

Special Meeting  
**Board Retreat**  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
January 10, 2022

A Special Meeting (Board Retreat) 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 10, 2022.

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

Adequate written notice of this meeting of the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education was sent to the Township and Village Clerks, The Star Ledger, the News Record and all schools.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Present In Person: Board Member Bergin, Board President Joshua  
Board Member Siders

Present Remote: Board Member Malespina, Board Member Telesford  
Board Member Vadlamani, Board Member Winkfield,  
Board Member Wittleder, Board Member Wright,  
Student Rep. Morros

Absent: None

*NINE VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT*

BOARD PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

The School Board meeting is a business meeting in public 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 presented to the full Board for discussion before any action is taken. Only then, is it placed on the agenda for action at a public meeting.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Hello Dr. Taylor and members of the Board of Education.

My name is Malia Herman. I am a Maplewood resident, mother of two and president of SOMA SEPAC, our district's Special Education Parent Advisory Committee.

Our SEPAC Board would like to welcome the new members to the BOE. We look forward to working with you.

As you know, New Jersey Law specifies that "Each District Board of Education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities." [New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2(h)]

Our district is fortunate to have an active parent-led SEPAC. We meet monthly with the Assistant Superintendent of Special Services and quarterly with the Superintendent to provide feedback on what we are hearing from parents in the special education community. Additionally, two SEPAC board members are a part of President's Council, which meets monthly with Dr. Taylor. We have SEPAC liaisons at each school, and we plan and hold monthly meetings for parents.

However, despite SEPAC being a legally-mandated entity, there is currently no official connection between the BOE and SEPAC. This was not always the case. Only a few years ago, there was a specific board member designated as the liaison to SEPAC. This board member would typically attend our meetings, as well as stay in contact with the SEPAC leadership. We are speaking to you tonight to consider adding that role back.

There are 1,121 children in our district with IEPs, a number that would be higher if you included those with 504s. Our of a district-wide enrollment of 7,000, special education students comprise at least 16 percent, more if you include children with 504s.

With the number of policies that the BOE considers each year, and the number of challenges facing special education children, we feel that it's time for the board to re-instate a liaison to SEPAC.

BOE members are elected by the community to serve the students of our district. We'd like to help you serve them better.

Thank you.

**BOARD RETREAT**

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools

Good Evening Board Members and members of the public. Harassment Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) are high priority for this district, our Board of Education and Administration. We often discuss HIB cases that rise to the level of review by the Administration and

Board of Education. We have a belief in the growth mindset and to always be improving on our practices and protocols. To that end, with new Board Members, we thought it would be a great idea to bring in vendor LEGAL ONE to give us some expertise and professional development for the Board on this important topic of HIB.

Joanne Butler, In-House Counsel emphasized that HIB is such a big issue that all districts are facing in New Jersey and that this Board is committed to making sure HIB is ideally eliminated. With the monthly reporting that must be given to the Board, it is important that all of Board of Education members understand the legal criteria for what constitutes HIB, the parameters of what can be done as part of an investigation and then as follow-up.

Sandra L. Jacques, Esq. LL.M. of LEGAL ONE facilitated the Board Retreat – The Role of Board of Education Members: Legal Requirements and Responsibilities.

The Retreat focused on the following:

- HIB Overview and Recent HIB Case Examples
  - The HIB Process
  - Bullying vs. NJ HIB Law
  - Definition of Harassment, Intimidation or Bullying
  - Protected Characteristics
  - The “Other” Characteristics
  - New Jersey Anti-Bullying Case Law
  - HIB Summary Review
  
- Student and Staff 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Issues
  - Free Speech Defenses
  - What Student Speech is Protected?
  - What Student Speech is Not Protected?
  - Penalties
  - Staff Speech Issues “Pickering Balancing Test”
  - Pickering Analysis Questions

#### ITEMS FOR ACTION

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Siders to move resolutions 4242 and 4243 for discussion.

4242. Approves the Board of Education Committees for the 2022 calendar year as presented.

4243. Approves the Board of Education Committee Liaisons for the 2022 calendar year as presented.

ROLL CALL: Motion 4242-4243 PASSED YES: Bergin, Joshua, Siders, Telesford, Vadlamani, Winkfield, Wittleder NO: Malespina, Wright

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

Marian Raab

Good Evening and welcome to the three new Board Members. My name is Marianne Raab I am a Maplewood Resident and I have a 9<sup>th</sup> grade special needs student at Columbia High School and I also have recent graduate of Columbia High School who is currently doing a gap year. I wanted to thank you literally from the bottom of my heart for getting our school back open today. It was no small feat, I am aware of that. We are all trying to do what I like to say is our normal things in extraordinarily abnormal times. Our children have had their education substantially disrupted, unfortunately because of COVID. Not just my kids but the other 7,000+ kids in this district. Thank You, thank you, thank you for getting our schools reopened today. I ask you that as we get through the next difficult weeks and months.

Shannon Cuttle

Welcome to New BOE Members and happy New Year to all!

I am writing to say I am very happy that the BOE is receiving HIB training tonight. It is very valuable and important. Thank you for making that commitment to better training and understanding. HIB training is not just one and done and anti-bullying overall also includes looking at the climate and culture of a classroom or community, training and understanding of the definitions and understanding of what harassment, intimidation and bullying looks like inside and outside of the classroom, online and offline. I would encourage the Board to expand training to include anti-bias, and including cultural competency, climate and culture and to continue the discussion.

If we do not understand what our climate and culture looks like and for students and families to understand how to find support, guidance and crisis support, we will be missing creating inclusive safe spaces for all students. Thank you and I know we made a commitment as a district and thank you all.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, January 24, 2022 at 6:00 pm in the Superintendent's Office, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, as well as using the online video conference platform to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations, and other matters 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 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. If there are members of the community who would like to attend the meeting in person, please note that masks and social distancing are required in accordance with the guidance received from the local DOH and the CDC. Action will be taken.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Bergin, that the Board of Education will meet in Executive Session prior to the February 24, 2022 Public Meeting to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations and other matters, the nature of which will be made public at a future date. Motion unanimously approved.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua to adjourn.

Motion unanimously approved at 8:44 p.m.

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Eric Burnside, Board Secretary