

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education Minutes
Committee of the Whole Meeting
June 10, 2024
Report 23-207

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

Absent: Ty Krauss

President Mowen called the Board of Education Meeting to order at 5:32 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:

None

End of Year Activities

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board about several graduations we've held over the past few weeks. The Owosso High School graduation went smoothly despite a few sprinkles, followed by the Lincoln High School graduation a couple weeks later. Our fifth and eighth-grade graduations were also well-attended. The fifth-grade graduation had approximately 250 kids on stage with our 1,000-seat auditorium at capacity, it's clear these events are important to our community. June 6 marked the last day of school for our elementary students, with numerous kindergarten graduations and celebrations, complete with smiles, hugs, and photos. We are excited to offer a wide range of summer school opportunities for our students, with about 300 participants from pre-K through 12th grade. High school credit recovery started today, and elementary summer school programming kicks off tomorrow. One of the highlights is our pre-kindergarten program, which we call "Kindergarten Boot Camp." We've identified about 10 students without prior preschool experience to join this eight-week program, preparing them for

the upcoming school year. We are the only district in the area offering such a program, and we take great pride in it. Additionally, our summer meal program, the Meet Up and Eat Up, started today. We served more meals on the first day than in the past several years, showing how well-known and appreciated this service has become. Students will eat on-site at three locations—Bryant, Emerson, and our secondary campus—and can take meals home for the weekend on Thursdays. This new initiative ensures students have nutritious meals even when school is out. Also, part of our summer programming is Books at Bryant. We are excited to launch this weekly event starting this Wednesday at 6 PM (excluding the Fourth of July week). We've partnered with Culver's to provide children from birth to age 13 with a free book and ice cream every Wednesday. This community effort involves our police, fire departments, and various sports teams, including football, cheerleading, softball, and baseball. These role models will help kids pick out books and read to them. Overall, we have an action-packed summer planned and look forward to the continued engagement and growth of our students.

Back to School Activity

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board about our exciting back-to-school activity for everyone, Flat Stanley. This familiar character sporting an Owosso shirt will help us kick off the new school year. We've distributed these to all our staff. The task is to take Flat Stanley along with you on your summer adventures. Snap some photos and share them with us by texting them to the district phone number provided on the back. In August, as our staff return, we'll display all these pictures as part of our welcome-back message to the students. This activity is a great way for us to share our stories through pictures and create a sense of community.

Budget Update

Superintendent Brooks started by giving a huge shout-out to Mr. Dame for his incredible dedication to learning the school budget. He has been putting in extra hours, including weekends. His hard work is helping finalize the 2023-24 budget and prepare for the 2024-25 budget.

Mr. Dame shared some good news with the Board as we close out the 2023-24 budget, we're projected to have around a 20% general fund balance. We also experienced a surplus and the reasons for the surplus are, local revenue increased by \$200,000 due to a 5% rise in property taxes. Interest on investment yielded about \$420,000 for our general fund. We budgeted conservatively, predicting a decrease in student count, but the drop was minimal, resulting in higher state funds. We strategically used grants, such as ESSER funds, to cover expenses that would have otherwise come from the general fund. All preschool spots in our Great Start program were filled, bringing in additional revenue. Expenses were lower than expected, partially due to spreading the \$3 million air conditioning project over two periods. We received an additional \$111,000 from the state for special education.

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board our auditors are currently conducting various audits, including payroll and ORS audits, and will return in August to finalize their reports. While these

numbers are still preliminary, they are closer to final projections than we initially thought. In summary, despite an initial projection to deficit spend for the 2023-24 fiscal year, we managed to turn things around by efficiently using grants and managing our funds prudently. We're in a strong financial position as we head into the next fiscal year. Trustee Ochodnicki and Treasurer Quick also thanked Tim for all his hard work. Superintendent Brooks wanted to emphasize that this has truly been a team effort involving our entire central office, payroll department, Dr. Dwyer, and our business office. Ensuring everything is coded correctly requires collaboration and diligence.

Thrun Policies

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board he was asked to look into Thrun policies. He reported to the Board that we spoke with one of their policy administrators, and their system is highly customizable and user-friendly. They offer free implementation meetings to provide more detailed information if we decide to proceed. One major advantage of Thrun policies is the ease of annual updates, which can often be cumbersome. Additionally, Thrun will review our student and employee handbooks to ensure they are up-to-date and compliant with current laws. This is crucial, as our handbooks tend to accumulate changes over time, leading to inconsistencies. He stated that there are simple straightforward steps to switch to Thrun's service. The process includes downloading a checklist and having a virtual policy implementation meeting. We would finalize the details and present the complete package to the board for ratification. He spoke with the Corunna School District, which recently transitioned to Thrun. They reported the process took about 4 months. Thrun's policy manual is organized into five sections: policy overview, bylaws, operations and finances, district employment, and student curriculum. This streamlined structure makes it easier to navigate. Thrun also offers a degree of personalization. We can retain key elements from our current policies or include specific inserts as needed. This customization ensures our policies meet our unique needs. Thrun's attorneys will recommend the best options, which is a service not offered by our current provider, NEOLA. This guidance can simplify decision-making and ensure legal compliance. Transitioning to Thrun will require committee work from the board and our administrators to review and align our current policies with Thrun's recommendations. This process will take three to four months. Regarding costs, there are one-time fees and annual updates. We've already paid \$750 towards policy services, which will be credited. As a client with Thrun on retainer, we will also receive a discount. Additionally, Thrun is based in Michigan and focus on Michigan-specific laws is a significant advantage, ensuring our policies are relevant and compliant with state regulations. NEOLA, by contrast, covers the entire Midwest, which can sometimes lead to less precise updates. If there is interest, we can strategize our next steps.

Treasurer Quick inquired about the fee structure of NEOLA in comparison to Thrun. Additionally, she requested a sample policy from Thrun to compare against our current NEOLA policy, to better understand its clarity and manageability for certification purposes, and to see how user-friendly it is.

Trustee Ochodnicky recalled the excellent presentation by Lisa Swem in January about the policies we adopted, including contracts. She appreciated the relationship we have built with her and noted that her approach is cost-effective. She expressed strong interest in considering her recommendations further, valuing her insightful input. She also inquired whether, for every policy we adopt, we could eliminate some. She asked if Thrun would be reviewing our existing policies. The goal would be to identify which policies are necessary, which are outdated, and which need updating. She sought clarification on whether this review process would be included with Thrun.

Vice President Webster believes it makes sense to use Thrun for our policies since they are our attorney. In the event of legal action, it would undoubtedly be easier for them to defend their own policies rather than those created by another provider. She values the consistency and coherence this approach would bring. Additionally, she supports the idea of Thrun reviewing our handbooks, as this could prevent potential issues and ensure compliance.

Superintendent Brooks stated he spoke to Superintendent Fattal from Corunna, he shared how their board approached adopting new policies. They divided the work into subcommittees and thoroughly reviewed their current policies alongside Thrun's recommendations. They matched existing policies with Thrun's, kept certain ones, and removed others. This process took three to four months of committee work. Thrun will customize and personalize our policies, ensuring compliance with the law. Superintendent Brooks stated the next steps would be deciding if we want to proceed with Thrun, if so they offer three enrollment periods: this Thursday and Friday, early September, and December. If we decide to move forward, we will contact the Thrun policy administrator to set up specifics. He also reminded the Board this will require commitment from both the board and our administrators to ensure all policies are reviewed and aligned. Additionally, he will prepare a cost comparison between NEOLA and Thrun for the July meeting. This will provide us with the necessary information before making a final decision. We have some time before the September enrollment period, so we don't need to rush but should plan accordingly.

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:

None

Meeting Updates:

June 26: Board of Education, Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

Student Hearing

The meeting of the Board of Education was held to hear the recommendation for the discipline of student number 110005056. President Mowen explained the process of the discipline hearing and stated that there is a record of the hearing being made by recording and written minutes.

It was noted that the student was under the age of 18 years old. The father of student number 110005056 requested verbally that the hearing be held in open session.

President Mowen and all parties in attendance at the hearing introduced themselves.

President Mowen asked the father of student number 110005056 if he received a letter from the superintendent's office containing the student's rights and a statement of the complaint. Superintendent Brooks read into the record the letter outlining the charges and giving notice of the meeting. The parent denied receipt of the letter.

Testimony

Thrun attorney Erin Walz and Owosso High School Principal Dr. Dallas Lintner presented testimony for administration on the investigation that resulted from the student's actions dating back from an incident in September 2022 to the last incident in December 2023. Dr. Lintner also read into the record the determinations from the two risk assessments held at the Shiawassee Regional Education Service District, showed still concerned.

The student's father stated that in the latest incident, there were three students in the room without a teacher, leaving the room unsupervised. His son entered the room, and the students claimed he made certain remarks. However, there were no witnesses other than these three students, who were aware of his disciplinary plan and knew that another incident could result in his removal from the school. The father emphasized that there is no proof of the alleged incident beyond the statements of these three students. He also mentioned that his son has always eventually admitted to any past misbehavior, but remains adamant that he did not make the remarks this time, and the father believes him 100 percent.

Vice President Webster had some inquiries for Dr. Lintner regarding the reentry plan. She noted that the Board had crafted a detailed plan with even lingering concerns after the evaluation was done. The Board clearly outlined conditions for the student's return to school. Therefore, when the vape incident occurred, it should have marked the end of the student's opportunity to return.

She acknowledged that vape-related issues typically don't come before the Board but nonetheless was a violation of the reentry plan. Additionally, there were four subsequent incidents after the vape incident, prompting her to question why the matter wasn't brought before the board sooner. Dr. Lintner admitted fault, conceding that while the vape incident was significant, it didn't immediately trigger thoughts of the safety plan. Vice President Webster then turned her attention to the student, querying him about the conditions outlined in his reentry plan. She pointed out a clear violation regarding the backpack rule, emphasizing that even without the comment, the presence of the backpack breached the terms. The student countered, claiming clearance from Dr. Lintner, which was refuted by Webster, stating that a non-see-through backpack was not permitted.

President Mowen then solicited concluding statements from both parties. Attorney Erin Walz acknowledged potential failures in reentry plan enforcement, expressing ongoing concerns about the student's mental well-being based on past remarks. Conversely, the student's father claimed to have received confirmation from the school regarding the backpack, though unable to recall who he spoke with. President Mowen highlighted the student's alarming comment and subsequent action, insinuating a potential threat. Vice President Webster reiterated the gravity of the situation, pointing out the student's repeated infractions despite previous suspensions. She emphasized the board's initial support and desire for the student's success but emphasized the need to prioritize the safety of all students.

Deliberations

The Board of Education deliberated in the presence of the student and his father.

Decision


Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicky, that the Board of Education find student number 110005056 responsible for the charges presented against him and for such misconduct will be transferred to virtual instruction for the 2024-25 school year. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Moved by Webster, supported by Ochodnicky to adjourn at 7:18 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger

Respectfully submitted,


Ty Krauss, Secretary