

**OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes**  
**September 16, 2020**  
**Report 20-23**

President Rick Mowen called the Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting to order at 5:40pm. Due to Governor Whitmer's current Executive Orders 2020-154 and 2020-176, the meeting was held virtually using video conferencing from the Washington Campus, 645 Alger Street, Owosso MI 48867.

Present: Keyes, Krauss, Mowen, Ochodnicky, Paez, Quick, Webster

Absent: None

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Public Participation**

President Rick 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.

Gregory Brodeur, Owosso resident and former Board member, commented that he was in attendance to speak about Owosso for Change. Mr. Brodeur expressed his opposition to the group's demands regarding certain changes in the curriculum to address social issues. He stated that his opposition lies not in favor of racism, sexism, bigotry, etc. but in lack of time to teach social activism in schools. He further noted his belief that Owosso Public Schools (OPS) is not equipped to teach these social issues and that the substance on what to teach would be impossible to agree upon. He strongly urged the Board not to make any changes based on Owosso for Change's demands. Mr. Brodeur expressed his belief that children cannot fully digest social issues and should not be made to feel guilty of things that occurred years ago. Mr. Brodeur questioned the motivations of groups such as Owosso for Change and stated they "march under a banner of anti-racism" to define society into groups. He stated, "this is the antithesis of what we should be doing," and "the antithesis of individuality of freedom." Finally, Mr. Brodeur reinforced his opinion that Owosso for Change's demands are a "terrible idea" and that adults must discuss social issues without bringing children into the discussion.

There were no additional comments from the public.

**Beginning of School Year**

Superintendent Dr. Tuttle commended everyone in the district for a strong start to the school year, especially considering the circumstances the OPS team and families were faced with. It was noted that there have been minimal discipline issues, and everyone has been social distancing as best as possible. Dr. Tuttle shared that teachers are role modeling lifelong learners

by adapting to new technology and teaching in a new fashion. Dr. Tuttle thanked the team for their planning and leadership in the start of an unprecedented school year.

### **COVID-19**

Dr. Tuttle shared that one Emerson Elementary student tested positive for COVID-19. With a team effort, public communication regarding the positive case was sent out. Communication was sent out to teachers, parents of students who needed to quarantine, the Shiawassee County Health Department, families of students at Emerson Elementary, the entire district, the press, and the Board of Education. Dr. Tuttle shared the importance of ensuring all communication was accurate. The time from the moment the Shiawassee County Health Department confirmed the positive case to communication being sent to the district totaled 30 minutes. Dr. Tuttle thanked the technology department for their assistance in sending out timely communication. She also commended the OPS team and the Shiawassee County Health Department, particularly Director Larry Johnson and his team. Dr. Tuttle noted the Shiawassee County Health Department provided great assistance in preparing for a COVID-19 positive case in the schools and provided significant support in carrying out the plan. The Shiawassee County Health Department was complimentary of the way in which the district handled the situation. Dr. Tuttle will call the Shiawassee County Health Department whenever there is a positive COVID-19 case within OPS.

Trustee Ty Krauss asked if Dr. Tuttle found the biggest hurdle to be communication between all the entities involved. Dr. Tuttle confirmed that timely communication, accurate communication, and determining with whom to communicate with first were the biggest challenges. She explained that the situation was further complicated in that Emerson Elementary Principal, Jessica Aue, had to be quarantined after coming in direct contact with the COVID-19 positive student. Steve Brooks is serving as the interim Emerson Elementary Principal. Dr. Tuttle wants to share as much information as possible whenever there is a COVID-19 positive case in the district while also protecting any COVID-19 positive student and their rights.

### **In Person Versus Online Students**

Superintendent Dr. Tuttle shared the district has had requests from parents/guardians for their online learners to return to in person instruction, especially at the elementary level. She noted that at the secondary level, there is an equal balance of students wanting to switch from online learning to in person instruction and vice versa. Dr. Tuttle informed the Board that on Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, a letter will go out to all district families and will be shared on social media regarding when students may switch from online instruction to in person learning. Dr. Tuttle shared the letter with the Board. Schools must be notified by September 30<sup>th</sup> if a student wishes to return to school. These students will return to in person instruction on Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup>. If a student would like to switch from in person to online instruction, they must notify the school as well but can do so at any time. If the school is not notified by September 30<sup>th</sup> that a student would like to return in person, that student will need to remain online until Christmas break. Additionally, Dr. Tuttle stated that if a student wishes to remain online or in person, they do not need to communicate this with their school. Dr. Tuttle noted the families of students returning to in person instruction will need to notify transportation if needed. Dr. Tuttle explained that online instruction is going as well as possible, but there are cases of students missing some instruction, and there have been challenges to online learning. Dr. Tuttle brought to the Board's attention that

the 1:10-3:25pm extended day option for in person instruction at the elementary level is full. All available space and staff have been utilized.

### **Bond Update**

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board that Brendon Pollard's son passed away. The district expresses their deepest condolences to Mr. Pollard's family.

Dr. Tuttle noted that, overall, bond construction is going well, but slower than anticipated. Clark Construction notified Dr. Tuttle that the project will be completed by the end of March 2021. The building is in good shape right now, and the few technology glitches present at the beginning of the school year have been resolved. Dr. Tuttle commended high school staff who have adjusted to many changes including COVID-19 response, moving classrooms, and adapting to new technology. Dr. Tuttle hopes the first Board meeting that is back in person will include a tour of the new high school campus.

Vice President Shelly Ochodnicky asked if Nick Henne from Clark Construction is still leading the OPS Bond Project.

Dr. Tuttle explained that Mr. Henne is no longer leading the project. Karen Middleton began leading the project before Mr. Henne came onboard. Mr. Henne has since been promoted and is working on a project at Kettering University; however, he is still vested in the OPS Bond Project and responsive to any of Dr. Tuttle's questions or concerns. Dave Schultz has been serving for almost three months as the Project Manager for the OPS Bond Project. Dr. Tuttle shared that Mr. Schultz has a wealth of experience and has been doing a nice job. Dr. Tuttle also stated that Gary Steller and Mike Fillinger from Clark Construction have been stable forces and extremely helpful in the OPS Bond Project.

### **Extended Learning Plan**

Dr. Tuttle noted the Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan will be reviewed monthly by the Board at regular Board meetings.

Curriculum Director Steve Brooks shared Owosso Public Schools' Reporting "Timeline and Information for Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan Implementation." Mr. Brooks made comments regarding the Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan, highlighting some items from the plan including recaptured assurances put forth by the Board. He also pointed out survey information gathered in May and July, goals based off recommendations by the Shiawassee RESD, as well as notes on NWEA assessment. Mr. Brooks explained that NWEA is a national assessment OPS administrators and teachers are well-versed in. Students will be assessed whether they are learning online or in person. Mr. Brooks brought to the Board's attention further components of the Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan including the Early Warning System (EWS), school schedules, data to monitor student success, utilization of PowerSchool, technology resources provided to students, two-way communication strategies, and more. The "Timeline and Information for Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan Implementation" will be submitted to the State of Michigan.

Secretary Marlene Webster commented on the plan's inclusion of special education. She asked how Owosso Public Schools are communicating with families of special education students regarding the resources that are available to them.

Mr. Brooks responded that new special education guidance was provided by the state and the RESD on Friday, September 11<sup>th</sup>. OPS special education teachers and administrators are working to communicate with and address the needs of families of special education students regarding technology, Wi-Fi access, and more. Teachers are communicating with the families to ensure they have all needed support.

Dr. Tuttle shared that the plan will be published on the OPS website after Board approval.

Mrs. Ochodnicky asked how teachers will be assisted with the NWEA assessments.

Mr. Brooks noted that he is working directly with the NWEA on guidance for administering assessments to online students. He has also been in contact with the administrative team to provide additional support to teachers during testing times, such as substitute teacher coverage when necessary. Mr. Brooks shared with the Instructional Leadership Council that the administration is here to support teachers and ensure assessments are provided in a timely and quality manner.

Dr. Tuttle explained the assessments are a requirement of the schools instituted by the federal government.

Trustee Cheryl Paez inquired about the percentage of students completing online learning.

Dr. Tuttle shared that OPS started the school year as expected, with 65% of students attending in person instruction and 35% of students completing their classes online.

Mrs. Paez asked if most online learners are attending and completing their schoolwork.

Dr. Tuttle replied that most online learners are participating online and doing very well. OPS police officers completed well check home visits when concerns were raised about a small number of students not completing their online work. Dr. Tuttle shared that online learning requires a lot of self-motivation and is not ideal, but OPS teachers and families are doing the best they can to keep students learning and safe.

Mrs. Paez commended online students and parents/guardians for their online learning efforts.

Mr. Brooks shared that OPS is tracking two-way communication between online learners and their teachers. To date, after only six days of school, there have been almost 6,500 contacts from OPS staff to online learners. This is a great testament to how hard OPS teachers and staff are working.

### **Football Game**

Dr. Tuttle shared that Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan High School Athletic Association are allowing sports to resume. For Owosso Football games, each player and coach will be given two tickets to distribute to family/friends. Everyone who attends a game must wear masks, and the band will not be playing at football games. Tennis, swimming, and cross country are the only sports in which players are not required to wear masks during competition. Owosso Public Schools will be Facebook Live streaming the September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020 varsity football game from Willman field. There will be two commentators announcing the game on the live stream. Dr Tuttle noted that if this live stream goes well, the streaming will be expanded to other sporting events. She also stated that the new Pixellot video production system is scheduled to be ready in late October. Once this system is activated in the gymnasium and at Willman Field, Pixellot cameras will be used to stream live sporting events.

Dr. Tuttle explained the district is not currently charging admission fees for sporting events. While this does result in a financial loss to the athletic department, Dr. Tuttle shared that in response to COVID-19, she wants to make things easier for the district. In addition, free admission will aid social distancing efforts and decrease contact at sporting events.

### **Trojan Spectacular**

Dr. Tuttle announced the Trojan Marching Band Showcase is tentatively occurring at 7pm on Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup> at Willman Field. This event will occur in place of Trojan Spectacular. Each band member will be allotted two tickets for family/friends to attend.

### **Budget**

Dr. Tuttle stated that a conservative budget was presented to the Board because the foundation allowance for this school year was unknown. Significant cuts were predicted, but funding may hold steady. Dr. Tuttle shared optimism for a positive 2020-2021 budget. It is presumed that the legislatures will finalize the budget at the end of the month. After the budget is finalized, Dr. Tuttle noted that negotiations and contracts can be set.

Chief Financial Officer Julie Omer reminded the Board that at the October Board meeting an auditor will be presenting the audited financial statement. The budget for 2020-2021 is looking positive at this time. Mrs. Omer shared that the legislature will take formal action to finalize the budget by September 24, 2020.

Dr. Tuttle shared that many Michiganders spent stimulus funds on new cars this year, increasing Michigan's revenue. This may be a reason the state's revenue was unexpectedly high.

### **Changing October Board Meeting**

Dr. Tuttle proposed moving the October 26, 2020 Board meeting to October 19, 2020. Board members were asked to email Dr. Tuttle if the new proposed date does not work for them.

### **Bus Drivers**

Dr. Tuttle brought to the Board's attention that school districts in Michigan, including OPS, are struggling with a bus driver shortage. She explained that the district needs a minimum of thirteen bus drivers and is having to combine a route with the current shortage. Dr. Tuttle shared a plan to

incentivize bus drivers to join OPS and stay with OPS. Dr. Tuttle commended Renee Secor-Jenks, OPS Transportation Supervisor, as OPS drivers enjoy working with her and are complimentary of her leadership.

Ty Krauss asked if Dr. Tuttle needs any help marketing for bus driver openings.

Dr. Tuttle responded that she would happily accept assistance in the recruitment effort. She will share the bus driver job description with Board members.

Dr. Tuttle noted the schools are accepting new trip drivers as well. Trip drivers may drive for athletic events, band events, etc. and do not need to complete a daily route.

### **Technology**

Dr. Tuttle shared that OPS will be increasing the technology department by one person. With increased online learning and new technology from the Owosso Bond Project, this hire is necessary.

### **Board Questions**

Superintendent Dr. Tuttle welcomed Ms. Alexa Stechschulte as the new Board Correspondent and Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent.

Treasurer Sara Keyes welcomed Alexa to OPS. She noted that her children are happy to be back in school with friends. She shared that a teacher had contacted her sharing concerns about a parent's discontent with students watching CNN 10 in the classroom. Mrs. Keyes also shared a parent complaint regarding only cold lunches being served at school.

Dr. Tuttle explained that CNN 10 is an on-demand digital news show specifically designed to be age appropriate for kids and to be shared in the classroom. Dr. Tuttle stated that she is passionate about teaching current events to OPS students and encouraged the Board to watch a few CNN 10 episodes. She noted that CNN can be viewed as politically biased, but CNN 10 does not deliver news in a biased way. Teachers have not been told to use CNN 10 in the classroom but have been asked to teach current events. Dr. Tuttle supports the use of CNN10 and other methods to deliver this content. In response to Mrs. Keyes' note on school lunches, Dr. Tuttle shared that beginning October 5, 2020, OPS will be serving three hot lunches per week.

Mr. Brooks stated that he recently watched five episodes of CNN 10, and the episodes covered a variety of topics ranging from wildfires across Western states to the chemical composition of Venus and different inventions made by the U.S. military. Mr. Brooks shared that the episodes were apolitical and presented the facts. He shared his belief that the program was very age appropriate and encourages parents/guardians to watch it with their children. Additionally, Mr. Brooks explained that if parents/guardians do not want their child watching CNN 10, they may have their child watch news of their choice and complete current events assignments using a different news source.

Shelly Ochodnicki asked if CNN 10 is age appropriate for eight-years old students. She also inquired if teachers preview the episodes before they are shown in the classroom and if there are assignments that accompany watching CNN 10 in the classroom.

Mr. Brooks replied that it is an expectation that teachers preview the CNN 10 episodes before showing them in their classrooms. He also explained that teachers can easily fast forward through any section of a CNN 10 episode if they do not find it appropriate for their class. Mr. Brooks said teachers do have assignments that accompany the viewing.

Ty Krauss welcomed Alexa and thanked everyone for their strong efforts in the beginning of a new school year.

Trustee Cheryl Paez welcomed Alexa and commented on the band currently practicing indoors. Mrs. Paez asked what the plan is for bands and choirs once the weather turns colder and they are no longer able to practice outdoors.

Dr. Tuttle responded that the situation is challenging, but there is a plan in place for band and choir to adapt to the situation. Some adaptations may include teaching music history in the classroom and practicing playing instruments at home. She shared that students will continue to practice outside when the weather is nice and wear their masks whenever they are not playing their instruments.

Cheryl Paez asked if food service is feeling overwhelmed at this time.

Dr. Tuttle responded that food service is experiencing rapid changes and is having some difficulty in packing lunches. She shared that breakfast is going well, but lunch requires a quick turnaround. John Klapko, OPS Food Service Director, is aware of the challenge and is working to provide more support to food service.

Cheryl Paez inquired about touring the new 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade campus.

Dr. Tuttle stated that she will take the Board on a tour the next time a Board meeting can occur in person.

Trustee Olga Quick inquired about the maximum number of people allowed in the stadium for the Trojan Marching Band Showcase. She also congratulated OPS staff on a successful start to the school year.

Dr. Tuttle responded that there will be a maximum of two attendees per band student in the stadium. Everyone will be social distanced at the event. Dr. Tuttle also mentioned the date for the event is tentative to ensure Michigan's most recent Executive Orders are followed.

Secretary Marlene Webster welcomed Alexa back to OPS.

Trustee Olga Quick welcomed Alexa and thanked everyone for a successful start to the school year.

Dr. Tuttle shared the sad news with Board members that probation officer Michael Walker suddenly passed away. The OPS team expresses their deepest sympathies to Mr. Walker's family and friends.

Shelly Ochodnicki welcomed Alexa and shared that she received positive feedback on the first week of school. She noted that OPS staff members have gone above and beyond to make sure OPS students feel welcomed and comfortable.

President Rick Mowen welcomed Alexa and commended students and staff for a successful first week of school. He also thanked the Emerson Elementary staff and the Administrative Team for their quick response and transparency regarding the one positive COVID-19 case.

**Upcoming Board Meeting Dates.**

September 28: Board of Education Meeting, 5:30 pm

October 12: Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting, 5:30 pm

October 19: Board of Education Meeting, 5:30 pm (note date change)

**Adjournment**

Moved by Ty Krauss supported by Shelly Ochodnicki to adjourn at 7:08 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Alexa Stechschulte

Respectfully submitted,

*Marlene Webster*

Marlene Webster, Secretary