

Oyster River Cooperative School District
FY23 Public Budget Hearing
January 11, 2022 7:00 p.m.

School Board Members: Brian Cisneros, Denise Day, Tom Newkirk, Dan Klein, Yusi Turell, Al Howland, Michael Williams

Administration Present: James Morse, Suzanne Filippone, Catherine Plourde, Sue Caswell, Josh Olstad, Doris Demers, Jim Rozycki, David Goldsmith, Misty Lowe, Jay Richard, Rebecca Noe

There were 5 members of the public present.

Michael Williams opened the meeting at 7:00pm and introduced Dr. Morse.

Dr. Morse thanked the audience for watching and invited feedback from the community at the end of his presentation or by emailing comments.

Dr. Morse began his presentation talking about the new middle school. He stated it has been driving the budget for the past 5 years. It will open to students on February 28th and to the community this August. One feature of the new ORMS is it is net positive. By using solar panels, it will generate the power it will use, and in the future, it will have the ability to produce power to sell to the grid. Dr. Morse explained how the new construction has an emphasis on student safety and wellness, as well as meeting students' academic needs to offer the best learning opportunities.

Dr. Morse described other district highlights, including SAT scores with an aggregate of 1570, math scores with 67% proficient compared to a 43% state average, a college placement rate of 86% and a high school graduation rate of 99.5%. Dr. Morse stated that although they are doing well in many areas and they could pat themselves on the back, they are a district that is always looking for ways to improve. For example, data does show that 2nd grade can improve since these students were impacted greatly by the pandemic with a shorter schedule and remote learning. Dr. Morse said our multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) looks at these numbers and identifies how to support the individual child. Regarding students who receive special services, Dr. Morse stated the district has a 100% graduate rate compared to a national average of 68%, a 0% drop out rate and 46% of students attending a 4-year college, which is outstanding.

Dr. Morse explained that the tennis courts were removed 3 years ago for the construction of the new middle school and parking lot. They were taken down with the commitment to rebuild them, however, the current inflation rate is drastically affecting the cost. The budget includes the price of the tennis courts and if it passes, they will be rebuilt in the spring, as promised.

Dr. Morse stated the 2022-2023 projected enrollment is 2,137, which includes 180 tuition students and 31 preschool students. He also described the projected enrollment for the next 5 years, including numbers for district enrollment by Durham, Lee, Madbury as well as Barrington tuition students. The total number has gone from 2,095 enrollment in 2014 to 2,106 enrollment in 2021.

Dr. Morse informed the listening audience that the projected budget increase was on track for a 7% increase, but the School Board insisted on delivering no more than a 4.1% increase in spending from the approved 2021-2022 budget. They felt it was a promise they owed the town after their support for the new middle school. This amount includes funds 10, 21, 22/23 and all warrant articles recommended by the board. Dr. Morse said the board chose to use \$400,000 from the expendable trust fund and \$500,000 from the emergency fund to lower the impact to towns.

The major drivers for the budget were identified by Dr. Morse as Health Insurance (4.5% increase), the Guild Agreement, ORESPA Agreement (Administrative Support Staff & Custodians) & ORPASS Agreement (Para-

educators), the Bond for the Middle School, and New Positions including 1 tutor at the Middle School, 1 tutor at the High School, 2 custodians at the Middle School and 1 DEIJ Position. Dr. Morse stated these new positions were made by the Board to specially support the students.

Dr. Morse's presentation included a discussion of the DEIJ position, which he believes is desperately needed since we don't have a specialist in the district to train teachers, provide latest research or develop shared practices in equity & inclusion in the curriculum, instruction & assessment. Up until now the DEIJ work has been done by volunteers in the committee of approximately 24 people. Dr. Morse stated their work leads us to a place where we now need a robust training program to support staff. A DEIJ position will also provide the necessary support to students and parents who are historically marginalized because of color, being handicapped, being gay, being transgender, having varied religious faiths and being in poverty. Dr. Morse stated that with the pandemic, came even a bigger concern to support the mental health and social emotional learning of students. He believes a DEIJ position will provide support for mental health, self-advocacy, navigating social norms and providing a safe, healthy & just environment for all students.

Historically speaking, Dr. Morse explained the rise and fall of past budgets with 2017-18 having a similar increase in the upper 3- 4% range. Dr. Morse was transparent about this year's FY23 budget stating it includes a general fund total of \$50,668,275, the costs of two contract agreements, the funds for school nutrition and the deduction of grant to account for a total of \$52,403,315. The impact to towns is estimated to be higher than they traditionally end up being, with an anticipation of a \$.85 increase in Durham, \$.16 in Lee and \$-.06 in Barrington. While these amounts are not a guarantee, they are the best estimate for the time, but often come in less than predicted. If the budget does not pass, Dr. Morse stated the default budget of \$51,721,541, which is \$411,784 less, automatically becomes the budget for FY2023.

Dr. Morse concluded his presentation stating that the public will be voting on Articles 3-6 as follows: Article 3 – Operating Budget, Article 4 – ORESPA, Article 5 – ORPaSS, and Article 6 - Facilities Development, Maintenance, and Replacement Trust for \$125,000 to purchase the solar array that will produce extra power in 5 years. He provided the audience with the dates and times for the next meetings including public meetings for each town, the Feb. 8th Annual Meeting Deliberative Session I, which is important for people to attend and give their voice, and the March 8th Annual Voting Day/Session II.

Dr. Morse asked the public if anyone had any questions.

Darren Keller of Lee stated his disagreement with the efficiency of the past and current budget. He said Dr. Morse made a big deal 10 years ago about efficiency, specifically with the new middle school, yet he says it will require the addition of 2 custodians to maintain it. He said he will be voting "no" on the budget because he undelivered on tuition money from Barrington, the district has gotten less efficient since it needs to add positions, and the schools are underperforming and are not as good as they could be. Dr. Morse counteracted Darren's statements and stated the two of them can respectfully disagree.

There were no other comments from the public.

Brian Cisneros made a motion to close the public budget hearing at 7:40 PM, 2nd by Denise Day. Motion passed 7-0.

Michael Williams moved to enter into non-public session at 7:41 PM under RSA 91A-3:II (I) , Consideration of legal advice provided by legal counsel, either in writing or orally, to one or more members of the public body, even where legal counsel is not present, 2nd by Denise Day. Motion passed with roll call vote of 7-0.

Brian Cisneros made a motion to adjourn at 9:26 PM, 2nd by Michael Williams. Motion passed 7-0.