

Special Meeting  
Board Retreat  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
August 1, 2023

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 Kaitlin Wittleder called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Board Member Duvall Wilson, Board Member Eckert,  
Board Member Gifford(6:16 P.M.), Board Member Telesford,  
Board Member Winkfield, Board President Wittleder,

Absent: Board Member Malespina, Board Member Vadlamani,  
Board Member Wright

*SIX VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT*

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

NOTICE OF THE MEETING

Please take notice that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in the following manner:

- A. That written notice was sent from the Office of the Secretary of the Board at 10:00 a.m. on July 20, 2023.
- B. That said notice was sent via email to Maplewood and South Orange Township Clerks and the Editors of the News Record, Star Ledger, and the Village Green.

Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver - Board President Wittleder

I would like to acknowledge the passing of New Jersey Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver. Lt. Governor Oliver served as the first black woman Assembly Speaker in the State history and the second to lead a Legislative Chamber in the country. She was a trailblazer and a true icon for representation, diversity and progress.

The Board held a moment of silence in her honor.

Introduction

Board President Wittleder introduced Charlene Peterson, NJSBA Field Representative. Charlene will facilitate the Annual Board Retreat, BOE Self Evaluation and District Goal Setting Meeting. In preparation for tonight's meeting each Board Member has submitted their BOE Self Evaluation via an online tool provided by the NJSBA. The annual Board Self Evaluation is an exercise in setting a future Board up for

success by looking at our processes, how they can improve and how we can continue to adopt best practices going forward.

We will start the meeting with public comments and then we will move from the dais to a family style table to discuss and review the preliminary District goals and Board Goals for the 2023-24 school year. We will also be discussing the BOE Self Evaluation which we will use as the base in determining our Board goals. We will come back to the dais to report on the information discussed at the table later this evening. I also invite community members to join us this evening. We welcome your participation.

I would like to acknowledge that we have a Board of Education Candidate in the room this evening. I would like to thank you for attending this important meeting.

#### 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.

#### HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Community Member and SEPAC President Beth Consentino spoke on behalf of SEPAC and offered the following recommendation for the Board to consider when working on creating the district goals for the upcoming school year: Include family engagement practices on every level throughout the district and with that to write a policy for the district that encompasses what we already know and research has shown, when families are engaged student achievement levels are higher, teacher retention is better and school climate and culture is improved. She offered examples of what this would look like. Her recommendations will be emailed to the Board.

Community Member and Board Candidate Will Meyer also spoke on behalf of SEPAC and asked the Board to establish a goal of reviewing special education programs and services in comparison with the needs of the students in our district, and ensuring the programs we provide are responsive to those needs, including by adding and modifying classrooms as appropriate. He also requested the board task the district with a goal of studying the situations leading to out of

district placements, including the circumstances leading to lawsuits brought against the district, and identify unmet student needs that we could begin to support in-house with new, innovative types of classrooms, likely at a net savings, for the benefit of those families and our entire community. These recommendations will be emailed to the Board.

Community Member and SEPAC VP of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Victoria Bond spoke about what the words diversity equity and inclusion mean in the context of the two incidences of alleged abuse at at Montrose ECC. Requested an update on how the district is applying Handle with Care Training. Recommended positive behavioral intervention and support training as well as hiring trained coaches who specialize in working with school staff, teachers and paraprofessionals on proactive approaches to lesson causes for meltdowns and dysregulation. SEPAC will share names of local providers. Another recommendation is training in schoolwide family engagement. It is not enough to send out surveys. Parents need to feel connected to their child's school which means regular two-way communication with the teacher who is with their child every day. The feeling of disconnect is compounded for parents of young students who have communication challenges and speech delays.

Community Member Rujun Shen spoke about the ongoing aftercare shortage and challenges of the YMCA aftercare program. Asked the Board if they can provide any clarity on the gap between the YMCA's aftercare capacity and the needs of District families and what will be done about the shortage. Asked the Board and Administration to exercise oversight with this vendor. Asked if the Board looked into other vendors to fill the aftercare need and if not why?

Dr. Taylor made the following comments in response to comments made during public speaks:

Thank you to all who brought their concerns this evening and shared their opinions regarding our district and/or Board goals. If you stick around to hear our conversations this evening you will hear our options for district goals ring in the same tone as some of the public speaks that were shared.

Regarding the need for additional aftercare services please email your concerns and I will follow up with the YMCA. There were some very promising plans to procure and expand their programs but I do not want to speak for them formally. But I will share your concerns and will share with you their response.

#### BOARD RETREAT

Motion made by Board President Wittleder, seconded by Board Member Eckert to begin the Board Retreat. Motion unanimously approved.

Board Members began the Board Retreat to discuss the Board Self Evaluation and Board and District Goals.

The Board reconvened to present preliminary Board Goals developed this evening.

Dr. Taylor

The Board was offered 11 recommendations for District Goals this list was created with SLT and experiences we had this school year. The Boards supported the creation of 5 goals. They include:

- SES waitlist guidance recommendations received from the Alves Group and utilizing the Beta test findings from the Alves Group for our Marshall Bolden future work.
- Construction referendum and exploring middle school construction funding for future use.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion strategic plan development
- I&RS intervention development
- Continued conversations around the diversity of school staff and retention and recruitment efforts
- Possibly a deep dive into the Special Services Department with a third party to review our best practices to ensure that we are serving our students in the best way possible, including a review of out of district placements, paraprofessional costs and legal costs.

We will refine these topics and present them during our committee meetings this month and hopefully bring them back if they are ready for a final Board vote on August 28. We anticipate between 5 - 6 goals, possibly 5 with some goals being consolidated.

Board President Wittleder

As a Board, we recognize we have a lot of work to do. We spent a significant amount of time establishing a shared vision. Our Board rating was a 2.2, the same as last year and the year prior it was 2.1. We recognize we are South Orange and Maplewood and we can do a lot better than that. One of the Board goals that we agreed upon is holding quarterly Board Retreats to cover topics similar to what was heard at the last meeting and this evening, restorative practices, Robert's Rules of Order, Cultural Competency and Roles and Responsibilities of Board Members.

Board Member Dr. Telesford recommended creating a norming and framing document to guide our work together that we can work on next year. It was titled as a Strategic Roadmap.

The Board would also like to prioritize policy work around family engagement. Thank you, SEPAC Members, for coming forward tonight to express this need.

We would like to prioritize policies around ensuring that our students have appropriate protections. This is something that we are already working on. We look forward to bringing forth some policies to pass in this regard.

The Board also plans to use the annual agenda to manage and guide monthly Board work.

All Board members will have the opportunity to weigh in on the final Board Goals.

New Business

None.

Future Meetings

Board President Wittleder made the following motions seconded by Board Member DuVall Wilson:

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, August 24, 2023 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, 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 optional in accordance with the guidance received from the local DOH and the CDC. Action will be taken. Motion unanimously approved.

Motion made by Board President Wittleder, seconded by Board Member Eckert that the Board of Education adjourn to Executive Session. The Board will not return to Public Session. Motion unanimously approved at 8:47 p.m.

---

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary