

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education Minutes
Committee of the Whole Meeting
February 12, 2025
Report 24-95

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

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

Amend Agenda

President Webster informed the Board of a requested agenda amendment, moving Agenda Item #2, Board Unpaid Leave Request, to follow Item #3, Public Participation. Moved by Ochodnicky, supported by Henne, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

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

Board Unpaid Leave Request

The Board reviewed a request for an unpaid leave of absence from an educational staff member, as outlined in the letter dated February 6, 2025. This request aligns with Board Policy 3430.01, which pertains to FMLA leave and its exhaustion, and Article 11, Section C2(e) of the OEA contract. After consulting with legal counsel, it was recommended that the Board approve the leave request for the remainder of the semester. Reinstatement or continuation beyond this period would require a subsequent meeting.

During the discussion, it was noted that the Board had three options: approve the request, deny it, or request a second opinion. Questions arose regarding the maximum duration of such leave. Under the OEA contract, the current approval would extend through the end of the school year,

with the possibility of requesting an additional semester, meaning the most extended allowable extension would be through the end of the first semester of the following school year.

Concerns were raised regarding the impact on students, particularly given the critical nature of the mathematics course affected by the leave. It was confirmed that a long-term substitute teacher is in place to provide consistency, and the math department has taken on additional responsibilities, including lesson planning, grading, and parent communication. Staff members supporting this effort are receiving compensation for their additional workload.

Superintendent Brooks recommended that the Board vote on and approve the unpaid leave of absence for the educational staff member. Moved by Ochodnický, supported by Pappas, to approve the unpaid leave request. Secretary Henne conducted a roll call vote. Ayes: Pappas, Henne, Webster, and Ochodnický Nays: None. Quick, Easlick, and Mowen are absent. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Ochodnický, supported by Pappas, to move into closed session at 5:38 p.m. to address matters protected by attorney-client privilege. Secretary Henne conducted a roll call vote. Ayes: Pappas, Henne, Webster, and Ochodnický Nays: None. Quick, Easlick, and Mowen are absent. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Ochodnický, supported by Pappas, to move back into open session at 6:09 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

March 26th Board Meeting

Superintendent Brooks acknowledged an oversight in scheduling, as he inadvertently booked a vacation on the same night as the March 26th Board meeting. He apologized for the mistake and presented the Board with options: rescheduling to March 19th, March 24th, or March 25th, or keeping the meeting as scheduled. Dr. Dwyer offered to lead the meeting if it remains on the 26th. After discussion, the Board agreed to proceed with the originally scheduled date, with Dr. Dwyer stepping in.

Kindergarten Registration

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on kindergarten registration, highlighting the district's strong marketing efforts. He commended Jessica Thompson, elementary principals, and Title I teachers for their creativity and dedication. The team finds a fresh theme each year despite considering recycling past ones. This year's campaign aligns with the district's *This is Our Story* theme and incorporates a movie-inspired concept.

The registration materials included in Board packets provide kindergarten-specific information and showcase the district as a whole, emphasizing long-term enrollment. To reach families, the district has launched three commercials on cable and streaming platforms throughout the month, placed newspaper ads, and implemented a robust social media campaign. A registration postcard will be mailed to every household in Owosso and Henderson on Friday, encouraging families to

schedule an appointment. These postcards should arrive by the weekend or early next week. The district is fully prepared and excited to welcome new students.

Barn Update (Bids)

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the barn project, noting that bid requests have been issued and are due by 3 p.m. on February 26, 2025. The project qualifies as a capital improvement; funding could come from existing capital improvement funds. The district earns approximately \$15,000 monthly in interest on its \$4 million balance, generating around \$60,000 in the past four months—revenue that could help cover site preparation costs.

Approximately \$250,000 in grants has been secured for raising and constructing the barn. The site preparation, separate from the barn's construction, is estimated to cost between \$75,000 and \$100,000 based on initial estimates from Spicer. If the Board reviews the bids in February, the project could be placed on the March agenda for action, allowing work to begin as soon as conditions permit. Spicer estimates completion within a few weeks once the ground is ready.

Regarding infrastructure, water availability has been assessed, and preliminary tests indicate a sufficient supply. The site has been perk-tested, and nearby wells, including those on Middleton and the city's well off North Hickory, provide confidence in water access.

Beth Clark continues to secure funding for the barn, having already raised approximately \$250,000. Brooks plans to review bids with Spicer on February 26, 2025, and present findings to the Board for discussion and potential action in March.

Budget

CFO Dame provided an overview of the governor's recently released budget proposals. While they include a 4.1% increase in per-student funding to \$10,000, much of this is symbolic. Rising retirement costs will offset the increase, bringing the actual impact closer to 2%. Transportation grants will remain stable, and health and mental safety funding is expected to continue at \$150 million.

Last year's audit finding regarding an excess balance has been resolved on the food service side, but this year's projected \$300,000 surplus will need to be spent. The district has used funds for necessary kitchen upgrades, replacing outdated equipment with multi-functional units that improve efficiency and capacity.

The district continues to secure key grants, including a \$176,000 Stronger Connections Grant—one of the highest awarded statewide—and additional funding through a robotics grant. Efforts are ongoing to maximize available resources, such as transportation funding through GSRP and potential grants for additional buses.

Mental health, safety, and security funding (31a) are anticipated to increase beyond initial proposals based on legislative discussions. Meanwhile, the uncertainty surrounding the new healthcare mandate remains, with ongoing negotiations between state lawmakers.

Financially, the district is in a strong position, with a projected fund balance of 23-24% or higher. Strategic use of grants has helped sustain financial health while allowing flexibility for future needs.

Curriculum investments continue, including a recently secured \$420,000 reading grant. Previous funding through ESSER grants supported updates to math, science, and technology curricula. Additional funds have been set aside for curriculum improvements if necessary.

CTE programs remain a priority, with seven district-run programs—including a newly added cosmetology course—and six more offered through the RESD. These programs cover fields like welding, healthcare, and electrical work. CTE funding requires an additional \$120,000 to be allocated directly to these programs.

CFO Dame emphasized that the district is focused on maximizing funding, making strategic investments, and expanding opportunities for college- and career-focused students.

Facilities

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the district's facilities plan, noting that the current scope remains unchanged from previous discussions. Over the holiday break, Clark conducted 3D imaging of all district buildings in collaboration with Spicer. They are finalizing cost analyses to ensure accuracy and alignment with projected expenses. Superintendent Brooks holds biweekly meetings with Spicer and Clark every other Monday at 3 p.m. to monitor progress.

Acknowledging concerns from some board members regarding the timing of a potential bond, Brooks shared that he has secured a treasury meeting in May, where the district must submit its bond proposal. To prepare, it is recommended that the district begin forming committees, conducting facility studies, and engaging both staff and community stakeholders. This includes outreach to groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and Kiwanis to build awareness and support.

The proposed improvements focus primarily on critical infrastructure needs—roofing, sidewalks, parking lots, electrical, and plumbing—and plans for a new transportation and maintenance facility. The proposal includes adding three classrooms at Bentley's Bright Beginnings to address growing daycare demands, which is expected to help retain families within the district.

The total estimated cost is \$44 million. However, by restructuring existing bonds, the district could pursue a more feasible target of \$35 million. Some projects may need to be deferred or removed to align with funding limits.

Superintendent Brooks emphasized the importance of improving community education regarding the bond's purpose. He acknowledged past shortcomings in effectively communicating the need for these investments and stressed the importance of proactive outreach. While concerns exist about the timing, he noted that waiting for a "perfect" moment may not be realistic and that delaying action could create more significant challenges in the future.

At this stage, Superintendent Brooks is not seeking a formal vote but rather a consensus from the Board to assemble committees and initiate community engagement efforts. When the time comes to finalize ballot language, a formal proposal will be presented for board approval. If preferred officially, a resolution can be drafted for the February meeting to authorize these preliminary steps.

Curriculum Updates

Dr. Dwyer began by clarifying the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). She explained that NAEP is not administered to all students but involves random sampling from select schools. For instance, three years ago, one fourth-grade class in our district participated, and more recently, a random selection of students from Lincoln was chosen. Since NAEP does not provide individual or school-level feedback, its results cannot directly inform instruction or school improvement efforts.

In contrast to NAEP, Michigan mandates that all students, including those receiving special education services, participate in state assessments. The state enforces a 1% cap on the number of students eligible for alternative assessments. This means that even students with significant learning challenges are often required to take the same tests as their general education peers. If the district exceeds this cap, penalties may be imposed. Dr. Dwyer emphasized that not all states follow the exact requirements, which leads to variations in how students are tested and how the results are reported. Due to these differences, comparisons of student achievement between states can be misleading. Therefore, when reviewing national assessment data, it is crucial to account for these variations to ensure a fair interpretation of Michigan's educational performance.

Literacy Pilot Update

Dr. Dwyer addressed the need for additional resources to support middle school teachers in differentiating instruction for students with diverse learning needs. Since the Into Reading program includes a secondary component, Into Literature, this provides an opportunity to introduce aligned instructional materials at the middle school level. Two middle school teachers will pilot the Into Literature program in late February to explore its effectiveness.

The second literacy initiative, Collaborative Literacy, is progressing as planned. Pilot kits for this program have been ordered, and professional development sessions are scheduled for participating teachers. An overview session will be offered for all K-5 teachers to ensure they are well-informed about the program.

Dr. Dwyer also highlighted the re-establishment of the district's health committee, which must meet state requirements for its composition. The committee, chaired by School Nurse Nichole Brooks, includes a diverse group of stakeholders: parents Andrea Janes, Rick Rakoski, Jason Schmitz, and Ken Wright; Health Educator Deb Clevenger from OHS; School Board President Marlene Webster; and Student Representative Ava Poag, an OHS junior in the Health Science Academy. Once the Board approves, the committee's first task will be reviewing the proposed addition of an HIV education slideshow to the elementary curriculum. This slideshow, which presents HIV education from a bloodborne pathogens perspective, will undergo review by the

committee and two public viewings. The goal is to show the updated curriculum to the Board by April, ensuring that nurses can teach the content before the end of the school year and keeping the district in compliance with state guidelines.

On the topic of assessments, Dr. Dwyer reported that winter assessments have been completed, and principals and teacher leaders are actively analyzing the data. The insights gained from these assessments will guide instructional adjustments, helping to provide targeted support for students across the district.

In other staff updates, Dr. Dwyer noted that approximately 20 staff members' CPR certifications expire in March. To accommodate renewals, Deb Clevenger will conduct a CPR certification course before the end of the month, allowing staff to maintain their credentials.

Looking ahead, new administrators Zeb Perrin and Alex Eskew will attend the Thrun Title IX comprehensive training on February 20, 2025. This training will ensure that they fully understand Title IX policies, procedures, and best practices for handling sensitive situations that may arise.

Finally, Dr. Dwyer highlighted a recent mid-year workshop for new teachers and their mentors at the Lebowsky Center for Performing Arts. The event included a tour of the facility, discussions about opportunities for collaboration with local organizations and businesses, and brainstorming ways to provide real-world learning experiences for students. The theater was buzzing with preparations for the upcoming production of *Into the Woods*, which promises to be an exciting show. District staff members, including Jessica McClung, are involved in the production. Jessica, who also serves as the district's mentor coordinator, was praised for organizing the event, which fostered meaningful discussions and connections among new educators.

District Van

Superintendent Brooks shared his idea of purchasing a district van to support better transportation needs for smaller groups and various school activities. He noted that many districts use 10-passenger vans for local travel, and he believes Owosso could benefit from a similar vehicle. The van would primarily be used for food service deliveries, replacing the need for larger box trucks for smaller items. It would also serve the district's athletic programs, particularly for golf and cross-country teams. It would allow them to travel more efficiently with groups of five to six people rather than using a large 77-passenger bus.

One key advantage is that coaches could drive the van with just a chauffeur's license, avoiding the more complex requirements of driving a bus. Superintendent Brooks is in the process of gathering cost estimates and plans to put the purchase out for bid. With the surplus funds in food service, a significant portion of the cost could be covered by this budget. He emphasized that this has been an idea he has long wanted to implement and feels now is the perfect time to move forward with it.

Thrun Policies

Superintendent Brooks led a discussion on the Thrun policy review and update process, focusing on areas requiring district-specific input (highlighted in blue) and options for Board consideration with administrative recommendations (highlighted in yellow). The Board concentrated on the 2400 and 2500 series, covering Board Membership and Duties, as well as Board Meetings and Open Meetings Act Compliance.

The discussion began with the 2400 series, which pertains to board member elections. Superintendent Brooks noted that policies such as elections (2400) and the acceptance and oath of office (2402) are dictated by law and require no modifications. In policy 2403, which includes district-specific input, the Board confirmed that it consists of seven members serving four-year terms. Policy 2404 addresses board member vacancies and appointments and follows legal guidelines. Policy 2405 outlines board officer positions, with the Board choosing the option that requires officers to be board members, ensuring the treasurer's role remains within the Board. The review continued with policies detailing board officer duties (2406), reaffirming existing practices.

Moving on to the 2500 series, which governs board meetings and Open Meetings Act compliance, the Board discussed meeting procedures, quorum requirements, cancellations, and public postings. Policy 2500 specifies that Robert's Rules of Order (Newly Revised) will guide parliamentary procedures. Policy 2501 addresses electronic board meetings, allowing members to participate remotely via telephone without voting rights, provided they notify the Board president or superintendent 24 to 48 hours in advance.

The discussion also covered policy 2502, which states that meeting agendas are prepared by the superintendent in coordination with the Board president. Policy 2503, addressing voting requirements, remains unchanged as it follows legal statutes. Policy 2504, concerning public participation, maintains the three-minute speaking limit per person, though some school boards have reduced public comment opportunities to a single session per meeting. The Board also reviewed policies on board committees (2505), reaffirming the committee-of-the-whole structure used by Shiawassee County Schools. Organizational meetings (2506) were discussed, with a recommendation to align meeting scheduling with the calendar year rather than the fiscal year for consistency.

Meeting Updates:

- February 26: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- March 1: Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Conference Room 112
- March 26: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30 PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

Important Upcoming Dates:

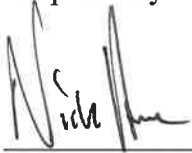
- February 14: Half Day for All Students: Teacher Work Day
- February 17: No School, President's Day
- February 19: OHS Band Concert, 7:00 PM, PAC
- February 20: OMS Band Concert, 7:00 PM, PAC
- February 22: OHS & OMS Jazz Band- An Evening of Jazz Fundraiser, 5:30 PM, Baker College Welcome Center
- February 25: NHS Blood Drive, 7:00 AM-3:00 PM, PAC
- February 25: OMS Choir Concert, 7:00 PM, PAC
- February 25: CTE Awards Banquet, 7:00 PM, Baker College Welcome Center
- February 26: OHS Choir Concert, 7:00 PM, PAC

Adjournment

Moved by Ochodnicky, supported by Henne, to adjourn at 7:10 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzinger

Respectfully submitted,



Nick Henne, Secretary