

# Superintendent Newsletter

February 2024  
Volume 4, Issue 3

Dear Oyster River Community,

This is the last budget I am presenting before I retire on June 30th. To say it has been an honor to serve as superintendent of this school district would be an understatement.

From my first time meeting your children, I knew this was a special place. I have never met so many students whose desire to learn was so obvious. You have raised very special young people. On top of that, the dedicated staff, administrators, teachers, and support personnel who rise to every occasion and actively look for ways to reach every child's needs, are awe inspiring. Parents and caregivers demand excellence from us, and it motivates us to do even better work.

Finally, the communities of Durham, Lee, and Madbury are models for how three towns can come together to support public education in a way that makes this district an exemplar throughout the state. In addition, Barrington's high school students have blended beautifully at Oyster River High School.

As a district, we continue to outperform the state on the only measure used universally, the SAT. Our composite score was 1119, while the state was 944 and the national was 954.

Oyster River recently placed third in the State of New Hampshire in a study conducted by Stanford and Harvard researchers evaluating grades 3 through 8 math test scores. The story published in the [New York Times](#) includes a database of grade scores for public schools in 41 different states, showing how each one is recovering from pandemic learning loss. More on this in Assistant Superintendent Filippone's report below.

Although we are doing very well academically, our major area of concern, post-pandemic, continues to be the mental health of our students. We have seen a seven-fold increase in referrals for assessments. As a result, the School Board has included a licensed mental health counselor in the proposed 24-25 budget.

Another area that deserved attention is the strings program. This program started ten years ago with less than three dozen students and has grown to over 260 young musicians due to the efforts of Strings Teacher Andrea von Oeyen. Having a ratio of 260:1 is unsustainable, so the School Board has included an additional strings position in the proposed 24-25 budget.

We have reached the final year of building up the district's ability to pay for the new middle school. This budget includes the last increase of \$586,044. After this proposed budget, the entire middle school bond will be built into the on-going operating budget. The building has been an incredible success and will serve the district for decades to come.

The major challenge for this budget is 15.1% increase in the cost of health insurance or nearly a million dollars. This increase is the second largest in my tenure as superintendent. Other factors impacting the

proposed budget include an increase in utilities which have increased by more than \$200,000 and the annual negotiated salary increases for the following:

- Oyster River Teachers Guild: \$709,317
- Oyster River Administrator's Association (ORAA): \$95,905
- Oyster River Educational Support Personnel Association (ORESPA): \$77,505
- Oyster River Paraeducators and Support Staff (ORPaSS): \$136,126

The district also negotiated a new contract with Oyster River Intervention and Tutor Association (ORITA), Warrant Article 4, that includes \$139,846.63 in pay and benefit increases. The School Board lowered the impact of these increases by offering a retirement incentive with a projected savings of \$315,000. The Board also approved additional revenue of over \$1,000,000 that helps lower the impact of the budget on taxes. Overall, the budget is up 4.17% or a proposed budget of \$56,415,352.

The warrants may be [viewed here](#), and their explanation may be [viewed here](#).

Again, it has been an honor to serve these past twelve years as your superintendent. I wish the district my best as you move into the future.

Respectfully,

Dr. James Morse

Superintendent

### **Assistant Superintendent's Report**

The ORCSD was recently ranked third in New Hampshire in a study conducted by Stanford and Harvard researchers who analyzed math test scores in grades 3 through 8. The story published in the [New York Times](#) includes a database of grade scores for public schools in 41 different states, showing how each one is recovering from pandemic learning loss.

This research found that Oyster River students show little loss during the pandemic and large academic gains post-COVID, which is something we can corroborate through our own local assessment data using STAR.

District highlights from our recent Deliberative Session include:

- 99% High school graduation rate
- 100% Special Education graduation rate
- 83% College placement rate
- High aggregate SAT score of 119 with a 95% participation rate
- 61% of students met or exceeded the SAT match benchmark (compared to a 35% state average)

Acadience, STAR, the NH SAS, and the PSAT/SAT are districtwide assessments administered at the ORCSD. Acadience and STAR assessments are curriculum-based measurements that are used for benchmarking at regular intervals and monitoring progress allowing for long-term instructional goals with an end grade level objective.

The NH SAS and the SAT are statewide assessments administered to certain grade levels at the local level by our faculty and staff. The PSAT is an optional test administered for merit scholarship and SAT preparation. All of these are summative snapshots of a student's learning and performance.

We are grateful for the Oyster River community's continued support and investment in our students' success.

Suzanne Filippone  
Assistant Superintendent

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice**

Due to several instances of discriminatory graffiti at the middle school and high school, our community was unfortunately recently faced with a reckoning. District leadership and school administration publicly addressed the community-at-large, held grade-level presentations and, at the high school, had faculty lead require advisory discussion activities rooted in education about hate speech, antisemitism, and racism.

This incident and the community's response to it were opportunities for growth and demonstrated the importance of learning topics of hard history to better inform students on the impact of certain words, phrases, and symbols.

Poet Robert Penn Warren said, "History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future." With this in mind, I have been working with the high school principal to create educational opportunities in advisory sessions, such as an activity on personal values and self-betrayal. I will offer another activity focused on belonging and inclusion in April and I have worked with the middle school principal to confirm a guest speaker for kindness week to address the power of language with all grades.

My other ongoing projects also support our goals of inclusion. In particular, the DEIJ Community Group will be hosting a community-wide event in early May centered on the theme of belonging, building empathy, and understanding through storytelling and lived experiences. I will facilitate a workshop for teachers and staff for the upcoming March Teacher Workshop called "Bias Bootcamp" and the national organization Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) will implement a four-part training series on Intentional Inclusion.

As I start planning learning opportunities and programs for next year, I am keeping this work as my core focus. I am committed to furthering the work of cultivating an inclusive and accepting district culture and I look forward to sharing more with you in the coming months.

Rachael Blansett  
DEIJ Director

## General News & Announcements

### Election Day March 12, 2024

Warrant articles # 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 will be on the ballot in Durham, Lee, and Madbury. Supporting documents for the FY25 budget can be found online under the "Budget FY 24-25" tab. The February 6 Deliberative Session may be viewed here (presentation starts 9:36 minutes in) and an explanation of the warrants is available here.

### Competency-Based Reporting Survey

Thank you to students, staff, parents and guardians of students in grades 6-10 who completed the survey. The results were announced during the February 21 School Board meeting and will be utilized to improve our grades reporting practices. The survey will be made available online in the coming days.

### Oyster River Middle School Leadership

On January 17, Bill Sullivan was named as ORMS' principal. Principal Sullivan had been serving as interim principal since the start of the school year. On February 7, Alida Carter was also named as assistant principal.



### New Facilities Director and Human Resources Director

Dave Totty was named as Facilities Director starting May 1. Jennifer Horton was named as Human Resources Director with a start date of March 4.

### NH SAS Testing Dates for Grades 3-8, and 11

The testing dates are available by grade levels here.

### Kindergarten Registration

Kindergarten registration for the 2024-2025 school year concluded on February 13. Families with children entering kindergarten next year can contact their school's registrar to complete their registration packet.

- Mast Way School: Christine Nelson, 603-659-3001, ext. 3300
- Moharimet School: Helen Holmes, 603-742-2900, ext. 4302

### Internet and Digital Safety Presentation

On February 1, Detective Lieutenant and New Hampshire Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC) Commander Eric Kinsman presented a free program on internet and digital safety at the Oyster River Middle School. Those interested in learning more about the presentation may do so here.

## Learning Devices

Oyster River provides an enhanced learning experience to students of all grade levels by providing a device to all students. This strategy helps educators integrate multimedia elements and educational apps, as well as making learning more fun. Internet and digital resources allow students to explore subjects beyond the traditional curriculum and encourages independent learning. To learn more about computer use at ORCSD, please [click here](#).

## Amy Sterndale Receives Distinguished Service Award

The 2024 Distinguished Service Award was given to [Amy Sterndale](#) during the February 6 Deliberative Session. Amy was recognized for her unwavering commitment and support both as a district parent and resident.

Congratulations, Amy!



## R.E.A.C.H. Summer Camps

ORCSD is collaborating again this year with the Town of Durham Parks & Recreation Department (DPR) to provide unique and engaging camp opportunities for Oyster River students between the weeks of July 8 and August 2, 2024. Camp registration can be completed through [DPR's RecDesk portal](#) and will remain open through April 19 or until full. Camp catalogue may be [viewed here](#).

## Important Dates

**2/26-3/01** February Break

**3/06** School Board Meeting, ORMS NH SAS (Writing), Mast Way 4th Grade NH SAS (Writing), Open Circle Parent Program

**3/07** Mast Way 3rd Grade NH SAS (Writing), Moharimet Grade 4 NH SAS (Writing)

**3/08** Moharimet 3rd Grade NH SAS (Writing)

**3/12** Election Day

**3/15** Teacher Workshop Day

**3/20** School Board Meeting

**3/22-23** ORHS Little Women

**4/03** School Board Meeting, ORHS Grade 10 PSAT, and Grade 11 SAT

**4/04** Moharimet 4th Grade Musical Finding Nemo Jr.

**4/10** ORMS NH SAS Assessment (Reading)

**4/11** Mast Way 3rd and 4th Grade Musical Willy Wonka Jr.

**4/13** Moharimet Pancake Breakfast

**4/17** School Board Meeting

**4/22-26** April Break

**5/01** School Board Meeting, ORMS NH SAS Assessment (Math)

**5/15** School Board Meeting, ORMS NH SAS Assessment (Science)

5/24 Teacher Workshop Day

5/27 Memorial Day



## Mast Way Elementary School

### Visiting Author Matt Tavares

Author and illustrator Matt Tavares visited Mast Way on February 16 as part of the school's Celebration of Reading Week. The New York Times bestselling author-illustrator presented a special program and his books. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the writing process, publishing, and to have their book signed. Additional details [available here](#).



### Family Literacy Night

On February 8, Mast Way Literacy Specialist Alison Neri, supported by a team of colleagues and volunteers, hosted a well-attended Family Literacy Night. The event started with a presentation about how human brains learn to read while students listened to a read-aloud and followed by attendees being invited to explore various informative stations.



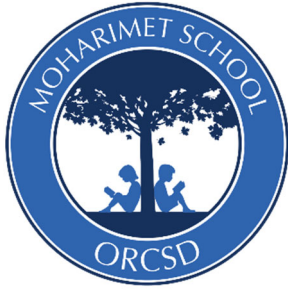
### Willy Wonka Jr.

Save the date for this exciting performance at the Oyster River High School Auditorium April 11, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

### Ode to Joy: A Second Grade Tribute to Composers

Our 2nd graders performed at the Oyster River Middle School Concert Hall on February 20. The music and movement show was a collaboration between teachers Cathy Baker and Chris Milner. The students executed choreographed movements to the music of composers while singing and playing instruments.





## Moharimet Elementary School

### The Year of Water: 100th Day of School

February 12 was our 100th day of school for the 2023-2024 school year. Students were invited to celebrate by supporting a cause connected to Moharimet's "Year Of" theme and bringing 100 pennies. Classes will use their coins for learning activities prior to donating their money to [The Water Project](#).

### Visiting Author Matt Tavares

Author and illustrator Matt Tavares visited Moharimet on February 14 as part of the school's Celebration of Reading Week. The New York Times bestselling author-illustrator presented a special program and his books. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the writing process, publishing, and to have their book signed. Additional details [available here](#).



### Sugaring Season

It's sugaring season and Moharimet students of all grade levels were invited to take part in the school's sugaring efforts. Principal Goldsmith would like to thank Jim Davis, Lizzie Higginson, the entire Moharimet team, parents, caregivers, and community volunteers who helped students tap the maple trees. Additional details are [available here](#).



### Pancake Breakfast April 13, 2024

Mark your calendars, the beloved tradition is back for its 20th year! You are warmly invited to join this community event and enjoy a delightful plate of pancakes with maple syrup produced by the school's students and dedicated volunteers.



## Oyster River Middle School

### Coffee and Conversation with the Principal

Principal Sullivan offers opportunities for families and community members to connect with him over coffee. Upcoming Coffee and Conversation will take place at the Oyster River Middle School Learning Commons between 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. on the following dates: February 23, March 29, April 19, and May 31.

### Clubs and Activities

With many clubs to pick from, it's easy for middle school students to find something they'll love! Our clubs and activities are doing very well this year. One of our most popular one, VEX IQ Robotics, sent 14 teams to the NH/VT State Championship in Manchester on February 18 where three teams qualified for the VEX IQ Robotics World Championship. Additional information may be [found here](#).



### Kindness Week

Kindness Week is held the week of February 19-24 and features a new theme each day. Middle school educators offer lessons during Advisory and organize activities to demonstrate the importance of acceptance and inclusion.

### Lunch Fund

Thank you for your generous donations. Our lunch fund has been replenished.



## Oyster River High School

### Scholastic Art Students Honored

Eighteen Oyster River High School students were honored at the Scholastic Art Awards of New Hampshire ceremony on February 11 at Pinkerton Academy. Their artwork, along with the artwork of other students who submitted theirs, will be displayed at the Durham Public Library with an opening reception on March



6, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. Congratulations to all participants and Oyster River Gold Key winners, Silver Key winners, and Honorable Mentions.

### Coffee House

Hosted quarterly by student publication Mouth of the River, Coffee House is an opportunity for students to display their art and talents. Coffee House's last edition attracted a large crowd and featured lively performances of music and poetry.

Additional information may be [found here](#).



### Substance Abuse Resources

Oyster River High School Licensed Alcohol & Drug Counselor Britta Bartlett recently published an article with helpful resources to help educate families on substance abuse. To read the article please [click here](#).

### Counseling Updates

The 8th grade transition to high school began in February with a grading lesson, school counselor presentations, individualized appointments to meet with high school counselors, and advisory presentations from school counselors and the Extended Learning Opportunity (ELO) Coordinator.

### Athletics Update

- Girls indoor track won Division II
- Girls swim placed second at the state meet
- Unified basketball moved to playoffs
- Junior Colton Brisard was selected to participate in the 2023 Offense-Defense High School All American Football Bowl game in Florida
- Haley Kavanagh set Division II and school record in the 1500 meters



# We're Hiring!

For more information or to apply, please visit [applitrack.com/orcsd/onlineapp](https://applitrack.com/orcsd/onlineapp)

Retirement incentives means a lot of openings! Thank you for sharing these opportunities with your network.

- **2nd Grade Teacher (Mast Way School)**
- **Library Media Specialist (Elementary/k4)**
- **Special Education Teacher (Elementary)**
- **Physical Education Teacher (Mast Way School)**
- **Physical Education Teacher (Middle School)**
- **6th Grade Language Arts Long-Term Sub (Middle School)**
- **STEM Teacher (Middle School)**
- **Digital Learning Specialist (Middle School)**
- **World Language Teacher: French and Spanish (High School)**
- **Paraeducators** (multiple positions) - 6.5 hours a day, Monday to Friday
- **Substitute Teachers: Long-Term Elementary and All Areas**
  - Wouldn't it be great to have a job where you only work when you want to? If you were a substitute teacher, you could do just that!
- **Custodian 2nd Shift Full Time (Mast Way School)**
- **Child Nutrition Workers/Cook**
  - Located at both the high school and middle school, multiple positions, no prior experience necessary.
- **Bus Drivers:** \$25.71 dollars per hour, competitive benefits package with medical, dental, long-term disability, 403b, 11 paid holidays, 15 days of paid sick time, and a \$1,000 annual perfect attendance bonus!

### **SAU Email Contact Information**

- Superintendent: Dr. James Morse | [jmorse@orcsd.org](mailto:jmorse@orcsd.org)
- Assistant Superintendent: Suzanne Filippone | [sfilippone@orcsd.org](mailto:sfilippone@orcsd.org)
  - Executive Assistant: Wendy DiFruscio | [wdfuscio@orcsd.org](mailto:wdfuscio@orcsd.org)
- Business Administrator: Amy Ransom | [aransom@orcsd.org](mailto:aransom@orcsd.org)
- Communications Specialist: Genevieve Brown | [gebrown@orcsd.org](mailto:gebrown@orcsd.org)
- DEIJ Director: Rachael Blansett | [rblansett@orcsd.org](mailto:rblansett@orcsd.org)
- Director of Student Services: Catherine Plourde | [cplourde@orcsd.org](mailto:cplourde@orcsd.org)
  - Administrative Assistant: Pamela Purser | [ppurser@orcsd.org](mailto:ppurser@orcsd.org)