

REVISED 07/25/22

**Oyster River Cooperative School Board  
Regular Meeting Minutes**

**June 15, 2022**

**DRAFT**

**SCHOOL BOARD PRESENT:** Denise Day, Brian Cisneros, Heather Smith, Matt Bacon, Yusi Turell, Dan Klein

**ABSENT:** Michael Williams,

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:** Paige Burt

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:** Dr. Morse, Jay Richard, Rebecca Noe, Misty Lowe, David Goldsmith, Catherine Plourde.

**ABSENT:** Sue Caswell, Suzanne Filippone

**STAFF PRESENT:**

**GUEST PRESENT:**

**CALLED TO ORDER at 7:00 PM by Denise Day**

Denise welcomed new student representative, Paige Burt, to the Board. Paige introduced herself as a rising senior, DEIJ committee member, and varsity athlete. She announced the Boy's Tennis won State Championships and reviewed the remainder of the year including ½ day finals and ½ day "reading" days.

**I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Brian Cisneros moved to approve the agenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon.**

**Dr. Morse proposed adding a short presentation introducing the DEIJ Coordinator to take place prior to Public Comment.**

**Brian Cisneros proposed removing Facility Naming from the Discussion & Action Items.**

**Motion as amended passed 6-0.**

**II. VIDEO & SUPERINTENDENT about DEIJ & WEBSITE**

Dr. Morse stated he had a conversation with Rachael Blansett, the new DEIJ Coordinator, on Monday because his written announcement and communication introducing her as the new hire was not sufficient to answer community members' questions. Dr. Morse created a video to give Rachael the opportunity to reintroduce herself and speak to the concerns that have been raised by the community.

[Click here to view Dr. Morse and Ms. Blansett's video](#)

A full video transcript is available at the district website. Talking points from the video included Rachael's homelife and value of education; her interview process and stellar references; the DEIJ work she's done up to date; her current work on a Maine school's anti-racism taskforce; her curriculum focuses to help marginalized groups; podcasts created during her time in grad school; her efforts to reappropriate language that historically shamed; and her commitment to building relationships & networks within the community.

Dr. Morse presented the additions that have been made to the school district website. He shared links to DEIJ community work, the DEIJ vision & goals, a petition from the community, a FAQ's page, the DEIJ job description approved by the Board, the completed and adopted job description and his welcome notice announcing the new DEIJ hire to the community.

Dr. Morse also shared how proud he is being the superintendent of the district where work is done on a regular basis to help every learner be engaged. He acknowledged a time when the district was entirely focused on academics, and they were not reaching a population of students that were disconnected from school. A new focus to include Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) was added into the curriculum to reach marginalized students. He spoke about the Special Education departments very tangible success and the institution of 68 Hours of Hunger, led by the school nurses to provide food, jackets, shoes, and clothing to students. Dr. Morse said although there were many reasons to be proud of the accomplishments, the first student suicide hit the district hard and revealed a gap. Actions were put in place to address students that were idealizing by increasing counseling services, psychological staff, and workshops. After acknowledging that transgender students were not feeling supported by the school the first transgender policy was put into place. Similarly, reactions to issues involving race gave way to realizing more support was needed around equity and inclusion. And today, the reality is a teacher's contract can be pulled for teaching divisive concepts. In describing where the district has been and where it is now, Dr. Morse concluded with thoughts that circled back to Ms. Blansett's hire. He stated he and Rachael know that podcasts and vulgar language cannot be part of the school system. Dr. Morse explained that he does not use social media in the employment process. He said as a public employer he does not have the right to know a candidate's age, marriage, or health issues. The district is, however, required to conduct criminal record checks. Dr. Morse stated he is absolutely supportive of Rachael, the DEIJ committee received her extremely well, and he believes she will be amazing support for the teachers.

### **III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Joshua Harwood of Lee thanked Dr. Morse for showing the video and updating the website. He stated he has concerns as a parent in the district. Joshua shared thoughts about his experiences growing up in poverty and in the Marine Corps interacting with a mix of people. His concern is for the district presenting one directional view that can turn into indoctrination and resentment. He urged Dr. Morse and the board to be transparent and include the parents.

Deb Edwards of Lee shared that she is a Hispanic, single mom from Panama. In being a Christian, she feels like a minority in a district that is predominately liberal and progressive. She showed concern for parents knowing what is going on with their children, specifically around gender choice in the school without parent involvement. She felt there should be an option to opt-in or out regarding these conversations and stated children are too young to make those kinds of decisions. Regarding inclusion and equity, Deb pointed out that spiritual children may want to be prayed for during the school day and suggested having a non-denominational chaplain available. She thanked the board for everything they do.

Jill Piparo of Lee stated her support of a licensed drug and alcohol counselor. She also shared her opinions regarding the DEIJ conversation stating she was disturbed to see Rachael's podcasts and Instagram posts. She stated the podcasts are relevant and stated a new podcast was posted two weeks ago. Jill stated she is embarrassed as a parent of kids that go to school here and felt money would have been better spent training staff. She stated it is Rachael's thoughts that worry her, not her language.

Darren Keller of Lee shared that his wife is an immigrant, and his kids are bi-racial. He said they came to the school district for the educational opportunities, such as robotics and mandarin. He said he did not come here to get dragged into ugly partisan politics. He felt that Dr. Morse's video was a textbook example of sweeping an issue under the rug.

Michelle Nathan-Hannon of Lee expressed how incredible the new middle school is with shared space, a common learning area and a sense of grade level community created by design. In contrast, she stated the special education resource room is isolated downstairs from all the other classrooms. She said the space is drab with no team colors and no easy access to counselors, occupational therapists, or physical therapists, and more importantly peers. She said it is a contrast to the old middle school and the elementary school's inclusion of

special education. Michelle stated the new building segregates an already marginalized group of students and encouraged Dr. Morse and the board to find a way to put the students back in their community upstairs.

Shawna Coppola of Madbury spoke on behalf of the Equity and Justice group by reading their statement of support. She expressed how thrilled they are with Rachael's hire. Her statement also encouraged those in opposition to sit with their discomfort and use it as a crucial means to reexamine why they are against measures of diversity and inclusion.

Jim Toth of Durham expressed his concerns for the hiring process as a professional having worked in human resources. He provided statistics from various employment sources stating that 94% of employers do background checks, 70% do social media checks and 54% eliminate candidates because of provocative and inappropriate social media content. Jim's concerns are what will be done in this position behind closed doors.

Jeff Berlin of Durham stated he has no kids in the district but if he did, he would pull them out. He commented on Rachael's shirt worn in social media posted by the school magazine. He asked if we want kids to think being a whore is good and if the word should be reappropriated. Jeff stated he went to school at Oyster River and did not feel race and discrimination issues existed then or now. He is shocked that the school feels they need a coordinator.

Janet Perkins-Howland of Durham shared her pride in the DEI hire. She stated she is so glad it has come to pass and sees talking about the issues as a way to move forward. Janet felt the reactions of the community present a good first topic on what makes Oyster River a welcoming community or not. She urged people to use the discomfort they are feeling to grow.

Kathy Collins of Durham felt grateful for the position and wished there were more support for it. She cited national examples of crime to emphasize the necessity of the position and felt the funds were well spent. She asked those in opposition if Rachael did not have the social media posts, how would they feel about her.

#### **IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Brian Cisneros moved to approve the June 1st, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon.**

The board had no revisions to the minutes.

**Motion passed 6-0.**

**Brian Cisneros moved to approve the June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, Non-Public Meeting Minutes as written, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 6-0.**

#### **V. ANNOUNCEMENTS, COMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS**

##### **A. District**

Rebecca Noe of ORHS congratulated Paige Burt on being selected as the new school board student representative. She reported that graduation went really well and congratulated all the 2022 graduates. Recently the 8<sup>th</sup> graders from ORMS and thirty-seven 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Barrington attended a high school orientation and National Honor Society students shared advice with the up-coming class. Last night's Fall Sports meeting was well attended, and families learned about sports and several clubs being offered at the high school.

Rebecca provided the following dates and events to take place late summer:

August 17 – Counseling 101 Info

August 18 – Application 101 (How to apply to jobs and colleges) & Introduction to HS for Parents at 6 pm.

August 25 – Freshmen Orientation 8:30-12:00 pm to include tours, speeches, and activities.

Yusi Turell asked if there would be an on-line option for Freshmen Orientation for those who already have vacation plans. Rebecca stated that the nature of the orientation would not fit into an on-line option, however, a

student can visit the school anytime Monday-Thursday and families can contact the office to receive orientation materials.

## **B. Board**

Yusi Turell read a letter to the board and listening audience addressing her feelings regarding the DEIJ position and interview process, the announcement of the hire, and the recent reactions from the town among other statements of opinion.

[Click here to read her letter](#)

## **VI. DISTRICT REPORTS**

### **A. Assistant Superintendent/Curriculum & Instruction Report(s)**

#### Middle and High School Schedules

Jay Richard of ORMS and Rebecca Noe of ORHS shared their collaborative plans and schedules for the upcoming school year. Both schools will alternate and align blue and white days. There will be cross building attendance of students and staff for accelerated courses and music classes.

Rebecca stated that the high school will have 80-minute blocks with the addition of a FLEX period on white days.

Jay stated his appreciation in collaborating with Rebecca. His plans include instituting FLEX, Bobcat time, and advisory to provide continuity between the schools. Rebecca and Jay aligned periods for middle school students attending a HS class, so they do not miss other class time. Jay shared that the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> graders are very excited about having World Language.

Regarding lunches, Rebecca said there will be three lunches determined by discipline, which is down from the past four due to COVID spacing measures. Jay stated he plans to open the year with three lunches: 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 6/7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade for transition purposes and then they will eventually go to two lunches after Fall. To accommodate the larger numbers, lunches will be broken down into 15-minute segments alternating eating and recess.

Denise Day asked how students get to the HS and Jay stated they currently take a bus, but students may be able to bike or walk with the closer proximity between the schools. Heather Smith confirmed with Jay that there will be students transitioning between the schools in the Fall.

Dr. Morse commended Rebecca and Jay for aligning master schedules, which is the first time for the district.

#### Reach/Summer Faculty Professional Development

Since Suzanne Filippone was absent, the report on summer professional development will be provided at a later time.

#### ORMS Plans for Building Grand Opening Update

The ORMS Grand Opening will be held on Tuesday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> from 11:00-1:00 under the solar canopy. Jay Richard stated the event is open to every parent and community member across the district. State officials have been invited, as well as Durham, Lee and Madbury town dignitaries. Companies involved with the construction will also be in attendance. Details of the event are still being worked out, but plans include speeches, a ribbon cutting ceremony and student involvement.

The board asked to include former board members Al Howland, Tom Newkirk and the wife and daughter of the late Kenny Rotner.

#### COVID Metric Update

Catherine Plourde stated last week was the last of the SASS testing. She reported that numbers are down a bit, but there are still students and staff missing the last week of school. Catherine stated that SASS testing will most likely not be returning in the Fall since federal funding is ending. They will continue to have a relationship with UNH and if they feel there is a need for PCR testing to open back up, they will have a conversation. Testing held in the nurse's office will also be fading out for the next school year since home testing kits are readily available.

Yusi Turell thanked Catherine for all her work throughout the year in collecting and reporting the COVID metrics and providing updates from the state and various health organizations.

## **B. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Morse shared that a student is working on their Eagle Scout Badge and has requested to rebuild the walking bridge. A fundraiser is being organized to raise money for the project.

### Recognition of Jim Rozycki's 9 years of Service to the District

Dr. Morse stated that losing Jim Rozycki is a big loss to the district. He praised his nine years of hard work and dedication to transforming the district saying that every building was touched and transformed by Jim.

### MS Blasting Update

Dr. Morse explained that during the MS blasting phase a considerable amount of ledge was revealed, which was more than an anticipated and unused MS construction funds will need to go toward the removal.

### Safety Plan

Dr. Morse stated that safety plans were reviewed by the police chiefs in an effort to continuously review and improve planning. The district is looking into allowing limited surveillance to the police during a state of emergency. Legally they would be prohibited from turning the cameras on at any point of the day and surveillance would only be permitted during a crisis. Dr. Morse has sent the plans to the state for review.

### Fall Enrollment

Misty Lowe of Mast Way and David Goldsmith of Moharimet provided an update on enrollment numbers for Fall. Misty stated that Mast Way is in great shape for enrollment, and they are not in need of any new hires at the time. Two grades she is watching are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> since numbers are high; however, currently there is not a need to share students across the elementary schools.

David Goldsmith stated that overall enrollment numbers for Moharimet are lower for next year since the exiting 4<sup>th</sup> grade was high. Two grades he is watching are K and 3<sup>rd</sup> since they are close to the limit, but there is no need to share families across the schools yet. David reminded families that school assignments will be given out in August.

Denise Day said since enrollment varies year to year, she continues to bring up the possibility of exploring having all classes for one grade to be in one building. It would eliminate families switching across schools when classroom numbers are too high.

## **C. Business Administrator**

### District Treasurer

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to appoint the District Treasurer, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Dan Klein.**

Heather Smith inquired about the treasurer's role. Dr. Morse explained that it has historically been a position in New Hampshire required by the state. The treasurer cuts the checks and signs them, and Brian added it is part of checks and balances since no one in the SAU has that authority.

In a memo from Business Administrator Sue Caswell, it was acknowledged that Lisa Harling is stepping down from her role as the District Treasurer after 20 plus years. Sue recommended appointing Karl Van Asselt, current treasurer for the Town of Durham, for the Treasurers Position stating he understands the role of the position.

**Motion passed 6-0.**

#### **D. Student Representative Report**

Paige Burt provided her report at the beginning of the meeting during her introduction.

#### **E. Finance Committee Report**

An update will be provided after next week's meeting.

**F. Other:** None

#### **VII. UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGENDA**

Denise Day asked the Board if any items needed to be discussed separately and there were no concerns.

Guild Nominations for the 2022-23 School Year

Superintendent Authorization for Hiring During the Summer

List of Policies for first read: JLCA – Emergency Plan for Sports Related Injuries and Additional Protocols for Athletics Participation

**Brian Cisneros made a motion for approval the guild nominations, superintendent authorization for hiring during the summer, and the list of policies for first read, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 6-0.**

#### **VIII. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS**

##### Current High School .50 FTE Biology Position increase to 1.0 FTE and LDAC

Principal Noe requested the half time biology position be increased to full time to restore a needed biology class and to offer Jon Bromley's Design Thinking course, which falls under the district's Vision of a Graduate. It was also discussed that the current Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC) resigned to the private sector for higher hourly rates. Currently \$28k has been allocated for the LADC position.

In a memo, Dr. Morse requested that \$70k of undedicated funds under the Health Insurance Line be transferred to the Science position in the amount of \$28,210 and the LADC position in the amount of \$41,790.

Dr. Morse stated that incident numbers reported by administration, Officer Nicolosi, ORMS and Quick Tips justify a need for the LDAC position, especially given how marijuana has become more legal and acceptable to society and the use of mushrooms, prescription pills and acid are prevalent. Dr. Morse stated that a full time LADC is rare to find, and the field is very specialized.

Board members discussed the use of the undedicated funds. Yusi Turell agreed money should go to the Science position and suggested a half of the remainder go to the Professional Development fund to cover denied teacher requests for summer work and the rest to attract an LADC counselor. Dr. Morse stated that \$22K would not be a large enough sum to cover summer professional development and it is not a stronger need. Denise Day showed concern for next year's budget funds. The board wondered if doubling the budget and advertising the position might attract a person that will work the same or slightly more than the previous officer.

**Yusi Turell made a motion to transfer \$28,210 from Health Insurance to increase the .5 FTE Biology position to 1.0 FTE, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 6-0.**

**Yusi Turell made a motion to transfer \$41,790k from Health Insurance to the LADC account, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 6-0.**

ORMS Interim Director of Student Services Nomination.

Catherine Plourde discussed a memo outlining changes to positions in the Special Education Administration. Brian Ryan and Andrea Biniszkiwicz requested to shift to part-time positions and their requests were honored. Brian will work part-time at Moharimet while Andrea will work part-time at Mast Way. The shift opened an interim position for Assistant Director of Student Services at ORMS and Catherine nominated Moharimet's School Psychologist, Brittany Prendergast to the interim one-year position. Brittany has recently earned her certification in Special Education Administration and the opportunity will support her growth and development. Catherine nominated Kathy Secinaro for the interim position as Moharimet School Psychologist. All interim positions will be for one year to evaluate the part-time model. If the interim positions do not work out, Brian, Andrea and Brittany will have the opportunity to return to their previous full-time positions.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to approve the ORMS Interim Director of Student Services Nomination, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Heather Smith. Motion passed 6-0.**

Moharimet Interim School Psychologist Nomination.

**Heather Smith made a motion to approve the Moharimet Interim School Psychologist Nomination, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Yusi Turell. Motion passed 6-0.**

Facility Naming – Removed from the agenda.

District Involvement in election information.

It was discussed that the town uses different systems than the school to present election information. As a result, it is confusing and difficult for townspeople to locate candidate information pertaining to school elections. Denise Day asked for input from the board prior to the policy committee writing a draft. Brian Cisneros offered to help since he has prior experience. Board members should send their ideas to Dr. Morse who will also be researching what other districts do. Dr. Morse stated it will be important that the board remain unbiased.

**Matt Bacon made a motion to begin the process for district involvement in election information, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 6-0.**

Board Goals for 2022-23

**Yusi Turell made a motion to table Board Goals for 2022-23, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 6-0.**

## **IX. SCHOOL BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES**

Manifest Committee reviewed the following Manifests.

Vendor Manifest #27 \$751,877.10

Payroll Manifest #25 \$1,172,429.41

Brian Cisneros announced the Finance Committee will meet on Tuesday and Denise Day announced the next Policy Committee meeting will be held on September 8<sup>th</sup>.

**X. PUBLIC COMMENTS** None provided

## **XI. CLOSING ACTIONS**

**A. Future Meeting Dates:** July 6, 2022 - Manifest Meeting – 3:30 PM SAU Conference Room  
July 20, 2022 - Regular Board Meeting – MS Recital Hall  
August 3, 2022 - Regular Board Meeting – MS Recital Hall

**XII. NON-PUBLIC SESSION:** RSA 91-A:3 II {If Needed}  
**NON-MEETING SESSION:** RSA 91-A:2 I {If Needed}

## **XIII. ADJOURNMENT:**

**The School Board reserves the right to take action on any item on the agenda.**

**Heather Smith moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:29 pm, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 6-0.**

June 15, 2022

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Respectfully Submitted,  
Karyn Laird, Records Keeper