

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
February 3, 2025**

**5:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) & (c) –
Merrimack TV Training Classroom**

- **Student Welfare**
- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Ms. Lori Chair Peters, Chair; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Vice-Chair; Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member; Mr. Ken Martin, Board Member; Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member; and
Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative,

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Ms. Amy Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum; and Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the regular meeting to order.

Chair Peters read aloud the Merrimack School District's mission statement into the record as follows:

The Merrimack School District will provide a high-quality, future-driven education to all students in the community. Students will engage in learning opportunities that reflect both rigor and relevance and meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The district will prepare students to understand, adapt, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological changes in the world. Our overall goal is to inspire, create, and encourage students to be curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated individuals who are lifelong expert learners. Merrimack graduates exercise judgment they are innovative and will become responsible contributors to society. We hope the discussions we have tonight will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

State Representative Wendy Thomas addressed the Board and said she wanted the School Board to know she was present and would relay any information back to Concord.

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and stated that she appreciated the staff at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School for hosting the Literacy Night the previous week. She said it was a very successful event.

3. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked the staff at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School as well as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle for the very successful Literacy Night. He said the monies that the voters had approved were providing a very solid return on investment.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said they were currently working on the 2025-2026 school year calendar and noted the importance of providing early release days to have professional development training for the teachers.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that when there was inclement weather, he had to make decisions about a two-hour delay or a snow day very early in the morning. He further stated that sometimes, main roads were cleared, but side streets could remain very icy.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also commented on the successful Literacy Night. She said there were also partners present from the New Hampshire Department of Education who were collaborating with them on the Literacy Grant.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the following Wednesday, February 5th, would be an early release for professional development where they would provide staff with a mix of mandatory training, instructional support, and time to address some building needs.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said that the Board would receive a series of parent/family engagement events via email that the district would sponsor through the end of the school year.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that he had received a number of bids and quotations regarding the warrant article to replace the roof at the James Masticola Elementary School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School in the amount of \$834,000. He said he felt confident that the job could be done with the sum of \$834,000.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters also said she had attended Literacy Night, where she joined the 4th-grade Writing Seminar and learned that the 4th-grade students were learning how to write four-paragraph essays.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she felt colleges were looking for better reading and writing skills and thought the Merrimack School District was going in the right direction.

Vice-Chair Hardy and Board Member Halter both commented that they were very impressed with the Wit & Wisdom Curriculum.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Haddad said February was Black History Month, and the students for cultural equality were doing an incredible job highlighting diversity.

Student Representative Haddad also said they would start course selection soon, and as part of that process, Nashua High School South would have an open house for their CTE Programs on February 12th, and Nashua High School North would have an open house for their CTE Programs on February 13th. He also said that some new courses were added to Merrimack High School. The School Board collectively said that they highly encouraged parents and students to attend the open houses.

Chair Peters said there would be a Budget Committee meeting the following evening at 6:00 p.m., and the public hearing on the budget would be held on Tuesday, February 11th.

4. OLD BUSINESS

a. Vote on Warrant Articles

To the inhabitants of the School District in the Town of Merrimack, County of Hillsborough, New Hampshire, qualified to vote in School District affairs:

You are hereby notified to meet at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School in said District on Tuesday, March 4, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. for Session 1 (Deliberation) to discuss the matters to be voted on by official ballot and to meet at the designated polling sites, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, Merrimack Middle School, or St. John Neumann Church on Tuesday, April 8, 2025, Session 2 (Voting) for the choice of School District officers elected by ballot and any other action required to be inserted on said official ballot. The polls for the election of school district officers and other action required to be inserted on said ballot will open on said date at 7:00 a.m. and will not close earlier than 7:00 p.m. to act upon the following subjects:

ARTICLE 1: To elect all necessary school district officers for the ensuing year.
(Vote by Ballot.)

ARTICLE 2: Shall the Merrimack School Board be authorized to accept on behalf of the District, without further action by the voters, gifts, legacies, and devises of personal or real property which may become available to the District during the fiscal year? (Majority vote required).

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept Article 2. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

ARTICLE 3: (Special Warrant Article) Shall the District establish a capital reserve fund under the provisions of RSA 35: 1, to be known as the Administrative Office Development Fund for the purpose of designing, constructing, equipping, furnishing, and/or renovating office space located in the district to include but not be limited to the offices for Superintendent Services, Student Services, Student Wellness, Technology, Business Operations, and Human Resources, and to raise and appropriate the sum of up to Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$750,000); this sum to come from the June 30, 2025, fund balance available for transfer on July 1, 2025, and further, to name the school board as agents to expend from this fund? **No amount is to be raised from new taxation.** (Majority vote required).

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept Article 3. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Rothhaus asked how much money the district usually had in surplus funds. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the current year's surplus was \$3.6 million. He said the surplus (the unassigned fund balance) that the district had at the end of the school year was applied towards the school portion of the tax rate.

Board Member Halter asked how many capital reserve funds the district had and what were the balances in those funds. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the following:

<u>Fund</u>	<u>Balance in Fund</u>
Paving Capital Reserve Fund:	\$300,000
Roof Capital Reserve Fund:	\$ 3,000
Math & Reading Fund:	\$ 90,000
Special Education Capital Reserve Fund:	\$535,000
Maintenance, Repair, & Emergency Fund:	\$540,000

Board Member Halter commented that she felt the \$750,000 was a bit high.

Chair Peters commented that she felt \$500,000 was a more appropriate number. Board Member Halter commented that she agreed.

Board Member Martin commented that he felt it was very important to ensure that the intent was very well advertised and that it was not going to raise taxes.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to amend his motion to accept Article 3 with an adjusted amount of \$500,000 instead of \$750,000. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion as amended.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

ARTICLE 4: (Special Warrant Article) Shall the District raise and appropriate the sum of Eight Hundred Twenty-Three Thousand Two Hundred Thirty Dollars (\$823,230) for the purpose of a roof replacement at James Mastricola Elementary School and James Mastricola Upper Elementary School? (Majority vote required).

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that the portions of the roofs that needed to be replaced were quite old and were leaking in some areas.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that as a member of the Planning & Building Committee, she felt it was critical to keep all of their facilities in good shape.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to accept Article 4. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

ARTICLE 5: Shall the District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$96,823,198? (Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$ 95,808,066, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the District or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget.)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept Article 5. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Halter commented that she felt it was important to note that the ask represented a 1% difference between the default budget, and it represented way more than 1% in progress and improvements that the administration had done.

Chair Peters commented that the budget had been level-funded for the past three years, and they had not kept up with inflation. She further stated that the budget matched the inflation rate, and it was the first one that matched inflation in years.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. FY26 Budget Discussion

Chair Peters reviewed a PowerPoint presentation, and she explained that, per Salary.com, the cost of living in Merrimack, NH, was 16.9% higher than the national average. She added that although the teachers' salaries were much better than in past years, they were still not competitive.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the increase in teacher salaries had made a significant difference in the number of people applying for jobs.

Chair Peters also commented that health insurance premiums had gone up by 252% since 1999, but Merrimack had managed to offer competitive health care packages.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that while the State of New Hampshire did not have a sales tax, the money for necessary services had to come from somewhere else, and that onus fell on property taxes.

5. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

6. POLICIES

a. Annual Review of Investment Policy (DFA)

Chair Peters stated that the School Board reviewed the Annual Review of Investment Policy (DFA) on February 3, 2025.

b. Revised Health Education and Exemption from Instruction Policy (IHAM) 2nd Reading

This policy will be voted on at the next School Board meeting.

c. Revised Procedural Safeguards Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability Policy (ACE) (1st Reading)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to waive the first reading of the Revised Procedural Safeguards Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability Policy (ACE). Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- d. Review of Section 504 Procedural Safeguards - Parent/Guardian/Student Rights Under Section 504 (ACE-R)
- e. Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Policy (AC) (1st Reading)

Chair Peters stated that the School Board reviewed the Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Policy (AC) on February 3, 2025.

- f. Review of Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment and District Anti-Discrimination Policy (AC-R)

Chair Peters stated that the School Board reviewed the Non-Discrimination Equal Opportunity Employment and District Anti-Discrimination Policy (AC-R) on February 3, 2025.

- g. Review of Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Annual Notice of Contact Information (AC-R2)

Chair Peters stated that the School Board reviewed the Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Annual Notice of Contact Information (AC-R(2)) on February 3, 2025.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 21, 2025, Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the public minutes of the January 21, 2025, meeting, as presented. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- b. January 21, 2025, Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the non-public minutes from the January 21, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained: Board Member Halter)

8. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Nominations

- Kevin Morehead, Science Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Shayna Beaulieu, Elementary Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter stated that she attended a Budget Committee meeting on January 28th where the committee heard department reviews for maintenance, technology, special services, and food services. She said they would hold their work session the following day, and the following week was the public hearing.

b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she received correspondence from a parent who had a concern at the Merrimack High School, and she pointed that parent in the right direction.

Chair Peters stated that she had received several pieces of correspondence about concerns at the high school, and they were all directed to the appropriate person to handle the concerns.

Chair Peters said she also received some positive feedback pertaining to the School Board's work.

c. Comments

Student Representative Haddad stated that on Thursday, a little bit of time would be carved out of the day so that the entire school could watch a Unified Basketball game.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she thought it was very important for the Board to keep up with updating the policies.

Board Member Martin commented that filing for school district offices would open in approximately two weeks, and two positions on the School Board would be vacant.

Chair Peters stated that it was very important that the public understood that all decisions regarding IEPs and 504s were data-driven. She said the data, through assessments, determined services and were not based on wants, needs, or suspects.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

State Representative Thomas addressed the Board and said there was a bill that requested that the rooms and meals tax be lowered from 8.5% to 7.5%. She said that

would benefit the tourists and not the people who live in New Hampshire, and the difference would have to be made up through the property taxes. She said the Interest in Dividends Tax that was removed last term had created a \$189,000,000 hole in the state budget. She said that tax benefited the top 10% of the wealthiest people in New Hampshire.

State Representative Thomas said she also heard that a goal of the party that was in the majority was to cut the budget by \$500,000,000. She added that all of the cuts would fall on the backs of the taxpayers.

Ms. Kaitlyn Bernier, 2 Birch Street, addressed the Board and said the Education Trust Fund was projected to have \$125,000,000 with the increase of the EFA's, which would use \$105,000,000, and the little bit left over was supposed to go towards special education.

MOTION: At approximately 7:35 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.