

TRENTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
108 North Clinton Avenue
Trenton, New Jersey 08609
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
Friday – March 24, 2017 – 5:30 P.M.

Completed March 31, 2017
Convened at 5:34 p.m.

Call to Order

Board President Gene Bouie called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

President Bouie led the salute to the flag.

Roll Call

Present:

Gene Bouie
Addie Daniels-Lane – arrived 5:39 p.m.
D. A. Graham
Fiah Gussin
Jane Rosenbaum
Gerald Truehart II
Lucy Vandenberg
Heather Watson

Acting Superintendent of Schools – Nelson Ribon - Absent

Business Administrator/Board Secretary – Jayne Howard - Present

New Jersey Sunshine Law - Read by Board President Bouie

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.

Mission Statement - Read by Board President Bouie

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

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Adoption Of Agenda

Motion was made by Dr. Graham and seconded by Ms. Gussin to adopt the agenda. Agenda was adopted by all Board Members present.

<u>ROLL CALL</u>	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Addie Daniels-Lane		not present for vote	
D. A. Graham	X		
Fiah Gussin	X		
Jane Rosenbaum	X		
Gerald Truehart	X		
Lucy Vandenberg	X		
Heather Watson	X		
Gene Bouie	X		

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

President Bouie advised the public that there will be two instances of public participation on tonight’s agenda, including one after the Community Forum. Mr. Bouie stated it is important for the Board to hear the public’s feedback after interacting with the candidate.

Ms. Naomi Johnson-Lafleur, President of the Trenton Education Association (TEA), stated that she was away for the February meeting, and she took the opportunity tonight to welcome new Board Members Ms. Daniels-Lane and Ms. Watson. She also recognized Dr. Michael Rush of Ray & Associates for his work on the Superintendent Search. Ms. Johnson-Lafleur hoped for an open dialogue this evening. She said that she and her members want to see the District move forward, and they look forward to an honest discussion this evening and greater things for the District.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Dr. D.A. Graham facilitated the proceedings, starting with thanks to everyone for coming out to the meeting. He introduced Dr. Fredrick H. McDowell, Jr. to the community. Dr. McDowell spoke about his background, his life and growing up in the rural south. He discussed his career in education and why he went into that field – to make a difference in the lives of young people.

Question & Answer Exchange

- Q. You stated you plan on creating a supportive learning atmosphere. What have you been able to do in other jurisdictions or districts where you have served to get parents to assist in that endeavor?
- A. The best way that I can describe that is going to be as my time when I supervised schools. I think it’s important for me to set the context, so I’ll set it extremely quickly. We had a large comprehensive high school, roughly 1400 students. It was an International Baccalaureate World School, but only for a few students. Of the 1400 students, 400 of the students participated in the IB program. Ninety-five percent of

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those students were middle- to upper-middle-class White students. One thousand of the students were on the traditional side in the non-IB program, and they were 95% students of color. When you looked at the distribution of resources within a single school, they were operating as two separate schools and had been allowed to do so for roughly 30 years – unfortunately to avoid middle-class white flight. The challenge at the time that I was given from the Superintendent was this particular school had originally been 2300 students, not 1400; and every year they were losing between 100 and 150 students because families in this modern era did not want a segregated school. We knew that we needed to do something, and we knew that we needed to do something immediately; but they had tried to separate the school for 10 years and had failed miserably each and every time because they had not involved parents, they had not involved the community. They didn't involve the teachers who had boots on the ground. I took all of the information that they had had over all of the misgivings from 10 years, set it on fire and vowed that we would not do that. I pulled together a group of parents, teachers, students, community members and district staff totaling about 35 individuals; and we sat in a room for three painful hours and hashed out what were the real issues at the school that we truly needed to solve. It was a brainstorm. It was not a fun meeting. The first 30 days of meetings were not fun meetings, but at the end of the day I gave them one charge; and that charge was that I don't know what this school needs to look like, but it can't continue to look like this. So, continuing to move forward and holding individuals accountable, providing resources, I added additional resources to the school to help manage that level of change process. We brought in community engagement specialists, both within the district and professionally outside the district, in order to facilitate. We had a series of community level meetings – not on the school's campus because we wanted individuals to feel comfortable. We went to the varying neighborhoods to engage family members, both on the IB side and on the traditional side, because we wanted to make sure that there was significant parent voice because we wanted to be able to meet the needs of students – not the needs of individuals who work in the school and like maintaining that status quo. We had committed teachers that wanted to see a change but didn't have the necessary support. We had teachers lead subcommittees paired with their partner parent; and they were the ones that were really responsible for making sure that we pushed the agenda. My staff and myself, we held individuals accountable for being able to move forward by setting the criteria for which we needed to operate, provided the resources and gave the structure needed to be engaged in a thoughtful process of change within that school. What ended up happening, about nine months later, was what was called The One George. The name of the high school was George Washington High School. So it was called The One George Movement because students, parents, teachers said that they wanted it to be one school. They didn't want the school to be segregated. They wanted to improve across the board. What we were able to do is to come up with a multiple year strategic plan that really put the school on a path to be able to move forward; and the first thing was demystifying the differences and the capabilities of young people by opening up access to the International Baccalaureate program and ramping up access to the Advanced Placement program, and also ramping up the Special Education and the ELL programs so that we didn't have the haves and the have-nots on the same campus.

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This was led by students, teachers and parents. I gave them the space, the opportunity, guidance, resources; and we were able to co-construct what they are now in year three working on, which is a five year strategic plan in order to move them back on the path of where they were years ago.

- Q. Do you have plans to implement strategies that will leverage individuals and community organizations who have expertise, resources, best practices to strengthen the success of the District? If so, can you share some of those examples? Basically, how would you leverage stakeholders?
- A. I think the most appropriate way to answer that question is – I have ideas, I don't have plans, because I don't make assumptions about what's going on or what's not going on within the community. The first thing that needs to take place on behalf of any new leader is actually surveying the landscape of what's happening within the district, what's happening that's going well, what subtle tweaks could go well, and what is inherently broken and needs to be fixed or needs to be cast out. In terms of being able to engage businesses, both as a principal and as a district leader, I have engaged businesses, colleges, non-profits, foundations, organizations on a multitude of ways based on the individual needs presented by schools. So for me, community level engagement has to be tailored to the specific needs of the campus that they support. The only ones who can communicate what those needs are, are the students, parents, teachers and school leaders on each individual campus. At the District level, it's really about how do we identify individuals around the city and within the region; because it's my perspective that a strong Trenton Public Schools is good for Mercer County and the region. It's not specifically just good for the City of Trenton. So making sure that we have done our homework and identified individuals that we want to engage, that could be sincere partners in this work, so that we can create a win-win solution to be able to help not just the students within the school District; but also to help with organization's bottom line.
- Q. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is a proponent of privatization, charters, school choice and vouchers. Urban districts often fall victim to these initiatives, which often lead to layoffs and school closures. How will you advocate for Trenton Public Schools as you interact with politicians, the Department of Education and the community at large?
- A. I have been a lifelong supporter of public education. I believe that public education is a right, not a privilege; but public education also needs to make sure that we're delivering on the promise to support our young people. In terms of how I engage about public education, it really is making sure that we are communicating what the needs are; but we're also telling our own story. I think the challenge that we have, and specifically what Trenton has been experiencing, is a demonization of what it is that you're doing or not doing; because we're allowing other people to tell our story. One of the things that private schools and charter schools and other various educational management organizations do extremely well is marketing. They market based on perceived fear within the community. There are great things happening in Trenton. The question that I've always had is, Who knows about it? So if we're not taking the time in order to tell our story, we're not tooting our horn. We're telling our story with sincerity, and we're

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really highlighting the work of the professionals within the District, but also the successes of the students. We do have young people that are going to college and being successful, we do have young people that are entering the work force and are being successful, we do have young people that are entering in military service and are defending this country; and we need to make sure that everybody within the region and everybody within the state knows what it is that we're doing and how they can help.

Q. What do you believe is the importance of the Arts to K-12 education?

A. The Arts saved me, the Arts are what kept me in school. As I shared with you earlier, I was that knucklehead kid that was bored to tears in school; but I was always on time and prepared for Art class. I took Art class from Grade 6 all the way through Grade 12, and I had three Art classes in Grade 12. I got accepted into the North Carolina State University School of Design. At the time, a couple years ago, it was one of the most prestigious design schools along the East coast. They only accept 600 students in the country; and I was accepted because of my portfolio, because of the recommendations from my Art Teacher, who was also my Guidance Counselor, and the work ethic that I was able to show during the two-day interview process that they took students through back in those days. I'm a huge fan of the Arts. I believe that the Arts are a highly effective engagement strategy that helps promote creativity, independent thinking, outside the box thinking for young people that is so desperately needed today; but it also helps to ground students who think differently and don't necessarily subscribe to conventional methods of instruction. It gives them a voice and it gives them a space and opportunity for them to demonstrate levels of success. So in terms of advocating for the Arts, I'll continue to advocate for the Arts and to expand on people's level of thinking about what the Arts is and what the Arts is not.

Q. Explain your understanding of how the proposed changes to the Every Student Succeeds Act, which replaced No Child Left Behind, will impact the Trenton Public Schools. What do you think the Superintendent should do to advocate for our schools and the District in challenging these regulations that may preclude schools from being removed from status?

A. Anything coming out of Washington at this point is tentative. Until we have some finality in terms of expectations coming from the Department of Education, I believe that the best way for us to move forward is to work together; and the only way for us to work together is to get in schools. As a former principals' supervisor, I didn't take accountability or compliance measures at face value without hearing from the teachers, without hearing from the school leaders, and helping to co-construct what support looks like. Some of the new rules associated with ESSA, specifically as it relates to schools with lower status, is that the school district is primarily responsible for the school improvement plans and has equal footing; whereas in the past, a lot of that was really pushed off on the schools and the finger was pointed at schools. So now that the District is being held more accountable, I think it behooves us to make sure that we're working in concert together to co-construct what a plan is and making sure that we're providing meaningful support at the school level; and then holding ourselves, both the District and each individual school, accountable for the results.

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- Q. What are your short- and long-term plans to improve the culture of the Trenton Public Schools, and how will that directly impact the PreK-2nd Grade students and their ability to read at grade level upon the conclusion of Second Grade?
- A. Literacy is one of the most important things that we can do. A love of learning and a love of reading – that’s probably the greatest gift a school district can give to its children. I’m a firm believer that making sure that students are able to read before they enter into Third Grade is what determines whether or not they graduate on time. In the immediate is for us to begin identifying what are the areas of focus that we need to make sure are taking place in every single elementary classroom that’s going well. So if we know that we have proven practices taking place in our classrooms, we need to make sure that we’re replicating what we know is working. We need to reduce the priority clutter that our teachers are being faced with in order to make sure that teachers can truly drill down and drill down deeply in making sure that our babies can read upon entrance into Third Grade. The next step is making sure that we have a long-term plan for what happens once we get our children across that particular benchmark moving into Third Grade. Then what comes next? What comes next is making sure that above and beyond being able to read, that our children can also do Mathematics. So the Literacy, if a child can’t read, they can’t do Math. Making sure that it’s an all-hands-on-deck approach, and that we’re ensuring that each and every child, losing no children, can move forward in terms of being literate by the end of Second Grade/beginning of Third Grade. The most immediate thing that we can do, above and beyond identifying what’s going well in our classrooms, is to celebrate what’s going well in our classrooms. Students need to see, both from their teachers, from their parents, from the members of the community, that reading is important. They need to know that this is what we’re focused on. Children want to make sure that they are meeting the expectations of the people who love them; and if we show them that reading is important, I believe that they’ll step up.
- Q. The Trenton Public Schools has been plagued with years of non-compliance and violating the rights of our Special Education students. What is your plan to ensure that this does not continue?
- A. First thing is making sure that we are all crystal clear that IEPs are not negotiable. IEPs are legally binding documents; and when an IEP team makes a determination about what levels support are, we need to make sure that we’re providing that support. That’s a non-starter as far as I’m concerned. One of the misconceptions that many individuals have is that Special Education means less than. I don’t believe that. I believe that Special Ed means learns different, not less than. So, ensuring that all of our students, regardless of whether or not they have an IEP, understand that they have the same bar to get across; and it’s our job to make sure that they have what they need in order to meet that expectation – not comparing kids to each other, but comparing kids from wherever they are to that bar and making sure that we fill in those gaps.
- Q. How would you ensure that the curriculum is both culturally sound and prepares our students to be competitive with their counterparts?

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- A. First thing is making sure that we have a diverse group of stakeholders providing input into the curriculum. Students need to see themselves in the curriculum. Making sure that the curriculum reflects the diversity in each of our classrooms is extremely important to me. As a student, the first time that I saw that there were individuals of color was my second year of college. So I believe that young people have aspirations but sometimes need to have an in-your-face example. So making sure that we have a curriculum that reflects the diversity within our District is important; and I believe that in order to have divergent levels of thinking in the room, you've got to have a wide range of experts, a wide range of stakeholders in order to make sure that we're holding ourselves accountable to being able to deliver on that promise.
- Q. Do you see changes in curricula as a basis for improving students' overall learning and achieving reading improvement in the lower grades; i.e., going back to the basics and teaching grammar to Grades 1-3?
- A. In terms of being able to answer that question in the manner that I'm going to answer it, I've got a personal preference and a professional one. My personal preference is that I believe that learning is best done in context, not isolated into a discrete set of skills. However, I'm also smart enough to know that Literacy teachers in elementary are the experts; and making sure that we have their voice in the room so that we can come together in order to figure out what's the most appropriate way in order to build those skills with our children would be my professional approach. That's how I'm going to choose to answer that question.
- Q. What will you do to ensure that the District is actually meeting the needs of children first and holding teachers accountable to meeting these needs as well?
- A. First thing is we have to make sure that we've established a baseline about what children need versus what children don't need; and the only way to do that is to be in schools on a regular basis. We need to see all of the conditions that staff members are dealing with and make sure that we're all on the same page about what the needs are. The second is making sure that we're providing appropriate support and resources to be able to meet those needs, and then putting systems in place in order to hold individuals accountable on a regular basis; and that is not about compliance, it's really about accountability. Provide people with the resources needed to move forward, continue to develop them and coach them when mistakes are made, not slapping individuals on the wrist but providing meaningful feedback in order for individuals to be able to move forward, and making sure that we are crystal clear about what the goals are. What are we trying to accomplish, and by when are we trying to accomplish it? And making sure that there are both on-site and off-site checks and balances in order to make sure that when schools or students or individuals begin to falter, support comes in order to get them back on track as quickly as possible.
- Q. Based on flat funding and the expansion of charter schools, how would you address a shortfall? Have you encountered this through your career?
- A. One of the challenges associated with urban school districts around the country is inconsistent funding. There's never enough. The needs of our children constantly

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change, and the funding is not coming as quickly as these changes are coming in our classrooms. In terms of in my previous positions, budget shortfalls were part of the job, which forced us as an organization to think differently about what we support and what we didn't support. One of the sayings that I continue to hear is that you have to do more with less. I actually disagree with that. You have to do less with less. We have to make sure that we're focused on our priorities that are going to move us to where we need to be, and we have to think about how do we supplement the things that we would like to have without denying or devaluing the level of support that's currently in place in order for students to be successful. In terms of funding associated with decreases in charter schools, it goes back to one of the first questions that were asked about marketing. One of the goals of the school district is to maintain its students. The absence of being able to maintain your students unfortunately does mean that the funding travels with the students. We have to do a better job of retaining the students that we have. We have to do a better job of making sure that we're maximizing every dollar, but we also have to prioritize. We can't do all things, we do have to make sure that we're scaling back and we're focusing on the things that really matter and that are going to push performance so that retention is no longer an issue within our school system. In terms of flat funding, I believe that operating within a vacuum is the wrong move. Anything as it relates to funding means that we need to have conversations, difficult conversations, as a community, as a system, as professionals, in order to make sure that we're holding each other accountable to the values that we've set as an organization; but that we're also being mindful and that we're looking for efficiencies together, and that we're being able to make sure that there's a collective thought partnering in order to be able to move the work forward so that individuals feel involved and that individuals feel invested. In the absence of funding coming from the city or coming from the state, there will be individuals within the community and within the greater region that want to get involved and want to invest to help us offset some of those deficiencies.

- Q. Would you be open to hosting regularly scheduled Town Hall Meetings with community stakeholders outside of the School Board Meetings? If so, what would you be seeking to accomplish through that type of forum?
- A. Yes, the Town Halls would need to take place in schools or in regional areas within neighborhoods to make it accessible to community members to be participatory and get involved. In terms of what I would be looking to accomplish is to actually get the voice of the constituents which we serve, to hear from individuals within the community on what's working, what's not working, what issues need to be addressed. What celebrations have we missed and forgotten to highlight? Also I think that it's important for a Superintendent to be visible within the community and accessible.
- Q. What is your "marketing plan" to retain our present student population and attract new students to our District in light of the competition from private and charter schools that are rapidly emerging?
- A. The best marketing plan is performance, so we have to be able to deliver on what we say that we're trying to deliver on. In terms of a marketing plan, the first thing that I'd be

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looking to do is to identify all of the points of pride within the system – making sure that we're all clear about all of the great things that are taking place – and then identify the appropriate mechanism in which to communicate what those points of pride are. Second is then to begin to think about how do we actively engage our constituents in some of the same ways in which our competition interact with our community members. We need to meet people where they are, and that means that we need to think differently about how we communicate, when we communicate and who we communicate to. We need to think about what that message is going to be. We need to think about what matters most to the parents in the community that are choosing to send their children to other places. We need to hear from students – what makes you come to school every day? We have to take all of this data and together we have to figure out what is going to be the way in which we present ourselves outwardly to make people – what's the compelling reason for individuals to come to Trenton Public Schools? We have to determine what that message is going to be. That's not a Dr. McDowell plan, that's a Trenton Public Schools plan; and that's what I would be looking to help develop.

- Q. If you have children, do you plan to send your children to the Trenton school system?
- A. In answer to the first question, we do have a child. She's three months old, so we have a few years before school. Right now we're thinking about daycare. So we've got a few years to decide. It's my hope that when it comes time for us to decide, we will have our stuff together and we have figured out where we'd like to live. I believe that you were going to ask a question. We currently live in the State of Pennsylvania. We do plan on moving to New Jersey. We've not figured out where.
- Q. Do you plan to move to Trenton?
- A. As any smart married man will tell you, it depends on what my wife says. Trenton for us is a possibility. We've not looked into real estate. This is still very new. We're still having conversations with the Board; and should we be so blessed to be presented with this opportunity, Trenton is a possibility for us to move.
- Q. What short- and long-term initiatives do you plan to implement to improve the culture of the Trenton Schools?
- A. I think the answer is going to be very similar. The first thing is to identify what's going well, and also identifying how do we celebrate in the District. Do we celebrate in the District, and based on feedback from staff members throughout the District, how's that working for us? In terms of culture, the way that culture is most effectively established is together – making sure that we're all clear about what type of culture we'd like to have, and then putting levels of support in place to be able to hold each other accountable as we build that culture together; and then taking time to celebrate once we reach each of those milestones. So, in the short term, it's going to be very similar as I'm doing due diligence around the District and getting a feel for the schools, getting a feel for the community, understanding all of the things that we're doing that are going well. Taking that into consideration as part of a greater plan around district improvement, culture can be built while also focusing on the academics.

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- Q. Give some examples of how you plan to outreach to local businesses and implement processes that increase access to opportunities derived from goods and services procured by the District.
- A. I'll speak to my experience in Philadelphia. One of the most important things that we can do as a good partner within the community as a school system is to make sure that we're appropriately preparing young people for the jobs that exist within the community. I sat on several city-wide advisory groups and boards, and we had a single-minded focus. We wanted to understand what was the professional landscape and what gaps were we trying to fill in terms of what are the financial opportunities for not just our students but also for our parents; and we were able to co-construct programming and partnerships to be able to help fill some of those gaps and some of those needs. As a major employer within the city, you're always going to have businesses that want to work with you because they think you've got money. What comes with that is a mutual ownership in the outcome. So I'll speak with specificity. We partnered with Comcast in 2016. It was a multiple deal, so they were hoping to get a city-wide contract to the tune of \$500 million. One of the things that we negotiated was, if they were able to get that \$500 million deal with the City of Philadelphia, they would be able to work in order to guarantee 125 jobs each and every year for our graduates coming out of the school district. In addition to making sure that we had a training program that gave our students a leg up while they were still in high school so that they could pass the exams and the screenings needed for them to be top level recruits, so that there was a direct pipeline feeder program into the workforce. That program is currently in year one. So that presented a win-win situation. Individuals wanted cable services and broadband action and so forth; we wanted to make sure that we had students that were getting good paying jobs. And we built programs in order to make sure that students were prepared in the IT fields to be able to take those jobs. In terms of my expectations for Trenton Public Schools, it would be to survey the professional landscape and, with a diverse set of business leaders, for us to start identifying some of the opportunities that exist within the community; and then seeing what can currently take place in the immediate and what do we need to take some time in order to build out a little bit further.
- Q. The District has a reputation of poor customer service in regards to serving our students and their families. How do you plan to improve this perception?
- A. I think we have to do more than improve the perception. I think we have to improve the reality. I tend to operate on the Nordstrom's continuum. If anyone's ever been to Nordstrom's department store, there has never been a time where individuals weren't running in order to see what they could do to help you. It's the red phone treatment. The purpose of central office or home office, and even the Board of Education, is to make sure that we're providing meaningful support to schools; and schools are to provide meaningful support to students and parents. When parents call, what does that experience look like? When students have needs, how is the central office responding to the needs that are being presented as told by the schools? We have to take all of those into consideration, and we have to do better. We have to make sure that we're

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not losing the individuals within our system due to poor customer service. We also have to make sure that we're being overly responsive so that no child falls between the cracks. A lot of the time, if you have a bad experience at school, you begin to shut down; and then that puts you on a path to dropping out of school. We cannot continue to be part of the problem.

- Q. Can you identify methods to implement emotional support for students in our District; i.e. counseling, healthy eating, basic necessities?
- A. At the end of the day, I think at too many times we break children apart into parts rather than to think about holistically what are the needs of the child. In terms of social/emotional, I'm going to say again the professionals that are on the IEP team are going to help to determine what are the appropriate supports needed for that child to be successful; and it's our responsibility to make sure that we're honoring that level of work and that commitment that we're making to that child and their parents in order to be able to meet those needs. In terms of social/emotional learning, we have to find engaging ways in order to keep kids connected to school and to give them something to shoot for. We have to take away punitive action, we have to take away a lot of the negativity that's contributing to students having challenging behavior in school; and we have to give them other ways to be able to demonstrate some of those challenges and still be able to move forward. So, as a former teacher who had high special needs populations, high poverty, high crime; as a former principal that had the exact same circumstance, we took each and every kid for who they were and what they presented, and we put each child on a personalized plan for success because we didn't think that any level of cookie cutter approach was going to be helpful for each of those children. We monitored progress – held the children accountable, but monitored progress – and then when we found that whatever supports that we had initially put in place were not working, we had the courage to course correct and try new things in order to continue to engage the students and their families, because our expectations were not going to lower.
- Q. What immediate first steps will you take to ensure safety and access to education in the least restrictive environment for students with special needs in the District?
- A. In the immediate is pulling together the Assistant Superintendent and their team for Specialized Services, and identifying what are the issues that we need to solve for? That would be Step 1. There's a strong team that's committed to moving the work forward, and making sure that I am crystal clear about what the challenges are up front would be my first step.
- Q. How would you engage or plan to reach disaffected students and teachers?
- A. Many times a direct approach is the best approach. In my former district, we made it a point to speak to dropouts. We would invite them in. We would bring in young people who had dropped out of school because we wanted to hear directly what were the contributing factors that led with them being disengaged. We took that data and used that data as an opportunity for us to correct what was taking place in the schools that they left. We also used it as an opportunity to re-engage young people that had left us. Same thing with parents – when parents become disenfranchised with the system,

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that's an opportunity for us to reach out to parents and find out what's causing that level of challenge and concern, and then work together in order to provide a solution to be able to meet their needs. So for me, it's not running away from our problems, it's actually running towards our problems, acknowledging that we're not perfect but we're going to improve; and making sure that individuals feel comfortable with expressing when they are not very happy with us.

Q. The percentage of Trenton students affected by lead poisoning is two times greater than Flint, Michigan. What are your plans to work with the community organizations and local government to address and support children who are affected?

A. Our children deserve to come to school and drink safe water. They deserve to come to school in safe buildings where they are cared for. They deserve to come to school where opportunities are not denied them to be able to move forward. Primary on the agenda is to make sure that is the case, making sure that we're working together with state and local government in order to ensure that we have everything that we need in order to correct the issues; but even more importantly is making sure that we're reaching out to families of children affected to make sure that barriers they are now facing as a result of this terrible situation didn't put them in a more compromising situation than they're already in.

Q. How do you think schools improve?

A. One day at a time. At the end of the day, as an educator, I think that too many times we get the brunt of the woes of society. We cannot, although we try, we cannot be all things to all people. We have very challenging circumstances, we have unrealistic expectations about what we can do within the 8- to 8 ½ hours per day; but at the end of the day, I have to believe that individuals are here for the right reasons. We are not NFL stars making millions of dollars. You have individuals who are using their own resources to be able to meet the needs of students. They're working ridiculous hours. They are bending over backwards to make sure that they are caring for other people's children just as they would themselves. For me, and maybe I'm an optimist, that is something that I can work with. In terms of how we improve, it goes back to some of the things that we've talked about earlier – making sure we are crystal clear about our priorities and what our goals are, making sure that we drill down with specificity on how we're going to accomplish that; and then on a daily basis, we make sure that we do the work. I never ask individuals to do other people's jobs. I ask them to do their job. If we all do our jobs and we all are equally committed and hold ourselves accountable, and each other, we're going to improve.

Q. How do you plan on getting parents involved? The District has held several programs and events with advertising, calling, etc. and turnout has still been low. How has this worked in your past engagement?

A. One of the challenges, unfortunately and fortunately for some, and I'm constantly reminded by my 16-year-old niece that I'm old and that things have changed – the most effective way to find out why parents aren't coming is to talk to parents. Parents have lots of demands on their time. Many of our parents are working multiple jobs, or they

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have children above and beyond the single child, so they have growing demands on their time. One of the things as a former principal that worked well for me is to actually have remote meetings either by phone, by Skype – if people still use Skype, now they use FaceTime – we’ve tried to figure out what are ways to engage our parents differently rather than having parents come to school during the day when many of them are supposed to be at work, or having them come at 6:00 or 7:00 at night when many of them are just getting off work and have to feed their children. Really trying to identify and hearing from parents, what’s the most effective way to communicate to you? What’s the most effective way for you to be involved, with the fundamental understanding that many of our parents want to be involved. If we’ve not engaged them in a way that helps them to be involved, they shy away. I think that one of the things that worked well as a principal is not making the assumption that our parents liked school. A lot of my parents, as a former principal, they had a terrible experience as a student; and that was their reservation. They didn’t enjoy school when they were a student, and the last thing they were going to do as an adult was to go to school. When we were able to find that was a real fear for some of them, some of them were not literate – so sending things home in writing when a parent couldn’t read was also not engaging the parents. We’re not lowering expectations, we’re trying to meet the needs. Making sure that we were engaging our parents in a way to which they felt comfortable, and being very concrete about how they could get involved. With some of our parents, what that meant was sending individuals to the community center in their neighborhood and talking to them about what it meant to do homework. We make assumptions that individuals understand the concept of homework. We make assumptions that individuals know that students need to do certain types of things in order to register for classes. What we did was we got back to basics and we removed all of the assumptions about what we thought parents should know, and we started talking to parents, and then we were able to engage parents at a much higher level.

- Q. What are you plans to work with after school providers, and what is your approach?
- A. The first piece is to make sure that we are identifying what are the needs that schools have, where we can leverage time after school. Going back to one of the questions that was asked earlier about charters or about private, is that they also believe in before school programs, during school programs and after school programs which are contributing to individuals wanting to leave the District. Some of our children need additional time, they need additional services. Making sure we are clear about what those services are, and in which communities and in which schools do they currently exist, and ensuring that each and every school has an opportunity to provide after school level of enrichment based on the needs of their students; then also making sure that we’re providing high quality after school programming in our schools and in holding individuals accountable to the results. In terms of what my approach would be – to work with the leadership team, to work with the school leaders, to work with the parents and the parent organizations in order to identify what the needs are, so that we can begin to fill in the gaps; and then develop systems and put them in place in order to hold programs accountable to make sure that they are providing true enrichment and supporting the normal school day program.

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- Q. The numbers of teachers of color, particularly Black men, have fallen precipitously across the country. This includes Trenton. Many studies have shown the positive impact of teachers of color on students' academic achievement. What are your thoughts on this trend, and what do you plan on doing to reverse this troubling trend?
- A. You bring a very real systemic challenge – finding young men of color that look like our children, that want to engage in this extremely important work. Making sure that we are aggressively going to places where we know that there are strong candidates of color would be an expectation. How that's actually accomplished would come from the leadership from Talent Acquisition and Development; but making sure that that's one of our mutual goals. Second is also thinking a little differently about what we mean to be a teacher. I'll explain. I had a conversation with a former staff member from several years ago, he and I are still colleagues. He was a Dean of Students. He was not a teacher by certification, but he taught young men and women every single day. He was a person of color, he was a highly valued member on the team; and he was single-handedly responsible for helping to keep kids in school, keep kids in class and help kids get across the line in terms of graduating from high school. So I think that we also have to think about where are there additional opportunities to bring in other candidates that reflect the diversity within our District when we are not able to find certified teachers of color.
- Q. Gang violence is prevalent in our neighborhoods. How do you plan on organizing safe pathways for students traveling to and from their homes or after school activities; i.e. working with the police?
- A. One of the offshoots of economic challenges are neighborhood crime and gang violence, so it's an unfortunate and unintended outcome associated with minimal opportunities for individuals to thrive financially. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law and father were law enforcement officers, so I have the utmost respect for local law enforcement. I worked as a principal hand-in-hand with both local police as well as school resource officers to make sure that we were addressing the situations that took place within the neighborhoods, making sure that there was a highly visible presence of both school staff and local law enforcement to build relationships with young people so that they could see that there was another way. One of the things that was extremely important to me was for our young people to see law enforcement as additional counselors, as additional teachers, as community leaders that they could look up to, that they could come with these situations. We developed at the schools a compensated CI program for young people, because unfortunately we live in a time where, however asinine it is, the snitches get stitches statement – we came up with an approach that allowed students to remain anonymous but to be able to keep their pulse on what was happening within the neighborhoods. We had constant two-way communication with local law enforcement to make sure that they were informed, so that we could intervene before situations got out of hand; and at the same time, engaging some of these challenging groups in order to see schools as safe zones and safe havens, so that nonsense didn't take place on campus, to and from school.

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Q. Why should the Trenton Board of Education hire you?

A. I think that there needs to be some acknowledgement within the City of Trenton. There have been some challenging circumstances over the last two years in terms of clear and consistent leadership. One of the things that I believe that I can bring is that level of consistency. I have made a long-term commitment to the work, to the community, to meeting the needs of young people. The Board has made a commitment to trying to find the right candidate that can be able to meet the needs. The Mayor has also made that level of commitment. I believe that my experiences have prepared me to take the helm of the organization and to be an effective leader, to be an effective community member, to be an effective team member in order to be able to push us to where I know that the school district can go. As I said before, there are challenges here. Make no mistake. Things do need to improve, but the District is not broken; and that for me was a sticking point. Making sure that there are good teachers, that there are strong students as a dedicated community, strong District governance was another plus for me. All of the components are in place with one exception, and that's clear, consistent leadership and a long-term vision for what this District can accomplish. I believe that I'm that candidate that can take the District to the next level using the resources in this room and outside of this room. I believe that I can bring individuals together. I believe that I can help repair some of the fractured relationships that exist throughout the City. I don't have all of the answers, but I have a few; and I'm looking forward to continuing the dialogue and the discussion and would welcome the opportunity as the next Superintendent of the Trenton Public Schools.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Hope Grant, President of the Trenton Administrators and Supervisors Association (TASA), stated she is encouraged by Dr. McDowell's answers, which resonated with the public. She hoped that the professional manner in which tonight's forum was conducted will become the norm in the District, and she said that TASA looks forward to working collaboratively with everyone to help our students achieve.

Ms. Janice Williams, Grievance Chair for TEA, likened Dr. McDowell to former Superintendent Dr. Durán, whom she felt was an excellent leader for the District. She also expressed appreciation for Dr. McDowell's comments on how to market the District and compete with the charter schools. She stated that technology should be used to enable parents to participate in meetings; i.e. through the use of facebook live. She also said that sustainable community schools will enable the District to be competitive.

Mr. Jerrell Blakely, Trenton resident, said he has been involved in the Trenton Public Schools his entire life and that he has seen that all people in the community really love the City. He said there has been a lot of discord over the past few years, but he is heartened to see the atmosphere he has just witnessed and a turn in the level of discourse.

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ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

President Bouie stated that the Board would move to Executive Session with no public action taken. As per the agenda, the Board and Attorney Lattiboudere discussed the employment contract for the Superintendent of Schools.

Motion was made by Dr. Graham and seconded by Ms. Gussin to adjourn the meeting into Executive Session. **All** were in favor, **0** opposed **0** abstentions.

ADJOURN 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Jayne S. Howard

Jayne S. Howard
Business Administrator/Board Secretary