

Revised July 26, 2023

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

June 21, 2023

DRAFT

SCHOOL BOARD PRESENT: Denise Day, Brian Cisneros, Dan Klein, Heather Smith, Matt Bacon, Tom Newkirk, Giana Gelsey

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Dr. Morse, Suzanne Filippone, Catherine Plourde, Sue Caswell, Amy Ransom, Rachael Blansett,

STAFF PRESENT: Josh Olstad, Gen Brown

GUEST PRESENT:

ABSENT:

I. CALLED TO ORDER at 7:00 PM by Chair Denise Day.

Denise Day made a motion to move into Non-Public Session under RSA 91-A:3 II(c), 2nd by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 7-0 by roll call vote.

Denise declared the Board back in public session at 7:08 pm.

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Giana Gelsey made a motion to approve the agenda as written, 2nd by Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0.

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None provided.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Giana Gelsey made a motion to approve the June 7th, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes, 2nd Heather Smith.

Giana Gelsey submitted the following addition:

On page 6 under the “NHSBA Resolutions” add “Giana Gelsey proposed writing a resolution to address 2021’s NH HB2, sections 297 and 298, which was known as the “divisive concepts” law. The statutes are now RSA 354-A:31-34. The school board previously released a position paper on this due to the potentially chilling effect on the ability to teach certain subjects. The board voted in favor of drafting a resolution, 7-0.

Denise Day submitted the following revision:

On page 6 identify the policy referenced in the 2nd paragraph by adding “...of Policy IHAMA - Teaching About Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Abused Substances” to the end of the sentence.

Motion passed with correction 7-0.

V. ANNOUNCEMENTS, COMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

A. District – None provided.

B. Board

Heather Smith announced that she attended graduation along with Matt Bacon and Tom Newkirk. She felt it was a lovely ceremony with outstanding student speeches. She congratulated all the students and thanked everyone that was involved with graduation and the behind-the-scenes work.

Giana Gelsey wondered about using UNH as the venue for future graduations. Dr. Morse stated that his first obligation is to honor the wish of the students, which is to hold the ceremony outside, and in extenuating circumstances use UNH for backup.

VI. DISTRICT REPORTS

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

Suzanne Filippone shared that so far, the district has had two incredible days of teacher workshops. Regarding summer REACH, the programs are geared up and ready to start. It will run from July 10th - August 4th at ORMS.

DEIJ Final Report (Rachael Blansett)

DEIJ Coordinator Rachael Blansett provided an End-of-Year Update presentation for the board. She stated that over the course of the year the DEIJ Community Group met five times, and during that time, they better identified their direction and next year's focus on community programming and education. Rachael coordinated and oversaw the visit by internationally renowned musician Tona Brown, which included a performance with all the orchestra students. There were a lot of meaningful questions asked during the student meet and greets, and overall student engagement was strong. She said it was a pivotal moment for both the community and the JEDI group. Rachael met with counselors, the JEDI student group, and gathered teacher and student feedback to draft a clear and improved district transgender policy procedure. Although DEIJ Competencies haven't been introduced to the classrooms yet, she has worked with NH Listens and is reviewing other district's work. The goal is to craft overarching competencies that both mirror and model the district's SEL work. Rachael plans to test and implement the DEIJ competencies with a group of teachers and gather their input and feedback to adopt a draft of competencies. She hopes to have this draft available for the board by the end of next year. Rachael also reviewed the five workshops that were created based off the teachers' needs assessment, noting that the LGBTQ+ training was most popular with the highest attendance. The Bias Bootcamp Workshop series was cancelled due to the June PD days, and it will be rescheduled for the start of the next school year.

Additional DEIJ work includes: 1) BIPOC student group space at the middle school and establishing one at the high school, 2) the UNH Extension Program with two selected OR students, 3) bringing culturally inclusive food to the dining service, and 4) the Manchester Teacher Residency pilot program which aims to diversify staff for growing diversity in student populations.

Tom Newkirk referenced Chris Hall's sabbatical work, which involved teacher research and suggested it might be a model for working with some teachers in the future..

Denise Day gave Rachael a big thank you and Heather Smith told her that the work is everything they hoped for with different connections made among teachers, students, and the community.

B. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Morse discussed the need for seating at the middle school turf field. The Finance Committee determined there are funds remaining to build bleachers with a capacity to hold 400 people. The bleachers will be built into the hill on the back side of the fence, and they will be handicap accessible from the parking lot.

Dr. Morse informed the Board he would like to change Rachael Blansett's title from DEIJ Coordinator to Director. The title will provide her with equal status to her peers who hold the same position in the state as DEIJ Directors. There were no objections from the Board.

Best Practices in Communications (Gen Brown)

Communications Specialist Gen Brown provided an update to the board's two communication priorities, which are a Best Practices in Communications document to set expectations and guidelines for district employees and a new website for the district and all the schools. Since a Best Practices in Communication document didn't previously exist, a new one was created based on reviewing samples, researching current practices, and receiving feedback from the leadership team. A draft was approved in June 2023.

This week Gen is providing staff with the Best Practices in Communication document and is offering initial training sessions on the topics of accessibility, confidentiality, email signatures, media releases and photography.

Additional professional development will be offered during the 2023-24 school year. The Best Practices in Communication document will be reviewed yearly, and its content updated as required.

Heather Smith said she was very pleased with Gen's presentation on communication practices. She said the information is great and helpful, and she has already seen an overall improvement in communication and consistency across the district. Heather said she knows what to expect for the principals' weekly communication and where to look for it, and she enjoys the Superintendent's Newsletter.

New Website Update (Josh Olstad & Gen Brown)

IT Director Josh Olstad and Communications Specialist Gen Brown provided a Website Update presentation to the board. They have been working with School Now, formerly known as Campus Suite, which was the provider selected because of their high-ranking features and functionalities that were important to the district. The new website has a centralized calendar, is mobile friendly, provides a search limited to the website pages, and integrates well with social media. A lot of work has gone into the current refining and reviewing phase, which has been very content focused and collaborative. Thursday, June 29th, will be the official launch date, however the search component will not be running until two weeks later. During the next phase of work, they will collect and analyze feedback that the public can provide through the homepage.

Josh gave credit to Gen for being a key player in communicating with principals, tech integrators, and the athletics staff, in addition to the website service provider.

Josh and Gen gave the board a demo of the website, making note of its more personalized appearance with pictures of students and our schools. He also pointed out the ease of using the website's quick links to locate upcoming events, news, as well as a calendar that can be viewed by school or by using an overlapping feature to see events from multiple schools. Alerts across the top of page will indicate school closures or other important information, such as the changed office hours for summer.

Board members asked questions and provided comments. Appreciation for all of Josh and Gen's hard work was expressed and the board looks forward to the June 29 launch.

Update on Class Size Enrollments

Dr. Morse reviewed class size enrollment for fall of 2023. Currently the K-2 numbers are at a reasonable and comfortable number averaging 16-17 students per classroom at Mast Way and 17-18 at Moharimet. Grades 3-4 are larger at both schools averaging 20-21 students per classroom. The district will be monitoring the numbers throughout the summer and if there are any significant changes to discuss they will bring them to the board.

The middle school enrollment numbers are within the range predicted. Currently the 5th grade has the lowest numbers, and the other grades are within range for an ideal teacher to student ratio. The 5th grade 3-person team is excited to offer a more project-based component. Math will be taught by all three teachers and each teacher will also have focused areas of instruction.

There is a slightly higher enrollment than anticipated at the high school. Dr. Morse attributed this to ORHS being a popular option for Barrington families. Current enrollment includes approximately 180 students from Barrington. The max number of Barrington students per grade is 50.

Update on 3 Person Team – Middle School

Dr. Morse has met with Jay Richard, Bill Sullivan, and the 5th grade teachers several times to discuss the implications for next year's grade 5 team. The teaming will be one 3-person team and two 2-person teams, in which every teacher will teach math so they can provide student help during Bobcat Time. All teachers are receiving Eureka math training.

Heather Smith wondered why both teachers aren't teaching ELA on the 2-person teams. Dr. Morse explained one teacher will be responsible for ELA and the other teacher will alternate teaching Social Studies and Science by

quarter, in which considerable amounts of writing will be incorporated into those subject areas. The change will allow students to continue to get reading and writing supports, and the math supports that they otherwise wouldn't get.

Affirmation of Hiring

Dr. Morse announced the names of a high school computer science teacher, a high school special education case manager, and a middle school language arts teacher for new hire.

Tom Newkirk made a motion to approve the Guild Member List of Affirmation, 2nd by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0.

C. Business Administrator

FY23 Budget Update

Sue Caswell informed the board that the district will be receiving returns in the form of incentives and interest from Eversource and the Bond. She feels the district will hit their mark without using the retention fund and overall things are looking good. In a transfer of power, Sue introduced the district's new Business Administrator Amy Ransom, and the Board welcomed her. Brian Cisneros shared that he has known Amy for many years, and she is top-notch. Brian thanked Sue for all her years of service stating that she has done so much for the industry and for women in business.

D. Student Representative Report– None provided.

E. Finance Committee Report

ORCSD sports, turf field usage, and bottled water sales were a few topics discussed recently by the Finance Committee. Brian Cisneros said the information will be shared with the board in an upcoming meeting. The committee meets again at the end of August.

F. Other – None provided.

VII. UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGENDA– None provided.

VIII. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS

Strategic Plan Report Out – District wide {Suzanne Filippone}

Suzanne Filippone provided the board with an updated version of the Strategic Plan with annotations of progress toward the 5 Year Outcomes. She stated that some revisions were needed along the way, but the work continues to focus on the outcomes written in 2019.

The following are highlights from her report: Regarding District Curriculum progress, the goal of identifying Sustainability Coordinators has been completed and work is in progress toward a teacher-based curriculum support team across all curricula areas. A possible K-4 model for world language was presented in 2022 and remains under consideration. Several technology goals have been completed and it has been identified that a maintenance program will occur in grades 1, 5, 9 annually. Regarding School Nutrition, the middle school kitchens were installed, the training of staff is on-going, and many equipment upgrades have been made. In terms of District Sustainability, teacher coordinators have begun implementing the developed plan, faculty surveys were conducted, and findings were presented to faculty, staff, and the school board. DEIJ work is making steady progress with the hiring of Rachael, who has led several faculty trainings throughout the year. Many faculty and leadership are engaged in online work and training around restorative justice. Regarding transportation, research continues toward an electric/hybrid van replacement and work around a student bus safety program is continual. Concerning MTSS/SEL Mental Health, a lot of work has been done developing systems, collecting data, and implementing evidence-based screenings and supports. The district team will reconvene to review progress and evaluate where MTSS stands academically and behaviorally. The school board voted in favor of extending the Strategic Plan an additional year since there will be a new superintendent for the 2024-25 school year.

Tom Newkirk wondered about the status of competency-based grading at the high school since the timeline had been changing and evolving a few years back. Suzanne said there is discussion about a dual system and not removing the current numeric grading system, but rather adding competencies to the reporting. Dr. Morse stated a conversation with Principal Noe will be necessary. Tom pointed out it is a delicate topic that is political, emotional, and sensitive to people in the town, and stressed the importance of communication surrounding it. Dr. Morse assured the board that any changes to grading will include a lot of outreach to the community, and nothing will get lost in the translation.

School Board Resolutions

Giana Gelsey stated that she and Tom Newkirk reviewed the proposed ORCSD resolutions for the upcoming NHSBA annual meeting and decided on a change in plan. They decided to drop addressing the 306 regulations, as their concerns were largely addressed with reservations at this time, but to instead focus on the ramifications of 2021's HB2, which was signed into law as RSA 354-A:31-34. Although described as an antidiscrimination bill, it includes troubling language that inhibits the ability of teachers to fairly and equitably teach and children to learn honestly learn, and most importantly contains potentially severe penalties to teachers for perceived violations. Giana stated that the NH Department of Education, the Commission for Human Rights, and the Department of Justice provided clarification of the law, but that she and Tom determined that nothing in the clarification nor the law contradicts NHSBA's policies regarding equity and inclusion. Giana explained there is still a concern for the prospect of civil suits and "disciplinary sanctions" from the state that circumvent local school board policies and removes local control.

Giana read the proposed rationale and resolution:

In 2021, HB 2 was signed into law as RSA 354-A:31-34. Described as an anti-discrimination bill, it included a number of prohibitions for teachers with potentially severe penalties for violations. Due to lack of clarity in the law, a FAQ was issued by the NH Department of Education, the Commission for Human Rights, and the Department of Justice. Nothing in the clarification nor the law contradicts NHSBA's policies regarding equity and inclusion (NHSBA VI:F). However, we are concerned that the prospect of civil suits and "disciplinary sanctions" from the state has already had a chilling effect on efforts to create inclusive curricula which honestly address issues of bias and race. These civil suits and sanctions, as outlined in RSA 354-A:34, circumvent local school board policies that already exist to address parental concerns regarding curricular content. This is again an erosion of local control that we find concerning.

The NHSBA opposes any policy affecting curriculum that enables parents or guardians, to circumvent already extant local school board review policies and exposes teachers to civil suits and sanctions at the state level.

Dr. Morse made the edit to include "individuals" and Dan Klein suggested adding "organizations". After discussion, the Board agreed to have it read "*....parents or guardians, individuals, or organizations...*"

Final Proposed Resolution:

The NHSBA opposes any policy affecting curriculum that enables parents or guardians, organizations, or other individuals to circumvent already extant local school board review policies and exposes teachers to civil suits and sanctions at the state level.

Dan Klein made a motion to approve the proposed resolution with edits, 2nd by Heather Smith. Motion passed 7-0.

Chair Denise Day thanked board members Giana and Tom for all their work.

List of Policies for First Read: CHCA – Approval of Handbooks and Directives, CHD – Administration in Policy Absence, CM – Annual Reports

Policy Committee met on June 8th and selected Dan Klein to serve as chair. The policies presented tonight for first read underwent minor changes, and Dan outlined these for the Board.

Dan Klein made a motion to approve the List of Policies for First Read: CHCA – Approval of Handbooks and Directives, CHD – Administration in Policy Absence, and CM – Annual Reports, 2nd by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 7-0.

IX. SCHOOL BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES – None provided.

X. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None provided.

XI. CLOSING ACTIONS

A. Future Meeting Dates: July 19, 2023 – Regular School Board Meeting @ 7:00 PM MS Recital Hall

XII. NON-PUBLIC SESSION: RSA 91-A:3 II (c) – held at beginning of meeting.

NON-MEETING SESSION: RSA 91-A2 I {If Needed}

XIII. ADJOURNMENT:

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

Heather Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 pm, 2nd Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karyn Laird, Records Keeper