

**ORION COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT #223
1002 11TH AVENUE
ORION, ILLINOIS 61273**

**Board of Education Minutes of
Wednesday, February 18, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at the District Office, 1002 11th Avenue, Orion, Illinois, at 7:23 p.m., by Board President Hoftender. Present were members Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

ROLL CALL

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

PLEDGE

Board President Hoftender announced that the Board had met in executive session at 6:02 p.m. – 7:17 p.m. to discuss the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors, or specific volunteers of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee, a specific individual who serves as an independent contractor or a volunteer of the District or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. However, a meeting to consider an increase in compensation to a specific employee of a public body that is subject to the Local Government Wage Increase Transparency Act may not be closed and shall be open to the public and posted and held in accordance with this Act; and discussion of minutes lawfully closed, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06.

**EXECUTIVE
SESSION
SUMMARY**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve the consent agenda. The consent agenda included approval of minutes of the January 21, 2026, 6:00 p.m., regular meeting; January 21, 2026, 6:03 p.m., executive meeting; January 21, 2026, 7:07 p.m., regular meeting; approval of prepaid bills: \$23,263.14; approval of January 2026 Payroll Benefits: \$28,467.92; and approval of February 2026 bills: \$328,851.89, totaling \$380,582.95; approval of January 30, 2026, payroll: \$331,263.10; approval of February 13, 2026, payroll: \$343,139.84; approval of activity fund financial statements from CR Hanna Elementary School, Orion Middle School, and Orion High School; approval of district financial reports; accepted the resignation from Delaney Taets as middle school assistant track coach, effective immediately; accepted the resignation from Kati DeBacker as fresh/soph volleyball coach, effective immediately. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
CONSENT
AGENDA**

OHS Principal DeBaillie recognized Student of the Month, Abigail Kayser. Principal Bahnks thanked wrestling parents for their assistance with a recent tournament and expressed appreciation to Emily Walker for pursuing grants to bring visiting artists to the middle school. Mr. Blessman thanked Pat Hessler for assisting with middle school wrestling. Mr. Lowe expressed appreciation to Principal Bahnks for providing the recent

**STUDENT
AND STAFF
RECOGNITION**

Continued

professional development opportunity for staff. Secretary Abbott noted her appreciation for printed copies of the district newsletters being made available to the library.

Tara Miller, OEA President, reported on recent Labor Relations and Calendar Committee meetings.

**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

Superintendent Blessman reported on rehiring school personnel for next school year, various building and grounds projects, and a Calendar Committee meeting to discuss the FY28 school calendar.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
REPORT**

CR Hanna Principal Lowe reported that the Lowell Johnson Grant list has been completed and the PTA will donate towards a pergola, bench and volleyball net. He shared that Kindergarten Registration will take place on March 18 and Preschool Screening is scheduled for March 26. He also noted upcoming state testing and various upcoming school events.

**CR HANNA
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

High School Principal DeBaillie reported that the NHS hosted a BINGO fundraiser that raised \$2,000 for King's Harvest. He also shared information regarding Student Council fundraisers, a blood drive scheduled for April 7, the winter band concert, National FFA Week and pancake breakfast, state testing, and the upcoming spring musical.

**HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

High School Principal DeBaillie shared the high school athletic report, providing updates on basketball and wrestling. He noted that track season has begun and softball will start next week.

**HIGH SCHOOL
ATHLETIC
DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Middle School Principal Bahnks reported on Holocaust Art Projects and a Health class activity. He shared that an IL State Trooper visited to present on online predator awareness. He noted a recent professional development opportunity that allowed staff to visit other schools. Principal Bahnks referenced a recent soft lockdown, which prompted further discussion on preparedness, and thanked Abby Thomsen for assisting. Updates were also provided on athletics and Scholastic Bowl.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to hire Nicole Fennell as middle school one-on-one paraprofessional for the remaining 2025-2026 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE MS
PARAPROFESSIONAL**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to hire Kristy Sandberg as District Secretary and Food Service Coordinator for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE DISTRICT
SECRETARY/
FOOD SERVICE
COORDINATOR**

Continued

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to hire Elena Bell as middle school math teacher for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

MOTION CARRIED.

**HIRE MS
MATH TEACHER**

Motion by Hepner, second by Abbott to hire Lyndsey Haars as middle school PE teacher for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE MS
PE TEACHER**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to hire Rachel Hamilton as high school math teacher for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

MOTION CARRIED.

**HIRE HS
MATH TEACHER**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to hire Matthew McClean as head football coach at high school for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. Nay: Hepner

MOTION CARRIED.

**HIRE HS HEAD
FOOTBALL COACH**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to accept the resignation from Kristy Sandberg, as a middle school full-time secretary, effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ACCEPT
RESIGNATION**

The Board reviewed meeting minutes from the District Calendar Committee and Orion PTA.

**DISTRICT
COMMITTEE NEWS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to adopt Resolution abating the Working Cash Fund, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ADOPT
RESOLUTION**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to adopt the proposed FY 2028 school calendar, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ADOPT FY28
SCHOOL CALENDAR**

The Board discussed an upcoming IASB Blackhawk Division meeting

BOARD REPORTS

Motion by Nightingale, second by Berg to adjourn. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.
Wednesday, February 18, 2026