

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

**Board of Education Minutes of
Wednesday, January 21, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at the District Office, 1002 11th Avenue, Orion, Illinois, at 7:07 p.m., by Board President Hoftender. Present were members Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. Absent were members Berg and Drish.

ROLL CALL

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

PLEDGE

Board President Hoftender announced that the Board had met in executive session at 6:03 p.m. – 7:02 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.

**EXECUTIVE
SESSION
SUMMARY**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve the consent agenda. The consent agenda included approval of prepaid bills: \$33,905.83; approval of December, 2025 Payroll Benefits: \$29,711.41; and approval of January, 2026 bills: \$218,859.13, totaling \$282,476.37; approval of December 30, 2025, payroll: \$341,053.63; approval of January 15, 2026, payroll: \$308,767.74; 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 Brian Cookson as the High School Spanish Teacher, effective January 1, 2026; and approved the following high school volunteer track coaches: Scott Briney, Derek Engstrom, Nick Juenger, Eli Kayser, Morgan Matson, and Clay Schulenberg. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
CONSENT
AGENDA**

OHS Principal DeBaillie announced Leo Nedved as the December Student of the Month. Leo was recognized for his academic excellence, leadership, integrity and responsibility in the classroom.

**STUDENT
AND STAFF
RECOGNITION**

Tara Miller, OEA President, reported on upcoming committee meetings.

**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

Superintendent Blessman reported on rehiring the district's auditor, upcoming Calendar Committee meeting, building and grounds' projects, and maintenance grant.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
REPORT**

Continued

Middle School Principal Bahnks reported on athletics, honor roll, and upcoming Student Council events.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

CR Hanna Principal Lowe reported on SMART Lab, Lowell Johnson Charitable Foundation, updated District forms, and CR Hanna's hallway mural.

**CR HANNA
PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

High School Principal DeBaillie reported on Freshman Orientation, Hall of Fame Night, honor roll, and Student Council events.

**HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

High School Principal DeBaillie shared the Athletics Director report on athletic events, upcoming Senior Night, and wrestling tournament.

**HS ATHLETICS/
DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to approve resignation from Abby Thomsen as a Middle School Mathematics Teacher effective the end of 2025-2026 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
RESIGNATION**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve resignation from Julie Lough, Transportation Director, effective June 30, 2026. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
RESIGNATION**

Motion by Abbott, second by Stockton to approve a leave of absence under FMLA for Employee # 10926. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
FMLA REQUEST**

Motion by Hepner, second by Stockton to hire Abby Thomsen as the Middle School Principal for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE
OMS PRINCIPAL
FOR 2026-2027**

Motion by Hepner, second by Stockton to rehire middle school fall coaches for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**REHIRE
MIDDLE SCHOOL
COACHES**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to approve executive session minutes to be opened for public display (January, 2025 through June 2025). Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**EXECUTIVE
SESSION
MINUTES
OPENED**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve the destruction of closed meeting audio recordings of September 20, 2023 6:35 p.m.; October 18, 2023, 6:33 p.m.; November 15, 2023, 6:32 p.m.; December 13, 2023, 6:33 p.m.; January 17, 2024, 6:31 p.m.; February 21, 2024, 6:32 p.m.; March 20, 2024, 6:34 p.m.; April 17, 2024, 6:35 p.m.; May 15, 2024, 6:00 p.m. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**DESTRUCTION
OF CLOSED
MEETING
AUDIO
RECORDINGS**

Continued

The Board reviewed information from the Orion Music Boosters.

**DISTRICT
COMMITTEE NEWS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to hire Gorenz and Associates, Ltd., as the district's auditors for the fiscal school year ending June 30, 2026. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIRE
AUDITOR**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to adopt the Resolution abating the tax heretofore levied for the year 2025 to pay debt services on Taxable General Obligation Refunding School Bonds (Alternate Revenue Source), Series 2021B, of the District, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**ADOPT
RESOLUTION
ABATING TAX
ON BONDS**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to approve high school officials' pay. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**HIGH SCHOOL
OFFICIALS PAY**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve policy revisions as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
POLICY
REVISIONS**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve Elementary School's Smartlab Proposal as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**SMARTLAB
PROPOSAL**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to approve IESA Music Organization Competition registration. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
IESA MUSIC
REGISTRATION**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to approve bid from Musco Sports Lighting. Ayes: Abbott, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
BID**

Board President Hoftender discussed the upcoming IASB Blackhawk Division meeting being held on March 3, 2026. Board Secretary Abbott read one thank you card.

**BOARD
REPORTS**

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

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.
Wednesday, January 21, 2026