

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES – APRIL 30, 2019

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The public hearing meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, April 30, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at the Union High School Library, 2350 North Third Street, Union, New Jersey pursuant to notice sent to each member.

Mrs. Minneci called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mr. Vito Nufrio, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Linda Richardson, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Sherry Higgins (arrived 7:27 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gregory Tatum, Mrs. Annie Moses, Mr. Gerry Benaquista, Mr. Gregory Brennan, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Sandra Paul, Mrs. Anne Hart, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mr. Craig Wojcik

ALSO PRESENT:

Afshan T. Ajmiri Giner, Esq.

Mr. McDowell led the Board and audience members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Brennan read the statement required under the “Open Public Meetings Act”, a copy of which is on file in the office of the Board Secretary.

Mrs. Minneci read the District’s mission statement.

Mrs. Minneci requested a moment of silence in memory of Union High School Junior Anthony Steitz – the tragedy over the weekend – want to express our condolences to his family, friends and the whole community.

COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS:

Lynn Cornacio stated I am the UTEA head rep at the elementary schools. I also live in Union and I’m a paraprofessional. I have had the privilege of being a paraprofessional in the district for over 16 years. I hope that in the time that I have been here I have made a small difference in the lives of the children that I’m working with. However, it seems every year there is something with the paraprofessionals that has caused me and my colleagues to wonder if the Board realizes how hard we work and how vital we are to the educational community. Yes you do pay our salaries and our health benefits but now you want to privatize us. How do you think

that makes us feel – like we are not worth anything. The average paying salary for a paraprofessional is \$22,000. It takes 23 years to reach the maximum salary of \$37,000. By privatizing us we no longer have a pension and will we be full time or part-time? What would be the actual savings. This is not fair and why are the ones that are needed in the district are the ones paying the price? I found out recently that the Maplewood/South Orange school district privatized their paraprofessionals to a company and the district is now looking to hire the paras back as district employees because the district has no control over who is hired from the company, the company itself does not always have people that are qualified to handle the children to meet the needs of the district. Is this the road that we like to take? Why is it that there is a problem with the budget and it only affects those directly working with the children. If it is not the teachers, it's the paras. Paraprofessionals have built a relationship with the students. We work with these children on a daily basis. Privatizing would not permit this. If you lose a paraprofessional and replace it with others will you guarantee that the children will have the same consistency? The children that we work with need consistency. Would a company guarantee the same consistency? I don't think so. Who is to say that if they decide not to come to work today than a child will be left with no one. Mr. Tatum and other Board members that I see sitting before me, I am pleading with you to consider not privatize the paraprofessionals in the district. We are needed and we help support the teachers and the educational process of the students. No outside company will care for these children as much as we do. There has to be another way to save the budget without privatizing the paras. I implore you not to consider it.

Rich D'Avanzo stated UTEA vice president – I'm here reading on behalf of Diana Pielech she is a special education teacher – Burnet Middle School. “Was unable to attend tonight's meeting but would like to share my thoughts on changing paras benefits. Most of you know from videos shared last year with Board of Ed unified sports. Unified and team work is the message we teach everyday inside and outside of the classroom. I have five co-teachers, or paras as you call them, all of who are part of my team. The changing of benefits will affect 3 out of 5 paras. I know most of them will not return because of benefits. To sit here and explain the contributions that my paras have had on my life and my student's education would take me all night. We constantly undervalue our paras by threatening their jobs and taking away from their benefits. You are taking away from educators who go above and beyond. They are employees that are part of this team who allow our students to have success both inside and outside of the classroom. I want to share with you just one example of how these paras go above and beyond for our students. This is the type of employee that we will lose if we keep taking from them. One para stays every Monday after school implementing and coaching unified sports as a volunteer. He spends hours coordinating with the other schools and planning for our students to compete. This past weekend at the special Olympics track event, he woke up at 6 a.m. and coached all day until three o'clock – he was there representing our school and athletics – I had two games to coach at Rutgers. Our students won six gold medals. One of the students said ‘it changed my life, it really changed my life’ – this is what our paras do. They change our students' life. If these changes go through I know I will lose most of my support staff. I will lose my team. My students will lose three great people that have become role models in their lives and are part of our team. Our paras dedicate themselves to our district. I beg with you to fight for them as I am right now to show them their true value and equal asset to our district. Please find a solution.”

Angela Kahn stated I am a teacher at Battle Hill. Board members we are encouraging you to please say no to paraprofessional privatization. Our support staff, class room assistants, shared and one-on-one aides work with our children every day. They will be sent to us through an outside agency. We won't know them. Our kids won't know them. This is extremely concerning for our kids that really need consistency and instructors that are familiar with their needs. Teachers and parents won't have a say in who works with us and who works with the children on a daily basis. This will be done by an outside agency that is not vested in our children and our community. We ask you again to reconsider this proposal that would greatly result in our caring, valued and respective paraprofessionals to be replaced by people we don't know. Thank you on behalf of our concerned teachers.

Cathy Sharpe stated I don't understand why you chose the paras. The lowest paid people on the chain. Did you consider any other departments or are you just hitting the paras? Have you looked at Central Office administrative positions? One or two of them would more than cover all those paras that you are thinking of letting go. Are there any other positions that you are considering cutting from the budget? One thing that we are wondering is the paras that work pre-k and I'm sure the Board can't answer this but I'm sure somebody in administration can – the assistants that are in pre-k is under a different budget and everything – are they included in the six and under or are their jobs safe and somebody that is here one or two years and they you are taking someone that has been here six years and cutting them? Are the pre-k paras that are under six or under, are they going to be sent to the company and one of our people that are here more than that – cover that position? Or are they safe in their balloon because they are under a different budget? Mr. Tatum stated I will take that under advisement but that is all we will say regarding that at this time.

Mrs. Shape stated it is going to be very hard to tell somebody that has been here six years because you are in this classroom working with Tommy, you are going to go but the person who has been here one year because they were lucky enough to get in the pre-k department, they are safe because they can be interchangeable because para is a para is a para. We don't want it to be anyone but if they do go they have to be by seniority because that is the only fair way that I can see it. According to our contract which was signed by the Board, decisions go according to seniority so please keep that in mind when you cut. If at all possible please reconsider it because the amount of money that you are going to save on these paras can surely be saved in another way in some of the departments that are well over staffed. Paras are not overstaffed. We are cutting very close to core on that. I appreciate if you could reconsider this.

Nancy Lucas Miller stated I am a teacher at the high school. I am a rep and I'm a government relations chair. Do not privatize our students' educators. You claim that the Board does not have enough money. What have you done to try to get more? Our UTEA officers – government relations chair and other members have gone to Trenton to speak with our State legislature – Ann Margaret Shannon, Rich D'Avanzo, James Frazier and myself to name a few. They lobby for public education funding. They have gone to Washington DC to speak to our members of Congress. They have had personal conversations with Senators Menendez and Booker. In addition our State association, the New Jersey Education Association, is consistently working with State legislators. Who from Central Office has ever asked the State legislator for

help? Who has traveled to our nation's capital? What do your State associations do to help you? For the good of the district and our children, do not privatize our student educators

Rose Ann Tore stated proud Union resident. I work at Jefferson School as a media clerk. Do not privatize our students' educators. Across the nation a majority of educational support professional live in a school district that they work. They provide numerous intangibles because they feel responsible for their neighbor's children. The paraprofessionals in the district take care of our most valuable/vulnerable students - the special education students, the pre-k and the kindergarten students. If our paras get inferior healthcare and lose access to the pension system, they will not stay in Union and who will replace them – strangers? How can you put the care of these children in jeopardy – eventually in the hands of strangers. For the good of this district and our children, do not privatize our student's educators.

Kelly Osborne stated I'm a paraprofessional and about six years in our district. I started out as a substitute teacher and volunteering in our district since 1994. I work with children because I enjoy it. I have a pride when I see my child achieve. Is a person that is coming from a company going to change that child's life? Is that person going to clean up vomit from themselves and that child? If not, who will? When the parents come and says how'd my child do today? I cannot say, I will have to refer them to their teacher. It is unfortunate right now that the parents don't know what is going on. They don't realize their children are going to lose aides that they have known for years. I have been requested on more than one occasion because I do my job and I do it well and the children benefit from that. Today I also want to ask what company are you looking for? Do you know what companies you are using? What their reputation is? What is the turnover rate from those agencies? They usually pay a lower amount of money. Who is going to work for that kind of money? I make twenty-something thousands of dollars a year, half goes back to the Township because I live here. I have become a building rep just to share information with my other paras in the building because we don't know what is going on. As soon as we here information it becomes rumor. We wonder do you really understand what it is? Have you ever been in a special needs classroom? A self-contained classroom? For that – less than a living wage. How can we put the care of our students into the hands of those workers who have no loyalty to our district. For the good of our district and our children, please do not privatize our paras.

Secondly I would like to address some of the things that are going on in the community – I see many apartment buildings going up. Does the Board have any say in about how many children will be in our school district? If we are having a problem now with the bills, how are we going to make it if we are not aware of how many children are going to be in here in 2-3-5 years. The Township of Edison Board of Education is suing their township because they don't have any input. I think we should have input in that. I think we should be prepared for the numbers of children that will be coming into our district. At what point will we be building more additions onto buildings to serve these needs. I would like the Board to consider that and also for the good of our children and the district – do not privatize our paraprofessionals.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated I'm the proud president of Union Township Education Association. I would like to thank all the UTEA members who have come here tonight and a special thank you to those who have come to the mike. It is not an easy thing to do. At this

point I'm not sure if you on the dais got the handout. Kim Scott who is a proud parent of Union and she lives in Union and she is also a national education director – she went to DC with Rich and myself and Jim Frazier. Please do not privatize our students' educators. A number of issues were raised tonight. What about that living wage? After getting some very bad news last Tuesday, I have been organizing with Rich D'Avanzo and trying to get our members to attend tonight's meeting. Of course late last night I was still badgering the head representatives of each building – emailing and texting them and asking how many members they intend to get to the meeting tonight. I put a special effort on the paras attendance.

So let me sum up what is happening here tonight with a very sad email from Franklin School. I sent an email out last night "Is anyone from Franklin coming to the BOE meeting? With all the troubles with the paras I expect them all to come. I hope you had a chance to ask them to. The response from the head rep was "hi Ann, I am for paras and just one signed up. Name, told me she works but she will ask to see if someone can cover for her. No one seems to have the time because they all have two jobs. I have testing for PARC tomorrow, I will give you a count – I'm doing my very best." Ladies and gentlemen our paras work very hard for such little money that I would not call it a living wage. They have to work a second job and these paras work every day. Most of them, a lot of them, usually through their lunch because the students need constant supervision. They do get paid if they eat lunch with a student. But these same paras that work so hard every day, more often than not, do not get a contracted break because the student needs constant supervision and the school administrators do not have enough staff to cover these breaks. I know Mr. Tatum and Mr. Benaquista have been working with us on that. We are not trying to put anything on them. They are trying very hard. We have a hard time with substitutes. The fact is the paras don't even get their 25 minute break that they need – that is a breach of contract. I think not only should we keep these hard working paras as our own board of education employees, but you should increase their salaries and improve their working conditions. The board of education and the Union Township Education Association have a collective bargaining agreement. We will be negotiating a new agreement in the next school year. Let's do the right thing. Let's wait til the next school year – let's negotiate the changes and the working conditions at the bargaining table. For the good of our district and our children, I implore you – do not privatize our students' educators. Thank you.

Mrs. Higgins arrived at 7:27 p.m.

Lisa Mass stated I'm a resident of Union Township. I was born and raised here my entire life and I'm raising my two children here. I came here tonight to hear the rationale of the changes being made to the paraprofessional staff. It isn't solely based on a financial basis. I'm hearing is about our finances. By proposing this change you are clearly affecting the staff. Have you stopped to think how this will affect the children? What it will do or what it won't do. As a mother with a child that requires special education and related services, I am specifically concerned on how this will affect my child. Even if you aren't a parent with a child of special needs, your general education students will be affected. I have been in education for 12 years and I see how outsourcing staff can negatively affect a district. If you look at other districts that have done this with any type of services, lawsuits have often followed. I'm thinking it from a perspective believe it or not I am trying to see their perspective – mine is my priority but think about it in that terms on how it is going to affect the entire district. That classroom teacher will

also have to make other accommodations because when there is outsourcing there is going to be a big turnover. The staff people are not going to know that child and that will affect the entire rapport of the classroom. I hope that all the members of the Board consider the children and their decision making process. I'm looking at all of you right now please dig deep and try to find another way. This will really affect all the children.

Carrie Grim stated I work at Franklin and have worked for the district for five years. I am also third generation and have lived in the same house. My grandmother was the first to graduate from Connecticut Farms. Last year when I was on vacation and heard about the RIF I thought I was coming home to my last year in my position. A position that I love. When I came home I found out I was saved only because I was in the district for over 3-1/2 years. Fast forward to this year I am no longer saved because I have only been in the district for five years not six. I don't know how I feel about this. To me I feel like my services are not good enough. It hurts. I love my job and that is all I have to say. Please don't privatize, reconsider.

Jill Fleisman stated one of the teachers here at the high school. My comments will be brief and with all due respect, I'm hearing about a financial decision and I know that special ed being one of the largest costs in the budget, my question is because it is a financial decision did you think about the IEP's – that is a legal document. If that legal document is not followed to a "t" it ends up being a lawsuit. A lawsuit that will be very costly to be able to settle. It only takes one incident, one unhappy parent for that money that you think you are saving to go out the window. So please rethink this.

Mrs. Cordozza stated I have lived here for 40 years. Raised my children here and now raising my three granddaughters and I have been here before. Happy to say my granddaughter was put into the program and she is at our neighborhood school of Battle Hill. Now I hear all of this and I'm here once again to tug at your heart. I see the challenges my granddaughter faces. I see what her one-on-one has done for her. The attachment that has developed between the child and her one-on-one. The extra mile that the woman will go for my granddaughter. She has done things that others have not or were not willing to work with us and we have seen her blossom. Is she a challenge – yes. Will this privatizing hurt her – definitely. She is a child like other children in the system that needs consistency. They need that familiar face to feel safe. My granddaughter won't go over to just anybody. She will look at your face and if she knows you she will go with you and the teachers at Battle Hill will attest to that. Has it been a challenge with transition – yes but these people are not in there for the money. It is not their salary that pays the work that they do with these children. Please try to find a different way to balance this budget. Do something but don't do on the most needed – the children that desperately need their one-on-one, there consistency – that hurts. I know you are all educators. The majority of you have children in this system, that have gone through this system but until you have a child with special needs or a family member with special needs, you don't know how hard it is. It tugs at your heart. I love my granddaughter. I love all the special needs children at that school. I have made bonds with them because I'm a true volunteer and I see the hard work that the teachers and paras do and it is not their salary. They are worth triple or four times. The woman that takes care of my granddaughter, God put her in front of us. She is worth every penny there is in this world. She is good to her. She is loving and stern. I have seen my granddaughter blossom. She is a little be more – doing for herself and that is what we want. We want them to succeed. I

want her to go through the rest of the school years, graduating from high school and be a citizen that will give back to her community. Please look deep into your hearts and please do something but not at their cost. Thank you.

Michael Cohan stated I have arrived at this meeting thinking it was a hearing on a proposed school budget. Did this Board publish any information about the proposed prior to tonight? Mr. Brennan stated yes in the Local Source. Mr. Cohan asked is this hearing tonight intended to inform the public about the fiscal condition of the district and your plans and intentions regarding how to fund the schools. Mr. Brennan stated it is how we are going to fund the schools for 2019-2020.

Mr. Cohan asked what are these folks talking about because I come here tonight to learn about the budget and I have learned nothing except for a bunch of employees that are upset about something that is apparently is known to them but not known to me as a taxpayer and that is a little bit disturbing because if you want to have an open public hearing, there needs to be information for the public so that we can make informed comments to you and be able to form opinions about what your plans are. You may have met a legal requirement to publish the information but it would be helpful to have some information here at the hearing tonight when people arrive to the meeting looking to learn what those plans for the next fiscal year are. Having listened to the comments about an apparent plan to privatize some employees, I can tell you based upon what I have known and paying attention to things in other school district all around the State, privatization is not a plan. It is merely a way to kick a can down the road and avoid making difficult decisions now. You have a budget that is well over \$100 million dollars. You are raising \$91 million from us as taxpayers. I wonder how much this Board has deliberated on alternatives prior to coming to this meeting tonight. As a taxpayer and citizen and someone who has devoted 30 years of my professional career as a teacher in the district and 40 years as a resident, it is pretty disheartening to have members of the public come before you and see everyone sitting at this table – respectfully listening – but not offering any response whatsoever. It seems as though whatever is about to happen tonight is complete, you are going to listen to everyone, you are going to pose the comments from the public, you are going to move into your voting portion of the meeting and it will be a done deal. I just don't think that is a way to deal with the taxpayers of the community and the people that have an interest in the continued success of the school. I have always been proud of this school district, I have always talked to people about all of the wonderful things that we have done but if you take this action tonight, you are going to diminish this school district and make it less than it is today and what it is going to be.

BUDGET PRESENTATION:

Mr. Tatum stated to all our employees here tonight – we welcome you and hopefully with the comments that have been raised this evening, you will hear some solid answers to some of the concerns that have been brought forth in the presentation you are about to see.

I want to make one comment – I want to make it clear to everyone here – it is never our goal to hurt our employees. It is never our goal to take away from our district. The last two years has been fiscally challenging and I will tell you that at looking at this as an option, it is an option that will not take away positions from anyone in this room. It is an option that will allow

those who are involved to go into a system where their salary will remain the same, it will not change. Unfortunately due to the fact that we do have a budget gap, this district is underfunded by \$8.5 million. I have a statement in front of me that speaks to that. We have been year by year trying to do everything we can to maintain all of our programs and services for all of our children. Someone mentioned a few moments ago about an IEP and about the fact that an IEP could lead to legal challenges – you are absolutely right and that is one of the reasons why as you see if this plan is approved tonight and it is not a plan that has not been well thought out. I will along with my Central Office staff will be vetting every paraprofessional that comes through the door that is part of the requirements for someone to come into this district. It will be no different than anybody else that comes before me. I have to get a good feeling if they are worthy of being here in this district, servicing our children and insuring that they are of the same quality of the people that currently sit in this room. There will be no one in this room that would walk out of here tonight or in June without a position.

Last year we faced a real difficult challenge with the number of positions and dollar amounts that we were shorted once again and myself and this staff work very diligently over the summer to ensure that everyone had a position. I'm proud to say that tonight except for the two people currently exist, everyone got a job or found something in another district, but in the most part everyone is still working.

In this budget that we have tonight, I know I'm going ahead of the presentation but I have to say this now, it calls for other reductions – it doesn't just call for the paraprofessionals. I personally have worked very hard to ensure that there is very little of any teaching positions eliminated this year. This is a plan to keep our district solid and keep everybody working and to also maintain a level of professionalism that we have with all of you.

I want to make one comment that refers back to something Cathy Sharpe said and everyone knows I have the greatest respect for Cathy Sharpe – she is one person that I'm actually afraid of – when Cathy said two administrators would probably be able to wipe out all the issues we have here – I can tell you right now it is far higher than that. The numbers that we are talking about right now that affects subs, paraprofessionals - \$2.26 million and when you see what we have done with expenditures because of the wide gap that we had, we received \$334,000 of State aid, and as I look at what is going on around this State and how this is a struggle to maintain and keep everything together, I think what you are not realizing is that what we have done we have worked diligently and hard to keep everyone in this district working as opposed to letting anyone off.

Mr. Brennan stated prior to the approval by the Union County Superintendent's office, Mr. Tatum along with myself had a long conference call with Karen Dunn, the County Business Administrator and also the Interim Executive Superintendent, Daryl Palmieri. They voiced after hearing Mr. Tatum summarize his strategy for this budget and how responsible it was – they voiced how pleased they were with the way this budget was built, especially, how the district has followed the advice of the County office and following other districts, not only in Union County but throughout the State.

Budget meetings – we started having budget meetings back in August of 2018 and those budget meetings consisted of Central Office Administration, building principals, directors, supervisors, vice principals. We had Finance Committee meetings and we met a minimum of once a month – sometimes 2-3 times per month that we met. This was a collaborative approach to developing the budget this year. On March 19th the approved proposed budget was submitted to the County office by the Board.

Mr. Tatum stated in preparation of the budget, one of the things that we also did was take a look at a 3-year trend. We analyzed the budget for the last three years and took a hard look at what was the last budget that we had that was fiscally responsible. What we decided to do was to take all expenditures and bring them back to that level. That was a strategy to save the money that we were missing within the budget gap. As we looked at those funds we also went into particular lines of the budget and reallocate those funds in priority areas. One of the questions that was raised in the preliminary budget, how is it possible to have increases in special education costs but at the same time have a budget – that's all about prioritizing. We know that special education is a high priority in this district but at the same time we are not getting the funding to service all the children that we get. We are not getting the funding to service the population that comes into the district and then leaves us – in the door with an IEP, out the door with an IEP that says they have to go out-of-district. Every time that happens that is \$100,000 or more per child just for you to get a feel for what this is all about.

Mr. Brennan stated in this budget we had a change in fund balance from 2019-2020 budgeted fund balance which is the district's savings account is \$1.2 million less than the 2018-2019 budgeted fund balance. Why is it \$1.2 million less? Because of increase of salaries and benefits throughout the year; increase in special education transportation; increase in Charter Schools students – we went from 25 to about 46 and a \$15,000 per tuition and transportation, that is \$300,000 and also Mrs. Conti will talk about special education costs later on.

The proposed budget includes the State Aid increase of \$334,220; the local tax levy increase of 2.0% (\$1,795,523) – I said this at many meetings – the 2% is on \$90 million; that is only 70% of our total operating budget which is \$127 million. On 30% of our budget we don't get an increase.

The State aid increase – Mr. Vieira and I had a conversation with John Donohue of NJASBO, Executive Director, and we went over State aid and it is a very complicated calculation but what we took away from the conversation was of the whole pool of State aid money, Union is getting 1/10 of 1% of all the State aid money that is distributed throughout the State. It is not much money.

Revenue for 2019-2020 – we have our local tax levy which includes the general fund and debt service of \$94,320,891. We have our State aid which is \$38,124,663. We have federal aid which is \$2,873,007. Our budgeted fund balance for both the general and debt service is \$1,067,766. We have a miscellaneous withdraw from capital reserve and maintenance reserve which is \$781,000. For a total of \$137,167,327 of revenue.

Our appropriations for 2019-2020 – for our general school administration and central services and technology - \$9,328,261; for capital outlay we budgeted \$915,362; our debt service which was voted on years ago by the taxpayers is \$2,863,750. Salaries and instruction and this also includes tuition for out-of-district placements - \$69,787,456; operations and maintenance - \$10,345,736 and of that \$2 million are our utilities – gas and electric and \$1 million is for security; employee benefits - \$21,287,755; student support services - \$15,960,002; transportation - \$6,679,004; for a total of \$137,17,327.

Tax impact on the average homeowner for 2019 – for the general fund is \$78.91; for the debt service fund there was a decrease of \$.84 and the tax rate is also down to 1.7% because the tax rate went from 1.86% to 1.7% in 2019 due to the increase of assessed valuation of real property in Union – property values are going up so that is a good thing.

District Revenue – our local tax levy from 2014-2015 through the current year 2019-2020 – there is a slight increase of 2% per year. However, the funding of State aid every year is less than 1% per year which is flat. With revenue on \$100 million – if you look at the salary plus the benefits, \$2 million coming in for salary and benefits – we are getting an increase each year of \$5 million – without any increase with special education costs. You can see that we are outpacing our revenue by \$3 million a year.

District Salary and Benefits – the salaries in the district are approximately \$80 million and our benefits are a little over \$20 million – they remain constant and that is because we have had a decrease in the number of employees between 2014 and 2019. In addition to that we have had education by our health broker and have educated the staff to maybe opt into a cheaper plan so it doesn't cost them as much money out of their pocket plus it is a lower premium. We also decreased some of these salaries in the general fund due to the Title I special revenue funds and the work of Maureen Guilfoyle and some of the pre-k grant that we got this year.

Full-time equivalent district employees – where we went from 1,302 in 2014-2015, we dropped about 144 employees currently. Our full-time equivalent is about 1,158 employees.

Mr. Tatum stated I want to share some historical data on State aid. I had an opportunity last week to meet with the Board President and the President of the Association. I need the community to understand that this didn't happen overnight. When I talk about the \$8.9 million that we are underfunded, it goes back and other districts have done this – they have gone back and did what is called a 10-year analysis so from 2008 to 2018 – I took a look at our State income.

In 2008-2009, the district lost \$9.1 million – it was taken from our district. The following year we had a reduction in State aid of \$6,014,000 – for a total of \$15 million. Regarding historical data from 2011-2012, a reduction of another \$1.2 million and then an increase of \$3 million. Then for the next three years, completely flat – zeros – no more State aid. In 2016-2017 we got about the same at this year \$292,380. The next year \$213,000 was our increase. Last year we got an increase of \$1.4 million. I want to share with you two figures. In 2008-2009, our State aid in Union was \$32,228,883. In 2018-2019, our State aid was \$32,684,260. Our State aid just got back to where we were 10 years ago. This is what you have

been facing all these years. There is another important number to consider here. When you take a look at the State aid that we received over the last 10 years, we received over a 10-year period an increase of \$1,794,000. If you take that number and divide it by 10 you have been living off of \$179,466 over the last 10 years. I think that these are things that unfortunately no one is paying attention to but we have to because this is the reason why we are every year faced with a problem where some kind of creative financing to try to keep everything together here. I think you have to understand that we are not just trying to come up with ways of how we are going to take away more people. You people that are here from 1-6 with the exception of a year, I'm probably the person that hired you and vetted you and found you to be here for our students. This is not a problem that we put together ourselves, this is a real problem that ties into what I said. The State report I'm looking at right now and I shared with the UTEA. This district was underfunded by \$8,587,186. People might think I'm somewhere fabricating this report – this came straight from the Department of Education in New Jersey. This is what we are facing here. Unfortunately we are doing everything humanly possible to maintain a respectful education program for all of our children and for our parents. I don't ever want to say to a parent that I don't have a paraprofessional for you. That is why last year we moved kindergarten assistants to the special needs student not because we wanted to – we moved them because we knew we had to by mandate ensure that there were aides for all of our special needs students. These are the challenges that we are facing.

Mrs. Conti stated the areas on the screen are the largest areas of expenditures in the special services department. If you look at the numbers in the parenthesis they are the increase over the past five years. Tuition is the largest expenditure – which is the out-of-district tuition. They do increase 5-10% every year. At one point during the 5-year period we had approximately 115 students who attended out-of-district placement. We are now somewhere around 150 out-of-district placement. Those two factors made this increase which is about a 58% increase.

Special services transportation – that has increased about 27% - primarily the students with IEPs – the transportation is contracted out to an outside agency. Some reasons for that is because the out-of-district students can attend throughout the State of New Jersey different schools. Sometimes we may have one student on a bus route, sometimes they can be combined with students from other districts. If there was an increase in out-of-district tuition that would affect special services transportation because the students have to be transported to their placement.

The other is the community based instruction – we have had an increase in that because we are committed to making sure that the students are ready for when they leave us for post-secondary transition. To transport the students to those sites is in that figure as well. Also where the students go out and learn advocacy skills.

Contract related services – it is the related services that are contracted on the outside. The big areas are nursing over the last five years. We require nurses for students on transportation for medical needs or if they need a nurse in addition the school nurse. Behaviorists is a huge area and we talked about this at many meetings, the increase for the need of behaviorists and it really has shown to be a success for students.

Effective School Solutions has been added to this line as well. They provide the therapeutic services to students in the school. Some of the related services for out-of-district students is also in this department - the personal aides, as well as the related services of occupational services, speech language therapy. ESS behaviorists – those services actually help prevent children from going to out-of-district placement or attending more restrictive placement and keeping them in less restrictive environment which can help that first bullet of tuition.

Home instruction – that is district staff who work outside the contracted hours either to provide home instruction, medical – suspensions, IEP team determined home instruction. Applied behavior, analysis providers – they are in that line as well, as well as community-based instruction.

Contracted CST evaluations – 133% increase over the last five years and again that is child study team evaluation on the outside. It can be independent evaluations, it could be any other specialized evaluation – like assisted technology, vocational evaluations – those are important and they have increased. We must get our students prepared for when they leave us. It can be neurological evaluations, neuropsychological in that line as well. Years 16-17, 17-18 school year we had a jump in the number of students with IEP's. We are now over 1,300 so you are servicing more students as well.

Just to give you some numbers – tuition \$6.7 million over the five years to \$10.5 million; transportation \$2.4 million to over \$3 million; contracted related services \$350,000 to \$1.8 million. We have discussed at looking at behaviorists being employed in the district instead of outside agencies. The home instruction \$200,000 to \$300,000 over the five year and lastly the contracted child study team evaluations \$50,000 to \$100,000.

We have been fortunate to this point that we have been able to keep and maintain our services and actually it expands the services as well.

Mr. Tatum stated I spoke about budget impacts that we are facing – the 18 teaching positions that we have eliminated from the 19-20 budget but I also mentioned that most of those positions will be recovered through attrition and breakage through retirements. I'm very hopefully but maybe change one program into a requirement change that we need in our district. Most of those people will return. There is a proposal to reduce one central office administrator and one district supervisor. We also have in transportation over the years we have been transporting students at 1.5 miles, the State law says we transport at 2.0 miles and 2.5 miles for high school. A question came up before about pre-k and one of the things that we are doing is following the requirements of pre-k and that is the State will pay for transportation for pre-k students at 2.0 miles. Therefore we are going for busing at 2.0 miles we need to help close our budget cap and so it is consistent across the district. I want you to understand that there are other things that are going to take place in this budget other than the paraprofessionals.

The question came before why the paraprofessionals, why are we looking at them and substitutes, first and foremost, earlier Ann Margaret mentioned about the fact that there is difficulties sometimes getting substitute teachers but the truth of it is that we will be able to get

more substitutes to provide the staff that we are in need of. The reason we looked at the 6 years or less paraprofessionals, over the last six years there has been a growing trend in our district as far as paraprofessionals. There was one year that paraprofessionals were being used as substitutes. I mentioned this at my meeting with the UTEA president the other day, thankfully I was not the superintendent when it was done. I was the one that was forced to correct it. She said to me you have to understand that these are positions that we bargain for – I understood that. We have a position in our agreement that says they shouldn't be substitutes. What did we do, we did the right thing and hired every one of those paraprofessionals – it was 35 at that juncture. It has been an ongoing trend. Over the years we have been adding \$300-500,000 per year in paraprofessionals. This is a cost that is going through the roof. We did not want to affect anyone who has 10 years or more because they are already vested in the pension and we are certainly not trying to hurt any of them. I said this to Ann Margaret, there is an alternative but right now this unfortunately is where the money is being spent. To provide the service we need for all of our children, this is the reason why we are looking at the direction we are looking at.

I already spoke about that no one is going to lose any compensation, we will be doing all the interviews – that is part of the requirement and we will take people that we already have here. Many times when a teaching position comes available, we have been hiring paraprofessionals for years. We have always given the first opportunity to those paras that were certified. Long-term replacements – we always go to our paras. There was a time that if a para had to go up a position as a teacher, they had to resign from their para position; that doesn't go on any more. What I have always said, if they are going and they are servicing our student, they better have a job when they return if that position doesn't become available. We have remained committed to all our people. I can't emphasize that enough. We have looked at other alternatives and what we are looking at now – that is where we have increased the most in personnel over the last six years or more.

The number that we are looking at right now – salary and benefits for years 1-6 is approximately \$3.9 million. Right now the amount of money that is spent on 156 paraprofessionals that we do have right now is \$7.7 million. There are ups and downs and one of the things that we did last year and I talked and researched is the possibility if we do have to go this route, we may be able to provide more support for the kindergarten classrooms. I don't want you to think this is a plan that was just thrown together without any thought at all. We have looked at the entire district and how again we can provide the most services for our students.

Mr. Benaquista stated is to highlighting through budget cuts – programs and services for students that would be impacted. It is just highlighted some of the programs that we are still including moving forward and it is important for our students. All the time we are looking to maintain different programs that are important and maintaining for next year – CBI, extracurricular activities, full day pre-k, after-school programs districtwide, SEL, summer bridge, academy, 1:1 grades 6-12 and 2:1 grade 5 Chromebook, facilities improvement, ESS, extended school year, RTI, sports.

Sandra Paul stated the improvements in technology – we now have the 1;1 Chromebooks – every child in school has a device. We have a 2:1 at Jefferson where for every two students there is a device.

We have changed the infrastructure for the high school and middle schools and we also have made changes to the elementary schools. We also increase the band width. We were sharing 2 GB of bandwidth for the entire district – now we are at 5 GB and we have increased the connectivity between buildings and to the high school.

We had something today happen which I was stressed out about – we had at eight buildings doing the NJSLA at the same time and we had no glitches. Every dime we are spending is going for the kids.

We made infrastructure upgrades and we have implemented one or two cyber security things to prevent anything happening as far as hacking, phishing. We have also developed more online communication, quite a few of you have the app; you are now using school messenger a lot more for notifications. There is a lot more virtual communication taking place.

Mrs. Moses stated program offerings are the programs that will continue and we will not compromise the program that we have for our students. The number one thing is to ensure that the students get the best education possible. We do our best every day and we want to continue to ensure that our students get the very best.

The programs offered will be full-day high quality preschool education program that is funded by the State. We appreciate that. It is a program that we have never had before. It is a program that has brought back many students to the district. We know that we have so many preschool students that will be moving to kindergarten.

The following programs will continue: full-day kindergarten program; after-school enrichment programs district wide; the middle school academy; co-curricular activities; athletics sports – fall, winter and spring; bridge summer learning camp; extended school year special services; Title I schools – summer enrichment learning programs; English language learner program; visual arts program; world language districtwide.

The comprehensive academic programs that support all of the programs that we have in place will continue – i-Reading – reading and math; standard mastery and teacher toolbox; Apex learning – ELA, math and science 9-12; edConnect NJ – target instruction/assessments; Google classroom – Union High School, Kawameeh, Burnet – personalized and blended learning; tiered support system grades 9-12; social emotional learning – grades pre-k-12; respond to intervention – grades pre-k-8; career technical education.

Educational advances ELA will continue: Language arts – prepare students for success; college, career and life learners; cross curriculum; interdisciplinary writing techniques - grades 1-5; literature and writing circles - grades 6-12.

Social studies – incorporation of holocaust and Amistad curricula throughout social studies, language arts, science and math courses; increase depth of understanding of our global society – values of American democracy and citizenship; supporting students to think critically on national and global issues – K-12.

Math – enable students to solve the new kinds of programs; student learning hands on methods of discoveries; computer science offerings – UHS.

Science – equip students with the ability to use what is learned in real life (STEM) – grades k-12; STEM engineering course – UHS; STEM-project based unit activities – grades k-8.

Physical Education – wellness is a way to life – grades k-12; fitness assessments – grades k-12.

New initiative offerings – anticipated schoolwide Title I program for three schools; future recertification of UHS; computer citizenship curricula – grades k-8; computer science principles course – UHS; African American History course – UHS; financial literacy course – middle schools; introduction to Drone Theory and Design course – UHS; exploring social and digital media – UHS; new media production program – UHS; future teachers course – UHS; ACE mentoring program – UHS; implementation of weight/fitness program for student athletes during PE classes – UHS; supply chain management course – UHS.

We are doing 21st century education.

Mr. Brennan stated the physical plant highlights districtwide – bathroom renovations; new flooring; masonry; asbestos removal and ceiling/LED lighting – the budget is \$231,000. Our current balance in the capital reserve fund is \$800,000. We will be left with \$570,000. Mr. Vieira and I have been talking about is that our reserves over the years have been taking a hit and it is lower than we like to see them. We are going to work with Mr. Tatum and I know Mr. Tatum has been meeting with a planning committee throughout the year on coming up with new and better ways to save money in the district. I think that is where we will be able to generate some surplus and refund those reserve accounts.

Mr. Tatum stated we have a budget tonight that has been presented and endorsed by the County Superintendent and County Business Administrator. Because of last year we were under heavy scrutiny in terms of how we prepared this budget and we were told that. We were told during our QSAC visit that one of the things that we needed to do was take a hard look at the increase in the number of staff members that we are including in our school district because our revenues are not meeting our expenditures. All the things we talked about tonight in terms of how this budget was prepared was undertaken to maintain a quality education in the Township of Union.

I think our general counsel Mr. Taylor said clearly at one of our meetings, that this is a working document and maybe there is some money out there that we don't know about that is coming our way – and hopefully there is and maybe at that stage of the game there may be other considerations given. I don't know what is going to happen here tonight. We might have to do some other considerations as well. I want to thank you for coming out tonight and for being patient as we listen to you and how you listen to us about what we undertook and why we are going in the direction that we are going. As Ann Margaret and I we always sit and say we know we can't agree on everything but sometimes we have to agree to disagree. I think our common

goal is the same and that is to do the very best for our students and for all of you and for our parents in Union. Thank you.

Budget presentation appended to minutes.

Mrs. Minneci stated thank you all for your presentation. I know that as board members you sat with Mr. Brennan to go over the budget and you presented it to us and thank you for the presentation tonight.

FISCAL AND PLANNING COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolutions were moved by Mrs. Richardson, seconded by Mr. McDowell, for adoption:

F-1. APPROVE GENERAL FUND TAX LEVY

Approve the General Fund tax levy of \$91,571,651 in the 2019-2020 school year, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-2. APPROVE WITHDRAWAL FROM CAPITAL RESERVE TO CAPITAL OUTLAY (FUND 12)

Approve withdrawal from Capital Reserve to Capital Outlay (Fund 12) in the amount of \$231,000 for the following projects, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes:

1. Bathroom renovations – districtwide	\$ 44,000.00
2. New flooring – districtwide	\$ 66,000.00
3. Masonry – districtwide	\$ 44,000.00
4. Asbestos – districtwide	\$ 22,000.00
5. Ceiling, lighting – districtwide	<u>\$ 55,000.00</u>
TOTAL:	<u>\$231,000.00</u>

F-3. APPROVE TRAVEL EXPENDITURE MAXIMUM

Approve Travel Expenditure Maximum (\$85,000), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-4. APPROVE ESTABLISHING A MAXIMUM DOLLAR LIMIT – PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Approve establishing a maximum dollar limit for professional services (\$2,484,000), in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

F-5. APPROVE USE OF EXCESS SURPLUS FUNDS

Approve the Board of Education to include in the General Fund Budget \$808,567 of the Board of Education's excess surplus funds (@ 6/30/18 per audit) to help reduce the local tax levy.

F-6. PRE-APPROVE DISTRICTWIDE STUDENT FIELD TRIPS

Pre-approve districtwide student field trip destinations and purposes pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-5.8 in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Ruiz stated F-6 – for those students that were not part of the ROTC but either want to be at the services – would they also have an excused absence. Mr. Tatum stated because of the level of tragedy that we have here and heartfelt expressions that have already gone out, certainly on the advice of counsel it is something I would certainly consider in doing so. If you ask me without the legal opinion, my answer is yes but I want to make sure that I can legally do that so it doesn't affect any student's record.

Mr. Nufrio stated I have been on the Board since 2011 and I have witnessed for several years that we had fiscal problems much of which was presented by Mr. Tatum prior to even me being on this Board. The district did suffer a loss but having said that each year that we are challenged with the added expenses that kept coming – some of which you have already heard. I'm early with the expansion of some of the educational programs but mostly by the additional students that this district had to service in special services. I sat here and Mr. Cohan made a comment that we were all sitting here paying attention respectfully but I also took some notes.

I'm going to quickly highlight some of the notes I took – I think it was Mr. D'Avanza that commented – to find a solution and that the staff specifically the paraprofessionals are vested in this district. Also there was a comment that had to do with our children will not have the familiarity or be as comfortable with new paras that would be brought into the district. I don't know if Mr. Tatum is prepared to tell us how many paraprofessionals are actually looking at the option with the 6 or under years of service.

Mr. Tatum stated the budget at the time there was 86 now that we have found that there were a few more hired – it is 91. Mr. Nufrio stated 91 with less than 6 years of services.

I believe it was one of the paras that made the comment to urge this Board to visit classes. I can say with my time on the Board I probably just came to a building, not specifically a classroom, but looking through the classroom doors – I did that infrequently but I did 40 years as a school administrator and I just want to add that I did visit classrooms daily and I would be a liar if I said that paras are not educators – that was said several times this evening. They are educators and they are valuable essentially and absolutely needed to assist those children with special needs to be the other educator in the classroom. Teachers would have a terrible day if the para was not in the classroom. I know that for a fact and I can personally attest to it. I certainly did my best as a school administrator to be sure that if there was a paraprofessional absent that day, to get somebody in there before it got too late. I want to make that comment as well that they are educators.

The rapport established between the children and the paras – that is something that can't be compromised and there is a certain degree of compromise when you entertain even hiring new paraprofessionals because someone retired or somebody resigned. You always run the risk of will their personalities click, will the relationship with the teachers also be as good but when you have 91 on mass who may opt not to engage with the new prospects of a new employer with the conditions that this Board would have to absolutely vet company and that would be recommended to the entire Board to be sure that those individuals met all the criteria. I said that several times.

I asked Mr. Benaquista several times if the process should be even more stringent and more careful that we don't agree to take someone who is simply recommended by that company. It is going to pose quite a bit of problems for the entire staff to be sure that we are getting the right essential individual because again they are performing an essential job. All of those components have to be considered.

Your association president commented that negotiations are upcoming. I believe they just concluded last year. My question to the association is why wait until next year. You can always sit down at the table to renegotiate the current contract. That can be a possible solution where a meeting of the minds can be reached between the two parties – the Board of Ed and the employees. That is something that needs to be also seriously considered.

Last year we were faced with a fiscal challenge that was quite scary. Over a 140+ staff members were rifted because Central Office did their due diligence and with some creative adjustments were able to bring back the bulk of those individuals. I thought we were done at that point I thought we were on some level ground. Obviously that is not so. Solutions are always somewhere and I'm not saying this district has not done it's due diligence but perhaps we need to go further in assessing how we can fix the deficit that has been a yearly challenge. It was certainly preceded before my appointment to the Board and also preceded Mr. Tatum. Solutions are never out of the rule.

I noticed in the presentation that the Town of Union will simply have a 1.7 increase. We are approved for 2%. I don't see a reason why 2% couldn't help defray the deficit. I'm a taxpayer for 31 years. I have had to hold up my end as all of you who own homes. An extra \$20-30 would not have killed me but that is another possible solution. Why did we settle for 1.7 when we could have gotten to the 2%.

Mr. Brennan stated the tax levy increase is 2.0%, the tax rate is 1.7%. The tax rate is the assessed valuation – the denominator and the numerator would be the dollars needed to be raised for running the district.

Mr. Nufrio stated I do have a good memory because otherwise I would be on medication. I recall over and over on how we were only increasing at 1.7. Somewhere there was a miscommunication. I'm putting out there possibilities for possible solutions.

The second part of that is we could have asked for a little bit more than 2% - that is allowed by law. It would require district approval. Some of those solutions were not considered perhaps they should be. This year 1.7% was far less than previous years but we could have asked for a higher percentage maybe 2.5%. There have been districts in the last few years who have done that. Of course it would require approval by the Town.

I guess at this point I can't camouflage my feelings any longer so you know where I stand. Thank you.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I think someone in the public mentioned that the district won't have any control over who the district can hire for the paraprofessionals – is that a myth or is that

fact? Mr. Tatum stated in some school districts that may be a fact but it won't be here. One of the things that we are going to require is that we will not sit and entertain any company that will send us anybody. The first thing is for them to insure that the first right of refusal comes from the people sitting in this room. They get the first opportunity before anybody else and that is the way I want it to be. It will be part of the proposal.

Dr. Morgan stated I proudly work with outside paras in South Orange and I had two positions one as a director, this year I'm interim school principal. We have contracted paraprofessionals and I must say I too was concerned when they were brought on but this year has been great. I can't speak for everyone because I can only speak for what is happening in my building. They show up every day and on time. I have a student that is in a wheelchair, rides the elevator every day – when we have our drills - we have emergencies that happen and she is there by his side. She works so well with him that she also serves with him outside of school hours. They would not have met her if she was not in the building. I can only speak for myself experience and what is going on in the school that I currently run and it has been successful.

Mr. Nufrio stated Mr. Tatum – in addition to the number that I asked for – total number of paraprofessionals in the district. Mr. Tatum stated 156. Mr. Nufrio asked how did you or your staff arrive at the 6 year number – what was the basis for that? Mr. Tatum stated we look at trends. At looking at the trends, the question became where are we hiring all these people – what years and we recognized that there were two peak years – one was in year 3 and one was year 6. If you take those two years and look at both salary and benefits, it was about \$740,000 and was \$900,000 – so those two years combined were over \$1.5 million. A year or so ago we had the possibility of doing something like this and many parents were concerned about the fact that they would be losing their paraprofessional and we mentioned that we would be adding \$600-700,000 per year that becomes unknown because we have a population that we can't consistently account that they will remain the same or get new people. Unfortunately, as others said tonight, when we get a student with an IEP, we don't have a choice – we have to provide what the IEP says and it is a cost that is compromising the educational programs and services. We are getting to the point where this year we put a plan in action that addresses that concern because we need new people and anybody in that number will be affected but if someone brand new comes to the door, and probably will in August or September, they will also start that process.

We also have to make an assessment for what it is going to be next year in terms of those numbers. Depending on what the population will look like, we may need more or may be able to work with what we have. We have to do something to address the fiscal needs of this district.

Mr. Nufrio stated you mentioned the need and perhaps I misunderstood – the paras were used as substitutes. Mr. Tatum stated what I was referring to is there was a time period when we needed a number of classroom assistants that were unbudgeted and substitutes were being used for paraprofessionals and as someone mentioned that is a contract. We did it for a year and then we came to recognize that. We can't take 60 people who are doing a position and have actually be bargained for by the association and we had to move to hiring those individuals.

AYE: Mrs. Higgins, Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio, Mrs. Regis-Darby,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: Mr. Nufrio (F-1 only)

MOTION CARRIED

COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC:

Lynn Cornacio stated this year six years and under for the paraprofessionals – what happens if the following year the budget you still have a debt are you going to consider another levy – 12 and under? Or is it going to eventually be all the paras being outsourced? Mr. Tatum stated what I would like to see happen is to come up with a long-term solution to close the budget gap – Mr. Brennan referred to that. You know a little bit about it and you will hear a little bit more on Thursday night. The district has other needs. Right now we have to try to maintain our programs. My target is not paraprofessionals. My target is to look at areas where we are spending. Last year we had an influx in AP teachers. Maybe the State will hear us and there will be some more aid coming our way. Repurposing of different positions that we are working on right now. I'm already looking at trying to bring back the people we lost last year. Every year there is going to be some area that we have to but will not be every year the paraprofessionals.

Ms. Cornacio stated I thank you for your answers but I wouldn't be a representative of not just my building but of other paras if I didn't ask if those of seniority with the exception of maybe of Ms. Sharpe who has been in the district longer than I can remember, who have concern. I'm safe, because I have been in the district 16 years, and I'm proud of the 16 years I served in this district. I am thankful for the Board of Education who hired me. I do have others that are not here tonight and who are going to worry – at least I can say “hopefully not”. If it is not us will it trickle up because you already are down? Mr. Tatum stated every year we do the budget it is taking a look at what is available and whether or not we are going to be compromising the education of our students. I can say Lynn I probably won't be looking at paraprofessionals because hopefully we will start to see some savings but we may have to look at other entities.

John Zurka stated 34 years in Union Township. Out of those 156 paraprofessionals, how many live in Union. I'm sure there is more than 100-120. I want you to remember that because they are taxpayers in this Town and they are voters.

Ann Margaret Shannon stated the para company and Mr. Tatum did explain that they are supposed to offer them jobs. It sounds great but I just don't see how someone is going to take a \$20,000 job and not have the great benefits that we have and don't have access to the pension. I just want to be precautionary to say you are no longer going to work out because these people are going to come back to work. I think there will be a good chance that we will have a lot of openings for paras. I caution you on that.

I heard someone say that with this company they have to honor our salaries, so no one is losing compensation I would argue against that statement strongly because compensation does include benefits.

Programs – I went to the Wharton School of Finance – I’m a finance major and this is much more rewarding career. But the one thing I did when I was at Wharton was I took French classes because I wanted to major in French but back then I was too practical – what am I going to do be a French teacher? And now I’m a teacher but my point is Mrs. Vogel introduced me to my love of French in 7th grade and I took it 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and in 12th grade they did not have a class for me to take but my junior French teacher said I will take seven kids who want to take another French class – we sat in a corner, she helped us when she could. We have wonderful world language teachers and I am heartbroken that there is not going to be any French and German in the middle schools. I thought I heard world language is not going to be touched but I think that is a typo because it is going to be touched and I’m heartbroken that these kids are not going to learn French and German.

Dave Castaneda stated I’m a paraprofessional for four years at Burnet Middle School. I am proud and fortunate to be working for the district. I grew up here. My parents both recently retired from long careers in the district. It is an honor to be following in their footsteps. I work at Burnet where I attended years ago. I work in this building in the afternoons and in the summers at Battle Hill where I once was a student. Working as a para for the last four years in these buildings has given me the opportunity to work with some of the best teachers and paraprofessionals that support me, challenge me and I have learned so much from them. Working as a para has also afforded me the opportunity to work with students beyond the classroom. I have been involved with project unified program for several years now. Watching students with disabilities grow beyond their limitations.

This year, as a coach, I saw to expand our program to compete in Special Olympics. This weekend along with substitute in the district that volunteered their time, took a team of three athletes to the area five Special Olympics track and field event in Old Bridge. This was the first time in our school’s history. This athletes seize their moment. In the six events there were six first place finishes and each brought home two gold medals and are moving on to the States. It is also in the classroom that miracles are made. One student comes to mind – came to us and could only speak a few words, communicated through an iPad by the next school year the student was speaking in sentences, using his words to express himself – now we can’t keep him quiet. The mother came to us and cried because she never thought it could be like this. I cannot take credit for this. It takes a village to raise a child and in this case and so many other cases, results come from a consorted effort a team of all paras and teachers in the room - their consistency, their persistence and their patience. I came here tonight to ask the Board not to make any decision that would jeopardize these cohesive units of teachers and paras or break the bonds between the students and paras – paras that want to serve the district in years to come. I can’t afford all the things I need in life but if I know all my bills were paid I would do this job for free – best job I ever had. Thanks for your time.

Cathy Sharpe stated I like to go on the record thanking all the people that came out to support your paras; we appreciate it and I thank all the paras that came out to share their stories, their feelings with the Board. I also want to thank the Board and the administrators for sitting and listening to us. I just hope you weren’t just listening. I hope you were hearing and feeling what we feel in our hearts. Thirty-eight years I have been doing this job. Thirty-eight years I

have been coming up here sitting, pestering all the superintendents, administrators and not for me – for the kids. Tonight I'm asking for my people because every para and I feel like I'm the matriarch – I'm at the point where I'm actually pleading with you – think hard, long and find some solution to this problem other than letting these dedicated people, hardworking people, they love the children that they are working with – please give it as much thought as possible. I know it is not an easy decision but it is one that does affect, not just our lives, the lives of every child that comes through the system. Thank you but please don't make any rash decisions – give it a lot of thought.

Lydia stated I have been in this Town for 25 years and my girls with through the Union schools. I love this Town – the diversity. I come to every show – Christmas show, fair. We just had a potluck with all the different foods and it is so nice. I love my job. I look forward to my job. I look forward to working with my kid every day.

Sherry Maloney stated I grew up here in this Town. I came to Union in 1978. I have gone through the whole Union school system. My children are still in the school system. I was on the executive PTA. I am now a paraprofessional. I love the Township of Union. I don't want to work for some agency. I want to work for the Town I grew up in. I want to be proud of that is going to be taken from me. How can you do that? I'm also cancer survivor. My school opened up their arms to let me come back to work at the same school I went to. I need the health benefits and I need my job. Please consider this. Thank you.

Rich D'Avanzo stated one of the things that is significant about New Jersey over the years when it comes to public education is that we constantly rank in the top three in the country. We here it on a national level when we attend events; the power that we have in association throughout the country; when we go down to Washington DC we meet with our congress people, senators and drive home the fact that public school funding is at an all-time low especially when it comes to IDEA funding. What is going on right now in Union Township is just a micro of what is going on in this State. Not to point fingers any anyone but there is a big problem that goes on in this State when it comes to school funding and the way things work out. We took a hit last year with the budget, Mr. Tatum showed us zeros which is all accurate but when does the time come that you as a Board start to assume fiscal responsibility. Knowing that the funding isn't there and the cap in property taxes at a certain percentage and then always the system the people on the bottom and throughout are the ones to take the hit. It is a shame that it comes to that and it changes the livelihood of many individuals that depend on certain things. The bigger is where is the outreach to our local legislators, state legislators – something needs to be done and it really has blown up this year. You have districts like Toms River, Paterson and Jersey City that are looking at tremendous layoffs – how can you run a district like that? For example Old Bridge Township was also on their forefront to privatize their paras – they pulled it and what they did instead was closed the school. It goes beyond what we are all here for tonight. Something needs to be done throughout the State – the school funding formula, reaching out to local legislators. We will be in Washington in two days and we have meetings set up with our congress people and senators and we deliver that message each and every time we are down there. Some of us need to be a little more proactive on the Board's part – start reaching out to those individuals and gain an understanding of what is happening with public education. There are many districts that have turned to charter schools and think that is the answer and that is not.

That is basically funding money out of the local boards and that deprives the rest of the school district. I think if there is a lesson learned from tonight and from last year to this year, we really need to start searching for other ways to satisfy the students and this Township when it comes to public education. What is going to happen next if they cut more money than before you know it we may be looking at more teachers and closing down a school.

Mrs. Diaz stated the paras here today worrying about her job and I sat in Mr. Tatum's office last year because she almost lost her job – telling him that she really needs her job. My kids love their paras. If we lose our paras to go to privatization, my kids are going to lose it, I'm going to lose it and I'll sit in your office every day. Everybody at Battle Hill knows my kids – they do what they need to do to help her. They need more benefits and better pay. Don't take this away from them.

Raggita stated I just want to say that I'm 6-month hire in this district and I worked as a substitute for two years. Last year even though I was a sub and there was a cap on how many days you can work but I was one of them. This is not for that this is about me loving my job. I got hired for the reason but the child I work with you can come and check with the administrators in the building that the kid I work with took a 180 degree turn and the reason I decided to come up and talk is there are a lot of people like me and they will lose their jobs because they have been in the system for a very short time. So irrespective of 6 years or 6 months it is about the difference we make.

Chasity Santana stated I'm here to tell you as a parent, my current para was the one that brought peace to my mind. For so many years with my sixth child, I had no idea what I would do with him. I would drive to drop him off at school and I wouldn't go home I would just park because I knew I was going to get that call because something would happen. With this district, we found a para and a lot of other wonderful employees of this district give me the peace of mind every single day, including you Mr. Tatum. Knowing that I came come up here and speak from my heart and let you know that these people are vested and when you are vested we have to make them our employees. I understand that there is a grant formula that can name them something else but we have to give them what they need. We need them to love our children and I hope that no one will ever need an aid or a para for their child. If I could have that wish granted I would but know that without my paras, I don't know how I would live everyday with my children. From my heart, please think about where we are going with this because that trickledown theory that Mr. D'Avanzo just spoke about is true. We have all these CEO's making these millions and we are going to take from paras? Really? We have to do better. I don't know what is going to happen if my paras go away. I implore you to really think about the policies and procedures that we put in place for the future of Union. Thank you.

Mrs. Minneci stated thank you all for coming and let you know that we do value you and this is not easy. I taught for 40 years and I had a para at my side every day. It is not an easy decision. Thank you from the bottom of my heart and I'm sure everybody else. We appreciate everything that you do. Mr. Casteneda, I saw what you did online and I was a special ed teacher for 40 years and that is so special and I thank you and everyone else for all you do. I hope that we can work something but thank you for everything and I thank Mr. Tatum and his team for working so hard.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Dr. Morgan, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Higgins, Mr. McDowell, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Nufrio, Mrs. Regis-Darby,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**GREGORY E. BRENNAN
BOARD SECRETARY**