

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education Minutes
Committee of the Whole Meeting
September 13, 2021
Report 21-19

Present: Adam Easlick, Sara Keyes, Ty Krauss, Rick Mowen, Olga Quick, Shelly Ochodnicky, Marlene Webster
Absent: None

President Rick Mowen called the Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The meeting began in the Washington Campus Gymnasium, 645 Alger Street, Owosso MI 48867, was recessed and relocated to the Superintendent's Office, 645 Alger Street, Owosso MI 48867.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Participation

President Mowen stated that the Board of Education is a public body and recognizes the value of public comment on educational issues. Time has been included in the meeting's agenda for public participation. Members of the audience were reminded that 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:

- Tom Manke
- Alaetria Karbassi
- Stephen Myers

First Days of School Update

Dr. Tuttle began by saying the first days of school were different this year than in past years. She explained that there are sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth graders that have never been in the new 6–12 Grade Campus building. In the elementary buildings typically, they only have one new grade level, kindergarten, but this year we have kindergarteners, first and second graders that are new to the buildings and the buildings' routines. Dr. Tuttle continued by saying typically we have older students in the buildings who can guide the younger students and act as mentors. Because this facility is new to everyone there is no one to take on that mentor role. This means there is a learning curve for both students and parents. Dr. Tuttle mentioned transportation drop off and confusion about cafeteria lines as examples. She commended the police officers for their help with Gould Street and providing guidance to parents concerning entrances and exits at the new campus.

Dr. Tuttle stated that although we have added a lot of human resources to help with flow at the new campus, there are a couple positions we are hiring for. She explained that human resources are rare right now; several years ago, you may have had one hundred applicants for a single position whereas now you may receive one or two applicants. Dr. Tuttle specified that special education, counseling, and math positions are incredibly challenging to hire for. Bus Driver positions continue to be an issue. Dr. Tuttle explained Owosso Public Schools has tried to incentivize and encourage, both from inside and outside applicant pools, to get applicants for this position but to no avail. The district currently has just enough bus drivers to fill routes but if at any point someone was to become sick, the district would be scrambling to fill in for them. Dr. Tuttle said this is not just a district issue but a state-wide issue.

Educationally, Dr. Tuttle continued, we are doing great. We've had excellent feedback from both students and parents on the educational opportunities Owosso offers including the new menu for the cafeterias. Dr. Tuttle finished her update by asking if there were any questions from the Board on the first days of school. No questions were asked by the Board.

Student Count

Dr. Tuttle explained that student count numbers are important as that is how the district receives funding from the state called FTE (Full Time Equivalent). Every year the district has two count days. The first is worth ninety percent of the full FTE and the second one is worth ten percent which is called a blended count. The school budgeted to be down one hundred students and at this point, before count day, the district is down nineteen students and every week this number improves. The goal is to be zero students down before count day. There are several Lincoln students that would make up that differential, these students are on our books but have not shown up yet so we're working very hard to incentivize them to come to school. Dr. Tuttle finished by asking if there were any questions from the Board on the student count numbers. There were no questions from the board.

Budget Including ESSER Funds

Dr. Tuttle began by stating the budget is in great shape. She shared that a decade ago, we were projected to have a deficit of six million dollars, whereas now we have a positive fund balance of seventeen percent. This will be presented in greater detail at our next audit presentation. Dr. Tuttle explained this is, in part, due to the increased FTE (Full Time Equivalent) and positions that have not been able to be filled, it does not consider the ESSER funds. Although this is great news for the budget, Dr. Tuttle stated that it would be preferable to have the human resources that we are lacking. She explained that new positions would take the budget down but keeping the buildings staffed with the appropriate human resources which is so important.

Dr. Tuttle continued with an update on the ESSER funds; the Board approved the design process for the potential air-conditioning at the elementary school buildings. The design phase will hopefully be completed by December, and the district will send out requests for proposals in anticipation of the bids to come in for that amount. Depending on how those bids come in and comparing them with the ESSER funds available the district will decide how many buildings will receive air conditioning. Emerson would be the top priority given that it is a multi-story building,

and it does get particularly hot on those upper floors. Twenty percent of the ESSER III funds are required to go towards addressing “learning loss”, meaning trying to bridge the gap for lost learning opportunities for students due to COVID. Dr. Tuttle asked the Board if there were any questions regarding the budget. Vice President Ochodnicky asked what our current Foundation allowance amount is. Chief Financial Officer Julie Omer answered \$8,700. Vice President Ochodnicky asked what it was previously. CFO Omer responded in the neighborhood of \$8,000. President Mowen asked if the state was still hanging on to money set aside for local districts. Dr. Tuttle responded there is still some litigation happening regarding equalization payments for which our district is not part of that since we will receive our full allocation. She explained some of districts who did not receive as much in the way of ESSER funds because it was tied to Title I funding argued they should receive additional money. They were subsequently granted some of those funds but now that money is in litigation because there’s an argument that those smaller schools weren’t supposed to receive any money. The district will apply for those funds when they become available. The district still needs to apply for the second part of the ESSER II funds that have recently been made available and will apply for all the ESSER III funds when the application is released.

Dress Code

Dr. Tuttle began by saying there are many views on the dress code, some are conservative who would like us to go back to a traditional dress code and others, like students, would like to wear a variety of different clothing. These differences in opinion on clothing can be hard to balance. Owosso Public Schools does have a dress code strictly stated in the school handbook and we will continue to follow that code. Member Krauss asked if we had any complaints about the dress code. Dr. Tuttle responded that yes, we have had comments that we are much too conservative and comments that we are too relaxed. These comments come from parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Member Krauss asked what administrators think. Dr. Tuttle responded administrators would like to stick to the dress code, as school is a place to focus on learning not what everyone is wearing. Member Keyes shared that she has found it difficult taking her children clothes shopping for school because the trends right now are adult themed and less conservative. Dr. Tuttle said she understands fashion is important to students so that is where the balancing act comes in. Member Quick added she believes that the district dress code is very accommodating but that it can be challenging appeasing everyone, however respect should be a common theme. Dr. Tuttle agreed.

Homecoming Festivities

Dr. Tuttle stated that traditionally, Owosso High School has two big homecoming events where all the students meet in the gymnasium. This is difficult with COVID. After lengthy discussion administrators are hoping to have the homecoming dance outside with large tents. This will all depend on where our COVID numbers are at any given point. The homecoming interclass games will hopefully be held outside at the track. For the announcement of the court, because it is primarily a senior event, we will have the seniors go down to the gymnasium in their classes and all other grades will be able to watch the live-streamed event from their classrooms.

Personnel

Dr. Tuttle stated we have a lot of wonderful people working in our district, but we do have a few positions to fill such as paraprofessionals, custodians, and other support staff positions.

Washington D.C. Trip

Dr. Tuttle stated that the Washington D.C. Trip, arguably one of the most educational opportunities for students that OPS offers, has been canceled two years in a row. The tenth, ninth, and eighth graders did not get that opportunity. She stated the administrative team is working very hard to provide that opportunity for students if they wish to go. Some of the other field trips that kids have missed, like the Mackinaw Island trip were canceled as well so administrators are trying to work on similar opportunities for students to make up for what they have missed out on.

Calendar Items for the Board

Dr. Tuttle stated the big events are added to the Board calendar, like homecoming, graduation, the Board and committee meetings, but if there are any special requests from the Board, those can be added. Vice President Ochodnicky stated she prefers to have them on her calendar as it is more convenient to read, she would like to have all the varsity games sent out. President Mowen added he would rather have too many events on his calendar than not enough and miss something important.

Debbie Stair

Dr. Tuttle stated this is just a reminder that Debbie Stair will be at the meeting in October. We have been trying to book her for many years so she will be here at the October 11th meeting.

Bond Update

Dr. Tuttle shared that she has heard repeatedly how great the building looks considering where we came from. We still have some things that need to be completed. She continued to say the district had mediation with Kingscott today and Clark Construction Company is still working with us on some projects. Overall, the community and the students are very happy with how the facilities have turned out. President Mowen shared he thinks every Board member has had people reach out and say how beautiful the buildings and grounds look. He concluded by stating how wonderful it is the community came together to bring the district to where it is today.

COVID Numbers and Update

Mr. Brooks stated the district currently has 107 students that are out on quarantine, that is reflective of nine positive cases by students and one by a staff member. The district had six positive cases that ended quarantine today. Breakdowns fluctuate week to week. Last week, the high school had the most frequent reports of cases and quarantines. Over the weekend we had a rise at the middle school. Mr. Brooks continued by commending the administrators, who have been working tirelessly communicating with parents and students, coding students correctly in PowerSchool, tracking down which students are vaccinated and which are not because that affects quarantine status. Mr. Brooks continued to say the state did change the requirements which allows our students to get back to school sooner but the new requirements do put quite a burden on the school system. Prior to this, students were required to be out ten days if they had

been exposed, but the health department has changed this to seven days quarantine and the student may return to school with a negative test. This means we can get students back to participating sooner but that does come with a price. Dr. Tuttle added that the district is doing exactly what the Health Department mandates, nothing more nothing less.

Vice President Ochodnický requested clarification on what is mandated and required as opposed to what is recommended. Dr. Tuttle responded the Health Department has the authority to mandate that students be quarantined. Because the Health Department is overwhelmed, they have asked the district to make the phone calls to students and parents to notify them of exposures and subsequent quarantine conditions. Dr. Tuttle briefly reviewed the most recent guidance on quarantine and isolation and the many variables included in that guidance; masks or no masks, distance apart, vaccinated or not vaccinated. When the district calls the parents, the requirement is explained, whether their child will be isolated or quarantined, and they are also told they will receive a follow up call from the Health Department. Vice President Ochodnický said that her question is not what the guidance is but what the Board has in place as policy. She continued to say the state has not required anything and Shiawassee County has only provided guidance not requirements. She continued that she is not in agreement with requiring anything without a policy in place. Dr. Tuttle said these are requirements, according to the Health Department. V.P. Ochodnický responded that it is guidance according to the last document she received from Larry Johnson dated August 12, 2021. Dr. Tuttle stated the policy that the Board has is that as Superintendent, she must follow the law. Mr. Larry Johnson did say these are requirements, he said that to all the Superintendents. The entire county is following the Health Department and that becomes the law because he has the authority to do that. By virtue of him placing these requirements, the county and the district must follow those requirements. V.P. Ochodnický responded that these are not requirements, these are guidance and if we want to make any requirements or mandates that needs to be presented to the Board of Education as a policy to be voted on. She also stated that she does not agree with separating people based on vaccination status as she knows several people who have had the vaccination and still have passed away from COVID. She said the mask recommendation should be done away with completely unless the Board votes to enact a policy that everyone wears a mask. She continued to say she feels that the Board is overstepping its bounds as a government body.

Dr. Tuttle responded that Larry Johnson did tell us these are requirements, he has the authority to do that. V.P. Ochodnický said he does have the authority to do that, but he did not. Dr. Tuttle responded Larry Johnson did tell the superintendents these are requirements. V.P. Ochodnický said that still needs to come to the Board. Dr. Tuttle responded that she is not a health expert and does not claim to be one; she turns to the health experts for this guidance, recommendations, requirements, whatever they are. She stated that we are doing exactly what the Health Department says to do nothing more and nothing less. She continued to say that if the district were to do less that would be a violation of the law and as policy states, as Superintendent, she must follow the law.

Trustee Quick stated that the Board did have a discussion on the masking recommendation in August and at that time the Board left it as a recommendation and up to parents and students

whether they would wear a mask. She continued that as far as quarantine and isolation, it was her understanding those were requirements from the Health Department. V.P. Ochodnicky again stated that according to her document from the health department dated in August, those are recommendations. She also stated that the Return to Learn Plan ended on June 31, 2021 as well as any emergency powers granted to Dr. Tuttle.

Dr. Tuttle clarified that she was never granted any emergency powers as the Board found it was unconstitutional. She stated regardless, she has not enacted any emergency powers, she is only following Board policy that the superintendent needs to follow the law. Dr. Tuttle finished by stating the Health Department has the power not the superintendents. V.P. Ochodnicky stated her position again that any requirements need to come before the Board as policy to vote on.

Board Secretary Marlene Webster stated if these are requirements then the Board doesn't get vote on whether the law is followed. V.P. Ochodnicky responded the Board did vote on the Return to Learn plan. Secretary Webster stated, "It seems what Vice President Ochodnicky is asking for, what we are all asking for, is clarification as to whether this update from the Health Department is guidance or requirements." She continued to state she understands personal choice, however the point of quarantine is if someone is a public health risk they can't be in public where they could infect other people. She continued "For that to become a parent's choice...we all know the frustration when a parent sends their sick child to school, they should not do that. Quarantine is supposed to protect the public and it's a tough thing to have parents say, 'Well I'm not going to quarantine my sick child.'" Trustee Keyes asked "I recall a meeting where we had decided that if a parent's child was exposed to a positive student but not positive themselves, we would tell the parent that quarantine is optional. Is that still the case?" Dr. Tuttle responded "Last year, the school was quarantining students and staff. This year it has been decided that the only people who can quarantine students or staff is the health department. We are now acting with the Health Department and letting parents know ahead of time. As an example, the Health Department required me to quarantine an entire class after 18 students were exposed, so those students went online for seven to ten days." Secretary Webster stated she had a parent ask her what the school's communication policy is regarding COVID, as the parent felt the communication was not consistent enough and would like to know what the school's procedure is. Dr. Tuttle responded that last year, when there was a positive case, the schools notified all parents of students in the building. Administration received feedback from parents saying the communication was too much and too many notifications were being sent out. This year, the administrative team decided on two ways to keep communication open: the first way of communication is the district website is updated every time the district receives verification of a positive case from the health department. The second way of communication is when there is a positive case in an elementary building, the entire class of the affected individual is notified via email; we stopped making phone calls because the feedback from the parents was that the phone calls were too much. At the secondary level we do inform the entire school via PowerSchool email that there has been a positive case identified. Mr. Brooks added that the slowest part of the communication is waiting for verification from the Health Department adding that it can be a period of days before the Health Department can confirm a case. That means, Mr. Brooks continued, that although a parent may know of a positive case that case is not added to the

website until the Health Department confirms the positive status. Mr. Brooks finished his statement by adding that it is important to wait to hear from the Health Department because the school has received false information, whether that is due to outside testing or people not being honest, so to remain consistent the school waits for verification from the Health Department. Secretary Webster asked if the school waits to quarantine students until the Health Department verifies a case. Mr. Brooks responded the school does not wait because the buildings need to act as quickly as possible, but if there is a change confirmed by the Health Department then administration makes the appropriate changes to the quarantine status.

Dr. Tuttle ended the COVID update by stating her action item would be to verify with Larry Johnson that the guidelines on quarantine are requirements as opposed to recommendations.

Performing Arts Center

Dr. Tuttle began by stating the district now has a gorgeous Performing Arts Center (PAC). The district also had an agreement with the Cook Family Foundation that they would pay the technical coordinator at the Lebowsky Center to split his time between the Lebowsky Center and the PAC. This coordinator has since resigned from both positions. Filling this position is difficult because the PAC is state of the art and needs someone trained in technology to efficiently run all the center has to offer. People from all over the country have asked to rent the facility including the Fraternal Order of Police and the United States Marine Band, our local dance companies and so forth. We can not rent this facility out until we have the proper person to run it. There is a fee structure and rental form created by Community Education Director Jess Thompson that will be used when we begin renting the facility out. Vice President Ochodnický commented the fee structure is very reasonably priced. Dr. Tuttle agreed.

Juul Questionnaire

Dr. Tuttle stated this questionnaire is the result of the Board authorizing the district to join the litigation against Juul Inc., and other vaping manufacturers. Dr. Tuttle completed the questionnaire and provided copies for the Board to view.

MSTEP

Mr. Brooks began by introducing an article from the Detroit Free Press titled “Michigan’s M-STEP scores show dramatic declines during pandemic year” and explained that all the comparisons being made are from 2019 scores, because students did not take the M-STEP in 2020. Mr. Brooks continued by saying that 2021 was a difficult testing experience because many of the district’s students were online and it was not mandatory for those students to come in and take the M-STEP. Mr. Brooks included charts in the Board packets to show score comparisons but reminded the Board that not all the comparisons are accurate because not all students took the assessment. Mr. Brooks explained that among those that did take the assessments, there were many variables effecting scores such as school shutdowns where students had very little or online schooling and breaks in instruction that occurred. Mr. Brooks concluded that the district is gearing up for benchmark assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment and the North-West Educational Assessment and the scores of these tests will be used to measure success between fall and spring.

Round Table

Trustee Krauss commented that he appreciates the open discussion on COVID-19 and stated it's important to stay on top of this and do everything we can to keep our students and staff safe.

Treasurer Keyes commented that while bullying may derive from a variety of factors it should never be acceptable. She continued by saying it is important for administrators and office staff to remember that while these bullying incidents may be common occurrences to them, it could be traumatizing to the students involved. Treasurers Keyes concluded her thoughts by saying the Board and administrators should consider notifying parents directly after a bullying incident happens.

Vice President Ochodnicky stated the mental health of Owosso's community is suffering, largely due to COVID-19. She continued that the district's staff may not be prepared for the mental health crisis or have enough resources to combat the growing issues. Vice President Ochodnicky commended the administrators and staff of Owosso Public Schools for all their hard work throughout this ordeal. She concluded by posing the question, "How can we come together and work for everyone?".

Trustee Quick stated she believes the bullying issue needs to be addressed. She said she understood there are some social and emotional health programs being developed at the Middle School which she encourages. She concluded her thoughts by saying she knows that administrators do the best they can with what they have and time they have available and she appreciates all their efforts.

Trustee Easlick stated that he was bullied horribly in high school and doubts that the issues the district is facing is due to COVID. He stated the bullying he experienced has been with him his entire life, he is on medication for what he endured. He thinks there should be a packet that includes resources for the parent when their child is a victim.

Trustee Keyes proposed a group committee focused on the prevention of bullying.

President Rick Mowen concluded the open session by reviewing the upcoming Board Meeting dates.

Closed Session

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicky to move into Closed Session at 6:27 pm for the purpose of discussing contract negotiations. President Mowen conducted a roll call vote. Ayes: Mowen, Ochodnicky, Keyes, Easlick, Krauss, Quick. Nays: None. Absent: Webster. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicky to return to open session at 7:58 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Moved by Easlick, supported by Quick to adjourn at 7:59 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Brooke Barber.

Respectfully submitted,

Marlene Webster

Marlene Webster, Secretary