

# Oyster River Cooperative School Board

## Regular Meeting Minutes

January 5, 2022

DRAFT

**SCHOOL BOARD PRESENT:** Michael Williams, Denise Day, Brian Cisneros, Tom Newkirk, Al Howland, Yusi Turell, Dan Klein

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE:** Oliva Gass

**ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT:** Jim Morse, Suzanne Filippone, Sue Caswell, Catherine Plourde, Jay Richard, David Goldsmith, Misty Lowe

**STAFF PRESENT:**

**GUEST PRESENT:**

**ABSENT:**

**I. CALLED TO ORDER at 7:00 PM by Michael Williams**

**II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Tom Newkirk moved to approve the agenda as written, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0 with the student representative voting in the affirmative.**

**III. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Bruce Fenton of Durham spoke about the nature of force and violence. He told Michael Williams that he just broke a rule about shaking hands and they'll selectively choose to enforce force and violence. He stated that Brian Cisneros was at a football game unmasked, Dr. Morse had an employee in the SAU unmasked, and David Goldsmith instituted a mask mandate for Halloween event in a town that didn't have a mask mandate. He said there is no moral justification to apply force or use armed men to remove him for not wearing a mask. Bruce removed his mask and told Brian he was not armed and invited him and Mr. Goldsmith to beat him. Bruce took his mask off and returned to his seat asking the board to ignore him and continue the meeting.

At 7:04 PM the board took a 15-minute recess.

**IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Brian Cisneros moved to approve the November 18, 2021 Budget Workshop Minutes and the December 15, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Denise Day.**

Yusi Turell made the following revisions:

In the November 18, 2021 Budget Workshop Minutes on page 3 "300K" should be changed to "400k".

In the December 15, 2021 Regular Meeting minutes, the date "January 22" should be changed to "January 26" for the DEIJ virtual event.

**Vote on motion to approve the November 18, 2021 Budget Workshop Minutes and December 15, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes with corrections passed 7-0 with the student representative voting in the affirmative.**

**V. ANNOUNCEMENTS, COMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS**

**A. District**

David Goldsmith, principal of Moharimet Elementary School, told the board that the return to school has gone well overall since break. He said COVID has presented a real challenge and commended the staff and families for following guidelines. He gave numbers for absences, which included 27 at the start of the week and 15 today. Currently 4-5 staff are out due to COVID and even though staff does an amazing job covering absences, David

stated it does impact services. For example, when a Tier II tutor fills in for a teacher, those services can't occur that day. David could not commend his staff enough for creating a positive atmosphere amidst the pandemic.

Misty Lowe, principal of Mast Way Elementary school, said that her comments echo David's. Mast Way has been struggling with 7-10 staff out daily with only 1-2 substitutes filling in. She said her own father volunteered on Monday to help with coverage during cafeteria, recess, and bus duties. She encouraged anyone with extra time to consider volunteering or substituting. Misty reported that student absenteeism varied with an average of 40 per day with the majority being related to COVID. On a happy note, she publicly thanked the alumni association for donating books with a special thanks to Anita Mathers.

Yusi Turell asked how the public applies to be a volunteer versus a substitute. Misty said they'd go through the same process and the difference is a volunteer is with a staff member. She encouraged anyone with available time, however, to apply to be a substitute. The district offers the flexibility of doing ½ days or hourly positions in addition to working full day. Dr. Morse explained that those interested in being a volunteer and substitute follow the same process and encouraged those interested to contact the central office for fingerprinting, which is a cost covered by the district.

Jay Richard of ORMS stated they had a great start to the week and despite some groggy Bobcats kids were enthused to be back. He gave a huge credit to all the nurses and sub coordinators. He explained that the current situation is very fluid, with changes midway if students or staff have to leave due to illness. On Monday there were 58 absent, however, this included students extending the break and being out for other reasons. There are 53 days and 28 school days left until new ORMS opens. Jay shared his heartfelt gratitude to the community for their support of the new school.

Jay Richard gave an ORHS update on behalf of principal Rebecca Noe who was not in attendance. At the high school there has been a spike in COVID absences for the student population. The January 8<sup>th</sup> Winterfest has moved to a tentative date of February 18<sup>th</sup> due to possible snow and rising COVID numbers. Rebecca also gives her appreciation to the hardworking nurses, substitutes and staff filling in at the building level to help keep the school open and safe.

## **B. Board**

Denise Day thanked Mrs. Anderson for holding the Rethinking Education Panel Discussion and expressed her enjoyment in hearing the students' perspectives.

Yusi Turell commended the teachers and administrators for their smooth shift to the Remote Learning Day and how successful it went.

Michael Williams announced that the state is witnessing the highest number of active cases in the pandemic so far. He remarked on the tremendous job the school district has done to reduce transmissions and stated there is an overwhelming recommendation from the CDC to continue wearing masks since vaccines are not 100% effective. He thanked families for wearing masks and stressed it is the goal of the district to keep students in school. He expressed his appreciation for both the lengths staff are going through to maintain this goal and for the communication that takes place between home and school.

## **V. DISTRICT REPORTS**

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

Suzanne Filippone announced that boosters for 12-15-year old's have been approved by the FDA and they are waiting for the state to sign off. More information will be delivered as soon as it is available. For any staff listening, the Sabbatical deadline is January 15<sup>th</sup> and a last reminder email was recently sent out. Suzanne stated the YRBS survey was administered prior to vacation. She explained that the health data collected helps with designing programming to meet student needs. She anticipates results to be shared around summertime. Currently, the winter Star Assessments are occurring and lastly, there will be two DEIJ virtual events from 6:00-7:30 pm that require pre-registration. On January 13<sup>th</sup> *Building Bridges: Equity and Belonging in the Oyster River Schools* will focus on dialogue in small group discussions, while the second event, on January 26<sup>th</sup>, will consist of a

panel dialogue. Participation will be limited, however, if capacity is reached the events will be replicated for a future date.

### SASS

Catherine Plourde gave kudos to Suzanne and Chris Lemelin for their quick turnaround setting up the 15–17-year-old booster clinic that was recently held at ORHS. Although Suzanne would never give herself credit, Catherine said there were electronic issues all day that required a lot of troubleshooting behind the scenes that Suzanne handled. Catherine referred the board to the metrics handout stating that we are in the worse place possible, which is resulting in a huge domino effect in the buildings. Strafford County is in substantial rates for new cases, percent positive, ICU capacity as well as staffing capacity. She stated while most families are showing support to the district nurses, instances of negativity are surfacing. Catherine stressed that everyone, including the health staff, believe in keeping students and staff in school and a lot of work is being done to get testing done at each building.

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

Dr. Morse reported out on COVID related absences to distinguish between those absences and absences for other reasons. Across the district, COVID absences ranged in the 30-40's per building since break. Dr. Morse reminded parents that if students come to school sick or exhibiting any COVID symptoms they will be sent home. He stated if you are screaming at nurses or displaying rude or disruptive behavior, we can't work with you. He credited the vast majority of families for reading emails and following directions but reiterated that sick children will be sent home and that the schools are not a hospital. Testing that does take place is because students have come down with symptoms while at school or families have called ahead to schedule testing with the nurses. Dr. Morse continued discussing the current COVID surge relying on Dr. Harvey's expert testimony in her letter to the state, citing the following, "we are overwhelmed, understaffed, and stretched too thin and when the pandemic started, we tried to flatten the curve, now we are trying to flatten the surge." Dr. Morse acknowledged that in the middle of Christmas the CDC made the recommendation to cut down on quarantining from 10-5 days, but when pushed it wasn't for science reasons rather it was about the economy. Dr. Morse stated the DHHS is our governing agency, as soon as they come out with guidance, we'll attack our plan and provide information, but for the time being we're waiting for the state and then we will follow suite. Dr. Morse continued to say that any changes to our COVID plan would be shared with the board before going to the community. As far as our current strain, the Omicron is far more contagious than the Delta variant and currently Strafford County is the most impacted in the state. Vaccines are less effective against Omicron, however, the state still urges vaccination and boosters, as well as well-fitted masks such as N95 and KN95 since cloth masks are not nearly as effective. He also said that we've been told no child has died from COVID, however, it is a misnomer to think children can't be impacted, hospitalized, or die. In fact, at the beginning of the school year a child did die and was since reported in the news. Dr. Morse emphasized that the district is trying to keep school open and keep everyone's child as safe as possible. He stated we care about the children with our hearts, not just our minds. The district will continue to look at the plan, take into the state's recommendations, and revise it as deemed necessary.

Brian Cisneros agreed with Dr. Morse stating nurses deserve to be treated like human beings and finds it unacceptable to treat them poorly if you are not getting what you want.

Catherine stated we have to be role models for our children and each other. She explained that the nurses are our school health experts, and they are thinking ahead and making critical adjustments daily. For example, staff and department meetings will be virtual for the time being per their recommendation.

Tom Newkirk wondered if the quarantine period changes from 10 to 5 days if a negative test will be required upon reentry to school. Catherine responded she doesn't think so since the testing system is already overwhelmed.

Dr. Morse stated the reports from the principals indicated a very successful remote day. Teachers and students spent time preparing and doing dry runs, and it was evident in the outcome. As far as the parents' reaction, for every 12 positive emails there was 1 complaint. Dr. Morse said Friday's weather forecast estimates a range from

ice to a foot of snow and is keeping all options on the table. He will inform everyone Friday morning if it's a traditional snow day, remote day, or late start.

#### Communication Report Update – UNH Survey Center

Dr. Morse introduced Andrew Smith, Director of the UNH Survey Center, who led the district communication survey. Two thirds of the survey data will be discussed tonight, which includes staff and parent results, since the community results are still being collected and reviewed.

Andrew Smith explained that the focus of a survey's data is to allow an organization to focus on the management decisions that need to be made. He stated there was a great turnout rate with 713 parents and 96 staff completing the survey, additionally there were only minor differences in the feedback from both groups. Mr. Smith informed the audience that overall, results show that good communication is being made by the Oyster River School District. The parents and staff are, for the most part, happy with the quality, length and amount of communication being made. Andrew explained the results show that things are good, not great, so there are specific areas the district can focus on. Some areas needing improvement include the desire to have a more centralized district calendar that encompasses all the schools, more direct communication from the school board, and a website with more up to date information and new content. More specific to the website, staff and parents would like to see a more cohesive calendar, easier to access contact information, and updates to sports, clubs and after school activities.

The school board members had a discussion on disseminating the information and the next steps they will take. Board members wondered if they should act now or wait until the general public survey results are available. Andrew advised focusing on the staff and parent populations first, and not waiting. His advice for communication is to think mobile first. Emails and websites are being accessed primarily by phone and information needs to be mobile friendly. He said the word "consistency" and "Schoolology" were repeated in comments and he encouraged the district to also focus on those.

Dr. Morse thanked Andy for all his work developing the survey and analyzing the data. He commented that he is pleasantly surprised in how good the results are. He was pleased that across the different topics being surveyed, results were consistently in the 80% range, which is higher than he anticipated. Dr. Morse shared his appreciation to the percentage of parents who participated and acknowledged that while specific things need to be addressed in the district's communication, they are doable.

**C. Business Administrator** – No report given

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

Olivia Gass thanked everybody's work for the recent Booster Clinic and stated she and her peers felt it went very well. She felt the postponement of the Winterfest to Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>, the Friday before break, will have the same winter and celebratory feel. Olivia stated the remote day went very well overall, along with the return from winter break. She reported there were no junior/senior privileges today due to bad roads. Olivia said with midterms coming up over half the building has never taken one while the other half have only taken one or two, so a lot of time is going into preparing for them.

**A. Finance Committee Report** - No report given

**B. Other:** None

**VI. UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGENDA** – No items provided

## VII. DISCUSSION & ACTION ITEMS

### 2022-2023 School Calendar Approval

Dr. Morse shared with the board two versions of the 2022-2023 calendar indicating how many days the district would be out of alignment for students in the CTE program due to Teacher Workshop Days and February Break. If ORCSD aligns with Dover for a February vacation of 2/20-2/24 students would miss 6 days, while if February vacation is held 2/27-3/3, students would miss 11 days. Dr. Morse said he spoke to both Dover and Rochester to see if the schools would be able to provide supplementary work for missed days. Dover was interested in looking into it; however, Rochester said the teacher's contract would not allow it. Dr. Morse said should the district take February break the week after Dover, they would provide bussing to those students who still wanted to attend the program over break.

Brian asked if absences would count against the students should they miss their program during workshop days and February break and Dr. Morse replied yes.

Denise felt it was the right decision to do 2/20-2/24 break considering the extra COVID absences.

Tom agreed stating there was a real educational reason for aligning break with Dover.

Yusi said absolutely the educational priorities take precedent but pointed out that we don't know how these families feel and urged asking the CTE families for their desires.

Michael expressed a need to look at the other days out of alignment too and would like to see the school start before Labor Day.

Dr. Morse concluded that there are enough variables to not decide tonight. Current CTE families will be asked to provide their opinion on February break in the next few weeks another variation of the calendar will be presented at the next meeting.

### 2022 Warrant Article

Michael stated the approval of the warrant article will be held off until the public hearing.

### Assign Presentation of Warrant Articles

Michael assigned warrant articles to be presented by the following:

*Distinguished Service Award* – Tom Newkirk

*Article 3* – Brian Cisneros

*Article 4 & 5* – Dan Klein

*Article 6* – Michael Williams

**Michael Williams made a motion to approve the assigned warrant articles as a recommendation to the board 2<sup>nd</sup> by Denise Day. Motion passed 7-0 with the student representative voting in the affirmative.**

### Public Hearing Discussion

Dr. Morse announced there would be a Public Hearing on Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in the ORHS auditorium. It will be a comprehensive meeting to inform the public of the 2022 Warrant Article and to provide answers to any questions raised.

### Superintendent Self Evaluation

Dr. Morse delivered his self-evaluation report, stating that we have accomplished a lot with "we" being the operative word. He said that nothing that has been accomplished has been by one person. Dr. Morse credited the School Board and pointed out that having adopted a strategic plan prior to COVID was vital. In face of COVID, he and the administrative team couldn't ignore the other priorities and needs of the school. He said tough decisions and compromises were made knowing they couldn't be the same school system they were before COVID. He said he was so thankful to have been part of Heather Machanoff's Social and Emotional Learning discussion and to have gained an understanding of SEL prior to COVID since it has served as an important foundation for the work they have been doing. Furthermore, he stated during the pandemic the district never lost a step on DEI work.

Dr. Morse concluded that the school district has prevailed and moved forward on so many levels all while the nurses continue to work harder than they ever expected to take care of the health of our school community.

ORPASS Agreement

Michael Williams added the matter of approving the ORPASS agreement, which had been on the previous agenda but not ratified yet for approval.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to approve the ORPASS agreement as presented, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0 with the student representative voting in the affirmative.**

2022-23 SAU Administrator Contracts for the Assistant Superintendent and Business Administrator

**Michael Williams moved to enter into non-public session at 9:20 pm under RSA 91-A3 II (a), for the SAU Administrator contracts, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Denise Day. Motion passed 7-0 via roll call vote.**

Student representative Olivia Gass left for the evening.

Michael Williams declared the Board back into public session at 9:25pm.

**Brian Cisneros made a motion to approve the 2022-2023 SAU Administrator Contracts for the Assistant Superintendent and Business Administrator as presented by the superintendent, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Tom Newkirk. Motion passed 7-0.**

**VIII. SCHOOL BOARD COMMITTEE UPDATES**

The Manifest Committee met and completed the following manifests.

Vendor Manifest #15 \$1,721,097.64

Brian Cisneros told the listening audience that on January 21<sup>st</sup> at 3pm would be the final tour of the Middle School building.

Dr. Morse stated that they are beginning conversations on unexpended balances related to the middle school and how they would expend them. This will be discussed on Friday and next Tuesday at committee level with Brian Cisneros serving as a board rep.

**IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS:** None

**X. CLOSING ACTIONS**

- A. Future Meeting Dates:**
  - January 10, 2022 Superintendent Durham TC Budget Update 7:00 PM
  - January 11, 2022 Public Budget Hearing – ORHS Auditorium
  - January 14, 2022 Superintendent Madbury Selectman Budget Update 8:30 AM
  - January 19, 2022 Regular Board Meeting – ORHS Library 7:00 PM
  - January 24, 2022 Superintendent Lee Selectman Budget Update 6:30 PM
  - February 2, 2022 Regular Board Meeting – ORHS Auditorium

Dr. Morse thinks the January 14<sup>th</sup> meeting at Madbury will be at 8:30 AM in the morning, not at 7:00 PM, and will repost any correction to the minutes.

**XI. NON-PUBLIC SESSION:** RSA 91-A:3 II (c) & (a)

- SAU Administrator Contracts – This session happened earlier in the meeting.
- Superintendent Evaluation

**Michael Williams moved to enter into non-public session at 9:30 pm under RSA 91-A3 II (c) – to discuss the Superintendent’s evaluation, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Denise Day motion passed 7-0 upon a roll call vote.**

The Board returned to public session at 9:44 PM.

**NON-MEETING SESSION:** RSA 91-A2 I (a) There was no separate non-meeting discussion and action took place during the meeting.

- Strategy or negotiations with respect to collective bargaining.

**XII. ADJOURNMENT:**

**Tom Newkirk made a motion to adjourn at 9:44 PM, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Brian Cisneros. Motion passed 7-0.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Karyn Laird, Records Keeper