

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education
Committee of the Whole Meeting
April 9, 2025
Report 24-113

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

President Webster called the Board of Education Meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The meeting was held at the Wrought Iron Grill, 317 S Elm St #201, Owosso, MI, 48867.

Pledge of Allegiance

Board Workshop- Working as an Effective Governance Team

Debbie Stair, Assistant Director of Leadership Development for the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB), led an engaging and insightful workshop on strengthening governance practices and enhancing strategic planning. She began by expressing gratitude to the board for welcoming her back and shared her extensive experience with MASB and her personal background as a board member in her own district.

To kick off the workshop, Debbie distributed a board profile sheet for members to review and update their information. She then emphasized the critical role that strong relationships play in effective board governance, setting the tone for a collaborative atmosphere. She led a spring-themed icebreaker to facilitate this, encouraging members to select an image that best represented their current mood. This activity sparked self-reflection, provided an opportunity for personal sharing, and helped members connect on a deeper level. Debbie highlighted that such informal activities are essential for building strong relationships within the board. While differing opinions are inevitable, fostering these connections establishes a foundation of trust, enabling the team to collaborate effectively during challenging times. When board members work together, even amidst disagreements, they can remain united in their mission.

The session transitioned into deeper self-reflection as Debbie introduced the Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing model for the board to review. Members took time to reflect on where they see the board currently functioning along that model and shared their perspectives with one another. This activity prompted honest dialogue about team dynamics, strengths, and areas for growth.

The session shifted to a discussion on the board's current strategic plan, which is set to expire this year. The group acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive planning process moving forward—one that incorporates broad community engagement and aligns with the superintendent's goals. Debbie recommended that the board explore potential facilitators and begin the process in early 2026 to ensure the use of fresh perception data. The board also

discussed integrating the upcoming bond issue into the new strategic plan, emphasizing the importance of aligning it with long-term district goals and acting promptly to avoid rising costs.

Debbie then led the board through a thoughtful discussion on governance roles and responsibilities. She clarified the distinction between governance and management, emphasizing the board's role in supporting the superintendent, setting policy, and monitoring progress while resisting the urge to micromanage. Using real-world examples, particularly around budgeting and hiring, she reinforced the board's responsibility to ask informed questions and trust the administrative team to lead day-to-day operations.

Communication and transparency were recurring themes throughout the session. The board reviewed best practices for transparent and respectful communication internally and with the community. Debbie stressed the importance of asking thoughtful questions ahead of meetings, managing social media presence with care, and maintaining open lines of communication to foster trust. The workshop also addressed the need for regularly reviewing board norms and protocols. Participants recommended a biannual review cycle and suggested formalizing orientation and communication procedures to ensure consistency for all board members. Additionally, there was a focus on managing community concerns and clarifying protocols for board member visits to schools and district offices.

The conversation turned to the importance of trust and transparency within the board. It was acknowledged that even minor breakdowns in trust can have lasting effects, so it's critical to continually assess the board's effectiveness. Acknowledging areas for improvement and addressing conflicts constructively are essential steps toward becoming a stronger, more cohesive team. The board explored how its dynamics and approach to governance have evolved, particularly in light of external factors such as the political climate and social media. These factors have increasingly influenced board discussions, making focusing solely on the district's needs more challenging. The formalization of communication, driven by concerns about Open Meetings Act violations, has led to potential gaps in understanding, which some members expressed concern about. Some members suggested that more frequent meetings might be necessary to address the district's growing complexities, including the upcoming bond issues.

The need for more transparent communication processes was underscored, particularly regarding how information is gathered and shared. Members agreed that improving internal communication would help ensure alignment on district goals. The importance of a unified purpose was highlighted, with a shared commitment to prioritize the district's and its students' best interests.

The discussion on governance roles reinforced the importance of clarity regarding the superintendent's role and how the board interacts with them. The superintendent's responsibility is to serve the unified board, not individual members. The board must focus on strategic planning and ensuring that the district's long-term goals are aligned, while the superintendent is held accountable for executing those plans. Clear governance boundaries were emphasized, particularly in staffing and hiring decisions. Board members should focus on policy oversight, while daily operations remain the superintendent's responsibility. The board can ensure effective governance focused on long-term objectives by placing trust in the superintendent and administration.

As the workshop concluded, the board affirmed its commitment to effective governance, community engagement, and collaboration with the superintendent. Members expressed their appreciation for Debbie's insights and agreed to explore the next steps in strategic planning and facilitator selection.

Superintendent Brooks provided an update on the transition to Thrun policies, highlighting the benefits of their responsiveness to recent executive orders and legislative changes. Thrun has been making legal adjustments swiftly—often within weeks. This efficiency has proven to be a significant advantage, and the decision to switch has already shown clear benefits.

So far, three policy series have been completed. Only the 4000 series, which focuses on Human Resources, and the 5000 series, which covers Instruction, remain. Once those are finalized, the district will be able to adopt the complete policy set. While Thrun will issue another round of updates in June, only minor revisions are expected.

Once the remaining policies are finalized, we'll adopt the updated employee and student handbooks, a process Bev has been leading. All handbooks—including those for the high school, middle school, Lincoln, Emerson, Bryant, and Bentley Bright Beginnings—are in the final review stages with building principals. Bev has done an outstanding job aligning the handbooks with the new Thrun policies, pulling in the required legal language, and formatting everything for clarity.

The employee handbook is complete and fully aligned with the new policy series. All student handbooks are nearly finalized and ready for approval as soon as the policies are adopted. Ideally, we can approve both at the same time. Handbooks cannot be formally adopted until the updated policies are approved. A few sections, such as the cell phone policy, may require specific board input before finalization. Once the policies are in place, we'll move forward with handbook approval.

All handbooks will be distributed digitally only. Each one includes hyperlinks that connect policy references directly to the board policy for easy access by families. The finalized versions will be sent out as soon as they're ready. The high school handbook is over 100 pages—primarily due to legal content—but overall, the structure and language are solid and aligned.

Superintendent Brooks shared that the County Board Dinner, initially scheduled for April 15, may be rescheduled to April 29 due to low attendance. As of this afternoon, only six individuals have RSVP'd. He stated he would have a final answer tomorrow morning. He will send a quick group text with the update if the date changes. If it remains on the 15th, Rick and he will still attend and bring back any vital information to share.

Lastly, the Board reviewed the current progress on facility planning and the upcoming bond initiative. Superintendent Brooks shared that on April 9, the district launched a community-wide facilities survey through SchoolMessenger, Facebook, and the district website. The survey includes 25 proposed projects from Clark and Spicer, each accompanied by cost estimates and priority ratings. By 5 p.m. on April 10, just 24 hours after its launch, over 400 responses had

already been received. The survey will remain open until Tuesday, April 16, and staff have also been invited to participate, ensuring their input is included in the data set.

In addition to the digital survey, Superintendent Brooks led 12 in-person community meetings to present the same information and facilitate in-depth discussions. The early feedback from these meetings and the survey responses has been highly valuable. With a goal of gathering at least 700 responses, the district is on track to exceed that target. While all proposed projects cost around \$66 million, the district targets a bond closer to \$35 million. Dave Warner from Clark will analyze the data and present a summary to the Board on April 23, which will be instrumental in guiding the prioritization of projects.

The Board acknowledged the urgency of addressing deferred maintenance and the potential risk of escalating costs if the bond is delayed. There was also a strong emphasis on the need for continued public education regarding the zero-millage bond proposal. The role of public relations staff in addressing misinformation and ensuring the public has accurate information was also highlighted as a critical part of the effort.

Public Participation

President Webster stated that the Board of Education is a public body and recognizes the value of public comment on education issues. Time has been included in the meeting's agenda for public participation. Members of the audience were reminded they should announce their name and group affiliation when applicable and to limit their participation time to three minutes or less. Comments should be directed to the Board and be relevant to the business of the Board of Education. This is not an opportunity for dialogue with the Board of Education. The rules of common courtesy should also be observed.

The following participants addressed the Board:
None

Upcoming Board Meeting Dates:

- April 23: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium
- May 14: Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Conference Room 112
- May 28: Board of Education Regular Meeting, 5:30PM, Washington Campus Gymnasium

Important Upcoming Dates:

- April 11: Bryant Family Fun Night, 5:00PM, Bryant School
- April 15: OHS Talent Show, 7:00PM, PAC
- April 16: OHS Blue & Gold Banquet/Starfish Awards, 7:00PM, PAC
- April 18: No School, Good Friday
- April 26: OHS Prom, 6:00PM, Golden Glow in St. Charles

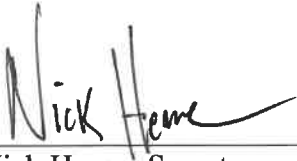
- April 29: OHS Band Concert, 7:00PM, PAC

Adjournment

Moved by Pappas, supported by Ochodnicky, to adjourn at 7:56 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Stephanie Goetzing.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick Henne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Nick Henne, Secretary

