

Merrimack School District Budget Committee  
Minutes  
December 12, 2023

Present: D. Coakley, G. Groff, L. French, M. Mackey, J. McCormack, C. Mower,  
M. Murphy, R. Paepke, N. Schoenfeld and E. Wilson (late).

Excused: S. Albuquerque

Absent: School Board Liaison N. Halter

Also Present: Chief Educational Officer Bill Olsen, Business Administrator Matt  
Shevenell, School Board Chair Ken Martin and School District Clerk  
Pat Heinrich

N. Schoenfeld called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and led those present in the  
Pledge of Allegiance.

**Public Participation**

There was none.

**Filling Vacancy**

N. Schoenfeld told the Committee that two letters of interest to fill the vacant seat  
had been received. She said both applicants were present to be interviewed by the  
Committee.

By random draw, Shannon Rand was selected to be interviewed first. She told the  
Committee about herself and answered Committee questions.

Heather Robitaille was interviewed next. She told the Committee about herself  
and answered Committee questions.

After a brief discussion about wanting to elect both candidates, a roll call vote was  
held.

	Shannon Rand	Heather Robitaille	Abstain
Dan Coakley	X		
Gina Groff		X	
Lee French	X		
Michelle Mackey		X	

Jennifer McCormack	X		
Chuck Mower		X	
Mackenzie Murphy		X	
Rachel Paepke		X	
Naomi Schoenfeld		X	
Ellen Wilson			X
	3	6	1

N. Schoenfeld announced that Heather Robitaille was elected to the Committee.

N. Schoenfeld called for a 5-minute recess so Heather Robitaille could be sworn in by the School District Clerk and take her seat on the Committee.

### **Budget Messages**

#### **Administration**

Chief Educational Officer B. Olson presented a brief overview of the Administrative budget priorities and explained the complexity of work that was done to develop the Administration's initial budget proposal to provide the appropriate programs, services and staffing for each child the District serves to the greatest extent possible. He said the District is working toward providing interventions in the areas of reading and math for all students in early grade levels, maintaining reasonable class sizes, providing competitive wages and benefits for staff and maintaining buildings that are safe and clean. He said the District will be proposing a new Central Office. He noted that the building is needed and the project will only get more expensive the longer it is put off. He closed by saying that each and every number in the initial budget proposal represents a person, a program or a service that is trying to shape the future of a child.

#### **School Board**

School Board Chair K. Martin explained that the School Board has no control over about 90% of the budget and that that each number in the budget is there for a reason. He said the budget includes funds to expand, enhance or build upon a lot of programs that were started in previous budgets and are working. He said that the School Board wants to present a budget that is reasonable and meets the needs of every single student. He also said he felt a new Central office is a critical need. He said he hopes the School Board and the Budget Committee continue to dialogue about the budget.

Discussion included:

- Public Education is important because it is in everyone's best interest to have an educated public.
- The Torchbearers program is a mentorship program for teachers, the goal of which is high quality teachers who remain with the District.
- BCBA stands for "Board Certified Behavioral Analyst."
- The School Board is currently negotiating a new contract (Collective Bargaining Agreement – CBA) with the Support Staff.
- Every year the School Board and the District Leadership team have a workshop to review and revise District goals for education.
- District's Low Ranking
  - Rankings are not an indication of meeting state standards.
  - Different data points are used depending on what entity is creating the ranking.
  - Not all students will go to college.
  - Merrimack students are meeting state graduation requirements and graduating.
- The I-Ready program
  - Used in grades K – 8.
  - The goal is to identify each student's needs and create a plan to optimize each student's individual growth.
  - Results may take 3 – 5 years.

N. Schoenfeld thanked B. Olson and K. Martin for attending the meeting and speaking with the Committee.

### **Materials for FY 2024-25 Budget Creation**

#### **Budget Binders**

Members received their Initial Administrative Budget books. N. Schoenfeld said in the past, members have had to pick up these books at the Superintendent's office and she thought that getting them delivered to the December Committee meeting was much easier for everyone. She reminded the Committee that the books do not contain the School Board's budget request but she hopes that it will be available by mid-January.

#### **Specific Material Requests**

N. Schoenfeld asked members if they had any specific material requests to help the Committee with creation of the Proposed FY2024-25 Budget.

J. McCormack asked for documents in excel format and/or electronically. M. Shevenell told the Committee that the entire book is currently available on-line on the District's Finance page. He said he could provide the proposed budget in Excel format as well.

R. Paepke asked for a report of actual expenditures for the last 2 – 5 years. M. Shevenell said he could provide that as well.

N. Schoenfeld told members that, if anyone had other needs or questions, they should contact her rather than contact individual Department Heads on their own.

### **Other**

N. Schoenfeld told members that during the last meeting, it became obvious that members have different opinions on how motions work and how to proceed and how to proceed. She said she had created a sheet of “motion guidelines” that was in the meeting packet and explained how she would be proceeding when motions are made. She explained various motion types that could be used and the procedures she would use.

### **Liaison Team Meetings**

N. Schoenfeld told the Committee that liaison teams are actually sub-committees of the Budget Committees and, as such, have to follow RSA 91-A meeting rules which means posted meetings with minutes taken and the public allowed to attend. She told the Committee she had hoped that site visits would be a less formal option to meet with Department Heads. However, the Department Heads think so highly of the liaison team concept, they want to continue the practice of meeting with Committee liaisons teams even though provisions might need to be made for members of the public to attend.

N. Schoenfeld said that the meeting packet includes the list of liaison teams, liaison team leads and other liaison team meeting information. She requested that only liaison leads contact the Department Heads. N. Schoenfeld told the Committee that members having specific questions for various departments should contact the liaison lead or save their questions for the night that department budget is presented and she reminded members that members can attend and participate in liaison team meeting other than their liaison assignment meetings.

N. Schoenfeld indicated that a “minute template” was provided in the packet of information which the liaison lead should simply fill in during the liaison team meeting, have the team approve at the end of the liaison team meeting and submit

the liaison team meeting minutes to the Committee during the Department's budget presentation.

Discussion included:

- There is no specific format to be followed at liaison team meetings.
- Ideally liaison team meetings will occur before that Department budget is presented to the Committee.
- A meeting can occur even if only one member can attend.
- Cancellations do not have to be posted.
- An additional meeting might be needed after School Board submits their proposed budget.

### **Next Meeting**

N. Schoenfeld announced the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, January 3, 2024 at 7 PM.

### **Public Participation**

There was none.

### **Committee Comments**

There were none.

E. Wilson made a MOTION TO adjourn. Second: G. Groff. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

N. Schoenfeld adjourned the meeting at 9:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich