

Special Meeting
Board Retreat
South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
August 1, 2022

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held in the District Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, New Jersey, as well as utilizing the online video conference platform on August 1, 2022.

Board President Thair Joshua called the meeting to order at 6:34 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 posted on the District website.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Bergin, Board President Joshua,
Board Member Malespina, Board Member Siders,
Board Member Vadlamani, Board Member Winkfield,
Board Member Wittleder, Board Member Wright

Absent: Board Member Telesford (arrived at 6:53 p.m.)

EIGHT VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Siders to allow distance participation for this Special Board meeting - Board Retreat. Motion passed unanimously.

BOARD PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

The school board meeting is a business meeting in public and 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 then shared with the other Board members for consideration. Only then is it placed on the agenda for Board discussion and action at a public meeting.

President's update

At our July 18, 2022 Board Meeting I updated the community on the process that led to the district's current transportation policy, as well as our request for the administration to provide an analysis of

what could be achieved for the upcoming school year. After reviewing the analysis and discussing the options with administration and our attorneys, it is clear the district cannot provide additional transportation at this time. We asked the district to provide data on legal, logistical and budgetary options and obstacles to overcome to make any additional transportation a reality. The FFT committee met for 2 ½ hours on Friday, July 22, 2022 to evaluate the possible options and obstacles presented by the district and in short, there is not enough time or resources to augment our existing transportation plans at this time.

The Board asked the district to evaluate several options before reaching this conclusion. One option was providing transportation to all elementary students between 1.75 and 2 miles away from their assigned school. This would have restored transportation for a large portion of families effected by the policy change as well as provided new transportation for any families assigned via the Intentional Integration Initiative (III) algorithm that fit this distance. Another option was offering subscription transportation. While that may be something the district and Board may consider for future school years, we were advised that there is not enough time to offer any subscription model for this coming school year. Families that qualify for free and reduced lunch would not have to pay for transportation under a subscription transportation model.

Another obstacle that we encountered was the availability of school buses and drivers. The Board did not consider solely restoring courtesy transportation as outlined in resolution 4134 as we believe that would exacerbate the disparity among those who receive transportation and who does not. Under the former transportation policy families assigned to the Marshall-Bolden pairing only received courtesy transportation to one of the schools even if they lived more than one mile from both. Under the former policy a student assigned to Seth Boyden as a sibling placement received courtesy transportation while a student placed via the algorithm without a sibling did not. Students placed at Marshall through the III would not receive transportation while neighbors placed via the pairing would. The current policy removes those discrepancies, but maybe not in a way that the community would prefer.

The current policy similar to the former one does provide transportation for families designated to be on hazardous routes. The towns and not the school district determine which routes are deemed hazardous. If you feel you are on a route that is hazardous, please contact the transportation department.

The Board that changed the policy consisted primarily of current or former parents of the Marshall-Bolden pairing and was acutely aware of the impact to those school communities. The Board was also aware of the inequitable distribution of transportation resources under the old policy. Last week, Thursday, July 28, 2022, I spoke to the Mayor of Maplewood and the South Orange Village President to advise them that there would not be any additional transportation outside of the district's current policy for the foreseeable future during 22-23

school year. They are working with the district and local police to mitigate potential traffic impacts around town and in particular near the effected school communities. I have asked Dr. Taylor and the district to contact our before and aftercare partners to inquire about offering additional before care spaces at the schools impacted by the district policy change.

Later this evening, the Board will begin to outline district goals for the 2022-23 school year. Analyzing options and making a recommendation for how to revise the transportation policy will likely be one of those goals. I anticipate incorporating feedback will also be included in the final version of that goal, which will be voted on at our August 25, 2022 meeting.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

The following community members expressed concerns regarding III placements and transportation: Josh Posner and Joseph Gabriel.

ITEMS FOR ACTION

Motion made by Dr. Taylor, seconded by Board Member Siders to move resolutions 4331 and 4332 for discussion. Motion unanimously approved.

4331. Approves the revised Board of Education Committees for the 2022 calendar year as presented.

4332. Approve Retro Salaries for the 2021-22 School Year [List on file in Board Secretary's Office].

ROLL CALL: Motion 4331 and 4332 PASSED YES: Bergin, Joshua, Malespina, Siders, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder, Wright NO: None

***Board Member Telesford joined the meeting at 6:53 p.m.
NINE VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT***

BOARD RETREAT DISTRICT AND BOARD GOALS

DISCUSSION

Charlene Peterson, Field Representative for New Jersey School Boards Association facilitated the Board Retreat. The Retreat focused on the Board Goals not addressed at the previous retreat and District Goals. Ms. Peterson explained the difference between Board goals and district goals. District goals help to set the direction of the district for the year. The Board determines three or four things that are important to move the district forward. The superintendent is held accountable for these goals by including them in his evaluation. Board Goals focus on improving Board Governance work and all of the tasks to accomplish the Board Goals need to be the work of the Board.

Board members reviewed last year's Board and District goals to identify accomplishments and focus areas for district goals. District goals are developed first because sometimes the work of the Board is to help support the work taking place in the District goals. Board Members chose major focus areas and were broken out into groups to discuss goals for each area. Board Members reconvened as one group and shared their thoughts.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Motion made by Board Member Siders, seconded by Board President Joshua to remove Kaitlin Wittleder as 2nd Vice President of the South Orange-Maplewood School District Board of Education for dereliction of duty, based on her failure to communicate with the Board before taking public action and failure to recognize how her actions can compromise the Board. Motion to discuss unanimously approved.

Board Member Wittleder read bylaw 0171 - Duties of Board President and Vice President and asked which law she violated.

Board Member Siders reiterated her reason for the motion.

Board Member Wittleder asked if she could be removed from office if dereliction of duty is cited in the bylaws.

Ms. Febres responded that the bylaws state "a President or Vice President who refuses to perform a duty may be removed", it does not indicate that it is the only basis for an officer to be removed.

Board Member Wittleder made the following statement:

I understand that some members of the Board wish to introduce a motion this evening to remove me as second vice president for introducing a resolution at our July 18, 2022 Board meeting to admonish Board Member Telesford's actions. Board Member Wittleder continued by providing the basis for introducing the resolution.

Ms. Febres interjected informing Board Member Wittleder that the information she is providing is subject to a pending investigation by her office and may be subject to litigation. As such Ms. Febres recommended that the substance of Board Member Wittleder's resolution is not discussed and that Board Member Wittleder may continue to explain that she wanted to make a motion but the substance of what she is alleging did or did not occur is subject to investigation and litigation against the Board of Education. So, to clarify, in talking about this you would be compromising the Board.

Board Member Wittleder continued to by stating as a Board we need to recognize what has happened and offer an apology to the community.

This is not about any individual, it is about the actions we take as Board Members, that jeopardize the safety and security of our students and the integrity of this Board.

Ms. Febres interrupted Board Member Wittleder reminding her that her comments about a fellow Board Member's actions that you have not proven and is not proven to be a violation of law or to be anything purposeful, is compromising the Board and inviting litigation.

Board Members continued the discussion on the resolution to remove Board Member Wittleder as 2nd VP.

Board Member Malespina made a motion, seconded by Board Member Wright to table this matter until the investigation is completed. Motion failed 3 yes (Malespina, Wittleder, Wright) 6 no (Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield)

Roll Call: Motion to remove Board Member Wittleder as 2nd VP.
YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Winkfield NO: Malespina, Vadlamani, Wittleder, Wright ABSTAIN: Telesford

Motion to remove Board Member Wittleder as 2nd VP failed.

Future Meetings

Board President Joshua made the following motions seconded by Board Member Siders:

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, August 25, 2022 at 6:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ. Immediately following the opening of Public Session, the board will move to go into a Closed Session in the Superintendent's Office, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, as well as using an online video conference platform to discuss personnel, matters within the attorney-client privilege, legal, negotiations, and other matters that may arise and require discussion, to be announced at a later date. Immediately following the Closed Session, the Board of Education will meet in Public Session (estimated to be 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. Motion unanimously approved.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Siders that the Board of Education adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 10:16 p.m.

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary