

**Minutes of Wednesday, February 12, 2025, Public Board Meeting
of the Orange Board of Education held at 6:00 pm.**

President Shawneque Johnson is presiding over tonight's meeting.

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

ROLL CALL (5) PRESENT (2) 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 Ms. Samantha Crockett
ROLL CALL (5) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (4)ABSENT**

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

**Moved by Mr. David Armstrong Seconded by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield
ROLL CALL (5) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (4)ABSENT**

Ms. Johnson graciously welcomes all attendees of the Orange Public School District Board meeting scheduled for February 12, 2025. She recognizes the student representative, Ms. Lopez, and inquires if she has any updates to share with us this month.

Ms. Lopez greets everyone in attendance and reports on Orange High School's progress, highlighting the implementation of an ID scanner system that has improved security by verifying student identities. This has reduced concerns about unauthorized access and has positively impacted the school environment.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the January 2nd, 2025, Reorganization Meeting Minutes.

**Moved by Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield Seconded by Mr. David Armstrong
ROLL CALL (6) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (3)ABSENT**

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the January 8th, 2025, Public Board Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Mr. Wingfield Seconded by Mr. Armstrong
ROLL CALL (6) YEA (0) NAY (1) ABSTAIN (3) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the January 8th, 2025, Closed Session Public Board Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Mr. Armstrong Seconded by Mr. Wingfield
ROLL CALL (5) YEA (0) NAY (1) ABSTAIN (3) ABSENT
Motion Was Not Approved

Ms. Gravesande indicated her absence and suggested that the motion be included in the agenda for the next meeting. Ms. Johnson concurred and invited Mr. Armstrong to deliver the Special Education Committee Report.

Special Education Committee Report - Mr. Armstrong delivers a succinct overview of the Special Education meeting that took place on February 4, 2025. He emphasizes the appointment of a new Transitional Coordinator, Mr. Littlefinger, who will assist students in their transition to high school. Mr. Armstrong praises Mr. Littlefinger for his valuable insights and discusses various community partnerships, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, Goodwill Access Link, New Jersey One-Stop Career Centers, Small Business Administrators, and SCORE Mentoring Centers. The meeting also addressed essential aspects of special education, such as the Individualized Education Program (IEP), psychological evaluations, and educational assessments. Mr. Armstrong concludes by stating that the meeting provided a wealth of information, some of which he is still reviewing and plans to present at the upcoming board meeting. He expresses gratitude to Ms. Harper and her team for their dedication and outstanding contributions to the department.

Ms. Johnson extends an invitation to Dr. Turner to present the Facilities Report.

Facilities Committee Report – Dr. Turner has recorded her attendance at a Facilities Meeting on January 23, 2025, which centered on maintenance and operational issues. Key discussions highlighted the need for clean, well-maintained facilities as the flu season approaches. The board and administration carry out regular inspections to evaluate conditions, and Dr. Turner emphasized the need for open communication to quickly address any new problems. The meeting also covered snow removal, updates on projects like the greenhouse and ROTC classroom, and steam pipe issues. The flagpole repairs have been completed. Dr. Turner voiced concerns about heating in some buildings and acknowledged the efforts of Mr. Vasquez and Mr. Ballard in addressing these matters. She reaffirmed the board's commitment to high facility standards and thanked everyone for their dedication to maintaining a safe environment in the district.

Ms. Johnson motions to open Public Comments.

Moved by Mr. Wingfield Seconded by Dr. Turner
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Public Comments

Ms. Johnson acknowledges a notable guest, the youngest attendee at the board meetings, who has shown a strong desire to participate and has reached out to her directly. She invites him to speak to the assembly and introduces him as a student from Park Avenue, emphasizing his commitment to community service, which includes frequent visits to the gym and his volunteer efforts at the food bank. She asks him to share his name and address before he begins his address.

Mr. Dacheler Evra extends his greetings to all participants and informs them of his status as a student at Rosa Parks Central Community School. He reflects on Dr. Turner's remarks regarding snow removal and recounts an incident where a parent slipped on ice at Rosa Parks, necessitating an ambulance. He requests further clarification on the protocols for snow removal and the application of salt on the streets.

Ms. Johnson expresses her gratitude to the young man for his inquiry and informs him that, although an immediate answer is not available, they will provide him with information regarding their processes. She encourages him to continue engaging with them, stating that if he observes anything of interest, he is welcome to attend their board meeting and share his thoughts, as his perspective is valued.

Ms. Singleton, an educator at Lincoln Avenue School, expresses her gratitude to the board for their commitment to keeping parents informed, particularly regarding the recent phone blast aimed at updating contact information. She raises a concern about the potential inaccuracies in the contact details, emphasizing that incorrect numbers may result in messages being sent to unintended recipients. Nevertheless, she acknowledges and values the board's initiatives to enhance communication with families.

Dr. Fitzhugh addresses Ms. Singleton's concerns by clarifying that the district implemented a phone blast and posted an emergency message on its website. This initiative enabled parents to report any inaccuracies in their contact information via email. He emphasizes the contributions of Ms. Spottswood-Brown, mentioning that approximately 45 emails regarding discrepancies were received over the weekend. Dr. Fitzhugh praises her commitment to responding to each inquiry, ensuring that families remain connected through the Genesis Parent Portal. Dr. Fitzhugh recognizes the difficulties associated with maintaining accurate contact information but assures Ms. Singleton that the district is diligently working to resolve these issues to enhance communication with parents.

Ms. Johnson motions to close Public Comments.

Moved by Dr. Turner Seconded by Ms. Gravesande
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson extends an invitation to our Superintendent, Dr. Fitzhugh, to offer some remarks.

Dr. Fitzhugh extends his greetings to all and reminds families that the school will be closed for winter break next week, with further information available on the website. An additional notice will be distributed shortly to assist families in their preparations.

He emphasizes that Orange High School provides more than \$9 million in scholarships, a result of the efforts of Mr. Belton, guidance counselors, and staff members. The inclusion of the Post-secondary STEM Innovation Academy contributes to this total, raising the scholarship amount to over \$10 million, with approximately \$21 million accessible as of February. Dr. Fitzhugh urges the team to surpass last year's goal of \$25 million. Current figures indicate they are \$4 million away from this target, but he is confident that they can reach it through collaborative efforts.

Ms. Johnson motions to do a consent agenda, specifically omitting and tabling item L-1 (Resolution to Approve the Facility Use Request from Cougar Soccer Clubs).

Mr. Sherif questions the relevance of the discussion on the guest call and the tabled issue. Ms. Johnson clarifies that there are two Girl Scout troop requests, one already established. Concerns about recruitment struggles led to an email to the councilwoman to determine if the new troop would compete with the existing one. Dr. Turner expressed concern about division if another troop recruits from the same pool of girls. The issue was discussed in the facilities

committee, but due to lack of responses, it is being tabled. The main concern is division, but the issue is the presence of two competing troops. Confirmation is needed to ensure unity rather than competition.

Mr. Ballard requests clarification on whether there are any remaining discussions related to the items that are on the agenda for the vote.

Ms. Gravesande requests Dr. Fitzhugh to expand on H-5 (Resolution to approve a memorandum of understanding between Orange Board of Education and Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center to facilitate an observation/job shadowing program for Health Science CTE Students at Orange High School).

Dr. Fitzhugh elaborates on the initiative for Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, highlighting the involvement of students in job shadowing activities. These students received recognition for their interactions with professionals in various fields, including food services, medicine, and psychology. He points out a 2024 graduate who benefited from the program, underscoring its success. Dr. Fitzhugh then extends an invitation to Ms. Alcantara to share further insights.

Ms. Alcantara conveys that the resolution is designed to obtain approval for the continuation and enhancement of the program's agreement, proposing an increase in the student limit from 10 to 15 students per group. This change will permit a total of 30 students to participate in practical experiences at Cooperman St. Barnabas. The program is aligned with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) objectives at Orange High School, addressing the work-based learning needs in areas such as entrepreneurship, culinary arts, health sciences, graphic design, and potentially filmmaking. Students will gain valuable experience in various medical fields, with hospital staff serving as crucial mentors.

Moved by Dr. Turner Seconded by Mr. Wingfield
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Mr. Ballard notes that there are three resolutions that have been proposed for inclusion on the agenda.

Mr. Ballard motions to approve the agreement involving the Orange Board of Education and employee number #0298, which was addressed in the earlier executive session.

Moved by Mr. Wingfield Seconded by Mr. Sherif
ROLL CALL (6) YEA (0) NAY (1) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Mr. Ballard motions to approve Dr. Esther Friedman to perform psychiatric evaluations for students as required.

Moved by Mr. Wingfield Seconded by Ms. Gravesande
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

A member of the board inquires about the resolutions, to which Ms. Kleen responds that they are seeking authorization for providers to assess special education students. The initial resolution calls for the hiring of an additional psychiatrist to alleviate a backlog that is hindering student evaluations. The second resolution pertains to evaluations of assistive technology to identify appropriate devices for students. Ms. Kleen underscores the pressing necessity for prompt approval, citing two students who are in immediate need of evaluations. The resolutions were not presented earlier due to regulations regarding posting notices.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve access communication and therapy to complete assistive technology evaluations of students as needed.

Moved by Mr. Armstrong Seconded by Mr. Wingfield
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson announces the upcoming district's meetings.

Public District Meetings

Public Relations Committee Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, March 4, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, March 12, 2025, at 7:30 pm at the BOE

Closed District Meetings

Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, February 25, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, March 3, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, March 4, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, March 6, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, March 6, 2025, at 5:30 pm

Human Resources Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, March 10, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Board Comments

Mr. Sherif extends his congratulations to the superintendent and the staff for their exceptional efforts, acknowledging that another district holds their achievements in high regard and experiences a degree of envy, particularly as some staff members transition to his district. He emphasizes the significance of publicly acknowledging these successes and commends the district's administrative approach and advancements within the STEM Academy, bringing these matters to the forefront as evidence of enhanced standards.

Ms. Gravesande has shared that she previously talked about her concerns with Dr. Fitzhugh and her colleagues but now wants to address these issues publicly. She values the district and its schools and notes that she and Ms. Johnson often see problems during their visits. While Dr. Fitzhugh responds quickly, she questions why improvements happen only after board visits. She encourages staff to report issues and speak up to board members. Ms. Gravesande stresses the need for change and that many building issues have simple solutions. She calls for pride in the schools, highlighting that staff spend more time there than at home. She plans to keep visiting and wants administrators to be more proactive, concerned about some staff's lack of engagement.

Dr. Fitzhugh expresses his disagreement by stating that he cannot concur with the proposed statements. He emphasizes his position as a strong advocate for the staff, asserting that he is, in fact, one of their most significant supporters. Therefore, he would prefer that such remarks about the staff not be made.

Dr. Turner expresses her love for Orange and her role on the school board, finding joy in her work while others may see it as a burden. She values her colleagues, considers the board a family, and encourages open communication among staff, stating that no issue is too small to discuss. She believes that unacceptable behavior in homes should also be unacceptable in schools. Dr. Turner praises the administrative staff and school principals for their dedication, especially Mr. Belton's commitment to students, which resonates with her as a former principal. She urges everyone to focus on the positive changes in the district rather than the negatives, stressing the progress made through collaborations. She concludes by expressing pride in her role, playfully noting her favorite board member but ultimately recognizing Mr. Cordes and his team's vital contributions to the district's success.

Ms. Johnson addresses significant issues regarding communication and acknowledgment within the Orange Public School District. She highlights the district's open-door policy, reassuring parents that the administration, including Dr. Fitzhugh and his team, is consistently available to address any concerns. She advises parents to refrain from discussing personal matters related to their children on social media and encourages them to utilize the official email address, reopeningofschools@orange.k12.nj.us, for inquiries, assuring prompt responses from Ms. Spottswood-Brown, Dr. Fitzhugh, and other staff members.

Additionally, she commends Mr. Jackson for his efforts in enhancing security operations and expresses gratitude to Ms. Alcantara for her leadership in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Lastly, she acknowledges Dr. Fitzhugh for his nearly six years of dedicated service and invites him to provide a summary of his contributions and the financial resources he has secured for the district.

Dr. Fitzhugh asserts that, in partnership with his team, he has successfully obtained tens of millions of dollars for the Orange Public School District, highlighting the collaborative nature of this accomplishment.

Ms. Johnson concurs that success is a collective endeavor and recognizes the significant role of social media in highlighting accomplishments. She points out that external organizations have the ability to acknowledge and honor individuals for their contributions, as their skills and efforts are now more visible. She praises Dr. Fitzhugh for his exemplary leadership and the commitment of his staff, asserting that he merits recognition for his contributions.

Furthermore, Ms. Johnson extends a warm welcome to Mr. Ortiz as a new member of the team, appreciating his proactive approach and commending his performance during his initial month. She assures him that she is attentive to and values the contributions of all those who play a part in the district's success.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

Moved by Mr. Sherif Seconded by Ms. Gravesande
ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT