

**Oyster River Cooperative School District**  
**FY24 Public Budget Hearing**  
**January 11, 2023 7:00 pm**

**School Board Members:** Michael Williams, Brian Cisneros, Denise Day, Dan Klein, Yusi Turell, Matt Bacon, Heather Smith

**Administration Present:** Dr. James Morse, Suzanne Filippone, Sue Caswell, Josh Olstad, Doris Demers, Lisa Huppe, Jasmine Daniels, Gen Brown, David Goldsmith, Misty Lowe, Jay Richard, Rebecca Noe

There was 1 member of the public present.

Michael Williams started the meeting at 7:00 pm.

**Denise Day made a motion to open the public hearing, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0.**

Dr. Morse thanked the audience for watching the presentation. To view the slideshow, [click here](#). Dr. Morse spoke about a variety of past and present factors that tell a story of where the district has come and where it is now. Below are summarized points for those factors.

***District Highlights***

The district SAT score is an aggregate of 1118, which is one of the highest in the state. In a 2017-2022 SAT score comparison, Oyster River continues to be higher than the state and the nation as a whole. Furthermore, math scores are 64% across the district compared to the 37% state average. The district's college placement rate is 83%, which includes 4-year, 2-year, and technical programs, and 17% of students choose military or work upon graduation. Oyster River's 98.58% high school graduation rate remains one of the highest in the state.

***MTSS***

Dr. Morse stated that children are still struggling post COVID with reentering school. While administration, teachers, paraeducators, and tutors have done a terrific job reintegrating students, there are still pressures on students at the family and school level since OR is a high performing district. As a result, the district has increased professional development around suicide prevention and trauma informed teaching. A social emotional curriculum has been embedded into the buildings along with strategies to reacclimate students and teach executive functioning skills. The district continues to think about students as individual's vs a collection in order to create and personalize plans for success. The alignment of the middle and high school master schedules, a first time for the district, has been a huge accomplishment. This alignment provides the greatest opportunity for flexible learning time and advisory.

***New ORMS***

Thanks to the overwhelming community support the new middle school opened last year and this year it was completed with the addition of turf fields and a playground. The project is living up to the academic expectations, is safer, and is one of the more sustainable schools in the country. In fact, the building was projected to be net neutral and now it is expected to be net positive producing more energy than it uses. It recently achieved Gold LEED status, which is a sustainability certification that has been received by fewer than 800 school buildings in the United States.

***Tennis Courts***

The district went from 3 to 4 new tennis courts, and in their new location the new courts are now on the same side of the road as the rest of the athletic facilities. Access is more practical and conducive to the students and community.

***Staff Accomplishments***

Oyster River is very fortunate to have its caliber of staff, which comes with the following distinctions:

Alida Carter – NH P.E. Teacher of the Year 2022-23

Val Wolfson - NH Social Studies Teacher of the Year

Erica Cooke – Dover Chamber of Commerce's Teacher of the Year

Cathi Stetson –NH Teacher of the Year semi-finalist

Sean Peschel – ELO Coordinator of the Year

Susan Leifer – 2022 State Finalist of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics

Michael Hope –NH Healthcare Hero runner up

***Student Accomplishments***

Combined with high academic scores, we have student recognition in competitions and the following:

ORMS has the top robotics program in NH (three teams attended World Championships in Dallas)  
ORHS 2021 state championships for Division II Golf, Girls Cross Country, and Unified Soccer teams  
Student participation in Madbury Day parade  
Globe Project - 4<sup>th</sup> grade participation  
Music students attended States

### **Enrollment**

Enrollment remains in a steady place in terms of projection of numbers and building capacity. Being overcrowded and under-resourced are not concerns as once was the case awhile back at Moharimet. All buildings are in working order with average to small student to teacher ratios. Current enrollment is 2,140, which includes 174 tuition students of which 171 are from Barrington as well as 22 preschool students. Total enrollment from 2014 to present has been relatively consistent.

### **INCREASES**

The Board has had to face a number of expenditure drivers including a 3% increase in Health Insurance; Guild, ORESPA, ORPaSS, and ORAA Agreements; the ORMS Bond; a Solar Array Purchase; and ORMS Counselor & Tutor positions, which have grants that are ending. Dr. Morse noted that tutors for small group learning has been a huge advantage K-12.

### **SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET GOALS**

Initially the school board budget was to include three options: a 3.0%, 3.62% and 4.32% increase from the 2022-23 budget. However, the district learned it was going to receive \$847,218 less in state funds compared to last year. This put the board in a deep dive to identify priorities and try to reduce the tax increase to residents. They agreed to an increase that is half of 3.0%, which results in a 1.54% increase. Dr. Morse credited the Board for doing a great job identifying cuts that would least impact students. To offset losses, they decided to cut personnel costs by offering an early retirement incentive, cut two unfilled special ed para positions, cut an unfilled technology position, cut repaving the Moharimet parking lot and cut carpet at the library. It was agreed that a budget of 3.0% would have crippled taxpayers in the three towns.

### **BUDGET IMPACT & TAX RATES**

The proposed 23-24 budget is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in 12 years and one of the lowest ever presented. It is equivalent to years 2012, 2013, and 2014 where resources were stretched. This year the priorities were given to support students and resources were stretched.

The loss of evaluation and state funding will have heavier tax affects in Durham than Lee and Madbury, however, there will still be a relative impact on each town. Therefore, the Board decided to not grow the budget as much as anticipated.

While we won't know the actual effect of taxes on our budget for the fall, Sue Caswell does a very good job getting her projections close to the actual costs. The total budget for next year is \$53,211,098. Should this budget fail in March, the district will have to cut \$257,188 since the default budget is set to be \$52,953,910.

### **MEETING DATES**

Dr. Morse let the listening audience know that the next meetings will be very important.

A public meeting hosted by each town will be on the following dates:

Madbury – **January 13<sup>th</sup>** at 9:00 am (Madbury Town Hall)

Lee – **January 23<sup>rd</sup>** at 6:00 pm (Lee Safety Complex)

Durham – **February 6<sup>th</sup>** at 7:00 pm (Durham Town Hall)

The Annual Meeting Deliberative Session I will take place on **February 7<sup>th</sup>** at 7:00 pm at the ORMS Recital Hall.

This session is critical to moving forward.

The Voting Day (Annual Meeting Session II) will take place on **March 14<sup>th</sup>** at the following locations:

**Madbury** – Madbury Town Hall 11:00 am – 7:00 pm

**Lee** – Lee Safety Complex 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

**Durham** – ORHS 7:00 am – 7:00 pm

Dr. Morse and Chair Michael Williams asked if anyone from the public had questions or clarifying questions. No one from the public spoke.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to close the public hearing, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 7-0.**

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:24 pm, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 7-0.**