

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – June 11, 2019

NOTICE OF MEETING:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, June 11, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. at the Administration Building, 2369 Morris Avenue, Union, New Jersey pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mrs. Minneci called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Sherry Higgins, 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:

None

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gregory Tatum, Mr. Gerry Benaquista, Mrs. Annie Moses, Mr. Gregory Brennan, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Mrs. Moses led the Board 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.

Mr. Nufrio read the District’s mission statement.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON RESOLUTIONS:

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Minutes will be approved next week.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Communications are part of personnel.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT:

Mr. Tatum stated there will be a presentation by Gifted and Talented Competition Winners, presentation by Hussan Peavey – Supply Chain Management Leader - Rutgers Business School and recognition of Teachers and any other highlights for the last month. We are

very proud of our softball program and you will hear more about that. Looking forward to project graduation.

EDUCATION/STUDENT DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, for adoption:

E-5. APPROVE COMPREHENSIVE EQUITY PLAN – 2019-2022

Approve Comprehensive Equity Plan for School Years 2019-2020 through 2021-22, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I noticed in the back-up that this has a lot of policies – is that the norm? Mrs. Moses stated yes.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I also noticed that there were two areas that we were deficient in and we are looking to fix it by 2021-22 – what are the plans? Do we have plans in place? Mrs. Moses stated once they are submitted to the County, the County will then ask for those plans and we have to put them together.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked who will be part of the committee? Mrs. Moses stated they will be teachers, administrators and led by Mr. Benaquista.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked what is the deadline for submission? Mrs. Moses stated June 30th.

Dr. Morgan stated Mrs. Darby stated there were a lot of policies submitted with the plan, is there anyway the Board can actually see this data that you use to say that we are in compliance? Mrs. Moses stated Mr. Benaquista has that data.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked do parents also have access to that if they wanted to? Mrs. Moses stated yes.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked who was involved in writing the one that is presented here tonight? Mrs. Moses stated Mr. Benaquista had a team of committee members. Mr. Tatum stated that is part of the requirements that a team has to be in place to do this. For many years there was a 3-5 year plan where all the district did was actually to comply with the statement of insurances and I believe this is the year where the cycle has to be revisited.

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

Mrs. Regis-Darby presented the Education Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated E-7 – what was revised on the calendar? Mr. Tatum stated there was a proposal originally on the table that we make the first few days of school half days. We discussed that and that idea was not one that was amiable to the committee of people I spoke to last week. Also due to the winter holiday, that last Friday was in question and then open up Monday for one day so we made an adjustment to include that day and move it towards the end of the school year.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked this was reviewed by the UTEA and the principals of the building? Mr. Tatum stated the UTEA was advised that this was going to take place. I don't know if there was any opposition as far as us giving them the additional day. There were questions that came from the organization as to why we were opening up for one day.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated E-2 – the proposed development plan. Mrs. Moses stated the plan is for the entire year of the district. It also has to be approved. It was what we had this year not what is happening next year. This is what we did for 18-19. Also on the website you will see the PD we put in place – to see what the district is doing on those half days.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked what was the feedback on that? Mrs. Moses stated parents knew what was being done in each building for professional development.

FISCAL AND PLANNING COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Mr. Nufrio presented the Fiscal Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated F-13 – I think we had tabled this item because we wanted it to be voted inside of the budget and I thought we voted for this item when we voted on the budget – why is it also on the agenda? Mr. Brennan stated this is for the current year and it is for increased legal fees – 2018-2019 – not for the new school year. We are amending it. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we are doing another increase? Mr. Brennan stated we have a lot of litigation going on in the district.

Mrs. Ruiz stated F-14 through F-18 – approve renewal of several vendors. Mr. Brennan stated we went out for RFP's last year for all of these professional services. This is a renewal of their services. Mrs. Ruiz asked why did you put out another RFP. Mr. Brennan stated in the contract, you don't have to go out for an RFP for professional services, we have the option to renew them. We don't go out for RFP's every year. We have a calendar up on the website. Depending on the professional service, it could be a 2-year contract or longer because you want continuity. With the auditors it is usually a longer term 3-5 years because you want consistency in the reporting.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked how long have we been with ConnectOne Bank? Mr. Brennan stated we just renewed last year. Mr. Taylor stated professional services pursuant to the public school contract law are exempt from public bidding. It is pursuant to the accountability regulations. It is not required but it is encouraged to go through a competitive process – request for proposals – meaning that qualifications and price are considered but price is not the

controlling factor. You are not required to go to the lowest responsive responder. The RFP process is not required annually but proposal services is in the Board's purview. The Board has the discretion, has the authority pursuant to 18A to pick these vendors in these particular category - quite frankly without the recommendation of the administration. It is wise to consult the administration for their input, experience, level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction but it is your decision as a Board. As indicated, these contracts had an option to renew for another year so absent any complaints or requests from Board members. You have some new Board members and some incumbents – while each Board member is entitled to their own perspective/opinion, hearing no request to go back out from new ones or incumbents, the presumption is that your administration would continue with the current vendors in place. Could it or should have it been brought to a committee's attention probably. Mr. Nufrio stated not required is one thing but normally we would have had committee meetings this evening but that was pre-empted by executive session so as such I just want to go on the record that we did not have fiscal committee nor operations committee. I would propose that we do meet between now and next Tuesday so that some of these questions can be addressed in committee and if the Board agrees the committee's recommendation would be to move forward. None of these were discussed in committee, they were just independently reviewed. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated by who? Mr. Nufrio stated independently – each of us.

Mrs. Minneci asked were some of these contracts for two years and we are just renewing them? Mr. Brennan stated yes. Mrs. Ruiz asked what is the term of F-15 – is that one year? Or two year contract? Mr. Brennan stated it is a one year with an option to renew.

Mr. Taylor stated pursuant to the public school contract laws, professional services – insurance – typically one year contracts but what we are saying is the option to renew is a recommendation to renew a new contract. You didn't want to go through the time and expense of doing another whole round of RFP's only to pick the same vendors because that is what happens in many instances. From a legal standpoint that is what is occurring. If you want to review it in committee, that is your prerogative. If you want to go out to RFP, that is your prerogative as a Board. From the incumbent standpoint, there was no deviation from the process that was followed and/or agreed to last year. If the majority of you want to do something different right now, that is your prerogative as a Board.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated for me personally we should go back to committee because I got this on Friday. Mr. Nufrio stated just to clarify I said independently reviewed – that doesn't mean we analyze it – basically yes or no. My recommendation and if Mrs. Richardson as the chair agrees that we should at least have a Fiscal Committee meeting because these are renewals and we don't want the public to think that we rubber stamp these.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I would respectfully proposed that to the extent that any of these from F-14 to F-18 are a one year contract, that has the option for renewal that we as a Board consider and/or vote upon whether or not we should go out for RFP. While I hear what you are saying Mr. Taylor, we can go out to RFP and end up with the same vendor but I think for the best interest of the district and the interest of fairness, if it is just a one year contract rather than rubber stamping it, if there are concerns that come out of your committee meeting we could go to

RFP. I don't think we should completely foreclose the opportunity to go to RFP just because that is the way we have always done it.

Mr. Brennan stated the calendar was proposed last year and how often we would go out for an RFP based on a proposal service. This calendar is on the website. If the Board wants to do something different than that is fine. We will meet in committee.

Mr. Nufrio stated can they be pulled pending a conclusion of a committee meeting. Mr. Taylor stated this is what I suggest, leave it on the agenda, have your committee meeting, if all goes well they are on there for next week. If there are questions and/or concerns, pull it next week.

GRIEVANCE/NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE RESOLUTION:

Mr. Nufrio presented the Grievance/Negotiations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Mr. Nufrio presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Nufrio asked what is a non-binding co-op agreement? Mr. Brennan stated all the co-ops, we can approve them so we can purchase from them.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated O-2 because there wasn't the original organizational chart to compare it to can you tell me what changed. Mr. Tatum stated under the pre-k program there was a position that the State requires that the supervisor position is paid for by the grant – so the position has to be recognized on the organizational chart. Everything else is the same.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked just to clarify, the money is coming from the Title I grant? Mr. Tatum stated yes.

Mr. Nufrio asked were there any changes in Central Office? Mr. Tatum stated no. The one additional staff will report to Mrs. Moses.

Mr. Taylor stated policy 5118 – nonresidents – the Board wanted to review it tonight for first reading. I have copies and will disseminate now. Mrs. Williams can summarize the changes and then tonight it will constitute the first reading and next week it can be on the agenda for the second reading. The issue is limiting the ability for non-residents to send their children to school in Union Township free of charge and that basically summarizes it unless Mrs. Williams you want to add to that. (Mr. Taylor handed out Policy 5118 for first reading).

This policy has been discussed at the last 2-3 Board meetings. The changes were discussed. The current policy allows the superintendent to grant admission into the district, free of charge, for non-resident parents – the practice has been for employees to allow their children

to attend school free of charge and that is the Board's discretion to do that. However, pursuant to statute the Board can also charge tuition for out-of-district students to attend school subject to the availability of space. The Board of Ed directed the committee to review it. The committee reviewed it. This policy encompasses the comments from the Board as well as the committee and constitutes the first reading of the policy. If there are questions and/or comments about it, you can make them tonight but you also can make them next week at the second reading.

At the second reading there also can be changes to the policy. As long as the changes are not substantive – changing the spirit and intent of the policy, it can still be approved next week at second reading. This is the posting here tonight. It will be posted once it is approved by the Board. It will be posted in your Policy Manual and on your website.

If there are changes recommended next week, you as the Board have the prerogative to do that, that is one of your primary functions pursuant to statute and the Code of Ethics. As long as the changes are not substantial, they can be incorporated on the spot at the meeting and it can still be approved. If for some reason the changes do a one eighty on the policy, it would have to be reviewed again at the next meeting because that would constitute a first reading.

The changes in the policy essentially eliminate the ability of the administration (which was in the current policy) to permit non-resident children to attend school free of charge. Rather diverting more so to statute which would be assessment of tuition.

Mr. Nufrio stated the discussion item - letter from Superintendent of Recreation for the Township of Union requesting to use the Jefferson School parking lot on Saturday, October 26, 2019 for the Township's Trunk or Treat event. This is annual with the condition that no politicking or campaigning takes place at these events because they are for the children. We don't like to mix politics with pleasure. This item will be on the agenda next week.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Mrs. Williams presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I have a discussion but I know this is personnel and I know we spoke about some of the items here in executive session. I would like an opportunity later on if we go into executive session to talk about some of these issues that I have. It is directly related to a person. Mr. Taylor stated if you have a question, we will go into closed session.

POLICY COMMITTEE:

Mrs. Williams presented the Policy Committee agenda for first reading.

POL-1.APPROVE POLICY 5141.5 – STUDENT SUICIDE PREVENTION AND CRISIS INTERVENTION

Approve Policy 5141.5 – Student Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention (first reading).

POL-2.APPROVE POLICY 8600 – TRANSPORTATION

Approve Policy 8600 – Transportation (first reading).

POL-3.APPROVE POLICY 5188 – NON-RESIDENT

Approve Policy 5188 – Non-Resident (first reading).

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Ruizi stated Policy 1 and Policy 2 – I'm on the policy committee and I have never seen this. We didn't meet on them.

Mr. Tatum stated I talked to Mrs. Williams, policy 2, amendments to recommend – it may be a situation where you might want to have a policy discussion.

Mrs. Williams stated I know we are using Strauss Esmay – are they going to be presented to us? Mr. Tatum asked if we got anything back. Mr. Benaquista stated they did send us drafts. Mr. Tatum stated in my review I have come to realize that some of the areas Strauss Esmay will match directly with New Jersey Statutes. Our policies have a divergent from that and on the advice of counsel might be more amiable to looking at whether or not we want to adopt that language in our own policy or something very close to it.

Mr. Nufrio stated we had a light discussion on the distance. If I understand correctly this is the recommendation from whom? Mr. Tatum stated this was the recommendation when the policy was reviewed. Strauss Esmay had sent their version of the policy but you haven't approved that policy manual. This was done with the administration and Mr. Taylor. The looked at the current policy as it reads and there are some provisions in that policy that need further refinement in consideration of the student population. I think how the policy reads right now it is kind of understood by the way the district operates but the way the policy was revised, doesn't address it in that manner and creates a different situation and I don't want to be responsible or the district wants to be responsible. Mr. Nufrio stated this should be pulled. Mr. Tatum stated absolutely. The committee needs to discuss it further.

Mr. McDowell stated the first line states "students in grades pre-k through 8". It is a dated policy what we are trying to bring it as close to compliance as possible. Mr. Taylor stated statutorily there is a distinction – high level grades – the requirement for transportation is further distance. It looks like this policy some time ago exercised discretion to reduce the mileage for the younger grades. The recommendation now is to make it compliant with the statute which is 2 miles verses 1.5. What I would suggest Madam Chair a retreat for the Board because you have a lot of new members working with the administration and amongst yourselves to get a line of expectations in terms of protocol because what I'm seeing is "how things used to be done" not that it was bad but it was the way that it was done efficiently with the Board and the administration in their view of whatever efficiency was. We have new members and technically the committees are your committees as Board members. It is incumbent upon you to schedule them. Also it is incumbent upon you to set expectations with the administration to facilitate the scheduling particular when there are issues that need some attention. It is no one's fault because you are all volunteers and you all work and not always available but business has to be

conducted. Usually you have a worksession like this to iron things out and that was o.k. before. If you want to have a more structured environment to review things in advance, just be prepared to be here more for your committees. If you do a retreat at some point in time you will help iron things out and spend less time talking about was there a meeting, who should have scheduled, I wasn't at the meeting.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated is the statute the same for high school students? Mr. Taylor stated 2.5 miles.

Mr. Benaquista stated on policy 1 the only thing that changed was one of the agencies that we provide and pay for is not working out. Nothing changed in the policy. Mrs. Conti stated the feedback on one agency from the parents was not good so we are eliminating that one and we will continue to look into finding another agency. Mr. Nufrio stated this was not a mandated change. It was a local administrative decision on which agencies to use.

Mrs. Minneci stated we will leave them all on the agenda and if you have a policy committee and discuss it but if you don't have a chance to meet we will pull them next week.

RESIDENCY COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS:

Mrs. Williams presented the Residency Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

None

APPROVAL OF BILLS:

Bills will be approved next week.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Ann Margaret Shannon stated regarding the statement on the calendar, one of the dates concerns the UTEA is the lack of conditioning in some of the schools and we did talk with Mr. Tatum about a half-day to begin the school year. We did not have any discussion about December 23rd. My opinion would get rid of one of the snow days and not extend the school year another day because of the heat situation. Our district is one of the longest districts out there. Mr. Tatum stated that request came from members of the UTEA. This office was flooded with calls about that particular day and that is why it was presented during the agenda review. Ms. Shannon stated the reason I brought it up was you said leadership. Mr. Tatum stated the leadership was regarding the half-day; that was something we discussed in my office and I was amendable to. An email came from Mr. D'Avanzo, he got a response from assistant as to why

we determined we were not going that way. The issue with the additional day which would be a bonus to the staff and we conferred with Mr. Loessel and to open up the buildings for one day during the winter is a waste of money. Ms. Shannon stated I would have rather taken off a snow day. I wasn't in disagreement with the 23rd, I think we should cut off snow days.

P-8 – our district has been under financial distress for a while now and I find it mind boggling that an employee who got a raise who hasn't been an employee for the past year. I just ask again, fiscal responsibility.

P-9 – I still want to know whether it is 8 employees with 3 years or less of service on the renewal list when there is more than 8 or more employees with 4 years or more service who got non-renewed and it is mind boggling to me that we are not honoring the seniority. It is very upsetting and it puts me in a horrible position because they are all members and I don't want to pit one member against another member. When a first year person keeps a job and a 6-year person losing a job, it is very upsetting and I wish people would reconsider that list.

I have asked for documents through email regarding workplace democracy act – I haven't gotten it yet. Mr. Benaquista stated I can give it to you tomorrow. I am waiting on IT. Our system doesn't have our district emails on it.

Ms. Shannon stated I also asked about the RFP for the potential private company for the paras and I haven't heard anything about that. I did see on the website an RFP for substitute paras and I don't know if that is all linked. It is very disconcerting that I haven't gotten any information on the RFP. Is the RFP for the subparas different? Mr. Benaquista stated it is the same thing – they were due today. Ms. Shannon asked why didn't the UTEA get a copy of that? Mr. Taylor stated it is on the website.

Ms. Shannon stated there wasn't anything that said salaries. You said whatever you were going to do you would tell them the salaries. Mr. Taylor stated let's let the public make their comments. When their time is up then we can respond if possible. Give her a copy of the RFP.

Ms. Shannon asked will I get a copy of what people responded? Mr. Taylor stated you may not be able to get that now because there is a procurement process about the information being available to the public immediately. If and when the time is appropriate, you may get it. I trust that the Board is not going to require an OPRA request because in the spirit of transparency and cooperation with the association we will be happy to give you any information that is available to the public if you ask for it.

Mrs. Ruiz stated the RFP – the proposals for the RFP were due today. Mr. Brennan stated 11:00 a.m. today. Mrs. Ruiz asked was an ad hoc committee formed for the review of those proposals? Mrs. Minneci stated we didn't do that yet. We wanted to get everything in first and then decide.

Mr. Nufrio stated the RFP is for a broad spectrum of paras and substitutes or two separate ones. Mr. Benaquista stated one is for paraprofessionals. We will be putting one out for substitutes.

Ms. Shannon asked who should I be corresponding with? Mr. Taylor stated depending on the issue but typically the superintendent is the point person for the district.

Richard D'Avanzo stated as we get into June and for those that are aware, the financial situation in the Township of Union School District as well as others – it is going to be happening in Trenton very shortly – it will be brutal – when you talk about government shutdown and the whole thing floating out there is about school funding. We have gone over and it has been addressed. Remember this – it is 2% of your entire budget – the money that you are looking for. I have a question that goes out to everyone at this table. Since we last met in May has there been any outreach to any of the local State legislators on this situation – shortfall of money in the budget that would offset and hopefully bringing back the paras because they don't have a job right now. I know a number of us and thank you Mr. Tatum for giving a few of us the privilege on Thursday to go down and lobby Trenton full force even though it is organized by the CWA – the NJEA has piggy backed on that and we are ready and raring to go and a phone call at this point in June because there is nothing cemented right now. There is nothing concrete about the money that districts are getting, the numbers that are in shortfalls and news came to us earlier tonight that you have to reach out. Something needs to be done. We have some power in this district to get some money but it has to be done now. When June 30th comes and the position of the Governor vs State Senator Sweeney is in – there are districts and certain legislators that need some money – that is the time to bring it to the table. There is nothing concrete about it. I hope that those channels are at least running. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nufrio stated typically when these situations occur it practical to have the Board look to the President of the Board to submit a comment statement request on behalf of the entire Board – it has been done in the past. It is certainly something we can consider doing for next week. We might be able to put together a resolution that would authorize and you are the spokesperson for the district – that on behalf of the Board we would like to see more cash. However it is worded is fine but that is the spirit of the intent of what you would submit.

Catherine Lewis stated I went to school for economics and I read our budget and there are a couple of little things – there are so many different ways that we can do this and be equally affective and not reduce programs and get everything our kids, teachers and paras need. One thing that stuck out was I was reading the contract that Mrs. Moses and Mr. Benaquista and everyone in Central Office has and tuition reimbursement. The people listed on the Central Office resolution have a blanket – you can go to school for whatever you want and get whatever degree you want. There are no stipulations. Mrs. Moses, Mr. Benaquista, all the teachers – we have all these limitations – only 9 credits a year and in our current field; you have to be tenured. I wanted to point that out and found that to be very concerning. The people educating the children have all of these caps on what we can do as far as education.

Denise Palacastro stated I'm from NJEA research. I heard you just say that the RFP online was for the paraprofessionals and that the substitute paraprofessionals was going to be posted. Am I correct? Mr. Taylor stated Madam Chair we are going to let the public make their comments, if the administration and Board would you please reserve your comment to the end of

the public comment. One of the charges you have is to operate more efficiently instead of having a dialogue back and forth with each speaker.

Ms. Palacastro stated I just need some clarification on what this is that I'm looking at. Under the request for bids, I'm reading substitute paraprofessionals services and as I'm continuing through the qualifications I'm seeing a phrase "and must maintain teacher substitutes" – I'm seeing the word "substitute" a lot. Is this the RFP for the 91 paraprofessionals that have been fired or is this the RFP for substitutes that is question one. Question two is as I compare the information in the RFP's to the parents were told, it is not matching up. I need to understand what you are looking for in the company to guarantee that they are going to have health benefits, to guarantee that the salary will be the same?

Sherry Maloney stated I need answers and I need them fast. I don't understand you knew last year that you were cutting jobs last year. What happened during the school year? What is going on with your financing? Do we need to go back to common core? I'm not trying to be insulting on purpose but I'm a little upset. I need my health benefits. You are leaving me with no answers about COBRA. I don't know where I am going next. Am I even going to want to go to the agency. Can we start making a decision and putting it on the table for the taxpaying citizens to know what we are doing so I know what to do with my future.

Mrs. Lopes stated P-2 you have a substitute list for 2018-2019? Is that a mistake or are we approving something that is done already. Mr. Benaquista stated anytime any one is added during the month, it gets updated so it is an ongoing list.

Ms. Palacastro stated so if we are going to answer questions, can my questions be answered? Mr. Taylor stated we cannot disrupt the meeting Ms. Palacastro. You had your opportunity to speak. This is the Board's meeting not the NJEA's meeting, respectfully, so the protocol is requested that comments/responses be made afterwards; however, if the administration and the Board choose to respond to a simple question to a resident or an employee that is their prerogative but I would respectfully ask you not to interject and disrupt the meeting. Thank you.

Christina Doblin stated I am not a paraprofessional nor a parent of a student in the special education programs but I am a disabled adult and I think one of the things that I'm not hearing is that we are talking about disabled children. Disabled children grow up and they become disabled adults. My community is the hardest community in this country to find work, to make a living. It is legal in this country to pay disabled people less than minimum wage. If I went to my neurologist's office and there was a different doctor there every time I went, I wouldn't go to that office any more. If the pharmacist that knows my medications and knows the negative interactions, if there was a different pharmacist every time, I wouldn't go to that pharmacy any more. Consistency matters to us. I get it is hard for kids to advocate for themselves but they are going to grow up and they need you adults to have consistency. They need to be able to go to school and have that person who is going to help them get the same quality of education that non-disabled children get. It is not fair for you to say that disabled children don't matter. To say that disabled children in Union – it doesn't matter if they make it to art class or it doesn't matter

if they don't learn math, or it doesn't matter if they aren't able to participate in the same things as non-disabled children.

Mr. Tatum stated as always the information that is out there is not accurate – number one and number two there never been a goal for any child in this district to not have what they need. What is happening here is a financial issue because we are under a financial constraint. One of the requirements that I insisted is the current paraprofessionals that we have in the district, remain here. That is a stipulation that I'm putting on any company that comes here for a bid. If they can't give us our paraprofessionals then they can't have a contract here. The goal is just the opposite of what you are being told. The goal is never to take away from children it is to make sure they have what they need. We have gone back and forth about this and I want parents to understand that the goal of this administration and Board, just like last year, and we spent the entire summer last year trying to ensure that everyone had a job. We are trying to do the same thing this year. This district is underfunded. We don't have the money despite what people may believe. I sat with the County Superintendent and I made a call regarding funding. I don't share everything I do but I'm telling you straight from me and there was an attorney in the room with me this afternoon when I was talking about the same issue so it can be verified – what we are working to do is try to ensure that our paras keep their job and that are students have as close to the same para as they had this year. Many of our paraprofessionals become teachers. We promote all our teachers from within for the most part. Sometimes a child faces a new para in the school year because they have been promoted in the district but a different person but one thing we are trying to do is maintain consistency. This whole thing about every day is going to be somebody different, that is not what we are looking to do. We talk about salary and benefits, we are trying to keep everybody working here. We are trying not to lose anyone. I don't want to see anyone lose their job. Last year only three people did not wind up with a contract – the three people stayed as long-term subs. I made a commitment that those people would get jobs when they come available. I stand by the things I say and I don't care what you hear out there. I'm telling you what I talk to the Board about and I'm telling you what I'm committed on doing and what is going to happen in this district. Those are the parameters that we have set to ensure that our children have what they need. If we find a way to find the money, just like I did a couple of years ago with the kindergarten assistants – as soon as I found the money they went right back. We find the money, we will put our paras back in place.

Ms. Doblin stated this entire group – a fraction or percentage of this group. Mr. Tatum stated the piece that you are missing is we will still be hiring the people. Ms. Doblin stated it will be a private company. Mr. Tatum stated but we will be vetting the people that come through the door but they will start with our people. They have the first ones to get jobs here.

Ms. Doblin stated a private company is in business to make money. A Board of Education is in the business of hiring the highest quality educators for their students and those two thing – that diagram does not overlap. Mr. Tatum stated I disagree with you because we set the requirements and they are going to be in the same parameters of the people that we have right now. 99% of the people who are involved in this situation right now are our substitute teachers and the bottom line is we hired them. If we have to go this route people will have to trust the fact that we are going to do our very best to ensure that our kids have the very best. If you look

at the RFP we have the right to interview and fire anyone that is not doing their job appropriately. There are requirements that are parallel.

Ms. Doblin stated I believe the business administrator was explaining contracts – you will have a contract with this private company so if you have a 2-year contract and you have a bunch of not so great paraprofessionals then you can't do anything. Mr. Tatum stated that is not how it works.

Mr. Taylor stated Mr. Tatum if I can respectfully extend an invitation on your behalf to this young lady as well as any other member of the public. Ms. Doblin stated I'm not a young lady. Mr. Taylor stated I meant it in the most respectful term as possible. What I was trying to convey was pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, in the Board policy, your time for public comment has long since expired and while respect and appreciate the Superintendent's efforts to be communicative with you, be responsive to you, I also want him to treat everyone in here fairly. For example Ms. Palacastro, NJEA, wanted an opportunity to have a similar dialogue, we did not allow that. I'm trying to counsel the Board to not allow that to go on because everyone else will want to have that same dialogue.

Pursuant to OPMA, the Board is required to set aside a portion of the meeting for public comment. The Board does not have to respond to public comment. The Board will attempt as it has to respond either through the administration or Board members to questions that are asked that they can respond to. If they can't respond, don't take offense to that. It may be they have to do some investigation or research some of these questions. I would also submit is that some of the information that individuals of the public come asking for is available through resources such as the internet, the website and/or be requested from the administration and/or the Board President in between the monthly Board meetings. You don't always have to wait a full month to ask some of the questions and get some of the information.

Some of the questions you are asking are quite detailed and require facts and figures and data and documents. It would be irresponsible in many respects with the administration or the Board to respond on the fly because they may not be giving you accurate information that you will be taking notes and then quoting them on. In many respects, I as the legal counsel for the Board may advise them not to respond. Don't get mad at them. They are relying upon the advice of counsel because they not only want to but have a legal obligation to give you accurate information. If and when it is possible because some of the information you asked for may not be subject to public disclosure. Don't take offense to it, that is the rules and regulations, policies, the laws that they are bound by.

Dr. Barbara Cedar stated have you looked at other schools that have privatized paralegals or any other workers in the school? If so what are the long-term consequences? It is easy to look at the one year program and save a lot of money but as an educator who has been through watching the privatization of education, what I saw was over time we didn't save any money. The first year we saved a lot of money but as this woman pointed out they are profit making institutions these private companies and you don't have long-term control over them. If you haven't looked at other institutions that have privatized, I would suggest that you do so because you make these rash decisions.

Cathy Sharpe stated a proud para for 38 years and I was happy to hear Mr. Tatum say tonight how he wants to keep our people all coming back but the sad news Mr. Tatum is that we have lost some of our good, our best people already. The 91 people cannot stand around and wait. A lot of them need health benefits. A lot of them are depending on their salaries to feed their families. They have reached out to other districts looking for a job. I hate to say we can't drag our feet. I don't believe you are dragging your feet. I don't know what the problem is. We have to think of these people. They cannot sit around until the end of August to find out whether they have a job or not. By then the other districts will have filled them and I hate to see these people who have dedicated a lot of their time to this district go elsewhere not because they want to but because they have to. My request to all of you is that you reconsider the decision to outsource your paras. My next request is if this is happening please get busy. Call a meeting with these people, let them find out what their insurance will be – you have to move faster we are going to lose them and our children are going to suffer because some of them are going to lose a para who they love. They love them like parents and we have to move fast and help them. Think of 91 people. I wish I could get all 91 standing here at the same time because that is the love you are taking from these children. They love each one of those kids and those kids love them. Please get on the ball and get this thing moving and let's get some answers before we lose all 91 of them.

Carla Biccari asked what is the job description in terms of educational background that has been requested to all these agencies? Has the agency been picked? I have seen other towns requesting zero experience. I would like to see what is posted for the RFP. I am also looking for the professional development – how they will be trained and the procedures that they will follow – the agencies or the Township's? Mr. Tatum stated I would love to sit down and have that conversation if you are available.

Tatianna Arrieta stated I'm a teacher at Union High School. I was looking at the calendar and I noticed that if we don't use our snow days they have been added to Memorial Day weekend. I don't know if you realize but the high school gets really hot. My classroom has gone up to 94 degrees. I have no windows. For next year can you take that into account on how late the school year ends and how it affects the students and how I work and it affects everything. I teach photography and I use chemicals and it gets hot and steaming and if you could just take that into consideration and maybe go back to the way it used to be by taking them off at the end of the year if we don't use them. I know there is project graduation to take into account and all of that. If the last day is set and let's say the 24th and we don't use those day the kids would have to come back for graduation if they know the date is set anyway. I was just wondering if there was another way of going about it.

Woman in audience stated I was the PTA treasurer for 11 years. A lot of times in PTA you had no money, you had to turn around and ask and we asked those parents. Can we turn around and ask? I already called Bob Menendez, Cory Booker – I was on the telephone with Governor Murphy a couple of weeks ago and explaining our situation. I wrote to our assemblyman so I don't know what else I can do. Maybe you all can do that for us too.

I have been with these children since 1st grade and I do care and I do know what keeps them calm and what doesn't. I have been asked to go to C-5 with them and agreed with it. I don't care where I'm put but I know the kids and at least they know a familiar face. What are we getting, what are we not getting, do I stay or do I not stay? I know other people that applied for jobs and got those jobs so they will not be coming back.

Dr. Francis stated I agree with Mrs. Sharpe that if we know we are going to privatize we should have all the information but not at the end of the year. They don't know what their future is.

But I have a problem with the NJEA being here. If the Board members don't know they gave \$16,000 to elect people in Cavatus' campaign. People here in Union that sat on the committee and voted for tax abatements for these developers and that means the school system is not getting any tax dollars from those tax abatements but yet they come here and push for the paras but it is almost ironic. Why would you come push for the paras when you shouldn't be giving money to people that voted against the interest of the district. It doesn't make sense to me.

Chasity Santana stated I have Ms. Sharpe's vision of 91 paras and what I see behind the 91 paras are 91 children and mine being my dog in the fight. When my child made a statement to the Board he woke up the next day and said "mommy did I save Miss Lil's job" and I wish I had an answer for him. I wish there was more communication so that we can know what to say to people and my child. My child has a disability where he needs stability. He has an IEP; it is a legal document where if anyone goes into the class he has to go the day before to see his class, desk, familiarize himself with the room so he might look, and I hate this word, "normal" – he has a different normal. I don't know how to prepare him if Miss Lil is not going to be there or if it is going to be a different Miss Lil. I feel there is no communication and I get there is litigation and all these wonderful things but I don't know what to tell my child. I thought we were in the business of educating children and that is where I am at with this and we need information. I need to know if I need to put in my IEP that not only does he have to meet a new desk and new teacher, but also a new aide. I need information to know how I proceed with my child. I get that everyone's hands are tied. Please remember and foremost that it's the children and for them I speak.

Elsie Mackie stated I heard everyone talking and I think the common thing is the communication aspect. I think the parents were blindsided by this on all sides. As mom to my child I am dead set against privatization. I find myself looking at my son's disability and saying he can't talk, he can't tell me if he is being not treated – he can't let me know anything versus someone else whose child is verbal and functional enough to state if privatization works for their child. My child can't tell me a darn thing. I am at the mercy of the administration. In terms of privatization I feel that somewhere along the line conversations had to have been happening. I feel like this could not just have just come up in April and all of us are at the table now having this intense fight. As friends we have been going back and forth on our views on it – I can only imagine the other parents. What happens is parents come to us and look to me for answers and I'm just as clueless as you guys and I don't have the information. I don't know what is going on. I say to Mr. Tatum is that we need to know what is going on and we need some finalization on

what the plan is going forward. It is important to include us the parents because at the end of the day we are all collectively advocating for the children. I don't think anybody in here does not care about the children. I think everybody cares about our children. It is just the communication and the management of what went down – that is the problem. I am a thousand percent against privatization. I am praying that is not the direction that we go because in my debates with my friends I'm stepping out of the rational person – your child can tell you if he is being abused, my child cannot. I have to guess and the trust that we have with our paraprofessionals especially my son's Mr. Castenada – everyone has seen him with the Special Olympics. He is dedicated to the kids. Just imagine how far my kid has come where he can look me in the eyes and say “mommy”. I feel comfortable to send him into the world and not second guess is he safe, are they treating him good, is he o.k. because he can't tell me so again when we go through this again because it is always at the end of the year that we get caught up in this, we got to start having the communication earlier and we have to start letting people know what is going on. Paraprofessionals should not be waiting last minute, parents shouldn't scramble, I should not be anxiety ridden over this. We have to do better. As a Board everyone is accountable across the Board. The job is the best interest of our district and if you as a Board from where I'm standing seems like you've been blindsided by all this and then where is my confidence in all of you collectively. Everyone has to start talking. We have to stop waiting last minute to hit us with this. Here we are in June – so that is my position. Get something to us soon. I need to know where our babies stand. I need to know who is going to be around him because he can't tell me.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Regis-Darby, that the Board go into Executive Session at 8:59 p.m. to discuss the following subject matters without the presence of the public in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12b.

- Matters rendered confidential by state or federal law.
- Pending or anticipated litigation, contract negotiation and matters falling under the attorney-client privilege.
- Matters involving employees and terms of their employment and contract.

Please take notice that minutes will be taken of the discussion conducted during the executive session and the Board will disclose the minutes of the executive session when the disclosure will not result in unwarranted invasion of individual privacy or prejudice to the best interests of the Board of Education and provided that such disclosure does not violate federal, state or local statutes and does not fall within the attorney/client privilege.

Action may be taken when the Board reconvenes in public session.

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

The Board returned to public session at 10:30 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the meeting be adjourned at 10:30 p.m. All present voting YES MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

GREGORY E. BRENNAN
BOARD SECRETARY