

Special Meeting
Fergus Implementation Committee
South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
November 27, 2023

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held utilizing the online video conference platform on November 27, 2023.

Board President Kaitlin Wittleder called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: Board Member Gifford, Board Member Malespina,
Board Member Winkfield

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 9:10 a.m. on November 17, 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'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.

Board President Wittleder thanked Dr. Gilbert and the administration for their work in support of the implementation of the Fergus recommendations. One of the first things that Dr. Gilbert did as Acting Superintendent was schedule District administration and Dr. Fergus to review the implementation that were presented to the Board on October 30th together. Dr. Gilbert will share an update to the Board and public on how the initial meeting went and discuss any potential modifications that may be made to the district's implementation plans as a result of the meeting with Dr. Fergus.

- Dr. Gilbert shared a presentation with the Board and public regarding the second part of the [Rutgers Report Implementation Plan Part II](#) which includes Dr. Fergus' recommendations. Dr. Gilbert highlighted the following slide which discusses the District undertaking a system push toward re-norming our school policies, pedagogy, and curriculum toward a more culturally responsive and inclusive norms. Dr. Gilbert noted what is guiding the District through this process and how the work that needs to be done focuses on the district's black and Latinx population as well as the district's free and reduced lunch eligible families. The end goal is that this work benefits everyone students, staff, and families.

Intervention & Referral Services

- Dr. Fergus' plan includes recommendations that are designed to put the district on a trajectory to have fully integrated or have this plan implemented within the next three to five years (which Dr. Fergus said is typical).
- Internal discussions are being had on what are the things that the District can do in the present to try and narrow many of the gaps that are related to the lawsuit.
- There are several things that the District is going to work on immediately which include:
 - Intervention recommendations from the Fergus report that are primarily within the I&RS process in the schools (Dr. Gilbert noted the four recommendations)
 - These are the furthest along in the implementation process that the district is starting to see some great impactful things happening to support this work.
- I&RS also included seven recommendations that deal with the pedagogical capacity with an equity lens, which includes ways to build the district's staff capacity to be great stewards of the work. Which highlights supporting our students and giving them opportunities to also grow and also make sure our educators are in a position to provide all those supports to include a culture responsive standpoint.

Intentional Integration

- There were five recommendations that were noted in the Fergus report. One of those recommendations has already happened since the last meeting on 10/30/2023; which was - District leaders met with the consultants The Alves Group to go over some of the recommendations. There will be a next step where the members of

the Alves group will connect with Dr. Fergus to include these recommendations in the three-five year plan.

Highlights:

- *Dr. Fergus met with members of the Senior Leadership Team on November 21st to discuss the DRAFT implementation plan which was presented on October 30, 2023 to the Board.*
- *Dr. Fergus did not offer any revisions to the plan at this time*
- *Dr. Fergus guided the team through a discussion on what successful & effective implementation looks like to ensure that our students are successful moving forward*

Stages of the Implementation:

- Exploration and Adoption
 - *Dr. Fergus has done several equity audits in the District with the last one being conducted this past June; this provides the District with an outline of where the District wants to go moving forward. Looking at the equity audit that was completed; it provides the District with a road map to ensure that the District includes the things suggested to meet the needs of our students and families.*
- Installation of Infrastructure
 - *What are the infrastructure pieces for successful implementation and sustainability - Dr. Gilbert highlighted that Dr. Fergus did not offer many revisions to the District's proposed plan because Dr. Fergus put very strong emphasis on the fact that the District needs to ensure that we have in place the infrastructure pieces for the implementation to be sustainable for future years. Infrastructure includes:*
 - *Data infrastructure to capture all the data required to ensure that we are narrowing gaps and paying attention to details and continue to meet the needs of our students*
 - *Professional Development is also important to ensure our staff has the training and tools to support students*
 - *These were the two big pieces that the district needs to focus on, developing them because they lead to more sustainability in the District;*
 - *When Dr. Fergus discussed professional development, we should consider how we want to model what it is we need our Educators to do for our students and also look at the practice in the classrooms and schools.*
 - *Need to build a successful workforce with the capacity to culturally responsible to our students of color.*
 - *Dr. Gilbert noted that he highlighted # 3 (Installation) & #4 (Initial Implementation) were the District is laying right now is between these two*

stages - will probably remain within these two stages because we are building on his recommendations.

- *#5 (Sustainability) is only grown out of if we have the infrastructure in place and effectively implementing the things that the District wants to put in place that is what builds sustainability.*

Next Steps Toward Implementation

- Meet with the Senior Leadership Team who met with Dr. Fergus to assess our strategy for the first year.
- Meet with Justice Wallace, Lawsuit Monitor, Representatives from Black Parent's Workshop, Dr. Fergus and SOMSD Representatives as part of our quarterly check-in on implementation in December - the purpose of this meeting is to show the District's commitment to the implementation of the Fergus recommendations.
- Schedule a follow-up meeting with Dr. Fergus
- Presentation of enrollment data for District and higher level classes during our next regularly scheduled board meeting in January

Questions/Comments/Concerns:

- Board Member DuVall Wilson: Appreciated the fact that the District has taken the initiative regarding next steps. Will the document that was originally shared with the board, be updated continuously?
 - *Yes, the District has several documents that are being used right now; that document is currently being used, as well as the actual implementation plan document. What the District actually tried to do was make sure the initial things that were placed in that first public document coincided with some of the things that that the District was doing in their long plan; we will add things to that public facing document so it is consistent.*
- Board Member DuVall Wilson: During the November 21st meeting it was shared that Dr. Fergus mentioned what successful implementation look like and I believe that goes back to the S.M.A.R.T. goals that the team is working on; some of those goals need to be revised to include deadlines. As the District continues their work in year one I would like to see growth and add to the goals.
- Board President Wittleder: Did Dr. Fergus suggest that there be academic achievement data points throughout the 3 to 5 year installation implementation phase, is there a measure of success to ensure that the work is getting done?
 - *Dr. Fergus did not share any specific targets at this time; not to say that he will not. The purpose of meeting on November 21st was to focus the District's attention on making sure we are looking at those stages of the implementation and ensure we have those stages in our minds especially the infrastructure pieces. When Dr. Fergus spoke about data; he shared that in order for the District to be successful we've got to make sure that the*

data infrastructure in place to help monitor the district's successes and failures. Conversations were had with Assistant Superintendents and Directors. We are aware that we need to review our data warehousing, we have to have a way to collect this data in a more efficient way that is user friendly. The data needs to be user friendly for our building leaders and is designed in a way for us to pull together things to present to the board; it also needs to be usable data for all to use. The district is currently using performance matters which isn't necessarily user friendly, we are aware that there are other data warehouses that can be used. We will be recommending some of the other data warehouses and will be included in the recommendations sheet that was shared with the board. As we continue to have these conversations with Dr. Fergus and look towards what building the infrastructure looks like we may have to add some asks to the resources may be. The other big emphasis is ensuring that the District has professional development which Dr. Fergus put a big emphasis on. The focus is to ensure that our staff have the tools they need to be successful in their classrooms and also who have the most direct contact with students. Those two things go hand in hand.

- Board President Wittleder: I believe it is helpful to have the time frame to manage the District's expectations, the board's expectations, and the community's expectations. We know that we want this work to happen overnight but to do this work thoroughly; and one of the first conversations that was had was about the sustainability piece, we want this work to make a dent and to improve outcomes for all students.
- Board Member Vadlamani: Dr. Gilbert you are meeting with the monitor on December 21st and at the point you will be providing documentation of what the District is doing. Can you share that with the Board before your meeting with the monitor so that we have a first look of what is going to be presented?
 - *This was previously shared with the Board, but I'd be more than happy to reshare the information with the Board so that all have one collective packet. The things that will be included will be the implementation planning document, the three to five year planning document. Anything that that will be presented to the monitor will be shared with the Board beforehand. Please note that we are meeting with the monitor on December 14th NOT December 21st.*
- Board Member Telesford: I know that we are discussing the infrastructure, I know that in July 2023 we had a vendor come do a presentation to the board that was more user friendly program that could be used by administration and by teachers, have we had anymore discussions regarding that software package? That was same meeting that Dr. Fergus attended where he spoke to the board about building up a data infrastructure that also included a data plan. I believe that these are two things that go very well hand in hand. Want to begin thinking about what the data plan will be. It will be important to take a temperature on the district

every now and then to have a data plan set for that and also looking at the software package that was discussed in July.

- o *That software package will be one of the that is considered but the District was also going to try look at other software packages so that the District can have a real clear look at other software that is out there so we can have a package that meets the needs of the District. I also wrote down your suggestion about having a data plan and what that looks like. While we are working on data warehouse we still need to continue to do the work; the District may not like performance matters at this time it is what is being used right now. We need to figure out how to make this work and other things to ensure we are meeting the needs of our students.*

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

The following community members expressed concerns regarding the Columbia High School Conference Period changing from period 9 to period 1. The change is negatively impacting special needs students and student athletes who are missing academic instruction when they have to leave their 9th period class early or miss their 9th period class entirely to participate in sporting events: Charley Drechsler, Teri Adams, Jennifer Paganini, Marian Raab.

Beth Cosentino spoke about the list of recommendations by Dr. Fergus specifically under the intervention recommendations #3 which states, develop a list of tiered interventions for academic and behavioral support. Who will be developing the tiered interventions for behavioral support, what does that look like, how it will be conveyed to parents and how it will be done at each level PreK - 12th grade.

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 Eckert that the Board of Education adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 7:18 p.m.

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary