



# HOBOKEN BOARD OF EDUCATION

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October 29, 2020

To the Members of Hoboken City Council:

We, each of the duly elected Trustees and members of the Hoboken Public School District Board of Education, are compelled to address the City Council in connection with the meeting held on Wednesday, October 21, 2020, at which resolution CL2 was to be voted on. We cannot allow what we heard and witnessed to go without comment.

To put it simply, the majority of the council spread misinformation, engaged in one-sided self-aggrandizement, and actively participated in an imbalanced beration of the public it is elected to serve.

Resolution CL2, known to be unequivocally illegal at least 24 hours before the meeting by its drafter and sponsor, should have been pulled at the outset of the meeting, thereby saving everyone's time and avoiding the display that now risks leaving our public divided. Regrettably, it appeared to many watching that night as an orchestrated political move in advance of next year's mayoral race using the Hoboken Public School District and the three Hoboken charter schools as pawns.

On a more granular level, there were a number of statements made that were inaccurate and/or false, and therefore must be addressed:

- We and many others were recipients of a multitude of detailed and completely misleading and incorrect iterations of the alleged charter school funding formula in advance of the meeting. While much effort was put into these communications, the act of undertaking and purporting to replicate this very complex task displayed an oversimplistic understanding of what the State does every year, an annual task that is never quite the same in any given year. Specifically, the versions received from the council member did not capture, and could not have possibly captured, accurate data on the District's special needs or economically disadvantaged population, which it then presumed to compare, in all its intricacies, to that of the charter schools. For example, the analyses received completely overlooked the cost associated with one special needs child who requires an out of district placement along with related services and transportation, and that the cost of this is easily equal to the per pupil cost of five charter school students. It also neglected to include the need for ELL teachers for English as a Second Language, and the need for Licensed Clinical Social Workers for our homeless families and those faced with trauma. Each of these specific student service realities causes the per pupil rate to be higher and the need for funding to be greater for the District. There was, in short, no true understanding or allotment for the economic or social and emotional needs of our students as compared to other schools and the costs associated therewith. While the charter schools' funding boils down to a per pupil

calculation on paper as determined by the New Jersey Department of Education, a comparative per pupil analysis is not possible between PK-12 public school districts and charter schools.

In fact, while the financial analysis was presented as fulsome and official, it was wrought with flaws and, on a higher level, failed to take into account the impact of State aid calculations in the overall funding formula for the District. The analysis done was so fixated on the charter schools' position in this matter that it subtracted the PILOT funds from the tax levy rather than budgeting these funds where they rightfully should have been budgeted, thereby resulting in a \$55,000 gift to the charter schools.

In order to begin understanding these many intricacies, we welcome you all to spend some time in the District schools (when it is safe to do so) and see what we are providing for all of the children we serve. Spend time with the students and staff in the Applied Behavior Analysis classrooms for children with severe special needs, the multiple disabled classrooms, the therapeutic and life skills programs, or behavioral disabilities classrooms. These constant emails regarding the formula are frankly lost time for both the drafter and the reader as they cannot accurately address the formula without understanding all of the issues and, at the end of the day, are not within the Council's purview to undertake.

- Toward the end of the meeting, several Council Members called for the City to take this money back and use this so-called "gift" money to fund services and recreational youth sports. There are two unfortunate issues here.

First, referring to the the PILOT money meant for the District as a "gift" ignores the obvious - that New Jersey funds public education primarily through property taxes, and PILOTs granted in the City and, in this case, with respect to 770 Jackson, denies the District the ability to levy taxes from this development. When PILOTs are agreed to, the City negotiates away the levied taxes that the Hoboken Public School District would normally have access to under traditional taxation, to utilize in supporting both the district and charter budgets. In 2016, the City Council recognized this and sought to right that wrong in order to address the additional burden the PILOT would put on Hoboken taxpayers with regard to school taxes. To now categorize this single offset to all of the other PILOTs which put tax levy beyond the District's reach, as a "gift," is inaccurate. It belies a deep blindness to where this City has left the District time and again in terms of tax revenue.

Second, the position that there is nothing available for the economically and socially disadvantaged children of our community ignores and undermines all of the programs that the Hoboken Public School District offers and has offered, including throughout the summer, often for free, to the children in the district and to those across the city. By purporting to take this money back and use it for programs that are undefined and which are neither as established nor have the reach that our programs have, is unfortunate. This act simply undermines all of the programs and opportunities that the District is already offering and we hope that to the extent the City Council is not aware

of these many programs, they would reach out to us for more information. We are more than happy to discuss all of the programs offered with each and all of you.

- Several Council Members appeared to take great offense in the language of the petition, which over 750 Hoboken citizens signed, and usage of the term “defund,” yet made no mention of, nor apparently had a problem with, the use of substantially the same verbiage in a number of letters and emails from charter school parents which stated that they wanted to stop the City from “eliminating funding” to the charter schools. This is an egregious example of the clear imbalance in favor of charter schools to the detriment of our traditional public schools. It is a tired narrative that is not lost on your constituents. If the City Council is so concerned by the charter schools’ finances, it should begin that query at the charter school level with a review of the charter schools’ financials or review their board meeting agendas and minutes, which are not available to the public, instead of scapegoating the Public School District who is continually asked to do more with less, and delivers.
- Finally, for a Council Member to question the Board of Education on accountability is offensive. Most City Council Members have never attended a Board of Education meeting, nor sought to work with our programs or schools, but meanwhile easily cast aspersions about something on which they have little to no education. The Council Member should first consider why the District has been put in the position it is in to have to raise taxes: namely, substantially increased population combined with blocked access to commensurate tax levy through the many PILOTed developments, before making such a simplistic and misleading comment. We should all be celebrating student enrollment growth and a strong, growing public school district. In addition, the Council Member should take some time to understand the role and similarly understand what the Board of Education does and how it does it, before taking these positions against the District serving the largest student population in Hoboken.

The Board of Education will continue to serve all children in this City fairly and in accordance with state requirements. We will continue to make all state mandated tuition payments to charter schools attended by Hoboken students. We will not allow the City Council to give the appearance that they can or will usurp the State’s power to do so or to use our positions or that of the parents’ as a pawn. We are interested in working with the City Council, where appropriate, for the continued progress of the district in a positive and collaborative way and we expect you to support the Hoboken Public School District for the services and education being provided.