

**Oyster River Cooperative School Board**

**Regular Meeting Minutes**

**September 6, 2023**

**DRAFT**

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

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE: Absent**

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:** Dr. Morse, Suzanne Filippone, Catherine Plourde, Amy Ransom, Rachael Blansett, Gen Brown, Bill Sullivan, David Goldsmith, Misty Lowe

**STAFF PRESENT:**

**GUEST PRESENT:**

**ABSENT:** Maeve Hickok (student rep.)

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

**II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Tom Newkirk made a motion to approve the agenda as written, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Heather Smith. Motion passed 7-0.**

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None provided.**

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Giana Gelsey made a motion to approve the August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Newkirk.**

**Giana submitted the following revisions:**

On page 3 under “Review Superintendent Search Advertisement” in Giana Gelsey’s comment strike “it’s a unique role” and replace it with “the position highlights the district’s priorities, and the district spent considerable effort and political capital in developing the needed position.”

On page 3 under “Unanimous Consent Agenda” add the following statements to Giana Gelsey’s inquiry about stipends: “She pointed out that there is a disparity between athletic and academic stipends. Dr. Morse stated that the athletic stipends are typically higher than academic ones regionally and the stipends reflect that.”

**Motion passed with correction 7-0.**

**Giana Gelsey made a motion to approve the August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Newkirk.**

**Giana submitted the following revision:**

On page 2, under section B, add the following sentence to the end of the first paragraph: “Giana Gelsey had also independently submitted a letter to the Board of Education asking not to accredit PragerU due to the other content issues.”

**Motion passed with correction 7-0.**

**V. ANNOUNCEMENTS, COMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS**

**A. District**

David Goldsmith of Moharimet welcomed back the district and said the school had a wonderful start. In addition to the kindergarteners, there were 20 new students to Moharimet. David stated that the transition back has been positive and smooth. In a school-wide assembly they established routines, sang the school song, and recited the school motto, “We are kind, we are responsible, we are learners.” Teachers refer to this motto throughout the year in class discussions about behavior and learning. This year’s school-wide enrichment theme is “Year of the

Water,” a broad topic encompassing all subjects. The water theme will focus on science, recreation, geography, and conservation with a connection to community scientists, engineers, and artists. David gave a shout out to the staff for all their hard work over the summer and recognized new staff. An all-school open house will take place on Thurs., Sept. 28<sup>th</sup>. It will be split by alphabet with more details to come.

Misty Lowe of Mast Way shared that they had a wonderful school opening with a focus on “making connections.” Social emotional learning and open circle will be a focus for teachers to develop relationships with students. The PTO is currently holding their annual mum fundraiser, which can be accessed through the PTO page on the district website. Picture day will be tomorrow, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, and Susan Leifer will be offering two technology nights to discuss safety. They will be held from 6-7pm on Sept. 13<sup>th</sup> for kindergarten and Sept. 14<sup>th</sup> for grades 1-4. Childcare will be provided by the high school National Honor Society students. Mast Way will hold its Open House on Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> between 5:30-7:00pm. A map of the school and parking logistics will be made available, and there is no expectation to stay the entire time since it is a “drop-in” format.

Bill Sullivan of ORMS stated that their opening was unbelievable. Staff and students exhibited positive attitudes and for the first time since the middle school was built, all the outdoor facilities were open on the first day of school. Picture day will be held on Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> and the school Open House will be on Sept. 19<sup>th</sup> from 6-7:30pm. Stay tuned for parking logistics and grade level times. Many sports practices have begun, as well as the Drama Club which will perform the play, *Oliver*. Other club offerings will be made available soon.

Rebecca Noe of ORHS had the opportunity to welcome over half the freshmen families at the Intro to High School sessions. During the Freshmen Orientation students attended their advisory, participated in games, and found their classes. She thanked the Durham Police Officers for their participation in welcoming students and serving pizza. Seventy-five seniors attended the first annual “Senior Sunrise” at York Beach, in which students brought doughnuts, coffees, and grills for cooking breakfast. Rebecca said the school opening was positive with staff and students showing great spirit during the first few days. Homework has already begun, and in this week’s heat the staff collaborated to share cooler spaces. Auditions for the fall play *Arsenic and Old Lace* took place today. Picture day is tomorrow, Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, and the senior class will have their picture taken on the field. Other upcoming dates include a Sept. 12<sup>th</sup> College Night at 6pm, Sept 29<sup>th</sup> and Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> Browne Center team building opportunities for freshmen advisories, and an Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> Open House at 6pm for parents to navigate their child’s schedule and meet teachers.

Giana Gelsey commented that several community members had reached out to her regarding the significant police presence that greeted incoming freshman students at the freshman orientation. She prefaced that she is aware that the district has a good relationship with the Durham Police Department and that we have an excellent SRO in Officer Nicolosi, but that greeting students with 4-5 armed police officers does not necessarily present a welcoming atmosphere to students, particularly those of marginalized communities and/or people of color. She asked that the administration think about this point of view for the future, particularly in light of the goals towards restorative justice in the district. Rebecca Noe replied that the idea was to create a positive relationship with the local police. The goal was to help students feel safe and welcomed by having the officers serve pizza.

DEIJ Coordinator Rachael Blansett stated that the DEIJ committee group will hold its first meeting of the new school year on Sept. 26<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. An agenda can be accessed on the district website. She told the Board her 2023-24 school year focus will be on students and creating spaces of community and support. She established Pride and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) spaces at the middle school last year and this year she will focus on establishing spaces at the high school. Her goal is to have a LGBTQ2S+ space during flex period on white days and a BIPOC space during second flex on blue days. Her hope is that these spaces will provide an extra layer of community and support to students who may not currently feel supported. Rachael connected with an outside organization that provides a parent/caregiver support space for students questioning their identity. It includes education and peer networking for students. Rachael will touch base with elementary school principals to discuss having this support available to families. She also spoke about the two high school students that attended the Equity summer UNH extension program in Bethesda, Maryland. It included interaction with 4-H students and country-wide mentors. So far, they have theorized and created an action equity plan for the community, and

Rachael will assist them in reaching their May goals and project timelines. The board expressed their support and interest in seeing the final presentation.

## **B. Board**

Giana Gelsey stated that the School Board Association meeting is coming up soon. Further discussion took place under the Discussion and Action Items.

## **VI. DISTRICT REPORTS**

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

Assistant Superintendent Suzanne Filippone reiterated how well the opening of school went and credited the staff, transportation personnel, and child nutrition services. She also thanked Dr. Morse for his inspiring welcome back. Suzanne spoke about homelessness and End 68 Hours of Hunger trends noting that current numbers are higher than usual. Contact the SAU if you'd like to provide donations, monetary ones are most helpful in providing to the individual needs of families.

Suzanne let parents know that universal testing information is up on the website with dates. The NH State of Assessment is adding a writing assessment and is looking for pilot schools. Oyster River's 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders will participate, which will give faculty and students an advantageous "window" into what the testing will be like in the spring. Dr. Morse commented that it is an amazing opportunity, which benefits teachers with work samples and provides students the opportunity to test when it doesn't count. Teachers and students will be better equipped to know how they will be assessed when it becomes mandated.

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

#### Opening Day Enrollment

First day enrollment was as expected, and Dr. Morse was pleased with the class sizes. There are no major concerns moving forward with the school year.

#### Staffing Update

Dr. Morse stated the district had an extraordinary opening and he credited all the staff, facilities, transportation, nutrition, paraprofessionals, office workers, and teachers. He said it takes a lot of extra hands to open the school year and everyone worked very hard. He gave a big shout out to Lisa Huppe since it was the most efficient opening for buses during his tenure. Dr. Morse gave kudos and credits to custodians across the district, who have been working relentlessly without a facilities director. He gave a special thanks to Patrick St. Onge for stepping up and taking a lead role. Dr. Morse also gave a big shout out to the technology staff for all their preparations and hard work, and he thanked the administrators for opening every building perfectly.

In comparison to prior years, especially during COVID, the district has had one of its best openings regarding staffing numbers. It is only down five paraprofessionals across the district, which is much better than last year's twenty. The district is down one special education teacher, three tutors, one custodian, one nutrition worker, and one driver. All these numbers are considerably better, and Dr. Morse gave special kudos to the transportation department for their recruiting efforts.

### **C. Business Administrator**

Amy Ransom reviewed the DOE-25 form, which was reviewed and approved for the Department of Education.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to approve the DOE-25 as presented, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Heather Smith. Motion passed 7-0.**

Board members signed and dated the form.

Amy Ransom reviewed the MS-25 form.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to approve the MS-25 as presented, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Heather Smith. Motion passed 7-0.**

Board members signed and dated the form.

Amy thanked everyone at the SAU for their support as she transitioned into her new role as business administrator. She let the Board know that the audit has been completed and she expects a full report by the end of October.

In an Adequacy Update memo, Amy explained that based on the state's new formula they will receive a \$389,580 gain bringing the total loss to \$457,738. She said that the taxpayers can expect the school district's obligations to be met.

**D. Student Representative Report {Maeve Hickok}** – None provided due to a sports absence.

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

Brian Cisneros stated that during the first meeting on Aug. 30th they discussed initial budget matters, including adequacy amount, Fund Balance, and potential warrant items. The high school turf field is entering its 8<sup>th</sup> year of use, and since it is used a lot, it will need replacing in 2-3 years. Brian advised holding conversations about putting money aside and adopting a fee usage to offset the cost associated with excessive use. The board will hold future discussions on the longevity and flexibility of turf field funding, fees, and revenues. Brian also let the board know of a possibility in changing banks due to a buyout. The new bank has caused several payroll issues.

Giana Gelsey brought up grass fields stating that turf fields are less sustainable and do not meet district sustainability goals. Dr. Morse said the district is limited in field space and the normal wear and tear during sports would not hold up with natural grass. Bigger schools with multiple fields can rotate and allow for re-growth, however, we don't have that ability. Also, our growing season is shorter.

#### **F. Superintendent Search Committee**

Heather Smith stated that the committee is moving forward with publicizing focus groups. The logistics for the space are still being worked out. In next week's meeting they will focus on the structure for the screening committee, and this information will be available at the next school board meeting. The dates 11/30, 12/1, 12/4 and 12/5 have been confirmed for campus interviews with candidates. The committee is working on details of the structure and public form.

The Dec. 6<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting will be relocated, possibly to the ORHS Library, due to Moharimet's chorus concert. The Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> Budget Meeting may also have a venue change.

Heather invited the public to save the date for the Sept. 27<sup>th</sup> (remote) and Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> (in person) community focus groups.

On Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> the community can expect the superintendent search survey to open and remain available until Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>.

#### Communication Update:

Communications Specialist, Gen Brown, provided the following update:

The new district website launched on June 29, 2023, with directory updates, new content/pages, and edits. An Aug. 30<sup>th</sup> snapshot of user traffic since the launch showed 15K users and 199K site interactions. A survey was added in July, but it received low response due to the timing of summer. Responses have increased since the return to school and it is hopeful that with the communication going home more families will provide feedback. If anyone in the listening audience is interested in taking the survey, please do so by September 30<sup>th</sup>. Afterward the survey will close, and the data will be analyzed and prioritized for implementation.

Regarding parent communication, the district migrated to ParentSquare in June. Families and staff were notified of this change through emails and newsletters and by now have received multiple posts from ParentSquare. Next, there will be a district email to families regarding account registration. Currently, ParentSquare is limited to mass notifications from Building Administrators/Front Office, the SAU, and ORHS Athletics. Further training and resources will enable sending posts independently. More functionalities and classroom communications will be available in 2024-25, such as forms, permission slips, sign-ups, RSVPs, polls, and social media integration. A pilot

training program made of up staff and teachers will begin this fall. The feedback will be used to create a robust training program for all staff, which will be made available in spring 2024.

## VII. UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGENDA

- **ORMS Maternity Leave of Absence from February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 through the end of the school year.**

**Denise Day made a motion to approve the unanimous consent agenda as presented, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0.**

## VIII. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS

Communication Update – See Section F.

Determine School Board Members who will present at the NHSBA meeting in October.

The NHSBA meeting on Sat. Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> will occur in Concord from 10:30-2:00pm. Giana Gelsey is registered to attend, and Matt Bacon offered to put together a PowerPoint presentation. Denise Day said she will be there to present and asked board members to join her. If any board member is interested in attending or have ideas for the presentation, they can contact Denise. Dr. Morse stated that as School Board of the Year they are obliged to present at the assembly, and their recognition is an incredible honor that they deserve to receive.

Giana Gelsey commented that the NHSBA do not support the resolution written by Tom and herself for the upcoming meeting. Giana commented that she thought their reasoning was flawed, as their commentary did not appear to understand what the resolution was addressing. The NHSBA stated that they thought the resolution was too broad, when in fact the resolution was broad because the NH RSA (RSA 354-A:34) it was addressing was broad, which was the entire issue. Tom commented that the resolution was addressing the results of former 2022 bill HB2, which has made it so anyone can directly bring charges against teachers for very broad reasons without going through school district channels first. He commented that the law is very threatening to teachers' livelihood and ability to teach and circumvents school board autonomy. Tom was concerned that no other proposed resolution addressed the issues that have been created for teachers raised by HB2. Giana commented that other resolutions clearly had some communication between the authors and the Board of Directors for improvement, but no one had reached out to our board. Giana asked if the board would approve her reaching out to Barrett Christina, the executive director of the NHSBA for clarification and guidance on how to improve the resolution to get it passed. Some discussion occurred, and it was agreed that Giana should reach out to Christina in the hopes that the resolution could be passed at a later date. It was also suggested that the district reaches out to school boards to build a mini coalition of like-minded school districts.

The Board reviewed a draft letter written by Giana Gelsey and Tom Newkirk in opposition to the PragerU financial literacy course, which the State Board of Education is considering implementing. After a discussion around the various arguments, board members agreed on keeping paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 and moving a sentence from the middle to the top.

Dan Klein urged the Board to keep this topic on their radar moving forward and possibly reaching out to other school boards to build a coalition for down the road.

**Tom Newkirk made a motion to approve the letter as modified for submission to the State Board of Education, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matt Bacon. Motion passed 7-0.**

Discussion on School Board Goals for the 2023-24 school year.

Board members reviewed the 2023-24 School Board Goals. For theme 2: Curriculum, Instruction, and Competency-Based Learning Reporting and Survey, Giana Gelsey suggested including a few parents and students as another stakeholder on the committee. She also suggested pulling the UNH survey and having the board create their own. Several board members felt the previous survey was lengthy and convoluted. Denise Day felt they should hone in on feedback specific to competency-based learning to make sure students and parents are getting the feedback they need. She believes teachers, students and parents should be the audience. Tom Newkirk voiced that simpler might be better with only a 10-question survey. He felt there are steps that can be taken to test the validity of the survey by sampling a small group of teachers and students before sending it out to

the community. He also felt there was value with the UNH Center reviewing a draft of the survey to look for clarity and bias prior to board approval. The board expressed agreement with this idea and will continue to discuss survey specifics at future meetings.

Modifications to the goals included the wording in section B. of Theme 2, removing Theme 3, and renumbering the list for a total of 4 Themes.

**Tom Newkirk made a motion to approve the 2023-24 School Board Goals with modification, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Heather Smith. Motion passed 7-0.**

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

The Manifest Committee met and completed the following manifests.

Payroll Manifest # 4 Total is \$247,790.33

Payroll Manifest # 5 Total is \$602,035.44

Vendor Manifest # 5 Total is \$331,478.17

Vendor Manifest # 6 Total is \$193,002.79

Policy Committee will meet next week.

Sustainability Committee will meet on Sept. 21<sup>st</sup>.

**X. PUBLIC COMMENTS** – None provided.

#### **XI. CLOSING ACTIONS**

**A. Future Meeting Dates:**      September 20, 2023 - Regular School Board Meeting @ 7:00 PM MS Recital Hall  
October 4, 2023 - Regular School Board Meeting @ 7:00 PM MS Recital Hall  
October 18, 2023 – Regular School Board Meeting @ 7:00 PM Mast Way Cafeteria  
October 26, 2023 – Board Budget Workshop @ 8:00 AM – Durham Council Office

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

**NON-MEETING SESSION:** RSA 91-A2 I (a)

- Strategy or negotiations with respect to collective bargaining.

#### **XIII. ADJOURNMENT:**

**Heather Smith made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 pm, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dan Klein. Motion passed 7-0.**

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Karyn Laird, Records Keeper