

Minutes of **Wednesday, April 9, 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
Ms. Sueann Gravesande
Mr. Tyrone Tarver
Mr. Siaka Sherif
Ms. India Williams
Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

ROLL CALL (5) PRESENT (4) LATE (0) 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 (5) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT (4) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

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

Moved by Mr. David Armstrong Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande

ROLL CALL (8) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT (1) NOT PRESENT AT VOTE

Ms. Johnson greets everyone and formally welcomes all attendees to the Board Meeting held on April 9, 2025. She notes the absence of the student representative, Ms. Lopez, and states that the representative will be acknowledged upon her arrival. The meeting proceeds with the presentation and Dr. Fitzhugh's report.

Mr. Ballard states that the members of the Executive Team will present the Superintendent's Report during this meeting.

Students of the Month Report - Mr. Scutari introduces Ms. Alcantara to present the March Student of the Month Report. Ms. Alcantara congratulates and acknowledges the selected students from each school.

District Goals - Mr. Scutari presents the district goals as a year-end review, focusing on four main areas:

1. **21st Century Integration:** Targets 60% of students meeting or exceeding growth goals in Math, ELA, and Science, with a 5-point increase in NJSLA scores and full student participation in digital learning.

2. **Community Engagement:** Enhancing communication effectiveness and accessibility through various platforms and continuing parent/student councils.
3. **Facilities and Finance:** Building a responsive budget, implementing innovative practices, and fostering a supportive staff environment.
4. **Social and Emotional Supports:** Providing research-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum and expanding community partnerships.

The presentation reinforces that students remain the central focus of all district initiatives.

National Assistant Principals' Week - Ms. Alcantara celebrates National Assistant Principals Week, emphasizing Dr. Fitzhugh's deep appreciation for their impactful work. She conveys gratitude on behalf of district leadership, recognizing assistant principals as valued, inspiring contributors to school success.

National Paraprofessional Appreciation Day - Ms. Alcantara celebrates the essential contributions of paraprofessionals, recognizing their supportive role in the classroom. She commends them as invaluable partners to teachers and as unsung heroes in education. On behalf of Dr. Fitzhugh, she expresses deep appreciation for their efforts.

Week of the Young Child - Ms. Alcantara acknowledges the district's commitment to early childhood education and thanks all staff in Pre-K and kindergarten for aligning with national standards. She expresses gratitude for their contributions to the success of early learning and encourages continued celebration of their important work.

Scholarship Updates - Ms. Alcantara announces that, as of April 9th, Orange High School and STEM Innovation Academy have earned a combined total of over \$26.3 million in scholarships—\$12.3 million from Orange High School and \$14 million from STEM Innovation Academy. She emphasizes that the work is not yet finished, and the numbers are still growing. Ms. Alcantara celebrates the dedication of the students and commends the guidance departments at both schools for their relentless efforts in supporting scholars through the scholarship process. The achievement reflects the district's strong commitment to student success and post-secondary readiness.

Women of Worth Program at Scholars Academy - During Women's History Month, Scholars Academy hosted the Women at Work program, where influential women from the school community read to and inspired students in the Pre-K and Gifted & Talented programs. Special thanks were given to several board members and district leaders for their participation, highlighting the program's success in empowering students through shared stories and experiences.

Autism Awareness Month - The district is actively observing Autism Awareness Month with activities such as wearing blue, classroom projects, and themed displays. Blue symbolizes calm and understanding, while the rainbow infinity symbol—used in place of the puzzle piece—promotes neurodiversity and acceptance. Schools are encouraged to continue celebrating and educating throughout April with engaging, inclusive activities and resources.

Attendance Presentation for March 2025 - Mr. Scutari presents the district's March attendance report, showing that over half of students have low chronic absences, with only 14% in the high chronic range. He provides breakdowns by grade level and school type, praising 12th graders for setting a strong example. The district matches the state's daily attendance average of 96%, reflecting overall consistent attendance.

Facilities Update - Mr. Ballard provides facilities update, noting that while Mr. Vasquez is presently absent, the team—including Mr. Andre Repo and Mr. Jacque from PCI—continues to conduct daily deep cleaning, implement LED lighting upgrades, and address responsive repairs across the district. He highlights the prompt resolution of emergencies, such as a plumbing issue at Orange Preparatory Academy and a fallen tree at John Robert Lewis ECLC,

as well as ongoing roof and solar preparation at Rosa Parks and structural repairs at STEM Academy. Renovations at the Forest Street Annex progress expeditiously in preparation for its scheduled opening in September 2025. Mr. Ballard also addresses challenges with aging elevators, some of which require full replacement. He assures the board that, while routine maintenance is carried out consistently and without disruption, all significant health, safety, or infrastructure concerns will be communicated in a timely and transparent manner. The facilities team remains committed to ensuring that all district schools are safe, functional, and conducive to a positive learning environment.

Additional District Announcements - Mr. Ballard announces that the district will be closed on Friday, April 18th, for a holiday, and from April 21st to April 25th for spring break. The district will reopen on Monday, April 28th. He assures that the facilities department will continue operations during the closures. He concludes by providing the district's social media handles and encouraging the public to stay connected through the app, stating that this concludes the superintendent's report.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the March 12th, 2025, Public Board Meeting Minutes.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the March 12th, 2025, Executive Session Meeting Minutes.

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

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.

Ms. Johnson transitions the meeting by stating that the committee reports will not be presented at this time. She then motions to open Public Comments.

Moved by Ms. Sueann Gravesande Seconded by Mr. Tyrone Tarver
ROLL CALL (9) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT

Public Comments

A student from Rosa Parks Community School, Dacheler Evra, addresses the Board of Education to express concerns regarding the school's elevator, which has been out of service for most of the school year and only operates briefly when repaired—posing challenges for senior staff who rely on it for accessibility. Dacheler also highlights positive developments, noting that the school hosted several successful events in March, including Literacy Night, Career Day, and Pie Day, which fostered community engagement and enriched the student experience.

Ms. Johnson thanks Dacheler for his comments and assures him that the elevator issue will be investigated, stating that she will inform the facilities team accordingly.

Ms. Singleton, an educator at Lincoln Avenue School, raises two inquiries regarding item H3 – Resolution to Approve a Waiver Request to Increase Class Sizes in Preschool Disabilities Programs. She first asks whether the waiver request is prompted by an unexpected midyear increase in the enrollment of preschool students with disabilities, rather than being a pre-planned measure. She then seeks clarification on the district's long-term plan should the waiver be resubmitted upon expiration, specifically questioning whether additional certified staff will be hired to support the rising number of preschool students requiring disability services.

Ms. Jessica Kleen responds to Ms. Singleton’s inquiry, confirming that the class size waiver request under item H3 is not pre-planned. She explains that preschool students are often enrolled based on age, and eligibility for special education is determined only after the evaluation process. Due to the timing late in the school year, the district does not have sufficient time to establish a new classroom. Regarding the district’s long-term plan to address increasing enrollment without relying on waivers, Ms. Kleen notes that the matter is actively being discussed by the board and administration, although no specific details are available currently.

Mr. Bill Nussbaum, a teacher at Orange High School and a member of the district’s Health and Safety Committee, raises serious concerns regarding unresolved facility issues. He reports a longstanding roof leak in Ms. Singleton’s classroom at Lincoln Avenue School, which has persisted for at least two years, predating her assignment there. Despite previous assurances that the issue was being addressed, Mr. Nussbaum expresses frustration over the prolonged delay and emphasizes the urgency of repairs, quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to underscore the “fierce urgency of now.” Additionally, he reports a security concern at Orange High School, where missing door components in the cafeteria have prevented effective lockdown procedures—an issue reportedly pending since September. Mr. Nussbaum urges the district to prioritize timely action and accountability in addressing these safety hazards.

Following Mr. Nussbaum’s comments, Board President Ms. Johnson questions why Ms. Singleton had not previously raised the classroom leak issue during board meetings. Dr. Turner echoes the importance of direct communication. Ms. Singleton responds that she followed all proper reporting protocols and notes the issue predates her tenure, affecting multiple classrooms. She also describes efforts to minimize safety risks. The Board emphasizes that staff should report urgent concerns directly, not wait for public meetings.

Mr. Tarver emphasizes that Ms. Singleton followed proper protocols and that accountability now lies with the administration and Board. He supports creating a safe space for staff to raise concerns and highlights the need for transparency. A board member briefly mentions observing the issue during a school tour.

Mr. Sherif recalls that the Lincoln Avenue roof leak was previously reported, and directives were issued, yet no progress has been made. He stresses the need for immediate repairs by the next Board meeting, citing negligence and the importance of accountability. He also raises concern over the unresolved elevator issue affecting mobility access.

Ms. Gravesande reminds the Board that roof repairs are approved and scheduled for summer, suggesting Mr. Ballard clarify. Mr. Sherif notes the lack of follow-up on delays and stresses the need for transparency and timely updates.

Mr. Ballard responds firmly, clarifying that the Lincoln Avenue roof leak stems from structural deterioration requiring full replacement, not patchwork. He emphasizes the district does not neglect issues, notes past repair attempts have failed, and confirms a complete roof replacement is approved and scheduled for summer.

Mr. Ballard addresses concerns over delays, explaining that public entities must follow legal protocols involving architects and engineers before launching major capital projects. He affirms the district’s urgency, but notes timelines are shaped by regulations and funding, not neglect. On elevators, he explains many are decades old, with parts no longer available, and confirms that replacements—costing around \$370,000 each—are underway through issued purchase orders. He highlights a maintenance budget increase from \$700,000 to \$2.7 million over five years, emphasizing the administration’s active efforts and calling for a balanced view of progress alongside concerns.

Mr. Sherif maintains that the lack of follow-up on the roof repair request reflects negligence, as the Board should have been informed that a full replacement—not a repair—was needed. He stresses the need for timely

communication from staff reporting to Mr. Ballard and raises concern over unresolved heating issues, urging greater accountability and oversight moving forward.

Mr. Ballard responds that Mr. Sherif's statement is inaccurate, clarifying that the roof issue was discussed with both the finance and facilities committees. He explains that repairs were made but failed, prompting the administration to request and receive Board approval for a full roof replacement.

Ms. Johnson emphasizes that the priority is to get the issue resolved and stresses the importance of clear communication with the school. She notes that better communication could have prevented the concerns from reaching the board meeting and invites the next public comment.

Mr. Holmes, an Orange resident and district employee, underscores the urgency of the roof leak issue, citing its potential impact on upcoming state assessments. He emphasizes that water leaking into classrooms could compromise the testing environment and risk invalidating results. While he acknowledges Mr. Ballard's report, he aligns with Dr. Turner in calling for immediate resolution.

Ms. Johnson motions to close Public Comments.

Moved by Dr. Fatimah Turner Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande
ROLL CALL (9) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson motions to proceed with a Consent Agenda.

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

Mr. Tarver raises concerns about resolution N-4, noting that the revised facilities use policy removes longstanding language allowing groups like the Boys and Girls Scouts to use school facilities for free. He emphasizes that this change could limit access for youth organizations and urges the Board to preserve past provisions. He also requests a clear explanation of policy changes and questions the lack of a committee report. Ms. Gravesande confirms the policy committee met and that the draft is available but did not send out a summary. She explains that this is only the first reading, and feedback will be reviewed before the second reading for potential revisions.

Mr. Sherif recommends withdrawing the policy for now, suggesting the Board reconvene to review and revise it. He expresses concern that charging community organizations, like the Girl Scouts, for facility use could limit student participation in beneficial programs. He emphasizes the need to ensure the policy supports students and avoids future complications, urging a more thoughtful revision before moving forward.

Ms. Kleen clarifies that as it is the first reading, no changes are being made to the policy yet. It is simply being presented for consideration. All feedback and concerns will be considered before the second reading, where adjustments will be made to address the needs of the district and board members. She advises against withdrawing the first reading, as it doesn't affect the policy yet.

Mr. Tarver expresses concerns about approving the \$50,000 payment for the City of Orange Mayor's Circle of Excellence, pointing out that while previous resolutions for \$50,000 were approved, the payments were not consistently received by the district. He requests that the city should pay more if it's included in their budget. Mr. Sherif counters, explaining that the finance committee confirmed the city owes no money, referencing their follow-up in committee meetings. Mr. Tarver then questions the payment records, stating that only one payment was found

despite multiple resolutions being approved. Ms. Gravesande clarifies that she recollects multiple payments but encourages Mr. Tarver to check the records in BoardDocs for further verification.

Mr. Ballard clarifies that some financial records are unavailable due to a past cyber incident, but available documentation, including copies of checks, has already been shared. He explains that under current Board Policy 7510, civic organizations like the City are only required to pay custodial fees. The custodial cost for the City's use of Lincoln Avenue School is approximately \$43,000, and the resolution caps the amount at \$50,000.

He emphasizes that he is acting in accordance with existing policy, not withholding funds. The resolution has been revised to reflect a change in program dates—from August 15 to August 8—to accommodate summer programming for district students. The updated resolution seeks approval for the City's use of the facility through August 8 for an amount not to exceed \$50,000.

Ms. Johnson questions the inconsistency in objections to civic organizations using district facilities. She notes that both the Boy Scouts and the Mayor's summer camp serve students, yet only some receive criticism. She emphasizes that these programs benefit working families and urges the board to prioritize the needs of children and staff, stating it is their duty to act in students' best interests.

Mr. Tarver states that the Girl Scouts utilize one room for an hour, twice a month, resulting in minimal costs—significantly less than the city's extensive recreation programs, which run for several months and incur much higher expenses. Ms. Johnson emphasizes that the focus should remain on serving the needs of children. Ms. Williams notes that the 2009 version of Policy 7510 allowed the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to use district facilities at no cost, but recent revisions removed this provision. Dr. Turner highlights that the current policy specifies that the city is only responsible for custodial fees. Mr. Tarver adds that while state-mandated language must be included, the district should retain previous language that supports civic organizations. Mr. Wingfield clarifies that Policy 7510 is currently in its first reading, and no changes can be implemented until the second reading. The policy will return to the committee for further review and possible revision.

Mr. Tarver states that, as a public entity, discussions should occur publicly unless confidential. He emphasizes this is the appropriate setting for all board members to raise concerns. Mr. Wingfield acknowledges the point but reiterates that Policy 7510 cannot be changed until the second reading.

Mr. Tarver notes that several members have different concerns, and this meeting is the only opportunity for collective input before the next policy meeting. Dr. Turner supports allowing Mr. Tarver to express his concerns.

Mr. Sherif asks whether civic organizations offering free services to students should be charged for facility use. Ms. Johnson responds that this should be discussed in executive session. Mr. Sherif adds that if an organization provides free services, the district should consider allowing free facility to use.

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	Remaining agenda items		L1 & N4
Mr. Siaka Sherif	All agenda items		
Mr. Tyrone Tarver	N1, N2, N3 & N5	L1	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	Remaining agenda items		L1
Ms. Fatimah Turner, PhD.	All agenda items		Anything pertaining to St. Elizabeth University and Seton Hall University

Ms. Kleen explains the district has a binding contract with the Girl Scouts, providing support and free facility use. She clarifies this is separate from other civic requests. Mr. Sherif asks what the policy is when a civic group offers free services to students.

Ms. Johnson announces the upcoming district's meetings.

Public District Meetings

Public Budget Hearing – Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 5:30 pm at the BOE

Public Relations Committee Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, May 7, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, May 14, 2025, at 7:30 pm at the BOE

Closed District Meetings

Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, April 29, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, May 5, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, May 8, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, May 8, 2025, at 5:30 pm

Human Resources Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, May 12, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Board Comments

Mr. Sherif expresses appreciation for everyone's efforts and emphasizes the importance of working together for the success of the district. He informs the board that he will not attend the next meeting due to the passing of his sister. Ms. Johnson offers condolences.

Dr. Turner extends heartfelt condolences to Mr. Sherif and reflects on the importance of setting aside egos to focus on students. She apologizes to the administrators for the long meetings and commends their dedication. She shares her recent experiences visiting schools, expressing how impressed she is with the students' growth, the safe learning environments, and the hard work of staff and leadership. Dr. Turner emphasizes the need to listen to students and stop internal conflicts that distract from the district's progress. She ends by expressing pride in the district and a sincere thank you to all who contribute to its success.

Ms. Johnson encourages everyone to attend the Moana Jr. Spring Musical at Orange Prep and echoes Dr. Turner’s message on unity. She emphasizes that, although disagreements are natural and even necessary, the Board must work together with one voice. She cautions against forming opinions based on others’ experiences and stresses the importance of building personal relationships. Sharing her own journey from misunderstanding to mutual respect with a fellow board member, she urges the Board to stay focused on their common goal—serving the students.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

**Moved by Mr. David Armstrong Seconded by Ms. Sueann Gravesande
ROLL CALL (9) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (0) ABSENT**