

TRENTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
108 North Clinton Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 08609
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Monday – February 8, 2021 – 5:30 PM

Completed February 9, 2021
Convened at 5:30 P.M.

Call to Order

Board President Addie Daniels-Lane called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

President Daniels-Lane led the salute to the flag.

Roll Call

Present:

Gene Bouie
Nicole Brossoie
Addie Daniels-Lane
Yolanda Marrero-Lopez
Taraun McKnight
Gerald Truehart II
Jeannie Weakliem
Sadé Williams

Acting Superintendent of Schools – Alfonso Q. Llano, Jr. - Present

Business Administrator/Board Secretary – Jayne Howard - Present

New Jersey Sunshine Law - Read by Board President Daniels-Lane

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 on Trenton's Webpage, the Times and the Star Ledger.

Formal Action will take place at this meeting.

Mission Statement - Read by Board President Daniels-Lane

All students will graduate with a vision for their future, motivated to learn continually and prepared to succeed in their choice of college or career.

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Adoption Of Agenda

President Daniels-Lane advised that the Superintendent’s Recommendation for this evening has been revised as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Acting Superintendent of Schools, approves the grade level reorganization and school attendance zones presented by Ross Haber Associates, to take effect in the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Daniels-Lane asked for a motion to adopt the amended agenda.

Motion was made by Ms. Marrero-Lopez and seconded by Mr. Bouie to adopt the amended agenda. Amended agenda was adopted by all Board Members present.

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Gene Bouie	X		
Nicole Brossoie	X		
Yolanda Marrero-Lopez	X		
Taraun McKnight	X		
Gerald Truehart II	X		
Jeannie Weakliem	X		
Sadé Williams	X		
Addie Daniels-Lane	X		

SUPERINTENDENT’S REMARKS

Acting Superintendent Llano discussed the history of how the District got to the point where a redistricting is being recommended. He stated that from the 2014-2015 school year to the 2019-2020 school year, the District experienced a 12.3% increase in enrollment, as verified in the ASSA report. Up to the year 2024, Trenton Public Schools are projected to experience a 14.57% enrollment spike. Mr. Llano stated reasons for his recommendation as follows:

- Class size concerns
- Enrollment concerns
- School attendance concerns
- Encouraging growth and innovation
- One out of every four K-5 classrooms is over-enrolled
 - Out of 245 General Education homerooms, 16% are over-enrolled
 - Out of 68 Bilingual classrooms, 56% are over-enrolled
- Ensuring a thorough and efficient education
- Many instructional benefits of small class sizes, especially for the youngest students
- Past successes of K-3 schools in the District
- Better use of existing space

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

President Daniels-Lane reminded the public of the guidelines in Bylaw 0167 – Public Participation in Board Meetings.

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Ms. Amanda Short, Teacher at Mott School, expressed concern about the timing of the redistricting plan. She felt that stakeholders have not been given enough time to consider all aspects of the plan.

Ms. Judy Martinez, President of the Trenton Educational Secretaries Association (TESA), also felt the plan is being rushed. She acknowledged the necessity of the plan but said not enough time has been given for full consideration by parents. She stated the plan will require the hiring of more Administrators. Ms. Martinez also expressed concern with the proposal to split some schools which are currently functioning as K-8 schools. She felt there will continue to be overcrowding in the same areas. Ms. Martinez asked that Bilingual classes be in every school.

Ms. Monica Carmichael, President of the Trenton Administrators and Supervisors Association (TASA), stated that TASA members have concerns in the areas of safety (students walking within the City areas – territorial, highway, staffing at crosswalks), personnel (hiring staff to fill vacancies), District (start times affecting student drop-off) and budget (ensuring the inclusion of all stakeholders as part of budget development). Ms. Carmichael stated that TASA fully recognizes the pressing issues that call for redistricting, but the concern is with timing of the plan.

Mr. Kevin Davis, representing Community stakeholders, felt the Board is acting without enough community outreach and dialogue on the redistricting plan. He stated that children's lives have been affected by the pandemic, and he expressed concern that starting a new school will further stress them. He also felt that the plan should be tabled until a permanent Superintendent is hired, and that there should be an independent analysis of the costs and benefits of the plan. Mr. Davis discussed possible logistical challenges if the plan is implemented.

Mr. Andrew Goulburn, Special Ed Teacher, asked if it is wise to implement the redistricting plan since it will create additional transitions in the lives of our students. He also expressed concern about moving Middle School students back into a building with Elementary students. He also stated that some students will be travelling further to school.

Trenton Education Association (TEA) President Ms. Talithea Duncan stated that, while TEA has consistently advocated for smaller class sizes, which the plan includes, members still have concerns about the implementation process. She asked that Leadership immediately convene committees to ensure a smooth transition; and she specifically asked for an Instructional Committee to address the formation of a 4-6 intermediate structure and what that would entail. Ms. Duncan stated that TEA looks forward to collaborating on a successful implementation of the redistricting.

Ms. Janice Williams, TEA Grievance Chair, felt that Gifted and Talented (G&T) students have not been well served by the District. She stated that the District prioritizes sports over academics, and she said there should be a magnet school for G&T students. Ms. Williams said Trenton loses too many G&T students to Charter Schools.

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Ms. Jacqueline Tolbert-Beverly, Retired Teacher, expressed concern about the timing for implementation of the plan. She felt more consideration is needed for stakeholder feedback.

Mr. Darren Freedom Green, Community, felt that many parents have been left out of the conversation. He also expressed concern about the needs of Special Education students possibly not being met under the redistricting. He stated that moving students from one City Ward to another will lead to turf violence. Lastly, Mr. Green said that no elected officials have been part of the discussion on redistricting.

Mr. Oneil Burns, Senior at TCHS, said that being at the same school for K-8 helped him learn. He spoke about the benefits of his time at Kilmer School, and he asked that the students be considered first in any decisions that are made.

Ms. Joy Ingram, Parent, felt the lack of time provided to parents for consideration of the plan is disrespectful. She stated that the plan should be approved for a future school year, not for 2021-2022.

Ms. Shadura Lee, Community, felt that parent and teacher input has not been taken into consideration. She discussed adjustments that must be made in stakeholders' lives, and she said additional time is needed prior to implementation.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Weakliem asked why the plan cannot be delayed beyond September 2021. She felt there are too many unknowns in the process, and the best interests of the students are foremost.

Ms. Marrero-Lopez stated that the District has already been disrupted, and she questioned the wisdom of waiting until September 2022 to redistrict. She said that it will benefit students to return to smaller classes and expanded resources right away. She also stated that there will still be staggered starting times, enabling parents to drop off children at different schools. Additionally, before and after school care will still be operating. She stated that, regarding Covid, the schools are ready to be opened in May; and she felt there should be confidence with opening in September. Ms. Marrero-Lopez acknowledged there will be changes, but the changes have already occurred. She said the District will be opening Bilingual classes in 11 of the 13 schools. Special Ed classes will be provided in all the schools to ensure the least restrictive environment for the children. Ms. Marrero-Lopez said support is essential from City Council, the Mayor and the Police Department. She wondered if there will be enough teachers, and she said that the closure of some Charter Schools enables the District to take advantage of their resources since most of their students were from Trenton. Ms. Marrero-Lopez expressed confidence in the District being able to implement the redistricting plan for September 2021; and she felt this would be best for our students, including those in G&T programs.

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Ms. Williams expressed concern with basing decisions on the demographer's report, stating that it is based on predictive models and that conditions can change daily. She felt there has not been enough information to consider the social, cultural and community impact. She said that more time is needed for discussion.

Mr. Truehart cautioned the Board to be sure the plan can be implemented in such a short time before voting to approve it. He did not believe the District and families will be ready for redistricting in September 2021.

Mr. Bouie said that overcrowded classrooms have been a continuing issue, and smaller classes drive improved learning. He said he is 100% behind the plan, but he has a couple concerns. One concern is regarding the budget. Mr. Bouie felt that more funding will be needed to sustain the redistricting. He also wished to know what percentage of students will be negatively impacted. He also agreed with Ms. Williams' statement on the need for a magnet school.

Ms. Brossoie stated she understands everyone's concerns, and she also agrees with Ms. Marrero-Lopez and Mr. Bouie on the need to implement the redistricting plan. She believes it is the best plan for our students, and she stated that students will need the nurturing environment of smaller class sizes when they return to school. Ms. Brossoie felt that change happening all at once is better than dragging the situation out over the next school year.

Ms. McKnight felt there is nothing to lose by taking the time needed to implement the plan correctly. She stated the benefits of the plan need to be understood by the stakeholders, and this will take time.

President Daniels-Lane observed that change is difficult for many, herself included. She said she appreciates everyone's concerns. Ms. Daniels-Lane expressed her approval for the plan, but she stated her concern is with the timing. She asked the Superintendent to discuss how Bilingual and Special Ed students will be impacted by redistricting. She also asked what consideration is being given to addressing safety concerns.

Superintendent Llano stated that there are many unknowns moving forward with the pandemic, projected enrollment, etc. He also observed that there are many positives; but there will be consequences in implementing the plan, such as families having to change school zones. He stated the purpose of the plan is to ensure that students are going into a classroom that is, at a minimum, at the at-risk number or less. Superintendent Llano said the at-risk number for Kindergarten is 21; but some teachers have 28 students in their class. He appreciates the struggle of teachers in engaging 28 students, especially in a virtual environment. The Superintendent said that 11 out of the 13 schools will have a Bilingual and a Special Ed program, which will allow most students to attend their neighborhood school. In closing, he said that the Leadership Team will work diligently to execute whatever course of action the Board decides this evening.

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Ms. Daniels-Lane asked for guidance from General Counsel James J. Rolle, Jr. on possibly making a motion to table the recommendation for future consideration. She wished to know what options this would leave the Board, specifically if tabling the motion this evening would allow the plan to be brought back for the 2022-2023 school year. Mr. Rolle answered that, if the motion is tabled tonight, no action is taken, and the meeting is closed. He stated that the Superintendent can remake his recommendation at a future meeting of the Board. He advised that the Board cannot now vote on an action to take place in the 2022-2023 school year. Mr. Rolle said there is case law affirming that a Board of Education is prohibited from taking an action that would obligate a future Board in anything other than purely administrative matters (filling vacancies, rollover of certain contracts). Mr. Rolle advised against voting on anything for the 2022-2023 school year. Ms. Daniels-Lane asked if the Board could vote in May or June on implementing the plan for 2022-2023. Mr. Rolle advised this would be more appropriate and would allow sufficient time for planning.

Ms. Marrero-Lopez observed that not everyone is onboard with implementing the plan for September 2021, and she felt that the District needs to work with, and build trust with, all stakeholders.

Ms. Weakliem asked if staff can continue working on the plan even if it is tabled this evening. She said it is a very good plan and she would like to see it implemented smoothly.

Mr. Truehart said the Board is already in the throes of the strategic planning process, and he suggested that redistricting be included in the Five-Year Strategic Plan. President Daniels-Lane agreed with Mr. Truehart.

Ms. McKnight stressed the need to be open to new options, and the plan should be fluid.

Superintendent Llano stated that the strategic planning process already includes components of grade level reorganization, and Administration will continue to move forward with that plan. He agreed that tabling the resolution may be a good strategy, allowing the plan to be addressed later in the school year. He said that preliminary work will continue, such as revising the Street Directory.

BOARD DISCUSSION & ACTION ON CONSENT AGENDA

Superintendent's Recommendation (Amended):

BE IT RESOLVED that the Trenton Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Acting Superintendent of Schools, approves the grade level reorganization and school attendance zones presented by Ross Haber Associates, to take effect in the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Daniels-Lane asked for a motion to table the resolution for future consideration to allow for additional planning with reference to the timing for implementation.

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Motion was made by Mr. Truehart and seconded by Ms. McKnight to table the implementation of the reconfiguration plan. The motion was unanimously adopted by the Board.

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Gene Bouie	X		
Nicole Brossoie	X		
Yolanda Marrero-Lopez	X		
Taraun McKnight	X		
Gerald Truehart II	X		
Jeannie Weakliem	X		
Sadé Williams	X		
Addie Daniels-Lane	X		

Ms. Daniels-Lane stated for the record that implementation of the redistricting will not take place for the 2021-2022 school year. Rather, planning will proceed under the Superintendent's direction for 2022-2023 and continued engagement of community and other stakeholders as we plan for the future. She thanked everyone who participated, and she said that change is difficult but sometimes needed.

Motion was made and properly seconded to adjourn the meeting. **All** in favor, **0** opposed, **0** abstentions.

ADJOURN approximately 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Jayne S. Howard

Jayne S. Howard
Business Administrator/Board Secretary