

Orange Southwest School District (OSSD)
Regular Board Meeting on Wednesday November 12, 2025
Randolph Union High School
6pm

[Click Here](#) for a link to the video recording of the meeting.

Minutes

I. Opening (6:00 pm)

- **Board Attendance:** *Ensuring a quorum*

Board: Anne Kaplan, Aimil Parmelee, Beverly Lauchner, Martha Hafner, Ryan Anderson, Rachel Gaidys, Rachel Fish (virtual)

Administration: Michael Clark, Robin Pembroke, ORCA Media, Kyle Southworth

Guests present: Arthur Puritz, Barbara McKeon, Tina O'Donnell, Jennifer Chisholm, Abby McFadyen, Lisa Wright, Alex Brown, Larry Satcowitz, Tim Moynihan, Shirley Huang, George Rosalbo, Jack Mason, Myles Rosario, Bev Taft, Tevye Kelman. Online: Zyla Nuite, Emily Huff, Bob Worley, Wes Gibbs, Joe Bent, Janni Jacobs, Tracey Gardner, Norie Belanger, Hannah Bonasera, Tammy White, Julie Hinman, Sara Richards, Kayla Manning-French, Heidi Schwartz, Rachel Bent, Stefanie Cole, Abi Gershon, Suzi Zabni, Caitlin Obenauer, Christopher Rivet, Jenn Doyle (apologies to anyone missed!)

- **Meeting Purpose:** Initiation of Budget Process
- **Review and Accept Agenda:** *Meeting purpose? Are these the right agenda items? Is the right amount of time allotted?*
No changes to agenda

II. Ownership Linkage (6:05)

- **Public Comment:** *Board welcomes comment but is not able to take any action. Comments limited to 3 minutes per speaker.*

Jack Mason, Myles Rosario and George Rosalbo briefed the board and attending community on results of a survey (attached) they completed in their Economic Justice Project Based Learning Class. Students pointed out that the positive results indicated the school community did exceptionally well in promoting inclusivity, equity and academic opportunity and maintaining current funding levels would help ensure continuation of that.

Alex Eingorm spoke about being a senior mentor, and an email he had received. He expressed concern that the budget would be cut and believes there simply isn't room.

- **Update on Act 73 (H 454)**

- Up for Learning Project Update

Michael Clark invited the community to attend the Listening Session at RUMHS on Thursday, Nov. 13 at 6 pm. RU students have partnered with WRV and Montpelier students and Up For Learning in Re-Visioning Education that they will present to the community and begin discussions.

- Redistricting Task Force Update (Map #2 and #3)

<https://vtvsba.us5.list-manage.com/track/click?u=24c45fb830ec587cff6e5d090&id=39682412e6&e=1b2b501e57>

- **Review Draft of a Level Service Budget (Review EL Policy 2.4)**

Michael Clark spoke about the level service budget increase of 5.08%, and about the three budgets to be reviewed by the board – OSSD, RTCC and RAVEN. This increase includes moving a grant-funded .5 PE position to local funds as well as \$800,000 to support special education out-of-district student placements. Robin Pembroke explained that out-of-district student placements are students that must be placed in a program out of the OSSD as the district is unable to meet their needs. The increase is in consideration of a number of students who have moved into the district with an existing IEP requiring the district to meet these needs. Tuition to the New School, Washington County Mental Health, Foundations, etc. is a huge driver for this budget increase.

The only reductions are the replacement of the assistant superintendent position with that of a director of curriculum and student achievement. Health insurance came in with a much lower increase than expected, and retirements also played a part as the new hires are generally less experienced and are at lower salaries. Ryan Anderson comments that the community is concerned about tax increases but doesn't want to see service losses. Michael Clark explains that while expenditures are controlled by the district, the revenue is not, and the tax rate is not yet available from the state. Aimil Parmelee notes that last year's level service numbers were higher and impacted by the state adjustments to average daily membership and the weighted student funding formula.

Anne Kaplan asks if budget drafts could be produced that might reduce the overall cost, Michael Clark notes that 1% of the budget is approximately \$280,000. Martha Hafner asks if there is communication or collaboration between the towns and the school to have foreknowledge of the tax impact. Rachel Gaidys reminds that our district is comprised of three different selectboards, Michael Clark doesn't recall there being a joint meeting, and the education tax isn't as clear-cut as property taxes. Beverly Lauchner asks if there has been conversation (within the cabinet) about further cuts? Michael Clark responds that the level-funded budget is as far as the conversation with the cabinet has gone,

and Rachel Gaidys asks what would be on the list if more money were available? The response is repairs to facilities across all campuses, student support and staff training would make that list. Michael Clark notes that schools and emergency rooms are the only Vermont entities that cannot turn anyone away, and the schools' support of students is more complex than ever – including laundry, food, mental health services, health services, providing cold weather gear and other clothing as well as education. Martha Hafner asks if the community should be more involved in helping to support students educationally through experiential learning opportunities. Rachel Fish comments that while school costs are increasing because student needs are being met, it's worth noting that retention and graduation rates are up because the student needs are being met.

Michael Clark moves on to discuss the RTCC and Raven budgets. The RTCC transport from and to the technical center in Barre as well as a health careers instructor salary affects the draft budget, but RTCC is also a tuition situation, and operates on a six-semester average so change rolls slowly. The Raven program is anticipating the addition of a staff member and expects a 1.86% per student tuition increase. Martha Hafner requests more information on the program and the population served, Michael Clark responds he can have Raven present on the program at another meeting.

Michael Clark reminds the board this draft budget is a best plan for funds that will be expended in two years. The final budget will need to be warned in mid-January, and the tax rate should be available by the December board meeting as well as the excess spending threshold.

- **Public Comment:** specific to the *Level Service* budget. *The Board welcomes comment but is not able to take any action. Comments are limited to 3 minutes per speaker.*

Barbara McKeon asks how the decision to cut late buses was made, and what exactly are curriculum development costs? Michael Clark replies that the decision to discontinue the late bus was based on the number of riders, which varied from 6 to none. Curriculum development costs are assessment and reporting supplies as well as professional development for teachers.

Emma Janicki thanks Michael Clark for acknowledging the kinds of services that are offered by school staff (clothes, laundry, food, etc.) and comments that experiential learning is not a fix-all or replacement for the support students need.

Larry Satkowitz discussed the buy down from last year but noted it is unclear if that is possible this year. Until the yield bill is unveiled, that simply is an unknown. In response to Martha Hafner's question about collaboration with town and district, he commented that while there is no

active collaboration, town leadership is aware of tax increases and the budget needs for education. Labor intense industries typically see increases above the cost of inflation.

Tevye Kelman echoed previous comments about Michael Clark's remarks. He said it always strikes him what kids arrive at school with, or without (clothes, food, supplies) and states that community connections are important, developing those connections takes more resources (staff & time) so it isn't necessarily going to reduce cost. Structure takes a lot longer to build up than it might seem.

Shirley Huang asks if the district has seniors who are graduating early or involved in early college? And is the district paying for that? Michael Clark replies that the early college program is state funded, so that cost is paid with tax dollars, but not local funding. Bev Taft offers that early college counts for high school graduation credits as well, and there are currently 6 students involved in the program.

- **Board Discussion:** Does the Board believe this is supportable by the taxpayers?

The board discusses their desire to consider a budget that is under the excess spending threshold, there is concern about paying a "penalty" on top of increases. Currently the cost per student is \$16,331, the board notes that having that information is good but will not necessarily drive what the board will bring to voters. Michael Clark asks if they would like the district to prepare draft budgets in -.5% increments (similar to how the budgets were prepared last year), and wants to know what's off the table? Ryan Anderson states that closing Brookfield School is off-limits, other thoughts are to keep it under the excess spending threshold, and for Michael Clark to bring it all to the board for consideration. Michael Clark points out that this year there is less fat to cut, and things will get uncomfortable more quickly.

- **Next steps and Budget Timeline reviewed**

III. Board Process (7:10)

- Support Staff Negotiations

No update at this time, will be re-visited at December's meeting

- Sabbatical Request: appointment of committee

As per the Professional Staff CBA, a committee consisting of two teachers, one administrator and one board member must be stood up to consider any sabbatical requests. The Association has suggested Brian Kennedy and Julie Hinman as faculty representatives. There is currently one request.

Rachel Gaidys moves to appoint Brian Kennedy, Julie Hinman, Michael Clark and Rachel Fish to decide '26-27 sabbatical requests. Motion is seconded by Aimil Parmelee and passes unanimously.

- **Bus Bid**
Michael Clark advises the board that typically two buses are replaced every two years.
- **Transportation Reserve Fund: decision made by vote of the Board**
Martha Hafner moves to approve access to the transportation reserve fund for the purchase of two buses as recommended by the transportation director. Motion is seconded by Ryan Anderson and passes unanimously.
- **Side Letter Re: Custodial Contracting**
Michael Clark discusses the staffing shortage in the district's custodial department, and discussion with the Association to allow the usage of an outside agency until vacancies are filled. This agreement will allow outside custodial services to Brookfield and Braintree; services will be provided primarily when students are not present and that staff will be background checked.
Ryan Anderson moves to approve the side letter as written. Motion is seconded by Aimil Parmelee and passes unanimously.

IV. Board Education (7:25)

- **Reminder of Policy Governance Virtual Training Thursday 6pm Dec 4, 2025**
- **Report on the VSBA Conference**
Beverly Lauchner reported she enjoyed learning about student representation and would be interested in exploring that, Martha Hafner liked the discussion of the dynamics of trust and how it is an essential ingredient to a healthy school.

V. Monitoring the Organization (7:30).

- **Accept/Reject EL 2.1 & 2.2 (BMD 3.4.5) 2nd Read**
Aimil Parmelee moves to accept EL 2.1 and 2.2. Motion is seconded by Ryan Anderson and passes unanimously.
- **Financials (EL 2.3 Financial Conditions)**
The board has no concerns about the monthly financials.

VI. Policy Decisions for District Governance (7:35)

- None for this month

VII. Monitoring the Board (7:40)

- **Board Self-Evaluation: Monitoring compliance with Board Governance Process and Board Management Delegation Policies.**
Board discusses budget, training, community outreach and creating a more in-depth onboarding process for new board members. Anne Kaplan suggests Martha Hafner could be part of an orientation process. Aimil points out a misalignment between when a board member is elected and when training is offered.
- **GP 4.7 Governance Investment – Self Evaluation**

VIII. Consent Agenda (7:50)

- **Vote on acceptance of Consent Agenda:** *Items that the Board has previously delegated to the Superintendent, but that an external authority requires the Board to approve. The entire Consent*

Agenda is adopted by one motion, without discussion. However, an item can be removed from the Consent Agenda for discussion with a majority vote GP 4.3.4.

- Approve Minutes from October 8, 2025
- New Hires

Aimil Parmelee moves to approve the consent agenda as presented. Motion is seconded by Beverly Lauchner and passes unanimously.

IX. Closing/Incidental Information (7:55)

- Superintendent's Report
 - ACT 73 Updates
 - Redistricting Task Force
Beverly Lauchner questions the most recent press release about voluntary consolidation. Michael Clark discusses the phases laid out in the plan, and notes it is a real implementation plan.
 - AOE ACT 73 Resource page and Class Size Requirements
 - UP For Learning Project
 - Sabbatical Request
 - Budgeting Highlights and Timeline
 - Ends Snapshot
Michael Clark shares his enthusiasm that the process is effectively a real time snapshot of how the kids are doing with Ends and state reporting. This will allow administrators to report progress to Michael and faculty and staff can report progress to their administrators in a more timely manner.
 - Re-Visioning the Future of Public Education in VT Listening Session
- Action Item Recap

X. Executive Session *If needed*

No executive session

With no further business, Chair Anne Kaplan adjourned the meeting at 8:35 pm.

Future Meetings

- Agenda Planning Meeting: Monday December 1st at 6 pm
- Regular Board Meeting: 6pm December 10, 2025 at Braintree Elementary

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle M Southworth

Kyle M Southworth

Administrative Assistant, 11/14/2025

Economic Equity and School Environment

Names George, Jack, Myles in the Economic Justice Project Based Learning Class.

We made a survey to see how students' economic situations are affecting academic and school life. Our survey presented students with a series of statements and asked them to indicate agreement or disagreement, on a 1 to 5 scale, 1 being strongly agree, and 5 being strongly disagreeing. We received 160 responses, from grade 7 through 12. The results from the recent school survey reveal a relatively strong sense of fairness, support, and positive student experiences across the community. Overall, the data from our survey indicates that our school is successfully fostering an equitable environment and that ongoing support is essential to maintain and build upon this success.

These are some survey questions:

1. Academic Equity and Opportunity

The statement "*I feel that my financial situation doesn't affect my academic success*" received an **average score of 2.44**, which indicates general agreement. This suggests that most students believe their financial background does not limit their ability to succeed academically. Such a result highlights that our school's academic policies, access to resources, and teacher support are effectively minimizing barriers related to economic differences.

2. Teacher Behavior and Student Respect

Responses to "*My teachers make assumptions about my economic status*" averaged **4.19**, showing strong disagreement. This is an encouraging sign that teachers are not engaging in biased or judgmental behavior toward students based on their economic status. It reflects a professional and inclusive teaching culture that should be preserved and supported through continuous training and resources.

3. College Aspirations and Financial Concerns

The statement "*I want to go to college, but I don't believe it's a financial option*" averaged **3.63**, leaning toward disagreement. This means that while some students may still have financial worries, most feel optimistic about their opportunities for higher education. Continued guidance counseling and scholarship programs can ensure this positive outlook remains steady.

4. Judgment and Stigma Around Financial Help

Responses to "*I feel judged in asking for or taking financial help*" averaged **3.70**, indicating disagreement. This shows that our school has cultivated a community where seeking help is not stigmatized which is a critical element of a supportive educational environment.

5. Social Climate and Peer Treatment

The question "*I hear students make fun of others due to their economic status*" had an average of **3.41**, or a neutral result. While not highly concerning, it suggests there is still room to strengthen empathy and awareness among students. School programs that encourage kindness, inclusion, and cultural understanding can help further reduce social tension.

Conclusion

Overall, the survey results reflect a school community that is doing exceptionally well in promoting equity, inclusivity, and academic opportunity. Students generally feel respected, supported, and confident that their financial situation does not define their educational experience. However, it's worth noting that students who self-identified as "working class" or "low income" were more likely than their peers to report that their economic status impacted their education, suggesting that there is still work to do.

Because the positive outcomes indicated by the survey results are a direct result of current programs, teacher training, and student support systems, a lot of funding cuts could threaten this progress. Maintaining current funding levels, or making sure there is strong consideration about cuts, ensures that our school continues to provide a fair, encouraging, and academically strong environment for every student.