

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

**Board of Education Minutes of
Wednesday, June 17, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at the District Office, 1002 11th Avenue, Orion, Illinois, at 7:05 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 6:01 p.m. – 6:58 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 of meetings closed, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the lawful minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06.

**EXECUTIVE
SESSION
SUMMARY**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to approve the consent agenda. The consent agenda included approval of minutes of the May 20, 2026, 6:00 p.m., regular meeting; May 20, 2026, 6:02 p.m., executive meeting; May 20, 2026, 7:00 p.m., regular meeting; approval of prepaid bills: \$26,953.90; approval of May, 2026 Payroll Benefits: \$47,957.35; and approval of June, 2026 bills: \$206,451.01, totaling \$281,362.26; approval of May 29, 2026, payroll: \$351,501.12; approval of June 15, 2026, payroll: \$307,400.96; 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 Amy Kayser as high school head cross country and track & field coach, effective immediately; accepted the resignation from Jeff Wiedenmann as middle school assistant cross country coach, effective immediately; accepted the resignation from Anthony Zuidema as a custodian for the Orion School District, effective immediately; accepted the resignation from Jenna Muñoz as middle school student council sponsor and middle school language arts teacher, effective immediately; Approved Jeff Wiedenmann as middle school volunteer cross country coach for the 2026-2027 school. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
CONSENT
AGENDA**

A Public Hearing was held to discuss and receive public input on the amended FY26 budget. Time: 7:07 p.m. - 7:09 p.m.

**PUBLIC
HEARING**

Continued

Motion by Berg, second by Abbott to adopt the amended FY26 budget, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ADOPT
AMENDED
FY 26 BUDGET**

The Board presented Certificates of Merit to the following State Track Qualifiers: Wyatt Steen~high jump, Brody Ossian~triple jump, Savannah Streeter~2nd place in high jump, and Coach Logan Hohl. Principal Bahnks recognized sixth grade student Britton Steen for placing fifth in the high jump at the State Track and Field Meet. The building principals and Board recognized Superintendent Blessman on his retirement and thanked him for his years of service. Principal DeBaillie recognized Becky Nightingale for being honored with the KWQC Hometown Hero Award.

**STUDENT
AND STAFF
RECOGNITION**

Tara Miller, OEA President, reported that negotiations are ongoing.

**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

Superintendent Blessman reported on summer maintenance projects, preparation of the budget for the upcoming school year, negotiations, and the IASB Conference in November. He also expressed appreciation to the Board and staff and thanked everyone for a great ten years.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
REPORT**

High School Principal DeBaillie reviewed the student discipline report and provided updated information regarding a project supported by contributions from the Athletic Boosters and the Orion Education Foundation.

**HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

Ashlee Amador, High School Activities Director, reported on athletics, including all-conference team members, and summer camps. She also recognized Certificate of Merit recipients who were not present to receive their certificates, including state qualifiers Will Maher (long jump) and Mallory Pronschinske (high jump), along with coaches Amy Kayser and Morgan Schroeder. She also mentioned the upcoming Annual Athletic Boosters' Golf Tournament being held on August 8th.

**HS ATHLETIC
DIRECTOR REPORT**

Middle School Principal Bahnks reported on 8th Grade Promotion and recognized student speakers Jaidyn Owens and Rachel Manecke for their outstanding public speaking.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

C.R. Hanna Principal Lowe thanked the custodial staff for their work. He shared information regarding the SmartLab Open House and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony scheduled for Thursday, September 24 from 5–7 p.m. He also noted staff and student recognition from PBIS network and reported that Mrs. Belowske was selected for the Teacher Advisory Board for StoryWorks 2.

**CR HANNA
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

Continued

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to grant tenure status to the following teachers at the conclusion of the 2025-2026 school year: Allison Bersell, Feryl Cutkomp, Bailey Driscoll, JR Greenwood, Gayle Grundstrom, Krysten Larson, Kaitlyn McCullough, Carolyn Pace, Emilee Rains, and Myka Walljasper. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
TENURE
STATUS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to rehire the CR Hanna Extra-Curricular positions for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**REHIRE CRH
EXTRA-
CURRICULAR
POSITIONS**

Motion by Hepner, second by Berg to rehire the Middle School Coaches for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**REHIRE MS
SPRING
COACHES**

Motion by Hepner, second by Stockton to rehire the Middle School Sponsors for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**REHIRE MS
SPONSORS**

Tabled to rehire the High School Spring Coaches for the 2026-2027 school year.

**TABLE
AGENDA ITEM**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to rehire the High School Sponsors for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**REHIRE HS
SPONSORS**

Tabled to hire full-time custodian

**TABLE
AGENDA ITEM**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to hire Amy Grundstrom as a middle school cook for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE MS
COOK**

Motion by Hepner, second by Stockton to hire Jennifer Maertens as middle school Language Arts Teacher for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE MS
TEACHER**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to approve paying a one period overload, in accordance with the OEA Contract, to Lesley "JR" Greenwood for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ONE PERIOD
OVERLOAD
PAYMENT TO
TEACHER**

Continued

The Board reviewed information from the Orion Music Boosters.

**DISTRICT
COMMITTEE NEWS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve the permanent transfer of interest from Working Cash Fund to Education Fund. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.
MOTION CARRIED.

**PERMANENT
TRANSFER
OF INTEREST**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to approve the Special Education Policies and Procedures Handbook, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
SPECIAL ED
POLICIES &
PROCEDURES**

Motion by Stockton, second by Nightingale to approve the OHS 2026-2027 handbook changes, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.
MOTION CARRIED.

**APPROVE OHS
HANDBOOK
CHANGES**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve the 2025-2026 final school calendar, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
FINAL 25-26
CALENDAR**

Motion by Stockton, second by Hepner to approve the school lunch prices for the 2026- 2027 school year: C.R. Hanna student lunch = \$3.50, OMS and OHS student lunch = \$3.75; adult lunch = \$4.75. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.
MOTION CARRIED.

**APPROVE
SCHOOL
LUNCH PRICES**

Motion by Hepner, second by Abbott to approve the following overnight trips of less than 200 miles (one way) for the 2026-2027 school year, that are not part of the IHSA state finals series: volleyball ~ September 11-12, 2026, to Williamsville, IL; wrestling ~ December 28-30, 2026, to Springfield, IL; and girls' soccer ~ May 7-8, 2027, to Rockford/Oregon, IL. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.
MOTION CARRIED.

**APPROVE HS
OVERNIGHT
TRIPS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to approve the District/Building fee schedule for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
2026-2027
FEE SCHEDULE**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to approve the Employee Non-Resident Tuition Waiver Agreement, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
EMPLOYEE
NON-RESIDENT
WAIVER**

Continued

President Hoftender reported on a recent Blackhawk Division meeting attended with Board Member Nightingale. It was agreed that Orion will host a Blackhawk Division meeting in the fall of 2027. A Board Retreat was discussed and scheduled for Thursday, July 23, at 6:00 p.m. Secretary Abbott read one thank you note.

**BOARD
REPORTS**

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

ADJOURN

MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.
Wednesday, June 17, 2026