

Special Meeting - Budget  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
May 3, 2021

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held using the online video conference platform on May 3, 2021.

Board President Thair Joshua called the meeting to order at 6:30 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, TAPintoSOMA.net, villagegreennj.com, all schools and is posted on the District website.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Cuttle, Board Member Joshua,  
Board Member Maini, Board Member Malespina,  
Board Member Siders, Board Member Winkfield,  
Board Member Wright, Board Member Zubieta,  
Student Rep. Forman

Absent: Board Member Bergin

EIGHT VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Winkfield to allow distance participation in our monthly Regular Board Meeting 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

Sarah Iozzio - Copresident of CHSMPA

Speaking on behalf of Columbia High School Music Parents Association (CHSMPA), we want to express our thanks for the actions taken to date to support the enhanced music opportunities for students this summer. We would like to encourage an additional desperately needed commitment to further bolster music instruction for the 2021-22 school year and beyond. The district's homepage emphasizes an exceptionally high commitment and access to music education and boasts of two awards. It is incumbent upon this district community lead by the Board of Education to live up to this nationally recognized exceptionally high commitment and access to music education.

We are aware of the previous spending of \$65,000 requested by Columbia High School music teachers Todd Van Beveren and Peter Bauer to spearhead summer music education into a month long music program and we applaud the decision and support the teachers. We are also aware of the two additional .4 music teachers in the middle schools, but we do not believe it is enough. In place and instead of these two additional part time teachers the district and Board of Education need to approve 4 additional fulltime music teachers for the district band and orchestra programs, two for the middle schools and two for the high school. We believe this because the music program is in jeopardy. In a typical noncovid school year approximately 400+ fifth graders choose to learn to play an instrument. These fifth grade students become the MMS & SOMS band and orchestra students who in turn populate the CHS marching band, concert band, orchestra and pit band for the musical. This school year began with only 248 fifth graders learning to play an instrument. Currently only 58 fifth graders continue to learn to play an orchestra and/or band instrument in school.

What does this mean for a district that purportedly values music education and demonstrates an exceptionally high commitment to access and excellence in music education? First, with as much that has happened during COVID, the students missing out on a public music education are those who cannot afford to obtain this education privately. Those students who can afford private lessons will continue to thrive. Those who cannot afford this luxury whether for reasons of finances or available time opportunity access outside of school will be those who are left behind. Secondly, we are a district of access and equity and we need to live to that designation in the area of music education. In fact, in NJ Schools Performance Report the portion of the report title District Highlights, we list the following: Nationally Recognized as one of the 100 Best Communities for Music Education Five Years in a Row. The reality is that 58 current fifth graders cannot possibly sustain an award winning level of music education in our district over the coming years. Todd Van Beveren estimates that the attrition in music education due to COVID at the fifth grade level and beyond will result in a 30% loss in orchestra members and the loss of three years of playing level overall. The

statistics for band are likely similar. These deficits in learning cannot be made up with the summer music program and the addition of only two part time music teachers in the middle schools.

Suzanne Holt

Based on our discussions with current CHS music educators with knowledge of the district's music programming, an additional 4 full-time music educators are needed over the coming school year to instruct students in individual band and orchestra instruments at the middle and high school levels, two at the middle school and two at the high school. These educators are the minimum of what is need to make up the loss of learning in playing on additional instruments occurring over the past 15 months of virtual school. The money is available. There is simply no argument to not do everything possible to sustain the SOMSD music education program. Plato said, *I will teach children to play music, physics and philosophy; but mostly music for patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.* If the Board of Education does not act now to address the losses of music education over the past year this will be an undeniable statement that this district is no longer willing to make the same exceptionally high commitment to its music program that's become an integral part of the South Orange Maplewood District.

Thank You  
Board of CHSMPA

Maris Doran

On behalf of my child's second grade Marshall Elementary class, I write today to express public acknowledgment of their teacher, Heather Mittiga. Our class has been continuously impressed with Heather's ability to navigate the challenges this past year. She has gone above and beyond in her efforts to maintain a sense of community and joy of learning across the virtual platform. Her creativity, consistency, and passion have been evident as she so beautifully translated teaching across this new space. In a year when the teaching landscape has been ever changing, and the structure constantly shifting without any of the usual norms, she has continuously implemented new and creative ways to continue to TEACH and lead her classroom as the trusted and respected educator she is. We, the parents of her students, want to make a public recognition of her herculean efforts this year to rise to and meet the needs of her students. We remain so grateful Heather Mittiga teaches in our district and that our children (and we!) had the benefit of her leadership during this particularly challenging time.

Signed, Heather Mittiga's 2nd grade, Marshall Elementary School  
Parents

Dr. Ronald Taylor

I want to echo the thanks of the parents who took the time to recognize their teacher and the efforts put forward by their teacher during an unprecedented time. I am not allowed speak about the performance of employees because that will be evaluating in public but we are all happy to hear this.

It is the beginning of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage month and we will be sharing some resources with our community as we recognize that very important acknowledgement, especially during the current climate that we are all privy to.

Saturday was Principal Appreciation Day. I reached out to our Principals and I thought it was very appropriate that principals will have their appreciation day on a Saturday. For those of us who have been Principals, Saturday is the day that we sometimes look forward to. To our principals and those watching please reach out to your principals and tell them how much you appreciate them. They have been an integral part of us getting to Phase 5 of our reopening plan.

To our wonderful music advocates from CHSMPA, the plan we have in our budget was recommended by our Supervisor of Fine Arts, who very thoughtfully and carefully backwards mapped what was needed at this time to fulfill the gap that we know exists. You have been heard and I am an extreme proponent of the Arts. We know the Arts have a direct link to academics for many of our students and we appreciate that. The Board heard your advocacy loud and clear. The Arts are definitely a consideration in the work we are doing this year and last year as part of our budget process.

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

#### 2021-2022 SCHOOL BUDGET AND TAX LEVY PRESENTATION

Andrea Del Guercio, Acting Business Administrator presented the 2021-2022 School Budget and Tax Levy Presentation which included the following:

- Projected Revenue
  - Projected Operating Budget
  - Revenue Sources
- Expenditures
  - Salaries and contracted services
  - Tuition
  - Transportation
  - Other Benefits
  - Special Services, Technology, Curriculum, Maintenance & Operation, Utilities, Central Admin, custodial supplies
- Additional Funding
- Expenditures vs Revenue

- Tax Impact
  - Estimated School Tax Impact
  - Year over Year Tax Impact
- Budget Calendar
- Audit Report

[presentation on file in Board Secretary's office and on the district website]

2021-2022 SOMSD BUDGET UPDATE ADDITIONAL STATE AID FUNDING - Dr. Taylor

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools presented the 2021-2022 Budget Update on Additional State Aid Funding outlining the following:

- District Priorities
  - Student Recovery from lack of in-person instruction
  - (Academic & Social Emotional)
  - Comprehensive Equity Plan
  - Office of Civil Rights
  - BPW Settlement
  - Under-credit/Over-aged
  - Student Support
- CEP/OCR/BPW - Access & Equity (Academic Intervention)
  - Student Academic Recovery
    - Access and Equity
    - SLAM Lab Personnel
      - Equal Opportunity Schools
      - Advance Placement for all
    - Middle School STEM Intervention
      - Increased District Sponsored Tutoring
      - Increased Funding for Summer Opportunities
- Social Emotional Resources for Students
  - Expansion of Traditional ESY Program
    - Summer/Fall/Spring Arts Program
    - Challenge Days for Secondary Schools
  - Conversion of former Director of Safety
    - Access and Equity Funding
    - Continued support from additional Mental Health Specialist
- Comprehensive Student Recovery (Academic & Social Emotional)
  - Academic Intervention
  - Social Emotional

[presentation on file in Board Secretary's office and on the district website]

Board member discussion following the presentations included but was not limited to the following questions and concerns:

- Board Member Zubieta - Why hire outside vendors like Equal Opportunity Schools and Challenge day instead of using internal staff?
- Dr. Taylor - I have seen opportunities for us to take things on within our District, but there are levels of expertise, especially when we have had systemic challenges in a specific area that outside vendors bring a level of specificity, expertise and finite view to help us address these issues.
- Board Member Maini - By approving this budget are we approving the reorg of the security position or is this a suggestion that will still need to go through the process of defining that position?
- Dr. Taylor - If you approve this budget as it is you are approving the funding for this new position. We have a long way to go before you review and approve the job description, advertise and hire for this position.
- Board Member Winkfield - I would like to applaud the inclusion of social emotional findings in the budget. I think it is a really important opportunity to invest in that and I would love to encourage us as a district to think about social emotional supports for the adults in our district in addition to our students. In thinking about what our teachers and administrators have been through in the last 15 months or so they have also experienced a lot of trauma. We should think about using some of the funds to provide for some healing for the adults in our district as well.
- Dr. Taylor - Thank You Board Member Winkfield. This is such a thoughtful comment. It is great to hear this sentiment. I know that one of the things that surprised me when I first came to New Jersey to work was the many accountability regulations regarding using funds for adults. This will be one of the conversations that I have with the Achieve Foundation and other funding sources not governed by our accountability regulations to help provide healing and help with the challenges and intensity that has overtaken us all.
- Board Member Malespina - C&I asked for a lot more in-depth data related to specific items in the budget, especially with regards to some of the new initiatives that you want to put in. Some of the proposals cost a lot of money and I highly recommend that we have more conversations about these new initiatives to determine if it is what our students really need; the data has not been shown to us to prove that.

- Dr. Taylor - I respectfully disagree. I responded with specificity to the emails that I received from C&I requesting a response about some of the cause and effect items and how some of the concerns are connected to the Access and Equity work that we shared. I disagree that we have not shared data; I think we shared a lot of data, we can always share more. As we are moving through this school year, every marking period yields more data and every marking period we are seeing student responses to interventions. Things are ongoing and moving forward. As Board Member Maini said, what you are approving are line items. The Board still has to approve everything that is within this budget. Every month we share with you what we are doing and what we are recommending so the Board can discuss and ask questions before approval. We understand the want for more data because Board members want to know that when they approve items it will resolve our problems. I feel very comfortable with what we put forth in the budget.
- Board Member Cuttle - Thank You Mrs. Del Guercio and Dr. Taylor. I would like to echo Board Member Winkfield's comments regarding including social emotional supports for all staff in our district on all levels. I want to challenge us to think of our budget as the moral document outlining what we are going to invest in and how we are going to do it. In having conversations on how we are going to build better student investments to help them become their best selves, to thrive inside and outside the classroom. I look forward to hearing about the additional programming opportunities as we move the budget forward. Every student and dollar matters and counts as we take the steps forward together in creating the path to not only solving the problems we have now, but making sure that we are creating something that we are embedding into the climate and culture of our District that will go beyond this Board to help all students become their best selves.
- Dr. Taylor - Well said, thank you.
- Board Member Zubieta - When I hear Dr. Taylor's explanation of why we need to use outside vendors, Board Member Winkfield's request for social emotional support for our students and staff and when in the previous meeting we talked about the one year extension for courtesy bussing because this past year has been difficult for our families all of these things make sense to me. The issue is I do not just see this document as a document of our moral values or obligations. I also see this document as a fiscal document. I cannot think of a single program that I would want to cut, but we do need to ask ourselves why is it we talk about socio-economic class but we do not talk about the effects of a 2% tax levy, which results in a total tax levy of 3.2%, given our previous obligations based on debt service. Why aren't we talking

about the families who have lost jobs and the effect of taxes on them. I am not saying there should be a 0% tax levy but there has to be a number between 0-2% that makes sense to give our citizen's tax relief.

- Dr. Taylor - This is my tenth year as a Superintendent. I always joke that for every budget that I am affiliated with there is probably one less year of my life that I will have on the end. These are the things that we think about, being balanced and understanding. These are the things that Mrs. Del Guercio and our former Business Administrator Mr. Roth were focused on when we met with the FFT Committee months ago. Not spending every nickel available to us because COVID shut us down and interrupted our normal budget cycle. We actually returned a significant amount of funds to taxpayers. Part of the reason there is a 2% cap on districts is because that is about the average of what the cost of living increase is for employees. If we do not keep that floor raising every year, we will end up hitting a fiscal cliff and having to do major cuts. In Mrs. Del Guercio's presentation it showed that we have zero banked cap left. Banked cap shows that we have not gone to our 2% cap, we have it for a rainy day, but when that happens you have almost compounding interest from salaries and benefits that we are responsible for every year. I think that this Board and our Administration has been very thoughtful of the fiscal circumstances of the community and gave an approval of a very significant return to the taxpayers. We also have to keep in mind that the business that we are in is improving our district for our students, so we have to keep that in mind when we don't go to 2% it will catch up with us. We have to keep our floor strong to avoid massive cuts.
- Board President Joshua - We know that the State came through with additional aid for us even in the year where the State's finances were hit and all the things that COVID did not only to us but our national economy. Through the work of Mrs. Del Guercio and her predecessor Mr. Roth, we are in a situation where we do not have to cut and as Dr. Taylor said we should commended them for that because we know we have been in situations in the past where the Board has had to cut positions. We have had staff come in to public board meetings explaining why their position should not be cut. We do not want to be in that situation, so I do think the budget put forth has been very thoughtful and I am grateful for all of us that we are not being forced to cut positions going forward.
- Board Member Wright - Happy Teacher's Appreciation Week to our teaching staff, Happy Administrative Assistant's day to our Administrative Assistants and to all of our staff we appreciate all you do. I am concerned about the cuts to Title I, II, III funds and how it will affect teacher salaries and programs. What

programs and staffing are we losing that will affect our title I students.

- Dr. Taylor - I am not aware of a drastic reduction in our Title I funding. We can research this and get back to you. This is federal funding and so it is possible that with all of the other funding i.e. the Cares Act and other federal funding that title funds have been reduced.
- Mrs. Wright - What can Equal Opportunity Schools do for us?
- Dr. Taylor - We have not given a contract to any vendor at this point, but a program or vendor like this helps to find areas of implicit bias within an organization. Things that are keeping your higher level courses from being more representative of the district's demographics.

[presentation on file in Board Secretary's office and on the district website]

ITEM FOR ACTION

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Maini, that the Board of Education approves the following:

4135. WHEREAS, on March 15, 2021, the South Orange and Maplewood Board of Education approved a preliminary budget to be submitted to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval; and

WHEREAS, the preliminary budget was approved by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools on April 8, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the preliminary budget was advertised in the News Record of Maplewood and South Orange on April 22, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the preliminary budget was presented to the public during a public hearing on March 15, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the total amount of the 2021-2022 budget shall be:

	<b>2021-2022 Total Expenditures</b>	<b>Less: Anticipated Revenues</b>	<b>Tax Levy</b>
<b>General Fund</b>	141,695,735	15,894,948	125,800,787
<b>Special Revenues</b>	8,675,670	8,675,670	0
<b>Debt Service</b>	9,311,827	2,264,278	7,047,549
<b>Total</b>	<b>159,683,232</b>	<b>26,834,896</b>	<b>132,848,336</b>

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Education hereby adopts the 2021-2022 School District Budget; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Board of Education approves travel & related expense reimbursements for 2021-2022 in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7, to a maximum expenditure of \$200,000, for all staff and board members.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT there should be raised for the General Fund \$125,800,787 for the ensuing 2021-22 school year; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT there should be raised for Debt Service Fund, \$7,047,549 for the ensuing 2021-22 school year.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4135 Passed. YES: Board Member Cuttle,  
Board Member Joshua, Board Member Maini,  
Board Member Siders, Board Member Winkfield  
NO: Board Member Malespina, Board Member Wright,  
Board Member Zubieta

#### HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Board Member Malespina - Is the Board doing anything in honor of Teacher Appreciation Week? It has been an incredible year and I feel that we as a Board should acknowledge them in some way, to thank them for their hard work and dedication. This also goes for principals and administrators who have really stepped up in a time of constant change.

Board President Joshua - I will work with the Executive Committee to write something formal this week that we can send to the rest of the Board for feedback before a statement is released.

#### FUTURE MEETINGS

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, May 10, 2021, at 6:00 pm via the online video 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 8:00 pm via the online video platform. Action will be taken.

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, May 17, 2021, at 6:30 pm via the online video 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 pm via the online video platform. Action will be taken.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Cuttle, that the Board of Education meet in Executive Session prior to the May 17, 2021, Public Meeting to discuss personnel, legal and Special Education matters, and negotiations, the nature of which will be made public at a future date. Motion unanimously approved.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Cuttle that the Board of Education adjourn to Executive Session to discuss personnel, legal matters and negotiations. Motion unanimously approved at 8:07 p.m.

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Andrea Del Guercio, Board Secretary