

Minutes of **Wednesday, May 14, 2025, Public Board Meeting**
of the Orange Board of Education held at 5:30 pm.

President Shawneque Johnson is presiding over tonight's meeting.

Ms. Shawneque Johnson
Ms. Fatimah Turner, Ph.D.
Mr. David Armstrong – Absent
Ms. Samantha Crockett – Absent
Ms. Sueann Gravesande
Mr. Tyrone Tarver
Mr. Siaka Sherif
Ms. India Williams
Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

ROLL CALL (7) PRESENT (0) LATE (2) ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT:

- Mr. Jason Ballard, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Mr. Dwayne Ortiz, Assistant Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Ms. Jessica Kleen, School Board Attorney Substitute with Machado Law Group

FLAG SALUTE

Ms. Johnson motions to move into Executive Session.

Moved by Mr. David Armstrong and Seconded by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Ms. Johnson motions to close the Executive Session and move into a Public Meeting.

Moved by Mr. Siaka Sherif Seconded by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Ms. Johnson opens the meeting with a formal welcome to all attendees and acknowledges the student representative, inviting her to provide any updates to the Board.

Student Representative Ms. Ramos begins her report by expressing appreciation for teachers and school staff in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week. She offers an apology for her absence at the previous meeting and raises a concern regarding ongoing air conditioning issues in the Rosa Parks Library, requesting consideration for improvements. She concludes her report with no further updates.

Ms. Johnson notes Dr. Fitzhugh's absence, explaining he and several administrators are in Chicago to secure \$4.5 million in funding through the Verizon Bills List for Cleveland and Rosa Parks Schools. She then invites Mr. Scutari to deliver the Superintendent's Report on Dr. Fitzhugh's behalf.

Students of the Month Report - Mr. Scutari presents the Superintendent's Report on behalf of Dr. Fitzhugh, beginning with the recognition of Students of the Month, representing schools throughout the district.

Mental Health Awareness Month - As part of the Superintendent's Report, Mr. Scutari highlights that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. He shares a message from Dr. Fitzhugh encouraging the school community to break the stigma, engage in open conversations, and prioritize mental well-being for students, families, and staff.

Teachers' Appreciation Day - Mr. Scutari acknowledges Teacher Appreciation Week and notes that staff appreciation events were held district-wide. On behalf of Dr. Fitzhugh and the administration, he extends gratitude to all teachers and staff for their ongoing dedication and daily contributions to student success.

Nurse's Appreciation Week - Mr. Scutari recognizes May 7th as National School Nurses Day and School Nurses Appreciation Week, expressing gratitude for the vital care and support school nurses provide to both students and staff.

District Goals - Mr. Scutari briefly reviews the district's strategic plan, outlining the four core focus areas:

- **Core Focus One:** Strong Homeschool Community Connection
- **Core Focus Two:** Universal Student Supports
- **Core Focus Three:** Human Capital and Job-Embedded Professional Development
- **Core Focus Four:** Rigorous and Relevant Curricula and Instruction

Mr. Scutari reminds everyone that all district efforts align with the strategic plan as the district continues progressing toward excellence.

Scholarship Updates - Mr. Scutari reports that as of May 12th, Orange High School has secured \$14,686,750 in scholarships, while STEM Innovation Academy of the Oranges has secured \$14,940,882, totaling \$29,627,632 district-wide. This amount surpasses last year's total of \$20,012,000 by approximately \$9.6 million, with both schools closely competing.

Project Lead the Way Distinguished Schools - Mr. Scutari congratulates Heywood Avenue School and STEM Innovation Academy for being named Project Lead the Way Distinguished Schools for the 2024–2025 school year. He explains that the award recognizes equitable student access to STEM programs, highlighting the district's commitment to providing inclusive STEM opportunities.

Attendance Presentation for April 2025 - Mr. Scutari presents the April attendance report using slides to show chronic absenteeism categories and breakdowns by grade levels and schools. He highlights that 55% of students have low chronic absences, 14% have high chronic absences, and that overall attendance exceeds the state average. He then introduces Mr. Edwin Vasquez for the facilities report.

Facilities Update - Mr. Vasquez provides the facilities update for April, highlighting ongoing cleaning efforts focused on high-touch areas to prevent illness. He reports improvements in plumbing issues and recent deep cleaning of cafeterias and hallways during spring break. At STEM, the underground oil tank was decommissioned as part of an upgrade to high-efficiency boilers, with plans to patch the area once weather permits. Gym floors at Cleveland, Park Avenue, and STEM received maintenance, enhancing their appearance alongside new LED lighting.

Mr. Vasquez explains the district uses Facilitron for managing work orders, addressing routine maintenance promptly. Roof repairs and replacements are underway, notably at Lincoln School, with recent heavy rain monitoring showing positive results. The facilities team continues collaboration with the School Development Authority and contractors on punch list items at the high school and Cleveland, preparing for an August walkthrough and turnover.

He emphasizes the district’s commitment to maintaining health and safety for staff and students and invites any questions from the Board.

Ms. Johnson inquires about a water issue at Lincoln Avenue. Mr. Vasquez clarifies that there was a sprinkler pipe leak—not a roof issue—which affected a classroom but was repaired the same day, with damaged tiles replaced and the area fully dried. Ms. Johnson confirms with Ms. Tesa that there is no water in any classrooms currently. Ms. Singleton also confirms the issue in her room has been resolved.

Mr. Sherif inquires about temperature control in classrooms during warmer months. Mr. Vasquez responds that systems have been switched to summer mode and provides an update on Lincoln Avenue School, where 10 rooms initially had AC issues—now reduced to five. He explains that part delays are the main challenge, with several items on order. He also notes minor blower issues at Park Avenue and Rosa Parks, with those also awaiting parts.

Mr. Vasquez confirms that complaints are addressed promptly and proactively, though some rooms are now reported as too cold. Ms. Johnson requests a comprehensive AC status report for all schools at the next board meeting. Mr. Vasquez agrees and adds that multiple projects are planned for summer, particularly at Lincoln and Oakwood, promising notable improvements by September.

Dr. Turner publicly welcomes Mr. Vasquez back and thanks him for his continued dedication to the Facilities Committee during his absence. She commends his commitment to staying informed and keeping the committee updated. She also congratulates him on receiving an award. Mr. Vasquez expresses his appreciation and congratulates Dr. Turner in return.

Snow Day Give Back Days - Mr. Scutari advises all that the district will observe three snow day givebacks: Friday, May 23rd; Tuesday, May 27th; and Friday, June 27th. As a result, the school year will conclude on Thursday, June 26th for students and 10-month staff.

Next Month’s Superintendent Report - Mr. Scutari tells all that Dr. Fitzhugh will unveil the 2025 District Goals and share the NJGPA test results during next month’s Superintendent’s Report. He hints that the results will be promising, stating the community will be “pleasantly surprised.” He encourages everyone to stay connected by downloading the Orange App and following the district on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for updates.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the April 9th, 2025, Public Board Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Dr. Fatimah Turner

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the April 9th, 2025, Executive Session Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Mr. Siaka Sherif

ROLL CALL (6) YEA (0) NAY (1) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Ms. Johnson opens the Committee Reports and invites Mr. Sherif to present the Finance report. She notes the absence of other committee representatives and confirms that Dr. Turner will deliver the Public Relations report after Mr. Sherif. The floor is then given to Mr. Sherif to begin his presentation.

Finance Report - Mr. Sherif reports that the Finance Committee met on May 8th to review financial matters and facility use requests. He notes that 21 items are recommended for board approval, as detailed in the agenda and meeting minutes. He confirms the district remains in a positive financial position with no negative balance.

Additionally, the district has secured grants outside the budget, further strengthening its financial standing. Mr. Sherif thanks the finance team for their efforts in maintaining the district's strong financial health.

Public Relations Report – Dr. Turner reminds everyone that the Public Relations Committee meetings are streamed live on Facebook and encourages the community to watch for accurate updates about the district. She stresses the importance of staying informed directly through these meetings to avoid misunderstandings and stay connected with school staff and board members.

Ms. Johnson thanks for the presentation of committee meeting and then motions to open Public Comments.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Public Comments

Mr. Joe Nathan, a special education teacher at Cleveland Street School for 18 years, thanks the board for approving the Jennifer Nathan Memorial Arts Fund. The fund honors the memory of his late wife Jennifer, who passed away 16 months ago and had a deep passion for the arts. Mr. Nathan aims to transform his grief into a positive legacy by enriching arts education at Cleveland Street School. The fund will support afterschool clubs in dance, music, fine arts, drama, film, and podcast production, as well as provide cultural field trips. The fund is registered with the state and awaiting IRS tax-exempt status. A teacher committee has been formed to guide the programs. Mr. Nathan seeks the board's help in networking and fundraising to expand immersive arts education, hoping to inspire and empower students while honoring Jennifer's love for creativity and storytelling.

Ms. Sawyer expresses gratitude to Mr. Ballard for his dedication in addressing the roof leak at Lincoln Avenue School, emphasizing his commitment to the safety and well-being of staff and students. She highlights progress made through safety measures, mold risk monitoring, and open communication, underscoring the importance of thoughtful resolution to maintain community trust. Mr. Ballard responds by acknowledging the collaborative nature of their work, emphasizing that their shared focus remains on supporting the students' best interests. Ms. Johnson commends Ms. Sawyer for her consistently positive attitude and ability to see the good in people, even in challenging situations.

Ms. Singleton, from Lincoln Avenue School, addresses two board agenda items: H-14 and K-1. She specifically speaks about K-1, inquiring about planned upgrades to the Lincoln playground. She highlights the need for additional playground equipment for older students, improved play surfaces to prevent muddy conditions, and accommodations for children allergic to grass. Ms. Johnson encourages her to submit her wish list formally to Superintendent Dr. Fitzhugh. Ms. Singleton also thanks the board for approving the roof replacement at Lincoln Avenue. The board appreciates her input and requests she send her detailed wishes in writing to Superintendent Dr. Fitzhugh.

Ms. Alely St. Hilaire, representing Rosa Parks School, expresses gratitude for a recent discussion on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) hosted by Ms. Harris. She emphasizes the importance of understanding how stress affects children's learning and behavior and highlights the critical need for safe, stable, and nurturing environments. Ms. St. Hilaire urges school staff and administrators to complete the ACEs training available on the CDC website to better support students. She also encourages incorporating these conversations in PTO meetings to reach the broader community. In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, she calls on everyone to openly discuss mental health, break down stigma, and prioritize self-care.

Dacheler Evra, a student at Rosa Parks Community School, addresses the Board of Education to raise concerns about two ongoing issues. First, he notes that the boys' restroom in the cafeteria has lacked a functioning lock for over half the school year, compromising students' privacy and leading to repeated incidents of unintentional walk-ins. Second,

he reports that three of the four water coolers in the building are currently not working, leaving only one available on the third floor, which is inconvenient for students. He respectfully requests prompt action to resolve these matters to help maintain a safe and respectful school environment.

Ms. Johnson thanks Dacheler Evra for speaking and assures him that the concerns he raised regarding the restroom lock and water coolers at Rosa Parks Community School will be addressed promptly, beginning the next day.

Dr. Turner affirms that previous speakers have been heard and expresses strong support for Mr. Nathan's memorial arts fund. She shares her own passion for music, mentioning her involvement in raising funds for a pink piano at Inner City Café to offer piano lessons to local students, and invites Mr. Nathan to visit and play it.

Ms. Johnson motions to close Public Comments.

Moved by Dr. Fatimah Turner Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Mr. Tarver raised a concern about a discrepancy between the printed agenda and the online BoardDocs agenda regarding items H-13 and H-14. Ms. Kleen explained that the omission was noted and that the translator could read the missing items aloud to avoid delaying the meeting. Mr. Ballard clarified the content of both resolutions:

- **H-13:** Approves a cooperative pricing agreement with the BuyBoard Purchasing Cooperative, which provides access to pre-approved RFPs for various purchasing needs at no cost.
- **H-14:** Affirms a partnership with Rutgers University for a \$2.3 million grant proposal to support the transition of paraprofessionals into full-time teaching roles.

The public has access to the full agenda on BoardDocs.

Ms. Johnson invited Ms. Massoud to further explain resolution H-14, related to a partnership with Rutgers University. Ms. Massoud shared that Rutgers is applying for a \$2.3 million grant in collaboration with the Orange Board of Education. The grant will support paraprofessionals who either have or are pursuing bachelor's degrees by enrolling them in Rutgers' alternate route teacher certification program. Rutgers will assist with Praxis preparation, exam fees, and alternate route coursework.

The program builds on the Aspiring Educators Initiative and is a result of ongoing collaboration with the Orange Education Association (OEA). Tuition costs will be shared between Rutgers and the district's tuition reimbursement program. Mr. Sherif confirmed his understanding that the initiative will help transition paraprofessionals into certified teaching roles.

Ms. Johnson motions to proceed with a Consent Agenda.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey WingDr. Fatimah Turner Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Mr. Ballard inquires whether there are any discussions or questions pertaining to the items listed on the Consent Agenda.

Ms. Gravesande asks Mr. Ballard to explain Resolution K-1 in more detail. He shares that it relates to a grant application for facility upgrades at Lincoln Avenue and Central Elementary Schools, including turf replacement and a new playground. The full scope is still being finalized based on available funding. Ms. Gravesande also requests more information on Resolution H-1, which Mr. Ballard explains involves expanding the Verizon Innovation Learning Lab program to include additional classrooms and schools to support technology-based learning.

Mr. Sherif expressed concern that giving the board discretion in the facility use policy could lead to unfair decisions. He advocated for clear, written guidelines that ensure equal treatment and discounts for groups meeting specific criteria—particularly those benefiting students.

Ms. Gravesande and Dr. Turner clarified that discretion is necessary for flexibility and fairness across varied cases, noting that the board already uses discretion when voting on matters. Dr. Turner emphasized that most facility requests involve programs for students and that charging only custodial and security fees protects district finances.

Mr. Ballard confirmed that 98–99% of facility requests are student-focused, and Facilitron is used to standardize and transparently apply costs. He noted most groups are not charged full rental fees, only essential operational costs.

Mr. Tarver clarified that the only group explicitly granted free facility use under the current policy is the Boy and Girl Scouts, due to their minimal resource use. He refuted a claim that this exception was tied to previous city control and stressed this practice is common across many districts.

The discussion concluded with reminders to avoid interruptions, keep comments orderly, and maintain respect during the meeting.

During the discussion of agenda item J-7 concerning the hiring of an auditor, Mr. Tarver inquires about the timeline for the next audit. Ms. Johnson requests that the board proceed with voting as she needs to leave due to a personal commitment, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and noting her consistent attendance and dedication to her duties. Mr. Tarver reminds the board that a quorum remains to conduct business if she departs, leading to a brief exchange regarding meeting decorum and members’ rights to speak. In response to the inquiry, Mr. Ballard explains that the audit is nearly complete but has experienced delays due to a cyber incident and the transition from CSI to SchoolFi. He confirms that the audit is expected to be received by Friday and will be presented to the Finance Committee and relevant parties, with the state informed of the challenges encountered.

Mr. Ballard initiates a roll call vote following a motion to adopt the consent agenda.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Dr. Fatimah Turner
ROLL CALL

Board Member	YEA	NAY	ABSTAIN
Mr. David Armstrong	All agenda items		Anything pertaining to SPAN
Ms. Samantha Crockett	All agenda items		
Ms. India Williams	All agenda items		
Mr. Siaka Sherif	All agenda items		
Mr. Tyrone Tarver	H-14, K-1, L-1, L-2, M-2, M-3, M5-M14, N-1, N-2	J-9	Remaining agenda items
Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield	All agenda items		Anything pertaining to Montclair State University, St. Elizabeth University & Rutgers University

Ms. Sueann Gravesande	All agenda items		Anything pertaining to Jeremy Gravesande
Ms. Shawneque Johnson	All agenda items		L1
Ms. Fatimah Turner, PhD.	All agenda items		H-2, Anything pertaining to St. Elizabeth University and Seton Hall University

Ms. Johnson announces the upcoming district’s meetings.

Public District Meetings

Public Relations Committee Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, June 11, 2025, at 7:30 pm at the BOE

Closed District Meetings

Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, May 28, 2025, at 3:30 pm
Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, June 2, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, June 3, 2025, at 3:30 pm
Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, June 5, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, June 5, 2025, at 5:30 pm
Human Resources Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, June 9, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Board Comments

Ms. Johnson addresses the board with a heartfelt message emphasizing the importance of mental health and unity. She acknowledges the struggles many families face, including food insecurity and housing challenges, and commends a board member’s resilience despite personal loss. Ms. Johnson urges the board to move past petty conflicts and focus on the well-being of students and staff. She encourages respectful disagreement and collective action, reminding members that their shared mission is to serve the community’s children and educators. Highlighting the board’s commitment to thorough investigation and accountability, she stresses the importance of asking detailed questions before approving decisions. Ultimately, Ms. Johnson calls for unity and mutual support to advance the district’s goals.

Dr. Turner stresses that executive sessions are meant for private discussions to resolve disagreements, not to silence members. She underscores the importance of maintaining professionalism and decorum during meetings and expresses disappointment that some members have not yet embraced this expectation.-----

Mr. Tarver emphasizes that executive sessions are designated for confidential matters, while all other discussions and voting should take place during public meetings or committee sessions. He supports open discussion and debate during full board meetings, allowing members to ask questions and seek information. He explains that he abstains from voting when he lacks sufficient information, as abstention means not legally endorsing a decision. Mr. Tarver also expresses concern that salary approvals are combined with other financial items, making it difficult to support those resolutions.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Mr. Siaka Sherif
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Mr. Ballard informs the board that the superintendent requested he share important dates regarding the student representative position for the upcoming year. The application and petition will be available for download on the Orange Board of Education website starting May 15th. A virtual meeting with Mr. Ballard and Ms. Kleen is scheduled for Thursday, May 29th. Completed applications and petitions are due by Friday, May 30th, 2025. A candidate debate will take place on Wednesday, June 4th, followed by the election on Friday, June 6th. The selected candidate will deliver an acceptance speech on Wednesday, June 11th, 2025.

Mr. Ballard concludes by wishing everyone a good evening.