

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

Board of Education Minutes of
Wednesday, September 23, 2026

The meeting was called to order at the District Office, 1002 11th Avenue, Orion, Illinois, at 7:00 p.m., by Board President Hoftender. Present were members Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.
Time: 7:08 p.m.

**ROLL
CALL**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

PLEDGE

Board President Hoftender announced that the Board had met in executive session 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 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**

A Public Hearing was called to order to discuss the FY2027 budget.
Time: 7:10 p.m.

**PUBLIC
HEARING**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Berg to adjourn public hearing. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. Time: 7:11 p.m.

ADJOURN

Motion by Nightingale, second by Hepner to approve the consent agenda. The consent agenda included approval of minutes of the August 13, 2026, 8:01 p.m., special meeting; August 19, 2026, 6:04 p.m., executive session meeting; August 19, 2026, 7:00 p.m., regular meeting; approval of prepaid bills: \$61,282.47; approval of August, 2026 payroll benefits: \$37,862.43; and approval of September, 2026 bills: \$333,242.92; totaling \$432,387.82; approval of August 28, 2026, payroll: \$183,277.83; approval of August 29, 2026, payroll: \$164,965.75; approval of September 15, 2026, payroll: \$354,308.70; approval of financial statements from CR Hanna Elementary School, Orion Middle School, and Orion High School; approval of district financial reports; approval of FOIA requests from the following: Anita Jackson - Salary information for all District Office secretaries and building secretaries, benefit information, hourly wages and stipends; Educator Support Network - Official district work contact numbers; accepted the resignation from Dominic Martin as the Middle School Head Wrestling Coach, effective immediately, Gayle Long as the Fall Spirit Squad Sponsor, effective immediately, Beverly Garner as a Middle School Cook, effective September 4, 2026, Nicole Fennel as a paraprofessional, effective August 24, 2026,

**APPROVE
CONSENT
AGENDA**

Continued

Kayla Jones as full-time Middle School Secretary, effective immediately; approved volunteer coaches: Middle School Chess ~ Oliver Jones, Middle School Boys' Basketball ~ Ryan Wetzell, Middle School Cheer ~ Michelle Clarke and Delaney Taets, Middle School Volleyball ~ Corbin Kane. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

Superintendent Bahnks recognized staff for their efforts in transitioning district staff forms to a paperless process and recognized employees who received Years of Service awards at the August Teachers' Institute. Principal DeBaillie recognized Sadie Appel as OHS Student of the Month for her leadership, classroom responsibility, and willingness to learn. Principal Lowe thanked staff for their efforts in preparing for Farm Night at the elementary school.

**STUDENT
AND STAFF
RECOGNITION**

Tara Miller, OEA President, reported that the contract is currently at the printers and will be distributed when completed. She also noted an upcoming Labor Relations meeting.

**PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION**

Travis Noyd, Athletic Booster Club President reported that a plaque recognizing student-athlete Logan Lee has been placed at the high school field.

Superintendent Bahnks introduced High School Student Council President Carlee Deloose, who will serve as a student Board representative for three months. Carlee will provide updates and highlights from the student perspective. She thanked the Board for the opportunity and expressed her hope that the experience will encourage open communication between students and staff. She shared updates on upcoming high school events, the recent Student Orion-tation Night, and the upcoming Riverbend Student Hunger Drive.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
REPORT**

Superintendent Bahnks continued his report with updates on the E-Learning Renewal discussion planned for October, current compliance with the Cell Phone Ban, a recent TIF meeting, ongoing wireless network issues and the IT Department's backup plan, healthcare consulting and financial meetings, and the District Employee Handbook update. He also discussed developing an AI policy for students and plans to gather parent feedback regarding "Growing Competitive Greatness" next month.

High School Principal DeBaillie recognized Ian Ringier, who was named Auto Body Student of the Quarter at the area career center for his growth, positive leadership, and enthusiasm for his work. He also shared information regarding an upcoming choir concert and Homecoming Week.

**HS PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

High School Activities Director Amador, was absent; however, her report was shared with the Board.

**HS ACTIVITIES
DIRECTOR'S
REPORT**

continued

Middle School Principal Thomsen recognized staff for creating a wellness calendar focused on encouraging movement and conversation. She also shared information about “Turtle Tuesday,” an initiative started by Mrs. Burgert to provide students with activities focused on developing responsibility and life skills. A Staff Recognition list was shared as a way for staff to recognize and encourage their colleagues. Mrs. Thomsen also provided an update on middle school athletics.

**MS PRINCIPAL'S
REPORT**

As part of a new monthly building spotlight, the following Middle School Students shared their experiences: Rosalee Haars, Irelynn Larson, Emily Leuck, Norah Nedved, Kalli Nelson, Zackery Noyd, and Myla Purdy. Students discussed adjusting to middle school routines, including lockers, classroom schedules, outdoor lunches, and mini courses. Student-athletes shared their positive experiences participating in middle school sports, including the inaugural softball team’s accomplishments at the regional, sectional, and state levels. Larson also shared her experience as Student Council President, including organizing fundraisers and dress-up days and encouraging student involvement. Students also discussed a new student recognition initiative in which staff recognize students who stand out through their actions and accomplishments. Students shared how it felt to be recognized by their teachers and offered advice to other middle school students on becoming strong leaders.

**BUILDING
SPOTLIGHT**

Motion by Nightingale, second by Stockton to approve Brock Blessman as the Chess Sponsor at the middle school for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

**APPROVE MS
SPONSOR**

MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Nightingale, second by Abbott to approve Feryl Cutkomp as the Chess Sponsor at the middle school, for the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

**APPROVE MS
SPONSOR**

MOTION CARRIED.

Motion by Hepner, second by Abbott to approve Stephanie Moen as an Instructional Leadership Team Member for the remainder of the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED**

**APPROVE
ILT MEMBER**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to hire Krystyn Griffin as a part-time paraprofessional at CR Hanna for the remainder of the 2026-2027 school year. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

**HIRED CRH
PARA**

MOTION CARRIED.

The Board reviewed information from the Orion Music Boosters and the PTA.

**COMMITTEE
NEWS**

Motion by Stockton, second by Abbott to adopt the FY2027 budget, as presented. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender, Nightingale, and Stockton.

**ADOPT FY27
BUDGET**

MOTION CARRIED.

Continued

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

**ADOPT UPDATED
POLICIES &
PROCEDURES**

Motion by Stockton, second by Berg to approve the Memorandum of Understanding concerning National Board Certification wording and reimbursement in the collective bargaining agreement. Ayes: Abbott, Berg, Drish, Hepner, Hoftender and Stockton. **MOTION CARRIED.**

**APPROVE
MOU**

The Board discussed the upcoming November conference and Delegate Assembly. The Board also discussed the November ballot measure regarding at-large School Board elections, which would remove township restrictions within the district for candidates and impact the April 2027 School Board election.

**BOARD
REPORTS**

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

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.
Wednesday, September 23, 2026