

OWOSSO PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Board of Education Minutes
Committee of the Whole Meeting
June 14, 2021
Report 20-159

Present: Adam Easlick, Sara Keyes, Ty Krauss, Rick Mowen, Olga Quick, Shelly Ochodnicki, Marlene Webster
Absent: None

President Rick Mowen called the Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The meeting began in the Washington Campus Gymnasium, 645 Alger Street, Owosso MI 48867, was recessed and relocated to the Superintendent's Office, 645 Alger Street, Owosso MI 48867.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Participation

President Mowen stated that the Board of Education is a public body and recognizes the value of public comment on educational issues. Time has been included in the meeting's agenda for public participation. Members of the audience were reminded that they should announce their name and group affiliation when applicable and to limit their participation time to three minutes or less. Comments should be directed to the Board and be relevant to the business of the Board of Education. This is not an opportunity for dialogue with the Board of Education. The rules of common courtesy should also be observed.

No participants addressed the Board.

End of the Year Message

Dr. Tuttle commended the Board for leading the district through an incredibly challenging year. She also thanked OPS staff, students, and families for their support, understanding, and resilience. President Mowen added that he was grateful the district was able to remain open for in-person learning for a majority of the school year.

Staffing

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board that the district is in a good position regarding staffing. There is one third grade teaching position that remains open. Trustee Quick noted the many staffing changes at Lincoln High School (LHS) this year which she expressed makes her a bit nervous. On a positive note, Mr. Forest Tate and Mr. Taylor Sergent will be excellent additions to LHS. Trustee Quick commended Mr. Tate for visiting the school and students this spring, a gesture she believes Lincoln students appreciated. As announced, Dr. Dallas Lintner is transitioning to the LHS Principal position and Mr. Steve Irelan is transitioning to the Owosso High School (OHS)

Assistant Principal and Athletic Director position. Dr. Tuttle said that Dr. Lintner and Mr. Ireland are good friends and are helping each other to ensure smooth transitions for both schools. Dr. Tuttle informed the Board the district is beginning candidate assessments and interviews for the Administrative Assistant position this week. Finalist must have strong computer, reading, writing, and organizational skills.

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board that she is working with the Cook Family Foundation and Lebowsky Center for Performing Arts on contracting an individual to serve part time as a coordinator for the new Performing Arts Center. She explained that the new facility is beautiful and “high tech.” There is a need for additional personnel to help ensure the first year runs smoothly with all the new technology.

Dr. Tuttle reported that following Officer Mike Ash’s retirement, the district has contracted Mr. Dave Stone, an Owosso graduate, as a Liaison Officer.

Calendar

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board of the following important dates:

- July 29: all administrators return to the district
- August 3-4: all administrator meetings
- August 10-11: new teacher orientation
- August 16-17: district-wide professional development

Dr. Tuttle invited the Board to the Grand Opening of the secondary campus for all OPS staff on August 16th. The Grand Opening will include a team-building activity and self-guided tour of the campus.

Summer School

Curriculum Director Steve Brooks shared that the secondary schools began credit recovery through their summer school program. There are approximately 100 OHS students at 20 LHS students participating. The district has a total of 375 students taking advantage of summer school opportunities from preschool through 12th grade. Trustee Krauss asked if summer school opportunities are only being offered to OPS students. Mr. Brooks confirmed that is the case, adding it is a grant stipulation. Mr. Brooks noted that many staff members have been willing to help with the summer school program, and they have been monumental in ensuring the program’s great success. Mr. Brooks also shared the summer school program is focusing heavy on the social aspects of learning, especially for the younger students, after so many social activities were canceled in the past year. SATA transportation is free for any student who would otherwise be unable to attend. To secure SATA transportation, Owosso families simply need to call SATA to set up their ride schedule.

Mr. Brooks also announced that “Books for Bryant” begins on Thursday and will continue through the summer to provide free reading materials for students and young children in the community.

Shiawassee Virtual Academy – Pilot Technology Program

Dr. Tuttle announced the county-wide virtual learning option for the 2021–2022 school year. She explained that online courses will be offered through the Engenuity/Canvas program, and there is no limit to how many students can be in a class at this juncture. Because the program is county-wide, it does not necessarily follow OPS curriculum. While there will be one teacher per grade level at the elementary level, the online program will require ample parent supervision for success. Dr. Tuttle added that students will only have the option to switch back to in-person learning at the end of a semester. Trustee Quick asked who will be in charge of attendance for online learners. Dr. Tuttle replied that two-way communication is still required, and a teacher of record or mentor will take attendance. Dr. Tuttle also explained that there will be no online option for preschoolers. Online learning provided by OPS is only an option for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Professional Development for 2021-2022

Mr. Brooks announced that OPS staff will have numerous professional development opportunities throughout the year, beginning in August. Staff will be able to choose between various sessions on topics such as technology, trauma, restorative practice, listening circles, communication platforms, SafeSchools, and more. Dr. Tuttle explained the importance of listening circles, noting she would like OPS staff to partake in courageous conversations and hopes teachers will feel more confident facilitating tough discussions in the classroom.

Mr. Brooks shared that OPS Writing Committees are analyzing units and preparing to begin strong in the fall. The Math Department is also working to bridge 8th and 9th grade algebra. In addition, OPS staff is engaging in Project Lead the Way and International Baccalaureate trainings to prepare for the 2021–2022 school year.

Bond Update

Dr. Tuttle announced that tours of the new secondary campus will be open to the public on the following dates:

- Tuesday, July 13 at 6pm
- Wednesday, July 21 at 9am
- Tuesday, July 27 at 7pm

Dr. Tuttle explained the Grand Opening for the public will be November 4th at 7pm. The delay is to ensure COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and the Performing Arts Department has time to prepare performances.

Dr. Tuttle noted that many new signs will be placed throughout the district this summer, along with at the entrance of the new Performing Arts Center.

Spicer Contract/ Sinking Funds/ Air Conditioning

Dr. Tuttle shared cost estimates to air condition the elementary buildings, provided by the Spicer Group. The total cost would be \$4,750,000. Dr. Tuttle explained that if the district, at some point, decides to proceed with air conditioning the buildings, design costs will be a large upfront cost because the elementary school buildings are rather old. Funds for the air conditioning could come from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund III (ESSER III) and sinking fund.

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board of the following sinking fund projects that are commencing this summer:

- Secondary Campus: renovations to tennis court inclusive of addition of concrete pad and a pergola, renovations to baseball fields inclusive of the baseball scoreboard and softball scoreboard
- Willman Field: renovations to the football scoreboard and fencing, field goal replacement and relocation, and GameClocks
- Emerson: renovations to the bathrooms and stairwells
- Bentley: pergola installation
- Elementary playgrounds: new rubber mulch and some tree removals

Budget

CFO Julie Omer provided an overview of the budget. She reminded the Board that in March 2021, the projected 2021–2022 fund balance, assuming ESSER funds would be used for 2% off-schedule payment for all groups, was \$1,925,351 or 5.66% of expenditures. CFO Omer reported that she now predicts the fund balance will be \$1,802,680 or 5.24% of the expenditures.

Numbers

Dr. Tuttle shared that, at the time of the meeting, 215 students were enrolled to begin kindergarten with OPS next year. This puts this district on schedule for an average size incoming kindergarten class of 240–250.

Dr. Tuttle excitedly reported that zero students or staff members were in quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19.

Board Retreat

Dr. Tuttle informed the Board that their retreat has been rescheduled for October 11, 2021. The Board Retreat is an open meeting that community members may attend, but topics of discussion will include the role of the Board and its long-term goals, rather than regular agenda items.

Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan

Dr. Tuttle explained to the Board that the Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan is superseded by MDHHS emergency orders which currently requires all individuals who are not fully vaccinated to continue wearing face coverings through June 30, 2021. Thus, unvaccinated students in summer school must continue wearing masks while inside through June 30, 2021. The Extended COVID-19 Learning Plan will expire on June 30, 2021.

Senate Bill No. 460

Dr. Tuttle made the Board aware of Senate Bill No. 460, a bill that has been introduced to the Michigan legislature by Senators Theis, Daley, Runestad, Barrett, Victory, Zorn, Outman, and Vanderwall. In summary, the bill proposes prohibiting Michigan schools from covering critical race theory or the 1619 Project. Dr. Tuttle simply wanted to inform the Board the bill has been proposed because she knows the Board receives many questions from community members on the topic.

Vice President Ochodnicky said that she would like the Board to be mindful in keeping community members informed of what is being taught in the classrooms.

Dr. Tuttle added that she believes the Board should continue to have open discussions on topics not everyone agrees on. Trustee Quick agreed that having open conversations was an important starting part.

Secretary Webster shared that while she is not an expert in critical race theory or the 1619 Project, she believes what is happening with regard to racial tensions and the history of racism in America should be taught in school. She emphasized the importance of teaching students the truth about Owosso's own history of not welcoming people of color into the community, being a "Sundown Town". Secretary Webster added that she often hears people say racial tensions were a thing of the past, so why talk about them now? Her response is that racial tensions and discrimination certainly exist today, and those who truly believe they have been eliminated are likely speaking from a place of privilege. She concluded noting that while she might not think Owosso schools need to specifically teach about critical race theory or the 1619 project, she absolutely believes Owosso schools need to teach about historical truth.

Dr. Tuttle pointed out that many history books that have been used in the classroom were not written by people of color, and all authors, no matter how objective they may try to be, likely have some of their perspective in their writing.

Secretary Webster noted that her friend, a black woman, informed her that when she travels to former Sundown Towns, she travels with other black families. Vice President Ochodnicky suggested some individuals might believe those who live in what was once a Sundown Town still practice discrimination when that is not the case. Secretary Webster responded that people of color, even in today's world, are treated differently by many. Trustee Krauss said it is an assumption to say everyone still treats people of color differently. Secretary Webster responded she does not assume every white person treats people of color differently, but some do which creates a negative experience. She added that is where education can come in, to remove negative attitudes towards those who are different.

President Mowen stated that he has found the younger generation to be much more accepting of differences but finds it hard to educate older generations.

President Mowen and Trustee Easlick shared the stories of some of their acquaintances who have been treated differently or unfairly, likely due to the color of their skin.

Dr. Tuttle and Secretary Webster spoke to the importance of inclusivity.

Curriculum Director Steve Brooks and Secretary Webster discussed moving away from polarized language and focusing on the content of promoting equity and inclusion.

Trustee Easlick and Dr. Tuttle noted the importance of exposure to different cultures in education.

Closed Session

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicki to move into Closed Session at 7:44 pm for the purpose of discussing contract negotiations. Secretary Webster conducted a roll call vote. Ayes: Mowen, Ochodnicki, Keyes, Easlick, Krauss, Quick, Webster. Nays: None. Motion carried unanimously.

Moved by Quick, supported by Ochodnicki to return to open session at 7:58 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Moved by Ochodnicki, supported by Keyes to adjourn at 7:59 pm. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Alexa Stechschulte.

Respectfully submitted,

Marlene Webster, Secretary