

Minutes of **Wednesday, December 11, 2024, 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. Sueann Gravesande  
Mr. David Armstrong  
Ms. Samantha Crockett - **Absent**  
Mr. Derrick Henry  
Mr. Tyrone Tarver - **Absent**  
Ms. Fatimah Turner, Ph.D.  
Mr. Siaka Sherif  
Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

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

**ALSO PRESENT:**

- Mr. Jason Ballard, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Mr. Lamont Zachary, Assistant Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Ms. Christina Martinez, School Board Attorney Substitute with Machado Law Group

**FLAG SALUTE**

Ms. Johnson motions to move into Executive Session.

**Moved by Dr. Fatimah Turner and 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 Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield**

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

Ms. Johnson extends a warm welcome to everyone attending the Orange Public School District Board meeting on December 11th, 2024, and introduces our Superintendent, Dr. Fitzhugh, who will deliver the Superintendent's Report.

Dr. Fitzhugh announced the start of the scale-down process and announces a half-day holiday break on December 20th, 2024. He tells all present that the office will reopen on January 2nd, 2025, and a reorganization meeting will be convened at 6:00 PM. He acknowledged Mr. Henry, an outgoing board member, for his six-year service and expresses gratitude for his support and prompt responses to concerns. He sincerely thanks Mr. Henry for his exemplary service. On behalf of the Board of Education Administration and the Orange Scholarship community, Dr. Fitzhugh presents Mr. Henry with a plaque in recognition of his years of service.

Mr. Henry receives the plaque and conveys that he arrived amidst disorder, but he is optimistic about departing with a sense of organizational leadership.

Ms. Johnson expresses her gratitude to him and conveys that he will be missed. Additionally, she records a note indicating the absence of the student representative, stating that they will recognize her presence if she arrives this evening.

**Governor's Educator of the Year and Educational Services Professionals Awards 2024 Announcements** - Dr. Fitzhugh conveys his pride in the community and Orange Township, particularly at 451 Lincoln Avenue. He announces the acknowledgment of outstanding staff members and intends to organize a surprise celebration on Monday throughout all schools in the district. He underscores the significance of honoring those who have dedicated themselves to their work and urges everyone to applaud the award recipients.

Additionally, Dr. Fitzhugh invites Ms. Harris to engage in a conversation regarding ACCESS training and informs everyone that the discussion on bus evacuation will be deferred until the January meeting.

**ACCESS Assessment Results** - Ms. Harris clarifies that ACCESS is an annual evaluation designed for multilingual learners from Kindergarten through 12th grade, assessing students in four key areas: *Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing*. The primary objective is to track students' progress in mastering academic English, highlighting the shared responsibility of teaching both language skills and content knowledge. The assessment classifies language proficiency into six distinct levels: *Entering, Emerging, Developing, Expanding, Bridging, and Reaching*. Students who attain a score of 4.5 are recognized at the Expanding level and are eligible to leave the program. As of spring 2024, the district reported 1,478 multilingual learners enrolled. The performance metrics for these students is available by school, with Central Elementary School accommodating 219 multilingual learners. She concludes by telling all that historically, multilingual learners represented 7% of the district's total population; however, this percentage has increased to 27% across all grade levels, with nearly 40% in the K-4 category. In the last academic year, 59 students successfully transitioned out of the program.

**Dynamic Learning Alternative Assessment for Special Education** - Ms. Harper discusses the Dynamic Learning Map assessment, designed for students with significant cognitive impairments, which constitutes only 1% of the district's student body. The assessment evaluates their ability to live independently as adults. The data reflects assessments conducted over the last three academic years, specifically categorized by the 2021-2022 school year, covering grades 3 through 12. However, there is variation in the number of students participating in certain subjects or grade levels, including Mathematics and English Language Arts.

Ms. Harper highlights the performance indicators across various grade levels, particularly in Mathematics. During the 2022-2023 academic year, five out of eleven students reached the Target level in Mathematics. In 2023-2024, three out of ten students attained an advanced status in the same subject. In fourth grade, seven out of eight students met the Target criteria in English Language Arts (ELA), but none achieved an advanced score in Mathematics. In ELA, four out of ten students reached the Target level, while three out of ten met the Target criteria in Mathematics.

Ms. Harper concludes by stating that although the level of achievement is commendable, there has been a significant decrease in participation rates, particularly in the targeted areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science, highlighting the necessity for improvements in these fields.

**Students of the Month** - Dr. Fitzhugh acknowledging the students of the month announces the names of students from each school, celebrating their achievements.

**Attendance for the Month** - Dr. Fitzhugh delivers the monthly attendance slide presentation, highlighting the yellow and green segments as the primary indicators of attendance. He observes that the red status has improved over the past two years, reflecting a reduction in its occurrence compared to earlier periods. He further explains that the majority of students in grades K-7 demonstrate either low chronic or moderate chronic attendance, while grades 8-12 correspond to the secondary level. He expresses his appreciation to the attendance teams, instructional staff, ancillary personnel, and administrators for their committed efforts. He concludes by informing everyone that the average attendance rate for November was 95%, aligning with the state average.

**District Facility Maintenance & Custodial Services Updates** – Mr. Vasquez reviews projects completed in November and emphasizes the commitment to thorough cleaning efforts. He engages with PCI staff and in-house custodial team daily to provide updates on various projects and work orders. Facility projects are ongoing to maintain a safe learning environment for students and staff. The facilities department has focused on enhancing buildings, including installing new boilers at the administration building and reconstructing the greenhouse. At Orange High School, repairs were made to the playground and aging pipes were addressed. The district will introduce a new work order program through Facilitron in January to streamline processes and streamline processes.

Mr. Vasquez outlines the activities for November, including the construction of new boilers at the administration building, installation of the flue, and the establishment of the greenhouse. The team has been diligently working despite weather conditions, running the electrical and water systems. The rubber flooring at Scholars Academy has deteriorated, causing concerns, but the team has addressed this by installing a new concrete barrier and fence. Damaged furniture at the high school was repaired promptly, and broken floor tiles were fixed to prevent trips and falls. The main office area at STEM has also been replaced with carpet. The team has been diligent in addressing these issues and ensuring the safety of the students.

Mr. Vasquez emphasizes the team's dedication to working alongside the SDA and Internal Construction to guarantee ongoing advancement concerning the construction at the High School, the resolution of punch list items, and the Cleveland School project. The team is attentive to the needs of the community and will ensure that stakeholders are kept updated on developments. The health and safety of both staff and students continue to be the utmost priority.

Mr. Vasquez indicates that a presentation regarding the ESSIP project was conducted in October and the initiative commenced with the installation of LED lighting at John Robert Lewis and is presently underway at Heywood Avenue School. The primary emphasis is on enhancing interior lighting, with plans to subsequently address exterior lighting. He has acknowledged the concerns raised about the parking lot lights and has contacted PSE&G for support. Additionally, the team is working in conjunction with PSEG to resolve issues related to their light pole located on the street, and he wishes to inform everyone that new exterior lighting will be installed as part of the ESSIP. He assures all stakeholders that by the conclusion of the holiday break, noticeable improvements will be apparent in the buildings.

Mr. Sherif inquires whether all the schools are currently equipped with heating systems and are operational, as winter is approaching, and it is essential for students to be comfortable during this season.

Mr. Vasquez confirms heat availability, and a new boiler system has been implemented to address issues. However, steam pipes in older buildings can fail, requiring repairs. He assures all that complaints are now considered significant, and immediate action is taken upon receipt. All boilers are closely monitored.

Ms. Johnson inquires whether there was an issue with the rug at STEM that necessitated its replacement, or if it was simply a matter of preference.

Mr. Vasquez has verified that the rug in question is indeed the original from Mary Lawn. Despite being cleaned several times, we were unable to eliminate the odor and stains. Additionally, we will begin work on the rug in room 124 starting tomorrow, which presents a similar issue as the original rug. Consequently, we will be replacing it with a new one tomorrow morning.

Mr. Wingfield is requesting if the Facilities team has visited Lincoln Avenue School regarding the management of the heating system due to the excessive heat levels there.

Mr. Vasquez is in communication with the ATC, responsible for managing the BMS system, and has turned off the blower to maintain a sufficient temperature in the room, ensuring it remains warm.

Ms. Johnson further notes that the gym is excessively warm to which Mr. Vasquez responds by assuring everyone that he will investigate the matter.

Mr. Sherif emphasizes the need to address the long-standing heat issue in Lincoln, which has persisted since his children were integrated into the school. He believes that the ongoing problem affects the comfort and well-being of students and requires decisive action for necessary repairs. He reiterates the need for focused attention to prevent both excessive heat and cold from harming children.

Mr. Vasquez reports that they are working on an issue with the outdated system, specifically the ATC and BMS. Trane is implementing their own system, similar to Cleveland High School's modern system. The current administration has streamlined control, limiting interactions to just two vendors, and will ensure timely repairs for the system.

Mr. Ballard thanks Mr. Sherif for his concerns and informs him about the ESSIP kickoff meeting. The meeting discussed building management systems for facilities. Mr. Vasquez mentioned previous challenges in building management. The installation of new systems will enhance control over operations and eliminate blame-shifting. A single vendor will manage maintenance and management, as part of a standardization process for three to five years. Stakeholders can expect significant improvements compared to the current situation.

Dr. Fitzhugh expresses gratitude to all attendees and informs the board president, board vice president, and members of the Board of Education that this marks the conclusion of the superintendent's report for December.

Ms. Johnson extends an invitation to the Student Representative, Ms. Lopez, to present.

Ms. Lopez extends her greetings to everyone and goes onto to share the results from a survey she conducted at Orange High School. She explains that in this survey, students were asked to reflect on positive aspects of their school experience and areas for improvement. The survey, categorized by grade level and gender, collected 386 responses from 86 freshmen, 107 sophomores, 160 juniors, and 33 seniors. The positive feedback revealed various themes, with freshmen highlighting new opportunities in sports, juniors highlighting teacher support, and seniors highlighting college readiness initiatives. Male students mentioned sports, while female students pointed out exclusivity for girls. Freshman girls raised concerns about bathroom access and dress code flexibility. Both sophomores and juniors expressed issues with hall sweeps and dress codes. Seniors requested more career and college counseling, with males focusing on dress codes and hall sweeps, and females highlighting the importance of mental health support. The most frequently mentioned positive aspects were sports clubs, safety and security, and teacher support. Ms. Lopez concludes by asking if anyone has any questions pertaining to the data presented.

Ms. Johnson inquires about the specific context the students are referencing when they mentioned access to the bathroom.

Ms. Lopez reports that at Orange High School, only one restroom is accessible, causing students to have to ascend to the upper floor. This inconvenience is particularly noticeable for lower-level students who often arrive late due to searching for an available restroom. The availability of restrooms also fluctuates, with some days being open and others not.

Ms. Johnson inquires whether security accompanies the students to the bathroom, remains stationed outside the bathroom, or if there is an absence of security altogether during their visits.

Ms. Lopez informs that security personnel are stationed in the hallway, and if you need restroom access, you must request their assistance, as there is only one restroom available for females during lunch periods.

Ms. Johnson inquires for further clarification regarding the term's safety and security.

Ms. Lopez states that this is the way students experience a sense of safety within the school environment.

Mr. Sherif seeks additional clarification regarding the dress code.

Ms. Lopez emphasized the need for better communication from Orange High School regarding new policies or uniform regulations. Students believe announcements should be made to the entire student body. For example, some students were prohibited from wearing specific pants without prior notice, leading to confusion and questioning why this issue was raised now.

Mr. Sherif seeks clarification on whether the students are discussing teacher support or a shortage of teachers.

Ms. Lopez highlights the significant percentage of students who appreciate their teachers, who provide support and guidance. Students often request college recommendations and invite teachers to attend sporting events, demonstrating the supportive environment in their high school.

The Board Members express their gratitude to Ms. Lopez for her time and for providing valuable feedback.

Ms. Johnson motions to motions to open Public Comments.

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

### **Public Comments**

Ms. Singleton thanks the board for their efforts in enhancing the website and securing grant funding for educational support professionals. They appreciate the dedication to retaining staff and empowering them to achieve certification as teachers. The ACCESS initiative aims to facilitate the transition of these professionals into teaching roles. The board's commitment to these initiatives is appreciated.

Mr. Wingfield thanks Ms. Singleton for her contributions and mentions Mrs. Masoud's remarkable website. The website serves as a comprehensive guide for prospective students and teachers, outlining grant processes for online classrooms and necessary facilities like Essex County College. It aims to facilitate student certification and classroom entry. The website is expected to be launched soon, and he believes that once it is unveiled, everyone here will be impressed by the exceptional work Ms. Masoud has accomplished specifically for this district. Excellent job; it is truly impressive.

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 motions to approve the November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Public Board Meeting Minutes.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Closed Session Public Board Meeting Minutes.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to do a consent agenda.

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

Ms. Johnson announces the upcoming district's meetings.

**Public District Meetings**

Public Relations Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, January 2, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Reorganization Meeting – Thursday, January 2, 2025, at 6:00 pm at the BOE

Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, January 8, 2025, at 7:30 pm at the BOE

**Closed District Meetings**

Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, December 17, 2024, at 3:30 pm

Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, January 6, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, January 7, 2025, at 3:30 pm

Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, January 2, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, January 2, 2025, at 5:30 pm

Human Resources Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, January 6, 2025, at 4:00 pm

**Board Comments**

Mr. Sherif is concerned about voting behavior in relation to the bill agenda, highlighting the importance of compensating community workers. He believes that funding for these workers is included in the bill, but members often choose not to support it, raising questions about their compensation. He urges clarity from federal board members on this matter, as the inability to pay district employees is a significant concern.

Ms. Johnson concurs with Mr. Sherif and advises him against voting for contracts or any other matters.

Mr. Sherif emphasizes the importance of understanding the perspectives of those involved in providing services to students and the district. He emphasizes the need for alternative opinions and compensation options for these women, who often work long hours and have families. He calls for board members to uphold values and ensure fair compensation for these individuals.

Dr. Turner expresses gratitude for the fact that we are a board of nine, emphasizing that the future of our educators and administrators is not dependent on a single individual.

Mr. Henry believes that the nine board members ensure fairness and impartiality in voting. He emphasizes that they are elected by their constituents to determine fairness for the student body and staff. When questions are raised, they

are not refusals but inquiries into the justification for payment. He aims to represent the perspectives of his fellow board members and believes in sound reasoning when considering negative votes or replacements. He notes that the remaining 10% of votes are not based on personal preferences but on rational judgment.

Ms. Gravesande underscores Mr. Sherif's point that board members are selected by their constituents and bear the obligation to engage in inquiries and participate in voting. Although the business administrators are adequately equipped to face challenges, it is vital for the public to understand that their representatives are not meeting this responsibility. Constituents must articulate their views through their votes. Both Ms. Gravesande and Mr. Sherif convey their dissatisfaction with the present circumstances and stress the importance of fostering constructive dialogue to enhance the district. While some members may choose to abstain due to conflicts of interest or absence, it is uncommon for any member to abstain from the entire agenda or to vote collectively on every item.

Ms. Johnson addresses the compensation framework for educators and the persistent disagreements among board members concerning compensation for teachers and staff who interact with students daily. She expresses gratitude for the support of various stakeholders, including Executive Directors, Business Administrator, Assistant Business Administrator, and Superintendent, in addressing contract-related matter. Furthermore, Ms. Johnson reiterates that Ms. Gravesande is highlighting the necessity of prioritizing the well-being of both staff and students, rather than endorsing candidates based on selective preferences. Additionally, Ms. Johnson underscores the importance of solidarity among board members, who frequently go above and beyond to promote the success of the school district. She urges the public to elect a board member committed to serving the community rather than pursuing personal agendas.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

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