

TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSESSION MINUTES – December 8, 2020

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The worksession meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Tuesday, December 8, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom, pursuant to the notice sent to each member. Action was taken.

Mrs. Minneci called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Sherry Higgins, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Mr. Vito Nufrio, Mrs. Linda Richardson, Mrs. Kim Ruiz

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Dr. Guy Francis (arrived 7:15 p.m.), Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams (arrived at 7:15 p.m.)

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

Mr. Gerry Benaquista, Mrs. Yolanda Koon, Mrs. Kim Conti, Mrs. Ann Hart, Mr. Craig Wojcik, Mr. Barry Loessel, Mrs. Maureen Guilfoyle, Mrs. Sandra Paul

ALSO PRESENT:

Lester Taylor, Esq., Kendal Longmore, Esq.

Mr. McDowell led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Minneci stated welcome Mrs. Koon to the district. She began December so welcome to your first meeting.

Mrs. Koon 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. Richardson read the District’s mission statement.

Comments from Public on Resolutions:

None

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes will be approved at next week’s meeting.

Communications:

Communications are part of personnel and will be approved at next week’s meeting.

Superintendent's Report:

Mr. Benaquista stated there are two agenda items that will be voted on next week – O-5 and O-6. I want to welcome Mrs. Koon to the district. We are so happy to have you and to have that support for our district.

At the Fiscal/Operation meeting, Mrs. Richardson suggested that since O-5 and O-6 are on next week for voting, that we invite the ESIP team, Dan Riggle-Schneider Energy, Lisa Gorab-Bond Counsel and Robbin Acampora-financial advisor to provide an overview of the two resolutions so the Board could have a better understanding of what needs to be voted on for next week.

Dan Riggle stated I want to focus on the solar piece but if Lisa Gorab could give us an overview of what is on the agenda for next week.

Lisa Gorab stated you have two resolutions and both of these resolutions relate to Phase II of your energy savings plan. If you remember we bifurcated it – Phase I and Phase II. Phase I is underway to be financed and move along, Phase II is now ready to be authorized. There are two parts of Phase II. The first is a solar power purchase agreement. If you remember at the last meeting there was an analysis being conducted as to which would be the biggest economic benefit to the school district to either own and construct the solar panels or enter into a power purchase agreement. It turns out to enter into a power purchase agreement is the most financially advantageous route for the district. Parallel with that analysis, the district had authorized and received proposals for the second round of PPA and they came in very favorably.

The first resolution you have on O-5 – approves the award of the Power Purchase Agreement to the most favorable proposal and to the vendor who provided that proposal. That Power Purchase Agreement is going to provide savings and that leads into the second part of Phase II. Resolution O-6 authorizes Phase II to go forward with the energy conservations measures that are included to be done – the actual capital improvements that will be paid for by the savings from the Power Purchase Agreement. O-6 authorizes Phase II to go forward contingent on two approvals which we are in the process of obtaining. One is the BPU approval and the other is the Local Finance Board approval. The BPU approval is anticipated to be received before your December 15th meeting and they approve the actual plan. The Local Finance Board is an approval of the financing of Phase II. We anticipate it will be about \$5.5 million and the resolution O-6 does a few things. It approves Phase II, it authorizes application to the Local Finance Board, it authorizes submission to the BPU and it authorizes the financing of Phase II with refunding bonds.

You have been through this with Phase I and it has been accomplished and now we are taking the final actions with respect to Phase II of your energy savings plan. As a reminder this is an overall plan taking into the completed two phases both phases are tax neutral so you are getting these improvements, paying for them with the calculated savings so there will be no tax impact by getting these projects done.

Dan Riggle stated as Lisa mentioned, the goal here is to get a lot of these capital needs addressed for the district with no tax impact through the savings and through the incentives. Most of what we are talking here is nothing new. It is a continuation of the project that has been in the work for several years now. The key piece mentioned a few months back was to put it into two phases and pursuing this third-party ownership model for the solar called a Power Purchase Agreement.

As Lisa mentioned, an RFP was put out by the district. We assisted the district with this RFP along with Lisa and one of her colleagues who is an attorney focused on solar. We jointly as a team assisted in putting this RFP out. There was an RFP over the summer; we received proposals and several months passed and we fine-tuned the project working with Barry and the district to tighten it up a little bit and go back out and we did get very favorable results. I will share that briefly.

There was an evaluation report provided. We got five responses back for the solar power purchase agreement. The five groups that responded were Advance Solar Products, Concord Management Services/Infinity Energy Services, HESP Solar/Brightcore, Pfister Energy and Sunlight General Capital. These bidders are a contractor as well as a financier that team together to get these projects completed.

The results were very positive. With the power purchase agreement, the district would not own the solar panels on top of the school buildings, as well as the parking areas at the high school and Hannah Caldwell but it would be owned by the third-party who would then sell the power to the district. Right now the district is paying 12.5 cents for electricity from the grid. This power purchase agreement would be for 1.75 cents – about a 10 cent drop – a massive reduction in the cost of electricity. This is a big savings opportunity due to some State incentives, as well as the reduced cost of solar that has been coming down over time.

We looked at the proposals and evaluated each company. All of which we have experience working with on other projects with a couple of exceptions. We interviewed each of the firms last Tuesday. Proposals were opened on November 24th and last Tuesday we hosted interviews and we had a review/discussion with the district and just yesterday with Mr. McDowell as the ESIP committee and we had a couple of other folks that couldn't make it. These were all good proposals from qualified companies. There was one that stood out and had a tremendous amount of experience working with school districts in New Jersey and that was Pfister Energy. While all of these firms had, for the most part, a lot of experience working with school districts, they had the most positive reputation and they were second lowest financially. The lowest firm financially did not have any completed projects with schools. They had one nearing construction but they were more greener and a little bit more of a risk due to the lack of experience and clarity on how they would deliver the project in their proposal and interview.

We reviewed this with the facility team and the administration yesterday. I think we feel in doing our analysis, checking references and discussing with the district as well as Lisa and Robbie, that we are very confident in this group in making this recommendation. However, ultimately this is a decision for the Board. This is a contract that will continue to help facilitate

but ultimately it would be a Power Purchase Agreement between the Board of Education and one of these firms.

Mrs. Williams and Dr. Francis arrived at meeting (7:15 p.m.)

Mr. McDowell stated we discussed this yesterday. I think at our last meeting we talked about our school district about owning the solar panels but as it turned out, that was not allowed by the BPU. Mrs. Gorab stated it was a model that the BPU would allow did not allow the district to account for the savings. It wasn't a viable option. They are applying that across the board the BPU to everyone – it is not just Union.

Mr. McDowell stated that is what I understood and after the presentations with the people yesterday, I am pretty confident that this is the way we want to go and at this point it is what we need to do because there is a deadline fast approaching and we need to act by next week.

Mr. Riggle stated there is a deadline. It is a little bit undetermined. We know that this incentive program right now, there is a transition incentive for solar in New Jersey – they call it the t-rec is set to expire sometime between March and May; however, there are a number of steps that need to happen between now and then to get the incentive secured and all signaling from the State is that these amounts that they offer as an incentive will be reduced. It is just a matter of how much and exactly when. I think we have enough time to help the district and make sure that gets secured. We are confident in that. At the same time we certainly want to keep this process moving and get this on the district's agenda for next week.

Mr. Loessel stated we are also going to get roofs with the solar. Mr. Riggle stated that is exactly it. With working with Barry and doing our site visits, we know roofing is a big need. We have identified about 400,000 square feet of roofs that need to be replaced throughout the district across six schools. Some of which are the complete roofs and some are sections. For example the high school is not the whole roof but a decent size chunk so that is a big need. When Lisa touched on the Phase II projects, that is primarily what this Power Purchase Agreement would go to do is fund about \$4 million worth of roof upgrades from the savings as opposed to other option where the district or taxpayers would have to foot that bill – that is a good point Barry.

Mr. Benaquista stated thank you team for giving that overview and hopefully that will help us with O-5 and O-6 next week. I will go into some of the questions from the November board meeting.

First I'm happy to say our student liaisons will be joining us next week. I spoke with all the students or their parents. There is one new student, our 9th grade student; however, the three from last year will continue on by moving up a grade level. I'm very excited to hear from our students at the high school.

I'm trying to set up other things to get some positive information out on what is going on in our community and our schools. I'm trying to communicate with the PTA to get a PTA voice of what the parents are seeing through the PTA. Ms. Ahearn is going to be sharing some

information on our college instant decisions. I am going to wrap up our fall sports and give an overview. I asked our principals to give me some positive information that is going on within the schools. I will share that as well as education and curriculum supervisors and anything else that comes up I will like to share and end this year 2020 and last Board meeting with some positive things. There are so many positive things that go on in our district and I don't think we have enough time to share all of them.

As always, I will give an update on the attendance numbers for November and I will ask Mr. Loessel to give a quick synopsis of where the company we hired is at with the evaluation of our buildings because the next step is to analyze the report they submit. I believe they finished the schools today. Mr. Loessel stated unfortunately they got caught with the COVID so a lot of the guys that were doing the inspections of the buildings couldn't come around. They got another team member to come in today and they finished two schools today. They did all ten schools and my maintenance guys have been going around and following behind them and fixing up the things that they said weren't working. We should get the report in a couple of days.

Mr. Benaquista stated may be we'll have a further update on that next week based upon what the report says. As you know, that is one of the crucial things to determine the return of school in the hybrid form; hopefully sometime in January or February 1st – the third marking period. Mr. Loessel stated we have ten schools that we have already corrected – the high school remains.

Mr. Benaquista stated at this point I'm going to review the questions that were asked last month at our November Board meeting and read the answers that were given to me when requested.

Indemnification of board members - is there a not to exceed amount by the insurance company? Clarity on the \$300 - is there a cap of coverage of legal fees? FYI - our deductible is \$50,000; however, it is based at the insurance rate of \$180 an hour not \$300. I also believe once we have met the \$50,000, the insurance company will pay \$180/hour and the BOE will still be responsible for \$120 per hour.

If we could ask parents what they think of the food that is distributed to the students (breakfast/lunch). In response to your request to address Mrs. Ruiz question: We will create a survey and any family who picks up a meal will be asked to fill it out. At every site there will be: QR codes to scan to access the survey, QR code slips so they can take the code with them and fill it out later, or a paper survey they can fill out on site. The link to this survey will also be placed on the Food/Nutrition page of the District website. As we spoke about, the survey will be most relevant if we target surveys of the families that are picking up meals. I will have this survey ready for distribution by the middle of the week.

We will speak with Pomptonian about the variety that we are serving. As we discussed, I want you to be aware that the process to change the meal schedule is a lengthy process. We need to submit the changes for approval by the State Department of Agriculture. Proactively we will start to contact distributors and work with Pomptonian's nutritionist to review the menu and see what changes can be made. Additionally, every food distributor is in a similar scenario with

other districts being remote and needing similar products, so there may be a supply chain limitation on the availability of products to make meaningful menu changes quickly. I will keep you updated on the menu as I get more information

Mrs. Miller's questions – we will have an off the air conversation.

Mrs. Lipstein had asked do we need to have an interim or can it be shared so a vote can be done in January? According to statute a district must have a Superintendent of record. Mr. Taylor stated that correctly characterizes the statute.

Daryl Martin asked about reopening of school - what about proper ventilation? custodial staff? Nurses? The district has enlisted EI associates (a third party) to conduct a certification of the conditions of our schools and to complete a district-wide ventilation assessment (proper air flow) to validate that the buildings are safe for students and staff to return to. There is a nursing shortage throughout the State. Mrs. Ionta who oversees our district nurses will make sure we have a plan in place to make sure all our needs are met with the students and teachers returning to our buildings and following all the guidelines from the health department, CDC and Department of Education. Our district meets twice a month with the County and the health department officials and we get updated information every two weeks. We are constantly changing and adapting the process and the responsibilities that we have to do as a school. We will be ready for our students to return on the medical side.

The Township of Union Board of Education has a nurse at each building and (2) at Union High School. While the district builds the 2021-2022 district budget, we will analyze the possible need for more school nurses.

Mr. Loessel, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds will make sure that that district has the proper number of custodial staff for the proper cleaning in reference to Covid-19. While the district builds the 2021-2022 district budget, we will analyze the possible need for more school custodians. I had a meeting with them the other day and I wanted to reassure them how important they are but at the same time their role as a custodian/maintenance person has changed tremendously over the last few months. I'm happy to say during this remote time Mr. Loessel and his crew have been focusing on getting the buildings ready at a level that they hadn't had a chance to because they are short staffed.

Suehay Monge - regarding January PSAT - if we are not back and school - what is plan B? The parents need to be notified, there needs to be more communication. Mr Benaquista spoke to Mrs. Monge about the PSAT and a letter from Mr. Hoyt and Mrs. Ahern went out to parents on November 25, 2020. Unless the Governor or we get told by the health department that are schools are shut, we will be hosting the PSAT. We will make sure it is safe and following the current CDC/health department guidelines and we will make sure these students sit for the PSAT which we all feel is very important.

Paul Casey - his son is done by 1:30 p.m. Maybe we should have podcasts or virtual chess or something for students. The district is monitoring the amount of time that students are on the computer and at this point only the clubs that are a necessity are being offered. An email

went out to the principals and the district is going to start preparing to reoffer clubs in January and we want to offer clubs that students are interested in before we just start a club because it is a club from the past. I anticipate sometime in January start kicking off our annual clubs. I want them to do a virtual club fair to inform all our students what clubs we are offering in each school. Students can approach the principal if they have an interest in a certain area that we are not offering.

Mrs. DiGirolamo - report on ventilation - can you give us more information - what is the plan? When, how, which buildings? How are issues going to be fixed? Hybrid - January/February? How are we going to do all this if there are money issues. The last correspondence of Mr. Tatum on November 19, 2020 to the school community – late January. It will all depend on this final report. We also mentioned the third marking period which is February 1st. We have to make sure the buildings are completely safe for students and staff before we move to the hybrid form.

When the district sends out the survey to the parents, please fill out the survey to the best of your knowledge of whether your child is going to be returning to hybrid or staying virtual. That will help us with the planning to make sure that we have all the classrooms covered in the virtual setting as well as the hybrid setting. Mr. Tatum's correspondence went out on November 19th which spoke to the reopening of schools. We will keep evaluating where we are at in the process and make sure the community knows as things progress, we will send out correspondence.

Education/Student Discipline Committee Resolutions:

Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Guilfoyle was not able to present at the Education Committee meeting so I would like her to present before you do the overview.

Mrs. Guilfoyle stated Title I Program Description:

Union High School

After School Student Support (December 1 - June 10) - English Language Arts, Geometry, Algebra, and Science teachers will be available Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:45 pm - 3:45 pm for extra help starting on December 1st. The extra help sessions will run through either Google Meet or Zoom (*subject to change if we go back to in-person learning*).

Advancement (December 1 - March 26th) - Students will have the opportunity to earn graduation requirement credits in a limited number of courses offered through the Apex Learning software. The courses being offered in the after-school advancement program are as follows: **Financial Literacy, Pre-Calculus, Probability and Statistics, Environmental Science, and Physics**. Students participating in the Advancement Program will receive a contract that they must adhere to in order to receive credit for the class they are enrolled in. This program will run on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:45 pm - 4:00 pm. Students are also encouraged to work on their own time outside of the suggested hours.

2021 FES Extended Learning Virtual Program “*Franklin Forward*” -January 22nd - June 19th 2021 -Saturdays 10:00 am-2:00 pm - Extended learning programs play a critical role in the continued support of students. The extended learning program will provide students with additional learning opportunities filled with rigorous and relevant instruction, as well as student-centered learning and enrichment experiences.

Social-emotional learning is critical to managing their emotions during this trying time. We want to help provide students with the skills that can help them navigate through this uncharted territory in our socially-distanced world.

Each Saturday we will host several sessions via google classroom/meet in our Title I Virtual Classroom. Meetings will be held at various times throughout the day to facilitate our students getting connected and acquiring the social-emotional skills needed to persevere. Each meeting will last approximately 45 minutes and will be facilitated by one of our Title I teachers.

Extended Learning Opportunities - Students will have the opportunity to:

- Attend virtual field trips
- Engage in S.T.E.M. and other science related activities
- Participate in math challenges and virtual learning games
- Receive instruction focused on cross-curricular learning

Gain problem solving and critical thinking skills through our Project Based Learning lessons that will help to develop their 21st century skills.

Jefferson Title I Extended Day Learning Program - Jefferson Elementary School uses Title I funds to provide an Extended Day Learning Program. The program provides students with enhanced learning opportunities in the areas of Mathematics, ELA, and cross-curricular Project Based Learning activities through STEM instruction. Students receive small group instruction and implement the Leader in Me habits which empower all students to learn academically rigorous content while developing 21st century skills. Small group and targeted instruction are utilized by all teachers to improve student’s ELA and Mathematics skills needed to meet the state’s rigorous academic standards.

Identified students are provided with enhanced academic support and learning opportunities. Students engage in small group and targeted instruction in the areas of ELA & Mathematics. Project Based Learning is utilized to enhance STEM skills that are covered in small group instruction.

Program Structure

The program begins in January and concludes in June. It is held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 - 3:45 P.M. Students receive small group instruction in the areas of ELA, Mathematics, and STEM. The students are grouped in cohorts and participate in the same course for 5 weeks before rotating to the next course. The students also participate in an authentic Book Club to reinforce reading and writing skills while reading a novel aloud with their class. The

concepts taught in Math and ELA allow students to utilize what they learned and make real world connections.

Title I Extended Day Learning Program Information Connecticut Farms - Connecticut Farms Elementary School receives Federal Title I Targeted Assistance Funds to support the Title I Program. The Connecticut Farms Elementary School Title I Program is designed to meet educational needs of those students identified as scoring below the district's minimum standards in Mathematics.

Two after school math programs will run at Connecticut Farms, 1 Support Math program and 1 PBL program - The support program will focus on math content and understanding. Teachers will be provided with Discovery Education and access to I Know It online platform. Teachers will also work with an assistant who will work with students in breakout rooms for further help and review. Students who qualify for this program met all 4 of the criteria as listed below.

The PBL Program will focus on problem and project based learning. Teachers will be provided with Tynker and access to Arcademics online platform. Programs will run virtually via Zoom on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30-5:50 beginning on January 12 and ending on May 27.

Title I Burnet Extended Learning Programs - Burnet Middle School will be offering tutoring for middle school students who are seeking assistance with learning in Math, ELA, and Science. Tutors will assist our students with homework to strengthen their academic skills, build their self-confidence, and increase their social skills by interacting with them and being a positive role model. The tutoring program requires tutors to be self-motivated, excellent problem solvers and build positive relationships with our students to encourage positive outcomes. Tutoring will take place virtually using Google Meet and/or Zoom on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings from 7:00-8:30pm. We currently have just over 100 students enrolled in the program and are exploring the possibility of expanding the program to include additional academic areas.

Mrs. Minneci gave an update on the Education Committee meeting. Mrs. Minneci stated last night we had our Education Committee meeting. We had Mrs. Moran and Dr. Cohen give a presentation on the AP and honors update. There was a committee formed and it consists of two Board of Ed members, three principals – one elementary, one middle and one high school, parents, teachers, supervisors, counselor from the high school and students from the middle and high school. Those students are both in AP and honors classes and general ed classes.

The committee met three times and slated to meet tomorrow night for their fourth meeting. The first two meetings they reviewed articles and information research from about 40 districts – looking for best practices. They reviewed it, discussed it. Some of the other team members submitted other articles and information for the committee to review.

The committee wants to give the opportunity to as many students as possible to participate in these classes. The next meeting we are going to review Union's rubric and then continue on from there.

We spoke about the Kean partnership. Mrs. Moses and Mrs. Ahearn finalized the agreement with Kean and it consists of a college course that will be offered to seniors. There will be a meeting tomorrow night for interested students. They will go over the criteria. They will be able to meet with Kean representatives that will help them through the process. It is intro to public speaking. The district will pay the cost for each student. It will be approximately 15 students. If there is more, Mrs. Guilfoyle mentioned that there might be some other moneys that can be used if we need more students to be enrolled. The guidance department will support the students involved in this program. It will begin in January 2021 and the grades will be part of the second semester transcript. This will be added to the program that the students are already involved in at Kean with the teaching program. They will try to expand and partner with UCC for the CTE students in the future.

We also talked about the instructional tech department and we have about 17 instructional platforms right now and Mr. Wojcik is constantly assessing the platforms, updating them, replacing them as necessary – conferring with the staff. He also offers training and he has office hours to support the staff. He works with the principals and supervisors. He also works with the students and their parents/guardians. He generates consumable materials, disseminates information, sets up PDs for the staff – there is a lot. We might need to look into expanding the department to spread around some of this work.

Mrs. Moses shared that the New Jersey student assessments will be given in the spring.

We talked about e-books – Mrs. Paul was at our meeting. The librarians have collaborated and re-subscribed to e-books for the students in the school district and it is from 5th to 12th grade. They will continue to work with Union Public Library and students can obtain virtual library cards that can be used to access e-books in the public library. The books are being updated to reflect the diverse community so the collection is being expanded. She also informed us that the district is now one-to-one with Chromebooks from K-12. They received them and are in the process of distributing the K-1, as well as high school Chromebooks. Parents and students of the district are encouraged to contact the IT Department for troubleshooting and repair issues.

Paraprofessionals will be getting Chromebooks from the special education department and hotspots continue to be distributed on an as needed basis. Requests are done via the technology work order system.

Mrs. Ruiz presented the Education Committee agenda.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, the following resolution was moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mr. McDowell, for adoption:

E-1. AFFIRM SUPERINTENDENT'S DETERMINATION OF HIB

Affirm the Superintendent's determination of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the periods November 11, 2020 to November 17, 2020, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes.

E-1A. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT OF HIB

Superintendent's Report of Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) for the period November 18, 2020 to December 8, 2020, in accordance with the information appended to the minutes (*no vote required; for reporting purposes only*).

DISCUSSION:

None

AYE: Dr. Francis, Mrs. Higgins, Mr. McDowell, Mr. Nufrio,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

Fiscal and Planning Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Richardson gave an overview of the Fiscal Committee meeting. Mrs. Richardson stated I like to welcome Mrs. Koon. We met yesterday and to Mr. Benaquista and Mrs. Manochio I wanted to thank you for joining us as well.

Mrs. Koon and Mr. Benaquista have been fine tuning the current school budget to get a better picture on how the district should proceed with restricting details in balances, revenues and appropriations. They have been working as a team. Mrs. Manochio has been involved in transitioning and bringing Mrs. Koon up to date on the day-to-day operations and what she was doing as a temporary replacement for Mr. Vieira. Mr. Benaquista has been working closely with her and analyzing and projecting our budget to the end of the year. They are looking at the reserves that have been depleted and trying to reestablish the reserves that have been depleted and trying to get more funding into those areas because it puts the school district in a very vulnerable position.

Mr. Benaquista had stated that positions that become vacant will be evaluated to ensure whether or not they are substantial if the position is not a necessity – the position will remain vacant. If the position is a necessity then of course a replacement will be made.

A big concern is the change in the cost for hospitalization with the changes that have come through the State of New Jersey. It is going to cost the school district an additional \$2 million for this fiscal year and that was not budgeted for.

Other cost concerns are funding all the accounts properly – special needs. They are taking a conservative position as they move forward. Transfers have been minimal due to proceeding conservatively and approaching every area conservatively so that the reserves can be restored and it can also meet the needs of the \$2 million of additional costs of health benefits.

Currently we have 146 out-of-district student placements. They have already started planning for next year's budget and it has been very hectic but productive.

Mr. Benaquista had stated the neighborhood schools would result in a savings to the transportation and it is still on the table but not for this year but possibly the future.

Mrs. Richardson presented the Fiscal Committee agenda.

Mr. Benaquista stated the New Jersey Educator Health Plan that became law in going into effect January 1st where the district needs to offer this new health plan to all employees. The new health plan is for most districts that are in the State health benefit plan, it is a cost savings because they didn't do things like our district did years ago and create EPO and OMNIA health plans that were already a lower cost plan to the district. Our district was ahead of the curve in negotiations coming up with these creative plans for new hires which was then a cost savings to our district. This new educators health plan comes in and now it ends up being a better plan than EPO or OMNIA while at the same time costing the district more money because the shift in the past was the employee was paying a percentage of the premium and everyone was in phase 4 of that percentage so an employee could be paying 36% of a family plan and now that same employee can possibly paying 7.9% of their salary for that family plan. For a family in this district, taking family coverage, it could possibly be a \$3,000 shift to the district. We have right now approximately 400 – estimating – we are finalizing enrollment sheets and once we have all the sheets we are anticipating 400 people moving into that new plan. If you did an average of \$1800 x 400 – you are looking at three-quarters of a million dollars that we didn't know we needed to budget for because this plan didn't exist when we were building this budget. When Mrs. Koon came along, to be fair to her, she needs to re-evaluate our budget. This is one of the big things that has been thrown at us mid-stream that we now have to reprioritize and come up with appropriations to now be able to balance the health benefit lines, as well as some other costs that has rose since we built this budget. Mrs. Richardson did express very well what Mrs. Koon and I did pop on for part of that fiscal to let the fiscal committee know that I think we need time to re-evaluate where we are at, how we are going to project out for the rest of the year. What I meant about essential positions, right now we are just going to make sure Mrs. Koon and myself are talking on every hire, that the money is budgeted for – that there is a UPC attached to every position. The County goes by that code as if the position is budgeted. We are going to make sure we stay diligent in making sure fiscally that we are very responsible especially in light where we are fiscally with these unexpected expenditures.

Mrs. Koon stated I think you stated it correctly. Upon my arrival, this is day 6, I met with my staff and we are in the process of analyzing Chapter 78 and now with the new Chapter 44, the district is going to absorb some of that cost. One way of trying to balance the budget is probably to look at reducing our appropriations. We are putting a freeze on some unnecessary expenditures basically by not compromising the essential needs of the students. We are planning to do a forecast. I'm trying to gather all the information, look at all of our revenue streams and our appropriations; making sure we have paid everything up to par and I'm just trying to get my hands around where we are with the expenditures. My department will be doing a forecast to give us a better picture of where we stand in June in addition to trying to look at the health costs

and doing an analysis on that. I will be working closely with the administrators and Gerry and fine tuning what that amount the district may have to absorb from that.

In addition to that, we are looking at transportation bills. We contract some of our special ed transportation and it is very high. I just took an average of three bills – we are paying close to \$600,000 a month which is very high. That line it looks like we may be short a little so I'm looking at the budget on where we may be able to save some expenses and be able to cover those costs and looking forward in the future whether or not there are other options that we might want to do – maybe looking at putting out bids ourselves as opposed to reaching out to UCES or maybe a partnership with another district in a joint venture and cut out the middleman. There are some other opportunities that I'm thinking about to help us reduce some of our expenses. It is going to take a little time. There are quite a few tasks before me.

I had a lengthy meeting with our auditors today giving me a recap of what they have been doing over the last month or so and trying to wrap up and close the audit for this year. He did indicate that our district is very tight with the expenditures. We really have to be prudent in what we are spending. He gave an example – you have \$500, you are spending \$499. There is very little wiggle room. I'm hoping we can capitalize during this time that the kids are in remote so maybe we are saving a little bit on utility bills because the kids are not in the school. We are trying to look at where we can save some money. Our biggest expenditure is headcount so I'm working with Mr. Benaquista; like you said essential positions we will fill others we will on an as need basis but we need to reduce our appropriation.

Mr. Benaquista stated just to be clear, this new educator health plan, it is not just teachers, it is all employees. I don't want anyone to think that this is something new for teachers, it is offered to maintenance, custodial, to anyone that is an employee to switch over to. It is not our district that has caused this, it is not any of our members that caused this, it is a signed bill that passed. They signed the bill in the Union High School gymnasium. Murphy came to Union High School gym and signed this bill which I thought was very interesting. It was the first time I was at a signing of a bill. I think it is something throughout the State and many educators have been pushing. Nobody in our district had anything to do with this as far as bringing this to our district. It is a State thing. I don't want anyone to think it was negotiated within our district. We have to follow the law. Thank you for letting us clarify those a little bit more. Those numbers are estimates. As soon as Mrs. Koon and I are able to finalize hard numbers, we will share it with fiscal again.

Mrs. Richardson stated thank you. Obviously everyone can see how hard they have been working these last six days.

DISCUSSION:

None

Operations Committee Resolutions:

Mrs. Richardson presented the Operations Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Ruiz congratulated the three new Board members – Mrs. Brens, Mrs. Regis-Darby and Mr. O’Shea.

Mrs. Minneci congratulated the future Board members.

Personnel Committee Resolutions:

Mr. McDowell gave an overview of the Personnel Committee. Mr. McDowell stated there were several items we discussed with Mr. Benaquista. We talked about the agenda. We talked about open positions as of December and what we are looking to do to fill those positions. We are looking at some possible reorganizations first before those positions are filled. We talked about the interim positions we have now – interim principal at Franklin, Burnet and the high school. We talked about changing Mrs. Cappiello’s title – she was the acting board secretary and we are considering making her the assistant board secretary through June 30, 2021.

Mr. Benaquista stated with the transition and you heard from Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Koon on how much is going on in fiscal, Mrs. Cappiello has been doing a tremendous job on the board secretary side and as all you Board members knows that is your first communication line. Up to June 30th – as soon as Mrs. Koon has gotten her feet wet and feels that she has a strong hold on not just analyzing the current year budget but we are also months behind on building – in a normal year Mrs. Koon would have started at the mid October to building next year’s budget – meeting with principals and stakeholders to start laying out the next year’s budget. She hasn’t had the opportunity to do that. We are meeting with the principals this week to get that ball rolling but she has a tremendous amount of work to do within fiscal. I mentioned to you in personnel that it would be beneficial on a month-by-month basis to keep Mrs. Cappiello supporting her. Hopefully the Board sees the reasoning and rationale behind it to make a smooth transition with Mrs. Koon as the BA/BS and give a little more support to a very busy district at a very busy time.

Mr. McDowell stated I’m glad you brought that to everyone’s attention because you know better than most and I’m sure Mrs. Koon does too that Mrs. Cappiello is doing an excellent job and appreciate it.

Mrs. Higgins stated I just want to say that Mrs. Cappiello is freaking awesome. Whatever we can do to promote her and to give her more responsibility and in a better position, I’m all for it.

Mrs. Richardson stated I would also like to say that Mrs. Cappiello has kept all of us in line. She makes sure that we know what we have to do and she does an unbelievable job. Mrs. Minneci stated where would we be without her. Mrs. Richardson stated we would be very disorganized. She really is the glue that keeps it all together.

Mrs. Higgins stated she is a very strategic partner to everyone; it is not like she is doing what she needs to do and being the glue. She is always thinking outside the box and she is always making sure that she is strategically through whatever we are doing. A little bit more than doing what her job is.

Mr. McDowell stated there are people that will be continuing in their current role and in an additional role as a supervisor – Mr. Hoyt as supervisor as high school science; Mr. Malanda as supervisor for KMS science, Mrs. Lorenzo as supervisor for career education and Mr. Shaw as supervisor as BMS science. Those are some of the changes in P-1A.

P-1 – there are additional changes that we are looking to make – one is the continuation of a long-term substitute at Battle Hill and we have hired a television production teacher and that is contingent upon the satisfactory completion of the hiring requirements. We have an employee who was a leave replacement/elementary school teacher and now she is becoming a full-time elementary school teacher at Connecticut Farms. We hired a part-time corner aide in transportation and she is also a night time custodian.

Extra pays are stipends and are reflective of the UTEA agreement for 2020-2021. There was one transfer within the same school.

Mr. McDowell presented the Personnel Committee agenda.

DISCUSSION:

Mr. Nufrio stated years back we encountered the appointment of administrators to cover for supervisors with that stipend – the question wasn't about the stipend, it was about the workload. With remote learning, the workload was not as extensive as compared to if we were in person learning – where the buildings are open for the students and staff. Thinking ahead, hopefully we will get back to the brick and mortar learning and I think it needs to be reconsidered as to who should be designated if by then the Board hasn't appointed the replacement supervisors. It is something to think about. Mr. Benaquista – we talked about when we were doing negotiations for both administrators and teachers. Your thoughts on that please. Mr. Benaquista stated we did speak in personnel last night about the open positions. Specifically the one supervisor open position; it is really contingent upon if the district is going to move forward and reorganize some of those supervising positions. We spoke with personnel on a more K-12 and our core supervising K-12 so then readjust some of the other areas. Still hire that one position and be responsible for different areas of supervision. Right now the person that left us oversaw science and career ed. If we went to a K-12 model, possibly shifting some employees from within to absorb or move into the open K-12 science position right now and then hire a supervisor to oversee some of the other departments that are being handled right now by the supervisors that are existing so then this way the cores would be K-12. It is something that we had discussed, it hasn't really come back around to be presented, but it is something that Mr. Tatum and I spoke this week. I will speak with him again as Superintendent of record and see what he wants to do possibly for next week. If we can get that reorganization into the Board for a vote on the change of position, then we can accurately post for that open supervisor's position and hopefully get our entire supervisor group organized in a way where we don't need the extra manpower to make up for people positions that have not been filled.

Mr. Nufrio stated that is understandable – I was just trying to focus on the workload that is involved if we were to go back into in-person learning that a principal would be racked with an enormous amount of work and possibly not able to complete efficiently both as principal and

supervisor. That was my first complaint years back and I think we drifted away from that but now we have a different situation and as long as remote learning is in place, that is fine, but evaluations still need to be done and that is an extra load for a principal to take on.

Mr. Benaquista stated it is and as much as the administrators are team oriented and help us out. I have had conversations with certain people that assume these responsibilities and they are doing it really to help us. They are getting a stipend on it but it does cause a lot of extra work. The number of observations that we have to complete in this district and some people feel that being in person may be a little easier to observe because that is what you have been used to and trained on for so many years. Now the administrators had to adjust in a matter of minutes to doing observations last spring through the portfolio process and now this year it is a combination and collaborative effort between the teacher and the administrator and it could be the portfolio still but observations even though we are not in the building, it is just as much of a challenge especially for certain people. If anything, the work load got a little harder because it wasn't traditional like we have always done in a normal brick and mortar setting. It is a lot of added pressure and our administrators are very thankful that they were willing to step up and assume that extra responsibility while keeping their responsibilities going.

Mr. McDowell stated some requests for salary adjustments but that is some of the things we have to discuss in executive session.

Policy Committee:

Mr. Nufrio stated we have no policy resolutions on the agenda this evening but we did meet last night – Mrs. Higgins and Mrs. Ruiz were not able to attend. We did discuss the two policies that were drafted and submitted for our review. I mentioned last month that Afshan had did a really good job drafting those two policies. In light of that, Mr. Benaquista was kind enough to attend the meeting because Mr. Tatum and Mrs. Moses were not available. What we were left with were some questions as to the thoroughness of which it was reviewed by Mr. Benaquista and Mrs. Williams and of course they asked for a little more time to read it and if they can get back to me before the end of the week, then I would ask Mrs. Minneci to put those policies up for first reading next week.

Dr. Francis asked Mr. Nufrio, what policies are you referring to? Mr. Nufrio stated the two policies that had to do with the remote learning which had to deal with attendance and use of electronic equipment. Dr. Francis asked do you have those numbers? Mr. Nufrio stated Mrs. Cappiello can forward the proposals by Afshan and I ask that she do that so all the Board members have it. I don't know if all the Board members got it but I received it, along with the committee.

Mr. Taylor stated the policies were just sent to the committee but we will gladly share with the full Board. Mr. Nufrio stated that is a good idea, it would make sense to have eyes on it by the rest of the Board. I alluded to it and I thought they were well drafted. I just want to make sure that all the t's are crossed and the i's dotted and Mr. Benaquista being thorough and efficient as he is also wanted to make sure that there was nothing in the language that would conflict or cause some question or concern. Mrs. Williams as well didn't have the opportunity to see all the language or read through it. I don't know if Mrs. Ruiz had the same opportunity. I know Mrs.

Higgins was o.k. with it. It would be a good idea to have everyone take a look at it and if the committee gets back to me before Friday, so that Mrs. Cappiello has enough time to put it on as a resolution. Mr. Benaquista stated I will make sure I get back to you at the latest Friday.

Residency Committee:

Mrs. Williams stated I spoke with Donna and the residency officers are still going out and making visits to make sure that students that say they are in the district that they are actually in the district. We will probably have resolutions in the near future but for right now we don't have anything.

Technology Committee:

Dr. Francis gave an overview of the Technology Committee meeting. Dr. Francis stated there is nothing on the agenda tonight but we did meet last night to go over the following:

Old Business

- Working on current proposals for district telephone and notification systems.
 - Update: Waiting on funding from the state for the notification system. The district telephone system will be done separately.
- Move from Systems 3000 for payroll and personnel to Genesis during the 2020-2021 school year.
 - Update: Contacted Genesis. Negotiated costs to be done over a 3 year period. Planning to work on setting up a meeting at end of January 2021 of departments that will be involved in the process.
- Laptops for middle and high school teachers
 - Update: Devices were delivered. In the process of configuring devices to district technology protocols.
- Security camera systems for middle and elementary schools
 - In the beginning stages of investigating this project. Replacing the security server system.
- The replacement cycle of middle school Chromebooks 21-22 school year.
- Secondary Internet access for load balancing of bandwidth for the district.
 - Turned on. Working on completion of the project.
- Upcoming E-rate cycle 2022- 2023.
 - Replacement of older switches in the wiring closets at middle and elementary schools.
- Upcoming technology infrastructure project 2021-2022
 - Replace current fiber between wiring closets in middle and elementary schools due to the inability to expand beyond 1GB
 - Replace with new fiber and configure for 10GB between wiring closets
 - 60% of the project was approved and funded by Erate 2021-2022

Approval of Bills:

Bills will be approved at next week's meeting.

Unfinished Business:

Mr. Nufrio stated I would like to welcome Mrs. Koon. Thank you for being diligent as you have already portrayed to be and I'm sure you are and hitting the ground running.

I had question of what you indicated earlier and alarming that our transportation costs is over \$600,000 monthly. Is that a current number or last year? Mrs. Koon stated it is current and it is a weighted average – we took an average of three months and it is close to \$600,000 a month. Mr. Nufrio stated that would include out-of-district busing as well? Mrs. Koon stated yes, that is the bulk of it. Mr. Nufrio stated so the bulk is out-of-district busing. Mrs. Koon stated yes and that is only one vendor – UCESC. We also have Morris Jointure. The UCESC is the largest ticket item. Mr. Nufrio stated but the total is roughly \$600,000. Mrs. Koon stated correct, per month for UCESC. Mr. Nufrio stated you indicated that we could do something to defray that cost? Mrs. Koon stated correct; that probably won't happen this school year but I did speak briefly with the supervisor of transportation and we were brainstorming through some other opportunities that might be an opportunity for the district – at least probe and see. Even shared servicing with another district based on the needs and where the students are going and/or maybe doing the bid ourselves without the administrative costs and may come in at a cheaper proposal. Those are just a couple of items I threw out to her to start probing, thinking and brainstorming. Looking at some of those very expensive rates – I think she mentioned that we may have 1-2 students on a bus and it is very expensive.

Mr. Nufrio stated last year, we did probe and inquire and we met as a Board and we had sessions with the transportation director and the biggest obstacle was finding companies that would submit proposals; hopefully that won't be the case going forward. I wish you luck and I hope you can make a big change on that because that is a tremendous amount of money.

Mrs. Richardson stated with the financial situation that we are in right now, do we have to revisit having an interim superintendent? I don't want an answer, I just want the Board to think about it. I won't be here after next week so it is completely up to the Board. Looking forward, it is going to be about \$80,000 to have an interim superintendent and I think it is something to be thought about.

Mr. McDowell stated our Board position last month about the policy that conflicted with a bylaw and I think someone was going to look into that. Mrs. Minneci stated did you check your information from Mrs. Cappiello, she sent some documents for executive session. Mr. McDowell stated the bylaw is for executive session? Mrs. Minneci stated yes.

New Business:

None

Comments from the Public:

Lyn Cornaccia stated Livingston School head rep. Tonight I heard an awful lot about Mr. Benaquista has been helping out and popping into meetings and everything else. My question is for you Mrs. Minneci and for the Board, why are you not considering Mr. Benaquista who is already doing the job of superintendent; having him as interim superintendent. It doesn't make any sense to look any further than Mr. Benaquista. Obviously he has all the qualifications that

we need. He even stated tonight that the State guidelines you have to have a superintendent run the schools. I don't understand why the Board is even hesitant; unless he does not want the position. Mr. Benaquista has been doing an extraordinary job and I think the Board would be foolish not to offer him this position. This is just my opinion. I hope that it can be resolved.

Dr. Jakubowski stated I wanted to say hello to everyone. I have listened to the meeting tonight and I do know that Mr. Benaquista did say something with regard to him serving right now in the capacity as superintendent. I only called from experience from 25 years ago. I don't know what the Board's position is, what they are going to do about an interim. In the 11 years this is the first time I actually addressed the Board since I retired. I do know that 25 years ago, the Board did pass a resolution after Dr. Barbato and Dr. Caulfield left. When I was the assistant, and by law I became the chief school administrator of the district until the replacement was found. I think a Board resolution naming Mr. Benaquista in this role will give him more strength and support from the staff. They know he is doing the work right now but I know from experience that a resolution kind of finalizes it. What the Board decides to do in the future is certainly the position of the Board and the Board's responsibility. But until you either find an interim or you hire a new superintendent, I do believe that a resolution would at least solidify Mr. Benaquista's position as your acting superintendent until a replacement is found. Also listening to the conversations from the new Business Administrator and what it would cost, I'm not sure it wouldn't be beneficial to this school district, to your finances, etc. just to name Mr. Benaquista until you are ready to hire a new superintendent. Again that is not my position, I'm just suggesting what I think should happen but at least a resolution naming him as the acting superintendent will solidify his position with the entire staff which I assume is very supportive of Gerry anyway. Thank you very much.

Nellis Regis-Darby stated I'm very happy to hear that the students will participate in the PSAT; however, the message that went out in a robo call mentioned that the PSAT was not mandatory. I think as a district a message should be that we encourage all of our students to participate in such exposure to the PSAT because again it is about engagement and having our students engage in such a test like the PSAT. Also, F-13 on the agenda, do you know when the first budget meeting will be. I think Mrs. Koon will be able to answer that question. Mrs. Guilfoyle mentioned that data was collected to enhance the Title I program. Do we know what kind of data was collected and can that data be shared with the stakeholders? Also, someone mentioned that there was an increase in the Title I funding because we have more Title I students, is that accurate? Is there going to be more funding because we have an increase of Title I students? I believe Mr. Taylor mentioned a while back that the district had a policy stating that kids could take whatever class that they wanted. If that is the case, do we really need a rubric if kids can take whatever classes they need to take?

Ann Margaret Shannon stated President of the UTEA. First, I wanted to say I'm sorry Mr. Tatum and Mrs. Moses aren't in attendance because I would like to share from the UTEA a very special thank you, good bye and good luck to both of them. The UTEA appreciates how much time and effort they shared with many thousands of UTEA members during their tenure. The UTEA wishes them health and happiness and many blessings in their future.

I want to know what the plans are for the interim superintendent. I don't understand why we can't get some information about this. I want to know why it is so secretive and I also want to know why you haven't appointed Gerry Benaquista as the interim superintendent starting January 1st because he has been doing the job for months and he is a big asset to the district. Many members see what a benefit it would be to have someone who has been here about 20 years and who knows the district, knows the employees, knows the parents, knows the curriculum – it just baffles me that we haven't already appointed him to the position. I'm begging you to make that decision, please, thank you.

Mr. Benaquista stated any of the questions that were asked tonight, I will try to have them answered for next week's meeting. I will try to get every answer that I can and bring it to the next meeting. Any questions next week, we will bring to the worksession in January.

Are you o.k. with Mrs. Koon answering the budget question? I'll do the rest for next week and we will keep that practice going so the public knows that they will get an answer at the next meeting.

Susan Lipstein stated how much are we saving on our regular transportation because we haven't had busing since last March. Can somebody come up with a figure because I think that should be extra money that we have that can be used for some of these positions and what we are talking about? Nobody has mentioned that the savings on that and there has to be other savings with the schools going remote. It seems transportation is the most obvious. I would like to get a figure on the cost savings we have had in nine months without busing the students. I was also concerned about the science supervisors – splitting it up. I'm not sure why that had to be done now. We have money for a science supervisor. Mr. Harrell had that position. I can't imagine why we would want to split it up amongst three people. Mr. Yeager was science supervisor and we really progressed and Maureen Guilfoyle knows, she was an excellent science supervisor and the district moved like gang busters because we had someone who was knowledgeable about this subject and experienced in science and Mr. Harrell also and he was a loss for the district. I think splitting it up the way it is split up and these people are not science experts and it is going to be truncated and bifurcated – whatever the term is for all carved up, I can't see that as a good idea. I have some concerns that I will bring up next month. I would like to know what the cost savings is because I think we must have a huge savings on transportation. Thank you.

Jeff Monge stated thanks for the overview on the healthcare expenses going up. Mr. Benaquista I just want to be very clear that as far as sponsorship of that very bill, correct me if I'm wrong, it was sponsored by State Senator Joe Cryan and it was heavily supported, I can be corrected if I'm wrong, by the UTEA and if the result of that is something that is effecting our school district, especially the budget, it is something that we can hopefully rectify in some way. Mrs. Koon, welcome to the district. One of the things that I employ you to look at is over the last three years, professional services has gone up tremendously – specifically legal costs. In fact we went outside legal because we used to have internal legal person because we were trying to save money. At that we were a little over \$200,000. We got the cost down to \$200,000 for two consecutive years and I think we are approaching close to \$2 million. A great cost savings right away is to look at bringing in in-house counsel again to save a ton a money like we had before. Transportation is obviously something to look at and as it pertains to Mr. Benaquista, Mr.

Benaquista I respect you greatly, I think it is totally inappropriate and a conflict of interest for the UTEA President and even employees to advocate for someone. I think it is absolutely appropriate to question the process, the timing, updates and all that – I totally get that but I think it is totally inappropriate to try to advocate to hire your own boss. It is a conflict of interest and whether you love him or not, I love Mr. Benaquista, I just think it is not appropriate.

Richard D'Avanzo stated UTEA vice president. First I would like to bring up a conversation that happened during personnel. I was always under the assumption, Mr. Taylor you can correct me if I'm wrong, there was a discussion vocally about personnel that was taking place kudos to whatever it is. I was always under the assumption and Mr. Taylor you usually shut it down awfully quick and Mrs. Cappiello does a fine job but I think that was really inappropriate at that time. If it was something else, or something negative, it would have been shut down. I just want to make a point to that.

Going back to Mrs. Guilfoyle talking about standardized testing – NJSLA – yes currently it is looking to the spring but for any parents that are concerned, especially staff members, as we are teaching virtually and no test last year and with a new election of a president and a true secretary of education, the odds are pretty great to say that test won't be happening in the spring. Even Betsy DeVoise turned back her recent comments stressing about it to trying to save face to try to show that she was all of sudden not force states for whatever little dollars they get for federal standardized testing.

Third, totally agreeing with Dr. Jakubowski said is someone in the position, about interim and familiarity especially during these times should really be considered especially with financing costs.

Lastly, I want to address the continued shots as we sit here virtually from the gentleman that just spoke ahead of me, taking shots at the UTEA being divisive as usual; maybe Mr. Monge you need to do some of your homework first before you decide that the UTEA. Mr. Taylor stated address your comments to the Board. Mr. D'Avanzo stated regarding healthcare benefits, as taxpayers, it is going to save money per taxpayer going down the road, that is the whole purpose of it, as well as any educational staff member paying more and more money each year, taking home less money, it is called net negative so a lot of people should do their homework before you decide to make those accusations and it goes across the board.

Natercia Lopes stated I followed the meeting somewhat today because I also had a PTA meeting so I was divided between the two. As I'm listening, my daughter graduated Union High School in 2012. At the time, Mr. Benaquista was one of the principals, one of the people in charge there. I went to a breakfast meeting with my daughter and I was aware that one of the teachers was ready to retire and he wasn't doing a very good job. I asked at the time what was being done because the kids were not leaving the high school prepared for that specific one. He told me that we know but he is retiring. My question to him or whoever is going to take his place because my sons are both in Burnet Middle now; what do you plan to do when the teacher doesn't really care because he is about to retire? The kids just don't get the education they are supposed to get because the teacher is about to retire so he doesn't care about the job he is doing. I'm just throwing that out there. I don't know if Mr. Benaquista is going to say or somebody

else is going to come in but it is just something that needs to be addressed because all the kids need a good education and it is not the kids fault that the teachers are tired and old and about to retire. Have a good night and stay safe and healthy.

Mrs. DiGirolamo stated I am outraged by what I just heard the last few minutes. First of all I want to clarify, I was there at the last Board of Ed meeting. I heard clearly the letter that the UTEA President read. It was clear to me it was not that they were asking to rehire their own boss, they were asking to not rehire a person who was forced to resign and that was Dr. Martin. It was clear to everyone; it is not the UTEA is asking to hire their own boss. Let me clarify that. If you have ears you can hear what was said about the horrendous things, the experience the teachers had with Dr. Martin cannot be gone unheard. Please do not try to twist things around. First of all, you UTEA is right. It is appropriate to say that they don't want you to rehire. It is not appropriate to rehire Dr. Martin. It is appropriate to say anything they want to say about Dr. Martin. The parents of Union Township are allowed to say whatever they want to say. Please be careful about what you are saying and your opinion. We all can hear clearly. Dr. Martin is not the right person to rehire and UTEA did not say they want to hire their own boss. Thank you.

Elsie Mackey stated it is no secret clearly we have a community once again divided on another issue which is now the superintendent or interim superintendent – whatever direction the Board is deciding to go. It speaks to the ineffectiveness; once again here we are December 8th, with January 1st coming. Two pivotal members of the team leaving and we the community are still in the dark as to who is coming or who is not coming. Once again battle lines are drawn. Those four secrets being leaked out – the whole nine yards. Hopefully by next week you guys will get it together and we will have something in place at least on an interim level that kinds of speaks to the community. Effectiveness is more like being better prepared. Why do we have to go through this every time something comes; it can never be a smooth transition with this Board. It is ridiculous but it is what it is at this point. Hopefully you guys will come together and meet in the middle somewhere.

I wanted to get some insight into the special education plans. I know that the district is held by whatever the leadership the State gives or the County and I think it is really important that we take some time to remember while we are talking about the PSATs and talking about Chromebooks and all this other stuff – really I don't hear a lot about the special education plan. I don't hear about the special education kids that are at home. I don't hear about the regression the children are dealing with. I don't hear about the staffing issues that are happening and managing. You don't hear about the plight of the kids with disabilities. While everyone is toggling over policies, about a superintendent who can come back or can't come back, who wants the job, who doesn't want the job – we have real issues that we are dealing with in the community and we don't have time for the nonsense that we have to listen to and be subjected to by elected officials tasked with taking care of our community.

What I'm asking is can we get some sort of feedback at least some messages or updates for the special education community and what the guidelines are from the State. Why can't the kids come back? We know a lot of the different things. Out of district schools have things in place. Why can't in-district schools have things in place for children with disabilities? They are regressing at a rapid rate while you all are fighting about nonsense, there are children that are

going back and forth and they are not getting quality education. Can you please come back to what we put you in these seats for – the greater good for our children? Can you please update the special education community and at least let us know what is going on? Talk to us. Tell us what is going on. Help us to understand. We don't hear anything from any of you. We hear about everything else but the thing that is really touching and heartbreaking is while you all squabble about nonsense and not putting an interim in or doing whatever, we have real issues out here that we need addressed.

Please can someone get in touch with the community and let us know what is going on; give us some feedback; some update. Help us instead of getting on here, acting up week after week for session after session. Next week, please give us some information; send a memo to us, a letter – you have the database with all the kids and families that are affected. Communicate with us, keep us in the loop. Let us know that you are there and you are advocating for us. Let us know something. It is cold turkey. You don't know who is going to be taken over. God help us if it is who I think you guys are thinking about but communicate to the community. Thank you.

Veronica Vervari stated I have to piggyback off of Ms. Macki here – I think what she was talking about is dead right. I'm emotional now to be honest with you. I was a television producer, a writer and a comedian before I lost my career in March. This idea of keeping the kids home and the fact that the Board won't work as hard as I think they can to get kids back in school is horrible to me. Nobody knows what parents are going through, the kids are going through. We are not really allowed to share with anybody on what is going on. I did and I got in a lot of trouble for it. My daughter is suffering. Every day I'm in the attic with her from 8:45 until 3 in the afternoon. She is on a computer all day. She is seven years old. She is constantly “when are we going back to school – I hate school”. I'm just trying to understand.

The other issue besides the kids – the kids are the most important issue – but I have been called a monster for suggesting that children go back to school. The numbers don't prove that children are super spreaders. The numbers prove that the children are not highly affected by COVID. There are a ton of school districts that are open right now in some capacity. I'm not asking to go rogue, no mask and to hell with everything – I'm saying follow CDC guidelines the best we can. I have friends that have kids in Kenilworth – their ventilation system, open the windows. Open the windows and have kids wear mask. From Mr. Tatum all we got was we need to do this and do this and I agree with Ms. Mackie, we are never informed ever. If you write a letter to the superintendent, you will never get a response unless it is something that there is going to be some trouble about. That is what I found with tons of parents – I wrote a letter but never heard back. That is not right. We are taxpayers. We are the people making sure everybody here is here. We nominate people and vote people in. I just want to keep in mind the parents who have to work. I need a job – do you understand. Unemployment is not cutting it. I can lose my house – dead serious – can lose my house if my daughter does not go back to school – do you understand. I don't think teachers are babysitters which is another thing people say to me. I think teachers are valuable. My daughter's education is valuable. My daughter's friendships are valuable – mask or no mask – she wants to be around other children. Even if it is six feet away – she needs to be with these other kids. Please work hard. Remember the decision to keep kids at home is one that in my opinion is elitist and privileged to have to say you can just

stay home with your kids, you don't need to go to work, we are going to make you stay home. I'm sorry to get so upset. I understand everything is complicated but it is December 8th. We were supposed to talk about October 15th what is going on and we still haven't gotten answers; then go through November; then go through December – how long is this going to happen. I wanted to put my two cents in. Thank you.

Mr. Benaquista stated before we go into executive session. I want to ask Mrs. Koon, was that an easy answer on the calendar? Mrs. Koon stated the preliminary calendar by the time we draft the budget, we will be meeting with the Finance Committee in February. Mr. Benaquista stated that is one of the attachments that is on tonight's agenda.

Mrs. Koon stated as far as the transportation issue – we can come back to that next week but keep in mind, we are still paying our drivers and our aides. Mr. Benaquista stated we will explain that in greater detail next week.

Madam President I would like to make one comment in reference to the comment Ms. Lopes said, I will definitely reach out to all the parents that spoke tonight I feel need a further explanation, like I did last month. As far as her comment, what she said is totally out of character of who I am and anyone that knows me as an administrator in this district for over 20 years. I would never talk about a teacher in public and I keep personal matters confidential as by law I have to. Thank you for allowing me to make that comment.

MOTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Moved by Mrs. Higgins, seconded by Mrs. Ruiz, that the Board go into Executive Session at 9:19 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: personnel, attorney-client anticipated/pending litigation – MC v UTBOE, UTEA grievance, Geller v UTBOE, UTBOE v Lowery.

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: Dr. Francis, Mrs. Higgins, Mr. McDowell, Mr. Nufrio,
Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Minneci

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

The Board returned to public session at 11:33 p.m.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Ruiz, seconded by Mrs. Richardson, that the meeting be adjourned at 11:34 p.m.

AYE: Dr. Francis, Mr. McDowell, Mrs. Richardson, Mrs. Ruiz, Mrs. Williams

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY**

