

Merrimack School District Budget Committee

Minutes

May 27, 2025

Present: K. Bernier, M. Berry, D. Coakley, A. dePreaux, J. Grobecker, J. McCormack, C. Mower,
S. Rand, H. Robitaille, A. Santoriello, B. Trant and School Board Liaison J. Hardy
Also Present: Attorney Gauvin Gray and School Board Chair Lori Peters

J. McCormack called the meeting to order at 7 PM and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

J. McCormack welcomed returning and new members and said the first order of business was approval of prior minutes.

Approval of Prior Minutes

J. McCormack said the minutes from February 11th and March 4th had been distributed and asked if anyone had any corrections.

None were suggested.

J. McCormack called for a motion to approve the prior minutes.

B. Trant made a MOTION to approve the minutes. Second: S. Rand.

MOTION PASSED: 9 – 0 – 3. (J. Grobecker, H. Robitaille and J. Hardy abstained.)

Committee Reorganization

J. McCormack called for nominations for Chair of the Committee.

K. Bernier nominated H. Robitaille. Second: A. dePreaux.

B. Trant nominated J. McCormack. Second: M. Berry.

J. McCormack offered H. Robitaille an opportunity to make a brief statement and gave a brief statement herself.

A roll call vote was held:

Budget Committee Minutes, 5-27-25 (continued)

	J. McCormack	H. Robitaille
K. Bernier		√
M. Berry	√	
D. Coakley		√
A. dePreaux		√
J. Grobecker		√
J. McCormack	√	
C. Mower		√
S. Rand	√	
H. Robitaille		√
A. Santoriello	√	
B. Trant	√	
SB: J. Hardy		√
	5	7

H. Robitaille was declared elected Chair.

J. McCormack called for nominations for Vice Chair of the Committee.

A. Santoriello nominated J. McCormack. Second: S. Rand.

H. Robitaille nominated D. Coakley. Second: A. dePreaux.

A roll call vote was held.

	J. Mc Cormack	D. Coakley
K. Bernier		√
M. Berry	√	
D. Coakley		√
A. dePreaux		√
J. Grobecker		√
J. McCormack	√	
C. Mower		√
S. Rand	√	
H. Robitaille		√
A. Santoriello	√	
B. Trant	√	
SB: J. Hardy		√
	5	7

D. Coakley was declared elected Vice Chair.

H. Robitaille and D. Coakley took their seats as Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.

H. Robitaille thanked J. McCormack for all the work that she did for the Committee and for arranging for the two guests for this meeting.

RTK 91-A review with Atty Gavin Gray Esq.

H. Robitaille told the Committee that Attorney Gavin Gray was present to give the Committee a presentation about RSA 91-A, otherwise known as the “Right to Know” (RTK) Law.

Attorney Gray told the Committee he was going to talk about RTK in general and specifically about Committee member communications. He presented a Power Point overview of RTK.

Attorney Gray told the Committee that the public’s right to know is not only codified in State Law (RSA 91-A:1), it is also mentioned in the State Constitution (Part 1, Article 8). He said the goal is maximum access and the NH Supreme Court has ruled that in RTK cases, it will broadly construe in favor of disclosure.

After his presentation, Attorney Gray provided handouts with more material on RTK and said he would email the Committee a copy of the Power Point. He opened the floor for questions, the answers of which included:

- Five or six members of the Committee discussing a Committee issue via group text is not a quorum but may violate the spirit of RTK.
- Members should not use conversations with other committee members as a substitute for Committee discussion at a meeting.
- Attorney Gray will research and get back to the Committee whether texts sent or received or material on electronic devices used by members during public meetings might be subject to public disclosure. He said disclosure might be dependent on the subject matter of the texts.
- Personal notes taken at meetings are private unless shared with other Committee members.
- Attorney Gray there said there is an exception in RTK for unreasonable invasion of privacy.
- Members should not “reply-all” to any emails sent to the Committee and should “blind-copy” all members when sending emails to the Committee.
- Social Media
 - An individual Board member commenting about Committee actions on a public forum is okay unless a quorum of members is also commenting.
 - Possibly a “thread” involving members of the Committee should be brought up for discussion at a public meeting of the Committee.
 - Emojis are comments.
 - Candidate Facebook accounts are not subject to RTK unless a quorum of the Committee is making comments.
- Remote meetings are allowed as long as quorum is physically present.
- Members using personal emails or personal devices (cell phones) for communicating about Committee business may need to disclose those personal emails and text messages in response to an RTK request.
- The School District legal firm looks at RTK requests, asks for responsive documents and materials; then reviews everything submitted to determine what documents will be

provided to the person who made the request. That person can do what they want with the information they receive.

- A member of the public can ask for all documents provided in response to RTKs.
- Members of the Committee should avoid mentioning Committee membership when speaking or testifying in public situations unless appointed by the Committee to do so.

FY25-26 Budget Update

H. Robitaille said School Board Chair L. Peters was present to update the Committee on the actions the School Board has taken to revise the FY25-26 budget to meet the default budget amount.

L. Peters told the Committee that, first, she wanted to let the members know that the first thing the School Board does when it gets an RTK request is contact legal for advice and direction.

L. Peters said the easiest way to explain the changes to the budget was to list the things that the School Board approved:

- Funding for 1 Gifted and Talented position. She said the District will be working to revamp the entire G & T program. She said this would include Professional Development for staff.
- Keeping the line items for G & T supplies.
- Funding a Math Interventionist but made the position parttime.
- Funding a \$10,000 stipend for a school counselor to perform the K – 8 Director of Counseling functions.
- Funding for 1 ESOL staff position. She said this is a program required by law.
- Keeping the Middle School Boys Soccer B team but removed the proposed Lacrosse teams.
- Purchase of new civics texts. She said there is a potential that the state will make Civics a full year course which the current texts do not support.
- Keeping the Registrar position
- Having administration move or reduce amounts in other budget lines to bring the budget to the correct default amount.

L. Peters called for questions which she answered:

- The District orders both digital and physical texts because of the additional resources that both provide.
- Physical texts are usually kept in classrooms.
- Some physical textbooks go home but this may be grade, homework, teacher specific or by parental request.

Committee Policies and Procedures Review

H. Robitaille told the Committee that the current Policies and Procedures were in the meeting packet. She said that J. McCormack had also provided copies of the School Board Visitor Orientation to Meetings for the Committee review.

M. Berry said that the current Policies and Procedures do not include a policy that was approved by the Committee last fall; specifically, that new members receive a copy of the Committee policy and procedures when they are sworn in.

After discussion about how the Committee can institute such a policy, J. Hardy made a MOTION to add to the Policies and Procedures that it is the responsibility of the Chair to see that all new members receive a copy of the Committee Policies and Procedures as soon as possible after they are sworn in and prior to the first meeting. Second: K. Bernier. MOTION PASSED: 11 – 0 – 1. (C. Mower abstained)

J. McCormack told the Committee she thought it was important for all members of the Committee to have an SAU email address and made a MOTION that all members of the committee must use an SAU email address for Committee correspondence. Second: B. Trant.

K. Bernier said the District needs to confirm that each member's SAU email address is unique and not the same as another person with an SAU email address.

MOTION PASSED: 10 – 0 – 2 (A. DePreaux and A. Santoriello abstained.)

Members were told that all members who do not currently have an SAU email address would be contacted by someone from IT with their assigned SAU email address and instructions about how to activate it.

J. McCormack told the Committee that during discussions with the attorney when she was working on the right to know request last year, she had asked about having a student representative on the Budget Committee. She said this was something that D. Coakley had asked about and Attorney Gray told her that a student representative to the Committee is not allowed because one is not specified in RSA 32.

J. McCormack told the Committee that last year she had proposed a Mission Statement for the Committee which might help the public understand how the role and responsibilities of the Committee are separate from the role and responsibilities of the School Board regarding the budget. She said that Attorney Gray said creating a mission statement was something the Committee could do.

J. McCormack also noted that the Committee Policies mention contacting the chair for an excused absence if a member cannot attend a meeting and she said she thought the Committee should consider a policy that the Chair will determine whether to excuse or not, members who leave meetings early.

D. Coakley suggested that "meeting attendance" has to be defined.

J. McCormack said there is a consequence for people being unexcused and there should be a consequence for those who leave a meeting early unexcused.

A. Santoriello suggested that maybe the Committee should wait to see if it becomes an issue this year.

H. Robitaille said there are several things in the School Board Visitor Orientation to Meetings that the Committee could look at to include in the Committee's Policy and Procedures. For

example, whether or not non-residents can speak. She suggested that this be an agenda item at the next meeting.

J. McCormack suggested that “second chances to speak” and “how long to speak” should be discussed.

J. McCormack suggested the Committee should create a social media policy.

J. McCormack also said she wants a policy that Committee minutes will be posted to the Committee website 5 days after the meeting and suggested that supporting documents for each meeting be posted on the website before each meeting as well.

J. Hardy told the Committee she didn’t think minutes should be posted before they are approved.

J. Grobecker suggested that draft minutes could be posted.

J. Grobecker made a MOTION to change the language in Policy and Procedures that meetings start at 6 PM. Second: J. McCormack.

MOTION PASSED: 11 – 0 – 1 (C. Mower abstained.)

J. Hardy left the meeting at this time.

M. Berry made a MOTION to move the word “only” in Section 7 – Liaison Teams, Section b3 to the beginning of the sentence. Second: B. Trant.

MOTION PASSED; 7 – 1 – 2. (D. Coakley opposed, H. Robitaille and J. Grobecker abstained.)

Committee Member Resignation

J. McCormack said she thought that the process the Committee uses should be included in the Committee Policies and Procedures and MOVED to add the Committee’s process to fill a vacancy to the Policies and Procedures. Second: S. Rand.

D. Coakley said he thought the next highest vote getter should be offered the seat.

M. Berry said that other town committees advertise an opening, accept letters of interest, interview those interested and then vote for someone to fill the seat.

The process that has been used in the past was explained.

J. Grobecker said she had concerns about the resignation being so close after the election.

H. Robitaille told the Committee that on the advice of Town Counsel, Mackenzie Murphy had submitted a letter of resignation from the Committee. H. Robitaille thanked M. Murphy for her many years of service on the Committee and called for a motion to accept her resignation.

J. Grobecker reminded her that there was a motion on the table.

H. Robitaille called for a vote on the motion to add the process of filling a vacancy to the Committee Policy and Procedures.

MOTION PASSED 8 – 1 – 2. (D. Coakley opposed, H. Robitaille and C. Mower abstained.)

D. Coakley made a MOTION to accept Mackenzie Murphy's resignation from the Committee. Second: K. Bernier.

MOTION PASSED unanimously.

M. Berry made a MOTION that the procedures used to fill vacancies listed in the Policy would include advertising the opening, accepting letters of interest, interviewing candidates at a Committee meeting and determining the final process to fill the seat. Second: B. Trant

MOTION PASSED: 9 – 1 – 1. (J. McCormack opposed, D. Coakley abstained.)

Next Meeting

By consensus, members agreed the next meeting will be on July 29th at 6 PM. H. Robitaille told the Committee, in addition to filling the vacancy, the Committee will again discuss Committee Policies and Procedures and there may be some additional training available.

Public Comment

L. Peters told the Committee that the statute indicates that the Committee will not be electing a new member but rather appointing a new member to fill a vacant seat until the next election.

Committee Comment

A. Santoriello clarified that that the vacant seat will only be filled until the election, at which time, a one year seat (the rest of the M. Murphy's original term) will be on the ballot.

D. Coakley told the Committee about the recent successes of Merrimack High School Academic teams: Chop Shop (3rd in world's) and the Granite State Challenge Team (1st place for the third time).

B. Trant made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: K. Bernier.

H. Robitaille declared the meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich