

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

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

- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Ms. Lori Peters, 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: Ms. Jena Hardy, Vice-Chair, and 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. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

- 1. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the following:

- The Thorntons Ferry Elementary School had raised \$13,000 for the American Heart Association's "Kids Heart Challenge."
- The United Nations Club participated in a "Mock Trial" at Bedford High School.

- The high school jazz band performed at the Clark Terry Jazz Festival at the University of New Hampshire, where three members of the band were awarded “Outstanding Musicianship Awards.” He said the jazz band also received two awards for the “Outstanding Saxophone” section and an honorable mention for Outstanding Musicianship.”
- Grades 3 through 12 will host a “Celebration of Song” concert at the high school.
- The New Hampshire Music Educators Association “Large Group Festival” will be held on Saturday, March 22nd, at Bow High School.
- The “Cavalcade of Bands” (grades 5 through 12) district band concert will be held on Wednesday, March 26th, at the high school.
- The New Hampshire Music Educators Association “All-State Band and Orchestra” will perform on Saturday, April 5th, at the Capital Center for the Arts.
- The Robotics Club competed in the Pine Tree district competition in Lewiston, ME, where they won an award for sustainability.
- The newly formed Merrimack-Hollis-Brookline-Derryfield Warhawks hockey team made it to the Division II State Championship but unfortunately lost 3 – 2.
- The Granite State Challenge team had won 3 consecutive competitions and was looking forward to winning another one.

2. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle congratulated Dr. Campbell, who recently won a full scholarship to attend the M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Science and Engineering Program in the summer.

3. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that he was happy that there was a good turnout at the Deliberative Session and was awaiting the vote to move forward with projects.

5. **OLD BUSINESS**

a. Deliberative Session Review

Chair Peters commented that there was a large turnout at the Deliberative Session. She said all of the Warrant Articles, as written, were moved to the ballot. She added that there was a proposed amendment to reduce the amount of the Operating Budget that failed.

Warrant Articles moved forward were:

- Operating Budget
- Roof
- Capital Fund for Correcting SAU buildings
- Two petitioned Warrant Articles

Chair Peters reminded the residents that the polls would be open on Tuesday, April 8, 2025, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Rotary Support to School District

Ms. Maureen Tracey, Merrimack Rotary President-Elect, Mr. Scott Wellman, Merrimack Rotary Past President, and Ms. Maureen Mooney, Merrimack Rotary Past President, were present.

Ms. Tracey discussed the “4 Way Speech Contest” and was hoping that Merrimack would integrate it into its curriculum.

Ms. Tracey said the Rotary Club started looking at scholarships in March; in April, they recognized Excellence in the Workplace; in May, they honored the Top Ten Scholars; in June, there would be the Interact Club (Helping with Recycling Event), also in June was the Changing of the Gavel, in July there was a Pancake Breakfast, in August they began the Turkey Trot Promotion, in September they did Roadside Clean-Up, in October was NuBingo, in November was the actual Turkey Trot, and in December they sold Christmas trees.

Ms. Tracey said the Rotary Club made significant donations to the Parks and Recreation Department, as well as donating to the police department and food banks, held coat drives, and partnered with Meals on Wheels, among others.

Ms. Tracey stated that the Rotary Club would like to have a representative from the School Board to join them for breakfast in an effort to make a stronger connection with the Interact Club.

Board Member Rothhaus thanked the members of the Rotary Club for their dedication to the Town of Merrimack.

Chair Peters commented that she was interested in getting the 4 Way Speech program back into the district.

b. Voice of Democracy Scholarships

Ms. Julie Schneider-Derubeis, Class of 1987 Alumni, addressed the Board and said she was part of the VFW Auxiliary for the State of New Hampshire. She said she was aware that Merrimack had received “Voice of Democracy” (for high school students) and “Patriots

Pen” (for middle school students) essays, but in the past five years, it has declined to almost nothing. She said a young man from Manchester Central High School won \$35,000 based on his essay and was the number one in the country. She said the theme for the Patriots Pen was “How are you Showing Patriotism and Support for our Country.” She added that the deadline to submit

the essay was October 31st. She said the people who won would get monies from the VFW as well as the VFW Auxiliary.

Ms. Schneider-Derubeis said the teachers and guidance counselors did not seem to know anything about it, and therefore, the students and parents did not know about it.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that there would be a Leadership Team meeting, and he said he would make sure it was addressed.

Chair Peters requested that Chief Educational Officer Olsen provide the School Board with an update after the Leadership Team meeting.

c. HB 675

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that HB 675 was a piece of legislation that would require school districts to cap spending according to a specific formula. He said there was an override provision that would require a 2/3 majority vote. He added that it was somewhat similar to Proposition 2 ½ in Massachusetts. He said in the first two years of the proposed legislation, budgets would be capped at the previous year's spending level and multiplied by the five-year average of the inflation rate.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he was unsure of what inflation rate the legislation spoke to; if it was regarding the average United States inflation rate or the inflation rate in the northeast. He noted that if the legislation were going to use the average United States rate, then the Northeast would lose significantly.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he did not feel there was any logic in setting a budget based on the average of the five prior years. He said the other option was to set the budget at the previous year's budget level multiplied by the average percentage change in enrollment over the previous five years. Further, Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he did not think either option was a good one.

Chair Peters commented that one of the things she loved about New Hampshire was how important the community was and coming together to decide what was best for the community was very important. She said they had a mechanism in place for budgets to change, and if the Town of Merrimack wanted to change the budget, it could be done at the Deliberative Session and at the ballot box.

Board Member Halter stated that she felt the proposed legislation was the exact opposite of local control.

Board Member Martin commented that he felt the proposed legislation was ignoring the fact that the majority of people did not want it.

d. New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project

Chair Peters read the following letter into the record:

To Governor Ayotte and the General Court of New Hampshire:

Two years ago, a group of over 150 local leaders - including Mayors, City Councilors, Select Board members, and School Board members - [presented a similar letter to this one during public hearings on the State budget](#), calling on the State of New Hampshire to increase its funding for public education in order to address well-known inequities and gaps. [What that budget contained](#), touted as one of the biggest increases to State education aid since the Claremont decisions, was only \$169 million (barely more than a 2% increase) that did not meaningfully affect the State's share of education funding, which remains [the lowest in the entire country](#).

This modest change has not helped reduce the downshifted tax burden faced by local property taxpayers trying to support their public schools. During the legislature's work in 2024, [there were several bills aimed at reducing that burden](#) and sending aid to districts and students that needed it the most, like students receiving special education services. Despite strong, bipartisan support in the House, these bills were killed by the Senate and failed to become law.

Meanwhile, all of us at the local level have continued working hard for our schools and communities to try and balance the needs of our students and the economic realities faced by our taxpayers. Inflation, energy costs, and unpredictable special education expenditures have put strains on our budgets, and the State has provided no relief.

The significant gap between actual expenses, which was [\\$21,545 per pupil](#) during the 23-24 school year, and average State aid, which was [only \\$5,148 per pupil the same year](#), must be closed with local property taxes. Our [local property taxes cover 70% of all school revenues in the state](#), the highest share in the country. In all of our communities, especially those with lower property values, this means levying higher and higher tax rates just to keep up. The result is a system where one of the biggest factors in determining the opportunities available to our students, and the burden placed on the taxpayer is local property values.

Despite record surpluses in the Education Trust Fund, excess State funds have not been used to help alleviate these disparities or provide aid to school districts. [In November 2024](#), the Department of Education announced that there was expected to be \$16 million less in the State's Special Education Aid fund than was being requested by local districts. This fund is used to reimburse school districts for specific, state-approved services provided to students with complex and intensive needs. These students have a federally protected right to these services, and if the State does not fill in the funding shortfall, it will downshift even more onto local property taxpayers.

As the legislature begins working on the biennial State budget – the single largest vehicle for school funding reform - you must take stock of the current situation communities are facing. For decades, the State has fallen short of its constitutional responsibility to fund education, losing again and again in court while downshifting increases onto local property taxes in most communities around the state. With [pending decisions](#) in the two current school funding lawsuits [coming any day from the NH Supreme Court](#), we once again call on the Governor and New Hampshire Legislature to act.

There are a variety of policy changes that could provide significant relief to local property taxpayers while boosting the funding going to school districts around the state. [The 2020 Commission to Study School Funding's final report](#), having now gone four years without the legislature putting its findings and policy proposals into action, still presents a strong framework to build from. The work of last year's special House Sub-Committee on Education Funding also did extensive work on the bipartisan proposals that were ultimately killed in the Senate.

It is the firm belief of those signed below that well-funded, excellent public education is the most important asset for the future of New Hampshire. [About 85% of New Hampshire children attend public schools](#), meaning an increase in State aid would help most children in the state access new opportunities while also providing property tax relief for most taxpayers. This is a win-win and promotes the health of the New Hampshire economy by investing in the next generation and making our communities more attractive for businesses and families.

We all work hard to balance providing critical services to our communities while not increasing property taxes beyond what people can afford. The current budget process presents a new opportunity for the Governor and Legislature to work together on finding a solution to the funding challenges faced by so many communities in our state. A school funding solution ensures every student, no matter where they live, has access to the best possible public education while also creating real relief for taxpayers. Doing nothing, while not only violating the New Hampshire Constitution, will only serve to exacerbate the existing disparities that exist in our state, driving local property taxes higher and keeping opportunities away from our students. The future of our state, and our communities, depends on the State contributing to a well-funded public education system.

Chair Peters commented that she felt the State Legislature needed to come up with some creative funding solutions that did not include an income tax and increase what they paid per pupil from the state level. She said if the Board so desired, they could add their names as individuals or as a Board to the letter.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she thought at one point in time the Board had decided to write their own letter. She said she felt the letter should be addressed to Governor Ayotte, State Representatives, and the State Senator explaining that they were fearful that they would not be able to continue to offer the services if there were to be a spending cap.

Chair Peters noted that she would provide the Board with a draft letter at the next meeting.

e. Regional Career and Technical Education Agreement with Nashua

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the annual Regional Career and Technical Education Agreement with the Nashua School District. He said nothing had changed and asked the School Board for their approval.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the Regional Career and Technical Education Agreement with Nashua. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

f. Review of March 11, 2025 Professional Development Day

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said a Professional Development Day had been held the prior Tuesday which included the third “Wit & Wisdom” implementation training for the current school year. She also said they had “OpenSyEd” implementation training. She said they had worked to implement a progress monitoring tool called “aimswebPlus,” along with a targeted Q & A session for the special education teachers and interventionists. She also said they had NAMI suicide prevention training for the school counselors and some of the wellness staff.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said they narrowed down some health curriculums they were looking to purchase the following year. She said they also had CPI training and refresher sessions.

g. Date for Goal Setting Meeting

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the previous facilitator was not available this year, but he was going to look into recommending someone else. Chair Peters said the tentative date was June 19, 2025, but they would discuss it at the next meeting.

h. Voter Information Guide

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the Board had a draft of the Voter Information Guide and asked them to review it.

7. POLICIES

a. Approval of Revised Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Plan (AC)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the Revised Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Plan (AC). Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

b. Approval of Revised Procedural Safeguards Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability (ACE)

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

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

c. First Review of Food and Nutrition Services: Anti-Discrimination and Civil Rights Complaints (ACR)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to waive the first reading. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. February 17, 2025, Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the public and non-public minutes of the February 17, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

- b. February 20, 2025, Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the non-public minutes of the February 20, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Resignation
- Harley T. Hall, Director of Graduation Pathways, Merrimack High School
- b. Administrator Retirement
- Richard Zampieri, Assistant Principal, Merrimack High School

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, as presented, with the Board's sincere appreciation for both employees' service to the Merrimack School District. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

- a. Committee Reports

Board Member Martin stated that he would attend a Curriculum Committee meeting the following day and would provide the Board with an update at the April 7th meeting.

- b. Correspondence

Board Member Martin said he received a few emails regarding the Deliberative Session.

Board Member Rothhaus said she also had some people who reached out to her regarding the Deliberative Session.

Chair Peters stated that she received communication regarding some staff and student concerns, and she forwarded them to the administration. She added that the district had received a number "Right-to-Know" requests.

Chair Peters also commented that she too had received some questions regarding the Deliberative Session as well as some voting and budget questions.

c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus commented the she had a Zoom meeting with Fidelity Investments regarding requesting funding for the SAU building. She said she did not think the district would be eligible under Fidelity's rules, but she would provide a more in-depth update at a future meeting.

Board Member Rothhaus said she was quite impressed at how well-behaved the Merrimack High Students presented themselves at the last hockey game.

Board Member Martin commented that March was "National Music in our Schools Month."

Chair Peters encouraged people to vote on April 8, 2025.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Maureen Mooney, a resident, and a State Representative, addressed the Board and said those in Concord were in the "very thick of budget season." She said the budget that had been presented to the members of the New Hampshire House was \$1 billion more than the prior term. She said it was a particularly challenging budget season.

MOTION: At approximately 7:51 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.