

BOARD OF EDUCATION
(Official)

March 30, 2015
Elizabeth, New Jersey

A special meeting of the Board of Education was called on March 30, 2015 at 8:00 p.m., in the Multi Purpose Room, Donald Stewart Center for Early Childhood Education, 544 Pennsylvania Avenue, Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Board President Ana Maria Amin presented the following statement at 8:00 p.m.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening. This is a special meeting of the Board of Education. Pursuant to New Jersey Statutes and the rules adopted by the Board of Education, notice of this meeting was sent to Worrall Community Newspapers, The Star Ledger and Cablevision of Elizabeth on Thursday, March 26, 2015. In addition, this notice is posted on the Bulletin Board in the lobby of 500 North Broad Street, and pursuant to this act, a copy has been filed with the City Clerk of Elizabeth.”

“I wish to extend a warm welcome to everyone present to this March 30, 2015 meeting of the Board of Education. We are here to govern, provide management oversight, and make policy for the district. The Superintendent manages the district. This is a meeting of the Board in public, not a meeting of the public.”

“This meeting is being recorded and will become part of the Elizabeth Board of Education permanent record. In order that the recording will adequately reflect the proceedings, please refrain from talking while others are speaking. I also ask that you silence the sound on your electronic devices. Since it is legally mandated that these proceedings be accurately recorded, I may have to ask for order periodically should noise begin to interfere with our recording capabilities. I am pleased that you have taken time this evening to join us. Thank you for your interest in the Elizabeth Public Schools.”

“There will be a public portion for citizens to address the board. Participants for the public portion must sign in one hour prior to the advertised start of the meeting so that they may have the opportunity to speak. The sign-in sheet states the name, address, telephone number and reason that the person wants to comment, whether it is an agenda item or a general education comment.”

Present: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Castillo-Ospina, Messrs. Monteiro, Neron (arr. 8:10 p.m.), Perreira, Rodriguez, Trujillo, Mrs. Amin – 9

Absent: None

Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Harold E. Kennedy, Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Schools Linda Seniszyn, Assistant Superintendent for Schools Rafael Cortes, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Jennifer Cedeno, Assistant Board Secretary Donald Goncalves, Comptroller William Greene, Supervising General Counsel/Board Attorney Marvin Lehman, and members of the public were in attendance.

Dr. William A. Greene gave the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Pledge of Ethics

Stephen Edelstein, Esq., Schwartz Simon Edelstein & Celso, LLC, stated that the budget process is established by the New Jersey Department of Education and for all districts which hold November elections, which is this one, it is the same. Mr. Edelstein stated that tonight’s action item is not the end of the budget process but is the very beginning of the budget process. Mr.

Edelstein stated that each school district including this one is required to send the budget to the Department of Education through the County Superintendent. Mr. Edelstein stated that once that budget is submitted to the County Superintendent it will be over the course of the next month or five weeks reviewed by the Department of Education for educational adequacy and other purposes. Mr. Edelstein stated that during that same period of time the public will have the opportunity to receive information about the budget and consider it at length. Mr. Edelstein stated that then, according to the schedule established by the Department of Education, the Board will hold a public budget hearing. Mr. Edelstein stated that the public budget hearing according to statute is to be held between April 24th and May 7th. Mr. Edelstein stated that in districts such as Elizabeth, former Abbott districts, the Department of Education generally requests that the public budget hearing take place at the end of that window because they need more time to review the budget. Mr. Edelstein stated that he thinks the plan here is to hold the public budget hearing toward the end of that window probably on May 7th. Mr. Edelstein stated that nothing that happens today sets a budget, nothing that happens today is written in stone, and whatever happens today can be changed. Mr. Edelstein stated that this is just the starting point.

Mr. Edelstein stated that this is a special meeting and unlike the Board's regular meetings in which every topic is up for discussion. Mr. Edelstein stated that at a special meeting such as this one the only item that the Board may discuss is the item that was noticed which is the budget. Mr. Edelstein stated that there was one other item in the public notice having to do with a settlement agreement that is not on the agenda and not ready to be brought to the Board. Mr. Edelstein stated that the only thing on the agenda tonight and the only thing the Board may discuss is the budget resolution and consequently all public comments must be addressed to the budget issues and the Board may not entertain other comments because the Board may not entertain any other issues tonight. Mr. Edelstein stated that the next regular meeting will be on April 16th with all the normal regular rules that everyone is used to and public comments may be on any topic. Mr. Edelstein stated that tonight is devoted entirely to this one topic.

Resolution – Submission of the Tentative Budget 2015-2016 School Year

A motion was made by Mr. Perreira, seconded by Mr. Trujillo, that the resolution be adopted.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Mrs. Castillo-Ospina, Messrs. Monteiro, Perreira, Trujillo, Mrs. Amin – 5

Negative: Ms. Bathelus, Mrs. Carvalho, Messrs. Neron, Rodriguez – 4

Ms. Bathelus stated for the record she is voting no because she just cannot support a budget that is astronomically raising taxes and putting more money towards legal fees. Ms. Bathelus stated that there are a number of things she does not agree on for the budget including the implementation of Source4Teachers.

Board President Amin presented the following public participation statement.

“At this time, the microphones are open for public comment to those who have signed in prior to this session. I shall call individuals to the microphones based on the order of the sign-in. Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration. The total time of public comment shall be limited to sixty minutes. No individual is able to yield their time to another individual. All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no participant may address or question Board members individually. The following rules for public participants shall apply: time limits will be strictly enforced, no personal attacks on individuals, no vulgar or indecent language, a person may address the Board no more than once during a single meeting, speakers should refrain from naming individuals, and comments or questions posed during public participation will not be debated. As a reminder, this is a meeting of the Board in public, not a meeting of the public.”

Mrs. Amin called upon the first public participant, Rosa Moreno, to address the Board.

Rosa Moreno, 17 Clover Street, spoke about the substitute services company.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Stephanie Goncalves, to address the Board.

Stephanie Goncalves, 202 Marshall Street, spoke about legal fees.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Tracey Howard, to address the Board.

Tracey Howard, 185 First Street, asked questions about the per pupil costs, number of teachers, and layoffs in the budget.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Christian Veliz, to address the Board.

Christian Veliz, 1048 North Avenue, spoke about work and made disparaging comments about a Board member.

Mrs. Amin thanked him for his comments.

Mrs. Amin recognized Union County Freeholder Sergio Granados and Councilman Torres who were in attendance. Mrs. Amin thanked all the district administrators who were in attendance tonight.

Mrs. Amin called upon the next public participant, Christina Moreira, to address the Board.

Christina Moreira, 805 Gephardt Avenue, spoke about testing.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Maria Lorenz, to address the Board.

Maria Lorenz, 103 Murray Street, spoke about testing and special education.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Danette Torre, to address the Board.

Danette Torre, 539 Grier Avenue, spoke about budget issues.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Daniel Lorenz, to address the Board.

Daniel Lorenz, 103 Murray Street, stated his comments were already made by others.

Mrs. Amin thanked him and called upon the next public participant, Rev. Dr. Queen Mother Imakku, to address the Board.

Rev. Dr. Queen Mother Imakku, 928 Olive Street, Vice Chair of the People's Organization for Progress, spoke about the budget.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, James Carey, to address the Board.

James Carey, 212 Inslee Place, spoke about a substitute teacher.

Mr. Edelstein stated that Board members are not permitted to discuss personnel in public.

Mrs. Amin thanked him for his comments and called upon the next public participant, Samir Amin, to address the Board.

Samir Amin, student, spoke in support of his mother and stated that he was taught that respecting everyone's opinion is a form of education.

Mrs. Amin thanked him for his comments. Since there were no other citizens signed in to address the Board, Mrs. Amin declared this portion of the public meeting closed.

Mrs. Amin asked Elizabeth Education Association President Rose Carreto to speak.

Rose Carreto, Elizabeth Education Association President, stated that this evening we all came out to support the students and the great schools in our wonderful City. Ms. Carreto stated that the students and the many great things happening in our schools depend on the school budget and your votes here tonight send a clear message that education in Elizabeth is the Elizabeth Board of Education's top priority. Ms. Carreto stated that your vote tonight speaks volumes that the students of Elizabeth Public Schools are worth investing in. Ms. Carreto stated that the Elizabeth Public Schools are a model for urban districts statewide and across the nation. Ms. Carreto stated that when the Board of Education crafts a budget that preserves the high quality of programs and the remarkable staff that the Elizabeth Public Schools currently has the children win and tonight the children won. Ms. Carreto applauded the efforts on behalf of the Elizabeth Education Association members who she represents. Ms. Carreto thanked the hard work of all teachers, assistants, nurses, counselors, secretaries, clerks, custodians, guards, drivers, warehouse workers, cafeteria workers, and aides. Ms. Carreto stated that with the support of this Elizabeth Board of Education we will continue to have great schools where children continue to do great things. Ms. Carreto thanked them on behalf of the Elizabeth Education Association and the students of the Elizabeth Public Schools for their support of the many great things that are happening here and that they are so proud of.

Mrs. Amin thanked her for her comments.

Mr. Rodriguez thanked the public speakers. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the decision for the Source4Teachers was a split vote and it did pass. Mr. Rodriguez stated that personally he voted no because he will always vote no to privatization and he feels that for profit educational companies really don't belong in our system. Mr. Rodriguez stated that internally we could have saved more money and had a better plan and that is his opinion. Mr. Rodriguez stated that this budget tonight and every year is a very contentious issue. Mr. Rodriguez stated that we are all aware that we have a budget over \$500 million, that we service 27,000 students, and we have almost 4,000 employees. Mr. Rodriguez stated that any kind of a vote on the budget is always a difficult decision. Mr. Rodriguez stated that he and his colleagues could agree that we never have enough money and it's not just our school system and every school system in the State of New Jersey is facing the same issues. Mr. Rodriguez stated that whatever side politically you are on the Governor has not raised school funding in many years and sadly that is probably a trend that will continue no matter who is in that office. Mr. Rodriguez stated that every year we are faced with growing costs and ever less funding. Mr. Rodriguez stated that why he voted no is because over the years before he was a Board member he believes there were many years of fiscal mismanagement and using this budget as a political weapon and tool has cost our students and our City educational programs and ways in which we can grow. Mr. Rodriguez stated that this year our budget is going to include a tax increase and is also going to cut positions at the same time. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the problem he sees with that is that after many years of fiscal mismanagement we are now at a point where the Superintendent and our Business Administrator have to work within a framework that is very limited. Mr. Rodriguez stated that he applauds them for the amount of work that they did and also the school principals and it is a very lengthy

process. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the process starts in November and even in October at the beginning of the school year. Mr. Rodriguez stated that almost at the start of the school year our entire district is already thinking about what they are going to be doing in April and May. Mr. Rodriguez stated that the tough decisions that we have had to make have come at a cost of prior Board of Educations' fiscal mismanagement and costing us educational programs. Mr. Rodriguez stated that some of the programs that we are going to be reducing and cutting are things that we have always been prideful of. Mr. Rodriguez stated that you see them in your mailbox usually with political slogans and some of these programs that were touted are going to be removed and cut back which is very sad. Mr. Rodriguez stated that every year we grow and this year we are up to 27,000 plus and we are working with less. Mr. Rodriguez stated that he believes the political decisions that were made with this budget in the past is causing us a lot of issues.

Mr. Trujillo stated that this is when anyone who doesn't want to hear him can exit because he is going to be here for awhile and has a lot to say.

Mr. Rodriguez excused himself from the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Mr. Trujillo stated that he is going to share with his colleagues a personal story. Mr. Trujillo stated that he doesn't enjoy politicizing special education and he doesn't claim to be an expert and he doesn't claim to know much about it except what the educators around him tell him and advise him what is best for the children. Mr. Trujillo stated that he does support the ability for the Superintendent to please have that dialogue with that community because he understands the importance of dialogue with that community. Mr. Trujillo stated that he has two children so before anything, before being a Board member he is a father. Mr. Trujillo stated that is the one thing he is 24/7, he is a father. Mr. Trujillo stated that when his youngest son was born and was about a month old he had a real high fever. Mr. Trujillo stated that they called the pediatrician who was on vacation and the covering doctor told them to come in. Mr. Trujillo stated that they brought him in and the covering doctor did the exam and said there was some kind of infection and that is why they couldn't keep the fever down. Mr. Trujillo stated that what the doctor told him next shocked him, even to this day. Mr. Trujillo stated that the doctor looked at his son and then at them and asked if they had him tested for Down Syndrome. Mr. Trujillo stated that for that moment the world ended for him and he had no idea how to deal with something like that. Mr. Trujillo stated that the doctor explained all the tests that would have to be done including a chromosome test. Mr. Trujillo stated that the trip to St. Barnabas Emergency Room was probably the longest trip of his life. Mr. Trujillo stated that he called a friend who he grew up with and was a nurse at St. Barnabas Hospital and she met them at the hospital and calmed them. Mr. Trujillo stated that he asked every person that came to see his son if his son had Down Syndrome. Mr. Trujillo stated that one after another they said it is hard to tell but they deliver so many babies here we normally can tell when they are born but you should test him. Mr. Trujillo stated his dilemma with no health insurance and barely making ends meet and now this. Mr. Trujillo stated that they went through all the tests and there is not a day that he doesn't thank God that his son is healthy.

Mr. Trujillo stated to an audience member that as you sit there and laugh this is why you shouldn't be advocating for special needs children because it is a serious issue and you are politicizing it. Mr. Trujillo stated that is disrespectful to the community that you are trying to serve. Mr. Trujillo stated for that one day, for that small moment in his life he did understand what you went through. Mr. Trujillo stated that he would never disrespect the people in that community by trying to politicize such an issue.

Mr. Trujillo stated that he called Mr. Kennedy today on the way here and asked if we are cutting the budget to special needs because he would not support that, he never has and never will. Mr. Trujillo stated that Mr. Kennedy told him no and in fact it has increased because we have more children in the district who have the need.

Mr. Trujillo stated that the same question that they asked why don't we open a program and do it in-house is because the law does not allow it. Mr. Trujillo stated that he asked that question eight years ago. Mr. Trujillo stated that we cannot open a school for special needs and

we will not be able to service all the children and meet their services. Mr. Trujillo stated that we cannot provide all of these because just in autism alone the spectrum is so wide we would not be able to staff that building with enough people. Mr. Trujillo stated that we cannot do it and it is not feasible. Mr. Trujillo stated that he wished he could do it for you. Mr. Trujillo stated that he wished he could do it for you and ease your pain. Mr. Trujillo stated that he wished he could spend all the money your child deserves he really does but to sit there and politicize something and attack us and say we don't care is wrong. Mr. Trujillo stated that he does care and he knows his colleagues here care. Mr. Trujillo stated that this is how he shows you that he cares because he votes for the budget and puts the money where his mouth is. Mr. Trujillo stated that he makes the tough decisions, raising taxes to hire more teachers and to keep the staffing levels where they are is a hard decision. Mr. Trujillo stated that he has sat here several times and voted against his own gut but he votes for you because he knows it is the right thing to do and it is the right thing to do for the children. Mr. Trujillo stated that when taxes go up his own taxes are going up and he is going to pay for it and he is willing to because he knows the education that his children are getting in the Elizabeth Public Schools is better than most private schools throughout the country. Mr. Trujillo stated that is not just him saying it but the experts saying it. Mr. Trujillo stated that to please stop politicizing and if you want communication he invites you to meet with him anytime. Mr. Trujillo stated that no one from their group has ever reached out to meet with him personally. Mr. Trujillo stated that he will be more than happy to sit down with anyone and listen to them but please don't allow it to be politicized because it is too big of an issue to be politicized. Mr. Trujillo stated that no one here wants to hurt children with special needs. Mr. Trujillo stated that he will not do it and he will not allow anyone to accuse him of doing it because it is simply not true.

Mr. Trujillo asked Mr. Kennedy if this budget cuts bussing. Mr. Trujillo stated that this budget does not cut bussing. Mr. Trujillo stated that bussing is very expensive, extremely expensive. Mr. Trujillo stated that we have been very fortunate to be able to give all the bussing we have. Mr. Trujillo stated that we provide door-to-door service for our PreK children and that is very difficult to do. Mr. Trujillo stated that we can't keep doing it. Mr. Trujillo stated that Mr. Rodriguez asked why. Mr. Trujillo stated that we continue to get the same amount of money while our expenses continue to go up and you can't have it both ways. Mr. Trujillo stated that there is a part of the community that doesn't want to raise taxes and there's another part that wants to keep all the services. Mr. Trujillo stated that he is in the middle and doesn't want to raise taxes but he will if he has to because it is for the right cause.

Mr. Trujillo responded to Ms. Moreira and stated that he can't speak for the Board but he can speak for himself. Mr. Trujillo stated that he is not ashamed to say that was handled poorly and should have been handled at the school level. Mr. Trujillo stated that she should have been told not to send things in the school bags for the children because he wouldn't want his child to get anything in his school bag. Mr. Trujillo stated that is his public apology from him to Ms. Moreira. Mr. Trujillo stated that he can't speak for the Board and can only speak for himself. Mr. Trujillo stated that Ms. Moreira is entitled to her own opinion. Mr. Trujillo stated that he is not the kind of leader that sits up here and hides. Mr. Trujillo stated that he is here to confront you and help you and he is not hiding.

Mr. Rodriguez returned to the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Mr. Trujillo stated that he is available and gave his personal cell phone number and email for anyone who wants to reach him. Mr. Trujillo asked who else is offering that service and willing to stand here and talk to you. Mr. Trujillo stated that they need to stop politicizing and if you really want to advocate for special needs then it is time to meet.

Mr. Trujillo stated that he is happy to say that we are continuing to do everything we can to keep the staffing levels where they are and need to be. Mr. Trujillo stated that it is a very difficult decision to have to lay off employees and employees are not just numbers and not just a line item on a budget. Mr. Trujillo stated that these are real people with families and real people who come to school every day and impact our children. Mr. Trujillo stated that his children know every security guard in the school, every custodian, every cook person, every teacher and they

know everybody because everybody there knows them and it is a family. Mr. Trujillo stated that it is the equivalent of just going home and throwing out someone in your family and asking them to leave, and you can no longer sustain them and they are no longer important. Mr. Trujillo stated that every one of our employees is important to us and we have not built and have had this much success without having these intelligent people who choose to come and work in Elizabeth. Mr. Trujillo stated that it is very important for us and part of what we believe that we have to reward and retain high performing people and we have the people. Mr. Trujillo asked if we are perfect and stated that no we are not perfect. Mr. Trujillo asked who is perfect and stated that no one is perfect and no district is perfect and all have issues. Mr. Trujillo stated that if you don't try to work through them you are not going to get anywhere. Mr. Trujillo stated that the lady who said City Hall and the Board of Education are two different animals is right and couldn't be more accurate. Mr. Trujillo stated that we don't clean streets, we don't fill potholes, we don't put out fires and no we don't do that but we do something much bigger than that. Mr. Trujillo stated that we do something that they could never do because we educate children and we affect lives. Mr. Trujillo stated that he doesn't educate anyone except his own children. Mr. Trujillo stated that it is their job to make sure we have the best and brightest within the district and that is what they are trying to do. Mr. Trujillo stated that he would love to meet with all of them if they really want to meet and have a discussion and he personally looks forward to it.

Mr. Monteiro thanked everyone for taking time out of their schedules to be here and thanked all the administrators and staff for coming tonight. Mr. Monteiro stated that what is important to recognize here tonight is that we are voting on the budget for the Elizabeth school district. Mr. Monteiro stated that he is not running away from his vote either. Mr. Monteiro stated that this is the fourth largest district in the State of New Jersey with over 26,000 students and more than 4,000 employees. Mr. Monteiro stated that we are the only large urban school district that has not been taken over by the State of New Jersey. Mr. Monteiro stated that Newark, Jersey City, and Paterson have been taken over by the State of New Jersey. Mr. Monteiro stated that we have a Senator and City Mayor who give this Board of Education no credit for what it has done in the past twelve years in transforming this system from one of the worst school systems in the State of New Jersey to the No. 1 Urban School District in the State of New Jersey. Mr. Monteiro stated that he has two perspectives on this because he was born and raised in the City of Elizabeth and has dedicated half of his life to public service in the City of Elizabeth. Mr. Monteiro stated that he served for eight years on City Council many times fighting the very people here today he now supports here because he didn't understand them. Mr. Monteiro stated that before you judge someone you should get to know them and before you talk about them you should talk to them and that's the lessons he learned from his parents who he thanks every day. Mr. Monteiro stated that he looks at the new immigrants that have come to this City and when the Portuguese came to this City behind them was already the Irish and the Mayor that he knew then was Mr. Tom Dunn. Mr. Monteiro stated that there have been only two mayors in this City in his lifetime and Mayor Tom Dunn was a kind man and a gentleman. Mr. Monteiro stated that when he was sixteen years old he asked Mayor Dunn why the Portuguese community weren't getting any jobs in City Hall or at the Elizabeth Board of Education and he responded that he can't do for you what your community has to do for themselves. Mr. Monteiro stated that Mayor Dunn said you have to vote and you have to have a voice. Mr. Monteiro stated that was the difference that woke him up that day and he recognized and realized that Mayor Dunn and the Irish community at the time only made up about 30% of the population of the City of Elizabeth yet many positions at City Hall and the Board of Education probably had ethnic origin of Irish. Mr. Monteiro stated that at point he recognized their voice much like the people here tonight. Mr. Monteiro stated that why he loves this City so much and why he still loves public service so much is because of people like you. Mr. Monteiro stated that those who come to this country seeking a better life and those who come here seeking a better way and better opportunity for their children are doing just like his parents did and just like probably each and every one of your parents did. Mr. Monteiro stated that what Mr. Trujillo said is absolutely right that this City is clear that it is divided. Mr. Monteiro stated that it is divided in so many ways and it is so unfortunate for our City in the United States of America. Mr. Monteiro stated that we are not united in this City and

it is pretty clear. Mr. Monteiro stated that there are folks who come and sit here with their t-shirts to ridicule the President and it is their First Amendment Right to do that. Mr. Monteiro stated that it is his First Amendment Right to say that it is offensive, disrespectful, and attacking a Latin American woman is offensive to the Latinos and that the Latin community also has a First Amendment Right. Mr. Monteiro stated that the President was elected to serve all the people in the City of Elizabeth.

Mr. Monteiro stated that it is important to remember that this Board of Education is about the children first and we have the No. 1 Urban School District in the State of New Jersey. Mr. Monteiro stated that when he was a councilman people were moving out of the City because our schools were failing. Mr. Monteiro stated that today our schools are the No. 1 Urban School System, three National Blue Ribbon Schools here in Elizabeth and more than any other city in the State of New Jersey, our test scores have been going up every year for seven years, and there are 26,000 students in uniforms. Mr. Monteiro stated that anyone who voted no on the budget here tonight is voting to cut the teachers and to cut the programs. Mr. Monteiro stated that this Board of Education is going to put the children and the City first. Mr. Monteiro stated that we are not going to run away from the fact that we are the top urban school system in the State of New Jersey. Mr. Monteiro stated that the staff and administrators work hard every single day and deserve what they get for working so hard and making this district No. 1. Mr. Monteiro stated that as Ms. Carreto, EEA President, said it's not just the teachers, it's the bus drivers, food service, secretaries, custodians, and every single person in this district that makes it work.

Mr. Neron thanked everyone for being here and joining us for this very difficult decision. Mr. Neron stated that it is a shame to see how divided the community really is. Mr. Neron stated that he wanted to encourage that we open our minds to understanding what diversity is really all about in a country that we serve here and we are here in the United States to serve our people. Mr. Neron stated that is why we ran and that is why we got elected and we ran to serve the people first and foremost. Mr. Neron stated that he has been listening to his colleagues talk about the budget and people voting no on the budget. Mr. Neron stated that let's clarify what that means and when you vote no to a budget and you are part of an entire Board of Education or you vote yes it doesn't mean you don't want to see your district succeed or you don't want to see your teachers get funded or you want to cut programs. Mr. Neron stated that you don't agree necessarily with how the money is being spent in the layers of issues that the budget may have according to his own opinion and he is speaking for himself and possibly his colleagues. Mr. Neron stated that there is a figure, and asked Mr. Kennedy to help him to clarify, according to the State of New Jersey this district should have been raising the taxes at a 2% tax levy each and every year. Mr. Neron stated that the district chose not to for several years which then put us in a deficit and then also led us to have to cut services time and time again. Mr. Neron stated that last year the Board cut \$40 million and this year \$38 million and that is a lot of cuts that the district had to endure due to us not getting the necessary state aid. Mr. Neron stated that if the Board had not gone on this political route to basically compare their raising taxes to the City raising taxes and you can't compare apples to oranges and it is two different services as everybody has said here all evening. Mr. Neron stated that if they had done that and gradually raised the taxes it would not have been such a shortfall and we would not have had to cut over \$78 million worth of cuts over the past two years and that is a lot of programs that have been cut and a lot of staff that is not here. Mr. Neron stated that it is not that we are saying no to a budget and no to our teachers. Mr. Neron stated that we need our teachers and we want to strive to be the number one district in the country, not just in the State and not just in the urban district. Mr. Neron stated that in order to do that we have to properly spend our dollars. Mr. Neron stated that if he doesn't agree to spend the dollars it doesn't mean that he is against education or against supporting the teachers who work very hard each and every day. Mr. Neron stated that he doesn't necessarily agree with the way the dollars are being spent. Mr. Neron stated that is how the decisions have been rendered this evening and that is what you have seen. Mr. Neron stated that he knows that they will have more discussions about the budget but there needs to be transparency before he can vote on a budget and understand and properly digest a budget because he needs to clearly understand it and understand the dollars that we are spending. Mr. Neron stated that it is going to

the County Superintendent for approval and then it is going to come back to us so that doesn't mean we are stopping the district and we are not boycotting education, teachers, or services. Mr. Neron stated that is not what he was elected to do and we were elected here to serve and he thinks the people understand that. Mr. Neron stated that he doesn't want the wool to be pulled over your eyes for you to think leaving here this evening that there is a group of people who said no to education and no to a school budget. Mr. Neron stated that they don't necessarily agree with how the money is being spent. Mr. Neron stated that we sit here and talk to the Superintendent, we work with the Business Administrator, sit with the Comptroller and we make decisions and we try to understand how this stuff is being processed. Mr. Neron stated that there are people that have been sitting on this Board for many, many years and they understand the ins and outs of the budget, they understand the staff, the people who are currently working, they understand people who are not working, they understand that there are line items on the budget that some positions are being filled and some positions are not being filled, and there are a lot of questions to be asked. Mr. Neron stated that before you can just make a decision on a budget you have to study and understand the budget. Mr. Neron stated that please do not sit here and think that their representation is making careless decisions. Mr. Neron stated that they are not making careless decisions and they are making decisions based on their gut and based on what they understand to be the proper needs of the constituents that they serve and to children that they serve in this district. Mr. Neron stated that we have to make them the priority and that is the bottom line and he thinks that is what you are hearing from all sides. Mr. Neron stated that let's really make it the priority and we should have been doing that for several years. Mr. Neron stated that the City has raised the taxes year after year because they have needs that they need to meet. Mr. Neron stated that the economy has changed, things change and the same with the district. Mr. Neron stated that we can't sit here and start making political decisions on not raising taxes for several years and now we have to raise taxes. Mr. Neron stated that he wanted to be clear and he could not sit here and be silent and let people say that we are voting no on a budget and that is not the case. Mr. Neron stated that he thinks they are voting no on the way the budget is being spent and how it is being spent. Mr. Neron stated that they are going to work in their committees and we are going to work as your elected representation to make sure the money is properly being spent throughout the year. Mr. Neron stated that regardless whether he supports it or not he has to hold our administrators accountable and the people that work for us accountable to make sure they are doing what they need to do for the district.

Mr. Perreira thanked everyone for being here tonight and it is great to see this many people from our community being involved in this process. Mr. Perreira stated that this is important and this is the money that is going to fund everything that we do here for the next twelve months starting July 1st. Mr. Perreira stated that it is a very tough decision and he never takes it lightly. Mr. Perreira stated that he is a father of two boys that go to schools in our district. Mr. Perreira stated that many of the people that get affected because of the budget are people that he has seen by visiting schools and teach his children in some cases, and the first year that he came on the Board there was a cut in regards to staff that affected his own spouse. Mr. Perreira stated that he has never been scared of making the tough decisions and has always been cognizant of what is the end goal and that is to educate the children who go to the district including his own children. Mr. Perreira stated that the main thing that he wants everyone to understand, and he sits here as a father and as hopefully as a voice to those who elected him as well, is that his main goal is that your children, his children, and all the children leave here with the proper education ready to go out in the world and become better people and better citizens and be a positive influence in our community.

Mr. Perreira stated that he has to disagree with some of the things that have been said here because this process starts almost at the beginning of the year and is done by a very big group of competent individuals who are hired to make these decisions and then provide us with options and what they believe are the ways the district can move forward providing services with the moneys that we are allotted by the State and the City and so on. Mr. Perreira stated that when we are presented with this we first have to wait until March 1st when the state provides us with the money that they are going to provide the schools. Mr. Perreira stated that once that figure

comes in whatever has been done before that is really null and void. Mr. Perreira stated that you could have started a budget two years ago and it really bears no weight until you get the money that the State is going to provide because it is over 70% of what we receive to be able to run this district. Mr. Perreira stated that it is a lengthy process and takes lots and lots of hours that are put in by the assistant superintendents, principals, and members of the administration including the Superintendent and Business Administrator. Mr. Perreira stated that it is not an easy process and in no way, shape, or form should be taken lightly.

Mr. Perreira stated that everyone who sits up here tonight was given a time and was afforded the opportunity to sit down and review what is going to be presented to the State and to the Department of Education in order to understand and answer any questions and opinions that they may have had. Mr. Perreira stated that it was not a process that was rushed in any way and everybody had the opportunity to at least digest it and come up with questions and come up with versions of opinions to be at least knowledgeable enough to make a decision tonight. Mr. Perreira stated that it is not to say that they may or may not be supporting education. Mr. Perreira stated that they cannot sit here and say that they were not afforded the opportunity and given the proper timing and proper information to at least be able to sit down with the Superintendent and with everybody from the administration to be able to at least ask the questions that they have. Mr. Perreira stated that he doesn't agree with that statement. Mr. Perreira stated that you should understand that this process is a step towards the budgeting process and if you have questions later then you can ask them. Mr. Perreira stated that if you don't support the budget in May then you can vote no for it. Mr. Perreira stated that the point is that you can't sit here and say that what you voted for is essentially saying that you don't agree with anything that was presented. Mr. Perreira stated that what was presented is to be able to run the district and that is what we are trying to do. Mr. Perreira stated that what we are trying to do is run a district and make sure our children are educated.

Mr. Perreira stated that we talk about politicizing these budgets and just so you understand the 2% he asked if anybody has any idea what 2% of our budget is when we raise taxes for 2%. Mr. Perreira stated that it has no impact on a \$38 million deficit, none. Mr. Perreira stated that it is about \$2 million. Mr. Perreira stated that we raised it one year that he has been on the Board and everybody likes to say that we politicized the budget. Mr. Perreira stated that it was politicized when that first bill from the City of Elizabeth went with a letter stating that the Board of Education raised your taxes. Mr. Perreira stated that to him that is politicizing the issue and that becomes the problem that we have here in the City. Mr. Perreira stated that if you talk about separation and division that is the problem and if we keep fighting each other that is not going to make any solution and it's not going to make it any easier to move forward and to make great things on both sides of this City and is not going to work. Mr. Perreira stated that we have to come together somehow and find a way, communicate and not fight, not argue, not scream and not yell and let's sit down and let's discuss. Mr. Perreira stated that when you talk about politicizing let's look at both sides and let's look at everyone and say that we understand we shouldn't have done this or we understand we should do that but at the end of the day we can't start pointing fingers because it is never going to end.

Mr. Perreira stated that in the past when we have decided to not raise taxes it has been prudent to not raise taxes because people are struggling to pay taxes. Mr. Perreira stated that every time he has gone out during campaign season and spoken with the elderly that still own homes that is what they tell you that they are being pushed out of their house and can't afford it anymore and that they raised their children here and they are hurting. Mr. Perreira stated that we have done the prudent things but every time we've come ahead to try to do the right thing for the district and for his job here as a Board member to make sure we provide the education for our children and therefore we have to have the budget to do so. Mr. Perreira stated that is the only way to do it and make tough decisions. Mr. Perreira stated that don't sit here and say that he politicizes something when it clearly starts and ends when these bills go out and it starts with a letter coming from a specific representative in the Mayor's office. Mr. Perreira stated that we can't sit here and start saying that it is two separate things and it is being politicized and you have to be able to respond and understand and educate people why it is being done and how it is being done. Mr. Perreira stated that if he as a parent has to raise taxes in order to make sure that our

children are able to get a proper education he will. Mr. Perreira thanked everyone for being here and stated that anyone who has any questions or concerns can reach out to him.

On a motion by Mr. Trujillo, seconded by Mr. Perreira, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Castillo-Ospina, Messrs. Monteiro, Neron, Perreira, Rodriguez, Trujillo, Mrs. Amin – 9

Negative: None

Harold E. Kennedy, Jr.
School Business Administrator/Board Secretary