

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
February 17, 2025**

5:00 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) & (c) – Merrimack TV Training Classroom

- **Staff Welfare**

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

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

Excused: Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative (Excused)

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

There were no public comments.

3. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

1. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the following:

- 2nd Grade won the Annual Pennies War Competition, raising over \$3,000 – Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.
- The high school's Culture Club had been working with students at the elementary school level, including reading to them and cultural dances.

- Noted that the district gave out special pins for all employees who had 20+ years of service with the Merrimack School District.
- Five students from Merrimack High School participated in the Jazz All-State Festival.
- 15 Merrimack High School musicians participated in the New Hampshire Educators Association Solo & Ensemble Festival.
- 16 students from the Merrimack Middle School concert band attended the New Hampshire Educators Association Solo & Ensemble Festival.
- The boys & girls basketball team and the swim team & dive team completed their seasons.

2. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that the prior Wednesday, the district hosted a very successful virtual training session with Sarah Ward, who was an internationally known expert on executive functioning and was a Speech & Language Pathologist.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also said earlier that day, they hosted an in-person event with Justin Agraz, the A-Cert Officer, at the Merrimack Police Department, and Julie Berglund, who worked for the Greater Nashua Mental Health, where they provided some information regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences and the Impact they had on Child Development.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the district had two family engagement events scheduled in March, noting they would both focus on helping parents with student behavior in the home.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said they had received their iReady scores, and the scores increased by 12% since the previous fall. She said a total of 29% of students were mid or above grade level in reading. She added that the scores in math had increased by 11%.

3. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the amount of appropriations recommended to go to the Deliberative Session by the Budget Committee was ready to be signed. He said the default budget was also ready to be signed, as was the Warrant that still needed to be posted.

4. School Board Update

Chair Peters sent out a reminder that the Deliberative Session would be held on March 4, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. in the APR at the James Masticola Upper Elementary School.

4. **OLD BUSINESS**

a. 2025 – 2026 Budget Update

Chair Peters commented that the Budget Committee had voted to move the proposed School Board budget forward. She then reviewed the budget process.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. Review of Protocol for Responding to Immigration Authorities

Chief Educational Officer Olsen read aloud the following memorandum into the record, noting that the protocol, in its entirety, was available on the school district's website under "Supporting Material for Board Meetings."

Subject: Protocol For Responding to Immigration Authorities

President Trump has initiated an aggressive national deportation policy pertaining to undocumented people. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) is responsible for the enforcement of immigration laws throughout the United States.

I have spoken with both our legal counsel and the Merrimack Police Chief about how the enforcement could impact public schools. From my conversations it appears that although it is possible that an ICE official(s) could visit one of our schools, there is a relatively small chance of this happening.

The District is required by law to enroll all students who reside in the District, regardless of whether they are citizens. As a result, when a child is registered for school, the District does not inquire as to a student's citizenship status. School districts are allowed to obtain documentation pertaining to legal residency within the community in accordance with state statutes. Therefore, we would not possess information regarding the citizenship of the family/child. Sometimes, a citizen will inform the ICE agency of a suspected undocumented family, and this may initiate an investigation. As previously stated, although an investigation in our school district is possible, it appears to be less likely than more likely.

In the unlikely event that an Immigration official appears at one of our schools, please follow the protocols in the document accompanying this memo. It is important that we comply with the law while also watching out for the safety and well-being of our students.

b. Board's Action on Petition Warrant Article to Delegate the Determination of the Default Budget to the Municipal Budget Committee

Article 5: *By Petition: Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:14-b to delegate the determination of the default budget to the municipal budget committee, which has been adopted under RSA 32:14.*

Chair Peters commented that at the time the agenda was set, there was only one Petitioned Warrant Article, and because the Article directly affected a rule of the School Board and the administration, they had the option to recommend or not recommend and to provide an opinion.

Chair Peters explained that the School Board oversaw the default budget. Chair Peters said her concern with the Warrant Article was that it put the entire budget process in the hands of the Budget Committee, who, while they did great work, did not see the full scope of the district's work and the School Board's work. She said she also had concerns about the dispute over one-time expenditures. She said it was her opinion that the Petitioned Warrant Article should not be recommended.

Board Member Rothhaus said she did not recommend the Article and had complete trust in Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and he had a lot of expertise.

Board Member Martin commented that he did not feel the Petitioned Warrant Article should be recommended. He added that he thought there was secondary motivation on behalf of the Budget Committee.

Vice-Chair Hardy also said she was not in favor of recommending the Warrant Article. She added that she felt the Budget Committee had become more partisan over the past few years.

Board Member Halter stated that she did not feel the Petitioned Warrant Article should be recommended, and the best people to decide on the default budget were the administration and the School Board.

MOTION: Board Member Rothhaus made a motion for the School Board not to accept the provisions under RSA 40:14-b to delegate the determination of the default budget to the municipal budget committee. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chair Peters stated that the following Board members would present and second the Warrant Articles at the Deliberative Session:

<u>Present</u>	<u>Second</u>	<u>Warrant Article</u>
Board Member Halter	Vice-Chair Hardy	Gifts & Properties (#2)
Chair Peters	Board Member Rothhaus	Admin. Office Development (#3) Capital Reserve Fund
Vice-Chair Hardy	Board Member Martin	Roof Replacement (#4)

c. 2025 – 2026 School Calendar Discussion

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the proposed 2025 – 2026 School Calendar.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the 2025 – 2026 School Calendar, as amended. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

d. Other

Chair Peters read aloud a letter from Board Member Rothhaus to the Chair and CEO of Fidelity Investments, as summarized below:

I am reaching out to request your assistance with a vital project in our town: rebuilding the Merrimack SAU building. The presence of your organization has had a profound impact on our community, fostering economic growth and a strong local workforce that includes many Merrimack residents.

Our current SAU building, a 1950s ranch-style house, is no longer capable of meeting the needs of our students, staff, and community. A recent fire report documented deplorable conditions, including mold, the absence of fire escapes, and non-compliance with ADA standards. While Merrimack citizens are overwhelmingly pro-education, the rising tax burden has created strong opposition to funding a new SAU building at this time. This leaves our town in a difficult position. We recognize the critical need for this project, yet we lack the resources to move forward without external support. A contribution from Fidelity would help ensure a better future for our schools and community, further solidifying the strong bond between your organization and the residents who hold it in such high regard.

Chair Peters read aloud a letter responding to Board Member Rothhaus' letter, as summarized below:

Please note that all charitable donations and sponsorship requests must be submitted online. Fidelity Investments no longer accepts mail, email, phone, or fax requests.

Board Member Rothhaus stated that she would send further information to Fidelity regarding the request. She asked the Board if they would be in favor of giving Fidelity Investment some naming rights if they were willing to contribute.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to negotiate naming rights should Fidelity Investments choose to sponsor part or all of the replacement of the SAU building. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

6. POLICIES

- a. Approval of Revised Health Education and Exemption from Instruction (IHAM)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Revised Health Education and Exemption from Instruction Policy (IHAM). Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- b. Procedural Safeguards Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability Policy (ACE), given its second reading.

To be voted on at the next School Board meeting.

- c. Revised Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Plan Policy (AC), given its second reading.

To be voted on at the next School Board meeting.

- d. Approval of Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy and Grievance Policy (ACAC)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy and Grievance Policy (ACAC), as amended. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. February 3, 2025, Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to accept the public and non-public minutes of the February 3, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items to discuss.

9. OTHER

- a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter stated that she attended two Budget Committee meetings where there were discussions regarding potential budget cuts of up to \$7 million. She said after much discussion, the Budget Committee voted in favor of the proposed School Board's budget.

- b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she received correspondence from a parent and a community member who had some concerns, and she pointed them in the right direction.

Chair Peters stated that she received some questions regarding the budget. She also said she had correspondence with someone who had concerns about a particular committee member, as well as questions about when the Deliberative Session was.

Board Member Halter said she received a phone call and passed it to the appropriate person as she could not answer the caller's question.

- c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she appreciated the good relationship between the School Board and the administration.

Chair Peters thanked the administration for attending all of the Budget Committee meetings and for providing information when needed.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

MOTION: At approximately 7:25 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.