access that she's given the community is second to none. I don't want to get involved in the politics of it, but when you have a good employee that's doing what they need to do, the community needs to stand up and speak out. When I'm critical, I'm critical. When I'm supportive, I'm supportive. There are things that I think the general community doesn't know. There's never been a time that I've reached out to this district and could not reach the Superintendent or get a phone call back. That's very important to community organizing. What makes our job great is when we can sit down at the same table and have a conversation and have these discussions. I remember also when she was hired. I remember all the praises that were lavished on her. It seems like when you don't do what people want you to do, there seems to be a problem. Everyone on this Board I know and I'm friends with a lot of people on this Board. My friendship has nothing to do with my opinion. My friend Ms. Davila will tell you I can be a friend, but I'm going to be who I need to be at the time I need to be it. This is the time. This Superintendent has made tough decisions. She didn't shy away from them and that's why she was hired, not to run from the decision, but to work it out and get it done. There's been many a time that my grandson who is eight years old would see this young lady here, run up to her, hold her hand and I had to fight to get him back. That tells me even children have the same opinion as I have. My support is unwavering on the job that she has done. Of course, the community will get mad at times because you're not doing what they want you to do, but that is not why I made sure she was hired. I did it because the resume spoke for her and then her personality gave me the backup. Ladies and gentlemen, you have a job to do here tonight, and everybody is not going to be happy with it. But when you have a person that you can depend on to make

those hard decisions, even when you disagree, that's where you put your money behind. I've supported people on this Board for reelection that do have a different opinion than mine. I pray that you get rid of the politics in your head and look at this from a human point of view. Has she done the job that's necessary to move this district forward? I say yes. You have my full support at any time and any time. Thank you.

Councilman Luis Velez: Good evening, everyone. As everybody knows, they call me Councilman Luis Velez from the great City of Paterson in the heart of Paterson in the Fifth Ward. As everyone knows, I have 13 plus schools in the Fifth Ward. As everybody knows, I have a heavy traffic student population in the Fifth Ward. That is the part I'm going to say as Councilman in the Fifth Ward. I want to express my personal support to Dr. Newell to continue serving as Superintendent of Paterson Public Schools. Our children deserve strong leadership, stability, accountability and a school system that puts their education, safety and future first. I had the opportunity to communicate as a Councilman and also on a personal level with Dr. Newell. An important concern affecting our schools includes improvements at School No. 15 in the Fifth Ward. I believe that continued collaboration, transparency and measurable results should remain central to the future of our school district. Our students must always come first. Education should be about progress, not politics. That's why I divided my message as a Councilman in the beginning to give you an analysis of what's going on in the Fifth Ward in the schools. I took that jacket off and I put my personal support to Dr. Newell. I look forward to continuing working with you. When I read the last "whereas", bless the renewal of her contract. I look to continue working together to the benefit of every student, parent, teacher and family in the City of Paterson. Board of Education members, the communication has arrived in front of you. The action has to be taken from you, Commissioners. Today you need to deliver the right results for every student and everyone in the City of Paterson. Why change something that really is working? Don't make that mistake. Let's move forward. Thank you.

Ms. Rosie Grant: Good evening, Mr. President, Board members, staff, community and Dr. Newell. My name is Rosie Grant, and I speak on behalf of Paterson Education Fund. I want to express my strong support for renewing Dr. Newell's contract. Leading a school district is an enormous responsibility and compensation should reflect that responsibility. We entrust our Superintendent with the education, safety and futures of thousands of children, the leadership of thousands of employees, and the management of substantial public resources. I was particularly struck recently by the news of the Montgomery Township superintendent's contract which will exceed $300,000 over its term. Montgomery serves approximately 4,400 students compared to 21,000 or more in Paterson. At that rate, it's approximately $68 per student in Montgomery compared to $14 per student in Paterson. Of course, salary isn't actually allocated on a per-pupil basis, but the comparison certainly provides perspective on the scale of the responsibility. I recognize that there is a difference of opinion about some district decisions, including the Middle School Model, but supporting a Superintendent does not mean agreeing with every decision. Accountability and support are not mutually exclusive. I've also heard concerns about the timing of this vote, particularly because it falls the day before the election. Let's remember that this School Board remains responsible for governing the district through the end of its term in January. I respect the importance of transparency, public participation and proper procedures. I also believe that planning for leadership continuity is a legitimate responsibility of this Board. We should not wait until the last minute and risk losing a good, experienced leader simply because we waited for the contract to expire. We should evaluate our Superintendent fairly, hold her accountable for results, and compensate her appropriately. Our children deserve strong, stable leadership. When we have it, we should do what we can to keep it. Thank you.

Mr. Errol Kerr: Good evening, Mr. President, Board, Superintendent Newell and Deputy Superintendent Henderson. I was told during my time on the Board that the most important job of this Board is to elect its Superintendent. The reason for that is because the Superintendent sets the tone of the district. The Superintendent is not only responsible for his school, but for all the schools in the district. This Superintendent has shown that she is capable and has every child that enters our district at heart. I was disturbed when I heard about the Middle School Model and the changes. I called the Superintendent and she took my call and walked me through that process. She didn't say everybody is wrong and I'm right. She walked me through the process, and I understood from her time spent explaining to me what that process involved and the benefits we will derive as a district. I'm here today on the basis of what she has done. I looked at the numbers of the district, and we have to ask ourselves are we falling behind or moving forward. That's a critical question that we must answer ourselves. From the numbers that I've seen, our district is moving forward. This has always been my concern. In the past we have created a two-tier educational system in this district. The Gifted & Talented, as good as it is, supports the notion that some kids are better than others. Of course, some kids are more brilliant naturally, but we should not separate the most gifted from those who are less gifted. What we need to do is create a system that fosters the kind of growth and development, and that's exactly what the Superintendent has tried to do. I'm total support. I would like to ask this Board that you look at her record from top to bottom. It's not about liking her. It's about the children that are in this district that she represents and whether she represents them well. I'm asking the Board to look at her full record and see if the work that she was employed to do in the first instance has been accomplished. Thank you.

Ms. Jaylynn Griffin: What's up? It's your girl Jaylynn. I'm invading the School Board meeting. 332 total positions, 89 active layoffs, 39 teachers, and 59 certified administrative staff. 243 positions cut through attrition and unfilled vacancies. How are we laying off teachers and administrators, but voting on a raise for the Superintendent who's making $300,000 already? People came and spoke about her work ethic and progress that she's making, but why do you need a raise and what comes with that raise? If we're giving you more money, what else more are you going to give us than what you have already been giving? I think it's greed. It sounds greedy. You make $300,000 already. You don't need a 3% raise every year. $344,000 is crazy. Mr. Rucker, you got up here and said you support this raise. I didn't know you supported greed, money laundering and theft. I have a question for you, Mr. Rucker and the rest of you School Board committee. Who needs the raise more? The teachers who aren't making half of $300,000 or your friend? She's already making a livable wage. Our teachers are struggling. What about them, the actual people on the ground doing the work? You speak of the children but depriving their immediate source of livable wages. The teachers who care are the ones that are affecting these kids' lives and are the ones that need the raises, not the Superintendent. I'm not saying you're not doing a good job. You just don't need extra money right now. We are all hurting out here and you're not hurting. That's what it looks like. I'm not going to sit up here and applaud a fish for swimming because you came and did your job. I'm not supporting your raise until you start supporting the teachers getting a raise. You don't need the money. They do. That's what I'm here to say. If you've been doing a good job, you've been doing a good job. Extend it or whatever, but that raise is out. That's something that doesn't need to be happening. No 3% raise for you. You are already making $300,000. I keep emphasizing that because I know half of us in this room aren't even making $300,000 or even close to it. To sit up here and for all of you to be looking me in my face, I hope you vote in the way of the people and not in the way of greed and corruption. Your seat is coming up too and I like to make videos.

Councilwoman Maritza Davila: Good evening, Mr. President, Commissioners, and Superintendent Dr. Newell. I didn't come here prepared today to speak, but as I was sitting there, I felt compelled to do so. If not, I would have been number three on the list. First, I want to start by apologizing to you. You can have an opinion, but to make statements of corruption, it truly saddens me to hear that because that has to come with proof. I also want to thank you for going to school and getting an education. You've earned your position. I came here today not just as an elected official. That aside, I'm born and raised in this city and in these schools where I've raised my son who graduated from Norman S. Weir and went to AHA. I'm here as a representative of higher education. I've been in higher education for 33 years, one at a four-year and 32 currently at Passaic County Community College. I know the work that you do. Why? Because I see you in the community. You don't just show up when you think it's right. You show up always and that's why I'm here to tell you that I appreciate the work that you're doing. I appreciate the work that we do together collaboratively with the college. I truly thank you because our students need more. I know what we get when they graduate from high school and all of the assistance that we have to give them. We have to do more. I've always said this and I hope that you take this and really consider it. College begins in kindergarten. We know times are changing so not everyone is going to go to college. That's okay. Degrees are important for those who feel that… If you want to create content, that's good too. If you want to be a welder, that's good too. I'm here to say that I support every person who spoke here except the individual who called you corrupt because that is unacceptable. When you refer to the word corruption and renewal, what is that saying? What are you doing? Commissioners, you have a job to do today. You were able to hire her and she went through the wringer then. She's here now. Guess what? We're in the works of getting a new president for the college and it's been very difficult. With that comes a contract and if your contract indicates that the next steps… Everyone that works... I don't make that money. I'm okay with it, though. I work very hard and at the end of the day leading with love is what I see in you. With that said, it doesn't matter who doesn't want to hear what I'm saying. I said it. You deserve it. Commissioners, do the job that I know you're going to do today. Thank you very much respectfully.

Mr. Christopher Small: Good evening, everyone, School Board, President and members of the community. My name is Christopher Small and I'm a candidate for Board of Education Commissioner. I'll be running for the School Board this upcoming election. November 3 is Election Day, so I urge everyone to go out and vote. Let your voices be heard. Speaking of voices, I've heard many voices come up to speak tonight. I think it's important that the community's voice is heard. Too often too many decisions are made without any valuable community input, and I think tonight's vote is another example of that. Whether we are in support of the Superintendent or not, no offense or disrespect to the current School Board, I think that's a decision for the new School Board that will be voted on November 3 to make. When it comes to school boards, one of the biggest responsibilities is not only to oversee the budget of over $850 million, but to decide and evaluate who the Superintendent is. I think that's a decision for the new School Board and the City of Paterson should decide who that School Board should be. Once again, no offense or disrespect, but I think that's a decision that the people of Paterson should be making and in turn that School Board should decide this decision tonight. That's all I have to say. Thank you and good night.

Commissioner Ilia Villanueva: Good evening. I didn't write a speech or anything tonight. I'm here as a community member, resident and taxpayer of the City of Paterson, especially the Sixth Ward. I want to thank each and every one of you Commissioners because I went through it when the Board of Education was taken over

by the state. Councilwoman Davila knows how hard we worked to get control back to you. It was a complete and total war and fight to get this back. We have to commend you and say thank you that at least this Board is working in conjunction to maintain this here. This Board is working perfectly. Thank you to the President and each and every one of you that tries to do your best. To my dear Commissioner Della, I know you guys have done the best and we don't have to go through local control again, which is a nightmare. I commend you. It's not easy to deal with what you're dealing with on a daily basis. I ask for respect. I'm not talking about you and I'm not addressing myself to you either. As a person who has run for office, I know how you have to take a lot. Listen, you're doing a great job. Believe me, it's not easy. I know that the achievements that you have are not big like everybody is expecting, but it's a start. I hope that you continue this path. I know that this Board will still be working together after November 3. It doesn't matter. We're only electing three more people from everybody that's here. Hopefully, some of the people here will be reelected. I wish you the best. Of course, we are here to help you and support you. I see you in every event in the community. I know that you're a community-oriented person and you have done a great job by trying to put everybody to work together with you, which I know is sometimes very hard. I hope that you stay with us. A person of your character and education could stand up from there and go anyplace else and make more money. Believe me. We have to thank you that you decided to stay and renew this contract. You could stand up from there and say, "I don't want it. I don't need it." And then we have to go through the search, which is very difficult. I wish you the best. I wish that this Board considers working together in the way that you are working now. President Ramirez, you know that I always have conversations with you. You have my full support and anything that you need, I'll always be here at your service. May God bless each and every one of you tonight.

Ms. Khadijah Jenkins: Good evening. When you want respect, give it. As the Superintendent and Board considers potentially repurposing three Paterson schools into a Newcomers school, a multilingual school and a school dedicated to special education, where is the funding to sustain qualified staff for these students, including children with autism and developmental disabilities? Not every current employee will qualify for the positions requiring specialized training or multi-language skills. Two behavioral therapists cannot meet the needs of an entire student population. Substitutes and paraprofessionals are given serious responsibilities without adequate training. Teachers are leaving, retiring or going on disability due to workloads and injuries. Substitutes are covering long-term assignments without fair compensation. Some teachers fear retaliation for speaking up and are in fear of their salary being tampered with. Veteran educators need second jobs to make ends meet. I don't want to hear that this is a national issue or that the jobs are available. Where is the balance between the budget, workload and fair compensation? What concrete steps are being taken to train and retain qualified staff? Support our existing Paterson workforce and ensure these children receive the education they deserve.

It was moved by Comm. Rosado, seconded by Comm. Mendez that the Public Hearing portion of the meeting be closed.

Comm. Wilder: Before I give my vote, I want to first thank everyone who spoke because I do believe in the right of people having their opinions, but I do need to set the record straight on a couple of things. I don't make a dime sitting in this position. Hold all applause or comments until I'm done because I need to say this. I decided to run for the School Board when I knew I could commit to the School Board. For many years people have asked me to run for this and run for that, but I waited until my child was in college and was far away in London. I said now I have the time to commit to the

children, parents and staff here in Paterson. I don't know about what the rest of the Commissioners do, but I can speak about what Della does. If there is ever anything out there for our children and I find out about it, it is directed directly to the Superintendent, and I always ask for a follow-up. But I do want to thank whoever it was who filed ethics charges because you learn from everything. You learn everyday something. The reason I want to thank them is because I was accused of things that had not even happened yet. I thought, "God, what is that about?" I always say every day, "Lord, order my steps." The lord says I will always protect you because there's no weapon formed against you that will prosper. First, I was mad but the woman that I am, I had to regroup. I want to thank that individual because they protected me. There were some things that I didn't know. Until you sit in this seat you think you can do so many things, change so many things and make things happen. If you don't have four other people that agree with your alignment, you are just a voice. What I've learned in the four years that I've had this opportunity to sit here is to read and always open my packets to the point where I don't just get the digital packet. I make them print a packet so that I can write on it and make sure that what I'm doing is in the good conscience of the people. There are times I don't agree with any of them up here because I hold my own. I want to make a statement. When we talk about a Superintendent, I wish that everybody could Google or Chat-GPT or whatever you do to get the amount of salaries that are out there. We are the third largest district. We have a sister town that has six schools and they're going to make just as much as the person who is running Paterson. I wasn't rude. I didn't interrupt. All I'm asking, Jaylynn, is for you to let me speak. Let me have my peace because I'm going to always respect what you say. You know I have respect for you. All I'm asking is let me get my peace out because I didn't interrupt you when you spoke. I respect where you're coming from, but I also have to say how it works. It sounds good, but it doesn't work that way. I don't knock your opinion or feelings because everybody is entitled to that, the same way I'm entitled to say what I'm saying right now. When we look at our district, we need to look at everything. I'm always fighting for the teachers to make more. I think I'm one of the loudest voices about it. I want to thank the situation with the ethics committee because it was an educational moment. I made so many people work this weekend. I did. I reached out to outside counsel. One thing I'm never going to give up is my reputation. My mother always said before she died, "All you have, Della Doreen McCall now Wilder, is your name." If anybody knows me, I'm the most giving and thoughtful person, but also intelligent enough to know I'm never going to do anything that's going to cause me harm later. I know I'm taking up a lot of time, but I had to get it off my chest. I wouldn't have been able to sit through the rest of this meeting without saying (1) thank you, (2) I learned a lot over the weekend, and (3) I'm going to do what I think is best for Paterson children. I don't care about politics. I don't care about relationships. Dr. Newell, I like you, but I don't care about you either when it comes to our children. Our children deserve just as much. I don't think anybody has had the opportunity to see as many schools as I have in the State of New Jersey on my tour when I was with Phil Murphy. The reason I got on this Board is because if those kids can get what they get, we can get the same thing. We deserve that, if not better. That's why I became involved in wanting to run for the School Board. Yes, I barely made it back, but I made it back by 11 votes. Thank you, Jesus. At the end of the day, it was God's will that I come back. I am not mad at any of you. I'm not mad at anybody. When you come here, please know what you're saying. I don't get paid to be here. This is a 100% volunteer job. In the State of New Jersey, we are some of the few states that don't pay their School Board Commissioners. I just left a national convention and half of them, if not more than half, are being paid to do this job. I do it because I care. I'm not trying to run for any other office. I do it because it's the right thing to do. I encourage anybody, if you think this is an easy task to sit in, come on and join the team. I take my hat off to you, Chris Small. It takes a lot to throw your hat in the race. I wish you the best of luck. But if you haven't sat here and you

haven't done the job, be a little more compassionate when you confront us. You don't know what we go through. I had to disappoint my child tonight to be here. The reason I'm late is because she asked me for a mommy and me day and I cut it short. That's the stuff we sacrifice. I sacrifice at least 20 hours a week reading because they just keep sending us paper after paper, memo after memo and email after email. I read them and I get on the staff's nerve. Why? Because I want to know what's right and wrong. They sent me something that said, "You better look at this because you may not be able to vote." I put the attorney to work. He makes $100,000 throughout the year and he worked this weekend. I want to know if I'm doing right. Thank you because if you didn't do it, I could be caught up in something that I don't know. I'm due diligent about what I do. Anybody that feels anything about Della Doreen McCall now Wilder, know this. I do the work. I cut my family off for the work. I don't spend my Sundays out having dinner with my husband because I'm sitting at a computer or I have papers on the dining room table. I'm going to say this to anybody who's running. If you are going to do the job, you better be ready to do the job because I'm going to call you out. I called Eddie out last time. I'll call anybody out. That was my best friend on this Board. I needed to say that. I'm sorry, Mr. President, if I took more time than I should have, but this job is serious. When our kids leave their high school and they can't read, I'm responsible for that. When our kids leave and they can't count money at a register, I'm responsible. I have to have the right Superintendent that's going to set the right tone to make the right decisions. They aren't always going to be political decisions or decisions that we want to hear. I'm a preacher by trade. Forgive me if I got a little hyper. I trust God in everything that I do. I know for anybody that says she's up there because she's trying to go to this or that, I could have been left this and been something different in another state, but I decided to stay and do the work. All new Board members that may be coming on, if you're elected, I'm going to make sure you do the work. I'm going to call you out. I'll know when you haven't read the packet because you don't know how to ask the questions. That's why I can ask questions. I love every one of the assistant superintendents and business administrators and personnel folks. But if they don't do their jobs, they have to go too. I've always been like that. It isn't about today. Thank you, Mr. President. My vote is yes.

On roll call all members voted in the affirmative. The motion carried.

Comm. Ramirez: At this time, I'm going to turn it over to General Counsel for some clarifications.

Mr. Buglione: Thank you, Your Honor. Good evening to the Board and members of the public. I've been asked to make a brief statement regarding some issues that you heard about tonight, but also that we have been working on over the last weekend. In particular, you have heard about the proposed ethics complaint. Ethics complaints are confidential until they're publicly filed. The ethics complaint issue has not been docketed, but nonetheless the Board has to take it seriously, so I've been instructed to give some parameters and an explanation to the public. A proposed ethics complaint was sent to the Board requesting that certain Board members not vote tonight or else they would be in conflict on a prior recent decision by the School Ethics Commission. The decision they cited was Public Opinion A1525, issued on September 23, 2025. In that opinion the School Ethics Commission made certain recommendations that Board members who have affiliate positions or relatives either working for that municipality or for the district, not vote. Specifically, one Board member had a family member who was the director of operations, which is the equivalent as an assistant superintendent at the district, as well as another relative who is a city council person. These were strong first level family relationships. The second individual was an assistant superintendent whose husband was a city council person for the same municipality. The third person in

question was an attorney for the Board in-house whose relative, namely a father, was an elected city council person. When they looked at all of those dynamics, the decision of the School Ethics Commission was there were conflicts and those individuals were prohibited from voting. We did a case law analysis, and we have determined that that particular case is not factually on point, nor does it prohibit our sitting Board members from voting for a number of reasons. I will make mention first of that opinion that I mentioned, A1525. We will mark that as Board Exhibit #1 for tonight. It will be part of the record if any member of the public wishes to receive a copy of that. It's a short period of time. It's only a year ago. We did a search for the 10-12 months forward and there was an opinion directly on point I submit to you which supports our Board members voting. That is Public Opinion A2225, decided by that same School Ethics Commission on November 25, 2025. It took under consideration that prior decision and some follow up letters that were sent by that applicant on October 8, 2025, regarding familial relationships, what a quorum was and what a quorum was not. Ultimately, it was determined that a Board member who works for a companion municipality is not automatically recused from voting or participating in a vote. You had to do an additional analysis. You have to ask, does the Board member have a relative that works for the city that could be influenced? Does the Board member have other family members who work for the Board who could be influenced by the Superintendent? Does the Board member in a city capacity, either personally or through a relative, have any budgetary considerations? We have reviewed the ethics disclosures by each of our Commissioners who were referenced. I can't state their names because this complaint is not public. If it doesn't go public, it would be unfair to them so we don't want to besmirch them. In concert with our Board Secretary, who is a Master Board Secretary and has innumerable experiences, we reviewed and analyzed those disclosures. The Board Secretary has reviewed the disclosures. There's been no change in the relationships. There is no conflict for the Board members in question to vote. Based on that, over the weekend we have tendered an opinion. It's confidential at this point, unless the matter moves forward. We will mark that, just for reference, as Board Exhibit #3 for this evening. We had to do a factual analysis and we didn't stop there. We went and reviewed other past case decisions as well and we have not found any situation which would warrant our particular Board members to recuse themselves. What we provide is guidance. The ultimate decision is on the Board member pursuant to the rules of ethics. They will certainly take the guidance of the Board's counsel, and they are entitled to rely on that, but they analyze it themselves. When we went through it, the opinion from A1525 in the municipality was not identified. All of those Board members had family relationships which crossed both lines on the municipality and the School Board. Here, we have separation. There is no crossover with relationships with the Board members who intend to vote this evening. We removed one of the first factual issues that needed to be addressed. Secondly, we have reviewed some of the most recent Board meetings and there were elected municipal officials of the highest level that spoke at prior Board meetings, not as a way of influencing in their official capacity, but they wanted the Board to undertake a secondary analysis of decisions already made and those Board members did not. They stuck with their initial decisions and that's a very telling point for the following reason. The first opinion that I referenced, 1525, talks about a Board member losing their identity or being improperly influenced. We can say by reviewing our notes and the actions of these Board members in their deliberations that they have not and that's very substantial. We can come to the finding that this Board has demonstrated independence, objectivity in their decision making, and a willingness to act in the best interest of the district. Therefore, I can affirmatively say when we reviewed the record in concert with our Board Secretary, and we've come to that conclusion for this opinion, that there should be no suggestion of any political cronyism, municipal influence, divided loyalties or tainted judgment. Therefore, we are convinced that based on the facts that we have, this Board has the

integrity, impartiality and independence of judgment for the deliberative process that's required for making a decision like this tonight. We then went on and looked at the different statutes which would require recusal. The keynote statute is under the educational statutes NJSA:18A:12-24, Paragraphs A-F and we've been able to state that we are in compliance with that and we did not find any conflicts. We moved on and analyzed continually the Public Opinion A1525. I can't underscore this enough – the Ethics Commission expressly relied upon the reciprocal relationship and the resulting reasonable public perception of compromised independence because of the crossovers and the possibilities of undue influence. Here again we found none because there's independence. These particular Board members, although they may work for a municipal entity, are not constrained by relationships in the familiar sense where they're directly controlled or a family member is directly controlled. That is a very strong distinction which was brought out by Opinion A2225 where they rejected municipal influence and marital influence. That opinion went on about a number of other things, but we can state that we can undercut the theory or allegation that there is municipal domination of this particular Board. We moved on and analyzed the complaint and its attachments. The biggest part is that the Board members here are independently voted upon. They're not appointed. That's another distinction with the prior opinion that was relied upon or cited. The municipal power for the budget does not affect these particular individuals. They, on the other hand, have control over their own budget independently. They have voted upon that and they have not been influenced. We are very confident that they are able to rely upon their own self-judgment. In conclusion, I'm paraphrasing because it was a long opinion and there are a number of other things that we relied upon. The Commission's later opinion that we have cited, A2225 from November 2025, confirms that municipal employment and even alleged marital pressure do not without material additional facts, proof or evidence defeat the independent judgment these particular Board members could make if they decided to vote. With that, on the advice of Counsel, we do not find conflict of interest and will respectfully submit that the Board members have the opportunity to vote tonight. I'll just cite a few items that we have relied upon that I've stated. We've relied upon NJSA18A12-21, NJSA18A12-24 A-D and 18A24-24.1 subpar F, School Ethics Commission Advisory Opinion A1525, September 23, 2025, School Ethics Commission Advisory Opinion A2225 of November 25, 2025, the advisory opinions published by the New Jersey Department of Education School Ethics Commission at their website, and the Paterson Public Schools Board of Education meeting archives from calendar year 2026. With that, I would submit that we have vexed through the allegations, and we believe at this time that they are not meritorious.

APPOINTMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
Dr. Laurie W. Newell

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Board of Education ("Board") approved the appointment of Dr. Laurie W. Newell as Superintendent of Schools, effective July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2027, for a term of four (4) years; and

WHEREAS, the Board and the Superintendent are parties to an existing Employment Agreement previously approved by the Passaic County Executive County Superintendent of Schools (hereinafter referred to as the "Executive County Superintendent") and governing her employment as Superintendent of Schools; and

WHEREAS, the Board desires to enter into an Employment Agreement with the Superintendent as the Chief School Administrator (CSA) of the Paterson Public School District (hereinafter the "District") commencing November 1, 2026, with an expiration date of June 30, 2031; and

WHEREAS, this Employment Agreement replaces and supersedes all prior Employment Agreement between the parties thereto. Signature of this Employment Agreement constitutes assent to a rescission of any and all prior Employment Agreement as well as agreement to the terms herein; and

WHEREAS, the Board has conducted its annual evaluation of the Superintendent in accordance with applicable law and has determined that it is in the best interests of the District to provide the Superintendent with a new Employment Agreement; and

WHEREAS, the Board and the Superintendent believe that a written Employment Agreement is necessary to describe specifically their relationship and to serve as the basis of effective communication between them as they fulfill their governance and administrative functions in the operation of the education program of the schools; and,

WHEREAS, the Executive County Superintendent has reviewed and approved the Employment Agreement on October 1, 2026, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:17-20.1, which shall take place prior to any required public notice and hearing pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:11-11, and prior to the district Board of Education approval and execution of the contracts to ensure compliance with all applicable laws, including, but not limited to, N.J.S.A. 18A:30-3.5, 18A:30-9, 18A:17-15.1, and N.J.S.A. 18A:11-12;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Paterson Board of Education approves the submission to the Executive County Superintendent the Employment Agreement for Dr. Laurie W. Newell as Superintendent of Schools, for a period commencing on November 1, 2026 through June 30, 2031, in accordance with the terms outlined in the Employment Agreement approved by the Executive County Superintendent.

It was moved by Comm. Mendez, seconded by Comm. Rosado that the Resolution to appoint Dr. Laurie W. Newell as Superintendent of Schools be adopted.

Comm. Wilder: I need to know that if by any chance the Ethics Commission doesn't agree with what we have been presented, does that still hold on the Commissioners. How does that work? For example, you'll never believe how many calls and things people have their own opinions about the situation. Whatever I decide to vote, and it may be different or agreeable to what has been said, does that hold us on an ethics situation? If this isn't right but I was advised by Counsel, will I still be held responsible for the decision that I make based on what was given to me?

Comm. Ramirez: We have advice of Counsel, but I will allow Counsel to elaborate if he wishes.

Mr. Buglione: That is correct. We can never guarantee exactly what can happen. People file ethics complaints for no reason at all and they have to be defended. In this

instance, I can state that due diligence was followed. The members of the Board reached out to the Board Secretary, which is the first and proper appropriate way to handle this. The Board Secretary provided resources. The Board Secretary and myself were in contact and did the research. We also had advice of other outside counsel reviewing and we have all come to the conclusion that there is no conflict based on the discussion and the facts presented to us. We can't guarantee you 100%, but I will tell you I've made an opinion tonight and it's a defense that you have. We have provided advice to you per your request that we believe this is appropriate. We have done legal research on that matter. There's even another opinion that I didn't mention, Public Advisory Opinion A0725. We had the newer positions, but we have really vexed this and went through it. You have the advice for a defense that you relied on us and we gave you the best possible advice that we could. You did not do this blindly. You did not do this without any advice. In fact, you have done your own research and relied upon us. I'll testify for any Board member that I have given advice because I feel that strongly about it. That's my duty and obligation and we take that very seriously. We would never put you in a position because you are elected officials. You are doing the work of the people, and we would never want you to be jeopardized.

Comm. Wilder: At the end of the day, my name and reputation mean everything to me. I don’t want to make a decision that can later erupt something that I believe in and then I'm no longer able to do it because of an ethics charge. I don’t take any of this lightly. I want to know that I'm protected. We know how this goes. If it goes left, then you have to try to swim out of it and you have to try to get your name back and all those kinds of things. Some people may be shaking their heads. I'm concerned because at the end of the day I want to make sure that I'm doing the right thing and I'm also making sure that nothing is going to come back to bite me because I thought I was doing the right thing. I know that there is no ignorance to law, and I also understand that we have to make a decision. I love Della first and I'm going to make sure that Della is covered. If I make a decision tonight, either way it's going to be a good or bad decision on one side or the other. The reason I'm asking for it to be said clearly to me is that if I make a decision, I do not need it to come back at me. All these opinions came in the eleventh hour and it's a lot of Digest. It really is, especially when you know you're doing your best to do the right thing by your community. I don’t need it to affect me and my future because I have a bright one ahead of me. That's why I asked the question. Technically you're saying that whatever decision I make tonight, even though you've given me the clear version and the analysis of what you believe to be right, if it is not right, I can still be held on ethics charges. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Buglione: There is a possibility. I can’t guarantee you 100%. I want to give you the honest answer. You do have the advice of counsel defense and some other defenses because we have given you that advice based on the analysis that we've done.

Comm. Wilder: That still doesn't say that I can be brought up on ethics charges based on something that the Ethics Commission can look at and say is not right or wrong. I have to know. I really want to know.

Mr. Buglione: We can never prevent anyone from bringing an ethics charge. They happen routinely for different reasons.

Comm. Wilder: If I had to go before the Ethics Commission, your word is the defense that I have to work with. Does that mean your defense is really going to defend me no matter what? That's my question. All of this has been so heavy in three days. You get this opinion from one person. You get that opinion from somebody else. You call the School Board like I did all day today and don’t get a response. I just want to know I'm

doing the right thing. That's all I am asking. I'm asking that if the School Ethics Commission says you guys did not look at it right, a charge can be held up against me. That's what I'm asking.

Mr. Buglione: A charge could be filed and then there's a probable cause hearing for a dismissal period. Then if it's determined to move forward, you have all of those defenses. We couldn't guarantee that a charge would never be filed, but you have a very thorough record here unlike any record that I've seen where the actual professionals involved have stated on the record, they gave you that advice, they stand by that advice, they cited the opinions and we have the School Board Secretary who has sent out packets with the actual opinions. We believe that you've been given the best possible advice and defense in this particular instance.

Comm. Ramirez: I will just add that by mandate I took governance and a case very similar to this was used as one of the examples. I feel very comfortable having been one of the only people on this dais right now who did have ethics charges brought against them last year and we beat them with the advice of Counsel, God and Cheryl who has been here 40 years and who's an archivist, that what we are doing is correct and within our power.

Ms. Williams: These are their decisions of the School Ethics Commission. They would have to go back on their own decisions if they were going to say he's wrong. These are their decisions.

Comm. Ramirez: Correct.

On roll call all members voted as follows:

Comm. Mendez: As the newest member on this Board, I'd just like to say that I appreciate everybody coming out and the diverse host of opinions here. As of right now, I received advice from Counsel stating that I should be okay, but I think that given my unique situation with my father being a city councilman, I think it would be in the best interest of all our constituents for me to recuse myself from this vote at this time. Thank you.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Before I vote, I want to say some things. I'm in the same place as Comm. Wilder. I have a granddaughter that's six years old. Her name is Nyla. She was in my home and she asked me, "Nana, where are you going today? Play with me." My heart was broken. I said, "Nyla, stay with your Nanu, I have to go to a meeting." I know tomorrow is my big day. We work here voluntarily for the next generation. We spend our time hour after hour for our kids and the next generation. It's not an easy job. It's a tough job. If you guys were in our shoes, then you would understand. I was a college teacher in my country teaching associate level accounting in Bangladesh. 25 years ago, I came to this country on Valentine's Day. My two daughters go to public schools. I have a long journey. I know the pain. I talk with the people. The last three years since I was elected, I've seen our Superintendent who is very humble and qualified. Whenever we try to talk or email her, we get a response. My vote is yes to continue her.

Mr. Buglione: We just have a procedural issue that I'd like to address. One of the Commissioners made the motion and decided to recuse himself, so in an abundance of

caution that would technically be considered voidance of the motion. If Your Honors are inclined to reinstitute the motion.

Comm. Ramirez: Comm. Mendez, we need you to pull back your motion.

Comm. Mendez: Upon further reflection, I'd like to withdraw my motion.

Comm. Rosado: I withdraw my second.

It was moved by Comm. Nieves, seconded by Comm. Rosado that the Resolution be adopted.

Comm. Freeman: I have to recuse to vote on this.

Comm. Mendez: I recuse myself.

Comm. Nieves: Yes.

Comm. Rashid: Yes.

Comm. Rosado: Yes.

Comm. Wilder: My vote is yes.

Comm. Ramirez: Yes.

The motion carried.

Comm. Nieves: Through the Chair, to the administration, after receiving a legal document over the weekend, I'm curious to know how that individual got my personal phone number, my personal email address, and my personal address.

Comm. Ramirez: Comm. Nieves wants to know how the individual who filed the ethics charges obtained our personal information. Were there any inquiries to our office for our personal information?

Ms. Williams: We do not give out any personal information. We have a sheet for the Board members and a sheet for public.

Comm. Ramirez: Did anyone request that, Board members or public, over the last few days?

Ms. Williams: Yes.

Comm. Ramirez: A Board member or member of the public?

Ms. Williams: A Board member, not a member of the public.

Comm. Ramirez: Okay, we will have the conversation with Cheryl. Thank you, Cheryl. And thank you to the Board member who put our personal information out there and probably violated the law. We will be taking action on that.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Ms. June Gray
Business Administrator/Board Secretary