

Special Meeting
South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
November 3, 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 November 3, 2023.

Board President Kaitlin Wittleder called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Board Member Duvall Wilson, Board Member Eckert,
Board Member Gifford, Board Member Malespina
Board Member Telesford, Board Member Vadlamani,
Board Member Winkfield, Board President Wittleder,
Board Member Wright

Absent: None

NINE 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 1:30 p.m. on October 31, 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.

Board President Wittleder shared the purpose of tonight's Special Meeting. Tonight's meeting was called to discuss the Superintendent. The superintendent received a Rice Notice at least 48 hours in advance of this meeting. Dr. Taylor has made the decision to have any conversations related to his performance in public session instead of closed session this evening. The Board will move to a short closed session to discuss attorney client privilege matters only. We will reconvene thereafter for public speaks and then a discussion about resolutions 4536A-C on the agenda for action evening.

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

I'm speaking to you via video because at 2:15 p.m. today I received the resolutions for this evening. As this is highly unusual and I'm not sure when or if I'll be able to address you again, I took the liberty to record this message. As the community you should be aware of what is occurring in the Governance of your school district. I hope that

everyone received our update earlier today along with responses to SOMEA Leadership's recent action.

For those wondering why we are here on a Friday evening before Fall Break, you should know a few facts. For those who have attended these meetings before you know that I do not normally talk about myself and my own Journey nor my professional challenges but I feel that I owe this to the community and to those who have tirelessly supported this generational work.

Dr. Taylor shared a PowerPoint presentation which highlighted the following:

- Dr. Taylor's Educational and Professional Journey
- Dr. Taylor's Performance and Evaluations
- Non-Renewals
 - Lame Duck Rules and Understandings
- Board President's Pattern of Behavior
- Board President and our Attorneys
- The Rise of the Executive Committee
- Conclusion
 - Responses to SOMEA Vote of No Confidence

Dr. Taylor concluded his presentation with the following comments: Please know that this is my life's work and I value what I've learned and what I have been able to create and been able to partner with very fantastic folks here in District. Even though we've had all these challenges, I am still here, ready to be a part of the answers, ready to continue our construction, integration work and our C&I growth. I welcome anyone to again peruse those responses to SOMEA's vote of no confidence to see our very thoughtful accurate and factual responses. It's my pleasure to serve. Thank you

Board President Wittleder made a motion seconded by Board Member Malespina to adjourn to Executive Session at 6:32 p.m. to discuss matters of attorney client privilege. The length of the of the Executive session is estimated to be 20 minutes, after which the public meeting of the Board shall reconvene and action will be taken.

***Board Members Adjourned to Executive Session at 6:32 p.m.
Board Members reconvened in Public Session at 6:57 p.m.***

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 Members Shawn Butkus, Henry Cittone, Rocio Lopez, Shira Lincoln, Patrice Massung, Susan Froelich, Kristie Thomas, Josue Martinez, Jen Scates, Christina Votta, Marian Raab, Beth Daugherty, Khadijah Costley-White, Summer Jones, Erin Scherzer, John Hong, Amy Paternite, Jocelyn Ryan, Ronni Schwartz, Keren Kozar, Allison Bekkedahl, Rhea Beck, Abigail Murtagh, Inda Sechzer, Dara Gronau commented on various topics including but not limited to: Dr. Taylor's Contract Non-Renewal, SOMEA Vote of No Confidence, MAPSO Freedom School, Deleveling, Freshman Academy, Credit Recovery, Board Governance, Personnel matters.

ITEMS FOR ACTION

At the request of the Board, Attorney Patrick Carrigg addressed the issue raised about lame duck actions. The Board's anticipated actions are all occurring tonight which is during the life of this Board. They do not bind a future board. They are occurring actively tonight and they will continue as long as they are in place during the life of this Board. So, this is not an unlawful action by a lame duck board.

As a second issue, normally personnel matters are all discussed in Executive Session. Employees of the school district are given a notice that the Board of Education will be discussing issues that could impact their terms and conditions of employment. In advance of those discussions the employee has the right to elect to have that discussion occur in public instead of an Executive Session. So, in advance of this meeting, Dr. Taylor did advise that he was requesting that the discussion occur in public session. So, what will occur now basically is the Board will have a discussion that it would otherwise have had in Executive Session. That discussion is among the Board, no one else is a participant to that discussion. Essentially what goes on now is people can see and hear what the board would discuss but cannot participate in it. The topic that could be discussed at the time of this discussion include performance, evaluation, discipline and anything and everything impacting the terms and conditions of Dr. Taylor's employment. This discussion is preceding the motions that are actually later in the agenda. This discussion follows the same Roberts rules.

Board President Wittleder supports the motion to issue notice of non-renewal of Dr. Taylor's contract because this has been the sentiment of the Board since May of 2023. Board President Wittleder explained the factors that influenced the Board's decision to take action regarding Dr. Taylor's employment, stating our position on the need for a change in leadership has remained steadfast and consistent throughout this process.

Board Members engaged in a spirited discussion about Dr. Taylor's contract non-renewal, and the process that led to today's Special Meeting. Board Members shared their thoughts whether in favor or against renewing him while offering detailed explanations for their position and how the non-renewal can positively or negatively impact the District.

ITEMS FOR ACTION

Board Member Malespina made a motion, seconded by Board President Wittleder to move resolutions 4536A-C for discussion.

Board Member Vadlamani made a motion to sever resolutions 4536A, 4536B and 4536C.

Board President Wittleder made a motion, seconded by Board Member Telesford to move resolution 4536A for discussion and voting. Motion passed unanimously.

4536A. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board hereby places Dr. Ronald Taylor, Superintendent of Schools, on administrative leave from November 3, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4536A PASSED YES: Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Malespina, Wittleder, Wright NO: Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield

Board President Malespina made a motion, seconded by Board Member DuVall Wilson to move resolution 4536B for discussion and voting. Motion passed unanimously.

4536B. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board hereby provides notice of non-renewal of Dr. Ronald Taylor's contract. The Board Attorney is directed to provide written notice to the Superintendent of said non-renewal.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4536B PASSED YES: Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Malespina, Wittleder, Wright NO: Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield

Board President Wittleder made a motion, seconded by Board Member Malespina to move resolution 4536C for discussion and voting. Motion passed unanimously.

4536C. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board hereby appoints Dr. Kevin Gilbert, as Acting Superintendent; effective November 3, 2023 (pending any necessary approvals by the Executive County Superintendent).

ROLL CALL: Motion 4536C PASSED YES: Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Malespina, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder, Wright NO: None

NEW BUSINESS

None.

Future Meetings

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

A meeting of the Board of School Estimate will be held on Tuesday, November 28, 2023 at 6:00 pm at the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education Administration Building, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, New Jersey; for the purpose of discussing funding for the remaining projects in the District's Long-Range Facility Plan. Action may be taken.

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, November 30, 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.

Motions passed unanimously.

MOTION made by Board President Wittleder, seconded by Board Member DuVall Wilson that the Board of Education adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 9:26 p.m.

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary