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## Board Business Meeting

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Agency: [Cleveland Metropolitan School District \(CMSD\)](#)

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## Summary

- Public comment focused on people directly working with scholars/students, and there seems to be a lot of frustration with students' needs not being assessed prior to the start of school.
- There seems to be a concerted effort from the district to be financially responsible with employee benefit costs.
- The district improved performance in some areas, according to state measures.

## Follow-Up Questions

- What public records requests are people accessing? What is the process?
- How is the district trying to give information to the public about the [levy on the November ballot](#)?

## Notes

### Agency background

The following information on the development and functioning of the board was taken from the [CMSD website](#):

- Cleveland's current school governance structure was created by Ohio House Bill 269 in 1997 and took effect Sept. 9, 1998.
- The Board of Education can have up to nine voting members appointed by the mayor of Cleveland from a slate of nominees selected by a local nominating panel, as established under state law.
- Board members must be residents of the district, and at least one of the nine members must reside in a part of the district that is outside the City of Cleveland (Bratenahl, Linndale, Newburgh Heights, and parts of Brook Park and Garfield

Heights).

- The board functions as the governing body of the school district.
- It typically holds meetings on two Tuesdays each month at 6:30 p.m. The first meeting of each month is a work session devoted primarily to information gathering, discussion and deliberation on issues or topics for future board business meetings. The second meeting of each month is a business meeting devoted primarily to the consideration of and voting on board resolutions.
- The board also provides for public participation at board business meetings in order to hear community concerns.
- People can contact the board office at 216-838-0030 with any comments, questions or concerns about the district.

Click [here](#) for the schedule for the 2024-2025 meetings.

Current board members:

- Sara Elaquad, chair
- Robert Briggs
- Midori Lebrón
- Diana Welch Howell
- Nigamanth Sridhar
- Charlene Jones

The [agenda](#) for this meeting is available here and includes links including supportive attachments for specific items.

### **The scene**

The meeting was held in the gymnasium at the [Natividad Pagan International Newcomers Academy](#), 3145 W. 46th St. Board members were seated at five tables that were grouped in a semicircle, with each table having a black cloth covering with the CMSD logo. The Board Attorney Kevin Burtzlaff was seated at a table to the left of the board members, and Chief Financial Officer Kevin Stockdale was seated at a table to the right.

Seven rows of five chairs were arranged for the public on both sides of a center aisle facing the board members with a small microphone podium positioned at the head. Two large display monitors were on either side of the board members and showed slides during presentations and a three-minute countdown timer for speakers during the public comment section of the meeting. My estimation of attendees is about 35 people, with many empty seats within the arrangement.

The meeting started on time at 6:30 p.m. and the roll was called, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. All of the listed board members were present at the meeting. Chair Elaquad said Warren Morgan II, the CEO of the school district, was absent due to illness and that Morgan's Chief of Staff, J.R. Tomkinson, would be filling in.

Elaquad recognized Reno Contipelli, the northeast regional manager from the Ohio School Boards Association ([OSBA](#)), who had asked to speak. He said there are 700 public school boards in Ohio belonging to OSBA and that he was glad to report that Cleveland schools remain in the top six in terms of enrollment. That means they will have representation on the OSBA Board of Trustees. He gave credit to former CMSD Board Member and former OSBA President Robert Heard. OSBA will be honoring Heard at a dinner in October. Contipelli said he is based in Northeast Ohio and offered his support as needed.

Elaquad said that [Issue 49](#) will be on the ballot for this November election as decided at a June meeting. She gave reminders of election deadlines for registering and voting.

### **Chief executive officer's report**

In light of the CEO's absence, Tomkinson called upon staff to present the information that would have been shared.

Chief External Affairs Officer Lisa Farmer Cole said for the first time in history the district has [received a 3-star rating for meeting state standards](#) and shared statistics that earned this recognition. It is the only urban district in Ohio to have achieved this status.

Cole also said that the first-ever [Step Up to Support Our Kids](#) rally on Sept. 21 was a success. Cole said 792 people registered and guest speakers included Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne. Three CMSD scholars won a countywide design contest for decorating a vehicle from the Cuyahoga County Sheriff's office.

Elaquad gave [comments](#) in appreciation for the teamwork required for these achievements.

CFO Kevin Stockdale came to the podium to share finance updates. The auditor of state's office is performing the annual audit and has been onsite since July and is expected to continue into December. The district's last audit earned the highest rate for financial management, called an "unmodified opinion."

Talent and Human Resources Officer Stephen Christian presented slides (beginning on slide 9 [in this presentation](#)) regarding changes to employee healthcare providers and contracts. Health benefits are the district's second largest expense, according to the presentation. Competitive bidding is done every three years, and they partner with [Oswald Companies](#) as their healthcare broker, Christian said.

He also presented a slide for the Get More Opportunities 2.0 fund that has a pool of more than \$4 million to be divided among all CMSD schools. Various people can submit proposals, with a Nov. 8 closing date. Christian suggested going to the [website](#) for more information.

### **Public participation**

Chair Elaquad provided guidelines: No more than 40 minutes for the comment period; each speaker limited to three minutes; speakers must have submitted requests ahead of time; speakers' names were called by the chair. Several names were called without a response; seven speakers came to the podium. The audience listened mostly quietly with a smattering of applause for each speaker.

- *Speaker 1:* This sophomore at Campus International [High School](#) said that the [Civics 2.0](#) program has “truly been a game changer” and said they hope that the funding through a grants process will be renewed to past years' level to allow more opportunities.
- *Speaker 2:* The speaker provided her name, Stacey Steggert, but not her title/status. She said she had a question in August at the board meeting and was stopped in the hallway afterward for a conversation with Erin Frew, CMSD's officer of schools. Steggert cited sources from her further research via public records requests and questioned the use of the new English Language Arts curriculum. Steggert said the new curriculum has been shown to benefit white students but not Black students and asked, “Is it really the position of the school district that inequity is so benign?”
- *Speaker 3:* This speaker, Polly Karr, said she is a parent of twins at Campus International School who volunteers 3 to 4 times per week and is the director of the after-school program this year. She has done public records reviews going back five years regarding spending in the district. Her [public comment](#) time was filled with details of specific examples of expenditures -- including the dollar amounts -- that are of concern to her.
- *Speaker 4:* Kindergarten teacher (Laura Stewart but not sure of spelling) at

Hannah Gibbons School [said](#) that she has several “whys” regarding students with disabilities enrolled in her general education classroom without getting needed screenings before starting school. Stewart said students are left waiting months for identification of needs. She also asked why preschool has clearly stated requirements for toileting issues but gen-ed kindergarten does not. Stewart questioned how she can build a foundation for learning with all of these difficulties in place.

- *Speaker 5:* Sherry McCutcheon said paraprofessionals are not getting paid fairly and performing duties not in the contract. McCutcheon mentioned losing staff and having poor physical conditions in buildings with no AC, mold, leaks, etc., while people at administration levels make a lot of money. She said she did not receive a response to her last inquiry to Morgan so she ended by giving her letter to the clerk along with a stamped response envelope.
- *Speaker 6:* Roberta Cathcart (not sure of spelling) said, “I stand before you today not as a criminally underpaid special ed pre-K paraprofessional but as a concerned parent of a child who attends a CMSD school.” She questioned who was responsible for the “transportation fiasco” at the beginning of the school year. Cathcart said CMSD left scholars stranded, and she questioned the district’s communication about transportation. Cathcart ended by saying, “My guess is that whoever was responsible for the transportation mess is severely underperforming while being ridiculously overpaid.”
- *Speaker 7:* Norah Mason, kindergarten intervention specialist, expressed concern about policies not being in place for COVID risk reduction and about children with disabilities not getting services and support they need. Mason talked about placing paraprofessionals into each kindergarten classroom, changing birthday cutoff dates for kindergarten, and having students’ needs assessed in the summer before school.

## **Resolutions**

See [agenda](#) for details within the attachments for each resolution.

Nine of the 11 resolutions presented had been discussed at prior work sessions, and all resolutions were passed with all six votes. The first resolution that had not been discussed was 8.02, which authorizes payment to Argonaut for the provision of learning supports to Davis Aerospace and Maritime Academy in an amount not to exceed \$300,000 for fiscal year 2025. Tomkinson said the academy had been a [spotlight presentation at the April 9 board work meeting](#).

The second resolution not discussed in a prior meeting was 9.06, which relates to the healthcare benefit presentation the board received earlier in this meeting.

Resolutions were passed as written for the categories of Finance, Operations and Academics. For Equity and Culture resolutions, more details were provided by Tomkinson. For example, there were 97 new hires this month and 37 separations.

There was no old business or new business.

### **Executive session**

The board entered [executive session](#) at 7:39 p.m. and returned at 8 p.m. Upon return, they passed three resolutions with all six votes for each. One was to suspend a school-based administrative employee with the cause being violation of policy, procedure or rules. The other two resolutions approved collective bargaining with the Teamsters Truck Drivers Union Local 407 and Laborers International Union of North America Local 860, Assistant Custodians.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

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