

Special Meeting  
Preliminary Budget Hearing  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
March 24, 2026

A Special Meeting (Preliminary Budget Hearing) 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 and via an online video conference platform on March 24, 2026.

Board President Meyer called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: Board Member Brown, Board Member Callahan,  
Board Member Higgins, Board Member Kapadia,  
Board President Meyer, Board Member Sackett-Gable  
Board Member Stephan

Absent: Board Member Bennett, Malini Nayar

***SEVEN VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT***

Pledge of Allegiance

NOTICE OF THE MEETING

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 10:08 a.m. on March 9, 2026.
- 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.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

WHEREAS, the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-11, permits the Board of Education to meet in closed executive session to discuss certain matters, and

WHEREAS, the length of the Executive Session is estimated to be seventy-five (75) minutes after which the public meeting of the Board shall (select one)  reconvene and immediately adjourn or  reconvene and proceed with business where formal action will be taken, now, therefore be it

RESOLVED: The Board of Education adjourns to closed session to discuss personnel, legal, and miscellaneous confidential matters. Be it further

RESOLVED: The minutes of this closed session will be made public when the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

Motion made by Board Member Sackett-Gable, second by Board Member Callahan to adjourn to Executive Session. Motion unanimously approved.

**Board Members adjourned to Executive Session at 6:33 p.m.**

**Board Members reconvened at 7:37 p.m.**

**Board Members Bennett and Nayar Present**

**Nine Voting Members Present**

HONORING CHRISTOPHER SETTLE

Chris Settle, a beloved security guard at the district's Administration Building and Columbia High School, passed away recently. Chris will be remembered for his kindness and dedication to the district community and as one of the most passionate Bills fans around. His passing has left a hole in the lives of many people who loved him. Details about his upcoming celebration of life service was shared.

SUPERINTENDENT BING

*We are presenting our preliminary budget tonight; it is not final; we will continue refining it over the next month and keep the community informed every step of the way. This has been a difficult process, balancing what our students need with our financial realities. Our main goal is to stabilize the district financially while protecting our staff, since they are our greatest asset and make up the majority of our budget. We are working to reduce costs, about \$2.5 million in staffing primarily through attrition and internal adjustments, while avoiding layoffs as much as possible.*

*Overall, we are planning for more than \$5 million in reductions next year. This will require going above the 2% tax cap, but we believe it is necessary to create long-term stability and avoid repeated cycles of cuts.*

*We have also identified key areas for savings, including restructuring transportation to improve efficiency, optimizing our Pre-K budget, and moving to a self-insured health plan to control rising costs.*

*Throughout this process, we are committed to transparency and community engagement. We will continue sharing detailed information and gathering feedback before the final budget is adopted. Our focus is on making responsible decisions that support our students, staff, and taxpayers, and ensure the long term health of our district.*

Interim Business Administrator Frank Ceurvels

*I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to work in the district. Over my career, I've put together more than 30 budgets and helped several other districts after retiring, but this has been the most challenging project I've encountered. It's a large district with many moving parts, and completing a budget of this size within a condensed three-week timeframe was demanding.*

*I couldn't have done this without the support of the staff. The central office team and senior leadership were outstanding. They spent countless hours working with me to review and analyze the budget. This was truly a group effort, and the district is fortunate to have such dedicated people working behind the scenes.*

*For some background, I've been assisting the district since around May of last year, helping with audit closeout, staff transitions, and financial analysis. When an unexpected leave created a gap, I was able to step in because I was already familiar with the systems and had a working understanding of the budget. Even so, completing the full budget development process was a significant task.*

*Budget development, analysis, and forecasting are areas I'm very comfortable with, and I feel confident in the budget being presented tonight. That said, this is only the preliminary version. The process doesn't end here. We will continue refining and reviewing it, looking for improvements all the way up to the public hearing. We recognize there are ongoing challenges facing this district and others across the state, and we will keep working to address them.*

#### 26-27 Preliminary Budget

Mr. Ceurvel and Mr. Bing presented an overview of the 26-27 Preliminary Budget. The presentation detailed:

- Budget Development Process
- Fiscal Pressure Matrix: Balancing Escalating Needs Against Hard Constraints
- Finding Fiscal Efficiencies to Balance the Budget
- Transition to a Self-Insured Health Plan
- Improving Operational Efficiency
- Budget Reductions
- Next Steps
  - Ongoing Assessment - Continue to Assess Programs and Budgetary Resources
  - Tax Impact Development - Develop Tax Impact Upon Receipt of the County Equalized Values
  - Final Budget Adoption - Public Hearing Scheduled or May 4, 2026

Board members expressed their appreciation for the extensive work and collaboration involved in budget development under challenging circumstances.

Questions focused on:

- Clarification of tax levy percentages and their relation to equalized property values.
- Details of reserve fund balances and their implications.

- Transparency and communication regarding staffing reductions and transfers, emphasizing minimizing negative impacts on staff and students.
- Transportation restructuring's projected savings and service improvements, including bus route optimization and adjusted school start times.
- The RFP process for contracted services, ensuring balance between cost savings and service quality, especially student-facing services like paraprofessionals.
- Monitoring and benchmarking health insurance costs against other districts in the self-insured model.
- Concern over the low capital and maintenance reserve funding in light of significant infrastructure needs.
- Continued commitment to special education and high-needs student services despite budget pressures.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE.

ITEMS FOR ACTION

Motion made by Board Member Bennett, seconded by Board Member Stephan to move resolutions 4932A-B and 4933.

4932A. Appoint Frank Ceurvels of School Business Innovations, LLC as Interim Business Administrator/Board Secretary effective March 1, 2026, through June 30, 2026, at a rate of \$175.00/hour. Reimbursable expenses are not anticipated; however, if such expenses do arise, they shall not be incurred without the prior approval of the Superintendent. Should they occur and be approved, they will be billed at cost plus 10%.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, subject to county approval, the Board President, Superintendent, and Board Secretary are authorized to execute and deliver any necessary contracts and reports on behalf of the Board.

4932B. Approve the following Organizational Appointments for the 2025-2026 School Year, effective March 1, 2026:

1. Appoint Frank Ceurvels 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 Frank Ceurvels as the Qualified Purchasing Agent and authorize him to negotiate and award contracts pursuant to NJSA 18A:18A-3.
3. Appoint Frank Ceurvels as the Custodian of Records for the school district.
4. Approve Frank Ceurvels as the Public Agency Compliance Officer for the school district.

4933. Approve the following personnel fiscal resolution.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

NAME	ASSIGNMENT	EFFECTIVE DATE
Moody, Imani	Business Administrator/ Board Secretary DIST - 1.0 FTE	3/2/26-6/30/26 (Paid Medical Leave)

ROLL CALL: Motion 4932A-B, 4933 YES: Bennett, Brown, Callahan, Higgins, Kapadia, Meyer, Nayar, Sackett-Gable, Stephan NO: None

Motion made by Board Member Callahan, seconded by Board Member Nayar to move resolution 4932C.

4932C. Approves the Preliminary Budget for the 2026-2027 school year in the amount of:

	2026-2027 Proposed Budget	Less: Anticipated Revenues	Tax Levy
General Fund	174,084,131	24,318,958	149,765,173
Special Revenue	13,133,877	13,133,877	0
Debt Service	13,015,908	2,824,525	10,191,383
Total	<b>\$200,233,916</b>	<b>\$40,277,360</b>	<b>\$159,956,556</b>

Be it resolved that the Board approves and authorizes the application to the Commissioner of Education to increase the General Fund tax levy for the 2026-2027 school year by \$39,698 for an enrollment adjustment.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board approves and authorizes the application to the Commissioner of Education to increase the General Fund tax levy for the 2026-2027 school year by \$5,108,540 for a health care cost adjustment.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education in accordance with the N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.3(a), establishes a maximum travel expenditure for the 2026-2027 school year not to exceed the amount of \$200,000.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education authorizes the Business Administrator to submit the 2026-2027 Preliminary Budget to the County Superintendent for review and approval.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4932C YES: Bennett, Brown, Callahan, Higgins, Kapadia, Meyer, Nayar, Sackett-Gable, Stephan NO: None

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

Future Meetings

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, March 26, 2026 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.

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Board Secretary