

**OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Board of Education Minutes**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**November 22, 2021**  
**Report 21-59**

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

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

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Building Reports**

Dr. Tuttle introduced Operations Director John Klapko to recognize retiree Karen Robinson. Mr. Klapko noted that Karen worked five years at Owosso High School and five years at Lincoln High School in food service. Mr. Klapko commended Karen for being a conscientious and happy worker and noted the schools would miss her greatly. He wished her well in her retirement and happiness in spending time with her grandchildren. Dr. Tuttle thanked Karen for her service to the schools, especially for her consistent kindness and happiness.

**Board Correspondence**

Dr. Tuttle began her correspondence by reiterating her plan and recommendation for lengthening the holiday recess. "I made the recommendation to the district to not have school today and tomorrow to allow for an extensive break which provides for ample time to separate exposures. It's a nine-day window to separate those exposures in our schools and try to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. Obviously, there is no guarantee, but the hope is that healthy students and a healthy team return on Monday, November 29. As you know we've had great human resource issues as well so I'm hoping, not guaranteeing, that we will be ready to return on Monday. This time frame was the least intrusive on our families. If we had to shut down for nine to ten days at any other point students would have missed significantly more days of schooling. The mask mandate after Thanksgiving is an attempt to mitigate exposure to the positive cases that will be returning to our schools after Holiday break. As you know last year, we saw upticks in COVID cases after the indoor holiday gatherings and if that trend holds, I am concerned we could face a potential shutdown if we do not do something to slow the exposure and infection rate. The use of masks is both protection from the virus as well as an attempt to slow the spread to keep our students and staff healthy to hopefully have in person instruction for the remainder of this year. If COVID-19 continues to spread as it is now, we will have further shutdowns. As you know there were nine classrooms that had to be shut down last week alone due to outbreaks and we run the risk of not having enough educational team members to properly run the district. Remember it is not just the teachers, but also food service workers, bus drivers, custodial and maintenance employees, and administration that it takes to operate our district safely and effectively. We have already had to close bus routes, shut down cafeteria lines, reduce cleaning, etcetera to navigate staff member shortages. According to Dr. Chernin from our local Health Department masks are the most effective way to slow the spread. While the mask mandate is in effect, all quarantine due to close contacts and the Test to Stay program will cease. However, per the Health Department, the district must still notify parents whose children were in close contact

with a COVID positive persons so parents are aware and able to monitor symptoms closely. Close contacts at this time defined three feet or less. The district will continue to offer COVID-19 testing for our students and staff who wish to be tested. This will occur in the PAC (Performing Arts Center) lobby on school days from 7:15–8:00a.m. This is a resource for families to try and identify positive cases before they enter our schools. As always, educational team members and students who are not feeling well should stay home or minimally test before coming to school. We are allowing extra-curriculars and athletics for high school students only because we have enough tests, time, and personnel to properly test this sub-section of our population, we do not have the same resources to test the entire student body every day. The following message is what I will be sending out to parents as a reminder and I just want you to be aware of it and it reads as follows: ‘On November 16, 2021, Owosso Public Schools Issued a mask mandate for students and staff effective November 29 through December 13. Students and staff will be required to wear a mask at school, on the bus which is a federal transportation mandate and as spectators at extra-curricular and athletic events. Our teachers will work to build in mask breaks throughout the school day for students. Students and staff will not be required to wear masks while they are outdoors. Student athletes and students participating in extra-curriculars will be tested weekly therefor they will not be required to wear masks at practices and competitions. Students in extra-curriculars and athletics who are not actively participating will need to wear a mask; for example, a basketball player does not need to wear a mask while playing but does need to wear a mask on the bench. Additionally, the district will follow the mask mandates of our competitors when we compete at their facilities; For example, Genesee County currently has a mask mandate so any time we compete in their county we will follow their mandates. While the mask mandate enacted by the Owosso Public Schools Board of Education is in effect, all quarantining due to close contacts and the Test to Stay Program will cease. However, per the Health Department the district will still notify parents whose children were in close contact with a COVID positive person, so parents are aware and able to monitor symptoms. Close contact is three feet or less. This mask mandate also allows our staff to focus more on the educational, social, and emotional needs of our students.’”

Dr. Tuttle continued “In addition to that, I share the following information from the CEO of Memorial Healthcare who sent this to me on Thursday as he is concerned with the overwhelming needs at our hospital. I read directly from his letter to me: ‘Dear Dr. Tuttle, at Memorial Healthcare our greatest responsibility is the health and safety of our patients, staff, and community. Like many other hospitals in the region, we are experiencing significant challenges in three different areas of focus; additional COVID-19 resurgence and subsequent patient volume because of this newest wave, high volume of non-COVID patients and growing pressures surrounding staffing challenges. These forces combined are putting collective strain on our healthcare system. Shiawassee County along with most of Michigan is experiencing yet another wave of COVID-19 which spawned a significant growth trend in all three of the key metrics we use at Memorial Healthcare to track the level of COVID-19. These metrics include testing positivity rates, employee positivity and inpatient COVID-19 census. All these metrics are now at or near previous records and as a result have placed Memorial Healthcare at the highest level of risk assessment. As you can see from the below chart in just four weeks COVID-19 positive test results have increased from 113, a 9.4% positivity rate, to 258 a 17.4% positivity rate. These numbers are the highest numbers we have seen since the pandemic began in early 2020. Additionally, because of a much more open social environment in schools, restaurants, sporting events, etcetera we are also experiencing a significant increase in non-COVID patients. Respiratory illness, seasonal flu, and other illnesses that had largely been contained due to COVID-19 precautions are also increasing. We are now also seeing patients actively seeking treatment and care who have previously delayed care through the pandemic and now require more acute care and longer hospital stays. Finally, like many other industries, the health industry has been severely impacted by the staffing shortages and recruitment challenges. From nurses

and physicians to important support staff that are critical to a hospital's operations the effects of these shortages are very real. Federal encroachment and legislative measures have placed increased pressure on staff resiliency further stressing an already difficult staffing environment. Despite all of this Memorial Healthcare is committed to doing everything possible to provide our patients with the highest level of quality care that can be found anywhere. Our elevated measures of safety and new protocols will continue to guide our actions and ensure we deliver on our promise. This pandemic is not over. Considering the high rate of infection and transmission in our community we urge the community consider wearing a mask indoors particularly if you are unvaccinated. As always, follow good hand hygiene measures, physically distancing yourself in crowded situations and of course if you are not feeling well, please stay home. If you have not already, please seek out your annual influenza vaccine shot as well as the COVID-19 vaccine and booster. The numbers are clear, those who are vaccinated are far less likely to contract COVID-19 and if infected are far more likely to experience milder symptoms. Over the last week alone, of the 27 patients with COVID at Memorial 78% are unvaccinated, 100% of those in the ICU are unvaccinated, and 100% of those ventilated are also unvaccinated. Children ages 1-5 represented 16 patients that tested positive, ages 6-10 represented 35 patients, ages 11-15 21 positive cases, ages 16-20 15 positive cases, ages 21-30 36 cases, with 71 plus representing 34 cases. Of the 27 current inpatient cases three were fully vaccinated.” Dr. Tuttle ended her superintendent’s report by stating “I just wanted to share those facts with you so that if you have questions, you have the correct information. I have nothing further.”

Curriculum Director Mr. Steve Brooks began with an update on District grants. “We’ve been working on several grants in the District, and I would like share some information with the Board on that. First grant that we worked on was the Early Literacy Childhood grant designated for kindergarten through third grade. That provides the District with additional professional development, additional reading resources and training. That’s about \$25,000 awarded to the District earlier this last month. We also have an Extended Time grant which involves the after-school programs we are able to offer K-12 and we’re also able to offer lunch time tutoring at the secondary campuses for those students not able to stay after school. We also have specific time dedicated to our online students, so they have additional time with a certified teacher after school hours as well. That Extended Time grant is about \$45,000, which will also help us get ready for summer school. This last year we had a very successful summer school. This also earmarks some funds so that we can provide those opportunities again for student’s this summer. We’ve also submitted reimbursement for all the benchmark assessments which is about \$25,000. We’re spending a significant amount of time preparing for our upcoming assessments. We have the PSAT on December 4, that is the Shiawassee Scholar’s time to take that assessment so there is a lot of work that goes into preparing for those assessments. We’re also preparing for the Mid-January assessments and the springtime SAT, PSAT assessments. CFO Omer and I have been working on the consolidated applications, that is all our professional development now through June 30, 2022. That is my report, thank you.”

### **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 individuals addressed the Board:

- Karen Steiss
- Tom Manke
- Corey Agnew
- Patrice Martin
- Emma Johnson
- Sandy Hrncharik

### **For Action**

- Moved Webster, supported by Easlick to approve the October 25, 2021 Regular Board Meeting Minutes, the October 25, 2021 Closed Session Minutes, the November 8, 2021 Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes, November 8 Committee of the Whole Closed Session Minutes, November 16, 2021 Special Meeting Minutes, current bills and financials as presented. Motion carried unanimously.
- Moved by Easlick, supported by Keyes to approve the Appreciation Bonus. Dr. Tuttle stated “I’ve talked to you numerous times about the human resource issue we are facing in schools and you also saw the audit that was presented a couple Board meetings ago where auditors showed we have an 18% fund balance. When I took over as Superintendent, if nothing was done with the contracts at that time, we were slated to be six million dollars in the hole which equates to about 20% of a \$30 million dollar budget. At that juncture, staff cuts were taken from everybody’s perspective. We’ve since turned that around from a negative 20% to a positive 18% fund balance as you saw in the audit. My recommendation to you is for the last two years our staff, from every position in this district, has gone above and beyond. I’ve told you before this year has been harder than last year. From trying to recruit bus drivers, custodians, teachers, administration, food service workers, maintenance and grounds workers, everybody is doing more with less. I know that is not just true of schools however we have a responsibility to our staff. So, I present to you, if you choose to accept, that the Board of Education authorize the district to proceed with bonus or stipend payments to all employees excluding the Superintendent, meeting the eligibility requirements set forth in the facts and statistics section of this report. I will read this verbatim as I think it is important you all have the same facts. ‘All employees have been required to go well above and beyond for the last two years as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is felt that a stipend paid in two payments will demonstrate, in a tangible way: 1) The district’s appreciation for services already provided by the employee; and 2) The district’s desire to retain its dedicated employees that continue to provide outstanding service to the students of the district, especially in such a competitive employment environment. In addition, although this payment was not initially accounted for in the budget presented to the Board in June of 2021, the financial results presented by the auditors to the Board at the October 2021 meeting reflect the financial ability of the District to provide these well-deserved payments to the employees. Facts and Statistics: To qualify for payment, the employee must be employed on the date when payroll is being processed. Current Employees starting on or after July 1, 2021, will be paid a total of \$500 in two installments. First Installment of \$250 to be paid in the first pay of December 2021. Second installment of \$250 (retention) to be paid on first pay in June 2022. Current Employees employed prior to July 1, 2021, will be paid a total of \$1,000 in two installments. First Installment of \$500 to be paid in the first pay of December 2021. Second installment of \$500 (retention) to be paid on the first pay in June 2022.’” Trustee Quick asked for discussion on the stipend. She stated “I think what I would like, and I am willing to amend this motion, is

to include the Superintendent. Her efforts in this have been paramount as well. I think I would like people to recognize too that the difference in the stipend is because it's been a two-year process, we recognize the work that has been put in over the last two years and that's why there is a difference. I would move to amend the motion to include the Superintendent." Dr. Tuttle responded "I prefer not to be included. I appreciate that, but I genuinely prefer not to be included which is why I proposed it as such." Trustee Quick withdrew her motion to amend the stipend. Motion to approve the stipend as presented carried unanimously.

- Moved by Quick, supported by Easlick, to approve the 2021-2022 Elementary Course Catalogue. Mr. Brooks stated that this had been brought before the Board earlier in the year under 'For Future Action' but was remiss as a 'For Action' item, which is why it is being presented again. Motion carried unanimously.
- Moved by Quick, supported by Keyes to approve the Obsolete Materials – Transportation. Dr. Tuttle "This was under 'For Future Action' at the last Board meeting. We have two busses; both have seen better days. One is a 1999 Blue Bird Diesel with 267,000 plus miles, the second is a 2004 Blue Bird Diesel with 250,000 miles. Kudos to our mechanic Mike Graham for keeping these busses running, obviously that is a lot of miles on some tough terrain. These busses have given as much as they can to the district." Motion carried unanimously.
- Moved by Webster, supported by Quick to approve first readings for Revised Bylaw 0100, Revised Bylaw 0167.3, Revised Policy 3120, Revised Policy 6114, Revised Policy 6152, Revised Policy 7450, Revised Policy 8310, Revised Policy 8320, Revised Policy 8330. Dr. Tuttle stated that Revised Policy 5722 will need additional discussion with administration and will be brought forth at a later meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

### **For Future Action**

No 'For Future Action' Items were presented at this meeting.

### **For Information**

Dr. Tuttle reported the following personnel changes:

- **Accepted Positions**

Bruce Campbell has accepted a Bus Driver position.

Andrea Rowell has accepted a Lead Cook II Food Service position at Owosso Middle School.

Dana Shepard has accepted a Special Education Paraprofessional position at Bryant Elementary.

Dalton Cremer has accepted the Maintenance/Grounds position.

Simon Godley has accepted the floating Bus Driver position.

Amy Jo Brown has accepted the Performing Arts Coordinator position.

Connor Sergent has accepted the Assistant Transportation Supervisor position.

- **Resignations**

Linda Skinner, Food Service Worker at Owosso High School has submitted her letter of resignation.

Jacob Nelson, Maintenance/Grounds has submitted his letter of resignation.

- **Retirements**

Karen Robinson Food Service Lead Cook I has submitted her letter of retirement.

### **Public Participation**

The following individuals addressed the Board:

- Bonnie Wood
- Karen Steiss
- Tom Manke
- Tony Newman
- Karma Chandler
- Stephanie Benton

### **Board Member Comments/Updates**

Treasurer Keyes stated “I agree with Stephanie that we should all be in this together. I also agree with some of what Corey said. My daughter had to be quarantined because she was exposed but she shares a room with her sister who goes to school every day. What? Like Andrea has said in the past we’re all not scientists. We’re trying to follow the experts but unfortunately the Health Department is letting schools hang out to dry. I really appreciate all of you coming here and voicing your opinions. I don’t know all the answers. We all agree with you. We’re not scientists. We don’t know everything. I would also like to address what Tom Manke said about Shelly being ‘attacked’ at the last Board meeting. I don’t think ‘attacked’ is the word I would use. I did ask if Shelly would like to take the time to address some of the comments made at that meeting about how she was there representing this Board. Anybody that knows Shelly Ochodnicki knows that she knows better. She knows that she can’t speak for the Board. I voted yes on the Resolution because it was exactly what we were already doing. I feel like the bonuses are very well deserved for our staff; it is not enough to express how much you are truly appreciated. It would be great to go back to the time that teachers were considered heroes and getting applauded for going to work. They’re not because like Stephanie said we’re not all in this together. Please know that as the Board we are trying to do the best we can for these kids. We care about these students. It is offensive to hear that we don’t care. They are our family, our kids. Please keep that in mind.”

Trustee Easlick stated “I would like to congratulate Karen Robinson on her retirement, there isn’t a person in this room that doesn’t appreciate her service. I would like to address the opinion that masks restrict freedom because wearing masks is a personal choice. This argument ignores that schools are public spaces marked throughout with restrictions on some freedoms in the name of protecting more basic liberties guaranteed to everyone. Parents do not have the freedom to come and go at the schools, they have to check in at the office to visit. They have to show I.D. to pick up their children, provide immunization records to enroll their children and ensure that their children adhere to the dress code. Schools do not allow smoking, they ban weapons; rather than restricting liberties such measures provide the conditions to ensure liberty is possible. What you

believe is a private matter but if you act on those beliefs in public spaces in a way that threatens the lives of others it is no longer personal choice but a public concern. As a parent, it is our job to teach our children to not only be concerned with their safety but to be concerned about the safety of others around them. That is my job as a parent, and I take that seriously. That is all I have to say.”

Trustee Quick “I also would like to congratulate Karen on her retirement and for her years of commitment to our schools. I am troubled. I am struggling. We sit up here as the governing Board of this district to make choices, to make decisions, with what we have available. We do the best that we can with what we have available. I am not against anybody because they might think differently than I do. Stephanie, I don’t ever want you to think I think differently about you because you choose to wear a mask or whether you choose to get a vaccination or not. We are all in this together. We have to work harder. I am truly trying to help make decisions and promote discussions as a member of this Board. That is our obligation. That is our responsibility. We are in this together, we have to work together, we don’t necessarily all agree but that’s ok. We’re working towards one common goal. I am grateful that I am a member of this Board, that I am part of a district that values our children and our staff. We have truly been blessed the last few years with an incredible administration, an incredible staff, and wonderful parents. We will get through this together, but we have to do it together. Thank you.”

Vice President Ochodnický “There is a lot that goes on to all of this. This is unprecedented times. I obviously feel very strongly where I stand and how I feel but that doesn’t mean I don’t respect the views of others and all that goes on to make this district operate. I did see that Genesee County is going to be lifting their mask mandate in December and something else that I saw that I did not get a lot of information on is Fowlerville schools, Livingston county have proposed to stop quarantine requirements for their healthy students. That is something I would like to read up on and look into further when we’re looking at what’s working and what isn’t working. There was a mom from Lapeer county who compared numbers with Genesee County for the past two months. Lapeer county was apparently considering masks as a mandate in that county and the numbers that were shared Genesee county had the same amount of COVID positives as Lapeer county who was unmasked. I think continuing to gather information is important, to hear other ideas and to respect each other is important. That’s all I have.”

Secretary Webster stated “I want to start off with a thank you to everybody who came to express their opinions tonight. We’ve heard you. We listen. This is a complicated and complex issue, as you all know. There is really good science on both sides, and we aren’t scientists. I appreciated Adam’s statement so much. We are trying to make decisions for all of the students that are in a public space; this isn’t a personal health issue; this is a public health issue. That makes it difficult. We did start the year with people making their own decisions until just a few days ago. It was a personal decision whether they had their children wear a mask at school. We have done that and it’s not working. We’re going to try something else now, we hope it works. If it doesn’t, we will try something else. We’re all living and learning here. We appreciate the input from everybody because we’ll have more decisions to make in the future. I want to say that just as we appreciate hearing all different voices, this Board has always been a Board where we have had great dialogue. Shelly and I came onto the Board at the same time and have served together through some difficult times although none as difficult as COVID. Just as you come here to express different opinions so too do we as Board members express different opinions. When I hear someone mischaracterize our very healthy and robust discussions here as an ‘attack’ that seems to me to be a very divisive word. It shuts down open and honest dialogue because what we had at that meeting was open and honest dialogue, it was not an attack. I certainly hope that if Shelly felt attacked because we disagreed with her opinion, I would publicly apologize for that. It was not meant to be an attack it was meant to be dialogue about a subject we all our passionate

about and stand very firmly on. As far as the question about the online option, we have not had an online option this year. We all agree that it doesn't work. We had two days last week of online schooling. So that's why we're trying to keep kids in school, to do everything we can to keep kids in school. The other thing I would like to say is about the bonuses. We did hear a number. We heard that staff that have been with us for six months are getting \$500.00, and those that have been with us longer than that are going to get \$1000.00. I trust this Board and I trust this administration that tomorrow I will not find out that some people got \$10,000.00 and some people got \$500.00. I believe that what I vote on in this room is what will be enacted. I just wanted to make that point. I think they deserve more than that, but we did hear a number. We did not say a total, but I think most of us can do some quick math to figure out what that number is based on the number of staff that we have. \$1000.00 for two years of extra work is not a lot of money but it is well deserved and I'm glad we're doing it."

President Mowen concluded the meeting by saying "Most of the necessary comments have been made by the Board. I would only like to make one comment and I'm sure I speak for the Board as whole that we offer our condolences to Shelly for the loss of her father-in-law that just happened. Our condolences and prayers are with you and your family."

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

**December 13:** Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus  
Gymnasium

#### **Adjournment**

Moved by Quick, supported by Easlick to adjourn at 6:50 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Brooke Barber.

Respectfully submitted,

*Marlene Webster*

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Marlene Webster, Secretary