

South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
Reorganization Meeting
January 5, 2022

A Reorganization Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held using the online video conference platform on January 5, 2022.

Board Secretary Eric Burnside 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 and the District website.

Motion made by Board Secretary Eric Burnside, seconded by Board Member Winkfield to allow distance participation in our reorganization meeting.

Motion unanimously approved.

OATH OF OFFICE

The Board viewed the recording Mr. Burnside administering the oaths of office to the elected Board Members: Qawi Telesford, Arun Vadlamani and Kaitlin Wittleder [The signed Oaths of Office are on file in the Board Secretary's Office.]

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Bergin, Board Member Joshua,
Board Member Malespina, Board Member Siders,
Board Member Telesford, Board Member Vadlamani
Board Member Winkfield, Board Member Wittleder
Board Member Wright, Student Rep. Morros

Absent: None

NINE VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Burnside explained the process for the election of officers and called for nominations for President of the Board.

Board Member Bergin nominated Board Member Joshua. Board Member Wright nominated Board Member Malespina. There were no further nominations for President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Joshua as President: YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani Winkfield NO: Malespina, Wright ABSTAIN: Wittleder

Board Member Joshua was elected President and assumed the Chair.

Board President Joshua made the following statement:

Thank you, Board Secretary Burnside and thank you fellow board colleagues for entrusting me with this honor once again. I am excited for the opportunity to lead the Board during these challenging times and I am grateful and hopeful for the progress we will make.

One of my biggest take aways from serving on the Board in 2021 came from Dr. Fergus' Equity Report. The surveys revealed many people recognize there is an equity problem in the district. However, many people do not feel that they are a part of the problem. I challenge all of us starting with me, my board colleagues, administration and all of the adults in our school buildings to acknowledge that we are part of the problem and to look internally as to how we can we can be part of the solution. The solution to provide more equitable outcomes for our students and also let us commit to having the hard conversations necessary to move the district forward courteously, respectfully and honestly. For me as well as my Board colleagues I will end by paraphrasing a quote from Q-Tip from a Tribe Called Quest, "And let's ensure that our egos are at idle, because the students are the task."

President Joshua called for nominations for 1st Vice President of the Board.

Board Member Wright nominated Board Member Malespina. Board Member Siders nominated Board Member Bergin. There were no further nominations for 1st Vice President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Malespina as 1st Vice President: YES: Malespina, Wright NO: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield ABSTAIN: Wittleder

ROLL CALL for Board Member Bergin as 1st Vice President: YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield Wittleder NO: Malespina, Wright

Board Member Bergin was elected 1st Vice President.

President Joshua called for nominations for 2nd Vice President of the Board.

Board Member Vadlamani nominated Board Member Wittleder as 2nd Vice President. Board Member Wright nominated Board Member Malespina. There were no further nominations for 2nd Vice President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Wittleder as 2nd Vice President:

YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder
NO: Malespina, Wright

Board Member Wittleder was elected 2nd Vice President.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE - *Dr. Ronald G. Taylor*

As everyone knows we are returning from winter break which concluded on Monday and we began virtual learning on Tuesday. In this time we have held a follow-up meeting with our Departments of Health along with our elected officials to discuss our shift to virtual learning and also the follow-up on the previous meeting about the surge of Omicron in our community and our schools. I urge everyone to check our latest newsletters that were released prior to break, during break and since break has concluded. There is some very important information there.

I am very happy and proud to say that our shift to temporary virtual instruction was seamless. Our parents, students and teachers did a fabulous job of following up on previous activities. Thank you to Mr. Bonds and the rest of the I.T. Department for assisting with some of the questions that come when we make this shift such as forgotten passwords and requests for chromebook replacements. I would also like to acknowledge our Departments of Health for being there for us and being active partners during these trying times.

I want to affirm and confirm that our plans for returning to in person learning on January 10 are still our plans moving forward. We have confirmed them a number of times while also acknowledging the number of school districts since we made this announcement that has joined us in this virtual setting to allow for our students and staff members to hopefully take a COVID test to ensure that our holiday activities will not bring the Omircron variant into our classrooms.

Last but not least I would like to confirm again for everyone that we are continuing our work at Underhill Field. We did make an announcement previously that our target for opening Underhill Field with the security updates would be the beginning of January. I just got an update that work is coming to close fruition very shortly. Were expecting within the next few weeks for that work to be complete and we will give an entire announcement for the community around the next steps for Underhill Field. We are keeping a close eye on the contractor who is helping us with this security updates.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Matthew Gamage

On December 14, I received an email stating that my child has been identified as a close contact of a case of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) at Clinton School. Four days after this exposure, my child was congested and did not go to school. Later that day they had a fever and tested positive with an at-home rapid test, which was confirmed

with a PCR test over the weekend and I notified the school. We have no other known exposure to a case of COVID-19 aside from the one at school and I have spoken with other Clinton families that have had a similar experience.

On December 22, Dr. Taylor communicated in a letter that 4 days of virtual instruction would begin on January 4. In that letter he wrote: "Thankfully, there has been no evidence of in-school COVID transmission..."

This was very shortly after the district announced closure of both Columbia and SOMS for the remainder of the week due to a "considerable uptick" of COVID-19 among students.

It is gaslighting to state "there has been no evidence of in-school COVID transmission..." There may not be definitive proof, but there is certainly evidence to draw the conclusion that there is in fact in-school COVID transmission.

If there truly were no evidence, then there is no reason to quarantine students after exposure to a close contact or close school buildings for in person instruction.

Can we just be honest about what we know and what we don't know, please?

Cathleen Mitchell

I find it concerning that district administration continues to say that "there is no evidence of in-school [COVID] transmission" when the reality is that contact tracing has broken down to such a degree that this data is simply not available. Our local and county health departments are understandably overwhelmed, but the consequence is that many families are waiting a week or more before being contacted about a COVID positive case and some families are not being contacted at all. Calls, when they do occur, are not collecting the type of detailed information that would enable the district to determine whether in-school transmission has occurred. And meanwhile there are a large number of families who are confident that the only place their children could have contracted COVID is in school.

I am concerned that unless district administration acknowledges the realities of the current Omicron surge, there will be little interest in adjusting mitigation measures, which are necessary to better protect our children and staff, and to keep schools safe and open.

Thank you for your time.

Laina Stapleton

I would like to know the basis of Dr. Taylor's statement that "there is no evidence of in-school [COVID] transmission."

What evidence is there that the cases that closed an entire school before break were NOT caused by in school transmission?

There has been a lack of contact tracing and such a delay in close contact notification that parents at several schools have felt compelled to share their own positive results with their classes because the district will take several more days to provide this information.

District administration has a responsibility to address this and increase mitigation measures, to better protect our children and staff, and to keep schools safe and open.

Until that happens, a virtual option must be made available for students at all grade levels.

Philip Gross

Dr Taylor has said that we "cannot" requiring testing for a return to classes. I do not understand why. Both the Los Angeles Unified School District and the Washington D.C. Public Schools are requiring negative tests for a return to class. Why is this obvious, minimal safety measure being ruled out?

Dr. Ronald Taylor

Dr. Taylor made the following comments in response to concerns/comments made during the Hearings of Individuals and Delegations:

- In response to the first three comments regarding the statements made by the district about there not being evidence of in school transmission, this statement is pulled right from the guidance that we received from the Department of Health and our local departments of health. In school transmission is linked via the epidemiology that happens when samples of individuals who are close together and who have been established as close contact through the lab work. The lab work establishes when there has been an in school transmission. I am not a medical professional nor am I an epidemiologist, but the information we are passing on we are lifting directly from the guidance that we are receiving from the health professionals who are in leadership positions.
- In response to the comment regarding required testing or negative testing to return to school, I cannot speak to what district outside of New Jersey are doing or why they are doing it. They are doing what is legal within those jurisdictions. I can say that from the advice that we have been given, that we cannot limit a student from coming to school based on a test to enter. We are proud to provide opportunities for testing and we encourage testing and vaccinations. Throughout this entire week, we are providing opportunities for additional testing for anyone in our school community who would like to partake of that. This is the advice that I was given and I am not aware of any district in the

state of New Jersey who is requiring a negative test after a break to return to the school building or denying students access.

Dr. Taylor encouraged parents and community members who were unable to speak this evening to email their questions for a response.

Ethics Training - David B. Rubin, Esq.

David B. Rubin, Esq. facilitated the Ethics Training.

The following topics were reviewed:

- School Ethics Act
- Legal Powers of Board Members
- Basic Principles
- Social Media Activity
- Appearance of Impropriety
- Advisory Opinions N.J.S.A.

ITEMS FOR ACTION - REORGANIZATIONAL RESOLUTIONS

MOTION made by President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Bergin that the Board of Education move resolutions 4240 and 4241 for discussion.

4240. Approves the following Reorganizational Appointments for the 2021-2022 School Year:

1. Appoint Eric Burnside as Board Secretary and authorize him to sign checks, notes, drafts, bills of exchange, acceptance, undertakings or other orders for payment of money.
2. Appoint Eric Burnside as the Qualified Purchasing Agent and authorize Mr. Burnside to negotiate and award contracts pursuant to NJSA 18A:18A-3.
3. Appoint Eric Burnside as Custodian of Records for the school district.
4. Appoint Andrea Del Guercio as Assistant Board Secretary and authorize her to sign checks, notes, drafts, bills of exchange, acceptance, undertakings or other orders for the payment of money in the absence of the Board Secretary.
5. Approve Stacey Robinson, Human Resources Director as the District ADA/504 Compliance Coordinator for employees.
6. Approve Susie Budine, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services as District Liaison for the Education of Homeless Children (per N.J.A.C. 6A:17-2.5).
7. Approve Susie Budine, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services as Liaison to the Department of Children and Families Division of [Child Protection and Permanency](#).
8. Approve Susie Budine, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services as the District ADA/504 Compliance Committee Coordinator for students.
9. Approve Stacey Robinson, Human Resources Director as the

- Affirmative Action Officer for the school district.
10. Appoint Joanne Butler, In-house Counsel as the Anti-Bullying Coordinator for the school district.
 11. Appoint Joanne Butler, In-house Counsel as the District Title IX Coordinator.
 12. Accept the By-Laws, Policies, Rules and Regulations.
 13. Adopt the Public Meeting Calendar for 2022 per attached.
 14. Adopt Code of Ethics
 15. Adopt the following newspapers and electronic news media for legal advertisements and the publication of Board meetings for the 2021-2022 school year: The Star Ledger, News Record, TAPintoSOMA.net, villagegreennj.com or the New York Times.
 16. Approve the following depositories for school monies:
 - Bank of America
 - PNC Bank
 - Chase Manhattan Bank
 - Wells Fargo Bank

4241. Adopt the Code of Governance Best practices as shown below:

BEFORE a meeting:

- Be prepared by reading packets prior to board meetings (and holding administration responsible for delivering draft agendas and packet information in accordance to bylaws)
- Arrive and begin on time for meetings
- Board members to notify the board officers and the Superintendent of in person or virtual attendance, absence or late arrival in advance of the meeting
- Ask questions ahead of time to allow administration to research requested information
- Questions for administration should go through the executive committee
- Respond to requests for availability or information from board members and/or administration within 72 hours
- Maintain confidentiality of information shared in advance of meeting

DURING a meeting:

- Adhere to Robert's Rules of Order during meetings
- Listen and speak with respect for others at all times, in public and in private.
- Reflect on personal comments prior to speaking to avoid duplication
- Listen with an open mind to the opinions of others and work to find consensus
- Respect the majority decision of the board

- Maintain the focus on student achievement and student growth
- Protect confidentiality of discussions during the preceding executive session

AFTER a meeting:

- Uphold all decisions of the board
- Systematic follow through on topics and discussions from board meetings
- Understand and respect the separate roles and responsibilities of the board and the administration. Confine activities within the boundaries of the respective roles and ensure that both the administration and the board can fulfill their respective roles
- Continually develop trust among board members and with the administration

If any board member feels that another board member has violated any provision of this agreement, that board member shall personally talk with the offending board member in an attempt to resolve the issue. If the attempt fails, the board member who feels that another board member has violated this agreement shall bring the matter to the attention of the entire board. Any concerns that arise should be dealt with at the earliest practical opportunity. We the undersigned members of the board of education and superintendent agree to abide by these objectives as a commitment to valuing education, showing good character and strong leadership to our students, staff and community.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Malespina to table resolution 4241.

ROLL CALL: Motion to Table resolution 4241 Failed. YES: Malespina, Siders, Telesford, Wright NO: Bergin, Joshua, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder

ROLL CALL: Motion 4240 (1-9, 12-16) passed. YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder, Wright NO: Malespina

ROLL CALL: Motion 4240(10-11) passed. YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, NO: Malespina, Wittleder, Wright

ROLL CALL: Motion resolution 4241 passed. YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder NO: Malespina, Wright

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Marian Raab

I am a long time Maplewood Resident and I have a 14-year-old son with special needs who is a freshman at Columbia High School. He had a wonderful first semester, we couldn't be more pleased with how things have been going for him. He has mild cerebral palsy that requires a lot of special services to make sure that he can fully participate and get a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. As stated things had been going great up until now, now that we have returned to virtual instruction.

I really appreciate the fact that Dr. Taylor has twice reassured us during this meeting that all plans are in place for the district to go back to in-person learning on January 10th. My child is able to pivot in and out of virtual learning, but this is still extraordinarily difficult for him. Being virtual for 18 months has set him back significantly in his progress in speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy. These are services that his IEP states he is supposed to receive on a regular basis.

Parents with students on the spectrum have been very vocal about what a disaster virtual learning has been just this week. One of the most universal culture values that I believe is that adults are supposed to be responsible for the welfare of children and not the other way around. So it is with open heart and all honesty I literally pray that you make all efforts and that nothing is spared to get every single child back in the classroom in person on January 10. It is detrimental to the vast majority of special education students in this district.

Dr. Taylor

We have had many conversations with SEPAC leadership around the decision and the supports that will be in place for special education students. I am so happy to hear that the first semester was successful and that this pivot to virtual learning was successful. I would like to close by saying, having our kids in school is what we all want. I hope that our messaging has reflected that.

We have to also think about some of the challenges that present themselves that we have to prepare for. With such a transmittable disease being prepared for what we hope is not the inevitable but the possibility of many staff members having to quarantine. We are having conversations with the department of health about how to actualize the CDC's latest guidance around 5-day quarantines and what looks like and we will be communicating that shortly.

NEW BUSINESS

NONE.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The Board of Education will hold a public Special Board Retreat on Monday, January 10, 2021 at 6:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ as well as using the online video conference platform to conduct annual training on Harassment, Intimidation, & Bullying (HIB). Action may be taken. The community can view the meeting by following the steps which will be listed on the agenda. If there are members of the community who would like to attend the meeting in person, please note that masks and social distancing are required in accordance with the guidance received from the local DOH and the CDC. Action may be taken.

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, January 24, 2022 at 6:00 pm in the Superintendent's Office, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, as well as using 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 Public Session at 7:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ in person and utilizing an online video conference platform which will include Hearing of Individuals. The community can view the meeting by following the steps which will be listed on the agenda. If there are members of the community who would like to attend the meeting in person, please note that masks and social distancing are required in accordance with the guidance received from the local DOH and the CDC. Action will be taken.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Bergin, that the Board of Education will meet in Executive Session prior to the January 24, 2022 Public Meeting to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations and other matters, 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 Malespina to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss personnel, legal issues, negotiations and other matters. Motion to adjourn to Executive Session unanimously approved at 8:02 p.m.

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary