

Minutes of **Wednesday, June 12, 2024, Public Board Meeting** of the Orange Board of Education held at 6:00 pm.
Vice President Shawneque Johnson is presiding over tonight's Meeting.

Ms. Sueann Gravesande

Mr. Derrick Henry

Ms. Samantha Crockett – **Absent**

Ms. Fatimah Turner, Ph.D. – **Absent**

Mr. Siaka Sherif

Ms. Shawneque Johnson

Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

Mr. David Armstrong

Mr. Tyrone Tarver – **Absent**

ROLL CALL (6) PRESENT (0) LATE (3) ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT:

- Mr. Jason Ballard, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Mr. Lamont Zachary, Assistant Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Jessica Kleen, School Board Attorney Substitute with the firm of Machado

FLAG SALUTE

Ms. Johnson motions to move into Executive Session.

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

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 Ms. Sueann Gravesande

ROLL CALL (7) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson introduces our student representative, Oluwatitofunmi Ayodele Oshuntolo (Mr. Tito).

Mr. Tito, with mixed emotions and a heavy heart, bids farewell as student representative of Orange High School, proud of academic progress fostering fair testing representation and recognition of student achievements. As he says farewell to Orange High School, he states that he has trust that the district will progress, welcoming change and upholding excellence for future students. He hopes for expanded opportunities and resources, envisioning a time when all can pursue their passions freely.

Mr. Tito thanks all teachers and administrators for their dedication. Special thanks to Ms. Labrador, Mr. Lemke for AP World History, and Ms. Frazier, Dr. Stewart, and Ms. Harrell for their student support. He continues to state that Mr. Belton's ongoing effort to improve student wellbeing at Orange High fills him with hope for the district's future.

Ms. Johnson tells Tito they'll miss him, wishes him luck in all endeavors, and thanks him for his significant impact on the Board.

Unable to detect which board member spoke due to audio, they praised Mr. Tito for his work, appreciated his contributions, highlighted his insights, and stated that they see him as a future Board Member upon his return.

Dr. Turner admires his professional attire, articulation, and poise, and tells him that sees him as a strong leader like in Dr. Seuss's book, she eagerly awaits to witness his future journeys.

Mr. Sherif expresses his gratitude to Tito's parents for their support, which enabled him to help his peers and district significantly.

Mr. Henry expresses how he appreciates Tito's relatability, ability to convey students' concerns to district leaders effectively, and empowering approach with students.

Mr. Ballard presents the 22-23 Audit by PKF O'Conner Davies to the Board, Public, and Community. He states that Jessica Iorio, representing Scott Klennan, will speak on behalf of PKF O'Connor Davies.

Jessica Iorio thanks Dr. Fitzhugh, Mr. Ballard, Mr. Zachary, and their team for their audit support. She states that the report has been filed; they have met with the Finance Committee and board members. She further explains that this government-wide audit covers school administration, services, operations, and compliance with accounting principles and regulations. She further states that in 22-23, they audited various federal and state programs, including grants. Their opinion was modified due to missing capital asset records, but the rest of the financials were unmodified. She states that the district has a healthy financial position with a surplus used for one-time capital needs and while maintaining this surplus may be challenging, there's also a capital reserve of 1.5M. She concludes by stating that overall, the district is financially sound and identified recurring financial closure issues this year and states that a new system should bring improvement and the payroll weaknesses, grant problems, and other issues will be addressed in the corrective action plan.

Unable to detect which board member spoke due to audio, they inquired if the upcoming corrective action plan will be shared with the board.

Mr. Ballard confirmed the corrective action plan is being finalized for board approval and further communicates that work has been done, and we plan to present it at the August board meeting following discussions with the auditor.

Ms. Johnson seeks clarification about the payroll audit.

Jessica goes onto to explain the payroll processes, including internal control testing revealing material weakness and payroll testing related to grants. She further states that internal controls are in place to ensure proper processing and explains that record-keeping challenges arose due to HR turnover, leading to difficulties documenting correct procedures. She also stated that payroll discrepancies were also noted, due to timesheet issues and explained that there are discrepancies in processing times in this district mainly because they're done manually. She concludes by stating that measures are needed to ensure accurate pay and prevent errors like overpayments due to salary entry mistakes and that the issues should be resolved as we have transferred this year into Genesis system and once, we modernize the timesheet system as well this will improve document provision. Jessica suggests enhancing internal controls, leaving decisions to the district.

Mr. Ballard thanks Ms. Iorio for her presentation. He stated that members of the board appreciate OKF O'Connor Davies' multiple meetings, marking the third time they've heard about the audit and the corrective action plan that will be presented at the August meeting. He further explains that Mr. Zachary and himself are finalizing details for submission to Trenton and extends gratitude to Jessica, Scott, and the whole PKF team for their diligence in our departmental turnover.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the May 8th, 2024, Public Board Meeting Minutes.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the April 10th, 2024, Closed Session Public Board Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Dr. Turner Seconded by Mr. Henry
ROLL CALL (6) YEA (0) NAY (1) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson motions to open Public Comments.

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

Public Comments

Ms. Sawyer expresses her appreciation for the district's transparency in explaining the connection between data disaggregation and interpreting teacher effectiveness. She states that teachers are vital for education, but this truth can be overlooked in efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and cultural competency. She further communicates that our commitment to student achievement goes beyond goals, driving us to avoid pitfalls like those seen in the Atlanta Georgia cheating scandal. Acknowledging this event's significance, we prioritize accurate data, assessments, and reporting. She continues to explain how falsified information hinders student support and so our administration focuses on student needs to ensure success. She continues to express how from a culturally responsive perspective, promoting district resources actively to support our community members, especially busy parents relying on the school system for their children's education, is crucial. She also states that providing resources that empower parents to help their children succeed academically without sacrificing family time is essential and with stronger PTOs, we simplify state standards for parents. While data may show ineffective teaching, the district plans strategic solutions and further explains how politics and local officials shape education. She concludes by thanking the district for their commitment and elections count.

Ms. Johnson thanks Ms. Sawyer and agrees with her comments, saying "well said."

Crystal Abosta, district mom, is concerned because her daughter's school is relocating and there may not be enough for the special education class in the building.

Unable to detect due to audio, someone from the Board asked Ms. Abosta which school is her child currently in.

Ms. Abosta answers that her child is in Cleveland School.

Unable to detect who was speaking due to audio, a board member stated this matter can't be discussed openly but promised to address it privately later and requested Ms. Abosta to wait for further discussion after the meeting.

Ms. Abosta agrees and states that her only concern is not wanting to change her child.

Mr. Lionel Wasara, a district father, mentions his son attends Cleveland School and shares the same concerns as Ms. Abosta. He also inquires if all children undergo evaluation for passing grades and graduation ceremonies.

Ms. Johnson tells Mr. Wasara that they will speak to him after the meeting privately and asks him to wait with Ms. Abosta as his question will be answered later.

Ms. Johnson motions to close Public Comments.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to have a Consent Agenda.

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

Mr. Henry inquires about our satisfaction level on something, however, I was unable to detect his other statements due to audio.

Jessica Kleen mentions that we are exploring our options, including legal matters she can't publicly discuss, but she is willing to provide more details.

Ms. Gravesande mentions concerns with the water dispenser on J23, and states that she saw the resolution to renew the contract and asks how satisfied are you with this decision regarding the water dispenser issue at the schools?

Mr. Ballard thanks Ms. Gravesande for her question and expresses overall satisfaction with Quench Water despite installation issues, such as water leakage and connectivity kinks with fountains. He emphasized the need for immediate reporting of water problems to ensure a swift response from vendors.

Ms. Johnson asks Ms. Gravesande if she is satisfied with Quench Water.

Ms. Gravesande states that she is concerned about the schools' safety as she notes issues like leaks in some fountains but isn't on-site daily and asks Mr. Ballard if he, as the BA, can confirm if he's satisfied, as she isn't.

Mr. Ballard acknowledges recent vendor improvements and emphasizes prompt issue responses at Forest, underscoring effective communication for problem-solving. He notes that plumbing issues necessitate a plumber, yet we are enhancing drainage by replacing elbows in water coolers.

Ms. Gravesande mentions that our functionality is currently at 80%.

Mr. Ballard agrees that we currently are at 80% and confirms we rushed to onboard a new vendor, cutting corners during the process which has led to issues that need addressing now.

Mr. Sherif suggests that allocating specific time for this ongoing repair could expedite the process, requiring a decision if the issue persists without such allocation.

Mr. Ballard acknowledges the issue and assures all that necessary actions will be taken by the vendor. He emphasizes the urgency and requested time until the summer for resolution.

Ms. Johnson says the next board meeting is in August, allowing all summer to address the issue promptly and efficiently.

Mr. Ballard then proceeds to do a roll call vote on the Agenda Items.

Mr. Armstrong agrees with all agenda items.

Mr. Henry agrees to everything except J12 (Resolution to Award of Contract – Food Service Management Contract for 24-25 SY between the Orange Board of Education and Chartwells).

Mr. Sherif agrees with all agenda items.

Dr. Turner agrees with all agenda items.

Mr. Wingfield agrees with everything except for anything dealing with Montclair State University.

Ms. Gravesande agrees with most agenda items but opposes to J12 (Resolution to Award of Contract – Food Service Management Contract for 24-25 SY between the Orange Board of Education and Chartwells) and J23 (Resolution to Approve Continued Contract with Quench Water– Point of Use Bottleless Water Dispensers) and expresses her exception of anything related to Jeremy Gravesande.

Ms. Johnson agrees to all agenda items.

Ms. Johnson announces the upcoming district and public meetings.

Public Relations Committee Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, August 7, 2024, at 4:00 pm
Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 7:30 pm in the BOE
Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, August 5, 2024, at 4:00 pm
Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, July 30, 2024, at 3:30 pm
Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, August 6, 2024, at 3:30 pm
Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, August 8, 2024, at 4:00 pm
Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, August 8, 2024, at 5:30 pm
Human Resource Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, August 12, 2024, at 4:00 pm

Board Comments

Dr. Fitzhugh gave a shout-out to retirees from Orange Public School District, including Ms. Moore (44 years) and Ms. Stewart (51 years). He expresses his gratitude for their service and congratulates the 25-year honorees, Ms. Battle and Ms. Davis. He concludes by expressing his appreciation for their dedication to the district.

Dr. Fitzhugh announces that half day starts on June 20th and the district will be closed on June 19th due to Juneteenth. He further states that more information will be noted in his weekly update sent out at 8AM on Friday.

Dr. Fitzhugh announces that last month, STEM Innovation Academy of the Oranges achieved 13th place in the 2024 New Jersey Best Public-School rankings. He thanks Dr. Reid and her team and all our elementary partners for preparing children from early childhood schools to elementary. He thanks everyone for their support.

Dr. Fitzhugh reports positive scholarship numbers: Orange High School at \$17,334,237 and STEM Academy at \$9,347,140, totaling \$26,681,377. He concludes by reminding all that there is still time to increase these figures before year-end.

On behalf of Dr. Fitzhugh and the Board of Education, Mr. Ballard announces how thrilled they are that everyone will return to their Cleveland home in September 2024 as the new building is opening a year ahead of schedule, thanks to hard work with the state and support from Governor Murphy's administration and the NJ Schools Development Authority.

Dr. Fitzhugh expresses gratitude to the instructional executive team for helping choose floor tiles, desks, and furniture for the new building in Cleveland. He mentions that their dedication was crucial in preparing the furniture order for September and once again thanks all for their hard work and commitment.

Ms. Johnson praises Vice President Ms. Gravesande for securing almost \$1M in scholarships for our kids and expresses her admiration for her as an exceptional mother.

Mr. Sherif expresses gratitude to administrators, teachers, the district, and the financial team for supporting students. He applauds the audit results by PCF and emphasizes a commitment to transparency. He welcomes once again the new HR Director and reassures the public of ongoing support for student learning.

Mr. Henry communicates that he is unsure about the impact of the new Oprah Act on accessing public records, however, he believes our school district has been transparent and accessible and assures all that we will continue to be so. He then expresses his commitment to ensuring parents and professionals can access their records.

Dr. Turner expresses her appreciation for the hard work, resilience, and transparency Mr. Ballard and Mr. Zachary have demonstrated in overcoming challenges and moving us as a district forward. She thanks them for their dedication in getting things done and maneuvering us to where we are going. Dr. Turner turns her attention to our Student Representative, Mr. Tito, and tells him to aim for greatness! Dr. Turner continues to express her appreciation for the board members for their diverse perspectives and the Superintendent for the outstanding year. She also thanks the supportive team and hardworking administrators who always show up and excel in their work within our community and schools. She also thanks the parents for navigating school, work, and more and concludes by telling all to have a great summer; reminding them to relax, relieve, and release.

Ms. Gravesande says that she initially joined the board to advocate for her children in the district but found it challenging. She communicates that her son faced challenges last year but showed resilience and is going to college and expresses how proud she is. Despite academic focus, she appreciates teachers' influence and encourages understanding and support for struggling students.

Ms. Johnson emphasizes our duty to support the kids, our future, because it requires a community effort to ensure they receive the best.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

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