

**OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Board of Education**  
**Committee of the Whole Meeting**  
**March 12, 2025**  
**Report 24-107**  
**(At Place)**

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

President Webster 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**

**For Action**

President Webster began the meeting by addressing the first item on the agenda: the new hire for the position of Athletic Director/Assistant Principal. She noted that while the committee of the whole does not typically vote on matters, exceptions can be made in certain circumstances, particularly when there is a time-sensitive issue at hand. She explained that spring sports begin immediately after spring break, and if the board could make a decision that evening, the highly recommended candidate would be able to step into the role in time for the start of the spring season. In response, Quick moved to table the decision until the upcoming business meeting, emphasizing the importance of transparency. Pappas seconded the motion.

The Board then deliberated whether to approve the hire immediately or defer the decision until the next meeting. President Webster called for a vote, which resulted in 3 votes in favor of tabling the decision (Pappas, Quick, and Easlick) and 4 votes against (Webster, Henne, Ochodnicky, and Mowen). As a result, the motion to table the hire did not pass.

A central point of discussion was the timing of the decision, as spring sports were set to begin immediately after spring break. Delaying the approval would push the candidate's start date to April 21, potentially disrupting the upcoming sports season. Some Board members voiced frustration with the delay, stressing the pressure on the administration and the immediate need for leadership to effectively manage the spring sports programs.

Superintendent Brooks provided a comprehensive overview of the rigorous hiring process, which involved reviewing 35 applicants, conducting multiple interviews, performing reference checks, and gathering feedback from various stakeholders, including teachers, coaches, students, and Board members. Brooks highlighted that Mr. VanDuser emerged as the top candidate due to his strong leadership and teaching experience, making him particularly well-suited for the dual role of Athletic Director and Assistant Principal.

Some Board members raised concerns about the exclusion of certain top candidates from consideration. Superintendent Brooks explained that these candidates were not advanced due to neutral or negative reference checks, underscoring the critical role these checks played in the decision-making process. While opinions on the final selection varied, the Board acknowledged that the hiring process was thorough, well-considered, and supported by input from multiple sources.

In light of the district's pressing need for leadership and the upcoming summer months, several Board members stressed the importance of moving forward with the hire without further delay.

- Moved by Mowen, supported by Henne, that the Board of Education approve the hiring of the following certified staff:

Name	Building/Grade	Recommending Administrator	Salary Schedule Step
Nick VanDuser	OHS/Athletic Director/Assistant Principal	Superintendent Steve Brooks	Step 1 \$102,802

Secretary Henne conducted a roll call vote. Ayes: Henne, Mowen, Ochodnicki, and Webster. Nays: Easlick, Pappas, and Quick. Motion carried 4-3.

After his approval, Mr. VanDuser addressed the Board, expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the community. He shared that he and his wife moved to the area a few years ago, and he is excited to have the chance to plant roots here. He shared that his main focus is always the success of the students, noting that everything he does will be centered around their well-being and success. Mr. VanDuser reassured the Board that his commitment to the community and the students is unwavering, as he has devoted his life to supporting young people and will continue to do so in his new role. He also thanked the Board for their time and consideration, especially given the unusual timing of the meeting.

### **For Information**

### **MASB Board Workshop**

Superintendent Brooks provided details on the upcoming MASB Board Workshop scheduled for April 9 at the Wrought Iron Grill. The meeting will begin at 5:00 p.m., with dinner ordered at the start and a working session commencing at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will take place in a private room behind the bar, but accommodations will be made if any members of the public choose to attend.

The workshop will focus on several key topics, including the district's strategic plan, which is set to expire in 2025. Superintendent Brooks has reached out to Debbie Stair, a longtime MASB representative familiar with the Board, to assist in guiding the discussion. Other areas of focus will include Board communication and processes, district goals, and facilities planning.

Regarding district goals, Superintendent Brooks clarified that the Board had previously established a primary goal of positive promotions, with supporting data provided in December. The district has five working goals shared by teachers and administrators, which include improving attendance, positive promotions, and engaging learning. As the Board considers revising the strategic plan, Superintendent Brooks emphasized the importance of reviewing survey results from the superintendent search process. The district received overwhelming feedback from various stakeholders, which played a role in shaping the current goals. Integrating these insights into the next strategic plan could ensure alignment with community priorities.

### **Postcard**

Superintendent Brooks shared that this past week, we received a unique piece of history in the mail—an old postcard from 1930 featuring our former middle school. It was sent by Lowell Joerg, a gentleman from Stockton, California, who lives in an assisted living facility. His hobby is collecting old postcards and returning them to their original cities, often writing letters to the institutions associated with them.

In his note to us, he shared that he thought, *“By golly, I’ll send it back where it can be appreciated. Heritage is important.”* He even joked that he paid \$6 for it, so if we’d like to buy it for seven or eight, that would be greatly appreciated—along with some postage! The admin team thought that was fantastic, so they’re all pitching in to send him a roll of stamps.

He’s 96 years old, and in his letter, he mentioned that his late wife used to laugh and say, *“If you ever hear back from these folks, I’ll take you to lunch.”* He was even featured on the news in Stockton, highlighting his efforts to preserve history by sending postcards all over the country.

As the last principal of the old middle school, Richie Collins will record a short video response, and Lance Little, our district’s historian, will join in. They are also putting together an Owosso care package to send along with the postcard return.

### **Enrollment Projections**

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on enrollment projections, noting that Kindergarten registration took place last week. While numbers are slightly below where they typically are at this time of year, they remain close to expected levels.

Currently, staff are reviewing enrollment data to ensure all eligible students are accounted for. Approximately 80 to 85 four-year-olds from the Beginnings program are expected to enter kindergarten, and efforts are underway to confirm that all families have scheduled registration appointments. The district is working with Head Start, which typically has 25 to 30 students transitioning to kindergarten. Since these students can be more challenging to enroll, the district takes a proactive approach by directly bringing administrators, secretaries, and Title I teachers to Head Start sites. This allows for on-site assessments, parent meetings, and immediate enrollment, eliminating the need for families to visit the school separately.

With the addition of developmental kindergarten students and any potential retentions, enrollment projections are on track. However, there is still work to be done in the coming months to ensure all students are registered before the start of the new school year in late August. At this point, numbers are estimated to be within 10 students of the usual enrollment levels.

### **Curriculum Updates**

Dr. Dwyer provided the Board with curriculum updates, highlighting the progress of the elementary reading program pilot. Last night, teachers concluded their review of Into Reading, reflecting on its strengths, challenges, and any outstanding questions. During tonight's ILC meeting, they were introduced to Collaborative Literacy, the second program in the pilot, which will launch on Monday. Teachers are enthusiastic about the new materials, and the final decision will be based on which program best supports student reading development.

Tomorrow, first through fourth-grade students will have the opportunity to attend ARTrageous at the Lebowsky Center, a performance blending art, music, dance, and theater. This experience is largely grant-funded, with a small ticket fee of \$3, which schools cover for students unable to pay. First and second graders will attend the 9:30 a.m. show, while third and fourth graders will go at 12:30 p.m., totaling 440 students and staff per session.

The district's first Health Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 27, from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. This initial session will introduce committee members to its purpose, state requirements, and key discussion points through a PowerPoint presentation. A follow-up meeting will then focus on reviewing the proposed HIV education materials for elementary students.

### **Facility Bond Update**

Superintendent Brooks led the discussion on the facility bond, with Board members reviewing the documents in the meeting packet. He provided an overview of the bond refinancing plan, highlighting that the existing bonds (marked in yellow) and potential new bonds (marked in blue) would allow the district to secure approximately \$35 million in funding. These new bonds would be issued in three series, with around \$12 million allocated to each, depending on the timing of the issuance. The primary focus is first to address the most urgent projects, starting with Series 1.

Superintendent Brooks also shared that he and Vice President Ochodnický recently met with Tim Jenc, who expressed support for the bond proposal and is willing to help secure it. Brooks is scheduled to meet with Mr. Manke, although the outcome of that meeting is still uncertain. Efforts to build community support for the bond also include outreach to key individuals, such as Sarah Keyes and Cheryl Paez, who could serve as advocates for the proposal.

Several Board members raised concerns about the timing of the bond, especially in light of the recent significant water rate increase in the City of Owosso. Superintendent Brooks acknowledged that the rate hike could influence public sentiment, potentially affecting the bond vote. However, he clarified that the bond vote would not coincide with the water rate change on the ballot, which may help mitigate potential conflicts.

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the community outreach efforts, which include scheduling meetings at various times to accommodate different groups. These meetings aim to engage the community in discussing the bond proposal and prioritizing projects. A hands-on exercise was introduced, and participants placed stickers on various projects to indicate their priorities. The data gathered from these meetings will be analyzed using AI software to identify the community's top priorities.

A key issue raised during the discussion was the projected cost of the facility improvements. Initially estimated at \$44 million, the cost has since increased to \$96 million due to the inclusion of additional projects, such as a proposed Aquatic Center. While some of these projects were considered non-essential, Brooks emphasized that core projects—such as plumbing, electrical, and roofing repairs—remain vital to maintaining the district's facilities.

The Board also reviewed the district's fund balance, which currently stands at approximately 23-24%, or around \$8 million. Brooks noted that the fund balance is intended for emergencies and should not be used for large capital expenditures like facility repairs. Some Board members expressed concern that public perception could be a challenge, as some community members may not fully understand the need for the bond given the district's strong fund balance.

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on upcoming community outreach events, including a scheduled meeting with the Rise and Shine student group. These efforts are designed to educate the public about the bond proposal and gather support for the upcoming vote.

### **Barn Bids**

Superintendent Brooks reviewed the bids with the Board for the infrastructure project, which includes building the driveway, drainage, retention pond, and preparing the site for the barn. The work also covers the septic field and well installation. After reviewing the bids, S.P. Powell Sand and Soil from Montrose was selected as the lowest bidder by a significant margin. Darrick Huff conducted thorough reference checks, including feedback from the City of Owosso and the City of Saginaw, both of which praised the company's quality and reliability. Superintendent Brooks and Darrick Huff are confident in moving forward with S.P. Powell Sand and Soil, as they have a solid reputation and are committed to completing the project on time and within the agreed-upon price.

However, a concern arose regarding the well installation. After consulting with the Health Department, it was determined that drilling a well may not be reliable, as there is a chance of hitting sand instead of water. The Health Department suggested exploring the option of running a water line from North Street instead. While the well was initially budgeted at \$40,000, running the water line would add \$30,000 in costs. The City of Owosso proposed running the water line through the tennis courts and along the parking lot, which would offer a more sustainable water source for the future. Superintendent Brooks highlighted that the water line would be a better long-term investment, especially as the district plans to expand and add new facilities, such as a bus garage.

The water line would also address a current issue with inadequate bathroom facilities near the tennis courts, an area where there have been complaints about the lack of restrooms. Superintendent Brooks stated that the water line would resolve the water supply issue and make future projects, like bathroom facilities, more feasible. Darrick Huff recommended moving forward with the water line, and the Board is scheduled to vote on the decision at the March 26 meeting.

Regarding the project budget, Superintendent Brooks confirmed that \$250,000 has been secured from Beth Clark for barn construction materials. Additionally, \$240,000 in capital improvement funds from King Scott are available, and the district earns approximately \$15,000 per month in the sinking fund. These funds should cover the site prep costs, with the exception of the additional \$30,000 for the water line. If the vote on the water line passes, the project could begin immediately, with the goal of having the barn completed by summer. CTE students will assist with construction, helping to save money on interior work and trim. Beth Clark is also working on securing additional grants in case the budget falls short.

Superintendent Brooks emphasized that the Board needs to decide whether to proceed with the well or the water line before the March 26 meeting. Darrick will provide a revised quote for the water line. This decision will clarify the overall cost, and the Board will make a final decision based on this information.

### **Employee Handbook**

Superintendent Brooks shared that the employee handbook has not been updated since 2016, and a revised version is now ready. The handbook includes updates linked to the new Thrun policies, which are highlighted in yellow. Although the Thrun policies haven't been finalized yet, the handbook will include links to these policies. For example, when employees click on a specific policy number, such as 4104, they will be directed to the relevant document.

The goal is to bring the updated handbook forward for future action in April, allowing time for the OEA and OESPA to review it. A vote on the updated handbook is planned for May. While minor changes may still be made.

### **Cell Phone Legislation**

Superintendent Brooks discussed the growing momentum of a new piece of legislation in Michigan that would limit cell phone use in schools. The proposed law, introduced by a Senate Republican, would ban cell phones in elementary schools (K-5), restrict middle school use to before and after school, and allow high school students to use their phones before, after, and during lunch. This legislation has garnered significant bipartisan support, including backing from Governor Whitmer.

Under this legislation, school boards would be able to set stricter rules, but they couldn't implement policies that are more lenient than the state-mandated guidelines. Superintendent Brooks explained that this policy would provide teachers with clearer guidelines, making it easier for them to manage phone use in their classrooms. He also noted that some teachers

already have varying levels of enforcement, and a state-mandated policy could offer consistent rules across the district.

While acknowledging that cell phone use can be disruptive, Superintendent Brooks stressed the challenges of managing this issue at the local level without legislation. He shared concerns about the broader societal implications, such as the role of parents in teaching responsible phone use and the impact of cell phone distractions on learning. Despite differing views on the necessity of state legislation, Superintendent Brooks suggested that this bill might pass and become effective next year, offering a clearer framework for managing phone use in schools.

### **District Van Update**

Superintendent Brooks discussed the challenges and opportunities related to district vans, particularly in terms of transportation for school activities. Currently, regulations limit the purchase of school vans to 10-passenger vehicles, with insurance providers refusing coverage for anything larger. However, organizations like MASA are ongoing advocates for increasing the allowed capacity to 15 passengers, which would make such vans more accessible.

### **Thrun Policies**

Superintendent Brooks led a comprehensive discussion on the Thrun policy review and update process, focusing on key policy areas that required input from the district. The primary focus was on the 3100, 3200, 3300, 3400, and 3500 series, which cover General Operations, Finance and Borrowing, Facilities (Real and Personal Property), School Safety and Security, and FOIA Requests and Record Retention. Superintendent Brooks stressed the importance of reviewing these policies thoroughly, with live documents available for Board members to view and provide input. The goal is to finalize a package of recommendations for a vote by March or April, ensuring the policies align with both current practices and state requirements.

Superintendent Brooks began with Policy 2501 concerning Open Meetings and Zoom meetings. Initially, the district had planned to avoid using Zoom, but after consulting with Thrun, it was recommended that a provision be added to allow hybrid meetings in specific circumstances, such as when a Board member is absent due to military duty or an ADA-related disability. This change would offer flexibility without implying regular Zoom use unless necessary. The review continued with the 3100 series, which included various policies such as insurance (3101), smoking at district events (3102), cannabis and CBD products (3103), and alcohol at events (3103). Superintendent Brooks recommended prohibiting smoking at all district events and restricting cannabis and alcohol usage to maintain a drug-free, safe environment.

In the area of school safety and security, Superintendent Brooks discussed policies related to the use of cameras (3104), visitors and volunteers (3105), boosters and PTOs (3106), and the use of detection dogs (3107). For instance, he suggested requiring background checks for volunteers involved in transportation and proposed a new form to help track support groups like band and choir boosters. Superintendent Brooks also reviewed policies on service animals (3108), data breach responses (3110), and the use of drones (3111), emphasizing compliance with legal

requirements. He also recommended updates to technology use policies (3116) and intellectual property (3117) to align with modern practices and legal obligations.

Financial management policies were also reviewed in-depth. Superintendent Brooks recommended updates to fiscal management policies, including setting a minimum unassigned general fund balance of 15% to ensure financial stability and avoid state intervention. He also suggested adding the CFO to the list of authorized personnel for managing district investments (3204) and ensuring proper oversight of petty cash funds (3205). Other updates included recommendations on borrowing (3210), purchasing and procurement (3300), and property management (3305), with provisions for emergency purchases and facility rentals by non-curricular groups.

Superintendent Brooks addressed several safety-related policies, including the management of asbestos (3407), the use of firearms (3408), and FOIA requests (3501). He recommended simplifying the language in the firearms policy to focus on safety while updating the district's approach to FOIA requests, including implementing a fee structure and updating contact information. These changes align with the district's commitment to maintaining legal compliance, operational efficiency, and a safe environment for students and staff.

Superintendent Brooks emphasized that the proposed policy updates aim to ensure legal compliance, streamline district operations, and maintain a safe and supportive environment for all district community members. These updates reflect both legal requirements and the district's evolving needs, ensuring that policies are current, relevant, and in line with best practices.

### **Public Participation**

President Webster 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

### **Upcoming Board Meeting Dates:**

- March 26: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- April 9: Board of Education Committee Meeting, 5:30PM, Wrought Iron Grill
- April 23: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

### **Important Upcoming Dates:**



- March 14: End of Marking Period
- March 17: NHS Night, 6:30PM, PAC
- March 18: OHS Cornhole, 7:00PM, OHS Gym
- March 28: Half Day for All Students: Teacher Work Day (optional)
- March 31-April 4: No School: Spring Recess

### **Adjournment**

Moved by Quick, supported by Pappas, to adjourn at 8:05 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nick Henne", written over a horizontal line.

Nick Henne, Secretary

