

Special Meeting  
Board Retreat  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
February 8, 2021

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, New Jersey, on February 8, 2021.

Board President Thair Joshua called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Adequate written notice of this meeting of the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education was sent to the Township and Village Clerks, The Star Ledger, the News Record and all schools.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Bergin, Board Member Cuttle, Board President Joshua, Board Member Maini, Board Member Malespina, Board Member Siders, Board Member Winkfield, Board Member Zubietta, Student Rep. Forman

Absent: Board Member Wright

*EIGHT VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT*

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Siders to allow distance participation for this Special Board meeting - Board Retreat during the COVID-19 emergency.

Motion passed 8 yes, 0 no.

BOARD PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

The School Board meeting is a business meeting in public not a meeting with the public. Oftentimes it may appear to members of our audience that the Board of Education takes action with very little comment and in many cases a unanimous vote. Before a matter is placed on the agenda at a public meeting, the Administration has thoroughly reviewed the matter with the Superintendent of Schools/Chief School Administrator (CSA). If the Superintendent of Schools/Chief School Administrator is satisfied that the matter is ready to be presented to the Board of Education, it is then referred to the appropriate Board Committee. The Members of the Board Committee work with Administration and the Superintendent to assure that the members fully understand the matter. After the committee discusses the matter, it is presented to the full Board for discussion before any action is taken. Only then, is it placed on the agenda for action at a public meeting.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Anthony Mazzocchi

C. First off, a huge thank you to Paul Roth for his many years of service to the SOMSD. Paul is the embodiment of honesty and integrity, and one of the hardest workers I know. We are a better district because of your service, Paul.

I've written to the Board of Education and administration about this issue of arts instruction in SOMSD during (and after) COVID. As you are aware, the arts have been marginalized more than almost any other subject during remote learning here; this isn't dissimilar to national trends, but it's quite pronounced here in SOMSD, specifically because of our actions and planning. What I am most concerned about is the district instrumental and vocal music program.

In a normal year, between 80%-90% of district 5th graders start a musical instrument and engage in choir. That's approximately 450 students. A traditional (yet unfortunate) attrition rate between 5th and 6th grade is 50%. Another benchmark is that 50% drop instrumental/choral music between 8th and 9th grades. If you follow the data, that means: 450 students begin instrument instruction in 5th grade, 225 continue in 6th grade and 112 are left in 9th grade that comprise band and orchestra. Choir has similar numbers.

Across our state (and I am POSITIVE here in SOMSD), we have seen the numbers drop violently this year in systems that are all remote. Numbers have been cut in half with beginners. Therefore: 225 students have begun instrument instruction in 5th grade (with inferior instruction due to remote) 112 MAY continue in 6th grade (if we are lucky, most will quit since they have not performed or practiced together) 56 MAY be left in 9th grade that comprise band and orchestra (if we are lucky). That is not enough to continue a healthy program.

That will be the end of our music program as we know it. It's a 5th grade issue now, a middle school issue next year and it will be a Columbia High School issue in 3 years. I believe this is one of the most important issues in SOMSD's history as a nationally recognized leader in arts education there is a ton at stake here.

Dr. Taylor, I ask that you please fulfill the pledge you made us to cultivate and nurture a robust arts ecosystem in SOMSD and (at least) work to develop a one-year surge in staff and resources in order to hit a "reset" button and start students on instruments in 6th grade in the Fall. Without it, the district program is built on sand; staffing and budget cuts could follow, but most disastrous. We will have a generation of students denied arts instruction in SOMSD of all places. Please incorporate this into the FY21-22 budget.

A. To former Board Member Mazzocchi it is great to hear from you. I

hope that you know we are committed to the Arts and legacy of our district. As you can probably anticipate right now , Paul and I as well as FFT committee members and others are elbow deep into our budget process. We are thinking about many important things, like closing the achievement gap and supporting kids who may have experienced slippage during this unprecedented time. This is definitely on our radar as well. Thank you for your advocacy.

Anonymous

- C. We would like to express our concern for the current state of the choral music program. While we acknowledge that Choir is difficult in a virtual setting the toxic climate created by the new Director has caused a detrimental effect on the once stellar program built by the former leadership. The assessments are subjective and seem overly punitive. The teacher expects a foundation of "music theory" skills not previously taught in this district, thus causing students grades (and overall GPA's) to suffer through no fault of their own. In other words, this teacher has failed to meet the students "where they are" in their music education.

In our personal experience the teacher has failed to comply with IEP accommodations for one of our students; and has punitively graded our second student based on God-given musical ability, rather than effort and participation. Our efforts to communicate with the teacher to resolve issues have been met with a defensive and uncooperative attitude.

The choral music program at CHS has always been magnificent. Singing should bring joy. And with the mental health of our student population at a "tipping point" during the COVID Crisis, music should not be the most stressful subject. Music should be, and COULD be a valuable tool for bringing students together and creating happiness during these trying times.

So many students seem to be dropping out of the program it begs the question if there will BE a choral program next year.

- A. Board Counsel, Joanne Butler reminded the public that the Board cannot and will not discuss personnel matters and it is important for individuals to understand that an individual about whom they are speaking has their own potential right of action with regard any slander or libelous material.

***Board Member Wright arrived at 7:16 p.m.  
9 VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE***

Fred Meyer

- C. I want to acknowledge a very great crisis of conscience in the District based on some of the things we heard in the published SOMEA letter, pointing to some instances that we feel need to be addressed by the District and Board in some way. One instance referred to a gas leak in a building that was not handled in an appropriate way.

Another referred to a situation that may have required some sort of quarantine, but protocols were not followed. We understand that we have only heard one side of this story, but I am here to say that we need to hear from the other side. This is not something that can be passed by without comment and excuse me if it has been commented on and I have not seen it. This is important to us and many parents we have spoken to as well. We need to know what happened and why it will never happen again, in order to have confidence that our children are the number one priority. This lack of confidence is now seeping into a lot of other things.

It is my understanding that the Intentional Integration Initiative is going forward in September. Seeing what we have seen with Phase III Return to School Hybrid Program, the total lack of expectation that school would actually be there the next day, a school closure because of snow, but it is clear that the district was negotiating with SOMEA, everything looks to be in disarray. I have no idea what to expect in September when our child will be part of a generational change in the way the school district is run. I would like to know when we will be notified what school my child will be attending and more about this initiative. I know it is not an immediate, but it is coming and it is clear that very large projects have hit this district in a very bad way. I understand that getting school together for this year, while an enormous task has not gone well and there are more things coming that we anticipate will not go well. We need to hear from you in a way that instills confidence that every parent should have in the district.

- A. We did respond directly to the community impacted and I believe our local publications also carried and publicized our response to direct accusation that were a part of the letter from SOMEA. In short there was no gas leak at the school in question and we responded directly to the community and to the parents of that school and we gave a very detailed account. If you would like to send me your email I will forward the letter that we sent to the Clinton community.

Also, we truly understand the challenges presented by our current circumstances. If you look at many of the Districts in our immediate vicinity as well as those in other parts of the state they had similar challenges and ours are exacerbated because of our facilities challenges. We have shown that we do want to give our families an opportunity to have school in person if they are inclined to do so and we are working with SOMEA. I cannot really speak about collective bargaining, but we are very sensitive to this matter and are putting all of our efforts behind it. We will be giving an Intentional Integration update briefly this evening as part of our goal update. We are still moving forward with the Intentional Integration Initiative as well as our construction initiative which has been impacted by COVID-19, especially the State reviews. If you stay with us this evening and watch we have a lot of updates on the goals that have been put forward and as you have stated, these are huge goals, huge generational goals that happen to fall in the middle of a pandemic. So, we are managing both and our team is doing all that we can to put forth what is needed to give our parents options, but also

not take our eye off the ball even as it pertains to next years. It is still coming and we are still preparing for that right now. You will see some of that information in what we share tonight.

### **BOARD TRAINING ON SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION PROCESS**

Charlene Peterson, Field Representative for New Jersey School Boards Association facilitated the Board Retreat. Part I of the retreat focused on the Chief Administrator Evaluation Process and Tool as outlined below.

#### Chief Administrator Evaluation Process

- Legal Guidelines
  - Ethics Reminder: A Board member whose relative works in the district may not take part in the evaluation process.
  - Accountability: Evaluation of the Chief School Administrator is the Board's means of oversight and appraisal of the effective management of the school district.
  - Legal Guidelines: N.J.S.A 18A:17-20.3a and N.J.A.C. 6A:10-8.1
  - QSAC requirements
- Evaluation Process
  - Sample Evaluation Process Calendar
  - Evaluation Process
    - District Goal Setting
    - District Goals Progress Updates
    - Superintendent Evaluation Pre-Conference
    - Superintendent Completes District Goals Self-Assessment and Evidence for 6 leadership standards
    - BOE Completes Individual Superintendent Evaluations
    - Non-conflicted Board members meet to review compiled Superintendent Evaluation Results and Develop Majority Opinion Annual Performance Report
    - Non-conflicted Board Members meet with the Superintendent to Discuss Annual Performance Report
    - Board President and Superintendent Sign and Date the Annual Performance Report by July 1.
- Pre-evaluation Conference to discuss/share:
  - Progress on Goals
  - Performance Based on Standards
  - Student Progress
  - Questions/Concerns
- Public Session - Progress Updates
- Executive Session - Evaluative Conversations
- Documentation/Evidence
- District Goals Assessment
- Sample of Compilation for a Goal
- Standards and Standards Assessment
- Sample of Compilation for a Standard
- Annual Performance Report & Template
- Annual Summary Conference
- Considerations and Online Resources

## PROGRESS OF DISTRICT GOALS

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools facilitated part II of the Board Retreat. Dr. Taylor presented a Powerpoint presentation on the 2020-2021 District Goal update which included the following:

- **Purpose**
  - To share with the Board of Education and public a snapshot of our (work groups) progress thus far in satisfying our District Goals.
  - Review the Board approved Merit Goals.
  - Take a deeper review of our Access & Equity update.
- **Goal#1 Facilities - Long Range Facilities Plan:**

The Superintendent of Schools will continue to lead the District's effort toward the successful completion of our \$160M construction project. While understanding the unpredictable nature of COVID 19's impact, this work should include bringing closure to the detailed bidding process for our Elementary School projects, with a goal of breaking ground and completing construction as expeditiously as possible. The articulation of our Secondary School construction projects should be brought to fruition, including: a timeframe for regulatory approval, design, stakeholder review, and construction etc. with a goal of the Board considering the submission for code review by June 2021.
- **Goal#2 Intentional Integration:**

By June 30, 2021, the Superintendent will have successfully initiated the South Orange Maplewood School District's Intentional Integration Initiative (III), positively impacting the incoming kindergarteners enrolling in September of 2021 via our 'Berkeley Esque' / Micro-neighborhood approach.
- **Goal#3 Curriculum and Instruction - Comprehensive Academic Approach:**

The Superintendent in concert with the Curriculum and Instruction Leadership will create a comprehensive academic approach that is both philosophical in its explanation of pedagogical beliefs, as well as pragmatic in its mandates and expectations. This goal should result in the creation of a living collegial document, which will ultimately represent a multi-year effort. With an emphasis on a collegial process that involves engaging our educators to ensure this is not a top-down methodology, but an authentic result of a shared process where all participatory voices are heard and valued.
- **Goal#4 Personnel Recruitment, Development and Retention of Highly Qualified Staff:**

The Superintendent will foster a dynamic learning community that supports the recruitment, development and retention of highly qualified staff. This goal will be measured by and should include an analysis of:

  - Data regarding the demographics and diversity of new hires and the overall demographics and diversity of the District's certificated and non-certificated staff."

- o The District's year-over-year employee performance/ evaluative trends, i.e. formal evaluations, climate survey, exit surveys etc.;
- o Leadership development opportunities, both for current School Leaders as well as aspiring internal professionals.
- Next Steps for Goals 1-4: Expected Timeline
- Merit Goals Reminder - Goals 1-4
- Evaluation Process Time Line - District Goals and Merit Goals

[PRESENTATION ON FILE IN THE BOARD SECRETARY'S OFFICE]

***Board Recessed at 10:22 p.m.***  
***Board Reconvened at 10:26 p.m.***

The Board will continue the discussion on the Progress of District Goals at the February 22, 2021 Board Meeting.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

None.

Future Meetings

The Board of Education will meet in Executive Session on Monday, February 22, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. via online video conference platform to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations and other matters to be announced at a later date. Immediately following the Closed Session, the Board of Education will meet in public session at 7:30 p.m. using the online video conference platform. Action will be taken.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Wright, to adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 10:36 p.m.

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Paul Roth, Board Secretary