

Special Meeting
Budget Hearing
South Orange-Maplewood
Board of Education
May 4, 2026

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 and via an online video conference platform on May 4, 2026.

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

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

Absent: Board Member Bennett, Board Member Kapadia

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 7:42 a.m. on April 29, 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.

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 6:32 p.m.

Board Members reconvened at 7:04 p.m.

Superintendent's Update

For the second consecutive year, our district has engaged in an exhaustive line by line review of our financial landscape. We have scrutinized every contract, audit, and operational expense, reducing costs wherever possible. However, we have reached a critical junction, having exhausted non-instructional efficiencies. We were forced to shift our focus toward personnel and benefits, the largest drivers of our budget. All along we have grounded this work in the student experience in the classroom. At this point we can no longer afford to do things the way we have done in the past. However, as we move forward with some of these difficult decisions, our intent is to do them with care and compassion.

As we look forward to the next several years, we must be transparent about our reality. Future adjustments will inevitably impact student

facing areas including staffing levels and educational programming. I do want to say we are not navigating these waters alone. Over the past several months we have sought insight and partnership from every corner of our community including our action committees, local partnerships like the municipal partnership, Essex County Organizations, superintendents, principals, Business Administrators, public forums, town halls, Board committee meetings and regular board meetings. These conversations have underscored a singular truth. Turning the ship to avoid a fiscal iceberg requires a collective and sustained effort.

We cannot solve systemic financial challenges in isolation. It requires the trust and cooperation of the entire community to ensure everyone remains informed and engaged. We are leveraging our digital platforms to provide unprecedented access to district data on our website. You will be finding in the next few months financial and academic dashboards with real-time snapshots of our spending and student outcomes and also strategic planning tracking in addition to our academic tracking with a partnership with Hanover research. We're excited to share that with the community. We'll be bringing those to the committee level over the next couple months and then making those available to our public. We remain committed to protecting the integrity of our students' education, but the path ahead is difficult. By working together, we can ensure that our fiscal decisions, no matter how tough, are made with the best interests of our children at the center.

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR'S UPDATE -*Frank Ceurvels, Interim, Bus. Administrator*

The 26-27 Budget Presentation included the following details:

- Fiscal Pressure Matrix: Balancing Escalating Needs Against Hard Constraints
- 2% State Tax Levy Cap Limiting Annual District Spending Growth
- Finding Fiscal Efficiencies to Balance the Budget
- Improving Operational Efficiencies
- Transition to Self-Insured Health Plan
- Tax Levy Cap & Health Care Waiver
- Addressing Fiscal Challenges and Modernizing Transportation
- Preliminary Budget Increase/Decrease
- Proposed 26-27 Budget
- Preschool Funding Appeal
- Staffing Overview
- Appropriations
- General Fund 3 Year Revenue/Appropriation Gap Model
- Next Steps

Q&A with the Board, Mr. Bing and Mr. Ceurvels included but was not limited to the following questions/comments:

- Why do some budget categories show major reversals from last year, such as increased spending on special education but a \$2.4 million reduction in plant maintenance?
 - The administration reviewed every line item and built the budget based on current needs and available resources. Much

of the maintenance reduction reflects the depletion of maintenance reserve funds that were available in prior years, not a reduction in facility needs.

- How can the district reduce maintenance funding when buildings still have significant needs?
 - The district still has substantial facility needs. The reserve funds previously used to support maintenance are no longer available. The district is also exploring bringing more maintenance work in-house to reduce long-term costs.
- Are we approaching a financial cliff because fund balance is running out?
 - Yes, future budgets will be more challenging. The district has relied on fund balance and budget freezes to balance budgets, and those resources are becoming limited. Health insurance costs remain a major variable.
- What concerns do you see for future budgets?
 - The district can no longer rely on fund balance to avoid difficult decisions. Long-term financial planning and difficult conversations will be necessary over the next several years.
- What should the Board do in response to the projected budget challenges?
 - The board should begin discussing difficult decisions now rather than waiting, so there is time to prioritize solutions and support the district's long-term financial stability.
- Was funding for student field trips restored?
 - Yes. After the district won its preschool funding appeal, some of the recovered funds were used to restore field-trip funding and several other previously reduced budget items.
- What is driving costs in mental health, security, and technology?
 - Mental health staffing was preserved due to increasing student needs. Security costs are shifting as pandemic-funded elementary security positions end, while investments continue in vestibules, cameras, and other capital improvements. Technology costs are largely managed through leasing and infrastructure upgrades.
- Why are extraordinary special education costs increasing while extraordinary aid is declining?
 - Extraordinary aid is determined by the state and often falls short of actual costs. The district continues expanding in-

district special education programs to reduce expensive out-of-district placements and control long-term costs.

- Are positions originally funded through pandemic aid still in the budget?
 - Yes. Many positions added during the pandemic are now funded through the regular operating budget, though the district has reduced staffing through attrition and is continuing to evaluate positions as part of its long-term financial planning.

[Presentation on File in Board Secretary's Office and District Website]

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE.

ACTION ITEMS

Motion made by Board Member Sackett-Gable, seconded by Board Member Callahan to move resolutions 4964. Motion unanimously approved.

4964A. WHEREAS, the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education adopted a TENTATIVE budget on March 24, 2026, and submitted it to the Executive County Superintendent of Schools for approval, and

WHEREAS, the TENTATIVE budget was approved by the Executive County Superintendent of Schools on April 10, 2026 and;

WHEREAS, the TENTATIVE budget was advertised in the legal section of the News Record on April 27, 2026 and;

WHEREAS, the FINAL BUDGET was presented to the public during a public hearing held in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ on May 4, 2026 and;

WHEREAS, the Preliminary budget set for adoption was as follows:

	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	\$200,233,916	\$40,277,360	\$159,956,556

WHEREAS, due to a successful appeal with the State of New Jersey over the amount of local funding required to support the Preschool Education Program has resulted in the ability to lower the mandatory local contribution by \$457,728.00 and;

WHEREAS, the Superintendent of Schools is recommending that the following modifications be made to the tentative budget:

Revenues:

10-121	General Fund Tax Levy	\$ (139,728)
20-5200	Transfers from Operating Budget	\$ (457,728)
Total Revenues		\$ (597,456)

Appropriations:

General Fund

11-140-100-101	Grade 9-12 Salary Teachers	\$ 76,000
11-000-213-100	Salaries Health Services	\$ 76,000
11-000-221-320	Purch Prof Ed Svcs Imp Instr	\$ 15,000
11-000-222-100	Salaries Webmaster	\$ 25,000
11-000-270-512	Contr Svc (Other than bet Home&School)	\$ 58,000
11-000-291-270	Group Health Insurance	\$ 68,000
11-105-100-936	Local Contribution - Transfer to PEA	\$ (457,728)
Total General Fund Appropriations		\$ (139,728)

Special Revenue Fund

20-218-100-XXX	PEA Instruction	\$ (245,305)
20-218-200-XXX	PEA Support Services	\$ 977
20-218-400-XXX	PEA Facs	\$ (213,400)
Total Special Revenue Fund		\$ (457,728)

Total Appropriations **\$ (597,456)**

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that in consideration of the above, the Board of Education hereby adopts the following FINAL Budget for SY2026-2027:

	2026-2027 Revised Proposed Budget	Less: Anticipated Revenues	Tax Levy
General Fund	\$173,944,403	\$24,318,958	\$149,625,445
Special Revenue	\$12,676,149	\$12,676,149	\$0
Debt Service	\$13,015,908	\$2,824,525	\$10,191,383
Total	\$199,636,460	\$39,819,632	\$159,816,828

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 and;

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 \$5,176,540 for a health care cost adjustment.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board of Education hereby adopts the REVISED 2026-2027 School District Budget; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT \$149,625,445 should be raised for the General Fund for the ensuing 2026-27 school year and;

Motion made by Board Member Brown, seconded by Board Member Higgins to move resolutions 4964B. Motion unanimously approved.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4964A PASSED YES: Brown, Callahan, Higgins, Meyer, Nayar, Sackett-Gable, Stephan NO: None

4964B. WHEREAS, the South Orange and Maplewood Board of Education recognizes school staff and Board members will incur travel expenses related to and within the scope of their current responsibilities and for travel that promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district; and

WHEREAS, N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7et seq. requires Board members to receive approval of these expenses by a majority of the full voting membership of the Board and staff members to receive prior approval of these expenses by the Superintendent of Schools and a majority of the full voting membership of the Board; and

WHEREAS, a Board of Education may establish, for regular district business travel only, an annual school year threshold of \$1,500 per staff member where prior Board approval shall not be required unless this annual threshold for a staff member is exceeded in a given school year (July 1 through June 30); and

WHEREAS, the South Orange and Maplewood Board of Education established \$200,000 as the maximum travel amount for the current school year and has expended \$113,775.55 as of this date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the South Orange and Maplewood Board of Education approves travel and related expense reimbursements in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7, to a maximum expenditure of \$200,000 for all staff and Board members; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School Business Administrator track and record these costs to ensure that the maximum amount is not exceeded.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4964B PASSED YES: Brown, Callahan, Higgins, Meyer, Nayar, Sackett-Gable, Stephan NO: None

Motion made by Board Member Callahan, seconded by Board Member Sackett-Gable to move resolutions 4965. Motion unanimously approved.

4965. WHEREAS, the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education ("Board") is committed to maintaining a learning environment that is free from harassment, intimidation, and bullying ("HIB"), consistent with the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act; and

WHEREAS, a determination was made regarding HIB #301206_MMS_12152025 following the District's investigation and required procedures; and
WHEREAS, the Board received a request for appeal of the Superintendent's determination in this matter; and

WHEREAS, on April 28, 2026, the Board conducted a HIB Appeal hearing, during which the Board Committee reviewed the record, considered the findings, and heard all relevant presentations in accordance with applicable law and Board policy; and

WHEREAS, following the appeal hearing, the Board Committee provided its recommendation to the full Board for consideration; and

WHEREAS, the Board has reviewed the complete record, including the investigation report, findings, appeal materials, and the recommendation of the Board Committee;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education of the South Orange-Maplewood School District hereby affirms the determination in HIB Case #301206_MMS_12152025; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Superintendent and District administration are directed to proceed in accordance with applicable policies, regulations, and law; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board Secretary is authorized to transmit this decision to the appropriate parties as required.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4965 PASSED YES: Brown, Callahan, Higgins, Meyer, Nayar, Sackett-Gable, Stephan NO: None

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE.

NEW BUSINESS

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, May 7, 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 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 at 7:30 pm for an Organizational/Staff Renewal Meeting in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, in person and 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. Action will be taken.

The Board of Education will meet in Public Session on Thursday, May 21, 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. Action will be taken.

On Thursday, May 28, 2026 at 6:30 p.m., the Board of Education will convene using an online video conference platform for an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the Chief School Administrator (CSA) Evaluation. Action will not be taken.

Motion made by Board Member Sackett-Gable, seconded by Board Member Brown to adjourn. Motion to adjourn was unanimously approved at 9:25 p.m.

Board Secretary