

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
Committee of the Whole Meeting
June 11, 2025
Report 24-149

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

Vice President Ochodnicky 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

Vice President Ochodnicky 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:
None

Board Guarantee Review and Update

Superintendent Brooks presented an initial draft of proposed revisions to the district's Board Guarantee, which has remained unchanged since its adoption in May 2006. Prompted by recent feedback from the board retreat and committee discussions, the goal of the revision is to modernize and streamline the language better to reflect the district's current values and priorities. A draft outlining the updated guarantee was presented and shared with the Board for review and input.

This item is scheduled for possible action at the June 25 Board meeting. However, Superintendent Brooks stated that the timeline is flexible and can be adjusted to July if the Board prefers additional time for discussion or edits. He welcomed feedback from Board members, noting that changes—whether small word adjustments or more substantial revisions—are encouraged and appreciated. His intent is simply to initiate the process and support the Board in shaping a document that reflects their shared vision.

2025-26 Board Meeting Dates

Superintendent Brooks addressed the Board regarding the scheduling of Board meetings for the upcoming year. He explained that the proposed calendar includes meetings scheduled only through January, in alignment with the updated Board policies. Under the new policy, the Board's organizational meeting is now held each January, rather than July, as it was in the past. During that meeting, the Board will elect officers such as President and Vice President, and formally adopt the meeting calendar for the remainder of the year.

The proposed schedule follows the same format the district has traditionally used, with meetings on Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. Committee of the Whole meetings are included as usual, except for July and December. These two months do not include Committee of the Whole meetings due to how the full Board meetings fall on the calendar.

This item is scheduled for action at the next Board meeting, which is currently the final meeting on the existing calendar. Superintendent Brooks welcomed any feedback from Board members and noted that he is open to discussion if there is interest in changing meeting days or times.

Handbooks

Superintendent Brooks provided an update to the Board regarding the upcoming review and approval process for the district's handbooks. He noted that while this is not a new topic, multiple handbooks—including those for employees, high school, Lincoln, middle school, elementary, and Bright Beginnings—will be brought forward for future action in June.

The delay in finalizing the handbooks is intentional, as updates to the 5000 policy series—will directly impact their content. Each handbook has been thoroughly reviewed and aligned with the Thrun policies. Principals across the district have participated in the process, reviewing the current handbook language and comparing it to guidance from the district's legal partner, Thrun Law Firm. In some cases, the content was blended; in others, the previous language was replaced entirely with Thrun's recommendations to ensure consistency and legal compliance.

As a result, the handbooks are now more comprehensive and include necessary legal language, making them lengthier than in years past. However, they will be distributed digitally through hyperlinks, allowing for easier access and navigation. Superintendent Brooks also shared that, as in previous years, Board members received marked-up versions highlighting the changes for easier comparison. He emphasized that although this work essentially represents a fresh start, it is the result of lots of discussion and collaboration. Principals are supportive of the updates, and the final documents will be shared in two weeks.

Graduation

Superintendent Brooks opened a discussion with the Board to gather feedback on this year's graduation ceremony. He shared that a similar conversation had taken place with the administrative team, focused on identifying what went well and what could be improved. He highlighted that each year is an opportunity to reflect, learn, and enhance the experience for students, families, and staff.

One major point of discussion was the venue change. Due to weather, the ceremony was held indoors rather than at Willman Field, which is traditionally the preferred location. The indoor setting resulted in a noticeably more subdued and respectful atmosphere among attendees. Based on this observation, there was a suggestion to consider issuing a set number of tickets—possibly 12 to 15 per graduate—in future years. This would give graduates more control over who attends, potentially reducing disruptions from individuals with no personal connection to the students.

Brooks also noted that the PAC accommodated approximately 300 people. Some guests who had tickets opted to watch from the auditorium rather than sit in the bleachers, citing better video quality and visibility as key reasons. This led to the idea of offering a live stream option in the future for those unable to attend in person or who prefer to watch from home—a suggestion raised informally but worth exploring further.

This year, seven tickets were issued per graduate, and overall, entry went smoothly with no major issues at the doors. Superintendent Brooks praised the custodial and facilities staff for their professionalism and readiness, noting they wore their Owosso shirts and did an excellent job directing guests and maintaining order.

In closing, Brooks remarked that while the ceremony was beautiful and well-executed indoors, the goal remains to hold graduation at Willman Field whenever possible.

Curriculum Updates

Dr. Cathy Dwyer shared with the Board that 213 students are currently enrolled in the district's summer school programs. She highlighted the ongoing efforts to keep summer learning engaging and meaningful. At the elementary level, Principal Spielman has partnered with the OHS FFA Club to create a hands-on opportunity for students in grades 3–5. These students will participate in Shiawassee County Fair projects, with FFA members assisting them during an extended summer school hour. This initiative offers students a chance to present their work at the fair and gain real-world presentation experience.

Dr. Dwyer also highlighted the start of the *Books at Bryant* summer series, which launched tonight with a kickoff dinner. The series includes weekly events aimed at promoting literacy, community, and family engagement. Activities are scheduled through August 6, including games with sports teams, cheer events, touch a truck, water games, a football day, and a back-to-school fair with supplies and resources.

Additionally, Dr. Dwyer informed the Board that the middle school English Language Arts department has selected Amplify as their new core curriculum for the upcoming school year. She is working with CFO Dame to include this purchase in the 2025–2026 budget, with plans to bring it to the Board for future action in June and for action in July.

Bond

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the district's bond application process. All required paperwork has been submitted to the Michigan Department of Treasury, and feedback was received earlier this week. A few minor discrepancies were identified between the ballot language and the formal bond application. For example, the ballot stated a full roof replacement at Central Elementary, while the application specified that the new addition would be excluded. These small inconsistencies—just four in total—are being addressed collaboratively by the district's partners, including Spicer Group, Clark Construction, and Thrun. The revised documents are expected to be resubmitted to Treasury by the end of the week, with final approval anticipated in time for the July deadline. Treasury has a 30-day window to respond after resubmission.

In addition, Superintendent Brooks shared insights from a recent meeting with the Friends of the Shiawassee group. They provided valuable information regarding the location of the current bus garage and Jerome facilities, which are not merely in a floodplain but in a designated floodway—a significantly higher-risk zone. This distinction raises concerns about potential damage from ice, debris, or log jams during flooding events. The group suggested that much of the material from the site, especially metal, could potentially be scrapped for revenue rather than disposed of at a landfill. They also informed the district of several grant opportunities available for demolition and environmental remediation, especially for removing fencing and fuel tanks. These improvements would help restore natural water flow and improve conditions downstream. Superintendent Brooks noted that while funds have been allocated in the bond budget for this work, any savings or unused funds could be redirected to other prioritized projects.

Thrun Policies

Superintendent Brooks led a detailed discussion with the Board regarding the district's policy review and update process in collaboration with Thrun Law Firm. This phase of the review focuses on the 5000 series, which addresses a wide range of student-related areas including curriculum and academic matters. Specific sections under review include: 5100 (Student Rights), 5200 (Student Conduct and Discipline), 5300 (Enrollment, Attendance, and Records), 5400 (Curriculum, Instruction, and Parent Involvement), 5500 (School-Sponsored and Extracurricular Activities), 5600 (Student Support Services), 5700 (Student Health and Safety), and 5800 (Miscellaneous).

Brooks noted that Thrun typically releases legal updates at the end of June or early July. To accommodate this schedule, the June 25 Board meeting will include a motion to repeal all current NEOLA policies. Then, at the July 23 meeting, the Board will formally adopt the new Thrun policy set. Both actions—repeal and adoption—will occur during the same session.

Additionally, all student and staff handbooks will be updated to reflect the new policy references, ensuring consistency across all district documents. Should any legal updates be issued after July's adoption, the Board can expect a follow-up policy update process in August or September.

Round Table

Superintendent Brooks held a roundtable discussion with the board to address growing concerns around a proposed city ordinance that would issue municipal infractions—similar to parking tickets—for certain student behaviors, such as fighting and vaping. These infractions would carry fines but no criminal charges, and they would not be processed through juvenile or family court. The ordinance is intended to offer a new tool for handling repeat student offenders. However, several board members expressed concern that these fines would not effectively change behavior, especially since unpaid fines would not be meaningfully enforced. Moreover, if a fine is assessed, diversion programs—often viewed as the most constructive route—cannot be applied.

Diversion programs received widespread support during the meeting. These programs allow for early intervention without entering the criminal system and provide meaningful consequences like community service, education classes, or substance abuse assessments. One advantage of diversion is that it can be initiated by nearly any party and reviewed by the court without having to go through the prosecutor. It was noted that a new diversion program funded by a Lansing-based agency will soon be operational in Shiawassee County, which board members felt could significantly strengthen behavior interventions.

Behavioral data shared at the meeting revealed 317 reported incidents coded as fights, assaults, or bullying. However, only 13 of these cases were referred to the prosecutor—roughly 4.5%. Board members stressed the need for greater SRO visibility in schools, increased monitoring in bathrooms and hallways, and stronger follow-up procedures for reported incidents.

Accountability for both students and parents was another major theme. Some participants questioned whether fining parents would truly deter student misbehavior, especially in cases where families may already condone or normalize behaviors like marijuana use. Others argued that meaningful consequences—especially financial—might finally get the attention of parents who have not responded to suspensions or other school-based disciplinary actions. However, there was also consensus that financial penalties alone will not address the root behavioral issues. Concerns were also raised about the optics and implications of involving the city. Some board members felt blindsided by how quickly the ordinance moved toward a public hearing and possible city council vote. There was a sense that the issue should have been resolved within the school system before seeking city intervention. Several members felt that asking the city to enforce student discipline could be perceived as the school district abdicating its responsibilities.

Aside from the ordinance discussion, there was also a brief talk about structural concerns raised by a community member regarding the middle school building. Superintendent Brooks clarified that FOIA results show no significant structural issues, and the district is under contract with a developer working on redevelopment plans. Though progress has been slow, quarterly payments are being made, and development efforts continue.

Superintendent Brooks concluded by stating he would meet with the city attorney, police chief, and others before the city council voted on the ordinance. He promised to update the board following that meeting.

Closed Session

Moved by Henne, supported by Quick move into closed session at 7:36 p.m. for the purpose of discussing Superintendent Evaluation goals. Vice President Ochodnický conducted a roll call vote: Ayes: Easlick, Henne, Mowen, Ochodnický, Pappas, and Quick. Nays: None. Webster was absent. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Pappas, supported by Easlick, to move back into open session at 7:54 p.m. for the purpose of adjournment. Vice President Ochodnický conducted a roll call vote: Ayes: Easlick, Henne, Mowen, Ochodnický, Pappas, and Quick. Nays: None. Webster was absent. Motion carried unanimously.

Upcoming Board Meeting Dates:

- June 25: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

Adjournment

Moved by Henne, supported by Quick, to adjourn at 7:54 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger.

Respectfully submitted,



Nick Henne, Secretary