

South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
Reorganization Meeting  
January 4, 2024

A Reorganization 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 January 4, 2024.

Board Secretary Eric Burnside called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Callahan, Board Member Duvall Wilson,  
Board Member Eckert, Board Member Gifford  
Board Member Meyer, Board Member Sackett-Gable  
Board Member Telesford, Board Member Vadlamani,  
Board Member Wittleder

Absent: None

*NINE VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT*

Pledge of Allegiance

NOTICE OF THE MEETING

Aadequate 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 2:30 p.m. on January 6, 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, TapintoSOMA and the Village Green.

OATH OF OFFICE

Mr. Burnside Administered the Oath of Office to the elected Board Members: Elizabeth Callahan, William M. Meyer, IV and Shayna Sackett-Gable. [The signed Oaths of Office are on file in the Board Secretary's Office.]

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Burnside explained the process for the election of officers and called for nominations for President of the Board of Education. Board Member Vadlamani nominated Board Member Telesford. There were no further nominations for President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Telesford as President: YES: Callahan, DuVall Wilson, Eckert, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani NO: Gifford, Wittleder

Board Member Telesford was elected President and assumed the Chair.

Board President Telesford made the following comments:

*I would like to express gratitude to my colleagues for trusting me to serve as your Board President. I am committed to serving all our students, families and staff with dedication and integrity. My journey with the Board began in 2022, inspired by two defining moments that I would call my best and worst experiences as a student in this very school district. In my more negative experience, I worked on a group project and received a full letter grade lower than my peers. Despite having done all the work and pleading my case, the teacher told me I did not do the assignment and accused me of copying someone else's work. Feeling unheard, I did what any kid would do, I shut down completely and disengaged from the class entirely. This is a fate I would never wish upon any student in our school district. It is my utmost goal to ensure that every student is provided with the tools and support they need to succeed.*

*But it is not all doom and gloom. I had another teacher that inspired me with a simple challenge, it was a friendly wager, I would try to get 100 on a test while he would find a way to take points off, as you can imagine I worked really hard, 94, 98, 95 always close but never quite there. Until one day, I was sure I succeeded and when the test came back he pointed out you reduced this fraction and provided the decimal equivalent but you could have reduced the fraction more, half a point off. In my academic career I had a lot of highs but that was probably one of my best experiences. It wasn't about the grade but the challenge and inspiration that fueled my growth. This is the feeling I want every student to have, an environment where challenges ignite potential, support nurtures confidence and students feel empowered to believe in themselves.*

*So, where does that leave us as a Board? Recent years have brought challenges with some suggesting that internal divisions and dysfunction hinder our ability to serve our children. Having spoken to each Board member, I can confidently say that this perception is inaccurate. I see a Board eager to collaborate, find common ground and work together for the benefit of our students. As your President, I will actively cultivate this spirit of cooperation. While we will not always agree I pledge to dedicate myself to working together, fostering a one team one goal mentality. The New Year brought me a powerful lesson, treat your family, your team as one unit. When you are down they are down, when you are up they are up. This philosophy resonates deeply with me and I believe it should guide our Board too. We are many voices and those voices enrich our discussions but remember, we are one Board, one body. United we stand firmly behind Dr. Gilbert our Acting Superintendent as he leads this District. He is our partner in this process and shares with us one single goal, providing the best possible tools to improve outcomes for all our students.*

Board President Telesford called for nominations for 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President of the Board.

Board President Telesford nominated Board Member Vadlamani. There were no further nominations for 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Vadlamani as 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President: YES: Callahan, Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani, NO: Gifford, Wittleder

Board Member Vadlamani was elected 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President.

Board President Telesford called for nominations for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Board.

Board Member Sackett-Gable nominated Board Member DuVall Wilson as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President. There were no further nominations for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President.

ROLL CALL for Board Member Duvall Wilson as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President: YES: Callahan, Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani, Wittleder NO: None

Board Member DuVall Wilson was elected 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President.

#### 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.

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S STATEMENT

Acting Superintendent Dr. Kevin Gilbert made the following statement:

*Good evening members of the Board, constituents, families and those who are watching. First, Congratulations Dr. Telesford on your election as Board President and to our outgoing President Ms. Kaitlin Wittleder, thank you for the support that you have shown me in these few months. I really appreciate the partnership that we were able to build. Dr. Telesford I look forward to keeping that partnership going with you and all the members of the Board.*

*I would also like to take this moment to talk to the community about*

*the events that have transpired since we have returned to school. I do realize that for the new year it was a surprise and a shock for the announcement that I had to make in reference to the high school principal when I returned. What I asked the community, families and students to do is to please be patient as we work through the process of the leave that I had to announce. I do realize there have been rumors and innuendos about what is going on. I just want to remind everyone that those have nothing to do with the process and the process must go on so that we can make sure that whatever decisions happen following that process will be done in the best interest of the students, families and staff in the South Orange Maplewood School District. I just wanted to take the time to express that I understand. I know the support and the love that you have for the high school principal but I just ask for your patience as we work through this process.*

*As a reminder, I will not be offering comments after public speaks but if you would like for me to answer questions or respond to your comments, please put your name and email address on that form in the back and I will be happy to get back to you.*

#### HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

The following community members spoke during the Hearing of Individuals and Delegations, Former Board Member & Board President Elizabeth Baker, Maxwell Kravitz, Rocio Lopez, Rhea Beck, David Letwin, Jenn Sturm, Sabeel Abulsoud, Joseph Gabriel, Brett Robertson, Fariha Chougale, Michelle Bachir, Mindy Greenspan, Karen Sanderson, Michael Wechsler Adam Shapiro and Scarlet Strogov.

#### ITEMS FOR ACTION

Motion made by Board Secretary Eric Burnside, seconded by Board President Telesford to move resolution 4560 for discussion and voting:

4560. Approves the following Reorganizational Appointments for the 2023-24 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. Appoint Dr. Kevin Gilbert or Designee as the Affirmative Action Officer for the school district.
6. Appoint Dr. Kevin Gilbert or Designee as the Anti-Bullying Coordinator for the school district.

7. Appoint Dr. Kevin Gilbert or Designee as the District Title IX Coordinator.
8. Accept the By-Laws, Policies, Rules and Regulations
9. Adopt the Public Meeting Calendar for 2024 per attached.
10. Adopt Code of Ethics
11. Adopt the following newspapers and electronic news media for legal advertisements and the publication of Board meetings for the 2023-2024 school year: The Star Ledger, News Record, TAPintoSOMA.net, villagegreennj.com or the New York Times.
12. Approve the following depositories for school monies:
  - Bank of America
  - Chase Manhattan Bank
  - NJ ARM
  - PNC Bank
  - Wells Fargo Bank

ROLL CALL: Motion 4560 PASSED YES: Callahan, Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani, Wittleder, NO: None

Motion made by Board Secretary Eric Burnside, seconded by Board Member Vadlamani to move resolution 4561 for discussion and voting.

4561. Rescinds the award of the contract for the Superintendent Search Firm to New Jersey School Boards Association on December 21, 2023 resolution #4553Q and awards the contract to Hazard Young and Attea Associates (HYA) of Schaumburg, IL to support the district in its search for a new Superintendent at cost not to exceed the bid threshold.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4561 PASSED YES: Callahan, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani NO: Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Wittleder

Motion made by Board Secretary Eric Burnside, seconded by Board Member Eckert to move resolution 4562 for discussion and voting.

4562. Approves the Board of Education Committee Liaisons for the 2024 calendar year as presented.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4562 PASSED YES: Callahan, Duvall Wilson, Eckert, Gifford, Meyer, Sackett-Gable, Telesford, Vadlamani, Wittleder NO: None

#### HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Community Members Karen Sanderson and Adam Shapiro spoke.

#### NEW BUSINESS

Board Member Vadlamani made a motion seconded by Board President Telesford to request that the Board President create a new committee to manage the Superintendent Search. The committee will consist of three

Board Members, with one member from each election year of 2022, 2023, and 2024. The committee would streamline the hiring process and make it more efficient than a committee of the whole. Once the Superintendent is hired, the committee will be dissolved.

The Board did not support Board Member Vadlamani's motion.

Board Member Vadlamani withdrew his motion to create a Superintendent Search Committee. Motion unanimously approved.

Motion made by Board Secretary Burnside, seconded by Board Member Gifford to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss personnel matters and matters within Attorney Client Privilege.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education will go into Executive Session for the above stated reasons only; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board hereby declares that its discussion of the aforementioned subject(s) will be made public at a time when the public's interest in disclosure is greater than any privacy or governmental interest being protected from disclosure.

Motion to adjourn to executive session unanimously approved at 8:30 p.m. The Board did not return to public session.

---

Eric Burnside, Board Secretary