

Reorganizational Meeting
South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
May 10, 2021

A Reorganizational Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held using the online video conference platform on May 10, 2021.

Board President Thair Joshua called the meeting to order at 8:08 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 and all schools.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Bergin, 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: None

NINE VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Zubieta to allow distance participation in our monthly Regular Board Meeting during the COVID-19 emergency.

Motion passed 9 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

Abigail Murtagh

We have recently heard about the programming the district has put in place to address student learning loss. You've devoted many resources to bridging the academic gap. I am speaking tonight to ask the board to ask the District to devote the same resources to creating equally robust programs to address the social and emotional gap our students are facing. Many students are not ok. They are suffering from anxiety and depression, they have lost love ones, they have lost opportunities and milestones. They have not been able to process this massive upheaval in their lives. They are anxious about reentering school spaces, navigating friendship and disagreements. While some students are thrilled to be back in school others are reentering a space that has not been positive or nurturing for them. Our district must step in and help these students. I know the district has increased the number of social workers meeting with students this year and this is helping many. But it is only helping those who speak up and all of our students can benefit greatly from the support of our social work professionals. I am asking you to use the expertise of the district social workers to develop specific age appropriate social emotional curricula that can be delivered to students in the fall. Create programs that will give students the space and vocabulary to better understand and express what they are experiencing. Create a framework that classes can use throughout the year to do this work. Please do not just rely on social workers being available to those who reach out. Please do not just set aside time blocks and class schedules or distribute a list of generic topics for teachers to build upon. Please take the time over the next months to use the resources you have to create a specific scaffolded robust social emotional program to help all of our students.

Thank You

Keri Donahue

I would like to say to Dr. Taylor and the Board that it is time to open our schools for full-time learning for all students five days per week. I did some research today and learned that more than 3.5 million people in New Jersey are fully vaccinated. Additionally 4,813,516 have received their first dose of the vaccine. We also know that more than 75% of the teachers in our district are vaccinated. High school students have been eligible for the vaccine for several weeks now and today the vaccine was approved for children 12 and older. I've also learned that over 102% of persons age 65 and older have been vaccinated and as expected, as the number of people vaccinated rise the number of COVID cases has fallen. Today there were 459 new cases reported in the whole state. There were zero reported in South Orange today and two in Maplewood. Essex County as a whole has a change of -41 reported cases. Vaccines work! That framework in mind, we must now reopen the schools to all of our students but especially to our middle and high school students five days per week full time. We no longer have to wait and see. With the science and data that has emerged over the last year we know that the risk of becoming

infected with COVID in a school setting is extremely low and in fact is lower than the transmission rate in our communities. Dr. Taylor you have acknowledged that there is no evidence that COVID is being transmitted in our schools. Please do not brush off the last few weeks of school for the students. To them, these six weeks are everything. Six weeks to really engage in their academics, to be with their teachers, to see their friends, form new friendships, return to health and normalcy and to recoup a small portion of all they lost this year. Dr. Taylor, I implore you, give our children their six weeks.

Heather Cross

My name is Heather Cross and I am the mother of two MMS students.

Firstly, I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard this year to get our children back to school for in-person learning this year. Now that our community has reached the medium level on the risk matrix and cases continue to trend downward, we need to give kids in grades 6-12 more in-person learning opportunities. According to both CDC and NJ guidelines middle schoolers can be 3' apart in schools which should allow all those who are attending in person to attend 5 days per week. Every additional day of in-person instruction for our kids is critical and the district should do everything possible to maximize the number of in-person instructional hours for our students from now through the end of the year.

Thank you.

Alicia Humphries

Please confirm what Model # of the Odorox machines are being used in the soma schools? Please also confirm if they are on at all times or if they used at certain times? I have HUGE concerns that ozone generator machines are being used as an air purifier but in fact they are damaging our children's lungs and putting our children at risk. Ozone Generator Machines should never be used indoors where humans are let alone around children. It is deeply troubling that Odorox machines are in our schools bathrooms, hallways and gyms etc.

Allison Kopcha

While we have been pleased with the re-opening progress, there is still more we should be doing especially for our MS and HS kids. The teachers have been vaccinated, windows can remain open. 2 partial days is simply not enough. I finally saw a glimpse of my child again for the first time in 14 mos. Like so many, he's fallen behind academically and emotionally. Our kids need your support.

Anya Hoffman

My daughters are in 8th grade at MMS and 4th grade at Clinton. They have both been thrilled to finally go back to school these past two weeks, but it's still just not enough time in school. Now that NJ Department of

Health has rated the state and our region as being at only moderate (yellow) risk, we urge you to allow the middle school and high school kids to combine cohorts and go to school 5 days per week and to allow the elementary school kids to have FULL days 5 days a week. Our formerly school-loving kids have had little to no motivation while learning virtually, and the extended school time would be an enormous help not only to get them back on track academically but also for their social and emotional health.

Thank you!

Jessica Gurtman

My son is a kindergartner and every day comes back energized by being in school. He was excited to actually see the gym this week. I can only look forward and forget about hindsight and what's happened, so I beg the powers that be that he has the opportunity to attend five FULL DAYS a week. It will prepare him for what to anticipate in the first grade.

Jessica Keuskamp

Time to get all kids back in school 5 days. Kids are done with remote. Kids are behind enough let's get them back to speed.

Izzy Gladstone

Can we expect 5 full days in September? I'm a parent of two elementary school-aged children and I would be very disappointed with the district if this wasn't possible.

Pete Pachal

It's great the elementary school is back to 5 days a week, but I want to know what the district is doing to 1) Extend the day to a FULL day, 2) Allow the students to eat lunch at school, and 3) Return to fully in-person instruction (no Chromebooks).

Meredith Lambert

Two questions:

1. Why can't the middle schoolers be released for lunch then allowed back for 7th & 8th periods. There are plenty of places for them to eat outdoors. MMS is a spit from town and the park. And if a student chooses not to then they can just do 7/8th virtual but why can't the option be there?
2. With Maplewood township having released a statement saying we are now 'moderate' and cases down, can the middle school cohorts be combined so that they go 5 days vs 2?"

Jennifer Carlson

Thank you Dr. Taylor and the board for moving forward with reopening plan for elementary schools, it's time now to do the same for middle and high schools. Case numbers are down, teachers are vaccinated,. Give families the choice to send their teenagers to school five full days a week. It is not too late in the year: we have over 7 weeks remaining. Two half days is not enough. For our family, virtual school is not school. It is silently staring at a computer screen. Let's follow our neighbors in Livingston and other surrounding towns and allow our teenagers back in real school.

Leslie Enright

I am less concerned about children going back 5 days per week than them having substantive and engaging lessons while in school. The current model whereby (some) teachers teach to the screens is disengaging and uncreative. Teachers have the technology and they should be asked to use the technology creatively to teach to the students directly. I know some teachers are doing this already, and I cannot understand why others do not. The current model does not enhance learning, social skills or any of the benefits of being in a physical classroom.

Heather Brochin

I am writing to advocate for 5 days per week of school for middle and high school students and consideration of permitting them to leave campus or eat outside and return after lunch. These kids have lost out on so much. I have observed a dramatic improvement in their emotional health on the days that they are in person. These children need more and a return to a 5 day a week schedule and longer days. The high school students have had a half day schedule for more than a year. It is ludicrous. They have lost the ability to sustain a full day of classwork which will not serve them well in the future.

Spring and mild temperatures, widely available vaccines, and decreasing community spread provide this. Other districts within our county have middle and high schools students attending daily. Schools with old buildings have middle and high school students attending daily. Communities with diverse populations have students attending daily. Every District is unique, but there is nothing specific about our District that makes it more vulnerable to COVID spread. Masking, hand hygiene, windows open, it is working.

Let's do the work now and let our kids experience 6 weeks of full time school. Let's not make the mistake of sitting back and riding this out. Let's continue the momentum and let our kids experience support and some normalcy in May and June. This will also help us work toward the fall. Our students deserve it. Every day, every hour of more in-person instruction results in a healthier student and school community. Nothing is 100% safe. But all the science and experts are stating that the risk of having more in-person instruction is tolerable and appropriate. Thank you.

Kate Walker

Dear Dr. Taylor and members of the board, I am writing to request that you increase the hours and days that our children are currently in school. We thank you for the hard work that went into the reopening in phases 3 and 4, which has been life changing for the emotional, academic and social well-being of the children of our district. However, it's time for more. Elementary school needs to be a full day. Even given the guidelines of 6 feet of distance during unmasked time, we need to find a way for our youngest learners to eat lunch in school and have a full day in person. If hundreds of school districts around our region are able to do this, surely we can find a way. The same goes for increasing the number of days that middle and high schoolers are in school. As the COVID numbers from a public health standpoint continue to move in the right direction, we need to drop the cohorts at SOMS, MMS and CHS and get these children back into school 5 days a week. There are still 7 weeks left in this school year - we need you to move quickly towards a phase 5 reopening, as every hour counts at this late stage of the school year. Please move forward with these reopening plans as it's safe, it's possible, and it's time.

Thank you.

Melanie Giger

To all who have worked to transition the school district to Phase 5, thank you. My 8th grader attended in-person school for the first time on April 26. I observed more engagement in school and a lighter, more positive disposition immediately. My 6th grader had several days in school prior to April, but the consistent in-person instruction is having a noted positive effect on him as well.

Knowing that all grades are back to in-person instruction is a relief. But our work is not done. Spring and mild temperatures, widely available vaccines, and decreasing community spread provide the opportunity to move to more in-person instruction for middle and high school students. Let's work toward having middle and high schoolers to attend school five days per week. Other districts within our county have middle and high schools students attending daily. Schools will old buildings have middle and high school students attending daily. Communities with diverse populations have students attending daily. Every District is unique, but there is nothing specific about our District that makes it more vulnerable to COVID spread.

Although we have had positive cases in the buildings, I believe that there has not been in-school spread. Masking, hand hygiene, windows open it is working. With six weeks left of school it is tempting to "just ride it out". That would be a mistake. Doing the work now when we have created momentum in opening schools will be easier than doing the work to create a more "normal" schedule in the fall. Working this school year to have students in buildings for more time will make it easier to start next year with pre-pandemic schedules. And our students deserve it. Every day, every hour of more in-person instruction results in a

healthier student and school community. Nothing is 100% safe. But all the science and experts are stating that the risk of having more in-person instruction is tolerable and appropriate.

Thank you.

Rebecca Scheer

Even though the majority of students are in the classroom, on days when a teacher is absent, classes are asynchronous. (This is apparently due to the fact that subs are not trained to use Canvas, since this modality is still being used in class.)

This is not OK. Asynchronous learning is in no way an appropriate alternative for virtual learning, much less in-person instruction. When my son has an asynchronous day, he completes his work in about 15 minutes. This is not nearly enough instruction or class time to count for a legally mandated school day.

Alexa Ralff

Thank you all for pushing to get us back to phase 5! I write to you to encourage us to keep going. Most of the state and the county are 3 steps ahead of us at this pt. Anyone who wants a vaccine can get it, including many of our high schoolers. My 10th grader said he was more engaged in The 2 half days he had in person last week then he had been in a year. These kids need your leadership. I ask that we work towards 5 days of in person instruction for our high schoolers over the next few weeks. The year is not done.

Much thanks for your consideration.

Heather Hartzell

Thank you for all of the work that has been done to open elementary schools 5 mornings a week. The positive changes I have seen in my children's outlook on life are a balm after so many months of virtual school. However, given consistently falling rates of COVID infection in our communities and the widespread availability of vaccines I believe there is no reason that children cannot be in school for full days. I also want to encourage the district to bring back middle and high school students for 5 full days of instruction as well. There is no justifiable reason not to do this. Please also continue to work towards 5 full in person days for all students next academic year.

Thank you.

Michelle Reback

With the NJDOH reporting that New Jersey is now at "moderate" risk and in the yellow, it would be a perfect time to reevaluate in person learning for Middle School and High School students especially since our numbers continue to decline and our community spread is low. With more

and more people able to be vaccinated, which includes 16 years and older, our numbers will continue to decline. Can you please advise if the district is working towards adding more days for these students? I am specifically concerned with Middle School as I have a 6th grader who would benefit for more in person days. The social and emotional toll remote learning has brought to my child, and I am sure many others in the district are devastating. Many students are feeling a lot of anxiety about going back to school and being with their peers, not because they are worried about getting COVID, but because they have forgotten how to talk to and be around other kids after being alone in their bedrooms doing school. The Middle School years are such a socially important time for these kids as they are learning and craving more independence, something that is not happening while they are behind a computer screen at home.

Many districts across NJ have been back 5 days, whether it be half days or full days for a while, but with the news of NJ now being moderate risk and hopefully most teachers/staff are now vaccinated and hopefully more students are in the process of being vaccinated, I hope you are having conversations with your counterparts across the area to see how they are making this work, and with the BOE to work towards getting all of our kids back full time.

There is no reason why, if other districts can be 5 full days that we can't do this, even 5 half days would be a win at this point. Why is Maplewood DOH advising against lunch when other districts are allowing lunch as part of their full day program? Livingston Public Schools are back full time as of today, May 10th, Millburn Middle and High School are full days, still with cohorts, but alternate Friday's, they also have tents for set up outside for lunch with the auditorium and gym as back up). Can you also speak to what the district plans for the fall? There should be nothing other than 5 full days.

Our children deserve this, with only 6 weeks left of school, let's end on a high note and bring all the kids back.

Thank you

Katie Tichacek

Thank you, to BOE, SOMSD, and SOMEA and any other acronyms that has got us to where we are today, which is, with kids IN school!! As frustrating as this was as a parent, it was never lost on me how frustrating this has been for all involved. We are now stronger for it and very much aware of the HIGH benefits of having kids in school and LOW risks of COVID transmission in schools. I feel like we have seen science, common sense, and sheer will overcome fear - we can't stop now. we need to have all K-5 kids in school for 5 full days and HS/MS kids in school for 5 half days. Every hour in our kids' education and well-being matters.

Regina Eckert

I'm a parent to a Kindergartener and it has been truly amazing to see how much happier my daughter has been since being in school 5 days a week. Her teacher has noticed that she is much more engaged now that she's in more of a routine and in a classroom with most of her classmates. Are there any plans to get the children in for full days for the remaining weeks of school we have left this year? With warmer weather upon us, can we get creative to also utilize outdoor space for snack and lunch breaks, use tents during inclement weather (as long as it's not too dangerous?

It would be a mistake to try to just ride this out and by doing the work now and iterating as needed, it can help make opening up full time in the fall much easier."

Dr. Taylor responded to comments made during the Hearing of Individuals and Delegations with the following statement:

To those who spoke and wrote in your sentiment is obvious and is definitely acknowledged. This is a Special Board Meeting focused on the reappointment of staff members so I cannot give as detailed a response as I usually would, because it will take away from what this meeting was originally advertised for. I can share very briefly that we have not given up on opening. We have scheduled our Departments of Health to check-in as we stated in our Phase 3 Update. Our County is now yellow which makes our spread risk moderate not zero. Our Departments of Health have very granular township information that shows trends and we are still working towards returning. We are ecstatic that we have students from all of our grade levels returning to in-person instruction. We are still being cautious because we are still in a health crisis and we have to remember that. I will have more information as we meet with the Departments of Health.

***Board Member Wright joined the meeting at 8:35 p.m.
Nine voting members and one student representative present***

ITEMS FOR ACTION

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Malespina that the Board of Education approves resolution 4136 and 4138.

Motion withdrawn

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Malespina to approve resolution 4136

4136. APPROVE REAPPOINTMENT OF STAFF FOR THE 2021-22 SCHOOL YEAR

- LIST NO. 1 - Reappointment of Non-Tenured Staff
- LIST NO. 2 - Reappointment of All Other Staff

[lists on file in Board Secretary's Office]

ROLL CALL: Motion 4136 passed. YES: Bergin, Cuttle, Joshua, Maini, Siders, Winkfield NO: Malespina, Wright, Zubieta

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Malespina to discuss resolution 4138. Motion unanimously approved.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Maini to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss personnel matters. Motion to adjourn unanimously approved at 8:53 p.m.

Board Members (except Board Member Cuttle) return from Executive Session at 9:16 p.m. Eight Voting Members and One Student Representative Present

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Maini to withdraw resolution 4138. Motion to withdraw resolution 4138 unanimously approved.

Motional made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Malespina to approve resolution 4137.

4137. Awards the contract for Renovations and Additions to Clinton and Jefferson Elementary Schools to DMD Contracting LLC of Wayne, New Jersey for the following amount:

Base Bid	\$22,320,000
Alternate AB-03	\$ 60,000
Alternate AB-04	\$ 30,000
Total	\$22,410,000

ROLL CALL: Motion 4137 passed. YES: Bergin, Joshua, Maini, Malespina, Siders, Winkfield, Wright, Zubieta NO: None

4138. WITHDRAWN

**Board Member Cuttle joined the meeting at 9:20 p.m.
Nine Voting Members and One Student Representative Present**

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Board Member Siders opened a discussion on converting a standing Board Committee (Curriculum and Instruction Committee C&I) to a committee of the whole, which means all Board members will be a member of the committee. Board Member Siders is making this recommendation because there is a lot of information presented at the C&I Committee meetings that can be beneficial to all Board Members to hear. The C&I Committee receives a lot of presentations about items that eventually come to the Board for approval because they have a financial impact. The rest of the Board has to make decisions on whether or not to pass these initiatives

but the Board does not receive the presentations or information needed to make these decisions. Star Renaissance and Teacher's College presentations are examples of the presentations that would be beneficial to all Board members. At tomorrow's C&I meeting there will be a presentation on Effective School Solutions (ESS) program based at Columbia High School and detailed information about what is being proposed for our summer school programs. This information should be shared with the entire Board. Historically C&I has been a challenging committee for the Board. It is difficult to make decisions and for decisions to reside on the shoulders of four members when it really needs the dedication and input of all Board Members.

Board members discuss Board Members Sidors' recommendation. The public will be able to participate in committee meetings of the whole. Dr. Taylor and the Board discussed how to move forward with a committee of the whole and the need to streamline the C&I committee.

Ms. Butler reminded the Board that if policies and/or bi-laws need to be changed in order to create a committee of the whole that these changes will require first and second reading.

Future Meetings

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, May 17, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. via the 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 a Special Public Session at 7:30 p.m. via the online video conference platform. Action will be taken.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Bergin, that the Board of Education meet in Executive Session prior to the May 17, 2021 Special Public Meeting.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua that the Board of Education adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 9:47 p.m.

Andrea Del Guercio, Acting Board Secretary