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## SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Scranton School Board of Directors held a Special Meeting for General Purposes on Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 8:30pm via Zoom.

President Gilmartin called the meeting to order at 9:30pm. (Pledge of Allegiance was held at the 7:00pm Operations Committee Meeting)

Roll Call: By the Secretary.

Present: Directors Cruz, Dempsey, Fox, Hume, Malloy, McAndrew, Welby, Yanni and President Gilmartin.

Absent: All present.

President Gilmartin now offered condolences for Pvt. Stephen Sunday and the family of Susan Patte, former Board President, for the loss of her grandson.

Ms. Gilmartin announced that the Scranton Inauguration Committee is having a flag raising, a joint initiative with the city of Oakland, California, and our own Ryan Hnat was chosen to work an artist from California to design the flag. Ms. Gilmartin congratulated and thanked Mr. Hnat for always representing our district so well.

Ms. Gilmartin announced the purpose of the meeting is for General Purposes and has been duly advertised.

Public Comment:

Courtney Novak, teacher, spoke about the surplus found in the budget that was discussed at a recent board meeting and select raises were given out. Ms. Novak urged the board to look at other ways to settle the teachers' contract, amend the recovery plan as quality teachers are leaving the district and asked where in the recovery plan is the section to retain quality teachers and attract new ones.

Maria Hurst, teacher, spoke about the possible return to school and expressed her concerns of the cases of COVID and returning to school at this time. Mrs. Hurst said her students are attending virtually and are actually doing better learning from home.

Patricia Carr, teacher, spoke of the new PDE guidelines to return to in-person instruction and because the district is getting closer to school staff being vaccinated she is asking that for her safety and the safety of her students if we can please wait until everyone is vaccinated before returning to in-person instruction. Ms. Carr is also concerned that not all staff members will be vaccinated.

Holly Meade, teacher, spoke of the recovery plan and believes that due to so many fluctuating factors because of the pandemic, including enrollment and increasing taxes, this is the time to amend the recovery plan. Mrs. Meade suggested postponing the closing of elementary schools until the 2022/2023 school year as it is vital to get the students back on track after this difficult time. Mrs. Meade suggested that each individual building have its

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own hybrid return to school plan and also a meeting for Northeast families and staff as not all families have been informed of all of the work the district has done for the safe return to Northeast. Mrs. Meade also suggested that at least two directors meet with the SFT contract negotiator as a fresh take on this issue is needed.

(Suzanne Furey signed up but was not in attendance)

Jennifer Zaleski, teacher, thanked Scranton Police Department and On & On for providing Isaac Tripp Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with virtual field trips. Ms. Zaleski also spoke about the return to school in a hybrid model and urged the board to continue their path to protect the families and staff and wait for a vaccine including the 90 days after receiving the vaccine as it could greatly impact staff. Ms. Zaleski added that children are not part of a vaccine plan yet and how will we prevent the spread of the virus to families and district staff if they are not vaccinated.

Rosemary Boland, SFT President, spoke of the low number of 70 cases of Covid in the district and believes that is because the district has been remote learning and people have not been going in and out of buildings. Ms. Boland believes that now is not the time to abandon common sense as no one will be truly safe until everyone is vaccinated. Ms. Boland does not think we should mess this up now when we are so very close to being vaccinated and the vaccine does indeed need time to enter the body and do its job, we have to follow the science. Ms. Boland also voiced concern of sanitation measures and supplying students and staff with fresh water when drinking fountains have been turned off during this pandemic. Ms. Boland wants everyone back to school but it must be done safely adding that if ten teachers get sick, there aren't enough substitutes under the best of conditions and we certainly won't have substitutes during a pandemic.

Ms. Boland closed by urging the board to commend all the paraprofessionals who have been going into homes, putting themselves at risk adding that they have earned a contract and a raise.

(Haley Passero signed up but was not in attendance)

Following public comment the following motions were presented:

F-1 Motion to approve the Business Manager Employment Contract as outlined in the attached.

[..\..\Downloads\Business Manager Contract 1.14.21.pdf](#)

Director Cruz made a motion, seconded by Director Welby. Motion passed with seven (7) affirmative and two (2) negative. Directors McAndrew and Yanni voted in the negative.

ON THE QUESTION:

Director Yanni absolutely supports compensating the administrators of the Scranton School District and as chair of the Budget and Finance Committee she has tremendous respect for the current Business Manager's work ethic, his dedication to the students of the Scranton School District however she feels a vote tonight to increase the salaries of administrators when we recently raised taxes, and when our teachers have not been fairly compensated, who are the foundation of our district, she feels it would be detrimental to our progress as

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this board tries to move the district forward and if we continue to build up the top of our pyramid when our foundation is crumbling, she doesn't see how that strengthens our district. Mrs. Yanni believes once there is a contract in place with our educators, which is top priority, that's when we move ahead to correct these mistakes in the administration's compensation.

Director Hume asked if it is true that Mr. Laffey is operating without an Assistant Business Manager, and as she understands it Mr. Laffey stepped up when Mr. Brazil resigned and now we do not have an Assistant Business Manager.

Superintendent McTiernan said that is correct.

Director Hume also understands we don't have a food service manager in place.

Mrs. McTiernan said Mr. Laffey also oversees the food service department.

Director Hume asked if Mr. Laffey is doing the work of three people.

Mrs. McTiernan responded that is correct.

Director Hume asked if that has resulted in any savings for the district since he's been wearing three hats.

Mrs. McTiernan said yes it has and believes Dr. Finan has those figures.

Dr. Candis Finan responded that it has resulted by the end of 2021 a savings of \$515,000.

Director Hume asked if there are any plans in the immediate future to replace any of these people.

Mrs. McTiernan replied not at this time.

Director Hume thinks that since the position of the Assistant Business Manager is vacant, and she shares Director Yanni's enormous respect for Mr. Laffey, she has never not known him to not have the answers to a question but he would be working well in excess of 50 hours/week, he would be quite justified to ask for us to maybe fill the position of Assistant Business Manager in order to make sure that probably one of the most crucial positions in the district that affects everybody, would that be an amount greater than the amount of the salary increase we're putting forward at this time.

Mrs. McTiernan agreed.

Director Hume expressed that she wishes with all her heart a contract negotiated with the SFT and the teachers deserve a contract and she hopes that as they move forward with the negotiations with the various parties that we do the Act 93, the SEIU 32BJ, and the SFT; she wants it done but have we not already presented two contracts to the SFT that they have not found acceptable.

Mrs. McTiernan responded that is correct.

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Director Hume asked if we are in negotiations with the SFT at the moment.

Mrs. McTiernan said yes, that is correct.

Director Hume said there has to be mutual agreement to this and the recovery plan is pretty clear and she's heard people are tired of hearing that the savings have to be found within the contract, she thinks that possibly the only solution is being weary of hearing that the salary increases have to be found in the contract would be for us all to work together in the best possible way to find those savings within the contracts so we can give the teachers the raises that they wish but she doesn't see the connection between an ongoing negotiation which we all wish would be successfully concluded to the mutual benefit of the teachers and the district and as a contract for a person who is doing three jobs at the same time it seems to her they are separate matters and with all respect, she feels to conflate those two issues is to not deny the genuine low morale and the distress of our teachers but denying or not passing this contract for Mr. Laffey will not remedy the situation, she feels the only remedy for this situation is for good faith negotiations to continue for the benefit of all concerned.

Director McAndrew asked when was the last time we looked for a Food Service Manager or Assistant Business Manager; when was the last time it was posted or interviewed and how proactive were we.

Mrs. McTiernan could not answer at this time and she does not remember in her time posting for a Food Service Manager and as far as an Assistant Business Manager, she asked Mr. Laffey when we last posted for that position.

Mr. Laffey does not recall the date but it has been budgeted for since the vacancy opened in 2018 and he believes it was posted twice and they were unsuccessful finding an appropriate candidate.

Director McAndrew said his issue with a lot of these openings is that we interview people, we don't hire anybody or we offer it to one person and they come back and say no and then we don't interview anymore and we don't hire the next best candidate; and who knows next time we interview we're going to get anybody better than the second best. Mr. McAndrew thinks Pat Laffey is the best in the business, there's nobody he respects more, nobody that works harder in the district and his position is the most important in the district and unfortunately we didn't get him any help and he absolutely wants to give him the raise but right now it's a timing thing, we just raised our taxes \$1.7 million extra during a pandemic when the average income of our residents is around \$30,000. Mr. McAndrew added we're giving \$18,000 raises to multiple administrators and it's not that it isn't justified or they don't deserve it but it's not the time right now. Mr. McAndrew said he will be voting no adding that it's nothing personal but he thinks going forward, and these positions that we keep open, is it that we're not finding the best candidate or we're not finding the candidate that the administration wants; and he hopes we start looking for help and filling these positions and stop waiting so long.

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Director Cruz asked Mrs. McTiernan that, theoretically, if we did hire an Assistant Business Manager and Food Service Manager that would be thousands of dollars more in a salary compared to what Mr. Laffey's proposed salary adjustment will be?

Mrs. McTiernan said yes and asked Mr. Laffey what we have budgeted for, in the budget for an Assistant Business Manager.

Mr. Laffey responded the salary alone is around \$80,000 plus the impacted PSERs, FICA and health care package.

Mrs. McTiernan responded that alone is the Assistant Business Manager and Mr. Laffey has been filling the role of Food Service Manager.

Mr. Laffey added that the role of Food Service Manager has historically been performed by the Assistant Business Manager.

Director McAndrew asked that if this is a five year contract are we not going to fill those positions in the next five years or will we potentially look to hire those positions in the next five years and incorporate those new salaries.

President Gilmartin said she feels they are having two separate conversations and they are On the Question right now of Mr. Laffey's contract of the Business Manager and thinks they are having a staffing discussion.

Director McAndrew said that the teacher's contract was also brought up.

President Gilmartin thinks it is appropriate to a budget conversation and thinks they are getting off track, this is a budget expense, they understand the parameters of this contract, she understands there are different schools of thoughts on this, they can each weigh their own pros and cons, they have to vote as they each see is appropriate and move on. Ms. Gilmartin doesn't know that debating this contract and the staffing needs of the school district are the same conversation.

Director McAndrew said he was just relaying what was brought up, just asking questions on what was already brought but he understands.

Director Yanni reiterated that this is not personal and she would like to see these raises happen or the corrections happen once we have a contract in place with our educators and that is when she thinks that would be the appropriate time to do it.

Director Fox asked Dr. Finan to speak in regards of where we stand as a district and where we stand in regards to our administration. Ms. Fox said we have a board of nine because we all have different opinions, experiences and thought processes but she knows all nine of them want a teacher's contract. Ms. Fox asked Dr. Finan how important the current administration team we have is to getting us through this recovery plan and into a place of financial stability and also asked if we fail at this recovery plan where would we be as a district where there won't even be a teacher's contract; how important is this administration team to us as a district and to Dr. Finan as our recovery officer.

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Dr. Finan replied that when she arrived in the Scranton School District she wasn't sure what she would find but she has grown to absolutely respect Mr. Laffey's ability beyond what she ever imagined she would find in Scranton with the incredibly dysfunctional system that she found; she found one shining star and it was Mr. Laffey. Dr. Finan says that from the bottom of her heart adding that he works incredibly hard and is one of the hardest working people she has ever seen. Mr. Laffey worked all through the holidays to get the AFR done, to get the budget to PDE on time adding that Scranton is one of two districts that actually has to do a calendar year budget but tip toe through the fiscal year budget and it's not easy. Mr. Laffey has an amazing ability to do that and if the district lost Pat Laffey they would have to close the doors as there is no one that can step in his shoes and she means that sincerely. Mr. Laffey has counted every penny as she has counted every penny and he has helped move this district to where it was millions of dollars negative in the fund balance and the district is in a positive now and that doesn't just happen. It comes from dotting the I's and crossing T's and counting pennies and watching every purchase order and watching every code of items so they're properly coded. Mr. Laffey is one of the best and the district is very lucky to have him in Scranton and she never thought he would rival the Business Manager that she worked with for 24 years but he does. Dr. Finan added that this is a very small raise to a man who is holding the district together single handedly, he has never asked for an assistant, he has never asked for help. Mr. Laffey handed out over 100,000 meals when the district closed, he did that by himself, he didn't ask anyone for help and he won't ask for help; he'll just work through the night and when she says that a district of this size would have a whole team in a Business Office, Scranton has one person. Dr. Finan is not saying to hire a team, she is just saying they are doing an absolutely phenomenal job in Scranton with a handful of people who wear multiple hats and she thinks he deserves a contract, it is a law and he has well earned it. Dr. Finan said that we have saved \$515,000 of real money and that is what is helping us to get to that place in recovery. It has been a long road, the deficit was built over time and we're not going to get there in 3 months, 6 months or even a year but we are on the path and Mr. Laffey is a major portion why we're on that path.

President Gilmartin said she would always be happy to expound on the virtues of Pat Laffey but she thinks it is important to note that this is not a merit based salary adjustment, this is appropriate as Dr. Finan noted by law that the Business Manager should have a contract. Ms. Gilmartin added that she did her own little research and it seems as though Business Managers in other districts do have contracts and it makes sense to her what she has learned about the negotiations process and bargaining units that the Business Manager and the Human Resources Director would stand apart as does the Superintendent, this is all making sense to her, but thinks it's very important that this is about paying these positions absent of the individuals who are doing wonderful jobs on the appropriate salary schedule.

Dr. Finan agreed adding the fact that Mr. Laffey is handling three positions and we could be paying out \$300,000 but you're not paying that out and it is about the position and the position should be paid the salary and frankly she thinks it is one the district can afford and she wouldn't be able to recommend if we couldn't afford it but the Superintendent is recommending it and we have analyzed the budget and we can afford it.

Motion passed with seven (7) affirmative and two (2) negative. Directors McAndrew and Yanni voted in the negative.

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ALSO

F-2 Motion to approve the Director of Human Resources Employment Contract as outlined in the attached.

[..\Resolutions\Director of Human Resources Mgr Contract 1.14.21.pdf](#)

Director Cruz made a motion, seconded by Director Welby.

ON THE QUESTION:

Director McAndrew asked Dr. Finan about the Superintendent recommending these raises and he thought that Dr. Finan asked the board about it and sent an email on Monday, the day of the meeting.

Dr. Finan responded that she did but she cannot make that recommendation, she has to make the recommendation to the Superintendent, the Superintendent officially makes the recommendation to the Board. Dr. Finan said she did the research, she did the recommendation, looked at all the data and yes she's recommending it but officially any recommendation that goes on the board packet comes from the Superintendent.

Director McAndrew responded he was just curious because Dr. Finan asked them in an email.

Dr. Finan said yes, she did the homework behind it.

President Gilmartin added that the motion indicates that this is a recommendation of the Personnel Committee and the Superintendent. Ms. Gilmartin also added that she spoke with Mrs. McTiernan that there may be some discrepancies with the title of this position and there may be some internal documents that use a different organizational chart and different titles from a previous administration. Ms. Gilmartin clarified that the documents will be brought in-line with this contract.

Mrs. McTiernan agreed that they will be changing all of the Chief names to Directors which coincides with Pennsylvania titles so this position was formally called Chief of Human Resources and it will now be Director of Human Resources and they will be changing the names on those documents that exist but the job description will not change.

Solicitor Audi reminded Ms. Gilmartin of an amendment she was going to make.

President Gilmartin now asked for an amendment to the vacation section to read Policy 337; to omit (3) three weeks' vacation and insert Policy 337.

Director Hume made the motion, seconded by Director Cruz and motion for amendment to change that language passed with (8) eight affirmative and (1) one negative. Director McAndrew voted in the negative.

Final roll call on the amended motion passed with seven (7) affirmative and two (2) negative. Directors McAndrew and Yanni voted in the negative.

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ALSO

F-3 Motion to Approve the SEIU 32BJ Agreement for the term 2021-2023 as outlined in the attached.

Director Cruz made a motion, seconded by Director Malloy; motion passed unanimously on roll call.

ON THE QUESTION:

President Gilmartin asked Solicitor Audi to give a few highlights of what this new contract includes and the process by which we got here.

Attorney Audi said this is a contract that provides for some step movement, 50 cents/hour and 25 cents/hour increases, some fair raises and a change in the healthcare plan where the union has accepted a referenced-based pricing plan which enabled us to actually provide the salary increases that are in this contract and as they all know the recovery plan requires that the money is found within the contract itself and they did that jointly with the union accepting the reference-based pricing. Mr. Audi added that he has been negotiating contracts for 30 years and he commended everyone involved in this as this was an extraordinary professional exchange of ideas and needs where they literally discussed for hours at a time and there was mutual respect and mutual understanding of what needed to happen and consequently they were able to come up with a contract that they believe is fair to the employees and the bargaining unit of the 32BJ SEIU as well as fair to the needs of this school district, its tax payers and the students.

President Gilmartin remembers when the last contract was negotiated with the SEIU the same sentiment was shared and they certainly appreciate the efforts of the SEIU and their membership in working together with the district for the good of all and thanked everyone and the negotiations team for leading a good process.

Director Hume understands that this contract has been ratified by the union today.

Mrs. McTiernan responded that is correct.

NEW BUSINESS:

Director Hume asked Mr. Gentilezza how the response has been with the Covid vaccine questionnaire.

Mr. Gentilezza said they have about 740 staff members that completed the pre-questionnaire that's required by Hometown Health Clinic of NEPA that they need for pre-screening and he believes they're going to do follow-ups and more inquiry based off of that information and contact all staff members.

Director Cruz asked that if all goes well hopefully by early February is when tentatively they're planning to do the rollout.



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Mr. Gentilezza said we have to move into Phase 1B; we are still in Phase 1A and hopefully as soon as we get into Phase 1B we're on the top of the list so he is looking at around that timetable.

Director Fox spoke about Pennsylvania Fair Funding and a letter going out to Governor Wolf and if anyone is interested in signing to contact the board through their email.

Director Hume asked Director Fox to email the letter to the board.

President Gilmartin asked Mrs. Orr if there has been any public written comment.

Mrs. Orr announced that written comment has been received and sent to the board in advance of the meeting from: Craig Santoski, Angie Krieger, Kelly Butler, Lindsey Stevens, Jeff Boris and Ilkia Flores.

[Written Comment 1.14.21.pdf](#)

There being no further business a motion to adjourn was made by Director Hume, seconded by Director Dempsey and the meeting adjourned at 10:28pm. (The board now met for an Operations Committee meeting).

By: \_\_\_\_\_