

BOARD OF EDUCATION
(Official)

September 17, 2020
Elizabeth, New Jersey

The combined regular agenda and business meeting of the Board of Education was called to order on September 17, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. in the Multipurpose Room of the Donald Stewart Center for Early Childhood Education School No. 51. The Board is physically conducting the meeting at this location, however, in an effort to encourage social distancing and to preserve the health and safety of the Board, members of the public and the entire community and State, the meeting is open to the public using an on-line platform.

Board President Diane Barbosa presented the following statement at 6:40 p.m.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening. This is a combined regular agenda and business meeting of the Board of Education. Pursuant to New Jersey Statutes and the rules adopted by the Board of Education, notice of this meeting using an on-line platform was sent to The Star Ledger and Cablevision of Elizabeth on September 8, 2020. 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, New Jersey.

This meeting was previously noticed to be held in the Multipurpose Room of the Donald Stewart Center for Early Childhood Education School No. 51. The Board is physically conducting the meeting at this location, however, in an effort to comply with allowable social limits, encourage social distancing, and to preserve the health and safety of the Board members, the public, and the entire community and State, the meeting is open to the public using an on-line platform.

There will be an on-line public portion for citizens to address the Board. Participants for the public portion must register online up to the start of the meeting so that they may have the opportunity to speak. The public participation form states the name, email, and phone number of the person who wants to comment. Members of the public who prefer not to or do not have the means to participate using the online platform may continue to participate by emailing statements relative to agenda items and/or educational matters to the Secretary of the Board at kennedha@epsnj.org. All statements received will be read into the record during the meeting’s public comment portion. All emails must be submitted and received by the Secretary of the Board up to the start of the meeting and, as is always the case, must include the public member’s full name for the record. Each statement submitted by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration. The total time of public comment shall be limited to 60 minutes. Emails received but not read after the 60-minute duration will be spread in full in the Official Board Minutes of this meeting.”

Present: Charlene Bathelus (arr. 6:45 p.m.), Maria Carvalho, Iliana Chevres, Nathalie Hernandez (arr. 6:45 p.m.), Jerry Jacobs, Rosa Moreno-Ortega, Stanley Neron (via online platform), Stephanie Pestana, Diane Barbosa – 9

Absent: None

Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary Harold E. Kennedy, Jr., Chief of Operations Francisco Cuesta (via online platform), Co-General Counsel Jonathan Williams, Esq. of DeCotiis, Fitzpatrick & Cole, LLP (via online platform) and members of the community (via online platform) were present.

The President requests a motion to go into Private Session to consider matters exempt under the Open Public Meetings Act, specifically for discussion of personnel. The Board will reconvene in public and may add to the agenda.

A motion was made by Mrs. Pestana, seconded by Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, to go into private session at 6:43 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mmes. Pestana, Barbosa – 7

Negative: None

A motion was made by Mrs. Pestana, seconded by Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, to reconvene in public session at 8:56 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Hernandez, Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mmes. Pestana, Barbosa – 9

Negative: None

Mrs. Barbosa welcomed everyone and apologized for the time that we took. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the decisions, the guidance, and recommendations are all things that are so important and we need to take the time to make the right decisions that are appropriate for our students and for our staff. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we deliberated with the Superintendent, Board members, and our City Health Officer Mark Colicchio.

Mrs. Barbosa stated that beginning Monday, September 21, 2020 we will ask our instructional staff to teach from home remotely. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are taking steps to stagger the schedule of our support staff. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the Board is taking this action with the strong recommendation of our City Health Officer Mark Colicchio who was with us in deliberation. Mrs. Barbosa stated that food service will operate to continue to provide the breakfast and lunch program following a staggered schedule. Mrs. Barbosa stated that remote learning for students will continue as it is now. Mrs. Barbosa stated that tomorrow we continue to be in session and education continues. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are going to reopen on October 5, 2020 again at the recommendation of our City Health Officer. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the goal is to further reduce the number of the adults in our district buildings. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we have said from the outset that we will make decisions based on two major criteria, science and data. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the current data dictates that this is the best course of action today that we must take. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we will communicate further details to all of our staff and their representatives in the next two days with the details of the staggered schedule. Mrs. Barbosa stated that all of our recommendations are based on the health and safety and never forgetting the education of our students.

Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer gave the above announcement in Spanish.

Mrs. Barbosa welcomed everyone to our 2020-2021 school year. Mrs. Barbosa stated that this is Day 5 of our virtual learning and we have been in live communication with our teachers which have done a great job. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we appreciate our IT Department that is here with us today and stated that with remote learning there is a lot of work and a lot of computers. Mrs. Barbosa stated that they have staggered and brought together a planogram and developed an easier way for our parents to get to them and they will get to every parent and student that is having an issue.

Mrs. Barbosa asked if there were any comments from Board members.

Mrs. Moreno-Ortega stated that during National Hispanic Month we celebrate the contribution of more than 60 million Hispanic Americans to our culture and society. Mrs. Moreno-Ortega stated that Hispanic Americans are the largest minority group in the United States today. Mrs. Moreno-Ortega stated that generations of Hispanic Americans have consistently helped make our country strong and prosperous.

Mrs. Carvalho stated that she wanted to reiterate Board President Barbosa's apology to the public for making them wait. Mrs. Carvalho stated that she wants everyone to understand that the decisions that we have to make here we can not make quickly because people are waiting. Mrs. Carvalho stated that the decisions that we are making here tonight are decisions that are affecting every child in this district, every parent in this district, every teacher in this district, and everyone who walks through the door every day. Mrs. Carvalho stated that we needed to take the time to make the decision that we felt was in the best interest of everyone across the board. Mrs. Carvalho stated that we apologize that you are sitting at home and that you are waiting for us to come back to make decisions. Mrs. Carvalho stated that her phone has been blowing up with concerns about why are we taking too long, why aren't we faster, why are we making people wait. Mrs. Carvalho stated that we are making you wait because we need to make the right decision for the children of the City of Elizabeth. Mrs. Carvalho stated that we need you to understand that we did not create this pandemic but we are here together to make sure we get through this together. Mrs. Carvalho stated that our priority is our children and that has to be our priority. Mrs. Carvalho stated that we need you at home to understand that we need you to work with us and not against us to make this happen.

Mrs. Barbosa stated that for the impact of our decisions we know it and we feel it and that is why we take time to make the best decisions using what we learned from our outside community and that is the reality. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are nine brains here and we each have an impact on this community and we know it and we feel it. Mrs. Barbosa stated that this is the first week of school and everyone is working their hardest to ensure that the students stay on track. Mrs. Barbosa stated that to please have patience, schedules are out there, and teachers are putting everything together. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are going to do it one day at a time and we will get there together.

Mrs. Barbosa presented the following public participation statement.

"At this time, the meeting is open for public comment to those who have registered with the online participation form prior to this session. I shall call individuals to participate 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 60 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 participation 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.

If the 60 minute public comment period expires before all registered online participants have been called, remaining participants can email their statements to the Secretary of the Board at kennedha@epsnj.org and they will be spread in full in the Official Minutes of this meeting. The Secretary of the Board will read into the record all emails that have been submitted up to the start of the meeting. Each statement submitted by a participant shall be limited to three minutes in duration."

Mrs. Barbosa stated that she will call upon the participants in the order in which they registered on-line to speak.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the first public participant, Michelle Santos, to address the Board. Michelle Santos did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called upon the next public participant, Maria Lorenz, to address the Board.

Maria Lorenz spoke about problems with special education.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Christina Moreira, to address the Board.

Christina Moreira spoke about problems with remote learning and tech support.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments.

Mrs. Barbosa called upon the next public participant, Kason Little, to address the Board.

Kason Little spoke about problems with teachers' safety.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked him for his comments.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Elva Salgado, to address the Board. Elva Salgado did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Sheila Cuevas, to address the Board. Sheila Cuevas did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Angie Caraballo, to address the Board. Angie Caraballo did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Maria Paz, to address the Board. Maria Paz did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Zalaisha Mohammed, to address the Board. Zalaisha Mohammed did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Atef Elsayed, to address the Board. Atef Elsayed did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called upon the next public participant, Laura Saavedra, to address the Board.

Laura Saavedra spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Sierra Quijano, to address the Board.

Sierra Quijano spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Karen Simbaina, to address the Board.

Karen Simbaina spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Jason DeSousa, to address the Board.

Jason DeSousa spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked him for his comments.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Madeleine Bravo, to address the Board. Madeleine Bravo did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called upon the next public participant, Melanie Machuca, to address the Board. Melanie Machuca spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Fiona Joseph, to address the Board.

Fiona Joseph spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Fatima Singleton, to address the Board. Fatima Singleton did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Jessyca Villarreal, to address the Board. Jessyca Villarreal did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Iraklis Vogiatzidakis, to address the Board. Iraklis Vogiatzidakis did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called twice upon the next public participant, Pierre Francois, to address the Board. Pierre Francois did not respond.

Mrs. Barbosa called upon the next public participant, Katherine Beltran, to address the Board.

Katherine Beltran spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Danielle Fienberg, to address the Board.

Danielle Fienberg spoke about the CDC guidelines.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Danna Chacon, to address the Board.

Danna Chacon spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Rudy Joseph, to address the Board.

Rudy Joseph spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked him for his comments and called upon the next public participant, Miriam Ayala, to address the Board.

Miriam Ayala spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Yulieth Sanabria, to address the Board.

Yulieth Sanabria spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Luckerlie Barthelus, to address the Board.

Luckerlie Barthelus spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Lina Larrotta, to address the Board.

Lina Larrotta spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Ester Carrera, to address the Board.

Ester Carrera spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and called upon the next public participant, Selva Garcia, to address the Board.

Selva Garcia spoke in support of the Student Success Center.

Mrs. Barbosa called again upon Michelle Santos who was not able to respond earlier.

Michelle Santos spoke about remote learning for special needs.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked her for her comments and stated that there were no other public participants registered to address the Board.

Mrs. Barbosa stated that the emails received by the Secretary of the Board prior to the start of the meeting from people who did not want to participate in the audio portion of the meeting will be spread in full in the Official Minutes of this meeting.

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Carol Litchfield:

“Hi,

The reopening of schools has become a major concern, even more than before we opened. Teacher's medicals rescinded, despite most other doctors saying we shouldn't be in the buildings. Some people were approved to be home, yet others haven't heard anything or have to take a reduced salary or none. What's the rationale for paying for subs when you have willing staff eager to teach who already are being paid? It makes no sense. 5 buildings have now had to close due to COVID. I'm sure it's going to get worse. Why are our lives deemed so unimportant? It's not that we don't want to work, we just want to do it safely. Buildings are not safe to be in, as the past five days have shown us. Maybe you have a rationale for all this but from our perspective, with none given to us, it just seems as if we were not taken into consideration for the reopening process and that included our union not being present. Please, before more people get sick, before it becomes worse, consider what is best for EVERYBODY.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Karen Buchanan:

“Good evening board! I am starting my 33rd year in Elizabeth and am currently a teacher at school 5. We recently just shut down due to the Covid virus. You all keep talking about how safe our buildings are and what precautions and cleaning was done before we came back. I for one have seen something totally the opposite. My vents in my are black. My filters haven't been changed in months. I was a very healthy person prior to returning in September. When are these issues going to be addressed? Why do I have to keep going to work and breathing in unhealthy air knowing that you have stated that filters and vents were cleaned! MY HEALTH MATTERS!
And I gather because we are virtual (and virtual is the key word here) for an EBOE MEETING your life matters more than MINE and that's disgraceful! Come to My trailer and sit there for a day and just look at what I am breathing in everyday!”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Tonya Paul:

“Good evening Madam Superintendent, Madam President and esteemed Board of Education members.

As a 9th grade teacher, my biggest problem during the day is juggling multiple screens on teams, taking attendance, making sure my students have their cameras on and are actively participating in class. I do not have children that I have to worry about getting child care for and I do not have any serious underlying diseases that prevent me from being safe in my classroom. But just because I have the privilege of safety and security does not mean that my fellow teachers do. I am not filled with anxiety on a daily basis because I have to risk my life or risk losing my income. I do not have to watch my own children suffer because I can't be home with them while they are remotely learning. I am lucky.

My mother taught in Elizabeth for 30 years before she retired and one of the biggest lessons she taught me was that teachers have to stick together no matter what. Because if we don't, there will come a day when we will need someone to stick by us and no one will be there. So I'm sticking by colleagues. I will validate their fears while others dismiss them. I will empathize with their pain while others turn their heads. I will look at myself in the mirror tonight and know that I tried to make something in my world better. That I did not stand idly by while injustices take place. It may start with a letter to the board. But I will go wherever my colleagues need me to go. No one should be terrified of going to work when they can be equally effective at home.

You hired us to do a job. Please trust us to do it. There shouldn't be an "us vs you" right now. As educators, we should be united. But the more you ignore, the more you scoff, the more you placate some unknown entity that is driving your policy, the deeper the divide between us becomes. We WILL educate our students to the best of our ability because that's what we do. We just don't want risk ourselves and our loved ones to do it. At the very least, please let us choose what is best for us and our individual situations. There shouldn't be a cookie cutter solution to such a complex problem.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Edward King:

“Dear Board Members,

why aren't you meeting live and in person as a show of, 'we're all in this together' like teachers are expected to do?

Why has the technology/helpdesk/hardware department not informed the district staff that they have run out of laptops to exchange for outdated devices? Couldn't the slip of paper i filled out requesting a new laptop, in person behind Dwyer, been easily and efficiently filled out online? Why did i have to waste my time and put myself in a possibly health hazardous situation?”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Iraklis Vogiatzidakis:

“My question to the Board is twofold:

1. When will people who were previously granted their medical accommodation and resubmitted numerous times get their answer??
2. How many people have to be infected before you realize that this is serious and teachers can do everything from home like they do in other large districts i.e. Newark and Jersey City, and Paterson just to name a few.

Thank you.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Angela Monegro:

“Hello all,

I am writing this email to express my concern as I come to work every day in fear of being exposed to COVID-19. In the wake of hearing the three public schools in Elizabeth already having to close due to “possible” exposure in only ONE WEEK of schools opening, this email is written with great stress. I was turned down for my medical accommodation since students are not present in the building. However, it is now evident that the buildings are not safe even with adults. I do not feel safe coming to work, I am highly stressed on top of the fact that our jobs have become more stressful than usual due to navigating solely virtually. I ask you to please reconsider allowing staff to work from the safety of their own homes. This will in turn allow for a safer and more stress-free work environment. Allowing teachers to continue to provide the best for their students, without the added stress. Thank you for your time and consideration. Stay safe everyone.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from LaKiesh Jackson-Woodley:

"My name is LaKiesh Woodley and I am one of thousands of certified educators who has worked remotely since this fiasco began.

For 19 years, I'VE LOVED WHAT GOD HAS BLESSED ME TO DO IN MY STUDENT'S LIVES.

Through this pandemic, I've done what was REQUIRED by my district AND what's more, I've gone above and beyond, clocking countless hours, 7 days weekly and nearly 24 hours daily because of the HEART I have for my students and the responsibility I maintain for continuing to educate them through this madness. Ive gone above and beyond my districts requirements because I feel a personal responsibility to support their families through this pandemic as much as I can.

But in that, let's not forget that educators are actually people too and have continued to do all of this, while attempting to maintain the health and sanity of ourselves and our OWN families. Let's not forget that EDUCATORS are in the middle of this pandemic as well and feel the same pressures, fears and uncertainties as everyone else. I was horrified to see how educators went from being viewed as super heroes in March to being vilified once again and blamed for all the ills of the world in September.

We have only been in district buildings for 8 days at this point and already have started to see the beginnings of what is sure to be an EPIC failure of a restart.

There is so much yet unknown about this virus but what we DO know is that this thing is indiscriminate. Neither your age, race, nationality, socio-economic nor educational status will protect you from infection.

I wont attempt to understand all of the logistics associated with educators NOT coming into a building to teach but I do know that we are safer and more affective teaching from home. At the very least, we should be given the option.

There is absolutely no difference in teaching virtually from the desk at school and teaching virtually from the desk at home EXCEPT that the threat of contracting this potentially deadly virus is GREATLY increased if I'm sharing classrooms and common areas with individuals who I haven't already been quarantined with.

Trust me, WE WANT NOTHING MORE THAN TO BE BACK AT SCHOOL TEACHING. Face-to-face is less technologically complicated, offers less distractions, acts as a safe haven for those who need one, allows for hands-on learning and opens up creativity. Unfortunately, the nature of this virus is keeping us from that reality.

Clearly, if the schools aren't safe for children, they aren't safe for anyone else either. The last 8 days are a testament to that. It will only get worse from this point and the fallout will be horrendous.

Remember, we all go home daily....all over the state of new jersey and neighboring states....home to the waiting arms of our respective families.

Respectfully Submitted, But Concerned"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Sabrina Jagot:

"Hello all,

I am writing this email to express my concern as I come to work every day in fear of being exposed to COVID-19. In the wake of hearing, FOUR public schools in Elizabeth already having to close due to "possible" exposure in only ONE WEEK of schools opening, this email is written with great stress and anxiety. My medical accommodation was redacted due to students not present in the building. I come to work everyday under the assumption it is safe. However, it is now evident that the buildings are not safe even with just adults. I do not feel safe coming to work, I am highly stressed on top of the fact that our jobs have become more stressful than usual due to navigating multiple platforms and teaching solely virtually. I ask you to please reconsider allowing staff to work from the safety of their own homes. This will in turn allow for a safer and more stress-free work environment. Allowing teachers to continue to provide the best for their students, without the added stress. I am dedicated to teaching our students but the amount of stress and pressure I am feeling is overwhelming. Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate you and stay safe everyone."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Shari Gershenfeld:

"Good morning,

I have many concerns about being in the school to teach students that are at home. While I recognize that without students in the building, we are somewhat safer, I do not feel safe with the staff in the building either. The guidelines for this unknown, ever changing virus change frequently. And even though we have been 'told' that there are no safety concerns, no one has seen any proof of this. Sharing bathrooms with so many others is not my idea of staying safe. The most unbelievable part of this is that there is absolutely NO BENEFIT to teaching from school while the children are at home. I understand some feel the need to be at their school for many reasons, many staff members want to be home. The medical issues, as well as child care concerns should be enough. But what about people like me, who actually had a medical letter rescinded? I have been isolated and completely staying safe. Now I'm being forced into an indoor setting with many people. I have no idea what these people do outside of school. The inequality in how we are being treated is insane! Some get to stay home certain days for childcare, some teach from home for 2 days because the school has a case of covid. Obviously the fact is that there is no reason to be in the school to teach. This is an unprecedented time and no one knows the repercussions of this illness.

The staff has been treated unfairly in every way. I feel disrespected and scared every day. I've looked into early retirement and taking a leave, which is something I never would have done. Some teachers get to leave at 12:40, others have to stay in the building until 3:00. WHY??

Is the board going to wait for every school to get a case? Because I can tell you when that happens, I will be staying home for more than 2 days!!

Olga, board members, where is your common sense and humanity??
Disgusted!"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Daniel Maldonado:
"Dear Board members,

If find it ironic that you are meeting virtually from the comfort of your homes, when you are asking the teachers to go into the buildings, which is risky at best. As you are aware, we are only a few days into the school year, and even with all the precautions and protocols in place, four schools have had positive cases. If we were allowed to work remotely from home, then that number would most likely be zero. Why have us come in and risk our health, and the health of our families? It all boils down to trust, which you don't have for us. We should be allowed to work remotely if we desire to. You say "treat others the way you want to be treated", in the pledge, but when it comes down to it, those are empty words, as you really aren't practicing what you are preaching. Look out for the safety of all of us, and allow us to work remotely until this first marking period is over. Everything I am doing here, could be done from home with better internet speeds, better and safer ventilation, and no hour commute each way. At least give us the option of working from home remotely, as I'm sure there are teachers that live locally and would be willing to come in. Thank you for your time and attention in this matter."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Mieko Inghilleri:
"To whom it may concern:

I am writing in regards to our current work situation. It has become apparent in the last week or so that the plan to teach from our classrooms is not working out. Several schools have closed just in the first week of reopening due to COVID cases and the longer we are forced to work from our buildings rather than from our homes, the closures/numbers will only go up. I'm beginning to question the reason we are asked to be here each day if we can teach remotely from our homes the exact same way and we have no students coming into our buildings to teach. This is putting teachers' health and wellness at risk unnecessarily and this "return to a sense of normalcy" is feeling far from normal with all the rules and regulations in place.

In fact, I believe I can be more efficient working from home because my WIFI connection is more reliable with much less people on the network. Letting us work from home would help alleviate some of the wifi connectivity issues we have been experiencing in addition to providing a safe work environment. In addition, those of us that rely on the AM/PM programs and others for extra money will be losing that this year so it would be helpful to allow us to work from home to save some money on gas and travel. I drive an hour each way to work every day; if we worked from home my commute time could be used for planning lessons, grading, preparing myself to teach, etc. since we are only given a 30 minutes prep per

day to do this now. That is unrealistic. I have never worked so many hours in my life off the clock. This is causing so much stress and anxiety amongst the teaching staff, at least we could have some peace of mind working from home.

Please consider allowing us to work from home, as it is the best choice in the current circumstance for the safety of the staff and logistics of remote learning.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Joseph Troiano:

“good Morning -

How many schools have to close before we are finally told that we can work from home? We are risking our health in buildings where the vent systems have not been addressed (cleaned and maintained). I have concerns about bringing the virus home to my family.

I personally am experiencing financial concerns as there are no programs for teachers to earn overtime pay. This was an important part of our budget providing necessary money for my family. When we were allowed to work from home I saved the money from gas and tolls so this assisted my situation. In addition, the on-line teaching requires much more work for all teachers. I typically spend an extra 2 to 3 hours a day working to complete necessary tasks for my teaching. Instead I am required to spend that amount of time commuting. I would gladly devote this time to my work if I was able to work from home. What about all the teachers with young children at home who are learning on line? They are allowed to stay at home while the rest of us have to be in our buildings. This is not equitable., Please address these concerns at your meeting tonight.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Nick Afflitto:

“It's been obvious to anyone who has been paying attention, that things were not going to get back to normal this school year. The idea that students could be back in buildings for in person learning was never going to succeed, and this is a fact that has already been proven across the country only one week or so into the school year. If we listen to medical experts, and we should, we know that a properly implemented vaccine or therapeutics which would render this virus less dangerous are further off than most would like to admit. Out of all of the perspectives I've heard about this situation that we are in, one idea seems to make the most sense in both keeping people safe, and getting to the end of this as quickly as possible. We must be honest with ourselves and each other. So here is some honesty. The job we are doing in school right now, is completely possible from home. There is nothing I am accomplishing by attending my building everyday that I could not accomplish from my personal computer at home. By sending thousands of employees to work, you are spreading the virus. Let me be clear. When I say you, I am referring to the Elizabeth Board of Education. How ironic that you are reading this letter at a virtual meeting, while I am writing you this letter from my school. There are many teachers who opted to extend leaves, or put in for medical waivers because of your decision. While they sit home, with computers nearby, their students get taught by substitutes who do not understand the curriculum or the needs of the children. Many teachers that do come to work, have to place their children in daycares, further increasing the risk of virus spread. None of this is necessary. There are smarter ways to handle all of this, and I wish that we all didn't have to be forced into this social experiment to prove that it is wrong. Our number one goal as a society right now should be keeping people safe. We have had well over 200,000 deaths in this country, many of which were avoidable if we could have simply been honest and made smarter decisions. At the end of the day, I sleep better knowing I've done the best I can do to make the world a better place. We've already closed four schools for cases of Covid and many more are sure to follow. How many more people will those cases affect. Will it take the death of one of our co-workers to change your minds? How will you sleep tonight with your decisions? Thank you for your time.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Justin Tupik:

“When students are brought back into the buildings will teachers be given an opportunity to reapply for medical accommodations? Thank you for your attention to this”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Kathy Amato:

“Good morning,

My question is why are teachers allowed to leave and go home early after the school day but guidance counselor are told to stay in the building?"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Amanda Perez:

"1. For those teachers who were given an accommodation over the summer, what will happen to those teachers and said accommodations as the students eventually come back?
2. For those teachers who are legitimately scared for their health, the health of their immunocompromised loved ones, what does the Board/district plan on doing to address the fear that is brewing?
3. For those who are on the high-risk list for COVID, how does the district plan on managing them as COVID continues to jump from building to building?
4. If I get COVID, how is this covered regarding taking time off to hopefully survive it?
5. Will counseling be offered for COVID-specific anxiety/stress?
6. For those whose classrooms lack an HVAC system AND/OR windows that do not open, how is this going to be addressed prior to the students coming back into their respective buildings?
Thank you! Have a nice Thursday."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jessica Mayo:

"To the Superintendent, Board members, and the Central Administration,
I am writing to express how upsetting it is that the Superintendent, Board members, and Central Administration of Elizabeth NJ is not choosing to keep its faculty protected from COVID-19. These are scary times and it is disheartening we cannot go back to normal yet, but it is something we simply cannot do. Right now, I believe the main focus of the Superintendent, Board members, and Central Administration should be to keep students and faculty as safe as possible. However, by requiring faculty members to enter school buildings day in and day out, the safety of the faculty is not being considered. Teachers have all been provided with laptops, Professional Development on implementing programs, and access to technology support. A teacher's job can be performed in the safety of their own home. I ask you today to reverse your decision to require teachers to come into the buildings every day. As you are aware there has already been a teacher with COVID-19 in one of our buildings. Why are buildings still open when the spreading of this deadly disease is undeniable?
Sincerely a very concerned teacher"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Nicole Grygo:

"Mrs. Hugelmeyer and members of the board,

I would like to start out by thanking you for your dedication to our students and their families. While I am sure it was not an easy decision to come to, keeping our Elizabeth students in the safety of their homes was the appropriate choice. I wish I could say I felt the same regarding your decision about the Team members. I am one of the several hundred team members who was approved for telework. I received my medical accommodations due to my current pregnancy. I received my approval letter no later than two days after submitting my documentation and was thrilled that you were willing to put my safety first. My question for you is, why did you so flippantly change your minds? We have been teaching for four days. Four days, and four schools closed for positive Covid cases.

Our pledge of ethics states that we should care about others by demonstrating acts of kindness. If I am not mistaken, the pledge of ethics applies not only to students but to every person who is involved with our school system. I, along with countless team members have been calling and emailing requesting information and answers. Days upon days of no responses. Where is the kindness there? I realize that everyone in our district is overwhelmed and trying to do their best. How can we as team members do our best when we are worried about our lives? Why are some team members being granted accommodations to work remotely while the majority of us go ignored?

"I will treat others as I wish to be treated." If you or your family members had underlying medical conditions that could pose a threat to life would you sit back idly and wait for answers that may never come? I am asking you to please reconsider the safety of our team members. This statement comes directly from the CDC website; "Based on what is known at this time, pregnant women might be at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant women. Additionally, pregnant women with COVID-19 might have an increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such

as preterm birth.” This information is in addition to the fact that pregnant women cannot take the same medications as non-pregnant women. There is still so much left unknown about the long-lasting effects of this virus. I plead with you to please put our safety first. Please consider what could possibly happen to myself or my unborn baby in the event I got sick. I respectfully ask you to reevaluate my medical accommodation for telework so I can ensure that I am safe, healthy, and at my best to teach and support my 5th grade students.

Thank you for your time. I wish you all the very best and hope that you and your loved ones are happy and healthy.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Annette Furnback:

“Dear Leaders,

I hope this letter finds you all safe and well. I will keep my concerns short and brief, as I am sure you have heard all of this before.

I am a teacher with 13 years of dedication to the students and parents of Elizabeth. I spend countless hours planning meaningful lessons, grading papers, providing support – both educational and social emotional – to my students and parents. I go above and beyond every day to ensure my students are receiving the best of my knowledge, experience and enthusiasm for their learning and success. I have done this year after year and student by student, without complaint, and without any hope of reward other than my students’ and parents’ appreciation. I have not expected my Board of Education or administrators to recognize or award my achievements, but to respect my hard work and the fact that I am a human being with my own children, aging parents, a long commute and some major medical issues – none of which have ever hindered my job performance or the amount of time or work that I dedicate to my students.

In a time of global pandemic, where we should all be safely able to complete our jobs without fear of being exposed to this serious and deadly virus, I will never understand your decision to put our lives at risk by having us report to school buildings. You asked for medical notes – which my doctor gladly provided – in hopes of ensuring my safety. After rescinding the medical accommodations for which I was previously approved, I was at a loss for words. I will never understand this decision and have not a clue why anyone would think that I could not or would not provide the same exact dedication and support to my students from the safety of my own home.

Thank you for your time. May you remain in good health for your safety and the safety of your families.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Ellen Glynn:

“Good Evening Board Members and Superintendent Hugelmeyer,

When the Elizabeth Board of Education staff received a welcome back letter the term ‘sense of normalcy’ was used. Our work day is not normal. We are instructed to call or email fellow staff when needing help or collaboration. We quickly walk past coworkers for safety reasons and enter empty classrooms, scrub our hands after touching a series of door knobs, open windows that only open a crack and hope that provides proper ventilation in our aging facilities, and then we sit, often with masks on, to teach our student’s remotely. We have meetings regarding the health and safety of our fellow co-workers once an employee tests positive and many staff are forced to quarantine at home for two weeks, riddled with anxiety that they will get sick and avoid their own family to keep them healthy. It’s been 8 days that all staff has been back in the buildings and 4 schools have been closed to deep clean after positive cases were reported. This is not normal. Nothing is normal about this. The social emotional and physical health of our team members are being overlooked. Members at Edison are still working through the deep trauma we endured in the spring. The fact that we shut down within the first week caused great fear within our school community. We worry about our co-worker whom is currently hospitalized and we simply can not lose anymore members or risk long term health issues after ‘recovering’ from covid. Anxiety and stress level are at a max yet we continue to service our students and work beyond the school day to create seamless remote learning. I am grateful that students are safe at home but the same consideration needs to be addressed for the staff. At the very least give us choice to work within the buildings or in our homes. I know your jobs are difficult and that you have dedicated a ton of time to create reopening plans but please listen to the concerns and voices of the Elizabeth Board of Education staff, the same staff that make our schools an educational success!”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Duchetlyne DeBarros:

“Good morning,

Hope you and your family are doing well and are healthy.

I really feel that there are a few things that should be discussed during tonight's board meeting. I'm not someone who likes to make any trouble or stir the pot but I really feel as if our (the teachers and staff) health and safety is not a concern for the board.

I am someone who lost someone to Covid. I lost my grandfather in May and have seen the despair and pain that Covid causes. It goes without being said that most people who haven't experienced it personally, don't take it seriously. That has been made clear to me during these times.

I am also someone who submitted medical documentation for my Gitelman's Syndrome, got approved for medical documentation, and then had those recommendations rescinded. Even though I am working in an empty classroom, I am still being exposed (we all are) especially because Elizabeth is so big and there is little to no way, people are able to track who they've come in contact with.

Some of my concerns are:

1. The thermometers are inaccurate. I checked my temp at home then when I came to work it appeared to have gone down, which is not what happens. The more you move, the more your temp goes up if anything. Therefore, how can I feel comfortable coming into work when these are inaccurate? Anyone can have a fever and it does not show it because the thermometers are inaccurate. Also, some people are asymptomatic (but I digress).
2. The fact medical accommodations were rescinded is just ridiculous because some of us (I'm guessing most people who sent in medical docs) really are at risk. When I reached out to Olga directly, she quickly said it's because I'm in an empty room and when I asked for more clarification and an explanation, I NEVER received a response. Again, it's clear that the health and safety of their employees doesn't matter.
3. 3 schools in less than one 1 week (since we opened) here in Elizabeth have had positive cases and they've been given 2 days of working from home? Aren't the CDC recommendations 14 days or until people a symptom-free and/or Covid negative? How would someone explain that to, God-forbid, someone's family of an employee who got sick? It is completely counter-intuitive to me and again, so un-safe. It doesn't make any sense and I feel we need explanations and answers.
4. What is the reason for us to work in an empty classroom if we could do the same work at home? We are all using online platforms that can be accessed via our laptops, so I'd like to hear a clear answer to the reason why we are all here, being exposed in the building? Especially those of us who have pre-existing conditions.

The fact of the matter still stands that no matter what is said to us teachers, our health and safety is not a concern and I, truly, in my heart, hope that our concerns will be heard tonight because if not, I am sure it won't get any better. I hope I didn't sound rude, but this is very serious to me.

Best regards”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Seema Alcine:

“I do not feel safe. People are not wearing masks. Some people are wearing the same mask everyday. It is difficult to keep social distancing especially in the hallways. Also some staff members don't believe this is real they think it's political.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Anna Kroik:

“Dear Board Members,

I am submitting this letter to express my and some other teachers' concerns regarding having teachers working physically in schools. We know that cases of COVID-19 are increasing in our area, and it is just a matter of time that someone will get infected with the virus. There is a recent increase of cases, 346 new cases two days ago, 447 new cases yesterday. This is a 33% increase, just in one day.

We understand that the Elizabeth Public school system is doing their best to monitor everyone's conditions with checklists and temperature checks. The fact is that all teacher's risk of contracting the virus went up as soon as school began. Everyone is trying their best, but it's scary and stressful.

Many teachers have health risk factors or have loved ones that are high-risk as well. So many families lost loved ones due to the coronavirus, and on top of that, the long-term effects of the virus are still unknown. The CDC and WHO recommend staying home whenever possible, so please make accommodations for teachers and those with close family members who have pre-conditions and doctors' notes. Please make accommodation for the most vulnerable population to work from home and have physical attendance in school on a volunteer basis.

Elizabeth has a great team of teachers. They will be effective and give their best no matter if they are teaching from home or from school.

I appreciate your prompt attention.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Lydia Collins:

“Good evening. I want to praise school 90’s custodians. They do a phenomenal job.

Even so, it would be nice to know the air quality of the district’s filters and HVAC systems as this affects everyone in the building, teaching and non-teaching staff alike. What has the district done to ensure air quality in our buildings and how often are filters changed? This knowledge would certainly help ease anxieties and should be released. Students and parents should be aware of this as well.

The rise of frustration stems from the lack of transparency. Invite union leaders to meetings. Share critical information with staff.

I think you will find that teachers are an accommodating group of individuals who will help the Board and we don’t have to be divided needlessly as the goal of educating our community to the highest of standards remains the same.

When medical notices and private information was collected and then just as promptly, disregarded, this breach of trust widened. Many were left wondering why medical histories had to be shared in detail when a simple poll, checklist, doctor's note or generic form could have been taken. When air quality reports are not released to the workers in each building, division increased. Every time the union is disregarded or not invited to critical meetings, the divide seems impossible to bridge. When teachers must choose either their job OR childcare and healthcare issues, the divide becomes raw.

I am asking the Board to consider its teachers as a resource to respect. Doing so will only bring out the optimal result for students. Teachers who feel valued will pour that same energy into their classrooms and into their students.

Fight with us. Listen to our burdens. Hear our requests. Consult with the Union to find the working solutions. Teachers need a voice at the table.

Let's accomplish this together instead of pulling apart in separate directions.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jeanetta Jarmond:

“Hello, my name is Ms. Jarmond, I am an ICS teacher at Abraham Lincoln #14A. I would like to express my concerns about the way the Board members, the Superintendent Mrs. Hugelmeryer, and the Central Administration has treated its staff. You have completely ignored repeated request from our Union to be kept up to speed about the safety of your staff and the building's we are forced to work in. Even with underlining medical conditions, some very serious, we are forced to enter unsafe buildings daily risking our lives and the lives of our families. I think this is reckless, dangerous, and shows a total disregard for the safety and lives of all involved.

We have asked repeatedly to see the ventilation system report but have not been shown them yet, another way of disregarding our health concerns. Now, only five days into the school we have several staff members at different schools test positive for Covid 19. What is the Board doing to ensure the safety of its members, nothing? Two days to shut down a school is hardly enough time to quarantine as recommended by the CDC. It is my understanding that the recommendation is 14 days to quarantine after being exposed to an infected person.

Our Union has not been invited to any meetings to discuss the logistics or what is happening to those buildings effected by a Covid positive test or the safety of its members and their families. The total disregard for the lives of your staff and their families is damages and appalling to say the least.

Thank You.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Anne Milanocole:

“If schools are considered unsafe for children then why is it OK for the teachers, who are older and have preexisting conditions which make them more susceptible to catching the virus, forced to be in their classrooms in the school. Are teachers that disposable. I am really disappointed by your decisions. In case you like your teachers to get infected and die without family members nearby. Lets just wait for the winter spike to hit and then I bet you'll feel your decisions are wrong as covid strikes your teachers spent 2 months teaching from home. Do you mistrust them so much that you really think they are gonna just sit on their butts and not do any teaching. Shame on you.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Ruth Young:

“I am reaching out because I am extremely worried. I have gone to great lengths to keep myself safe since March. After being back to work for three days, I was informed that there was a positive case in my building and that I may have been exposed as a tertiary contact. Despite my best efforts to avoid catching this virus, I am risking myself every day by being in the building. The fact that kids aren't present does not matter. Adults are positive and exposing other adults. I am begging the BOE to allow teachers the choice to work from home. All classes are on Teams which records the meeting and duration of the class. It retains the attendance of all who attend. Teachers can be tracked and monitored if you do not trust that we are doing our job. The idea of one teacher dying unnecessarily is unconscionable. I have asthma, am prediabetic and at a higher risk. My medical documents were ignored. Please help us to stay safe and healthy.
Thank you”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Anne Eiring:

“Good Evening,
This has been a very stressful week. Three of our buildings have been closed for Covid cleaning due to confirmed cases of Covid 19. The staff is on edge. If the buildings are “Safe for All,” how is it the BOE Meeting is still being held virtually? Please, come sit in our old and unairconditioned buildings with the staff. If you feel it is safe for all, join us. If you worry about your own comfort, health and safety, you should reconsider allowing the staff to work from home.
Aside from the health issues, the Help Desk phone is not answered. One can be on hold for hours. I am aware this is due to the numerous calls, from not only staff, but parents with issues. The lines at the Hardware door are long and the wait can take hours. There needs to be access for staff to get answers to run their classes competently.
The frustrations of teachers working on numerous technology programs all at once is immense. The lack of tech support only makes it more challenging. We have Powerschool, Unified Classroom, TEAMS, myaccess.com, Envision, Go Guardian, Flip Grid and more, running at the same time. Updates occur during the day and the system will change without warning. Some tech issues require turning the devices on and off repeatedly, yet, no one tells us this.
Your staff is drowning and there does not seem to be a life jacket in sight.
Thank you.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Laura Vendemia:

“Good Afternoon,
I write this letter as a Concerned loyal educator. I understand that you may think that teaching from our classrooms is a form of Normalcy; but it is not. It is actually the complete opposite. It is sad.. we all have to stay in our rooms and can't talk or help one another.. so why I ask ?? I can do this from home and reduce the risk of Covid to all and have more time to learn all the new tech and do what is important educate my students.. that is what I want to do !! Educate !! Educate with our fear..
Also a separate tech line for teachers is needed.. we are on hold for hours to be hung up on.. I know and understand that the department is small..
Please listen to our concerns
Thank you”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Gayle Gesualdi:

“Good Afternoon,

I am writing to ask you to please consider the safety of the staff of the Elizabeth Public Schools.

In recent days a number of schools have had to be closed due to positive Covid-19 cases, it is evident that having people in enclosed spaces, indoors is not safe. This virus is highly communicable, and I am afraid the number of cases will only increase in the coming days.

The district did the right thing by allowing all students to learn remotely, this decision should be commended, and will keep our students safe. Don't the adult staff members deserve the same consideration?

This virus is new and we are learning more about it every day. We do know that certain individuals are more at risk than others. Initially, the district did the right thing by accomodating those staff members at risk to work from home. Unfortunately, those accomadations were rescinded right before the start of school, leaving many to weigh their jobs or the chance of loosing their life. This should not be the case, no one should be put in a position like this.

Having worked in business for many years before becoming a teacher, I know that well motivated and valued employes will always perform better at their jobs. Right now you would be hard pressed to find an employee that is motivated or valued.

We all want to be back to school, we love our students, and we miss them. The reality is it is just not safe in our buildings. Pardon my directness, but do you or any member of the board, or the superintendent share a restroom with 25-30 other people? One restroom, with one toilet, that has no lid cover. We do know that Covid-19 is found in wastewater, so how is it possible that teachers and staff in this situation are safe?

Please reconsider and allow staff to work from home, we have already lost staff members to this disease in the spring, please do not allow that to happen again.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Amy Quinn:

“Dear Ms. Hugelmeyer and members of the Board of Education,

I have been employed by the Elizabeth Board of Ed as a teacher since 2001. I love my job, I love my coworkers, I love this town, I love these kids. First, let me state that I do not envy your position - trying to do what is best for the majority in these unprecedented times is a daunting task. But I find myself disappointed in the district's response to this pandemic.

During July, an email was sent to all of the staff asking for doctor's notes that demonstrated any required accommodations for the upcoming school year. At this time, although I am high risk, I debated what to do. I wanted to come in to work and I wanted to teach the children to the best of my ability. Therefore, I was torn.

When it was announced that our students would be remote in the fall, I decided that I should put in for a medical accommodation since I would not be seeing the children in-person anyway - and at that point it did not seem worth the risk of exposure in a building with over 100 people. I could see no benefit of being in the classroom versus being home while teaching the students. In fact, there may be more of a benefit to being at home - where I am kept safe and can remain healthy. After sending in my letter of request, I also sent numerous emails trying to ensure it was received. I never even received a response to my inquiries. Not one acknowledgement.

Then, it was announced that ALL teachers would have to report to school and teach from their classrooms. No medical accommodations would be considered. I was dumbfounded. Many people had already received letters that they were approved, and many others - like myself - had been awaiting responses without any communication from anyone in authority.

I was floored that although my doctor had stated it was unsafe to be around other people, and that this virus has the potential to cause serious complications for me - that someone who does not know me at all, who is not familiar with my medical history at all, and who has never even met me - can say that they know better.

I was saddened that although I have spent the last 6 months avoiding social settings which could prove hazardous and keeping my family and I safe, that I was possibly going to be exposed to this virus.

Then I found out that people were getting approved to work from home because of childcare issues. I had procured a sitter for my own children who are learning remotely this fall, but she was only able to come 3

days a week. And this is at an additional expense from my paycheck - which is already smaller than last year's paycheck. Please do not take this as me being unappreciative, because this is not the case. I am very appreciative that I am allowed to be home on those days that they would otherwise be left alone. However, I am concerned that the Board did not think I was able to work effectively from home because I have a medical condition. Yet, the Board thought I was able to work effectively from home when the reason was childcare. So my health is not as important?

Now that we have had positive cases in our buildings, I hope the Board and administration can see that there is no justifiable reason to keep us in our classrooms. Please give us that option of working from home in order to remain safe so that we can continue to service our students. Please let me stay healthy, so that when it is deemed safe to bring our students back into the building, I will be able to be with them – and not be home sick or recovering. Please let me remain healthy for my own family's sake. Please let your employees know that you care about them, you respect them, and you trust them to do the best they can for the children of Elizabeth – regardless of their physical location during the school day. Please let me know that my health and safety is important to you - because I do not feel that way right now.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from David Ayd:

“Good evening members of the Board of Education, Superintendent Hugelmeyer, colleagues, and friends. I am a proud educator here at the Elizabeth Board of Education and have just begun my 15th year here. I breathed a large sigh of relief in August when I learned I would be able to work from home, and then was even happier when the announcement was made was for everyone to work remotely. Then, when it was announced that teachers would have to return, my stress returned, and I became nervous and scared. I am worried about everyone's safety, not just mine.

According to an article posted on NJ.com on September 16th, "New Jersey's latest rate of transmission of 1.06 is the same as officials reported Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. It has been above 1 since Sept. 4...Any number below 1 means the virus is decreasing." With a transmission rate above 1% for nearly 2 weeks, the risk remains critical and contraction still possible.

I do not wish to see anyone else contract this disease and certainly not suffer severe health consequences or death. Our school community already lost coworkers and it is devastating.

Schools and districts across the state who have begun the academic year in hybrid models have transitioned back to virtual learning already due to increased cases. We are not even two full weeks to the academic year and there have been multiple cases in multiple buildings. This is frightening. It seems that school closure is inevitable. I remain worried and anxious each day that I am in the building, working from a classroom.

This ongoing situation and these decisions cannot be easy for anyone involved. I am asking Superintendent and the Board to reconsider its position and allow all teachers the option to work from home.

Thank you and stay safe.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jack Fay:

“Along with the obvious health concerns that come with being in the building everyday, I am constantly losing internet connection with my students. On average I lose internet connection 3 times a day and sometimes for as long as 15 minutes. That lost time really adds up. I know that these problems would be minimal, or not even be a factor, with my internet connection at home.
Take Care.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Maria O’Keeffe:

“Ms Hugelmeyer, members of the Board,
I am writing to request that you reconsider requiring teachers and support staff to teach from school buildings. Buildings have only been open a little more than a week and it was already necessary to close four building. It is clear, that the more people in a building the higher the risk of COVID 19 infections. We have also been made aware that the district HVAC system is using MERV 8 filters instead of the CDC recommended MERV 13 to 17 filters. As many classrooms have no windows or just solid glass panes that don’t open, the ventilated air is all we have. PPE has not been made available, I have not been given a mask or gloves, that hand sanitizer is alcohol free, no disinfectant cleaning spray to wipe surfaces

and classrooms are not cleaned daily. Faulty thermometers are being used for temperature checks with readings of, LOW, 91, 92, 94, 95 degrees being common with comments from security of “these things don’t work.” None of which makes one feel safe. All these unsafe conditions and risk for no logical reason. Remote teaching is going well, my students are in their class teams, they are completing assignments. School is pretty normal except for not being in person and their teacher wearing a mask. All of my new students have never seen my face. I don’t feel safe removing my mask when my windows don’t open and the ventilation is not what the CDC recommends. We can teach our students just as well from the safety of our homes. Why are we being required to risk our health or worse for no reason? Thanks for your time.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Grace Serralheiro:

“Dear District Officials

The past few school days have been taking a toll on the teachers of Elizabeth Public Schools. Daily, we are in fear of bringing the virus home to our own families. We were given a full One day PD tech training on Teams and, in addition to this, even worked outside of our hours in the summer to learn Teams and other online tools to better develop our teaching.

We often work outside of our shifts, past working hours...before working hours...and weekends so that we may be able to better to educate children. I, myself, even stay up late into the night to work on lessons for elementary school, which I was moved to without having elementary school experience from teaching high school a week and a half before school started, to look up curriculum, make PowerPoints, make videos, and make project samples to better help my students.

We go out of our own pockets yearly to supplement for things we are missing in the classroom. Yet, the board does not recognize these extra things that we have to do in order to get things done and do so effectively. We do these things at home...on our own time...to help our students.

We, as teachers, do not ask for much. Safety and concern for our well being is not a lot to ask for. Since open, School 18, School 28, School 5, and Edison High School has all had Covid cases...all of these that could have been avoided if we were given the option to work from home. The morale of teachers has dropped. Our faith in our higher ups is dwindling. All of this...is not fair. Can you tell us what is the reason that we must teach from the classrooms if we can do so effectively from the safety of our own homes? Why do you feel it is safe for teachers to be in the building and not students?

Medical accommodations for those who are at a higher risk than others, that were previously approved by the board, were taken away.

And now look, Covid cases in our schools are popping up. If infected, are you ok with having a possible loss of a teacher’s life on your shoulders.

The anxiety of this all is taking a toll on the teachers of EPS who want to be able to feel safe while doing their jobs. Elizabeth has GREAT teachers. Teachers who are highly effective...teachers that have gone above and beyond for the students of Elizabeth...teachers who help their students win scholarships, excel in writing, sports, art, math....teachers who are, to a lot of students, a mentor and second parent. When you risk us, you also hurt the students.

We hope that you consider these things for the welfare of your teachers and their families.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Veronica Madrigal:

“Members of the Board, Superintendent, and Central Administration,

I am Veronica Madrigal. I hope you and your families are staying safe during this pandemic, because I know, thanks to you, that my family is not. I am the daughter of Jorge Madrigal, teacher for over two decades at Elizabeth Public High School, one of many whose medical note has been rescinded.

Considering that you’ve already had to close four schools due to COVID outbreaks doing what you’ve been doing, I feel as though you shouldn’t have any more words to say, and you should let teachers stay home and teach from there. However, I know that you’re being persistent in what you want to do, so I’ll roll with it, because I can be persistent too.

From an ethical standpoint, what you’re doing is completely stupid and ridiculous. You’re putting every single person in your faculty and staff--not just teachers, but janitors, security, etc--at risk of dying, dying alone because family members wouldn’t have access to them because of how contagious and dangerous this disease is. You’re sitting comfortably in your offices or wherever you work from perfectly safe, while

my father and his coworkers are cramped in windowless classrooms, sometimes sharing classrooms because there isn't enough room. Tell me how you sleep at night. Is it comfortably?

Because sometimes, I'm so stressed out about my father's wellbeing that I lose some sleep over it, I can't imagine what it's like for you. I told him recently that I would rather work for the rest of my life than watch him die in your school's walls, and you seem determined to make either one of those things true. I can already hear you now! "Jorge, Mr. Madrigal, just retire!" Sure, so the Board of Education is willing to pay for my college tuition? For my brother's?

Let me know when you've written the checks out.

From a legal standpoint, I have no idea how you're getting away with rescinding teachers' medical notes from their doctors. They are at risk. My father has asthma, he's gotten sick so many times with bronchitis. He's had to see numerous doctors, he's had to take many medicines, he has an inhaler. He's getting older. I don't know how to make you understand that he and his other coworkers who had medical notes are at risk, meaning they are at risk of getting, at risk of dying from COVID-19. I didn't know you all wanted to have deaths on your hands, normally people in leadership positions don't want that.

Again, I'm not a lawyer, but even I can tell you you're on the road to having way more problems than you've originally wanted to have because you're sending teachers in to teach and they get sick.

I want to understand where you're coming from. How come teachers of elementary, middle school, most high schools, universities--how come they can teach from home? What do they have that these teachers don't?

Did you secretly come up with a vaccine to COVID that you've given all of your Elizabeth Public School teachers and no one else has it? What is your problem with teachers teaching from home, as long as they do their job? Do I have to remind you again that you've already had to close 4 schools? Your plan has already failed. What you've wanted to do already has not worked, so why not just stop now and take action to protect your teachers, faculty, and staff?

If you had taken real steps to protect your teachers, I wouldn't be as snide as I am in this letter. My father took clorox wipes to his classroom, and they came up black because of how dirty everything was.

The ventilation and filtration system hasn't been cleaned. It's been six months of people being away from the school, why didn't you do a proper deep cleaning? Why would you decide to let teachers use classrooms without windows? Why would you let them share? Why have you not checked up on where your teachers have been, if they've been out of the country, out of the state, if they've tested positive?

You opened your schools for teachers to come in and teach, and you say that this is what you want to do, yay goals, but you haven't taken a single shred of responsibility for anything. You don't want teachers to stay home, you go so far as to rescind their medical notes to force them to stay in. I don't know how you can live with yourselves knowing that you're exposing dozens, hundreds of people to a highly contagious and fatal disease. How much money does this possibly make you that you're doing things this way? Is it because you don't want to admit that your high school could be more accessible to both students and teachers? What could it possibly be?

For all of the work that Governor Murphy and the residents of New Jersey have done, for all of the work that New Jersey's medical professionals have done, you have brought absolute shame to our state.

You are in a position of leadership, and this is what you do with the power that you have? How come that my friends and I, sophomores in university, have a better understanding and acceptance of guidelines and how this disease works? How come the children that I assistant teach at my job have a better understanding of the impacts of this pandemic than you? How come they have no problem staying safe and following the rules set for them, and they're six, seven, eight years old? How come you are all full grown adults, with responsibilities bigger than you, and just because you've been given some power and some money, you suddenly don't know how to act?

I'm glad I'm too old and too smart to consider anyone like you to be a role model. I'm glad that I don't work under you. I feel sorry for my father and his coworkers, people who have loyally worked for you and dedicated their lives to teaching students and bettering their education, to bettering the Elizabeth Public School system, for being treated this way. I am sorry that you clearly consider their lives to be disposable. I am sorry that you all clearly lack empathy and understanding. Above all, through my pity, I hope you get well soon.

Your disease of egotism and pride is poisoning the Elizabeth Public School system, and dragging everyone else down with you.

My father has been a part of Elizabeth's community for most of his life. I've watched him be a teacher, commute each morning when I got ready for school, for my entire life. I've watched him grade papers. He's shown me his students' work, he tells me how well they're doing when they do well, he tells me about classroom antics and funny things that happen. He's fostered my love of history, so much that I want to become an archaeologist. If he's done all that for me, I can only imagine how much he's done for his students over the decades. I'm biased because he's my father, but I also have this basic understanding that you all seemingly lack: he is a person. He is a human person, just like you. He deserves to work safely. He deserves to not have to worry about his health every time he steps into your buildings. I didn't want to be rude. The Teacher's Union has been trying to be cordial and nice to you, but I'm not a member of the Teacher's Union. I'm an angry daughter who doesn't want to lose her father to something entirely preventable. I hope you have a good day, night, rest of this meeting. Stay safe, and keep my father and his coworkers safe while you're at it."

Mr. Kennedy received the following letter from Aline Pires:

"Hello everyone, I hope all is well. I'm writing to you to express my deepest concern regarding us teaching from the building. I have a 14-month-old daughter that I had to put her in a day care center full time since I was not allowed a child-care accommodation. I'm beyond scared just to think that my little girl is being exposed to the max. I am anxiously coming to work every day thinking about my own safety and the safety of my family and now with the news that five schools were shut down due to possible exposure of COVID-19 it makes me a lot more anxious. At this point staff members should be allowed to teach from the comfort of their home if they want to. I do not feel comfortable and safe being at the building when within ONE WEEK five schools were already exposed. I come home everyday worry and anxious that I might be exposing my family to this virus. My mother who often helps me with my daughter has a compromised immune system, and now I can't even see her or ask her to assist me with my daughter since I'm more exposed now. In addition, some of us have to share rooms which makes it even more difficult to teach. Another problem is that as the cold weather approaches a lot of us will get SICK, and it sound extremely unfair for us to have to take a sick day if we could perfectly teach from home. I am very concern because I suffer from serious allergies and, the moment I start sneezing, coughing I will not feel comfortable going into the building and possibly exposing my colleagues. However, it also makes me anxious to know that I would have to use up my sick days. All that we are asking is that you make it optional for us to teach from the building. Some of us are happy and want to teach from the building. But for others teaching from the school is becoming a very stressful situation. I want the best for my students, I spend hours researching and looking up different methods to make their virtual learning experience the most memorable. However, the stress that I'm under when I think that I can possibly be exposed to COVID is overwhelming. I wish you all the very best and hope you're all staying safe. Our safety always come first. Thank you."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Greg Alvord:

"Hi my name is Greg Alvord and I am a teacher at School #13. I am recovering from Stage 4 cancer. My CANCER Doctor granted me a medical waiver to teach from home, since I am on the "high risk" list. This has been denied and I would like to know the reason why! Thank you"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Kelly Edmonds:

"For many years, I have been proud that I am a E high grad and that I am able to give back to the district that help me grow up, but since the Covid-19 started I can't say that anymore. As a high risk teacher with diabetes and asthma, I was given accommodations in early July. I went out and bought items to create my classroom at home and had set it up. I also made sure that my administration in my building knew I had this accommodations so they could plan for it as well. Two weeks prior to the start of school, it was rescinded- like other teachers in the district. My doctors did reach out to the chief medical officer and couldn't believe what they heard from him. The fact that he claims that people with no signs of Covid-19 can't pass it is absorbed. Unfortunately I can't go out on leave as I am the only person working and supporting my family. And I trusted that you made it save for my fellow teachers and I to return.

You, members of the board, claimed our schools were safe for people like me to return. Yes there are no students but since school started 4 buildings had to be closed due to cases of Covid-19. Our HVAC filters only have the MERV 8 filters not the recommended MERV 13 filters. And no PPE was given out, likely I carry at least 3 masks with me and brought in disinfected wipes to ensure my work space is as clean as I could make it.

The other issue is the technology. I have been dealing with both parent and student having issues with their lab tops. With students, many of their laptops are breaking down- mics and cameras not working, and programs not loading or slow to load. Parents have been telling that they can't log onto computers because students forgot their passwords, they try to reach out to help desk and are on hold for over an hour then the call is drop, they send in emails but aren't hearing back. Some of these issues, teachers could help with such as recovering passwords or resetting them- but as of now there is no way for my fellow teacher or myself to do that. All I can tell parents- there is nothing I can do and I have to reach out in the same way as you do. This is embarrassing since I know some issues can be solved quickly. Between these issues, I have come to the conclusion that you, members of the board, have little to no respect for the teachers health and safety.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Barbara Newman:

“My name is Barbara Newman and I am a teacher at School #28 with a valid medical exemption, which was overruled by our Superintendent and Board doctor. Below is my list of concerns as to why we should be teaching full-time remotely from home until it is clearly determined safe by all standards, not just the district of Elizabeth.

1. No students in school to teach.
2. I suffer from acute asthmatic condition, which was caused at School #15 due to the black mold condition in the school. I believe it hasn't even been resolved to this date as they just paint over it as needed. I am on 3 medical prescriptions. I was out on disability for over 9 months, which I had to prove (videos, photos) from the school. My primary care physician had written me out to teach full-time at home virtually and it was overturned by the Superintendent and Board doctor, Mr. Munoz.
3. Confirmed cases of COVID in School #28.
4. Lack of documentation of HVAC being properly maintained up to Government Covid standards.
5. I am much more productive in the safety of my own home teaching remotely than I am in a building, which I am unsure of the sanitary conditions in the building.
6. Lack of reasonable explanation (other than because I said so) of why teaching from an empty school building is more efficient than teaching from home.
7. The anxiety and mental anguish that I am suffering along with many other teachers in every school is unnecessary and unethical.
8. Did I mention, that there are NO students to teach in the building.
9. Due to the fact that we are teaching remotely from school and require to wear a mask for up to 6 hours has been deemed unsafe by my medical doctor resulting in the reason why he wrote me out in the first place.

I have been in constant contact with my doctor and personal attorney to safe guard myself in case I contact COVID because I am being forced to do a job which can be done from the safety of my home. Hopefully, this message resonates with yourself, the Board, the Superintendent, and our singing/dancing district doctor Dr. Munoz and you realize that the need to teach from school is unnecessary and you reevaluate the current decisions that are being made.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Dina Zayas:

“Good afternoon,

I am a concerned teacher who is petrified to continue working on site.

Therefore, I would like clarification on why the medical accommodations were rescinded. What is the rationale behind opposing doctors' orders to accommodate those teachers with medical issues who are at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19? Regardless if students are not in the buildings, staff members are forced into buildings to work alongside each other with buildings housing over 30+ staff members at a time. We share common areas like poorly ventilated bathrooms, kitchens, and classrooms - how is this deemed SAFE?

If having staff members return to work remotely from their school building was indeed safe, then please address the issue of 4 schools district-wide with POSITIVE Covid-19 cases from staff members all within one week of being back to work. Why were teachers not notified right away even if we did not work in that particular building? What is the protocol for properly handling this? One day of cleaning is NOT enough! How are these schools being properly sanitized? Do you have proof? Are you contact tracing? I hope you see this nightmare is getting worse by the day and school just started!

What is the protocol for staff members who are asthmatic and have COVID like symptoms? Are they to be quarantined every time they experience shortness of breath or a cough? If so, at whose expense? These are some of the many people who put in and were originally granted medical accommodations - so how does the board plan on handling these issues as they arise because they will?

Have all the ventilation systems in ALL buildings been properly serviced regularly and have the filters been cleaned out? If so, will you publicly allow people to see the reports? Were proper virus protection filters installed? When? Most filters throughout the district remain FILTHY which is the air that your staff breathes in regularly and can be a breeding ground to spread COVID-19.

Also, if childcare accommodations are now being made, what is the protocol for teachers to be granted permission? This is not in writing and it should be. Rumors are that some staff members are receiving different amounts of allowed days at home which is unfair! What is the criteria?

Next, there are major conflicts in scheduling. The start time we are supposed to swipe in is the same time we are supposed to start our LIVE sessions with children. How is this possible? There is not a sufficient amount of time in between. This also holds true for not allowing sufficient time for staff and students to use the restroom with a schedule that promotes back to back LIVE instruction. What suggestions do you have?

Furthermore, there was not enough training for teachers to feel confident learning different platforms and technical modalities. It was forced upon us in two days! We are now expected to be computer technician experts and curriculum developers. How is this fair? How is this possible? Your expectations are not realistic!

Hence, how are observations starting in October going to be a fair depiction of a teacher's effectiveness using these platforms and how will that effect teachers if one is not as technically savvy as another? How is Danielson going to prove an accurate measure of one's teaching ability when at least 60% of teachers don't even know how to properly navigate all of the platforms yet?

Also, taking temperatures in the morning is a waste of time since the thermometers are INACCURATE and either need to be recalibrated or thrown out. What is the point of us continuing to line up for daily temperature checks when people are getting 92, 93, and 94 degrees which isn't even stable for homeostasis?

In addition, what is the rationale behind teacher assistants remaining in an empty building until 3pm with the majority of teachers leaving and no students?

Overall, there are MANY teachers and staff members that are terrified and in a state of panic returning to work daily. We are dealing with a pandemic all while being forced to work on site while there are no students. Our workload can be done effectively from the safety of our own homes all without posing any risk to ourselves or others and without the liability accrued by the board. Why are you not empathetic to our concerns? Why can't we do our jobs from home?

We lost 6 colleagues last year to COVID-19, and we have members this year who contracted it and possibly spread it throughout multiple schools already, so why are you ignoring our pleas and concerns? Are you waiting for more deaths to occur? When will our lives and safety matter to you?"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Edmee Valentin:

“Good evening,

My name is Edmee Valentin. As a 30-year resident of the city of Elizabeth, I have also been fortunate to serve the community I live in as a high school teacher for the past 25 years.

I acknowledge that these are unprecedented times and we must remain understanding and flexible as decisions are made that impact our community – both the school community and our community at large. I have witnessed and been part of the positive changes within our district under its commitment to ensure the best possible education for the children and young people we serve. I am very proud to be part of a team of educators and support staff who have given, and continue to give, their best to our children and I

also acknowledge that these positive changes have been guided through strong leadership as well. As a classroom teacher, developing trust and a culture of mutual respect is key to producing positive outcomes. This is also true as a district employee. As an employee, I feel that the relationship between our district leaders and board members must be a trusting and respectful relationship. Presently, I feel this relationship has been adversely affected through the lack of transparency in the district's and board's decisions. District employees have been required to return to work and I don't feel safe although the district has assured us of our safety. Protocols have been set but how do we know when these are being met? How do I know when classrooms and buildings have been cleaned and disinfected? Why do I hear about schools that are shut down through social media? Lastly, why did you decide to rescind the employee medical accommodation requests? I did not request an accommodation but also understand why some of my fellow colleagues need to work from home. Again, these are unprecedented times and working from home is a reasonable request for those who are most at risk. The fact that students are home does nothing to allay any concerns or fears since we have several documented cases of COVID already within our buildings.

In closing, the district needs to do better in reassuring me and our community, that it is doing the best under the circumstances. The first step would be to allow those with medical requests to work from home. The next step would be transparency through clear and timely communication on how decisions are made -specifically, data, OSHA reports, and CDC guidelines used to make these decisions. My hope is that these considerations will continue to be employed when we eventually transition to face to face instruction.

Thank you for time and consideration. May everyone stay safe and healthy.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Tracy Sereday:

“Good Evening ,

My name is Tracy Sereday and I am a teacher in the district. I ask that you reconsider making all of the employees go into the buildings. Many of my colleagues are fearful to go into the buildings everyday. Please consider allowing staff the choice to go into the building or not if their position can be done virtually.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Nicole Gebhart:

“Dear Board of Education Members,

My name is Nicole Gebhart and I have been a teacher in Elizabeth for 21years. I am writing to you to express concern for the Elizabeth staff working in the buildings. We have currently had 4 schools with incidents of Covid. I feel as though our district is a ticking time bomb. Which school will it be today? Will one of us die? I love my students. I taught with live instruction in March. There is no need for us to risk our lives to teach remotely. Many of us have better technology set ups at home with dual monitors and and extra laptops. At school we don't get any added assistance. We all learned to teach online from the trainings that too were virtual. (thank you to our amazing tech department for that) There is a lot of risk and no reward to sending teachers and other staff into old buildings with low quality filters to teach in an empty classroom. My own children are on remote instruction and their teachers are teaching from home. Please care about our well being. Protect you staff like we protect our students.

Thank you for your time!”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Mary Ellen Scott:

“I would like to convey my utter anxiety about coming into a school building everyday. I am a 67 year old woman who had an exemption granted and then rescinded. I am not confident in the cleanliness of the building and the ventilation. I love my job, but have a sense of dread everyday. I fear getting sick and then passing it on to my husband who is also in the age group that is potentially negatively effected by COVID.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Noha Egan:

“Can anyone please let the staff members know why there is no information, or answers to our questions, pertaining to the ventilation system in our school buildings? I know several coworkers have asked repeatedly and there is never a direct answer. Thank you and stay safe.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jorge Madrigal:

“Good evening,

My name is Jorge E. Madrigal. I grew up in the city of Elizabeth, I have also been fortunate to serve the community as a bilingual social studies high school teacher for the past 25 years in both the John E. Dwyer Technology Academy and currently at the Admiral William F. Halsey Jr. Health and Public Safety Academy.

I have witnessed and been part of the positive changes within our district under its commitment to ensure the best possible education for the children and young people we serve. I am very proud to be part of a team of educators and support staff who have given, and continue to give, their best to our children and I also acknowledge that these positive changes have been guided through strong leadership as well. As a classroom teacher, developing trust and a culture of mutual respect is key to producing positive outcomes. This is also true as a district employee. As an employee, I feel that the relationship between our district leaders and board members must be a trusting and respectful relationship. I acknowledge that these are unprecedented times and we must remain understanding and flexible as decisions are made that impact our community – both the school community and our community at large. Presently, I feel this relationship has been adversely affected through the lack of transparency in the district’s and board’s decisions. As an asthma sufferer and as requested by the superintendent, I obtained a medical note stating the need for certain accommodations such as, teaching from home. It was approved! Then, as all other medical accommodations, it was rescinded. Why did you decide to rescind the employee medical accommodation requests? I don’t feel safe although the district has assured us of our safety. On the first day of school, my classroom was absolutely filthy. Mold and dust everywhere, why? Protocols have been set but they were ignored, why? The bathroom did not have soap. As a matter of fact, the soap dispenser was not even on the wall, why? Classrooms and buildings have not been cleaned and disinfected, why? I took photos because I was in shock at what I was seeing. Now, why do I hear about schools that are shut down through social media? Four in the last four days!

Again, these are unprecedented times and working from home is a reasonable request for those who are most at risk. The fact that students are home does nothing to allay any concerns or fears since we have several documented cases of COVID already within our buildings.

In closing, the district needs to do better in reassuring me and our community, that it is doing the best under the circumstances. The first step would be to allow those with medical requests to work from home. The next step would be transparency through clear and timely communication on how decisions are made -specifically, data, OSHA reports, and CDC guidelines used to make these decisions. My hope is that these considerations will continue to be employed when we eventually transition to face to face instruction.

Thank you for time and consideration. May everyone stay safe and healthy.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Carol DiGirolamo:

“Good evening Board members & Community Members,

I am writing tonight to express my disappointment & lack of respect offered to teachers.

As an educator, I spend a lot of time on thinking about how to keep the children in my care safe. We have fire drills, lockdown drills, & active shooter drills. In my mind, COVID is more dangerous than an unknown person in our building, since we do not know who a carrier is or is not. Teachers are concerned not only for their well - being but for the well-being of your child’s as well. I feel our buildings are not ready to provide a safe environment. Teachers have been in the buildings since Tuesday, September 8. FIVE schools have been closed due to COVID 19. Have educators seen any proof of filters were changed & CDC approved? Have educators’ questions been answered about how the air exchange flows? Has the building been cleaned to CDC standards? Have all the equipment promised to the employees been ordered, delivered & handed out to staff members? The list goes on and no answers offered.

Ms. Hugelmeyer stated that the schools were safe and equated them to indoor dining. I am a person who never received a response for my request to work from home at my Doctor's urging. Being an adult, I can choose to enter an eating establishment or not. Knowing my issues, to eat inside would not be a safe option for me. Can someone sitting up there explain to me, and the many other people in my situation why we are in the classrooms and our CHOICE to stay safe has been eliminated? IF it was as safe as you claim, why is this meeting virtual and not in person?"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Tracy Gulick:

"Good Evening,

I would like to know why teachers who have no children must be in the buildings five days while teachers with children were given accommodations to teach from home a few days a week. This is discrimination. Also, there have been covid cases in four schools in the first four days of school. We are teaching remotely so why can't we all teach from home instead of going into the buildings."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Eileen Campos:

"I would like to share with you the upmost stressful and overbearing situations that a teacher is facing today!!!! First of all, we are dealing with more non-stop technology that a teacher must be trained effectively before administrating it to parents, guardians, and students. As a co-teacher, I feel fortunate enough to communicate with parents who speak only Spanish and have no clue how to even touch a computer! I have been trying to help these parents in Spanish as much as I can with technology than ever before! Most parents take about an hour and a half to properly guide them on how to touch screens, download, install programs that weren't previously installed, directing them to programs, helping them getting accustomed with technology! I have seen parents expressing their feelings in tears through their videos cameras because they feel so lost and can't help out their child!

As a matter of fact, I appreciate what the tech department has done for us in giving help how to run these programs, however, I don't feel it is enough! We were only given one day on training with TEAMS (that platform being used to set up class meetings with our students and parents. The program has extensive functions to remember and control. It is a complete chaos when you are trying to manage a classroom of 20 students, with background noise and distractions while conducting a class! We are lucky if we can see 10 students at a time and on the bottom of the platform doesn't allow you to see other students! So do you call this effective teaching?

We are also getting thrown to other directions that is normally not our expertise! On top of this we have other guidelines that must be done other than teaching online. We are being overloaded with too much to do at this time and it is taking up over our 8:20 to 3:00 job! On top of this, we have to communicate with parents and improving our teaching skills to hopefully make this work!

I ask all of you to have compassion to our teachers and staff working at a facility right now. I have seen fellow teachers crying and stressed to the point that we can not think anymore! It is overbearing during these abnormal times. Thank you!"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jessica Priolo:

"I'm writing today to express my on going concerns over the safety of myself, my family and my colleagues. I had been granted accommodations and then they were rescinded. I received accommodations due to the fact my son is high risk. The fact that the accommodations were recalled since there aren't students in the buildings makes no sense. A person being high risk is regardless. It also, still doesn't change the fact I am exposing my child to unnecessary risk. While I was granted two days of work from home for childcare accommodations this is not enough. Having worked from home two days this week I can say I did my job just as well from my own home if not better. While in our building I have experienced many technical problems. At home I've experienced no technology difficulties.

No one feels safe and the district has not fully explained how exactly we are safe. Four buildings have shut down for covid cases. In order for us to truly be safe we need to work from home. We don't need to be micro managed, we need the ability to keep ourselves and our families safe while providing instruction to our students.

Thank you for your time."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jamie Jackson:
“The issue I have is not going into the building but that the classes are not being sanitized throughout the day or at all. My question is, when will this begin, and can you explain the procedures?”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Raymond Muller:
“I was told by the EEA – NJEA – and the EBOE – that our medical requests were going to be reviewed and responded to before the start of the current school year.
As of today , September 17 , I am still waiting for that review as are hundreds of other teachers across the district. With the current outbreak of COVID 19 across many schools in the district it is critical that teachers with underlying health conditions be allowed to work from home . When can we expect to have those responses to our medical reviews? Days ? Weeks ? Months ?
For those teachers with family members at home with health concerns we are now traveling back and forth from our schools , working in the buildings , traveling on a daily basis , not sure exactly what will be coming home with us to seriously jeopardize of those at home.
It really is unconscionable to take medical requests and dismiss them with total disregard to the health and safety of teachers and staff.
Thank you.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from John Griffin, EEA President:
“Good Evening Madam President, Madam Superintendent, and members of the Board,
I’m here tonight to express my concerns with the manner in which the reopening was handled by some of our stakeholders and the lack of communication with the Association, who was largely excluded. There are three school buildings closed right now and a fourth which just reopened due to COVID-19 infections. Had we not been excluded, and the lines of communication left open, this could have been avoided. I think there is a misperception amongst some of our stakeholders when it comes to myself and the EEA. You may have been told that we are problem-makers. We’re not. We’re problem solvers. Problems get solved by communicating. Communication occurs when two or more people have a conversation and see things through on their end. Those Conversations help build relationships, and relationships are important. Mutually beneficial results are rarely accomplished without them. On rare occasions when the EEA’s leadership is engaged by the Superintendent in discussions, we don’t just present problems and we never endeavor to create more. We present issues but we also offer solutions. And then we see things through on our end.
Therein lies the problem. We can’t work together to address issues and solve problems if we’re not communicating. There were several periods, sometimes even months at a time, that there was little to no communication between the Superintendent and the Association. And it wasn’t for lack of trying on our part. The most recent communications vacuum extended from March- July.
With that being said, here are the issues I bring before you this evening and look forward to discussing with you:
The district announced through a spokesman that it would be conducting “remote learning” in early August. Then turned around and blamed the teachers for “refusing to report”. They didn’t refuse. The Superintendent solicited medical notes from hundreds of our teachers who were “at higher risk due to COVID-19”. Those who qualified were granted medical accommodations and told they would be allowed to stay home and work remotely. That was the absolute right and humane thing to do. It was until the rug was pulled out from under their feet, their accommodations rescinded, and they were told to crowd back into buildings no matter how vulnerable they were. I would like to discuss a reasonable solution with the members of the board.
We tried to communicate to the Superintendent that the district wasn’t going to be ready on day one. We even proposed a four week moratorium on instructional staff returning so that every precaution could be taken before the populations of buildings increased ten-fold. The Superintendent and all the stakeholders were copied. Unfortunately, we received no response and now three schools are closed and one recently reopened due to COVID infections and the lack of preparedness. Obviously the threat posed by COVID was still present, even without large numbers of children reporting in person. I would like to discuss a reasonable solution with the members of the board. Finding solutions to problems caused by the lack of communication can be fixed if stakeholders re-engage us in conversations. As a matter of fact, I will give

you almost 3.5 million reasons to speak with me about what I believe is at the root of this problem. I would like to discuss a reasonable solution with the members of the board. Thank you for your time and attention this evening. I look forward to hearing from any Board member who wishes to speak with me. I'm optimistic that I will hear from someone soon. Please stay safe and healthy."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Sandra Hill:

"Good evening,

I'm writing today to express my concerns over my neglected request for medical accommodations and building safety. I understand all medical accommodations were rescinded however, mine was not even answered. According to the CDC I am at a heightened risk category and I really do not want my daughter to grow up without her mother. While I have been granted 2 days to work from home, my family members have needs that need to be met, and I would like to be safe 5 days a week. I'd understand the lack of consideration if actually could NOT do my job from home, but I can, and I actually do a better job at home because my WIFI doesn't lag, and I have access to all of the materials I have personally bought for teaching my grade and content area.

In my building I have only seen 2 bottles of hand sanitizer that are set out for staff. No spray, no disinfectant wipes, no PDP are available as promised.

It seems the air filters and vents were never cleaned or updated. That is unsafe. I work in an office with no windows for fresh air, even if I wanted it. No one has fully explained what was done to clean or verify that everything is safe for return to our school buildings. Why have you not answered any of the EEA's questions regarding this? Four buildings have already been shut down for Covid cases, but with our capacity rate, there was not supposed to be a risk to us coming in.

I'm an adult professional that does not need to be micromanaged inside a school building. I work countless hours, going above and beyond for our team members and students, I expect respect and the courtesy to keep myself and family safe while providing the quality instruction, to the students of Elizabeth NJ."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Marianne English:

"Question #1

Why are some staff members allowed to work from home because of Child Care Issues, but others, with medical concerns, have been denied working from home?

Question #2

Why are schools, with positive Co-vid cases, being closed for 2 days, to clean, only to bring back staff that has been exposed?"

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Hazel Outley:

"Good afternoon,

I am writing this letter to express my concern regarding the plans for school closures, considering recent activity. On September 28 we received a letter from the Superintendent stating, "All teachers will deliver live instructions to all students from their classrooms for the first marking period. We will reassess at the end of the marking period".

In the first 4 days of school there have been 3 school closings due to the Corona Virus. We are in a precarious situation leaving the safety of our homes on a daily basis and possibly being exposed to someone who has COVID-19, thereby possibly exposing our family to the virus as well.

The staff members at School #28, School #5 and Edison Academy were also in that situation and indeed were exposed to the virus causing a shut-down of those schools. What is the plan? To continue closing schools after an exposure and reassess after the first marking period? If that is the case where is the concern for the Social and Emotional well-being of teachers and staff? Walking into the possibility of

infection and then quarantine, produces anxiety in all front-line workers, especially those of us who are high risk and our loved ones at home who may or may not be high risk. Our mental and emotional states have already been pressed and stretched in the past several months adjusting to a curtailed lifestyle, the deaths of African American males (and females) at the hand of law enforcement agents, the death of John Lewis, a brilliant man and former civil rights leader and the untimely death a Superhero, Chadwick Boseman.

Thinking about recent school closings and the uncertainty of which school will be next to shut down due to the Corona Virus, educators are now having to make real life and death choices. Which do we love more, life that includes the pleasures of our spouses, children and grandchildren or teaching our future leaders in a place that puts us at risk of losing our lives or the lives of those we love?

There are about 35 schools in the Elizabeth School District. Let's represent each one as a domino and line them up. We all know what constitutes the domino effect. Well, it is already set in motion. You have the power to prevent other dominoes from falling. Be bold. Be brave. Be benevolent. Make the decision to allow all teachers to safely work from home as we continue to fight an unseen enemy."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Bettsy Baum:

"Dear Board Members:

I am a teacher at Halsey Academy. After returning home from work on September 14, 2020, I registered a fever of 100.4, and soon after my son also came down with a fever. It is with great fear and apprehension that I now await the results of my Covid-19 test. Not only do I fear for my health, but I am worried about exposing my family to the virus. This is no small consideration as my grandfather and stepmother have both died from Covid-19, and the toll that has taken on my family has been considerable.

After only one week since the school year began, my family and I have not only been potentially exposed to the virus but now are forced to deal with the emotional stress of waiting for test results. And, even if they come back negative, I know I will continue to face great uncertainty as the threat of the virus remains present.

Teaching is not just a job for me. It is a vocation that I cherish. I truly love what I do, and am pained that the pandemic has greatly disrupted my ability to teach students in the classroom. However, I love my family too, and the thought that I may be putting them at risk by increasing my exposure to Covid-19 has been a great burden. For that reason, I respectfully ask that you reconsider the decision to have in-class remote instruction and allow teachers to provide remote instruction from home. I sincerely feel this is not only the best approach for the well being of me and my family, but for other teachers and students as well."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Jennifer Hart:

"Good evening Board of Education members,

I would like to express my concern for the faculty and staff of the Elizabeth Public Schools. Since the opening of school on September 8th, 9 days ago, 5 schools have been closed because of positive cases of COVID-19 among staff members. The first case happened to be at Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Academy, a school that had 3 faculty members die last spring due to COVID-19. There are pictures from various schools of the filth coming out of the air vents and of disgustingly dirty and obviously unchanged air filters. The district claims to have cleaned and prepared the schools for the safe return of STUDENTS and due to a lack of staffing those students needed to stay home. The district has clearly NOT provided what was necessary for our dedicated custodial staff to clean and prepare the schools for the safe return of anyone.

As the superintendent holds meetings with the staff members of these affected schools many of their questions about plans for another outbreak are ignored. In fact, she said that an asymptomatic person cannot transmit COVID-19. Clearly the scientific information provided to her is not accurate as that statement is false.

If the information she has is not accurate and the schools are clearly not cleaned and prepared as is claimed, how can a plan even exist for the health and safety of all faculty and staff that you have made come into the buildings? Those who have medical exemption paperwork are put at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 simply by being forced to come into school and teach on a computer, something that can be done from home, and is being done from home by one of your very own board members.

What will it take for you to make public the plan for the safety of all faculty and staff should their be another outbreak? What will it take for the superintendent to answer honestly the questions being asked

by staff members who are scared for themselves and/or their family members? Will it be more deaths on your hands?
Thank you.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Tracey Thompson:

“Hello

I have two questions

Question one is regarding the PPE, I want to know what PPE should we be receiving daily and or readily available in the classrooms and buildings?

Question two is- I am a teacher with a CDA, although we work six feet apart, we are in the classroom for four consecutive hours. We do have on mask but not the N95, which are the best ones to wear. I want to know can we be provided with sanitizer or disinfectant for the air? Since, we are inside the building and not outside, particles can easily spread.

thank you for your time.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Toni McDonald:

“Good afternoon,

I wanted to send an email for the board members as I am currently being denied accommodations for childcare! I have a 2 year old and 6 month old at home who because of COVID their doctor does not want them in daycare. This is my main means of childcare. I have sent in a note from their doctor saying this and was still denied accommodations for childcare because they are not school aged kids. This is very unfair! I have used up all my leave time as I just am coming back from maternity leave. I do not have any other options to take a leave! I need the district to work with me and let me work from home some days. I am getting no response when I email Olga personally to reconsider her decision. This is what I was told from Verna in HR.

I also do not feel safe going into a school building where I can bring home germs to my infant child and my toddler. There has been 4 schools already with COVID.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Carolyn Rosenfeld:

“Good Evening Elizabeth Public Schools Community,

This is the beginning of my twenty-ninth year teaching in Elizabeth. There is nothing I would rather be doing than teaching as I was Pre-COVID. Sadly, that is not the state our city is in at this moment. We are dealing with a virus that is not going away anytime soon and no knows the long-term repercussions. We cannot go back to a Pre-COVID normal at this point in time. We must look at what is happening right now. Our school buildings have been open without students for a week and already at least four schools have needed to close due to positive COVID tests. I am concerned for the health of my peers and myself that this trend will continue.

Initially, you granted employees “teleworking” accommodations due to medical needs as per the CDC guidelines. Technically “telework” means working from a distance, not working from home. We trusted the Superintendent and the Board of Education to provide for our welfare, and believed your intention was to work from home; however, that was not the case.

Next, the Superintendent and Board of Education stated accommodations were no longer necessary since students would not be in the buildings. It was stated that returning to the buildings would provide a sense of “normalcy” and it was safe. We returned, as requested.

Since our return, through unofficial channels, not from the Board or Superintendent, we learned that four schools were closed due to positive COVID test results. We have also learned that our assistants, have not been given proper technology to perform their required activities. Additionally, many of us work in older buildings with poor or improperly serviced ventilation. This lack of transparency is unsettling. We believe that there should be acceptable levels of transparency in these matters to maintain levels of trust.

As a result, many of us do not feel safe and we are distracted from our duties by additional stress and anxiety. This impacts our ability to teach effectively, especially for those of us who have medical conditions making us high risk for COVID.

There does not seem to be a need to teach to an empty classroom. Teachers are resourceful, we can teach anywhere. I have personally taught in stairwells, hallways, auditoriums, and closets. We can adapt to teaching from home. We have been trained on our tools. The use of Microsoft Teams, Whiteboard, PowerSchool – Unified Classroom, Flipgrid, and GoGuardian can be just as effective, and in some cases more effective than in class learning. Unlike last year we now are leveraging these tools more efficiently, we have instituted a regular schedule for learning, we take attendance, monitor student engagement, and are better equipt to communicate with our students virtually.

Please review all previously approved medical accommodations and permit our at-risk members to work from home until it is safe.

Please treat us as the professionals we are.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Michael-Anne Regan:

“Good Evening Madam Superintendent, Madam President, and Board of Education Members, I have always loved my job. Teaching my students has been my passion since I was hired to teach in Elizabeth. I work at a wonderful school surrounded by wonderful people. In my years working in Elizabeth, this is the first time that I can say I feel truly unsafe.

We are in the middle of a pandemic and are being forced to go into building with many other people. We wait on long lines just to get into the building in the morning due to new swipe cards. The security guard taking our temperatures has to get extremely close to get a temperature that I am positive is not correct. Often times, my temperature is way too low. I know that colleagues of mine have literally had temperature of anywhere between 93-98 degrees F. That being said getting out of the building and waiting in that line is also just as crazy.

We have been assured over and over again that it is safe to work in our buildings. That is simply not true. Many buildings had COVID exposures this past week and had to shut down for cleanings. What is to stop people who do not realize they are sick from coming in and spreading a virus they don't know they have. Pre-symptomatic people are the most contagious. This virus can be spread in so many different ways. Just using the bathroom can put someone at risk mask or not.

Many of us are not working alone in our classrooms and must wear a mask at all times even when teaching. Specifically, I have 5 assistants in my classroom on a daily basis. My students have a very hard time understanding what I'm saying through my mask. By the time 12:39 comes around, my asthma has already been triggered and I spend my afternoons nebulizing. My doctor wrote a note and specifically stated that wearing a mask all day was not an option for me. When we were told that everyone had to go into the buildings regardless of their health issues, that sent a clear message to me that my life was not considered important by the superintendent or board of education. I am in the high-risk category if I contract COVID-19 and asthma is not my only medical issue. Why are you forcing us to risk our lives and the lives of our families? I would be horrified if I brought COVID home with me to my kids or spouse.

District staff should be working from home. We did it in March and we can do it again. Please stop making us choose between our lives and our jobs.

Thank you for your time.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Demetria Demoleas:

“Hello Mrs. Hugelmyer and esteemed board members,

I hope this email reaches you all well, safe and you and your families are all healthy.

My question this evening is why you don't make the attempt to sit with our EEA and have a discussion about the conditions of our school or teachers teaching from the safety of their homes. I even believe mr. Griffins emails go unanswered.

As educated, responsible, adults we would never think to ignore any one of you this way, ever, when you call on us. We have taken hours upon hours of workshops this summer (from amazing IT dept) we have left our homes to go to classroom with unventilated classrooms (there are numerous pictures to show) we took over 10 hours of more workshops behind 4 walls for 2 days and 1 of those days with our principal as

a teams meeting. So you did know it still wasn't safe to gather. We spend hours upon hours behind the computer planing the days work, spend all day fixing glitches with our students, helping them the best we can, giving them all we have. You knew we would. You know you have an amazing staff. You know our dedication the dedication of over 4000 members.

Members are getting sick one by one. Schools are not well. We all know.

Yet you won't answer or talk to one EEA president of this huge membership?

We are respecting our students, their guardians, parents, families, administrators, board members, and you. Mrs. Hugelmyer, we are the legs and foundation of this great system.

Please just take the time to sit and discuss a plan.

This is all we are asking."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Claudia Hudson:

"Superintendent Hugelmeyer, Board Members,

I will begin this communication as I always do these days, expressing my sincere wish that you and your families are safe and healthy.

To that end I must ask why you insist that teachers and staff go into the buildings putting ourselves, our families and our communities at increased risk to exposure to COVID 19? There are approximately 400 employees of the EBOE who according to CDC Guidelines are at increased risk for contracting COVID and increased risk of poor outcomes should they contract the virus. The spread of the virus is attributed in high percentages to asymptomatic people!

What is the reason for this decision? You must see that it doesn't make any sense. And with it you have sent a loud and clear message that you do not have our best interests in any component of this decision making process.

To our Union I can only say thank you for all you are doing to try to get the district to do the right thing. I wish everyone safety and health but I fear it is more precarious because of the decision of the Superintendent."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Eric Miles:

"Dear Board Members and Superintendent,

The policy choices you are making now as board and a Superintendent are choices no other board or superintendent have had to make in the 21 century. These times are unprecedented. I understand that it is not an easy task. But what I do believe is that when humane and equitable policies are formed it is important to use, when able, compassion as a guiding force. I say this because I do not believe compassion was used in the decision to ask teachers to return to the school building while students learn virtually. We as educators operate on the mantra that children come first. But if you do not take care of your teachers, ultimately you are not taking care of your students either.

It is unfair to expect to the best from even the most dedicated teachers if they are scrambling and concerned about childcare or focused on the safety and health of their co-workers, their own health and the health and safety of their own family. Teacher are human. We suffer from the same fears and worries as the rest of society. This moment will not last forever, but as board members and superintendents we only have a small window to show compassion and humanity in a very terrible time. Humanity and compassion, if shown, that will be remember long after this pandemic has passed."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Joanna Miles:

"My name is Joanna Miles. I am an ESL teacher in Halsey Academy, a person who is medically high risk from Covid and who was initially granted the accommodation to teach from home. One week before the start of school and our initial PDs, we received an email from the superintendent retracting all accommodations and requiring teachers to report to school buildings, leaving teachers at high risk from Covid in limbo. At that moment I felt as if the rug pulled out from under me and like many teachers, I felt anxious and worried about what would happen if I entered the building. I keep hearing people say the percentage is small, if you teach in a building without student, but who wants to roll the dice when it comes to one's life and health and that of one's own family.

Right now I am still in limbo. As of Sunday, I have been granted the temporary accommodation to teach from home while the Chief Medical Officer reviews my medical letters and accommodation request.

The prospect of teaching from inside the building and putting myself and others at undue risk is extremely stressful-not just for me but for my fellow colleagues. This could easily be resolved if we were shown the same compassion and understanding as our students. The whole beginning week of school was unnecessarily stressful. Having taught from home, I don't see why teachers are being forced to compromise their health. I await a response from my medical review."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Christy Rodriguez:
"Can the current 4 hour schedule be re-evaluated? As a parent and teacher in the district, I see the kids are exhausted by the 3rd hour. They are losing interest. Please consider reducing the hours on screens."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Christina Godlewski:
"Good Evening Mrs. Hugelmeyer and the President and Members of the Elizabeth Board of Education: I am writing to request that you reconsider your current virtual instruction plan which has teachers and staff working from their buildings. While your reopening plan outlined a cleaning protocol for hybrid teaching and learning, such plan was not provided for the Fall reopening for teachers and staff. As you are very well aware, four buildings have been forced to close after just 4 days due to employees having tested positive for Covid-19. To date, those in my building, School #89 have not received the promised PPE. Teachers and staff have not been diligent about wearing masks in common areas (only yesterday the teacher in front of me at temperature check/ID badge swiping was not wearing a mask and the security guards did not reprimand him nor did they offer him a mask upon entering!), teachers and staff have been congregating in all areas of the building and not social distancing either in the building or at home. Temperature check is a farce since the thermometers do not work. Monday my reading was 91.5 and yesterday and today it just said "low." Additionally, it has been brought to the employees' attention that buildings are not equipped with the CDC-recommended MERV 13 or higher filters; in fact, some teachers are working in classrooms which do not even have windows at all or windows that open. It is my understanding that to date the EEA has not received health and safety protocols in general, the reporting procedures for when violations occur, nor details about when and for how long quarantines will occur and last. Are you aware of the fact that many teachers are avoiding using the rest room because research has shown that there is danger of contracting COVID-19 from toilet plumes and that Covid-19 can be shed in one's fecal matter up to 2 weeks after someone has recovered from the virus? Regarding teaching and learning, you, the Board, parents, and the Elizabeth community/taxpayers should be aware of the day-to-day experiences of teaching virtually from the buildings. Teachers have to navigate back and forth between TEAMS, PowerSchool Attendance, Unified Classroom, GoGuardian, and any other tabs or files necessary for delivering that day's instruction. The internet has not been reliable because the network cannot handle all the livestreaming and daily updates to the software that is occurring. Teachers can do all of this from the safety of their own homes where the internet is more reliable. Finally, as a teacher who is considered healthy, I am writing to support my immuno-compromised colleagues whose healthcare accommodations were rescinded. Some master teachers who could have taught safely from their own homes were forced to take leaves of absence. Others who could not afford to do this are coming to work each day afraid for their lives for no real reason other than because you decided that teachers must report to their buildings. Many now suffer from anxiety and insomnia which will lower everyone's resistance to most viruses, Covid-19 included. I will end by saying that your "100% Virtual Plan" was a misnomer and urge you to allow teachers and staff to work from home. How many more must contract the virus, or God forbid, die in this district? Thank you for your time."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Alima Kone-Francois:
"I am joining the EEA to express my concerns about the unresponsive Board members. I was so stressed out that my Blood Pressure went to 200/135, I was really anxious about the lack of response. Only when our EEA got involved did I receive a response. In this time of pandemic situation, communication is key. Please answer our emails in the future. Thank you."

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Kimberly Sutherland:

“Good evening Mr. Kennedy,

I wanted to take a moment to express my concern over the current situation. I went into school last week on a very positive note. I was ready to take this on and quite honestly, I was happy to be in my classroom and back with my colleagues. I found that there was definitely far more accountability when I was teaching from my classroom than from my house in the Spring. I felt better about the lessons and my students were happy to see me even if we never met in person. We are already starting to build relationships and will continue to do so in whatever way we have to!

I have made phone calls, talked to parents, emailed, and have practically 100% attendance on a daily basis. I push myself to do the best for the kids I have dedicated my life to. However, with recent occurrences this is becoming very hard. I was an instructional coach at School 28 for 5 years and worked School 18 as a teacher for 3 years. When I learned of these schools having positive cases I immediately called people who I love and care for, out of concern and fear quite honestly. To hear them say they were not told what was going to be done in the future to assure their safety I began to question everything that has been going on. I trusted the situation I was going into.

I personally NEVER expected 4 schools to have positive cases in 4 days. This surprised and shocked me. I thought we would be fine. I felt safe. I felt good about going in to my building. I no longer feel this way. If this happened at other schools it can easily and quickly happen at my school as well. Please understand that there are certain individuals who have "excuses" not to wear masks. How can we feel safe when we are told that masks are required for all, but this does not happen. I understand that people have problems with wearing them ... but can those people not be excused and allowed to work from home? Why are we being put in situations that are simply uncomfortable for us to be in? Why should I have to feel like I am complaining when all I care about is my safety, the safety of my family and my colleagues?

There needs to be a better plan. There needs to be stricter rules if we are going to do this and stay safe. I am not complaining about being in school. I WANT to be in school. But I do not feel safe anymore. One of my own students said "how can you possibly be safe in school if WE are not safe in school?" Even the kids are worried about us.

The custodial staff is doing a phenomenal job. I cannot complain about them ... they are around and they try to keep up regularly. Our building has little ventilation and when the heat comes on in the winter I cannot imagine what is going to happen.

I simply do not feel safe. I have a friend who had the virus in March who is still experiencing symptoms 6 months later. I have protected myself and my family for the last 7 months. Please, find a better way to protect us. Clearly, what is occurring now is not working. Our students deserve the best, but honestly so do we. And if we cannot be assured that we are safe, then we sadly should teach from home. This is not what I ever expected to be saying last week at this time.

Thank you for your consideration.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Nick Nicoletta, EEA 2nd Vice President:

“Dear Board Commissioners,

I am deeply saddened and concerned by the decision to void the approved medical accommodations for our most at risk members. Our Superintendent and medical examiner only approved those who were at an increased risk of a severe illness of COVID-19 . These members are already stricken with medical afflictions that make their lives challenging under normal conditions. But now to expose them to environment in which will complicate their medical conditions and put them at higher risk, is completely unfair. We have had a significant number of deaths within our district from this devastating virus, why risk even more. Currently we have several buildings closed due to positive cases in the short time we began the school year.

All our members are under a tremendous amount physical and mental stress upon entering the buildings to maintain their health and lives even before they begin their assigned responsibilities.

Allowing our members work from the safety of their homes will lead to a healthier and more productive employee. I hope and pray you will reinstain the individual medical accommodations that were previously granted and allow the remainder of the members to work from the safety of their home.

Something we must ask ourselves as decision makers, people whose decisions affect many. Can I rest my head easily at night on my pillow and go to bed with a clear conscious about this decision I made? Is having these educators come into buildings worth the potential risk of losing another beautiful soul? Thank you for your attention in this matter. Stay safe and healthy.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Mary Ann Tagliavore:
“Good Evening!

Tonight many teachers, staff members, family and community members have sent in statements concerning the way the pandemic is being handled by the Elizabeth Board of Education. All of these statements are moving, heartfelt and compelling. Every single person employed by this district has legitimate concerns for their wellbeing and safety for themselves and their colleagues during this very difficult time.

I have great difficulty understanding why we are NOT receiving answers to simple questions such as what is the plan when a member of the district tests positive for Covid 19? Why are teachers and staff members of those buildings not being tested for Covid? Why is it not even being suggested to them? Why are the staff of those buildings expected back in the building 2 days later when the CDC says if you know you have come in contact with someone who has tested positive you are to self isolate for 2 weeks? None of this makes sense. When these questions are asked all you hear is silence.

These are not ridiculous frivolous questions. We should not even have to ask for answers to these questions! This is information that should be given to us directly without hesitation. We are educated, highly skilled professionals. We are to be treated with respect and dignity. We have the right to a safe, healthy work environment with clear procedures of how these situations are being handled.

Please answer these questions. Ease the anxieties of the people of the district. Treat us as you would like to be treated. Demonstrate the integrity you ask of us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Judith Mankowski:
“Members of the Board, Olga Huglemeyer,

I write to you as an educator, as a mom, as a fellow human being.

I write to you as a teacher who is discouraged by the lack of trust and respect we are being shown. I write to you as a mom who wants to live to see her children all grown up. But most of all, I write to you as a person who is petrified for myself and my co-workers.

In the past week, not one, not two, not three, but FOUR schools have had teachers test positive for the covid 19 disease. Four schools that, were deemed by you and your "medical expert" as safe. This is not safe. I have asked, and I know many others have asked, multiple times for proof of the inspections on our HVAC systems. We have not received a response. Many of us have asked to teach from the safety of our homes due to health concerns - and were granted accommodations that were subsequently rescinded because, with the children being remote the "schools buildings are safe". We now have proof that they are not safe.

Virus particulates are not filtered out by MERV 8 level filters, which many of our schools have. Virus particulates are not filtered out by MERV 13 rated filters, which is the *bare minimum* suggested. This bare minimum still allows transmission of disease. Virus particulates are filtered out by MERV 17 rated filters - THAT is the level at which schools will be safe. This is NOT a cold that we, as teachers, power through and come to work through. It's not a stomach virus, which many teachers contract at school each year. It's not even the flu, again, which many of us contract each year. This is a deadly, deadly virus - for those with and without risk factors, but exponentially more deadly for those of us who have risk factors. When you dismiss our concerns, and scoff at us, when you insist on having teachers in unsafe buildings, you do a grave disservice to the entire community. How do you think parents will feel when their child has to cope with the death of a teacher? Do you think they will still vote for you? Think again.”

Mr. Kennedy received the following email from Cynthia Villegas Renales:
“Superintendent Huglemeyer, President Diane Barbosa, and Board of Education Members,

My name is Cynthia Villegas Renales and I am a preschool teacher that has been employed by the Board of Education for the past 12 years. I am writing to you in hopes for all to understand some of the staff concerns regarding coming into the school buildings. I can only specifically explain to you in detail of my situation; but know, my situation is very similar to many others.

I initially sent a doctor's note regarding my son's medical condition to Mrs. Hugelmeyer and Mr. Cuesta in the beginning of August. When I did not hear from either after 10 days, I resent the same email. I never received a response from either regarding if accommodations were to be given for me. It was soon after this second email was sent that we were told no one was getting a medical exemption as students were going to be studying remotely. Regardless, I never received a reply to my email from either Mrs. Hugelmeyer and/or Mr. Cuesta.

I also was facing childcare issues as I have 2 young children learning remotely as well. There was a lot of emails sent back and forth between Mrs. DeFonseka and I, but it was very difficult getting a straight answer at the time if we were going to receive childcare accommodations or need to take FFCRA. This was extremely stressful. I did not even know until the middle of last week, right before the first day of classes, if I was going to be able to work because I had only a few days to find childcare accommodations for the three days I would have to report to work. Somehow, I made it work and now am faced with the fact that staff members in 4 different schools over the past 5 school days have tested positive for Covid. My son has a medical condition where if he were to get Covid, he may become very ill. I do not feel safe coming into my building. My classroom is in a trailer, but I still need to enter the building to scan my ID in the morning and afternoon. With Covid cases coming up daily, its not a matter of if someone in my building will get sick, it is when. With thousands of staff members entering these buildings daily, there is a lot of potential exposure.

I am grateful I can work from home two days a week, but by having this experience, I know we as teachers are more than capable of working from home effectively. I implemented the same lessons as I would from my classroom with no issues. My internet is better from my home versus my classroom as well. There have been several times where I would freeze during a call or I was unable to access a webpage I needed because there are too many devices logged onto the same network.

I sincerely hope you take all our concerns into consideration when thinking about how you are going to handle the influx of Covid cases amongst the staff besides sanitizing for two days and reopening the buildings. Our health and safety should be of utmost priority and as of now, I do not feel it is. We are someone's, child, brother, sister, mother, father, before we are educators. Thank you for your time."

Since there were no other participants for public speaking and no other emails received, Mrs. Barbosa closed this portion of the meeting.

Mrs. Barbosa thanked the public speakers for calling and taking the time for caring for our children and for our staff.

Mrs. Barbosa stated that she would like to reinforce the statement made earlier. Mrs. Barbosa stated that at the beginning of the meeting they deliberated with the City Health Officer Mark Colicchio and we have made a decision, a very well thought out informed decision. Mrs. Barbosa stated that beginning Monday, September 21, 2020 we will ask our instructional staff to teach from home remotely. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are taking steps to stagger the schedule of our support staff. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the Board is taking this action with the strong recommendation of our City Health Officer Mark Colicchio who was with us in deliberation. Mrs. Barbosa stated that food service will operate to continue to provide the breakfast and lunch program following a staggered schedule. Mrs. Barbosa stated that remote learning for students will continue as it is now. Mrs. Barbosa stated that tomorrow we continue to be in session and education continues. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we are going to reopen on October 5, 2020 again at the recommendation of our City Health Officer. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the goal is to further reduce the number of the adults in the district buildings. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we have said from the outset that we will make decisions based on two major criteria, science and data. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the current data dictates that this is the best course of action today that we must take. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we will communicate further details to all of our staff and their representatives in the next two days with the details of the staggered schedule.

Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer gave the above announcement in Spanish.

Mrs. Barbosa stated that understand in no way we will dismiss the interaction of a student being inside a classroom with their teacher. Mrs. Barbosa stated that we have to step back and use all our educated advisors, every power that we have and all the guidance that we have provided from the CDC and our health officers to make the right decisions. Mrs. Barbosa stated that the priority is health and the education of our students and that will always be the basis of all of our decisions.

Mrs. Pestana excused herself from the meeting at 10:00 p.m.

The President requests a motion to go into Private Session to consider matters exempt under the Open Public Meetings Act, specifically for discussion of personnel, contracts and legal matters. The Board will reconvene in public and may add to the agenda.

A motion was made by Ms. Bathelus, seconded by Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, to go into private session at 10:05 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Hernandez, Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mrs. Barbosa – 8

Negative: None

Mrs. Pestana returned (via online platform) to the meeting at 10:44 p.m.

A motion was made by Ms. Bathelus, seconded by Mrs. Chevres, to reconvene in public session at 10:45 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Hernandez, Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mmes. Pestana, Barbosa – 9

Negative: None

Mrs. Barbosa added the following to the agenda:
Minutes of the Meetings of August 10 and 20, 2020
Secretary/Treasurer's Report for the Month of July 2020
Personnel Report
Supplemental Personnel Report
2nd Supplemental Personnel Report
Tuition Report
Superintendent's Report – Consideration

Mr. Jacobs requested more information on the Personnel Report at the next meeting.

Mrs. Barbosa introduced Superintendent of Schools Olga Hugelmeyer to present the Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Investigative Results.

Superintendent Olga Hugelmeyer stated that pursuant to Board Policy 5131.1 Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) and New Jersey Statute 18A:37 The results of each investigation shall be reported to the Board of Education no later than the date of the next board meeting following completion of the investigation, and include: 1) Any services provided; 2) Training established; 3) Discipline imposed; or 4) Other action taken or recommended by the chief school administrator. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that since our last Board of Education meeting on August 20, 2020 and through September 14, 2020 our School Counselor conducted 1 HIB investigation. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that this investigation was Unfounded for HIB as per New Jersey law. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that there was 1 female regular education student that was the alleged victim, there was 1 male regular education student that was the alleged perpetrator, and of the services provided and actions taken for this case, there was 1 counseling session, and 2 parent phone

conferences to address this matter. Mrs. Hugelmeyer stated that furthermore, there were no new HIB investigations reported to Board members at the August 2020 meeting, therefore, there are no HIB cases for the Board to vote on this evening.

Mrs. Barbosa added the following to the agenda:

Superintendent's Report – Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Investigative Results - None
Authorizations Report
Supplemental Authorizations Report
Finance and Accounting Report – Authorization to Pay Vouchers, etc.
Supplemental Finance and Accounting Report – Transfer of Funds
Award of Contracts Report
Supplemental Award of Contracts Report
Communications - None
Claims List

Mrs. Barbosa added the following to the agenda:

Resolution – School Violence Awareness Week
Resolution – Anti-Bullying Week of Respect
Resolution – Approving Renewal of Contract for Air Filters - Blejwas Associates, Inc.
Resolution – Appointing Systems Electronic, Inc. to Provide Fire Alarm and Fire Signaling System Testing, Maintenance and Inspections During 2020-2021 School Year
Resolution – Appointing Bio-Shine, Inc., Concept Printing, Inc., Spruce Industries, Inc., EAI Education, a Division of Eric Armin, Inc., Imperial Bag & Paper Co., LLC, W.B. Mason Co., Inc., and Nashville Medical & EMS Products, LLC to Provide Personal Protective Equipment for the District
Resolution – Appointing Homecare Therapies LLC, t/a Horizon Healthcare Staffing, to Provide Individual Nursing Services to District Students During School Trips and as Substitutes to School Nurses During 2020-2021 School Year

The second reading of the following new and revised policies was done:

1250	Policy	Visitors
3510	Policy	Operation and Maintenance of Plant
3541.33	Policy	Transportation Safety
5141.3	Policy	Health Examinations and Immunizations
6173.1	Policy	Remote Learning

Mrs. Barbosa added the following to the agenda:

Resolution – Adoption of New and Revised Policies
Resolution – Modification of Professional Services Contract for Public Relations Firm – Strategic Message Management, Inc.
Resolution – National Hispanic Heritage Month
Resolution – Declaration that Racism is a Public Health Crisis
Resolution – Job Description – Nurse Coordinator

Mr. Jacobs stated that he wanted to bring attention to the Resolution for the Declaration that Racism is a Public Health Crisis. Mr. Jacobs stated that we can see from the COVID-19 pandemic the statistics show that 75% of the children that have contracted COVID-19 were of the Asian, Hispanic, and Black nationalities. Mr. Jacobs stated that those nationalities are disproportionately affected by this disease which is one of the reasons why we wanted to pass this resolution with this Board. Mr. Jacobs stated that more importantly to keep the focus of our community and of our nation on this important movement that is going through our society at this time and the fact that we don't want to lose sight of the changes we all should make trying to all get along as one society.

Mrs. Barbosa added the following to the agenda:

Resolution – Appointment of Acting Nurse Coordinator – Marie Noonan

Mrs. Barbosa asked for a motion and a second to accept the agenda.

A motion was made by Ms. Bathelus, seconded by Mrs. Hernandez, that the above be accepted.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus (abstain- Authorization Report- Union County), Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Hernandez (abstain- Authorization Report – Union County), Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mmes. Pestana (abstain- Authorization Report – Union County), Barbosa – 9

Negative: None

Mrs. Barbosa stated that it is important that education still continues through it all and the love for our children and the love for our staff is always evident through all our decision making. Mrs. Barbosa stated that it is important to reiterate that tomorrow we continue as we have been following with the reporting to the school buildings and on Monday, September 21st we start with the new decision that we made tonight. Mrs. Barbosa stated that more information, logistics, and details will be provided in the next two days as far as devices, technology, laptops, and logging-in as we gear into this full remote of our instructional staff and the staggering of schedules will be provided. Mrs. Barbosa stated that it is very important that we always keep in mind the two most important facts, we need everyone to be safe and we need our children to be educated. Mrs. Barbosa stated to our students, teachers, and all our staff, know that we do everything for the best.

On a motion by Ms. Bathelus, seconded by Mrs. Chevres, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 p.m.

The motion was carried by the following vote:

Affirmative: Ms. Bathelus, Mmes. Carvalho, Chevres, Hernandez, Mr. Jacobs, Mrs. Moreno-Ortega, Mr. Neron, Mmes. Pestana, Barbosa – 9

Negative: None

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