

**OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Board of Education Minutes**  
**Committee of the Whole Meeting**  
**January 8, 2025**  
**Report 24-76**

Present: Adam Easlick, Nick Henne, Rick Mowen, Shelly Ochodnicky, John Pappas, 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**

**Amend Agenda**

President Mowen informed the Board of two requested amendments to the agenda. First, Item #4, Election of Officers, will be moved to its own agenda item and retitled Election of Officers Procedures. A closed session will be added at the end of the meeting, with Agenda Item #1, Personnel Update, to be discussed during the closed session. Moved by Easlick, supported by Ochodnicky, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

**Oath of Office**

Administrative Assistant and Notary Public, Mrs. Stephanie Goetzinger, administered the Oath of Office to newly elected Board member Mr. John Pappas and re-elected Board members Mr. Adam Easlick and Mrs. Marlene Webster.

**Election of Officers Procedures**

Superintendent Brooks shared the process that the Board of Education uses for the annual election of officers. He explained that he would open the nominations for Board President by taking the first nominations. The newly elected President would use the same process for Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. When the elections are completed, the meeting will continue with the new officers in place.

**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

## **Budget Updates**

CFO Dame provided a comprehensive budget update highlighting key changes and future expectations. The projected deficit is \$960,000, down from the original \$1,060,000, reflecting a \$100,000 improvement. Revenue and expenses have increased by \$1.7 million and \$1.6 million, respectively, primarily due to grants requiring matching revenue and expense reporting. Despite these adjustments, the district maintains a healthy 20% fund balance. This conservative budget assumes full employment and does not account for potential adjustments, such as an anticipated \$500,000 increase from retirement cost offsets (147 A), which will be added once confirmed.

The budget assumes full expenditure of supply and energy budgets, though actual spending often falls below projections. Additionally, 66% of the budget is allocated to instructional costs, placing the district among the highest in the region compared to other schools in Shiawassee, Clinton, and Ingham Counties. This is achieved by efficiently managing administrative costs, which remain lower than peer districts. For perspective, the regional average for instructional spending is 59.65%, while Owosso spends 6% more, equating to an additional \$2.4 million invested in classrooms.

The district is preparing for potential increases in insurance costs, retirement contributions, and curriculum updates. Insurance rates are expected to rise 7.2% next year, adding approximately \$241,000 in expenses, with potential further increases forecasted. Retirement costs are projected to grow by 3%, and the district is proactively evaluating staffing needs to mitigate the costs. Funds have been set aside for future curriculum and technology needs, including a federal E-Rate technology program and replacing outdated materials like 23-year-old science textbooks.

Revenue remains cautiously estimated, with interest income projected at \$400,000 despite a more optimistic expectation of \$520,000. Fluctuating interest rates and state funding adjustments pose ongoing challenges. For example, the district's at-risk funding was initially forecasted at \$2.6 million but reduced to \$2.25 million due to changing economic conditions. Staff continue to pursue grants, including a \$40,000 application for additional school aides.

The district's sinking fund currently totals \$3.72 million, with \$232,000 designated for capital improvements and \$3.5 million reserved for safety projects. These funds include proceeds from litigation with an architectural firm. CFO Dame emphasized the importance of strategic financial planning, noting that the district is on track to meet its economic goals. Despite the current deficit projection, conservative budgeting and prudent cost management suggest the district will approach breaking even by the end of the fiscal year.

The district remains fiscally responsible, prioritizing instructional spending while preparing for anticipated cost increases. The budgeting approach ensures financial stability, with significant funds allocated for future needs. The next two-week update will provide further insights into the district's economic standing and strategic plans.

## **Bond Project**

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the bond project, emphasizing critical planning and collaboration to address the district's infrastructure needs while maintaining the current debt millage of 4.7 mills. By refinancing existing bonds, the district has the potential to generate approximately \$35 million for essential upgrades. CFO Dame and Superintendent Brooks

recently met with financial consultant Carrie Blanchett from PFM to review updated figures, considering fluctuating interest rates and rising construction costs.

Over the break, the district engaged Clark Construction and Spicer Group to foster more cohesive collaboration than the previous bond effort. Derek shared a detailed Excel sheet with historical data on district assets such as roofs, parking lots, and mechanical systems, providing valuable context for planning. Spicer and Clark conducted comprehensive assessments of all district buildings, including 3D renderings of classrooms and facilities. Their inspections of roofs, boilers, parking lots, and other critical systems have established a thorough understanding of the district's current infrastructure.

The team is considering a November bond election, which offers better community engagement opportunities than a summer vote. The November timing allows the district to leverage back-to-school momentum while avoiding the perception of rushing a decision during summer break. Preliminary discussions with county clerks suggest the bond may be the only item on the November ballot, though this is subject to change.

The following key next steps include commissioning an enrollment analysis to project future needs and ensure compliance with Treasury requirements. Thrun will assist with refinancing bonds, drafting ballot language, and managing financial details. Community forums will play a vital role in gathering input and aligning priorities with community needs, ensuring the bond reflects collective goals rather than being perceived as board- or individually driven.

The proposed projects include essential but less glamorous upgrades, such as roofing, plumbing, electrical systems, and parking lot improvements. Air conditioning remains a significant consideration, with a cost-effective alternative to traditional ductwork potentially reducing the \$13 million estimate. Items like artificial turf for Willman Field, initially included for discussion, have been deprioritized to focus on classroom improvements. Clark and Spicer continue to refine cost estimates and project priorities to ensure the proposed upgrades meet the district's most pressing needs.

### **County School Board Positions**

Superintendent Brooks informed the Board that representatives for two key positions—the Shiawassee County School Board Executive Board and the Shiawassee RESD Budget Review and Election—will be appointed during the January 22nd Board Meeting. These appointments will require a formal motion, support, and a vote by the Board.

### **K-5 Online Discussion**

Superintendent Brooks led the discussion on the K-5 Online Program, designed as a short-term solution for students facing extreme medical or behavioral challenges. Accelerate Education offers an interactive online learning platform with support from certified elementary teachers, flexible instruction, and engaging lessons. It aims to help students continue their education while addressing individual needs that prevent them from attending school in person. Although in-person instruction is preferred, this online option provides an alternative for students who need it.

Several board members expressed concerns about the effectiveness of virtual learning, especially for students with special needs or behavioral issues, referencing challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were questions about ensuring success in these cases, particularly if students

do not have external support like counseling or wraparound services. The virtual contract, signed by students and parents, outlines participation requirements and any necessary in-person assessments. The Board raised concerns about liability for outside services, acknowledging that while the district cannot cover these costs, it can assist families in navigating insurance and available resources.

The Board discussed the need for a review process to monitor student's progress in the virtual program. Students who do not progress could return to in-person schooling, potentially with additional support, such as after-school help. The virtual option is a last resort for students struggling with behavioral issues, allowing them to remain engaged in their education while receiving additional support. While the program isn't viewed as a permanent solution, it was emphasized as a necessary tool to help students stay connected to their education. The Board agreed that the program should be reviewed case-by-case before implementation, ensuring transparency and oversight.

Moved by Henne, supported by Pappas, to move the K-5 Online Discussion to For Action and to approve the Accelerate Education courses for the 2024-25 school year. Vote Ayes: Henne, Mowen, Ochodnick, Pappas, Quick, and Webster. Nays: Easlick. Motion carried 6 to 1.

### **Barn Project**

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the barn project and its associated funding. The district has secured approximately \$250,000 in Capital Improvement Project (CIP) funds, specifically allocated for site work and capital improvements. These funds are derived from the litigation with King Scott and can only be used for capital improvement purposes.

The plan for the barn project involves a bid process managed by Spicer, which will begin after the first of the year. The bid will cover essential site work, including leveling the ground, drainage installation, and setting up the necessary infrastructure for the barn. The project will include installing a septic system and a well, ensuring proper capacity to support the barn and future facilities, such as the bus garage and maintenance buildings. These improvements will also provide the correct septic field and well pressure size to service the entire site adequately. The barn will be located near Middleton Road by the salt bunker.

In preparation for the barn project, the district is utilizing the CIP funds for site prep work, which will also be necessary for the Transportation Center and maintenance facilities. Superintendent Brooks noted that Beth Clark has raised nearly \$300,000 for the project, including CTE grant funding, to cover the barn's construction and related facilities.

The overall cost for the barn, bus garages, and associated infrastructure is expected to be well within budget. The site prep portion is estimated at around \$1,500,000, significantly less than the total project budget. The district will send the site prep portion out to bid, and once the bids are received, the information will be presented to the Board for review and approval.

### **Jerome Street & Willman Field Parking**

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the Jerome Street parking project, detailing plans initiated by the city to address parking and infrastructure challenges near Willman Field. The city has approached the district with plans to renovate Jerome Street in the summer of 2026, which runs along the river near Willman. Superintendent Brooks emphasized coordinating the project

timeline with key school events. Specifically, he informed the city that construction should ideally begin after graduation and conclude before the first day of school to ensure smooth bus operations. While these preferences have been communicated, the district recognizes there may be challenges in ensuring compliance with these timelines.

The city's proposal includes adding gutters along the south side of Jerome Street, adjacent to the river, to prevent vehicles from parking on the walkway. They do not plan to install curbs on the north side, which runs from the stadium to the cinemas. This decision likely stems from cost-saving considerations and the impact on residential properties along that stretch. However, the city has proposed creating 10 to 12 paved parking spaces on the south side as bump-outs for district use, costing \$20,000. Superintendent Brooks expressed concerns about their location, noting they would be about 100 yards from the entrance to Willman Field, limiting their practicality for some attendees.

Discussions also touched on the current parking situation. Attendees noted that parking along the north side of Jerome Street is inconsistent, with some vehicles parked parallel to the fence while others park haphazardly, reducing the efficiency of the space. Suggestions included marking diagonal parking spaces along the wall to maximize capacity and improve organization. Concerns about muddy conditions and drainage in that area were also raised, assuming that the city's reconstruction project would address these issues, potentially in coordination with environmental guidelines from EGLE (formerly DEQ).

There was also a recommendation to encourage angled parking on game nights along the south side of Jerome Street, which could increase capacity significantly. However, the city's efforts to prevent vehicles from parking on the nearby trail could complicate this approach. Concerns were raised about the potential narrowing of the roadway if the bump-outs are added, further limiting parking options along that side.

Superintendent Brooks noted that formalizing the decision is essential, while the proposed \$20,000 investment for the additional parking spaces could be funded through the sinking fund or capital improvement project budget. He will bring the proposal forward for discussion and action at the next meeting to allow the board time to review and decide. Coordination with the city will continue to ensure the project meets the district's needs and aligns with the construction timeline.

### **Enrollment Data**

Superintendent Brooks provided an overview of enrollment data based on the fall count. It reflects the transient nature of the district's student population. During the fall count period, 207 students moved out of the district, while new enrollments resulted in a net loss of approximately 60 students. This was slightly better than the anticipated loss of 75 students.

The data indicates various reasons for the student movement. Around 20 students enrolled out of state, while others transferred to non-public schools or relocated within Michigan. The report included a graph illustrating these movements, with details about specific destinations. For example, 24 students moved to the Corunna district, but a deeper analysis showed that many

moves were due to relocations. Of those 24, four students had never attended Owosso schools, five moved as part of family relocations, and one had a parent who teaches in Corunna. Conversely, Owosso gained 15 students from the Corunna district during the same period.

A notable trend was families moving together, often with multiple children transferring to the same destination. These moves were geographically diverse, with families relocating across Michigan. Brooks emphasized that such movements are not necessarily permanent, as families often return after circumstances change.

Some discrepancies were noted, such as students with Owosso addresses attending other districts without completing required non-resident forms. These situations often come to light after the fact, requiring administrative follow-up to ensure compliance. The report highlighted the importance of understanding these dynamics for future planning.

### **Curriculum Updates**

Curriculum Director Dr. Dwyer provided an overview of several exciting initiatives underway this semester. At the middle school level, literacy and math intervention programs were launched to address student needs. The Lexia PowerUp program is now operational, targeting sixth graders identified through data analysis. Thirty students are currently enrolled, and early results are promising, with one student completing 38 units in just three days. Similarly, the math intervention program, Number Worlds, has been introduced, focusing on the lowest-performing seventh graders. Thirty students are enrolled in this program, demonstrating a strategic approach to addressing specific learning gaps.

Renowned national literacy presenter Jan Richardson will visit the district during the week of January 20. She will conduct a full day of professional development for teachers, focusing on literacy with an emphasis on writing. Additionally, she will work with preschool teachers at Bentley and lead classroom-based learning labs across all grade levels. These sessions involve Richardson modeling instructional strategies with students while teachers observe, followed by debriefs where teachers discuss the methods, ask questions, and explore practical applications in their own classrooms. Her visit, funded by the 35j grant, represents a significant opportunity for professional growth.

Jenny LaMay is continuing to support middle school science and social studies teachers through "The Writing Revolution" initiative. She visits classrooms twice a week to model writing instruction in content areas. Teachers are applying these strategies throughout their classes, and the initiative is already yielding positive feedback. This program is expected to significantly enhance writing scores.

Following an extensive review of literacy materials, the district has narrowed its focus to two pilot programs for reading and collaborative literacy. Starting in late January or early February, two teachers from each grade level, along with two special education teachers, will participate in the pilot. These teachers will visit neighboring districts using the selected curriculums to observe their implementation. They will also receive training from company representatives and teach a

full curriculum unit in their own classrooms. Feedback from these pilots will guide the final decision on curriculum adoption, ensuring the best fit for the district's needs.

Finally, Dr. Dwyer mentioned the review of the HIV curriculum. Working closely with the Health Advisory Committee and nurses, the district aims to implement age-appropriate lessons that focus on bloodborne pathogens, in line with state requirements. The goal is to ensure the content is informative while avoiding any controversial topics. A small committee will soon be convened to finalize the approach.

### **House Bill 6058**

Superintendent Brooks discussed House Bill 6058, which addresses insurance options for districts, particularly the hard cap insurance. There are two main insurance models: the 80/20 model, where the district covers 80% of the insurance costs, and the employee pays the remaining 20%, and the hard cap model, where the district sets a fixed amount, and any costs beyond that are passed on to the employee.

The House and Senate recently approved a 7% increase to the hard cap, which has now been sent to Governor Whitmer for approval. However, there are concerns that the governor may veto the bill due to its poor drafting. A lobbyist mentioned that the bill could be problematic, especially in how it addresses premiums. Currently, the premiums for a two-person policy are almost the same as for a whole family, which is an issue that lawmakers were attempting to address. However, the proposed changes may have unintended consequences, leading to other problems that must be resolved.

If Governor Whitmer signs the bill, the hard cap numbers would increase by 7%, translating to an additional \$241,000 for the district. However, this change would not take effect until next August, as the district's current collective bargaining agreement is in place until then. Regardless of the bill's outcome, the district is covered until August, and any changes will not impact them until the new fiscal year.

### **January 20, 2025, Professional Development Day**

Dr. Dwyer provided an update on the upcoming Professional Development (PD) Day scheduled for January 20, 2025. The day will focus on continuing the work that has been a priority throughout the year.

One key area will be disciplinary literacy, specifically reading in the content areas at the secondary level. This will allow teachers to further develop their approach to literacy within their subject matter. The CPI de-escalation strategies and scripts will continue. This topic, which was very well received in the fall, will involve teachers learning to write actual scripts they can use in the classroom to address student escalation. These strategies are part of the ongoing effort to equip teachers with effective tools for managing student behavior.

The day will culminate with Superintendent Brooks' State of the District address at 2 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center. This session will review the goals set at the beginning of the year and highlight the progress made. Brooks will also share key data collected throughout the year and announce the Teacher of the Year and Support Staff of the Year awards. The session is expected

to take about an hour, but it may be shorter, and attendees will have time for additional discussions afterward.

### **Thrun Policies**

Superintendent Brooks led the discussion regarding the Thrun policies and the ongoing process for reviewing and updating them. He introduced two piles of materials: one containing a checklist for policy implementation and the other featuring printed sheets starting with Series 1000, which are bylaws that need attention. The highlighted items in blue require action, such as filling in district information, while yellow highlights indicate options for the Board to consider, with recommendations from the administration.

The district is currently aligning with other districts, such as Corunna and the RESD, which are also adopting Thrun policies. Superintendent Brooks and other district leaders met to develop a game plan over break. The 1000 and 2000 series policies, which focus on board roles, boundaries, and elections, will be reviewed first, followed by the 3000 series on finance and the 4000 series on HR policies. The administrative team will review the 5000 series, dealing with instruction, teachers, and curriculum.

The Board will have time to review all policies, provide feedback, and consider options. The goal is to present a package of recommendations for a vote by March or April, though additional revisions may be needed in June when Thrun updates their policies. Superintendent Brooks emphasized that the process will move efficiently, with live documents available for the Board to view and provide input. The ultimate aim is to streamline policy adoption and ensure alignment with current practices and state requirements.

### **Meeting Updates:**

- January 22, 2025: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- February 12, 2025: Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Conference Room 112
- February 26, 2025: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

### **Important Upcoming Dates:**

- January 20: No School, Martin Luther King Jr. Day & Professional Development
- January 24: OMS Drama Club Performance, 6:00 PM, PAC
- January 29: FFA District Competition, 4:00 PM, OHS
- February 14: Half Day for All Students: Teacher Work Day
- February 17: No School, President's Day

Moved by Easlick, supported by Ochodnicky, to move into closed session at 7:52 p.m. to address matters protected by attorney-client privilege. President Mowen conducted a roll call vote: Ayes: Easlick, Henne, Mowen, Ochodnicky, Pappas, Quick, and Webster Nays: None. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Mowen, supported by Pappas, to move back into open session at 8:15 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.



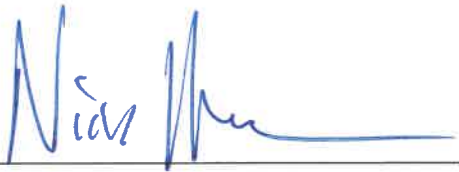
Moved by Quick, supported by Pappas, to accept the resignation agreement with Mr. Steve Irelan. President Mowen conducted a roll call vote: Ayes: Easlick, Henne, Mowen, Ochodnick, Pappas, Quick, and Webster Nays: None. Motion carried unanimously.

**Adjournment**

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnick, to adjourn at 8:16 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nick Henne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Nick Henne, Secretary

