

# School Board News Letter

## RSU 26 Fall 2017

Hello Orono school community. The RSU 26 staff has been hard at work the past few weeks preparing for the start of school. The board has also been busy over the summer. This newsletter is the first of an occasional series of newsletters to update you on things accomplished by the board as well as forthcoming work for the board.

### ***Hiring new Superintendent Meredith Higgins***

Much of January and February was spent reviewing, interviewing and selecting a superintendent for our district. Thank you to everybody who participated. Your feedback was important. We are very excited that Meredith Higgins started with us July 1. She comes to us from AOS 43 (Milo, Lagrange) and before that was in Florida and before that was curriculum director right here in Orono. She will be reaching out through a variety of media including a newsletter and coffees, but please introduce yourself to her if you get a chance.

### ***Budget update***

Thank you for your support at the annual meeting in May and the vote in June. We really appreciate it! The board is working hard to deserve this trust. We received an update to the state's funding of our schools in mid-July and held a public meeting to discuss what to do with the additional funds. Because of the warrant articles approved, we had the discretion to spend the money from the state according to our judgement of the best interests of the district. The district received \$182,975.50 in additional funds in comparison to what we expected when we originally passed our budget. We decided to allocate just over half of those new funds to property tax relief, and the remainder went to 1.3 FTEs of staff that we had badly wanted to hire earlier but couldn't. There will be a new math instructional coordinator for K-8 (very similar to the highly successful literacy coach added several years back but targeting math and covering two schools). We also increased the arts faculty, by adding 0.3 FTE to an existing half time position. As our student enrollments continue to grow we continue to look for the best way to meet this growing need.

Amidst all the headlines about the state budget that implied a major investment in our schools, the reality on the ground is more sober. At first glance, our final total funding from the state increased by \$257,701.16 over last year. But if you take out the state match to the PERS (contribution to teacher retirement funds that grew by 25% this year), increased special education and chapter 104 spending (meeting state standards) and increases due to increased student enrollment (most of our state funds are paid on a per-pupil basis), the remaining core funding from the state that funds the education of all our students only increased by \$12,563.46 (a 0.27% increase, which is way below inflation). The budget the legislators passed contains several challenges looking forward including a commitment to decrease funds for administration and a continuation of the passing of funding teacher retirement to the districts (it used to be paid by the state).

Funding education in a way that respects our tax payers' wallets and our children's needs will remain a tough challenge in coming years and we hope you will reach out to board members and express your thoughts and concerns on these issues.

## ***Community Values around Student Growth and Achievement***

The board has increasingly been trying to focus on the big picture and not be distracted by the details. And in any school district the big picture is student growth and achievement. Last year the board ran a series of well-attended workshops involving board, teachers, parents, administrators and students. We identified three main values we have as a district around student growth and achievement. It was a very rewarding process to see how much agreement there was and how quickly we converged. The three values we have identified are:

1. With regard to growth and achievement “meet our students where they are at, and move them forward”
2. We focus on the whole student, including their physical, social, creative, emotional and intellectual growth and achievement
3. Challenge and help students to build a lifelong growth and learning mindset.

We will use these three values as touchstones for setting goals and making decisions for the board.

## ***Goals for the coming year and facilities planning***

As required by policy, the board adopts a set of goals each year. These are intended to be areas of special focus for either the board or the district as a whole for the coming year. The goals adopted (after several opportunities for community input) for the 2017-2018 year are:

1. **Facilities** - facilities needs have been met in a reactive fashion for over a decade (often literally after the roof is leaking). We will conduct a comprehensive process (with extensive stakeholder input) over the year leading towards a five year facility plan. This is likely to take two years to get to a final plan including funding options.
2. **Vertical integration** (continue to look for opportunities to improve integration between the 3 schools such as curriculum, scheduling, university interactions, PBE, calendar, engineering/science)
3. **Communication** (continue to improve communication with the community such as looking for technology wins, methods to keep content up-to-date, board communication, calendar)
4. **Measurement of student growth and achievement goals** – after spending last year identifying three core values, we will spend time this year looking at how to measure our progress towards achieving these goals (ideas include survey graduates, other instruments, alumni day/connections, continued growth of high achieving students).
5. **Assessment and accountability around district/board goals** (make sure everybody knows about the goals and hold ourselves accountable for meeting them)
6. **Fiscal sustainability** – as always the board works to find a path that meets the needs of both students and taxpayers over the long run

## ***Key times to give feedback to the board this year***

Just like last year, you should expect to see a survey sent to the community on the superintendent in November, on the board’s performance in January, and on schools and principals in the late spring. We appreciate your time on these and take the feedback received very seriously. And of course we will have another annual budget meeting in mid-May and another budget election in June. And we will be talking about the budget at every board meeting February-April. Perhaps most importantly, we will have several public events to receive input on facilities needs and priorities throughout the year. Your turnout to these events will be critical to shaping the future of the schools (and our budget) for years to come.

Please share your thoughts and concerns with the board at any time. And we really love it when people come to board meetings and speak up!

## ***Introducing ourselves***

The RSU 26 board consists of five members elected by the public. One or two seats are up for election every March. You can find our contact information (email and phone numbers) at <http://www.rsu26.org/district-school-board/>. You can also find meeting agendas, minutes and video recordings of past meetings, and policies under the school board tab on the home page <http://www.rsu26.org/>. We love it when people attend board meetings (typically 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of the month at 6PM in the town council chambers). Meetings are also shown on Orono Public Access Television and will soon be live-streamed on YouTube.



**Mark Brewer:** I live in Orono with my wife Tammy and our four children, all of whom attend RSU 26 schools. I am a faculty member at the University of Maine, where I have worked since 2004. I serve on the RSU 26 Board of Directors because I am passionate about helping students thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

**Jake Eckert:** I have lived in Orono since 2000, I work for Progressive Insurance, I have a daughter at the middle school and a son at the elementary school. I coach youth soccer and enjoy skiing and mountain biking.



**Erin Ellis:** I have two kids at Asa. I moved back home to Maine a few years ago and my whole family has fallen in love with Orono.

**Brian McGill:** I am on the faculty at the University of Maine in the School of Biology and Ecology and in the Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions. I have two sons, one in the middle school and one in the high school, and have had a child in every grade in Orono from K-11. I love reading and the outdoors and have coached for various recreation programs in baseball and basketball. I serve on the school board because I believe nothing is more important to society's future than a great education for today's kids.



**Michelle Smith:** I am an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Maine. I teach genetics and life science classes for future teachers, and do biology education research. I helped to coach 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> grade soccer and love to hike, cook, and read. I can often be spotted at the Orono public library checking out stacks of books with my son.

Student representatives:

**Ben Allan-Rahill:** I am a senior at OHS. I like to play sports and I love science and technology. I also love learning languages and traveling the world.

**Becca Gallandt:** I am a senior at OHS. I am on the soccer, tennis and nordic ski teams. In my free time I enjoy running my own t-shirt company and playing the viola. I am also on the junior board of CISV, a global peace education organization. I have lived in Orono my entire life, so I try to give back to the community in any way possible.