

**OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Board of Education Minutes**  
**Committee of the Whole Meeting**  
**October 9, 2024**  
**Report 24-43**

Present: Adam Easlick, Nick Henne, Ty Krauss, Rick Mowen, Shelly Ochodnicky, Olga Quick, Marlene Webster  
Absent:

President Mowen called the Board of Education Meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The meeting was held at the Washington Campus Administration Building, 645 Alger St, Owosso, MI 48867.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Public Participation**

President Mowen stated that the Board of Education is a public body and recognizes the value of public comment on education issues. Time has been included in the meeting's agenda for public participation. Members of the audience were reminded they should announce their name and group affiliation when applicable and to limit their participation time to three minutes or less. Comments should be directed to the Board and be relevant to the business of the Board of Education. This is not an opportunity for dialogue with the Board of Education. The rules of common courtesy should also be observed.

The following participants addressed the Board:  
Mick Nighbert

**Thrun Polices Presentation**

The Board received a presentation from Lucas Savoie and Ray Davis of Thrun Law Firm, which provided a detailed overview of several important topics. These included the benefits of Thrun's services, a transition guide, an implementation checklist, a list of current policy subscribers, an order form, and the table of contents for both the policy overview and handbooks (student and employee). The presentation also covered the firm's mission statement, key definitions, and administrative guidelines and forms.

For over 75 years, Thrun Law Firm has been the leading authority in representing Michigan school districts and ISDs. Clients have consistently relied on Thrun's legal expertise in all facets of school law, including developing, reviewing, and modifying board policies. Thrun attorneys have extensive experience in advising clients on policies that, in many cases, were inconsistent, confusing, or not legally compliant. Recognizing the need for improvement, Thrun introduced a solution tailored specifically for Michigan schools.

Since 2020, Thrun has offered its Comprehensive Policy Service, which was created by Michigan attorneys with the unique challenges and legal requirements of Michigan schools in mind. These policies are designed to ensure legal compliance while providing school officials with practical guidance in a well-organized, user-friendly format.

Though not required for implementing the Policy Manual, Thrun also offers the Student and Employee Handbooks, Administrative Guidelines, and Forms as complementary products available for purchase. These materials align with the Policy Manual and provide additional value for Thrun Policy Subscribers.

Thrun's policies are customizable to meet the specific needs of each school district or ISD, rather than following a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Accompanying the Policy Manual is a Policy Manual Checklist, which outlines every policy that requires district action before adoption. This ensures a smooth and efficient policy implementation process.

Thrun attorneys host virtual Policy Implementation Meetings throughout the year to further assist districts. These sessions comprehensively explain the various policy options and allow district representatives to ask policy-related questions. Attendance at these meetings is highly encouraged for a successful policy adoption process.

Thrun includes a Title IX All Staff Awareness Training video, the Policy Manual, and the Title IX Policy and Formal Complaint Form at no additional cost. For those who purchase the Administrative Guidelines and Forms, Thrun provides 10 additional Title IX-related forms, such as the Documentation of Supportive Measures, Notice of Investigation, Notice of Additional Allegations, and several other essential documents to ensure full compliance with Title IX requirements.

During the presentation, Ray Davis noted that even if the Board chooses not to adopt Thrun's services, he highly recommended reviewing certain policies, which he listed for the Board's consideration. Treasurer Quick questioned why, as the district's legal representatives, Thrun had not previously reviewed the Board's policies for legal compliance. Ray clarified that he had never been authorized or directed by a board president to conduct such a review.

Treasurer Quick then asked if Thrun could provide examples for comparison, mainly to see how their policies differ from current ones. Ray responded that they could send examples, such as the definition of an administrator or their civil rights policy, to give the Board a clearer understanding of potential differences.

Additionally, Ray mentioned that Lucas Savoie might grant access to a set of policies so that the Board could review specific subjects of concern. He emphasized that they could also share insights from other districts currently using Thrun's policies, allowing the Board to hear the questions those districts ask during their implementation process. Ray agreed with Treasurer Quick's request for transparency, stating that they would allow the Board to review these policies and better understand the available options.

Superintendent Brooks stated that additional costs, such as the forms and administrative guidelines, are involved, but he doesn't think we need to address that now. However, the handbooks are an area that definitely needs an overhaul. At our last Superintendent's meeting, he had an in-depth conversation with Superintendent Fattal and spoke very highly of their experience with the transition to Thrun. They developed a plan to address the policies by series and systematically worked through them. He also recommended that if any of our Board members would like to contact the Corunna Board members for insight into the implementation process, they would be more than happy to share their experiences.

Corunna transitioned from NEOLA as well. Superintendent Fattal emphasized that when they closely reviewed their existing policies, many were outdated or no longer aligned with current laws, some of which had changed multiple times. It was eye-opening for them to realize how far behind they had fallen.

NEOLA typically recommends policy changes when laws or lawsuits bring issues to light, but the day-to-day policies often need to be updated and updated. Based on conversations Superintendent Brooks had with other superintendents beyond Corunna, the consensus is that Thrun's policies are the way forward, even at the cost of \$8,000. It will require effort, but so would updating our NEOLA policies, which also come with significant costs.

Vice President Webster added that she fully supports switching to Thrun. However, it's worth noting that they are relatively new at this, and we don't know how well they'll keep up with updates over the next 15 years. Their policies are up-to-date now because they're new, but how will their process evolve to ensure it stays that way?

Superintendent Brooks also pointed out, NEOLA is a national or Midwest-based company, covering multiple states and not tailored specifically to Michigan. In contrast, Thrun's policies and legal expertise are very Michigan-specific, which could be a key advantage for us.

### **Large Event Security Training**

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board that the district will participate in large event security training with Tom Mynsberge, as part of a countywide initiative. This training will involve tabletop exercises focused on managing security at large events, such as football games, basketball games, and graduation ceremonies. The goal is to develop strategies and protocols for handling potential security issues during these events.

This training is covered under our existing Critical Incident Management payments, and it will include high school administrators and other district personnel to ensure everyone is prepared. The entire county is involved in this initiative and is currently being coordinated for all districts.

### **Health Insurance Update**

We have been actively reviewing various insurance plans for the district, particularly in light of the recent 17.5% increase in our current MESSA packages. Collaborating with the OEA,

OESPA, the administrative team, and our MESSA representative, we have explored specific plans that best meet the diverse needs of our employees.

As a district, we can select four plans from approximately 85 available options, ensuring that we cater to all employees enrolled in insurance. A major factor driving up costs has been prescription drug coverage.

After a thorough evaluation, we received favorable feedback from both the OEA and OESPA on our proposed plan. The most notable change involves moving from Tier 3 to Tier 5 drug coverage during open enrollment. This change impacts drug categorization as follows:

- **Tier 1:** Generic drugs, pricing unchanged (ranging from \$2 to \$10).
- **Tier 2 and Tier 3:** Brand-name drugs will see a price increase (expected to be around \$30).
- **Tier 4 and Tier 5:** Specialty drugs are significantly more expensive and will have higher cost-sharing for those requiring them.

While generic drug prices will remain consistent, brand-name drugs will incur increased co-pays. The first two options presented are the most common and have minimal differences in cost. Lance has conducted an extensive analysis of these plans and assured us that they will reduce the overall increase from 17.5% to approximately 6%, benefiting everyone financially.

For support staff and employees who may not visit the doctor frequently, we are considering the “Balance Plus” plan, which features a higher deductible but significantly lower overall costs. This option can benefit employees seeking insurance coverage without frequent medical visits.

Vice President Webster questioned how this would affect the individual whose specialty drug costs \$125,000 twice a year, Superintendent Brooks responded that while there is a slight increase in costs for them, their out-of-pocket expenses will remain approximately the same. They are working through some of the costs associated with those specialty drugs. If adjustments are made to the deductibles, some drugs' coverage will change accordingly. Lance, our spreadsheet guru, has calculated everything precisely and has determined that their out-of-pocket expenses will be very similar to what they are currently paying.

We are finalizing paperwork with MESSA and have received authorization from the OEA and OESPA. Once submitted, the open enrollment process will be initiated. Before open enrollment begins, we will schedule sessions for all staff to meet with representatives who can address specific questions and provide detailed information about the new plans. We aim to finalize everything by November, ensuring a smooth transition for the January 1 rollout.

### **Enrollment 2024-25**

Superintendent Brooks shared a concerning update on student enrollment. As of Count Day, the district is down by 63 students compared to last year. While the district had budgeted for a

decline of 75 students, meaning they are technically 12 students ahead, this is still not where they want to be.

A detailed spreadsheet was provided in the packet, showing enrollment numbers by grade and building, along with district totals. Brooks emphasized the need to continue monitoring class sizes and staffing as they work to "right-size" the district moving forward, especially as they approach spring.

Brooks also mentioned efforts to collaborate with private schools for Title II and Title IV funding, as the law requires. While St. Paul and Salem have responded and continue to work with the district, Salem's enrollment has remained relatively stable. St. Paul has seen some growth due to offering significant tuition discounts.

The enrollment situation is always in flux, with the potential for slight adjustments by February. Brooks also addressed FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) funding, explaining that while the district can file for FTE funding for students moving in from out-of-county after Count Day, local districts generally follow a "general person's agreement" not to pursue FTEs from neighboring areas until the next count day.

### **Legislative Update**

Superintendent Brooks recently attended a legislative meeting and said it was fascinating to observe the slow pace of the process. He rushed to the meeting, only to spend just a few minutes before moving on to the next room. However, the legislative body eventually voted, and the governor signed the 5.75% reduction for retirement, which has now become a permanent change. This shift represents approximately a \$400,000 positive swing for us, directly related to our payroll.

Another topic Superintendent Brooks discussed was the complexities surrounding the 3% medical contribution. Essentially, anyone hired before 2012 pays 3% toward retirement medical costs. This year, they decided they had sufficient funding to continue this practice without needing the actual funds. In a somewhat convoluted decision, the legislators mandated that districts continue to collect the 3%, submit it to the state, and then the state will return the funds to the districts. This creates an unnecessary burden for us, as we must then determine how to redistribute that money to the employees from whom it was initially taken. It is an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars. The funds collected are also taxed, frustrating employees who may need help understanding this process.

Lastly, regarding 31AA, additional funding has been approved for safety and security measures. After significant cuts in the budget, they have restored \$125 million to the previously allocated \$25 million, bringing the total to \$150 million. We will apply for these funds, although they still need to catch up to the overall budget from previous years.

### **Board Training**

Superintendent Brooks emphasized the availability of board training through the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB). These training sessions can be highly beneficial, providing a valuable opportunity for both new members and seasoned veterans to refresh their knowledge of current best practices and policies.

MASB offers a variety of training sessions tailored to meet different needs, and we are more than happy to assist in facilitating this process. Superintendent Brooks also wants to ensure that our new board member, who will join us after the first of the year, receive proper onboarding and training to set them up for success.

### **Board Retreat**

Superintendent Brooks has proposed scheduling a board retreat on either February 12 or March 12. Both dates coincide with our Committee of the Whole meetings, which are already on the calendar. If the Board is interested, this would be an excellent opportunity to include our new board member and discuss our norms, expectations, and any strategic work that needs to be addressed.

We will have MASB facilitate the retreat, as they have done. This would allow us to focus on strategic planning sessions or any other relevant topics.

### **Community Coffee Update**

Superintendent Brooks wanted to provide an update on the recent community coffee event. Last week, he enjoyed attending a session at the airport, where he connected with many longtime community members. It was a rewarding experience for both him and the attendees.

He has another session scheduled for next week at Itsa Deli Thing, where he will continue to engage with the community by answering any questions they may have. There has been a lot of interest in topics related to Career and Technical Education (CTE), and FFA. These conversations are incredibly valuable and are exactly the purpose of hosting these sessions.

### **Staff Evaluations**

Superintendent Brooks shared an update regarding recent changes to staff evaluations due to new legal requirements. He credited Dr. Dwyer for her exceptional work updating the evaluation system and ensuring that all spreadsheets aligned with the latest coding standards. Dr. Dwyer has also worked closely with the unions and principals to ensure everyone is on board. With everything now loaded into the system, principals and teachers are set for the new evaluation process. This was a significant undertaking, and Brooks expressed his appreciation for Dr. Dwyer's efforts.

Additionally, Superintendent Brooks outlined the plan for his own evaluation. After the November Board meeting, a closed session will be held where he will present a self-evaluation, evidence tied to specific goals, and the evaluation rubric. Board members will then have a month

to review the materials and complete the rubric, with the final findings to be reported at the December Board meeting.

In a new step, Brooks has also asked all admins to participate in his evaluation process. They will receive the same rubric and have the option to provide anonymous feedback, which will be compiled by Carrie Yoho and shared with the Board. Brooks emphasized that he would not see the feedback but believed it was important for principals and supervisors to have the opportunity to provide their input.

This approach allows the Board to comprehensively view his performance, incorporating day-to-day insights from the admin team and the Board's perspective.

### **Bus Transportation Tracking Software**

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board we've been discussing bus transportation tracking software for the better part of the year, and he'd like to provide a preview of what it could look like. If anyone is familiar with Life360, this Tyler Drive system would work similarly but for buses. Essentially, we would install software and hardware on the buses. When a bus arrives, and a student gets on—if they're in secondary school, they can scan their badge—the system will alert parents that their child has boarded the bus. When they scan off at their destination, the parent will receive another notification that their child has safely arrived.

Additionally, through the app, parents can receive alerts when the bus is two miles, one mile, or any set distance away from the drop-off point so that they can be ready in advance. Our secretaries would also have access to this system, allowing them to see who is on which bus and ensure students are on the correct one. For instance, if a student is supposed to be on Bus A but boards Bus B, the system will alert them that they're on the wrong bus.

The system also includes GPS tracking, which can help Transportation Director Steve DeLong and his team optimize bus routes. Over the summer, they could input all students assigned to a certain bus, and the software would map the most efficient route based on their addresses, improving both route efficiency and accuracy. We'll also be able to track the buses in real-time, from point A to point B.

One more advantage is that we can integrate athletic trips into this system. Often, teams return late from games, and traditionally, when they reach a nearby point, the coach tells the students to call their parents for pick-up. With this system, parents could receive automatic notifications when the bus is 10 minutes away from school, making the process smoother and more predictable. While field trips could pose some logistical challenges, we can certainly build in notifications for sports teams and other regular activities.

After this explanation, Superintendent Brooks played a short three-minute video introducing the Tyler Drive system to the Board. He added that one thing he should have mentioned was the inspections. We must complete pre- and post-drive inspections on paper, which results in a lot of paperwork. This system would allow us to handle those inspections digitally, eliminating the paper trail.

The total cost for implementing the system is around \$50,000, covering the entire fleet's equipment, software, onboarding, and professional development. The full implementation process will take about nine months to a year. Based on the savings from our door project, which was funded through safety and security grants and came in under budget, Superintendent Brooks believes we can offset the cost of this program and the necessary equipment. There will be an ongoing annual fee for the software, but we're continuing to dig into those details.

After the first year of implementation, there will be an ongoing annual cost of \$9,000 to maintain the software. However, as Mr. DeLong pointed out, there are several state police and safety/security grants available that we can apply for to cover this expense.

### **Barn Project**

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the barn project, which has been progressing in collaboration with the FFA and Beth Clark. Preliminary drawings are in place, and the district has consulted with the Spicer Group to evaluate the topography of the proposed site. One key recommendation was to address the area's low elevation by adding drainage, tiling, and potentially a retention pond or basin to manage water flow from the nearby hill. This groundwork would benefit the barn and support future plans for the maintenance and transportation facilities.

Superintendent Brooks is seeking the Board's approval to put the project out for bid to determine the costs of preparing the site, including grading and drainage. The project could be funded through sinking fund dollars, which generate about \$20,000 in monthly interest, or a \$70,000 deposit from the middle school. Brooks emphasized that the goal is to avoid using district funds for the barn's construction, relying instead on grants and partnerships with construction trades and RESD for electrical work.

Superintendent Brooks also mentioned plans to explore a \$35 million bond project after the upcoming election, with no increase in millage. Spicer Group and Clark Construction have expressed interest in supporting the bond efforts.

### **Curriculum Update**

Dr. Cathy Dwyer wanted to update the Board about the curriculum. Last week, she had the opportunity to meet with Judy Fridline, who works with the Genesee I.S.D and serves as our regional school health coordinator. Together, they reviewed our health curriculum to ensure it aligns with the current requirements set by the Michigan Department of Education.

This is a sensitive topic, so they thoroughly and carefully ensure everything is done correctly. She doesn't anticipate any significant changes, but Dr. Dwyer wanted to inform the Board that this process is underway.

### **"thisisourstory"**



Superintendent Brooks highlighted several recent achievements across the district. On Monday night, the Trojan Marching Band performed at the Marching Band Festival, earning straight ones and continuing an impressive streak of over 67 consecutive years. The high school choir debuted their new uniforms at last night's concert, with the middle school concert scheduled for tonight. These performances demonstrate the remarkable talent and commitment of our students. Homecoming was another success this year, with perfect weather adding to the celebration.

In closing, Superintendent Brooks invited the Board to attend a holiday breakfast on December 10th from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. alongside the admin and central office teams.

#### **Meeting Updates:**

- October 23: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- November 13: Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- November 20: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

#### **Important Upcoming Dates:**


- October 15: OMS & OHS Evening PT Conferences
- October 16: OHS Band Hauncert, 7:30 PM, PAC
- October 17: Half-Day Elementary Only, Afternoon & Evening PT Conferences
- October 18: No School
- October 30: Trojan Spectacular, 7:00 PM, PAC
- October 31: Half-Day for All Students, Teacher Work Day
- November 4: OMS Powder Puff Game, 6:30 PM, Willman Field
- November 5: No School, Professional Development
- November 9: Owosso Sports Boosters Bash, 6:00 PM, Knights of Columbus

#### **Adjournment**

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicky, to adjourn at 7:26 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger

Respectfully submitted,

  
Ty Krauss, Secretary

