

Minutes of **Wednesday, January 8, 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 - **Absent**
Mr. Tyrone Tarver
Mr. Siaka Sherif
Ms. India Williams – **Absent**
Mr. Jeffrey Wingfield

ROLL CALL (5) PRESENT (2) LATE (2) ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT:

- Mr. Jason Ballard, School Business Administrator/Board Secretary
- Mr. Lamont Zachary, 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 Ms. Samantha Crockett
ROLL CALL (5) YEA (0) NAY (0) ABSTAIN (4) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson extends a warm welcome to everyone attending the Orange Public School District Board meeting on January 8, 2025, and informs everyone in attendance that the student representative, Ms. Lopez, will be absent this evening due to illness. Ms. Johnson then introduces our Superintendent, Dr. Fitzhugh, who will deliver the Superintendent's Report.

Dr. Fitzhugh welcomes all attendees, both those physically present and those joining online, wishing everyone a Happy New Year. He notes that we have now entered 2025 and expresses enthusiasm about the exciting initiatives that the board and administration are developing, some of which will be revealed later in the evening. To kick things off, we will start by recognizing the students of the month.

Students of the Month - Dr. Fitzhugh acknowledging the students of the month announces the names of students from each school, celebrating their achievements. Dr. Fitzhugh extends heartfelt congratulations to all of our outstanding students for the month of December, expressing immense pride in their achievements. He encourages them to continue setting high standards for their peers. We are confident that each of you will excel in the upcoming months.

The data categorized by general education students, multilingual learners, and special education students shows progress from kindergarten to fourth grade. The number of multilingual learners in the district is rising, with a steady increase over time. The NWEA assessment, used for high school math courses like Algebra One, Algebra Two, and Geometry, is administered to eighth-grade students in Algebra One and self-contained special education classes. The data, broken down by percentiles, shows how students rank nationally. The goal is to see more students in the "high average" and "higher percentile" categories. Grades eight and above will be reviewed in detail, including specific breakdowns for these assessments.

Dr. Fitzhugh has extended an invitation to Ms. Massoud, the Executive Director of Human Resources, to provide insights into our Aspiring Educators initiative. This initiative is crucial as we aim to enhance capacity within Orange Township.

Aspiring Educators Initiative – Ms. Massoud introduced the Aspiring Educators Initiative, a program designed to assist staff members in achieving teaching licensure. Launched on December 4th, the initiative features a dedicated website that provides resources, guidance on the licensure process, and collaborations with institutions such as Kean University. Additionally, the website includes professional development opportunities, Google Certifications, and Udemy courses. Test preparation is offered both in-person at Essex County College and virtually through Teacher's Test Prep. She concludes by emphasizing that this initiative is intended to support both staff and students, expressing gratitude for everyone's contributions.

Dr. Fitzhugh emphasizes staff support as the primary goal, expressing gratitude to Ms. Massoud and her team for outstanding efforts and to Ms. Boyd, our Officer of Innovation, for invaluable contributions. Dr. Fitzhugh emphasizes prioritizing student achievement, discussing assessments in mathematics and science. He invites Executive Director of STEM Focused Learning, Mr. Davis Scutari, to share insights.

i-Ready Data - Mr. Scutari presents fall and winter diagnostic data for math and science students in grades K-8 using i-Ready. The data compares performance between early September and pre-winter break, highlighting progress across grade levels. i-Ready evaluates students' performance in categories ranging from three or more grade levels below to mid or above grade level. Kindergarten through first grade shows notable progress, with students moving from pre-kindergarten or below-grade levels toward early or mid-grade level performance. The data is categorized into general education, multilingual learners, and special education students, reflecting an increase in multilingual learners over recent years. Movement toward higher performance tiers is evident across grades 2-8.

NWEA Math Data - The NWEA assessment is utilized for high school mathematics courses, such as Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry, and is applicable to self-contained special education students. Mr. Scutari observes that the twelfth grade exhibits a lower number of students, resulting in a leftward skew, as these students are enrolled in courses that are generally provided in earlier grades.

NWEA Science Data - The NWEA science assessment is administered to students in grades 3-12, including core high school courses typically taken in grades 9-11. Percentiles are not assigned for grades 11 and 12, so statistical regression is used to estimate these values. This approach provides a consistent and reasonable estimate based on grade-level averages.

Highlights - Mr. Scutari presents the key findings. In K-8 mathematics, there has been a 10.4 percentage point rise in the number of students achieving early, mid, or above-grade levels, with over 300 students advancing to higher achievement categories. In contrast, there is a 14.7 percentage point decline in students within lower achievement categories, with around 600 students moving up to higher levels. The median progress towards the expected annual growth is 58%, despite a reduced assessment period of 24 weeks, and 42% of students have improved their standing by advancing at least one achievement category.

In NWEA mathematics for grades 8-12, there is a 7.6 percentage point increase in students attaining high average or high percentiles, which equates to approximately 90 students. Simultaneously, there is an 8.9 percentage point reduction in students within lower percentiles, with about 100 students transitioning out of these ranges. Remarkably, 62% of students achieve their growth goals, exceeding the national average of 50%, and 69% of students see an increase in their scale scores, even if they do not completely meet their growth objectives.

In NWEA science, there is an observed increase in students in the high average or high percentiles in grades 8, 10, 11, and 12, along with a decrease in students in the lower percentiles for those same grades, as well as grade 3. This shows that more students are moving to the higher percentiles while others are progressing out of the lower ranges. Forty-one percent of students met their growth goal in science, slightly below the national average of 50%. However, 59% of students increased their scale scores from fall to winter.

Attendance for the Month - Dr. Fitzhugh indicates that a review of attendance from the previous month occurs each month, and today's focus will be on the attendance figures for December. Chronic absenteeism is classified into four categories: low (0-2.99 days), modest (3-4.99 days), significant (5-6.99 days), and high (7 or more days). He observes that illness is prevalent during this season and urges individuals to consult a physician if they are feeling unwell. The attendance data for December reveals that many students are categorized within the low to modest chronic absence ranges. Three years prior, the circumstances were different, prompting the launch of the Attendance Matters campaign to emphasize the significance of consistent school attendance. This data encompasses both district schools and preschool providers. He also advises parents against blocking robocalls, as they play a crucial role in maintaining accurate attendance records. Notably, attendance in grades 8-12 has seen substantial improvement compared to two years ago. The presentation includes attendance statistics from pre-K through grade 12, with a daily average for December recorded at 95%, which aligns with the state average.

Facilities Update - Mr. Vasquez provides a comprehensive update on the facilities and maintenance activities accomplished in December. He highlights the ongoing partnership with PCI, the cleaning and maintenance service provider, to uphold exceptional standards. Daily meetings with PCI's management team are conducted to ensure that all facilities are properly maintained and that projects remain on schedule. His team performs regular inspections to guarantee that the buildings are clean and functional, fostering a safe learning environment for both students and staff. Notable projects completed in December include the installation of boilers in the administrative building, refinishing gym floors at the high school in preparation for basketball season, and the installation of new shades at both Orange Prep and the older wing of the high school. Additionally, the auditorium at Central has been enhanced with upgraded sound and lighting systems, LED lighting, and a fresh coat of paint. The district has also initiated a new archery program, which involved the installation of archery nets at multiple schools. Looking ahead, upcoming projects will take place at Central under Mr. Ballard's direction, along with ongoing collaboration with the SDA and Terminal Construction to resolve punch list items at Orange High School and Cleveland Street School.

Unable to identify the speaker, a question has emerged regarding the shade replacements for the two schools, particularly concerning whether these replacements apply to the entire school or solely to the west-facing side.

Mr. Vasquez confirms that the high school was on the older side, and the new section, 90% complete, was installed by SDA Orange Preparatory. However, access to the main office and two classrooms was not possible.

Mr. Sherif shares concerns from his school visits, noting very cold classrooms at Park Avenue that felt like being outdoors. He emphasizes this ongoing issue needs attention despite efforts to address it. He also highlights recurring flooding at Cleveland, a newly renovated building, and questions the steps being taken to resolve these problems as the public has raised complaints. He urges a serious focus on these matters.

Mr. Vasquez responds that troubleshooting at Park Avenue will begin tomorrow morning at 7:30 am with vendors ATC and HVAC on-site to assess and address the issue, including potential blower or control system repairs. For Cleveland Elementary, he explains it is an SDA project with contractors and subcontractors involved. To determine the cause of the flooding, they plan to run a camera through the sewage system to identify if the issue is due to student activity, a malfunction, or construction errors, like a previous case at the high school. Accountability will be determined based on findings.

Mr. Sherif highlights ongoing issues at Lincoln, where some classrooms have heating problems that were noted months ago, even before winter. He stresses the impact on students and teachers, suggesting that cold classrooms may disrupt the learning process and create overcrowding if classes are moved.

Mr. Vasquez responds, explaining that the issues stem from outdated control systems and assures that the same team addressing Park Avenue will work on Lincoln as well. He acknowledges the difficulty of maintaining balanced temperatures but promises that the team will troubleshoot the problem and provide updates. He adds that the team plans to have answers for both schools by the end of the next day.

Dr. Fitzhugh and Mr. Vasquez confirm that updates will be shared well before the next meeting to keep everyone informed.

Ms. Johnson inquires whether the ESSIP program plays a role in guaranteeing that all educational institutions possess operational boilers and are moving towards modern systems.

Mr. Vasquez affirms that the program encompasses enhancements to both boilers and chillers. He elaborates that Park Avenue required a new chiller, which has been successfully installed, and expresses optimism that the building will maintain a comfortable temperature this summer. He also mentions that although these systems are newly implemented, there are still some issues that need to be addressed.

Ms. Johnson inquires whether an update regarding the boilers and chillers in all schools can be presented at the upcoming meeting.

Dr. Fitzhugh acknowledges that the update will be incorporated into the committee notes and presentation, and guarantees that the public will be kept informed about the progress.

Mark Your Calendars - Dr. Fitzhugh announces the following updates to families:

- The school district will be closed on Monday, January 20th, 2025, in observance of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday and will reopen on Tuesday, January 21st, 2025.
- The district PTO retreat will take place on Saturday, January 11th, 2025, at Lincoln Avenue School. All are welcome.
- Winter recess will be from Monday, February 17th through Friday, February 21st, 2025, with school reopening on Monday, February 24th, 2025, at regular time.

He underscores the importance of sharing this information ahead of time to allow families to modify their schedules accordingly. Furthermore, families of students who are advancing to the next grade or graduating will soon receive notifications to save the date. Dr. Fitzhugh urges everyone to stay attentive to the weekly updates for further details.

Dr. Fitzhugh announces that Mr. Zachary, the Assistant School Business Administrator, will be departing from his current role, having been appointed as the new School Business Administrator by the Passaic Board of Education in November. Dr. Fitzhugh expresses his gratitude to Mr. Zachary for his three years of unwavering support to the administration, board of education, staff, and students. He underscores the importance of the staff and students as the foundation of their mission, encouraging Mr. Zachary to carry this principle with him to Passaic. Dr. Fitzhugh extends his congratulations to Mr. Zachary on his new appointment, affirming that he is truly deserving of this recognition. With these remarks, Dr. Fitzhugh concludes the Superintendent Report.

Ms. Johnson motions to approve the December 11th, 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 December 11th, 2024, Closed Session Public Board Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Mr. Wingfield Seconded by Dr. Turner
ROLL CALL (5) YEA (0) NAY (2) ABSTAIN (2) ABSENT

Ms. Johnson extends an invitation to Ms. Crockett to present the Committee's Curriculum Report, along with Mr. Sherif, who will provide the Finance Report.

Curriculum Committee Report - Ms. Crockett indicates that the Curriculum Committee convened on December 17th at 3:30 PM. The meeting focused on two primary subjects: The Diagnostic Data for Math and Science, and The Implementation of the GOLD Assessment. She notes notable advancements within the district, including a 10.4% rise in high-end scores and a 14.7% reduction in low-end scores from fall to winter, along with 42% of students enhancing their placement scores. The GOLD Assessment, aimed at children aged three to five (grades zero to three), encompasses 38 objectives evaluated through various approaches, emphasizing the importance of family engagement and support at home. Ms. Crockett underscores the significance of progress across the district and the ongoing efforts in early elementary education, concluding her report with a positive outlook on future developments.

Finance Committee Report - Mr. Sherif indicates that the financial condition of the district was a topic of discussion, highlighting an atypical item: a donation of \$1,500. This donation necessitates board approval through a formal resolution, as it cannot be accepted directly from an external party. The donor expressed a desire to assist with parent education and programming, initially proposing to provide cold meals but later opting to contribute funds instead. Additionally, the treasury report, bills, and other financial issues were examined, revealing that the district is progressing favorably, aided by the Business Administrator and Dr. Fisher.

Ms. Johnson extends an invitation to Dr. Turner to present the Public Relations Report, along with Mr. Armstrong, who will provide insights on the Special Education Committee Report.

Curriculum Committee Report - Dr. Turner presents key takeaways from the public relations meeting held on January 2, 2025, during which Ms. Alcantara provided an overview of the events from December. She underscores the importance of visiting the school website for updates and photographs, highlighting the numerous activities that took place. Notable events included the Pride Award ceremony at Park Avenue, the Thanksgiving Balloon Parade at Forest, training sessions for Mango and the Parent Portal, Grinch Day at Central, a series of winter concerts, and the initiation of district-wide reading events. Furthermore, Ms. Alcantara introduced her virtual book club aimed at fostering literacy. Dr. Turner commends the advanced cosmetology program, remarking on the students' active participation and skill showcases. Additionally, students from Oakwood and OPA had the opportunity to visit the

Verizon Barbie StreamHouse. In conclusion, Dr. Turner encourages families to visit the website for further information and photographs.

Special Education Committee Report - Mr. Armstrong reports that the Special Education Committee convened the day prior at 4:15 pm. He commends the meeting's productivity, acknowledging Ms. Harper and her team's dedication. To address prior staffing shortages, two speech pathologists have been employed; however, the caseloads remain elevated, averaging around 60 students. Additionally, an intervention program was discussed, aimed at assisting parents in obtaining Medicaid reimbursements without jeopardizing their benefits. This reimbursement contributes to the district's special education budget and occasionally aids other departments. He expresses gratitude to the team for their hard work.

Dr. Fitzhugh clarifies that the program Mr. Armstrong is referring to is the Special Education Medicaid Initiative (SEMI). He elaborates that SEMI reimburses the district for services that are generally covered by the government, with the funds being redirected to the special education budget.

Ms. Kleen further clarifies that SEMI does not provide reimbursements to parents but instead offers a modest reimbursement to the district for services that have been pre-funded.

Ms. Johnson motions to motions to open Public Comments.

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

Public Comments

Ms. Alely St. Hilaire, representing Rosa Parks, underscores the significance of Mental Wellness Month. She commences by expressing her appreciation to the district for the introduction of Teen Mental Health First Aid through Parent University, which enables parents and educators to become certified in recognizing and addressing mental health issues with empathy. She points out that children today are navigating a digital landscape that may contribute to feelings of isolation. Ms. St. Hilaire calls upon parents, educators, and staff to acknowledge the effects of this isolation on students within the classroom environment. Furthermore, Ms. St. Hilaire raises concerns regarding the purpose and efficacy of detention, questioning the message it conveys to students. She proposes that rather than utilizing detention for silent reflection, it could be transformed into an opportunity to teach Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, thereby offering a more constructive approach.

Scarlett St. Hilaire, a fifth-grade representative from Rosa Parks Community School, articulates the concerns of her classmates. She expresses gratitude to the district for enhancing the quality of school lunches but urges that the milk be given more attention. She requests that the milk be inspected prior to being served, as several of her peers have encountered expired milk.

Ms. Singleton emphasizes a recent incident at the school where outdated contact information hindered communication with a parent. She strongly encourages parents to revise their contact information in the Genesis parent portal, as this is essential for both emergencies and effective communication. Parents have the option to update their contact numbers independently or inform the school through a phone call or written note. Additionally, she announces an event scheduled for Saturday at Orange Prep from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm, organized by Mr. Miller, Mr. Harp, and Treasure Island Promotions. This event is designed for male students in grades 7 to 10 (and possibly 11 to 12) and will feature workshops, refreshments, and opportunities for high school students to earn community service hours.

Ms. Johnson motions to close Public Comments.

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

Ms. Johnson motions to do a consent agenda.

Moved by Dr. Turner Seconded by Mr. Armstrong
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 – Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Orange Board of Education Public Board Meeting – Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 7:30 pm at the BOE

Closed District Meetings

Curriculum Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, January 28, 2025, at 3:30 pm
Facilities Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, February 3, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Special Education Committee Virtual Meeting – Tuesday, February 4, 2025, at 3:30 pm
Policy Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, February 6, 2025, at 4:00 pm
Finance Committee Virtual Meeting – Thursday, February 6, 2025, at 5:30 pm
Human Resources Committee Virtual Meeting – Monday, February 10, 2025, at 4:00 pm

Board Comments

Mr. Sherif assures the community that all concerns regarding building temperatures have been thoroughly addressed, with personnel present to rectify any issues. He underscores that the welfare of the children is well managed. Additionally, he requests Dr. Fitzhugh to investigate a public remark concerning the detention of a student in a classroom setting.

Dr. Fitzhugh confirms he will investigate it and provide a response.

Mr. Sherif expresses gratitude to all for their dedication over the past year, urging them to maintain the same level of commitment this year to further enhance the district. He emphasizes the progress made, noting an increase from 50% to 65%, and motivates everyone to persist in their efforts to attain continued success.

Mr. Tarver extends his heartfelt wishes for a joyous New Year to all.

Mr. Wingfield expresses a positive outlook for the forthcoming year, anticipating achievements alongside the new staff and board members. He acknowledges Dr. Turner's commitment and concludes with a note of appreciation.

Dr. Turner highlights that Ms. Hilaire is focused on the wider consequences of detention rather than merely a specific incident. She points out the harmful effects of extended detention, which include a decline in academic achievement and an increase in dropout rates, and she urges the district to emphasize social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices. Dr. Turner proposes exploring alternatives to detention, such as community service programs. Furthermore, she agrees on the importance of addressing temperature-related challenges in schools to prevent them from obstructing students' educational experiences. Additionally, Dr. Turner expresses her gratitude towards Ms. Massoud, praising her professionalism and her commitment to enhancing programming and the experiences of both

staff and students. Lastly, she acknowledges Mr. Zachary's move to Passaic, highlighting the supportive role of the Orange Board of Education in preparing him for future success.

Ms. Johnson appreciates Ms. Terrell's contributions to communication and appreciates her efforts in improving clarity. She praises Ms. Massoud for hiring someone with excellence and extends congratulations to Mr. Zachary for his recent appointment as BA to the Passaic Board of Education.

Ms. Johnson motions to have the Meeting Adjourned.

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