

**TOWNSHIP OF UNION BOARD OF EDUCATION
PLANNING SESSION MINUTES
FEBRUARY 18, 2021**

NOTICE OF MEETING:

TO ALL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS:

The planning meeting of the Board of Education of the Township of Union was held on Thursday, February 18, 2021 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.

Mr. McDowell called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and stated we are here for our annual planning meeting.

PRESENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Yocasta Brens-Watson, Dr. Guy Francis, Mr. Ronnie McDowell, Mrs. Nancy Minneci, Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Mrs. Nellis Regis-Darby, Mrs. Kim Ruiz, Mrs. Mary Lynn Williams

ABSENT AT ROLL CALL:

Mr. John O'Shea

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Mr. Lester Taylor, Esq.

Dr. Francis led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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.

Dr. Francis read the District's mission statement.

Mr. McDowell stated this is our planning session and there are several items on the agenda; it is a lengthy agenda and we will try to get through as much of this as we can and hopefully make some progress.

Discussion Items:

- UHS academic ranking
- Curriculum update - overall strengthening
- District reorganization
- Student concerns/issues brought via Student Liaisons (SEL)
- Budget update

- Special Education
- Dual language pilot program
- Board of Education goals
- Superintendent goals

First item is UHS Academic Ranking and I ask Mrs. Ruiz to start the discussion on that and Mr. Benaquista has some numbers as far as where we stand in State ranking and how to improve that in the coming years.

Mrs. Ruiz stated we were concerned with the ranking of the high school for 2020 and where UHS fell – it was shocking. There are 450 high schools in the State and UHS came in at 252 which is low. When you dig deeper you see that the proficiency levels were low. We have a math proficiency of 25% and a reading proficiency of 44%; overall 57.43% out of 100 which is not acceptable.

When I looked at the 18 numbers, it said 17% of our students take at least one AP exam which to me is way too low and only 11% pass an AP exam. That data is very disconcerting. The college readiness index was only 12.4 out of 100. Those numbers are very concerning and I would like to see them improve.

My goal for this meeting is what is the plan to improve these numbers. Taxpayers want good school districts and when we see this data it is not a good reflection of our schools. We have to figure out what is happening and when I say we I don't mean the Board, I mean our administrators. What's happening? Why are these numbers so low? And what is in place to improve these numbers? When you tell taxpayers that your college readiness for your high school is 12.4 and their taxes are \$10,000 a year, that is not going to go over too well. More importantly, we expect more for our students. That is the goal to get the best for all of our students. I would like to know what is the plan to improve the high school's performance.

Mr. Benaquista stated with any of these rankings, usually the data is from about three years ago. The US News was from three years ago – 17-18 school year. We have to be realistic of what we are doing today, we won't know this until three years from now.

There are a couple of indicators that US News does get their ranking on and two of the areas is tied to AP courses – they call it college readiness. They look at participation rate and the number of students that passed the courses and these are 12th graders. That is 30% of the indicator is dealing with participation rate and the number of students that passed. We will automatically jump in participation rate because now our district is paying for it.

The research we have done more recently is that parents were choosing their child to take one AP course because they are expensive and to have a child take 3-4 AP courses, it is a lot of money. If the child is nervous, maybe they are choosing not to take it financially or some other reasons as well. But if we are paying for the course through our title funds, we hope to have a higher percent of participation which will impact the US News ranking.

The next is to get the students to pass. It is not about having the kids take the AP courses, to get them to pass you also have to provide support and we talked about that along the way and creating programs to support the children involved in the AP/honors courses to make them successful. Our goal is not to just have them participate but also to get those passing scores that will get them college credits.

There is a new program coming our way and we were one of the districts chosen by Kean that our current 9th graders coming in, if they get accepted to the program, will be able to graduate with 60 college credits. One of the most important things is getting the students prepared for college and finding them grants or funding there is a better chance that our students can afford college.

The second part is college curriculum and that is also tied to AP courses and it is not just taking the AP course but taking them in multiple areas and at least four content areas. When the student is taking multiple AP courses, they are weighing that for you as well. For us opening up our AP/honors program, we are going to have students taking multiple courses which will help with the rankings.

We won't see this next year. The data that we saw was from 17-18. Most administrators in that high school aren't even around anymore.

Proficiency, that is an area on a regular basis we need to hone in on. We talk about as a district standardized tests – many people have spoken out that the students should take the standardized test for years now. If we don't have kids taking the standardized tests, the chance that we are going to score and get those points is less. We need to score proficiency on the standardized test and that is what they are looking at – if we are not taking the test it is harder to gain that 20%. Where you saw that data of the kids that did take it, we absolutely need to come up with support programs and figure out why they are scoring low when it comes to math and reading. Anxiety is a huge factor and it doesn't necessarily correlate to the type of student that they are in many facets and you see that with the SAT as well. There are a lot of variables that go into that. You can always try to do better in proficiency. We have to look at what we are doing within our district. I think we need a districtwide reading program at the younger levels. You need a foundation first. It impacts so many different areas. Our special ed referrals, our RTI – all that would be lessened if you had kids on reading level. There is a disconnect right now as far as performance reading wise as the kids are getting older and I think our district could use a very solid reading program but we have to do our research and choose which one is the best investment financially and also reading specialists to support our teachers to make sure it is getting done.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I hear what you are saying. Let's look at the 2018-2019 State report card for the high school – it was the last normal school year because 2019-2020 school year was interrupted by the pandemic. Let's go by the 2018-2019 data and that shows us below State levels for proficiency in both ELA and math. Mr. Benaquista stated I'm not disagreeing with that but on the agenda is the ranking and I thought you were talking about the rankings in these magazines and what is coming out and it does help improve those rankings. I agree with you on

our State report card. I didn't look into the factors but specifically going back to 2018-19 – I was speaking to our rankings in these outside sources.

Mrs. Ruiz stated I understand but you are saying those rankings are from 2017-2018 so let's look at a more recent year and the math proficiency and it is a little better; it is 25% in 2017-2018 and 29.5% in 2018-19. Mr. McDowell stated you are both saying the same thing.

Mrs. Ruiz asked what is our plan? Mr. McDowell stated we know that the AP/honors program has been revamped and that will have some impact on next coming school year and Mr. Benaquista and I talked about the reading levels in the schools. I know one of the administrators told me at a PTA meeting that the reading levels of the children that come into their school fifty percent are below grade in reading. There has to be something that we can do and Mr. Benaquista talked about a reading program that he was looking into and that would certainly help and that would be in the lower grades. I know that has an impact all the way through school. If students hate to read or are uncomfortable reading, then they won't do that and it will have an impact on them from elementary through high school so it needs to be looked at in the lower grades – the reading and math. Is there anything we can do soon that will have an impact as soon as possible.

Mr. Benaquista stated with the reading we have to attack it two ways. One of the goals is doing research on a reading program that will work in our district. Once we choose that investment, then there are trainings that go into it. Over a course of a year you have to get your employees trained in it. A lot of times those trainings are in the summer. The really good programs are very expensive. We can use reading specialists in every elementary school where they are making sure the kids are getting those and reading is not just comprehension. There are a lot of things that go into it. We have to make sure we are hitting all facets of it. It will impact math as well because math is a lot of reading. Why are the kids not doing well because they probably don't understand the math because they can't understand the problem.

Me sitting here today and being in this district for 20 years, I feel like we need to as a district research and bring on a high level reading program for all of our students but that is one thing over time you will see correct itself if you are doing it and sticking with it.

We also have a group of kids that are a grade level behind so now we need immediate intervention of how are we going to get these students caught up. It is not fair to let them keep going. We need to come up with strategies and our supervisors and principals need to identify where the kids are at and we need a good program that can really tell us where the kids are at and that provide the support not just during school but after school programs to get these students caught up. It will get harder for them as they get older when the curriculum becomes more challenging.

I want our rankings to improve but I want to work on the foundation stuff and you are getting everything at a level that is a high intense level, that the rankings will fall into place as we go. When we are talking about the whole child, we need to hit on all the needs and one of the main needs is reading. I would like to see us administratively and in our school district is to get

a committee together and really start looking at a reading program to invest in. We will also need Mrs. Koon to be a partner and reprioritize funds to support that program.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated thank you for sharing that information but during this planning meeting I don't want to leave this planning meeting without specific goals of what is it that we are supposed to be doing if we are going to improve our ranking at the high school. I heard you mention so many things but I'm still not sure specifically in terms of creating smart goals for our district to show improvement, what specifically are we going to do? How are you going to measure it? How are you going to achieve it? How is it realistic? How is it timely? If we cannot answer those questions then we are just going to keep going around and around on improving the high school ranking but we are not. I think the purpose of this is to create those goals so we know exactly know what the district is doing to improve the high school ranking. Everyone is saying a lot of things Mr. Benaquista but I have yet to hear what is it that we are going to do to make sure our ranking improves; especially when you are going to do something like this you have to create smart goals. We have been here for 30 minutes and I have not heard one smart goal as of yet.

Dr. Morgan stated I know the conversation started with the high school ranking because it is low and the high school is the flagship school of any district so we should always have a high achieving high school. However, we must look at what is coming to our high school. If we are not doing what we need to do at the lower levels, we are going to continue getting these results. I'm hearing our kids are reading below grade level; do we have data to show that? What are they deficient on? Why are they reading below grade level? Are the students that have been in Union since kindergarten? That would indicate to me that there is something wrong with our teaching staff. You can bring in any program you want to bring in; programs don't teach children, teachers do. I would like to look at what are we doing with our core. What are our reading strategies? How are teachers getting professional development to ensure that each child leaves reading by third grade? If you are not reading by third grade (inaudible) based on our data. You have to be mindful of that.

I pulled the report, I look at this data all the time and I was particularly interested in Union because I live here so when you look at not only the high school ranking but each individual school has its own report. According to what the State put out in 2018-2019, only Connecticut Farms is above average so that means we have a problem in most of our schools. Connecticut Farms was averaged at 70% and it is from 1 to 100 and that is where we are. I ask the community to please look at your school report. It is public information on the NJDOE website. In addition, we have a policy on our school board that states that the superintendent should give a data report annually. I have not seen that since I have been on this Board and I have not seen this since I have lived in this Town and I'm not blaming Mr. Benaquista for that but that is something the community needs to see so that we can be sure our schools are progressing. I agree with Mrs. Darby about the smart goals. What are our goals? What are we doing? How are they measured?

Mr. Benaquista stated if you wanted smart goals tonight, I wish I would have known that. I would have gotten together with our administrators and supervisors. I don't feel like I should sit here and create a smart goal without the leadership of the administrators of this district who

have their pulse on the curriculum on their students. We can easily create smart goals at each level – elementary, middle and high school. We can talk about what percentage of a class we want enrolled in AP courses. We can talk about what percentage of students we don't want to see failing classes – so less than 10% of our middle school students will fail a math class.

As to rankings, if you make sure everything else is working efficiently and you are getting data that kids are growing, the rankings will follow. Right now we have to look at our curriculum. Data is only as good as the data you are getting. If it is not clean data, where it can't be manipulated, that is one thing. If you are looking at data that is not accurately representing where that child is at, then that data is no good for you. You need data that is going to show you where the child is at.

I'm baffled too – I'm getting a group together of people I think are directly responsible to impact our reading in our district to say – we need to hash out where the truth lies on where the students reading levels are.

Mr. McDowell stated smart goals is what we need to do, look at the current data on where are kids stand now and if it is below level, between you and your staff and administrators come up with a plan to get it higher. Even if it is only a 10% increase. I think we would like to see a plan to see a measurable increase in a year or whatever.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated we are in the third marking period and if at this time we still don't have in-house data as to how many kids are reading at or above grade level, then something is wrong. We have to take a deep dive to really understand what is going on in our district.

Mr. Benaquista stated it is not about not having in-house data; when this agenda was created I thought we were talking about rankings. I can get the data. It is not fair – the smart goals should have been created before the school year started and I wasn't sitting in the chair of the superintendent and I'm presenting to the Board the smart goals. We are in the middle of the third marking period, in my mind smart goals should have been created at the end of last year so over the summer if you need PD or meetings, you can do that before the year starts. Then you should be reflecting and analyzing and are you getting close to obtaining where you set your goals. Where are you at along the year and analyzing it and asking did you meet your goal? There is a process involved.

Mr. McDowell stated I don't know how much can get done this year; the last year has been a twilight zone and it is no one's fault. We don't know how the school year is going to be in a couple of weeks. I think it would be reasonable to begin planning for some goals for this coming September. What are we going to be doing in September differently then what we have been doing in the past? Or what is Connecticut Farms doing that other schools are not doing?

Mrs. Minneci stated a good start is to form a committee or several committees – one for elementary, middle and high school to set the goals.

Dr. Morgan stated our job as a Board is to set Board goals. We can have the superintendent goals. They are totally separate from Board goals. What are our Board goals?

I'm just giving you an example: the Board president sits with and the superintendent develops Board goals. If our Board goal is to provide laptops to every kid, that is a Board goal. If you are talking about the day-to-day teaching and learning, that is a superintendent goal. My question has been and always will be what are our Board goals?

Mr. Taylor stated Board members, the Board goals are set by the Board, not the superintendent. The superintendent may be consulted or be engaged as part of that session but the Board goals are your goals – the nine elected Board members. Irrespective of who the superintendent is – it is the Board's responsibility. It is not a statutory requirement but it is best practice. The Board goals for the 20-21 school year – just say there were none created or you are operating off of old goals, there is nothing wrong with that. They don't have to be updated every year because in some instances goals are long term accomplishments or objectives. If you want to focus on developing Board goals, you can do that for the 21-22 school year. Keep in mind that the Board of Education, most of your business functions, academic functions, etc. operate on a fiscal year – July 1-June 30th. School is September through June. Even though the elections have changed to a November election and Board members being sworn in January, one would think you are on a calendar year basis so it would be early but you can do it for the next school year. If the data is from three years ago or what it is today, if you want to establish a goal for a laptop that is a phenomenal district goal. The superintendent would have to figure out how to implement that would be a request to the budget to pay for it.

The Board goals can also be tied into your superintendent goals which should be established on an annual basis as well and used in conjunction with your evaluation of the superintendent. I will note that in this instance your former superintendent retired January 1st, your current superintendent is an interim superintendent, so it is impossible to evaluate your superintendent for the 20-21 school year because you don't have a full-time superintendent. I don't know if the evaluation was done last year and I don't want to talk about it because it is a personnel matter but I would venture to say a lot of school districts did not evaluate their superintendent last year because COVID hit around March and schools were closed down and were side tracked on COVID.

Mr. McDowell, if you want to set goals or talk about goals, you might want to think more prospectively versus right now. Mr. McDowell stated thank you I do appreciate that. I do agree with Dr. Morgan that we need to set some goals for our Board. I think they would be straight forward. They will have an impact on the goals that we set for our superintendent in conjunction with him.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I feel like we went from ranking, and what we can possibly do, to now talking about the Board goals and I think we should have some resolution as to what we were thinking about before and I was trying to understand where we were leaving this based on Mrs. Regis-Darby's comments of wanting to see smart goals. Is our goal today to make a goal that the superintendent is establishing smart goals or are we creating those today. I'm not understanding what the request is.

Mr. McDowell stated we started with ranking and we need to conclude that and decide what we are looking to have our superintendent do about that. I think one of the things Mr.

Benaquista suggested was to get the staff together but we need to come up with a plan, or an idea or a statement on how we will address our academic ranking. Even that would be hard to address without setting goals. I think all those things overlap.

The high school academic ranking we need to do something towards improving that and that will be a long-term project. What is it that we can do now to address our low academic ranking?

Mr. Benaquista stated I think setting the goals, even though I think goals should have been set before the school year started, I do think that there should be goals set for the last six months of school. When you are setting goals and accomplishing your goals, and you set goals that challenge and increase the academics of students, then the rest will fall in place at least to some degree where it will impact our ranking at some point because you are constantly having growth within the children. We have to keep challenging ourselves and setting goals that are pushing our children forward. You have to analyze the data, see where you are lacking and what areas do you want to focus on to improve. Whether focusing on less students failing in middle school and look at the data of how many kids are failing classes and say we want 30% less kids to fail classes. Mr. McDowell asked is that data available? Mr. Benaquista stated yes, I can run any data. I just need to know exactly what you are asking. I can get administrators together and present to the Board some goals for the back half of the year and we would be using the data we have and making sure we are obtaining those goals by June 30th.

No matter what you should set goals, reflect on it and see where you are at. When you are not meeting it, you need to come up with a game plan of what went on and where you are going to change. If you don't reflect you will never know if you are moving towards obtaining your goal. Only being here a month in this position, there is a lot of things you can reflect on that maybe should have been different but there have been a lot of Board members that have been here too and this is the first time we are talking about it. Thank you for bringing it up. If we come and talk about things that we want to see happen, then we have to hold ourselves to it. Even in the short term we should be talking about next year and at the same time why not set up short-term goals for the next six months to see if we can obtain. Next year I would like to see the difference in AP courses compared to this year. We can definitely get together and set goals and look at data on where students are struggling and set up things to improve over the next few months.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated moving forward if the district is going to create these goals or if they become superintendent goals, these goals should be measurable. For an example, in 2021-2022 school year – 15% of our high school ranking will go up 15% based on blah, blah, blah and give me whatever we are going to do. This can become superintendent goals or whatever but we need to do something like that.

Dr. Morgan stated we have four months of school left – this conversation should begin now and I have been asking for goals. I have never seen any and I have been asking the questions but unfortunately we are having this conversation public but this is the only job of the Board is to hire the superintendent and to set goals and make sure the goals are followed through by the superintendent. We don't get into the day-to-day but we must have something that we can

refer to the superintendent and ask the question – where are we with this? How are we doing? How can we improve? And that is not done. As a parent in this district, I don't know what the goals are. I want to address Mrs. Brens-Watson, when you talk about ranking all of this stuff comes together because we can make a goal to say our ranking should be improved and we are going to do x, y, z. Increasing the AP enrollment – that is easy. Increasing the number of students taking Algebra I while they are in 8th grade, that is easy and that impacts our rating. When you got rid of the 6th grade accelerated math course, that cause concern because we have 138 8th graders in this district taking Algebra I; in my district it is Algebra for all 8th grade. Why are we not pushing that here? Our students can do it but we must give them the opportunity to do it.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I agree with you. I'm hearing we need goals – establish the goals, smart goals – are we asking Mr. Benaquista to do that right now or are we asking of ourselves to do that right now. Stop talking in circles because we are starting to talk in circles at this point and say let's establish the goals – goals are needed. I want to hear a goal. Can somebody give me one and it doesn't have to be Mr. Benaquista because he is not going to set the Board goals – it is us the members. I want us to start saying what it is we want established as a goal.

Dr. Morgan stated I'm not sure that is done now. Mrs. Brens-Watson stated that is exactly my question. One of the first statements was we cannot leave today until we have smart goals. I'm a little bit confused – do we do that now? Later? When do we do that? Or are we here today to just to say we need to establish goals? Which one is it? Dr. Morgan stated I don't know either.

Mr. McDowell stated one of the things is simply to get the data that is there. Let's ask Mr. Benaquista to gather that data; that is one assignment we would like him to follow through on after tonight. Come back to us with the data and what does it says? Are 60% of the students in the 6th grade below reading grade? And the numbers for the math too. That is one thing I would like to see; to know where we stand and not just have data that is not accurate. If Mr. Benaquista can gather the data on where our students stand – elementary, middle school; what the reading levels and math levels are and maybe move forward from there. Mr. Benaquista stated absolutely.

Mr. McDowell stated the Board goals are what we are looking for – our goals will all impact the UHS academic ranking; those are all tied together. Mr. Benaquista stated in time – as you are improving across the entire district you will see that impact on the high school. Sustain change takes time. You have to put the investment in and stay with it.

Mr. McDowell stated next is Curriculum Update – Overall Strengthening: Are you ready to talk about that. The AP/honors is part of strengthening our academic programs but is there anything else. Mr. Benaquista talked earlier about working with Kean.

Mr. Benaquista stated I will let Mrs. Guilfoyle speak on the curriculum side. We talk about our curriculum writing and one of the things I would like to see is a unified formal curriculum – so they all look the same; that is one thing that is not the case right now. You have

to have everyone doing it the same way and in the same format. I would annually our students and parents to have an opportunity to come and critique and audit our curriculum to see about the equity and how they feel about that. The Board should annually have our supervisors present to them on different curriculum. I think that will give a lot of insight to the Board members of some of the new things going on and that we have to embed into our curriculum or across the curriculum. Overall strengthening is general. Mrs. Guilfoyle please share what is going on.

Mrs. Ruiz left the meeting at 8 p.m.

Mrs. Guilfoyle presented and a summary is below:

New Jersey State Board of Education adopted on June 3, 2020 the Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) in the following content areas:

- Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills;
- Comprehensive Health and Physical Education;
- Computer Science & Design Thinking;
- Science;
- Social Studies;
- Visual and Performing Arts;
- and World Languages.

They will put New Jersey again at the forefront of national education by including the following:

- Climate Change across all content areas, leveraging the passion students have shown for this critical issue and providing them opportunities to develop a deep understanding of the science behind the changes and to explore the solutions our world desperately needs;
- Computer programming in all grade bands K-12, ensuring all students receive a 22nd century education in the critical computational thinking skills that are the underpinning of so much of our work and so many of our transactions; and
- National standards for science and visual and performing arts, ensuring access to, and opportunity in, science and the arts, for every New Jersey public student.

English Language Arts Instructional Units and Mathematics Instructional Units were created in collaboration with educator teams to assist districts in creating standards-based curriculum and assessment.

Districts will be required to adopt curricula based on the 2020 NJSLS according to the following implementation schedule:

September 2021	September 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 1: <u>Visual and Performing Arts</u> • Standard 5: <u>Science</u> • Standard 7: <u>World Languages</u> • Standard 9: <u>Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 2: <u>Comprehensive Health and Physical Education</u> • Standard 6: <u>Social Studies</u> • Standard 8: <u>Computer Science and Design Thinking</u>

Smart goals – our three schools that are Title I schoolwide – since we turned schoolwide we go through the annual school plan and process where we work as a team. Each school has a team and we meet four times a year where we analyze. First we came up with comprehensive needs assessment, then we develop smart goals for each of those schools and now we have certain interim times we look at where we are with getting to those goals and reaching those goals. We have meetings and report the cycle data at three cycles. We are in cycle two and that is all going into NJ Homeroom. We have three smart goals at Franklin – the first two address math and language arts and the third one speaks to school environment and climate. The same is true at Burnet and at the high school. When we first did our analysis for the school report card for 17-18 one of the things that we did implement was the lab courses for the math and language arts to improve the scores there. We did see some improvement after instituting that and all the supports that we have been putting in the summer programs. We are working with smart goals in our Title I schools.

Mr. McDowell asked overall are we strengthening our curriculum? Mrs. Guilfoyle stated yes. Last month we came out with the Amistad Curriculum Resource Guide. We also have social justice resources that are embedded into that resource guide. Amistad Curriculum resource guide board approved in January also included social justice resources embedded as well.

LGBTQ resources for social studies curriculum were adopted last July for grades 5-12; LGBTQ resources will be embedded in ELA in grades 6-12 in September. Supervisors and teachers are working together to update curriculum.

Randi Moan is working with the ELA teachers and they are working on resources that will be embedded into the ELA curriculum in September.

Mr. McDowell stated the data you were talking about before was that the star strong data. Mrs. Guilfoyle stated we are starting to look into that now. We do have meetings about the iReady data and now we are working with iReady and they are making appointments with the principals and supervisors in the elementary to go over that data and see what strategies to

address for learning loss. The iReady data gives us student growth; all of those reports. Mr. McDowell stated it would be nice to hear about that after you and your staff have your review.

Mrs. Regis-Darby asked is there any plan in terms of curriculum update to purchase literature text that support our 70% of our students within our district which are our black and brown students? They can see themselves in reflections in the text that they are reading in their classrooms. Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Paul do you want to speak to that because we started that two years ago. Mrs. Guilfoyle stated Randi Moran did speak to the education committee a few months back in the fall and discussed all of the new books.

Mrs. Paul stated if you go on the district website you will see the Department goals. I have been working with the librarians for the past two years and one of the goals that we came up was about how to deal with equity, diversity and inclusivity and which included all the aspects of the community; making sure that the books that are in the library and all the resources we have do reflect our students. We started with the purchasing of the books; this was before COVID. Since COVID we started moving everything that we had the ability with e-books so we started to do our collection and it required us to look at those collections and make sure those were definitely covered – LGBTQ – the curriculum is coming and we are going to have to change our curriculum to reflect that. The main thing was making sure culturally responsive, social justice, making sure we had diversity, inclusivity, culturally relevant. One of the things that we did as a library department was to ensure that whatever collection, books we were recommending to the students, teachers and making sure all those aspects are included in the instructional process that way kids can see themselves. We have been working on it and we are getting there. The other part is finding the resources – what books are available and what we can do. Once we find them, I know the librarians have been recommending it too the teachers.

Mr. Benaquista stated do you want to mention the transition with Ms. Moran and the resources. Mrs. Guilfoyle stated she did do a presentation to the education committee in the fall and then it was reported out to the Board the resources that she was putting in for her literacy program.

Mr. McDowell stated Mrs. Regis-Darby was not on the Board at that time but she did have a list of additional books that were being added for the purpose of inclusiveness.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated thank you Mrs. Paul but to Mrs. Regis-Darby's point, you are making the recommendations – do we follow up with the teachers to see who is using those resources, to what extent they are using it and integrating them into their classrooms because that is what is important here. You can buy them and have them but who is making use of those books.

Mrs. Paul stated when the curriculum reflects it, then is when the teachers will be using it. The librarians are not the language arts teacher or the social studies teacher, they provide the resources to help the teachers teach the topic and they also introduce it. Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I'm not implying that you should be the gatekeeper. Mrs. Paul stated we are investing in these resources and I made it a goal that they follow through.

Dr. Francis stated I know with the loss of the science supervisor and the building principal at the high school, they took additional responsibilities but I want to make sure that the science standards for the State are being met given the fact that they are overseeing it right now and we don't have a supervisor in place. Mr. McDowell stated that sounds like a goal for our superintendent to fill that spot because we do need a science supervisor. Dr. Francis stated it is a statement to make sure that those standards are being met because I'm assuming certain things need to be done. Mr. Benaquista stated Mrs. Guilfoyle and myself will get that information back to the Board.

Mrs. Guilfoyle stated I was the science supervisor for many years and it is still my passion and I still watch to make sure. Whenever I find PD for them, I'm still in contact with the teachers and send out notices to them all the time to keep them apprised. I got a program for them and they had PD on it yesterday and they will be using it in the middle schools as an additional resource for the remote and hybrid learning. At the high school I also purchased the gizmos that helps with interactive labs that are online. I made sure that was implemented and they had PD on that last week.

Mr. Benaquista stated it is something that we should also talk in personnel about.

District Reorganization:

Mr. McDowell stated district reorganization - I would ask Mr. Benaquista to give it some thought and find out if this is still feasible and how we can do it. I think it is one of the things we would like to get feedback on to find out if that idea from Mr. Tatum is still something we would like to do.

Mr. Benaquista stated I can speak a little tonight and set up a presentation. I reached out to the committee that Mr. Tatum put together; I think it is something that we need to continue to look at – what the research shows about the longer grade spans for the children but also district transportation and the cost of that. We have been talking to Mrs. Koon about; by making community schools what will it bring back in annual revenue to our district. It is a considerable positive impact on us fiscally. The most important thing is the research showing that the longer grade spans do help the children. It would be less transition for the students. They would all go to a central middle school for two grades and then high school. Mr. Tatum also talked about the pre-k to 6th, 7-8, 9-12 but he also was looking at pre-k-8 and then 9-12. I will get back with the committee and we will put together a short presentation for the Board to hear. We need to continue to move forward with looking at our reconfiguration. As far as the 21-22 school, I think you need a full year to get it out to the community to share data and research and sit down with people that it will impact. Mrs. Calderone did spend a lot of time redistricting the lines for transportation purposes and then that would free up a lot of transportation for us to own our own routes. We talk about out-of-district transportation, over time we would change our fleet to smaller buses and owning a lot of the routes that we subcontract out. As the acting superintendent, we do need to continue to look at this. I recently heard parents speaking that they would like us to continue to look at it.

There is a lot of research with that middle school child and I think it would be better to have a central middle school. We will get back with a presentation for the Board.

Student Concerns/Issues Brought Via Student Liaisons (SEL):

Mr. McDowell stated with what is going on in our school district now; that is an issue that we need to be on top of if and when we get back to school. If we don't get back to school, it is something that we still need to be aware of the social part and emotional part that the students are missing out on. It was Faith the 12th grader who spoke about some the feedback she got from some of the students. They missed school and their friends – what can we do about that? Not sure there is much we can do about that right now.

Mr. Benaquista stated after Faith spoke, we did meet with a group of students, Ms. Hall and they did speak at a faculty meeting. Ms. Hall do you want to share what took place?

Ms. Hall stated it started before Faith came forward. We had been having some conversations. I have a focus group of students from grades 9-12 and we talk about issues surrounding everything from school safety to social justice, mental health, wellness and so forth and the students expressed concern for the teachers and that is how this whole conversation evolved. What they were looking for was a way for teachers and students to connect about things other than the academics; to really talk about things are not really o.k. and that everybody is struggling and to try to connect – a way of checking in.

With the students' help, we created a presentation that we started to do at a faculty meeting and the fire alarms went off and we got interrupted but the crux of it was that they were missing that connection and they wanted their teachers to know that they were worried about them a little bit and that they felt we would all get through it together if we continued to be open and authentic and genuine and really reach out and support one another.

The morning check in and reaching out became something of a mantra and we hope that when we get back to school in person that we will be creating more of those connections for the benefit of everyone's mental health – the students as well as the faculty.

Mr. Benaquista stated I had a conversation with Mrs. Ahern and getting back into school and part of it was SEL and having her guidance counselors do professional development with the teachers on what to expect. Students are going to come back with anxiety, with many different issues. They have been home now for almost a year. We need to be ready to have conversations with the students and recognizing when they may need additional support, providing the support they need to be successful and adjust back to school. We will have training when the teachers go back from counseling side of it. The teachers need to open up and have conversations with the students prior to diving into the lesson. You really want to get to know your kids. You can't throw the curriculum at them, you have to make them feel comfortable in your class. You have to get to know them and build that trust and have them come back and be successful. There will be an adjustment no matter what – students and faculty. We will go back two weeks before to provide the training and PD for the teachers and it will be an adjustment back before the kids get back. Mrs. Hall stated next Tuesday night, Hi Focus is sending their clinician to discuss student mental health in the time of COVID and to give some parents tips on how to recognize what might be considered normal versus what may require a little more attention and how to have those difficult conversations. It will be Zoom. A flyer went out with the link on it.

Mr. McDowell asked if there were other concerns? This has been a strange last 10-12 months and issues are a bit different.

Budget Update:

Mrs. Koon can you share with us anything we should be doing for this coming year. Mrs. Koon stated this is a brief update on the budget. The full presentation will be done in about a month. I have been here a little over two months and getting acclimated and reaching out to administration, principals, custodians and everyone to try to pull together a budget.

As we prepare for the fiscal 2022 school year, a balanced budget is required – your expenses less – equals your revenue. Right now this is a projected revenue and it shows our sources. The Governor is due to give his address next Tuesday and we will probably have firmer numbers by the end of next week. There are moneys that the State and federal government provide to each district. We have a local tax levy and miscellaneous; State and federal aid; a fund balance; grants and entitlements, which includes pre-k and our debt service.

Districts are to increase tax levy at a cap of 2% each year; our miscellaneous income are from various different incomes – rentals, interest on our bank accounts, we are a receiving district for any kids – the Board just approved two the other night – Newark and Plainfield.

The State and federal aid – there is a school formula and it is based on the student enrollment as of October 15th. It is a flat amount.

The fund balance is from the auditor. He stated \$11 million of fund balance of which \$9-10 million was already earmarked and \$1.6 million is what we are using to close the gap.

The grants and entitlements – IDEA, Title I through IV and this also includes pre-k of \$8 million. Our debt service – one we refinanced a couple of bonds that were outstanding; in addition to that we funded bonds for our ESIP program. This is just a pictorial of our projected budget for the coming year.

There are several moving parts and I do accept a change by next week. The next is our project expenditures – we have over 3,000 budget items and this is sorted by object code which is categorized and I summarized them in these buckets – salaries and compensations which includes are base salary, vacancies, anticipated collective bargaining units for teachers, principals and maintenance that are all expiring as of June 30th. We are anticipating going into negotiations. Employee benefits, less employee contributions. Professional services that includes your legal, auditing, special ed, contractors for transportation and special ed, technology services, bond counsel; repairs, rentals, purchased services, aide in lieu for nonpublic charters and choice schools; telephone/postage, tuition – private, special ed, charter schools, choice schools; travel; insurance and lease agreements; general supplies; equipment line-classroom equipment, technology, athletic equipment, custodial equipment – anything over the \$2,000 threshold. Miscellaneous – memberships and other special expenses not captured in the other budget lines and we also have our debt service – financing bonds as well as the ESIP program.

This is a pictorial of our projected budget, we are still looking at it and we are still missing some data that is provided by the NJDOE. We are still tweaking and going back to some of our principals and supervisors. We are also looking at other ways of reducing our costs for instance e-rate, Medicaid semi program reimbursements, continue to leverage our purchasing programs, looking at other ways of saving energy – we will benefit once the ESIP program starts. We will yield savings but maybe not initially but in the years to come. The first year is implementation costs but we should see some savings.

I will go through it more in the next month.

Mr. McDowell stated you said the revenue should match the expenses – are we expecting more money from the State. Mrs. Koon stated we are not sure. We are being proactive and thinking of things we might need to revisit and trim down – it is in progress.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated thank you so much. I appreciate your ongoing clarity.

Special Education:

Mr. McDowell stated Mrs. Conti would you like to talk about special education.

Mrs. Conti stated I would like to talk about community-based instruction, some of the areas of wokeness that we trying to look and strengthen. I think COVID has taught us a new world for our students. With community-based instruction we always focused on getting into the stores, going into the community and now there is a huge shift – it is the virtual world; get your groceries delivered. How do you survive in a world that can change? You have to increase the skills and thinking that we had engaged in over the previous years. One way we are taking advantage of this is the Bog Center – community-based instruction and they offered free technical assistance for virtual interventions and how to give community based instruction virtually. They have webinars and PD courses for both students and teachers. Just recently we asked for Peapod which is ordering groceries online which is part of Stop and Shop. Also how do you create recreation for yourself virtually. All those skills that are important when you graduate and become independent adult and how you survive beyond high school.

Another piece is social/emotional learning – that is important in building equity for students with special needs and disabilities. How do you apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities? How do you manage your emotions? How do you establish and maintain supportive relationships? All of that stands in affecting how you perform academically and out in the community. We have reached out through presenters. Mrs. Guilfoyle has talked about PD and money that is available for PD and we would like to take advantage of that and we are looking at presenters for social/emotional learning and how it specifically relates to special education. We have taken a look at assistive technology and professional development for students and staff and how to use it. It is huge in many areas. Apple found out that the iPad was a very strong device for people to compensate for different disabilities or areas of weakness that they may need to strengthen. We are looking into assistive technology like co-writer, organizational strategies, also software applications that can help people organize with writing. Read aloud technology and also to assist in different reading programs that can help with content area in books to help reading comprehension and help students to compensate. We are moving

into this age of technology, we really have to look at increasing student and staff knowledge of how to provide assistive technology and how it can help in the classroom. It should be a regular part of classroom instruction and intervention because all of us could use assistive technology to strengthen our skills.

With COVID and everything we learned from that is the importance of communicating because we get caught up in our Zoom meetings and we are wanting to work on communicating with parents and we worked with CPAG executive board and maybe coming up with some lunchtime meetings where we can talk about things that are going on in special ed department. We are working on that communication piece because some of that gets lost. We jumped to trying to get the kids and the instruction virtually and remote. Now we are trying to get back to hybrid instruction. All that communication gets put on the backburner and we really need to take a look at that and go forward with the communication piece.

The other area is assistance from the NJDOE with positive behavior support in school. Once we can get back to schools, we should continue with some of those supports as well. We talk about multi-tiered systems of support – we need to do that for social and positive behavioral supports as well. Students are going to have a whole range of emotions and transitioning back to school and all of these supports are particularly important for our students with IEPs.

Dual Language Pilot Program:

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated it is important and what advantages it is for kids that are able to speak a second language. I'm hoping 2022-2023 that the district will start piloting a dual language program starting at our elementary school. I think that is the best place to start; we know kids at a young age pick up and learn a second language very easily. I think it is something that we definitely should do. I will implore the superintendent to please make this part of his goals or the district goals so that we can get that implemented for 22-23 school year. Mr. McDowell stated you were a big proponent for the pre-k so I'm sure you will see this through also.

Board of Education Goals:

I jotted down a couple of things we could talk about as goals. One is to hire a superintendent; that should be a one of the Board of Ed goals and bring that person up to speed and what his or her goals would be and what we would want to see them do.

Another goal is to review the policy manual – Dr. Morgan has that begun? That was one of the things that you had been mentioning before. I know you are the chairperson, if we are not doing that I think it is one of the things that the Board should be responsible to do and get the policy manual up to date.

One other thing I would like us to do and Dr. Morgan mentioned was to have a Board retreat. We need to understand what a Board retreat is. Mr. Taylor can you explain to us what a Board retreat looks like.

Mr. Taylor stated a retreat is a public meeting, you have to advertise it and set aside a public comment period. A retreat is 99% similar to what you are doing tonight. The Board

getting together and talking about vision, curriculum related goals, academic ranking and of course your Board and superintendent goals. Alternatively, you could pick up where you left off tonight and have it devoted to a few more subjects. It is not uncommon to have a facilitator – someone from NJSBA or someone else of the Board’s choosing to help facilitate the retreat. A lot of the boards benefit from having somewhat of a team building type exercise during a retreat. Not saying everyone has to be friends and get along but just an understanding of what makes everyone tick and get everyone focused on the what the subject is and you can work in your own way but towards a collective goal for your school district.

Some portions of the retreat may be appropriate for discussion in closed session – particularly issues that may impact your finances while a lot of the budget discussions can be in public to the extent that some of these decisions may impact your collective bargaining agreements, impact other matters from a conceptual standpoint aren’t quite right for public exposure. You can go into executive session; there may be legal updates but the Board can entertain issues in closed session. Some doing it during the week others do it on a weekend.

Mr. McDowell stated I had a different idea of what a retreat was where there is no business but just talking and getting to know each other. If it is along the lines of what we were doing tonight, maybe we can do it later on in the year and not call it the planning session but where we can discuss other items and see how far we are along in obtaining our goals.

Mrs. Regis-Darby stated as a Board to maintain focus on student achievement by making sure that whatever we are doing we are using data to drive those decisions that we are making.

Mrs. Brens-Watson stated in regards to goal setting and our mission as a district to provide opportunities for students – what other ways can we support our students’ ability to develop skills within the district and how we can align those opportunities to work that is being done with QSAC. Dr. Morgan are you the liaison? Dr. Morgan stated QSAC is cancelled this year. Mrs. Brens-Watson stated I understand that but just to provide better opportunities for our student representatives and I’m thinking of the ones that are selected to come to our Board meetings – how we can provide more opportunities for professional development for them and the students in general – including them in committee meetings or other options.

Dr. Francis asked can we set aside a time that we can speak specifically about Board goals and have more time to discuss them in more detail. I don’t know when but it would be nice for all of us to come with goals and present them and hash them out and see if we can come to some agreement on which ones we should focus on. Mr. McDowell stated sounds like a retreat.

Dr. Francis stated something within the next month so we can work on goals for the 2021-2022 school year. Mr. McDowell stated I was hoping we would have some ideas tonight and I think that is a good idea for us to meet and have that as an objective and to come away from that meeting with a set of goals for the Board and maybe also for the superintendent but the superintendent we would have to work with them to come up with those goals. I like the idea of a meeting to come up with Board goals.

Dr. Francis stated we talk about what goals we may want but we really should put it on paper and live by it. Mr. McDowell stated and refer to it from time to time and see how we are doing.

Mr. Taylor stated from a board goals standpoint – the Board goal is the what do you want? The how becomes a district/superintendent goal in terms of how you want to accomplish that goal. An example is a data driven decision making module – what does that mean, the superintendent will have to figure that out in terms of software, charts, meetings with staff and figure out how you measure the data showing incremental improvement and figure what you might not want to use if the data shows it is not producing a result. That is an example of the what and the how is you worry about after the affect.

Superintendent Goals:

Mr. McDowell stated we can do that but bear in mind that the goals that the Board comes up with are what we would like to achieve and the superintendent's goals would be how to achieve those things. We do need to look at a date for a Board goal setting meeting. Mrs. Regis-Darby stated I think that is a great idea and it will give the Board collectively to have time to collaborate together to create those goals. We will try next month and specifically for setting Board goals. Can you send out a couple of dates through email and then we can go through that process.

Mr. McDowell stated o.k. probably something on a Thursday evening. We can spend two hours and hopefully come away with something solid and with several goals for the Board.

Can we talk about superintendent goals without setting our goals and objectives? Mr. McDowell stated part of the superintendent goals which qualify for executive session because it is a personnel discussion.

Board members – please come up with three Board goals that we would like to discuss next month and then after that meeting we can have a meeting with the superintendent to let him know what our goals are and he can give us some thought on how he can accomplish those goals.

Dr. Morgan stated I would like us to revisit the equity discussion we had a couple of months ago but it is something we need to discuss. I know the AP situation was addressed but that was not just the goal of the equity and access policy that was introduced so we need to go back and revisit that. Mr. McDowell stated do you want to talk about it tonight? Dr. Morgan stated no, I just don't want us to forget about it.

Comments from Public:

Susan Lipstein stated I'm happy that we are offering public pre-k 3 and we have public pre-k 4 but my question is – are those children able to be referred to special services if we see that they have needs and be evaluated. Do we have at this point inclusive kindergarten with special needs children. If we are talking about catching kids early, that is the time to do it and identify the special needs in pre-k and by the time they get into kindergarten, you have an IEP. I spoke to Mr. Benaquista about this and I would like to see it implemented. My daughter teaches inclusive kindergarten and she gets these kids from pre-k 3 and 4 and they have their IEPs and

she can move right away with those kids; you don't have to wait a year or two to get them evaluated. Their needs are already there and she can study ahead of time and the progress you can make is incredible and the ones with more problems is the come into kindergarten with special needs and have not been referred. Can we refer pre-k 3 and 4 kids to special services and do we have inclusive kindergarten where we have special needs kids mixed in. I would like to see that happen and see if that could be a goal. If we need to ask the State for funding for special needs, that is another place we can advocate.

Mr. McDowell stated hopefully we will have an answer the next time we meet. Mrs. Benaquista stated me and Mrs. Conti will reach out to Mrs. Lipstein.

Mrs. Koon stated there is a funding in the budget for pre-k that the district does pay for pre-k children with special needs.

Jeffrey Monge stated years ago when I was on the Board, a process that we took and I thought it was effective was Board members provided ideas on district goals to Mr. Tatum at the time and then he took those and tried to incorporate them into action items as part of his superintendent goals. As part of the finance committee, we took those goals and tried to incorporate those items related to finance into committee goals and on a monthly basis reviewed them, got updates and reported back to the Board. Something that came out of it was the one-to-one initiative, bettering public relations, engaging Kean University, creating an RFP schedule – a lot of things that we were actually able to execute with that approach. Trying to have measurable goals, having methods and metrics which are very important. We talk about educational achievement – things like – achieve proficiency at each of the schools; each school has a different proficiency level so each school should have a goal and have that over 2-3 years and the methods that you are going to try to follow to meet those metric goals. If you categorize them by committee then it is something that can be updated as necessary and reported on at the committee meetings on a monthly basis with the Board meetings. It is a living document. It may change when it comes to the Board.

The last thing as it pertains to community school – I would hope that the district would take into account the percentages of academic performance and economic diversity. If you are going the route of a community school, when you are creating those communities, that you take that into account.

As it pertains to data, it has to exist. I-ready was brought to the district years ago with that idea – identify the data, see where the issues lie and being able to have the RTI to speak to it and that was at a building level. If we are recreating that wheel, I'm really questioning what we have been doing all these years with that data and execute on it.

Mrs. Williams left meeting prior to adjournment.

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

There being no further business before the Board in public session it was moved by Mrs. Regis-Darby, seconded by Mr. McDowell, that the meeting be adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

AYE: Mrs. Brens-Watson, Dr. Francis, Mrs. Minneci, Dr. Morgan,
Mrs. Regis-Darby, Mrs. Ruiz, Mr. McDowell

NAY: None

ABSTAIN: None

MOTION CARRIED

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

YOLANDA KOON
BOARD SECRETARY