

UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
Worksession – September 12, 2006

Meeting held at James M. Caulfield Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey 07083.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. Gary Abraham, Mrs. Judith Axelrod, Mrs. Linda Gaglione
Mr. Anthony Manochio, Mrs. Versie McNeil, Mr. Francis
Perkins, Mr. Steve Ruhl, and Mrs. Judith Salazar

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL: Mr. Steven Helmstetter (President)
ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Mr. James Damato, Ms. Karen Dunn, Dr. Theodore Jakubowski,
Mrs. Barbara Lombardi and Mr. Gregory Tatum

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Abraham at 7:00 p.m. Mrs. Salazar led the Board members and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Damato read the statement required under the "Open Public Meetings Act," a copy of which is on file in the office of the Secretary.

Mr. Abraham asked each board member to review the minutes of the Executive Session of July 18, 2006 and the Planning Session of August 15, 2006 for formal action at next week's meeting.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Mr. Damato stated that the communications have been referred to the appropriate committees.

EDUCATION/STUDENT DISCIPLINE:

Mrs. Axelrod stated that the committee met this evening to discuss each resolution.

Dr. Jakubowski noted that the students that were exited from school, as referred to in resolution #E-7, were students that were under investigation during the school year.

FISCAL AND PLANNING:

Ms. Gaglione presented the Fiscal and Planning Agenda. Mrs. Gaglione stated that the committee met prior to the meeting to discuss each resolution.

OPERATIONS:

Mr. Ruhl presented the Operation Agenda.

Discussion Items:

1. Waiver of Rental Fees to the following for use of school facilities:
 - a. Holy Spirit School
 - b. Portuguese School
 - c. Municipal Drug Alliance
 - d. Hillside Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Jakubowski stated that in the past, the board of education has waived fees for certain individuals, for example: Holy Spirit basketball program and the Portuguese School. Dr. Jakubowski said that the Board has to seriously think about the increased cost in electricity and that totally waiving the fees is becoming very difficult to do. Dr. Jakubowski said that the Portuguese School holds their program after school and that the building is open anyway. Mr. Perkins said that the operations committee discussed the energy and the direct incremental costs. He said that Mr. Magliacano would report back to the board before the next meeting with an analysis of the direct incremental costs to the district. Mrs. Gaglione asked Mr. Magliacano if his report would be done by Friday? Mr. Magliacano replied that he would try. Dr. Jakubowski voiced his concern on whether to waive rental fees and custodial fees for the organizations mentioned above. Mr. Magliacano said that the Board does not charge custodial fees if the custodians are working in the building. He said that that the four organizations requesting waiving of fees have always been waived except for the Portuguese School, which pays for rental fees only. Mr. Manochio asked if the board of education is obligated to provide facilities and waive the fees for Holy Spirit School. Dr. Jakubowski said that the district is not obligated to provide them services; he said that we try to assist them. He said by law, students from a private school are not allowed to play a sport in our district. Dr. Jakubowski said that based on the fact, that the budget was defeated, and that the district lost \$647,000 in state aid and an additional \$500,000 which the township committee chose to take from our budget, we need to look at things that the district needs to do vs. things the district needs not to do. Dr. Jakubowski voiced his concern with giving organizations the use of our facilities without paying any cost to the board of education. With regards to the organizations requesting waiving of fees, Mrs. Gaglione asked if the board can charge a price if they wish to. Dr. Jakubowski replied –yes. Dr. Jakubowski recommended that the Board continue to waive the fees for the Municipal Drug Alliance and the Hillside Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Dunn said that the rental fees schedule needed to be amended and that a utility surcharge will be added to the cost.

PERSONNEL:

Mr. Manochio presented the Personnel Agenda.

Mrs. Axelrod asked that the addresses and phone numbers on the substitute list be deleted for security reasons.

Mrs. Lombardi said additional teacher names would be added to next week's agenda. These teachers would be paid from the NCLB grant from Title 1, 2 & 3.

Dr. Jakubowski stated that several personnel names would be added to next week's agenda.

Dr. Jakubowski stated that there were 27 students in each of the fourth grade classes at Connecticut Farms School, so an additional teacher will be added. He said a classroom assistant that was hired in September would be moved to the position of a fourth grade teacher. Dr. Jakubowski stated that the philosophy is to hire classroom assistants with certifications so that they can be moved into a teacher position.

Dr. Jakubowski said that there was an increase in the number of girls that went out for the soccer team this year. He said the person that was the freshman coach in the past would take the coaching position again.

Dr. Jakubowski stated that the following administrators would be retiring this year: Mr. Jaranek, Principal of Washington School, Mr. Fortunato, Principal of the High School, and Mrs. Fortunato, Supervisor of English. Dr. Jakubowski said that he would like to post for the elementary principal position as soon as possible. He said that Mrs. DiGiovanni is currently the interim principal at Franklin School.

Mrs. Axelrod asked Dr. Jakubowski when he would post for the supervisor position? Dr. Jakubowski said that the changes that will take place administratively in the district could be enormous. He said he believes that at least four more administrators will be leaving the district by the end of the year. Dr. Jakubowski said that he spoke with Mrs. Lombardino about taking the responsibility of both Math and English Supervisor in February. Dr. Jakubowski said that by law any supervisor could replace another supervisor.

Mrs. Gaglione stated that one million dollars was paid to the insurance company. She said luckily the money was in the account, however, to elevate this from happening in the future, she asked for a bill payment schedule from the insurance company. Ms. Dunn said that a schedule was provided for future payments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Dr. Jakubowski stated that the opening of school went smoothly except for transportation. He said that each year it gets harder and harder because of the number of students that are bused out of district. Dr. Jakubowski stated that there was a bus inspection at the end of the summer, which led to some concern on whether some of the buses were suitable for driving students.

Dr. Jakubowski stated that student enrollment is down by 250 students; a significant decrease in kindergarten, a decrease of 80 students in high school, and a small decrease in fifth grade. Middle schools student enrollment has increased

Dr. Jakubowski stated that the building level objectives were presented and accepted by the county superintendent. He said the objectives were developed by each of the building principals, with the support of Mrs. Lombardi and Mr. Tatum.

With regards to the NJASK test results, Dr. Jakubowski stated that seven of our ten schools reached 40 out of 40 indicators, adding that he was impressed that Union high school was one of the schools. Dr. Jakubowski stated that both middle schools and Central-five school did not reach 40 out of 40 indicators because of the high number of special education students. Dr. Jakubowski said he was very happy with the results and that this is a credit to all of our people.

Dr. Jakubowski read the following statement:

“Last year Mr. Fortunato approached Mrs. Lombardi and me with a concern about the impact of our AP and honors courses on class rank. It appeared that as we offered more and more honors or AP courses, some even suitable for freshman, the playing field or equal opportunity for all the students changed. Since Mr. Fortunato knew he would be retiring sometime during the 2006-07 school year he wanted to address this issue and not leave it for his successor. He met with the education committee of the board to discuss his concern and later met with Mrs. Lombardi and me to discuss some ideas. Mr. Fortunato discussed the issue with his vice principals. Mrs. Buttell, Mrs. Hart and others in the hope of finding a solution that was fair and reasonable. After months of deliberation, Mr. Fortunato decided to continue to list both the weighted and unweighted Grade Point Average (GPA) on the transcript, but to only convert the unweighted GPA to a class rank at the end of the junior year. The valedictorian would still be decided using the weighted GPA. This determination would now take place at the end of the senior year and not after the first semester of senior year. His final decision was to make it effective with the class of 2008. He also clearly stated the changes in the student handbook and discussed them with the students at this opening of school orientation meetings.

I realize that there have been many questions, concerns, and anxiety over the change. Since Friday, I have had several meetings with Mr. Fortunato; have reached out to every district in Union County, as well as several districts throughout the state. I have asked one of the guidance counselors to reach out to several universities and I have already talked to the admission director at Rutgers and Seton Hall. Prior to the October board meeting, I will share my findings with the education committee and make a final recommendation to the Board of Education and resolve this issue.

Several items that I will consider:

Timelines of change

Purpose for change

Impact of Weighted vs unweighted rank

Need for class rank

Selection of Valedictorian

Equality of weighting courses: example should AP art studio be worth more weight than honors chemistry, or even regular chemistry

Practices in other districts (both in and outside the county)

College Priority List

Is an equal playing field really possible?

Honor Society criteria

Any other factor I believe is important

Some have questioned why would a student take an honors course if he or she does not receive more credit? I ask why not. Isn't the purpose of high school to prepare an individual for his/her future? Doesn't more challenging courses better prepare one for the rigor of college? To avoid taking a more rigorous course for the sake of class rank and nothing else is a terrible mistake and any concerned parent should counsel their child against making such a mistake."

Dr. Jakubowski said that he would have this matter resolved at the October meeting.

Mr. Perkins said that there was discussion regarding the paperless project for planning sessions. He said this is an inexpensive project and ask if the administration is considering moving forward with it. Dr. Jakubowski said that he believed that this matter was going to be discussed tonight. Mr. Perkins said that this issue is not on the agenda for discussion. Mrs. Axelrod said that she reviewed the project on a website and the project is very easy to operate. Dr. Jakubowski said that the meetings are board of education meetings, and if the board chooses to go to paperless meetings than it is their choice to do so. Mr. Perkins said that it is the administrations responsibility to assist in the operation of the Board as efficiently as possible. He said the savings, time, and labor of using paper and materials is over-whelming. Ms. Dunn said that there is no need to purchase equipment and that the goal is to use the lab tops in the school library. Mrs. Gaglione asked who would be responsible for the laptop and for the projection on to the screen. Dr. Jakubowski said that it would be the responsibility of the board secretary or a person in the technology department. Mrs. Gaglione asked if the technology person is required to attend the board meetings. Dr. Jakubowski said that they are not and that this issue needed to be discussed. Ms. Dunn said that that she would contact another school board to see what the process is for implementation. Mrs. Gaglione asked if each board member has a computer at home to tap into? Each member acknowledged that they had a personal computer. Mr.

Perkins and Mrs. Gaglione agreed that a cost analysis should be done on the paperless project before a decision is made. Mrs. Axelrod asked if there would be a paper agenda for the audience. Mr. Perkins replied – yes.

Mrs. Gaglione asked if the special parent group was put into affect this month? Mr. Tatum said that he spoke with the director of special services and correspondence is going out to parents this week.

Mrs. Gaglione asked for an up-date regarding the refurbishing of playgrounds. Mr. Abraham said that mulch has been placed on the playgrounds that needed it.

Dr. Jakubowski stated that the Board came up with a policy regarding the hours of use on school property. He said that he met with Deputy Chief Giordano, Mr. Bradley, and Sgt. Speckhart, and they asked if the Board would be consistent with the signs that they have up on their properties. Dr. Jakubowski said they looked at their signs and agreed that the signs just needed to be modified. Dr. Jakubowski said that the police would issue a warning the first time someone trespasses after hours and after that the person will be fined. Mr. Perkins said that that the sign should read as follows: “no un-authorized personnel” should be allowed on school property between dusk and 5 a.m. and “No Trespassing” – “violators will be prosecuted”. Dr. Jakubowski said that he tried to keep the policy specific and yet broad enough that people walking the track after dusk will not be stopped.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mrs. Hearn stated that she is a taxpayer in Union. She said that her children went through the Union school system and are now currently in college. She said that she heard about the change in the grading system for the honor classes and that she is appalled. She said that her children went to colleges out of state and colleges do look at GPA's. Mrs. Hearn stated that her children were in honor classes and they had a lot of assignments over the summer and they deserve a reward for that. Mrs. Hearn said that if a student is in an honor's class and they work hard than that student should be rewarded.

Mr. Weisbrod read a prepared statement and handed out a signed petition, which is amended to these minutes.

Mrs. Schimmenti stated that the petition is not a PTA policy. She said the parents who signed the petition are executive members of the PTA and that this is not a PTA position because a vote was not taken on anything specific. Mrs. Schimmenti said this matter is not about rewarding students but how we choose to reward students. She said it boils down to self-esteem. Mrs. Schimmenti said fourteen years ago she had a child come home with a little piece of paper that showed a weighted rank and an un-weighted rank and that her child focused on the weighted rank, which was higher. Mrs. Schimmenti said if you take away the weighted rank from the honor student, their focus is on their lower grade point average. She said it is not fair to any child, to take away their fifteen minutes of fame, within their peer group. Mrs. Schimmenti said in a perfect world we would not be having this discussion. She said children and still children and they need an external reward because they have not self actualized and realized what is inside of them. Mrs. Schimmenti stated that children needed to set their own self-esteem by bouncing themselves off of people around them. She said that a honor student that is forced to look at the lower ranking are going to say “my I worked all this time for this” instead of saying “I worked this hard and it paid off”. Mrs. Schimmenti stated that as a parent who has been in this district for 27 years and has seen changes come and go, she felt it is the obligation of everyone in the room to build our children's character, not to tear it down.

Michael David, a former Union high school student, spoke about how important weighted and unweighted grades are. He said the honor's program prepared him for college. He said the district

should evaluate the purpose of weighted grades. He stated that many students choose not to take honor's classes because of the potential of work. He said that by removing the weighted GPA rank, there is no reason for GPA grades. Mr. David said it is important to remember that.

Dr. Jakubowski said the only change that Mr. Fortunato recommended is to put the unweighted rank on the transcript.

Ms. Ciampi asked why Mr. Fortunato decided to change the policy now, when he is retiring from the district. Dr. Jakubowski stated that the playing field has changed in determining what would be a fair way to determine what student would be the best. He said Mr. Fortunato tried to resolve this matter before he resigned. His decision was done in good faith because he cares about the students and he did what he believed is best interest for the students. Dr. Jakubowski stated that he would review this matter and repeated again the considerations that he would be looking at. Dr. Jakubowski said that he would make a decision in October, not the high school principal. He said his decision would be based on what is best for all of the students in the school district.

Ms. Ciampi stated that she printed out the agenda for tonight's meeting and that items were added on the agenda after it was posted online.

Ms. Ciampi asked to explain Comprehensive Maintenance Plan, as referred to in resolution 0-6. Ms. Dunn explained that the Education Facilities Construction Act is required to put at least two percent of the building replacement value amount into their budget each year for required maintenance for specific locations. Each year the figure is computed and that amount of money for each building is the minimum amount of money budget for the subsequent year.

Ms. Ciampi asked who the district monitors personal phone calls throughout the district? Ms. Dunn said that each person that has an assigned extension number receives a phone bill and they must pay for any phone call that is not school related.

Mr. LaMatty stated that he formerly a teacher at Union High School, and he has also taught honors' classes. He said that there are good arguments on both sides regarding the ranking system. Mr. LaMatty said his main concern is changing the policy during the school year.

Ms. Coleman asked the board to consider her plea for allowing her son to take the school bus from Franklin School to Central-five School, where he would attend an aftercare program in a nearby area. Ms. Coleman said that she has contacted transportation and was told that she would have to pay \$173.00 per month. Ms. Coleman is asking for a reduced price or a no charge seat on the bus if there is availability. Dr. Jakubowski stated that only children that are eligible for busing are bused; if a child is not eligible for busing than they are prohibited to be on the bus. Dr. Jakubowski said that if a student is on the free/reduced lunch program, than they are allowed to take the bus for a fee of \$43.00 per month. Ms. Dunn explained that in 1997 the law was changed for all districts; it's states a child must live over 2.5 miles to be eligible for transportation. In Union there is a 1.5 mileage requirement for K-5th grades, a 2-mile requirement for 6, 7, & 8th grades, and a 2.5-mile limit for high school students. Ms. Dunn stated that the district is providing courtesy transportation for particular students at our choice. Ms. Dunn said according to state law, school districts can sell the seats on the bus providing there is a policy whereby we cannot discriminating against financial hardships for any particular students. She said that there is an application and that the regulations are the same as the school lunch and breakfast program. Ms. Dunn explained that if a subscription seat is given to a student and a regular rider decides to take the bus, than the subscription student would have to give up their seat. Ms. Dunn stated that the board has a policy in place; however, they have the choice to

amend this policy or make another recommendation. Mrs. Coleman asked the Board to consider her request. She said she cannot \$175.00 per month; she asked for a reduction in fee because her son would only be using the bus one-way, for four days a week. Dr. Jakubowski stated that this matter would be considered.

Mr. Donnarumma said he listened to the discussion regarding class ranking and felt that Dr. Jakubowski would make the right decision.

The Board returned to public session at 9:15 p.m. and resumed the discussion of the permit for the Portuguese School. There were various pros and cons discussed with bulk rental such as the Portuguese School, the German School and other schools that have used our facilities on an ongoing basis. The Board suggested that Dr. Jakubowski and Mr. Damato come up with a new bulk rental rate and that the resolution be put on for next week's regular meeting.

The next issue to be discussed was with regard to the Municipal Alliance and there was some discussion about the sources and uses of funds related to the Municipal Alliance. It was suggested that the Municipal Alliance provide some documentation as to those sources and uses of funds so that the Board may make a more informed decision about fee waivers or compromises.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

There being no further business before the board to be conducted in public session, on motion of Mr. Abraham, seconded by Mr. Manochio, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m. All present voting yes.

AYE: Mr. Abraham, Mrs. Axelrod, Mrs. Gaglione, Mr. Manochio,
Mrs. McNeil, Mr. Perkins, Mr. Ruhl, Mrs. Salazar

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

Motion was carried

Respectfully submitted,

JAMES J. DAMATO
BOARD SECRETARY

