

TRENTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
108 North Clinton Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 08609
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Wednesday – January 2, 2013 – 5:30 P.M.
MINUTES

Completed January 4, 2013
Convened at 5:30 P.M.

Call to Order

Board Counsel Kathleen Smallwood-Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. A quorum was achieved at 5:33 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Smallwood-Johnson led the salute to the flag.

Roll Call

Present:

Denise Millington – arrived 5:37 p.m.
Jason Redd
Jane Rosenbaum
Nicola Tatum
Mary Taylor-Hayes
Gerald Truehart II – arrived 5:40 p.m.
Toby Sanders

Excused Absent:

Sasa Olessi Montaña

Absent:

Justine Torres

Superintendent of Schools – Francisco Durán - Present

Business Administrator/Board Secretary – Jayne Howard - Absent

New Jersey Sunshine Law - Read by Board President Sanders

The New Jersey Public Meetings Law was enacted to ensure the right to the public to have advanced notice of and to attend the meetings of public bodies at which any business affecting their interest is discussed or acted on.

On the rules of this act, the Trenton Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting by publicizing the date, time and place, therefore posted in the Central Services Building, 108 North Clinton Avenue, City Clerk's Office, City Hall and the Times. Anyone whose name is on the mailing list should receive a notice.

Formal action will take place at this meeting.

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Adoption Of Agenda

President Sanders advised the Board of the amended agenda for this evening, including an addendum and also the introduction of the new State Monitor.

Motion by was made by Mr. Redd and seconded by Ms. Tatum to adopt the agenda. Agenda was adopted by all Board Members present.

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Denise Millington		not present for vote	
Sasa Olessi Montaña		absent	
Jason Redd		X	
Jane Rosenbaum		X	
Nicola Tatum		X	
Mary Taylor-Hayes		X	
Justine Torres		absent	
Gerald Truehart II		not present for vote	
Toby Sanders		X	

At this time, Ms. Smallwood-Johnson introduced Mr. Glenn Forney, Assistant Division Director of Finance for the Office of Budget and State Monitors. Mr. Forney, on behalf of State Education Commissioner Christopher Cerf, introduced the District's new State Monitor, Ms. Emily Capella. Regarding a letter that President Sanders wrote to Commissioner Cerf, Mr. Forney stated that a response is being formulated and he will defer to the Commissioner to address Mr. Sanders' concerns directly.

PRESENTATIONS TO THE BOARD

Superintendent Durán presented on the proposed school reconfiguration, including projected enrollment for 2013-2014 (handouts attached). He referred back to his presentation of December 17, and he stated that this evening's proposal is specifically to reconfigure the current schools and restructure them. Mr. Durán said this will allow the facilities to be aligned as closely as possible to the needs of the students who live in the various catchment areas. He said the State will not allow the District to construct new schools because there is currently adequate space with no large projected increase in enrollment. He also stated that the Early Childhood Program will be refocused and restructured to best meet the academic needs of the youngest students and to include Special Ed preschool classes. There will be no reduction in the overall number of preschool classes, and there is no increase in the number of in District preschool classes. The Superintendent said the many Out of District Preschool Providers will continue to serve students as well.

Mr. Durán said the goal of tonight's proposal is not to offer details; rather, it is a bid to provide a more comprehensive program that meets the academic and social needs of students at the middle and high school level. If the proposal is approved this evening, committees will be formed to work on the details, in conjunction with the school budget

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process. Committee work will include curriculum programs, staffing, facilities and transition of students. Committee members will be parents, stakeholders, teachers and staff.

Other goals are to locate bilingual centers closer to the homes of students they serve, to ease overcrowding and allow classroom space for every teacher, and to meet the needs of all students. The Superintendent said the proposal also includes the continuum of services for all special needs programs – LLD, Autistic, CI, MD and BD. This will allow students to remain in their schools for the total grade span of the school, rather than moving to a different school to obtain needed services at the next grade level. Services will be provided in the areas of learning disability, autism, cognitive impairment, multiple disabilities and behavior disorders.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

President Sanders advised of the rules governing public comment, designed to protect the privacy of students and the rights of employees.

Ms. Millicent Bland expressed concern about the lack of consistency for current students if Stokes School's configuration is changed next year to serve preschool students only at that location. Ms. Kimberly Thompson discussed the effect of moving Stokes students to Jefferson School, stating that this location is further from their homes. She also expressed concern about student safety. Ms. Elaine Parrish stated her displeasure with the proposed closing of Stokes School. She hoped the current students could be kept in the school.

Ms. Betty Glenn, President of the Trenton Paraprofessionals Association (TPA), stated she is glad that union leadership had an opportunity to meet with the Superintendent prior to the Winter Break to discuss the proposed reconfiguration. She discussed the importance of respecting community members who address the Board.

SUPERINTENDENT'S RESPONSE TO THE PUBLIC'S CONCERNS

Mr. Durán discussed the issue of repurposing Cadwalader and Stokes Schools from their current configurations. The reason these two schools were considered is due to the low enrollment at these schools versus their capacity. He also stated that the District cannot have Early Childhood classes on a second floor, which precludes the use of Jefferson School as the Early Childhood Center. If the proposal is approved, Jefferson School will be remodeled from the current open space concept on the second floor. Classrooms will be constructed, allowing the school to serve K-5 students and provide a continuum of services for any special education students attending. Stokes School has 13 classrooms on the first floor, making it better suited to an Early Childhood Center. Jefferson School has only four classrooms on the first floor. Additionally, the Superintendent stated that Stokes School was originally a K-3 school, with the fourth and fifth grades being added during the summer to accommodate an overflow of students at Kilmer School in those grade levels. He said that parents who attended the West Ward Community Forum asked the District to consider placing a K-5 school and a 6-8 school in close proximity to each other, which was a factor in making the decision to open Jefferson School to serve K-5 students.

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BOARD PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON THE SCHOOL RECONFIGURATION PLAN

Ms. Tatum asked if the District or the Community Providers provide a better service relative to Early Childhood Education. She agreed with the Stokes School parents' concerns, and she felt that the District should investigate using the Community Providers prior to moving students from Stokes School. She asked if the District will be reimbursed from the State if Stokes School is used as an Early Childhood Center, and the Superintendent responded yes. He stated that by using Stokes School as an Early Childhood Center, the preschool teachers will have better support and professional development than they currently have in scattered classes throughout the District. The goal is to improve the service and model it similar to the Community Provider classrooms. Mr. Durán said the program is not being expanded; rather it is being consolidated in a Center. He also stated that inclusion starting at the preschool age is important, and this can be facilitated by having general and special ed students both at Stokes. Ms. Tatum asked if the current first and second grade special ed students could remain at Stokes. Mr. Durán responded that if this were to occur, these students would then need to move to a different school for Grades 3-5, which does not maintain the continuum. Additionally, they will not have general ed peers in Grades 1 and 2 at Stokes School. President Sanders added that, due to Title funding, the District is required to maintain comparability among schools. He stated that the current reconfiguration model will allow the least amount of parents to be inconvenienced, but unfortunately there are some who will be negatively affected.

Ms. Tatum asked if the building configuration and facilities at Cadwalader School will suit the needs of middle school students. Mr. Durán said the restrooms in the main areas and the hallways are not modeled specifically for elementary-aged children, and they will be available for student use. There are a few Pre-K classrooms that have bathrooms within them, and this will not be needed for middle school students. Ms. Tatum asked how many students will be enrolled at Cadwalader, and the Superintendent responded that the numbers at the alternative middle school change frequently, so it is difficult to give an exact figure. The capacity at Cadwalader is greater than the number of students currently at the Rivera Learning Center. Lockers are not currently used in the alternative program, and they would not be needed at Cadwalader.

Ms. Tatum felt there were inconsistencies in the survey responses from the Community Forums, and the Superintendent replied that the responses were compiled from the answers submitted. He said that some participants did not answer all questions on the form.

President Sanders wanted the public to know that parental concerns do register with the Board, and he acknowledged the concerns of the Stokes School parents. He felt that the Board has made progress in addressing the needs of the broader community, and he stated that the District will continue trying to meet the needs of all students.

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President Sanders addressed Ms. Glenn's earlier statements on showing respect to the community. He said that in his time as Board President, no one expressing his or her opinion to the Board has been shouted down from the dais. He stated that everyone must understand that the public's right to express their opinions does not prevent Administration or Board Members from disagreeing with comments made during Public Participation, because this is part of civil discourse.

Mr. Truehart thanked the Superintendent and Leadership Team for the restructuring proposal. He felt that a specific business plan needs to be presented to the Board. He cited studies by Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University and Columbia University, which argue that the K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 model is not successful in terms of student achievement, attendance or behavior. Mr. Truehart said the District was previously structured as a K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 system. He asked what factual information was considered when the District went to a K-8 environment. He also stated that the educational program must be sound. The Superintendent said that the research was looked at carefully, and one of the distinctions about the three studies was made by a researcher named McEwin. Mr. McEwin found that the effectiveness of the K-8 model was only in schools that actually adhered to middle school philosophy and programs, and not in those schools that did not. His research suggests also that when K-8 schools are found to be outperforming 6-8 schools, it is because they are more fully implementing middle grades promising practices. No studies have been conducted with a large enough sample size to compare middle schools fully implementing the middle school philosophy to the K-8 schools.

Mr. Durán stated that another study was done that examined research on grade configuration conducted over the past 10 years, and the conclusion after looking at the research was that little evidence existed to determine a real cause and effect relationship between grade configuration and academic achievement. He stated it wasn't so much the grade configuration that made a difference; rather, it was what was being done at the middle grades level. He also said that the schools examined in 16 different studies were primarily in rural and small town districts, with few schools in urban areas. Mr. Durán quoted the study, "the results of these studies should be interpreted with caution, as they can't necessarily be generalized and don't control for all possible variables. Researchers looking at all of these studies urge practitioners to study strengths and weaknesses of various configurations. Rather than debate which is best for middle grades, we would be better expending our time creating a curriculum that intellectually engages and inspires young adolescents, pushes for organized structures that support relationships at that age, and better ways to reach out to that particular age group. No sequence of grades is perfect or, in itself, guarantees academic achievement and healthy social and emotional development because there is no "magic bullet" for grade configuration to improve that achievement."

The Superintendent said that what was done in Trenton was moving to the K-8 model without the types of curriculum and supports needed by the young adolescent. He said that

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when looking further at the budgeting process, the schools that perform better in a K-8 model have a sufficient budget for middle grades students. He stated that Trenton does not have the funding available to do this.

Mr. Durán agreed with Mr. Truehart's statement that tonight's agenda does not include the full plan. It is a beginning, to allow the District to move towards implementing the full plan with the alignment of resources and support, **including** parents, teachers and community. He stated it was determined after doing the research that the District must provide the middle grades with the programs and curriculum needed to improve student achievement at that level. President Sanders observed that the District shifted to the K-8 model under a prior Superintendent due to fiscal reasons, because it was apparent that the District's budget was going to be cut. He said the proposal is focused on directing sorely needed resources to the Grade 4-8 level.

Mr. Truehart asked how the Regional Achievement Center (RAC) waiver is tied into our improvement plans. Mr. Durán said that he has had discussions with the RAC regarding schools opened as a result of the reconfiguration (Jefferson and Rivera). The RAC will reassess the schools where the students transferred from to see if the new schools become a Priority or Focus school. The status follows the students. The current existing schools will remain in their current status, regardless of whether or not their grade configuration changes.

Ms. Millington stated that prior to becoming a Board Member, she viewed the K-8 implementation as a parent and community member. She said the outcomes were not as expected. She agreed with Ms. Tatum's observation that behavioral issues increased at the 6-8 level, and she stated the District must do what is best for the students, developing plans through committees to ensure a good quality middle school system. She asked if the proposal allows for adding classes if they are needed, and Mr. Durán said at some schools it does, but not at all schools. He said all the South Ward schools are maxed out at capacity.

Mr. Sanders advised that the current proposal puts the District in a better position to add a new high school in the future, since the current West Campus is a former middle school and eventually should be used for either the K-5 or 6-8 level.

BOARD DISCUSSION ON THE GRANT SCHOOL PROPOSALS

Ms. Millington asked what the acronym IXL means. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Spence said that the Principal informed her that this program was used last year, but she does not have all the specifics on it. She said it is a renewal of the site license for a computer program to support Math instruction in the classroom.

Mr. Truehart stated that, while he is not suggesting that the additional agenda items are not important, he felt that tonight's meeting should have been specifically for discussion of the reconfiguration, as was legally advertised. President Sanders said that the Grant School

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items were added due to an oversight that caused them not to be included on the December 17 agenda. He also stated that he and the Superintendent will work closer together on adhering to deadlines for agenda items.

BOARD ACTION ON RECONFIGURATION PROPOSAL

Motion was made by Ms. Millington and seconded by Ms. Taylor-Hayes to approve the Reconfiguration Proposal. The motion was unanimously **approved** by Board Members present. *Note to minutes: This approval also covers the Grant School Proposals on the agenda.*

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Denise Millington	X		
Sasa Olessi Montaña	absent		
Jason Redd	X		
Jane Rosenbaum	X		
Nicola Tatum	X (concern noted regarding Stokes School)		
Mary Taylor-Hayes	X		
Justine Torres	absent		
Gerald Truehart II	X		
Toby Sanders	X		

BE IT RESOLVED: that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approves the Resolution for **School Reconfiguration Plan for the 2013-2014 School Year** to reduce class sizes, accommodate additional space in student catchment areas and best meet the needs of all our students.

GRANT SCHOOL PROPOSALS:

1. BE IT RESOLVED: that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approves the Proposal for **NJ Model Curriculum Professional Development – Part II at Grant School** for the period January 12, 2013 through May 31, 2013 at a cost not to exceed **\$80,151.40**. The training will assist staff at Grades K-5 in the development of lesson planning correlated to the model curriculum.
 (Account Codes: TBD based on approval of School Improvement Plan using SIA A Funds)

2. BE IT RESOLVED: that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approves the Proposal for **IXL Site License for Grant School** for the period January 2013 through June 2013 at a cost not to exceed **\$2,400.00**. The IXL Site License will provide comprehensive coverage of Math Curriculum from Grades PreK to Geometry, alignment to the Common Core and NJ Model Curriculum, a variety of challenging math problems for students to work, student progress reports for teachers, unlimited access to all

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grade levels, and virtual prizes and awards to celebrate learning milestones and improve student achievement.

(Account Code: 15-190-100-610-0000-00-20)

BOARD ACTION ON ADDENDUM

Motion was made by Ms. Tatum and seconded by Mr. Redd to approve the name change for the lower grades of Hedgepeth Williams School. Grades 6-8 will remain as Hedgepeth Williams School. The motion was unanimously **approved** by Board Members present.

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Denise Millington	X		
Sasa Olessi Montaño	absent		
Jason Redd	X		
Jane Rosenbaum	X		
Nicola Tatum	X		
Mary Taylor-Hayes	X		
Justine Torres	absent		
Gerald Truehart II	X		
Toby Sanders	X		

BE IT RESOLVED: that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, approves changing the name of Hedgepeth Williams School (K-5 grades) to Paul Robeson Elementary School effective with the 2013-2014 school year.

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m. All were in favor, with none opposed.

ADJOURN 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Jayne S. Howard

Jayne S. Howard
Business Administrator/Board Secretary