

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
April 7, 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. 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 to, and adjust to the changing world, including civic, economic, social, and technological developments. 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

Erin M., a student, addressed the Board and stated that she wished to comment on the "Bring your own Device" policy. She said she did not think it was a good idea to limit the students to only Chromebooks. She said she was aware of the fact that there were some security concerns, but the Wi-Fi mostly covered that. She added that high-level students had a hard time achieving the work that they were doing on Chromebooks.

3. RECOGNITIONS

Chair Peters commented that this was Ken Martin's last meeting as a Board Member. Chair Peters said it had been a pleasure to work with him. Chair Peters, on behalf of the Board and the administration, presented Board Member Martin with a plaque indicating the Board's sincere appreciation for all he had done from 2022 to 2025. The School Board, in its entirety, thanked Board Member Martin for being one of the finest Board Members who had ever served, and they wished him all the best in his future.

Board Member Martin thanked the School Board for all their very kind comments.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the following:

- Cable Program with Dr. Sara Campbell, where they talked about her attendance at an upcoming summer program at M.I.T.
- Granite State Challenge - Thursday, April 10th at 8:30 p.m.
- Jackie McMahon and Cinzia Bibb, both school nurses, were recognized by the New Hampshire Department of Education as “Trailblazers in Education.”
- Nicole Soucie, Special Education Coordinator at Merrimack High School, was recognized as the “March WZID Teacher of the Month.”
- The district had recently recognized the paraprofessionals with a big thank you in honor of Paraprofessionals Appreciation Day. He added that he felt the paraprofessionals were the unsung heroes of the school district.
- Susan Stubbs, Rebecca Lessard, and the administration hosted the third annual Literacy Night the prior week, and it was a success.
- Jacob K., a 7th-grader at Merrimack Middle School, competed in the State Jr. Oratorical Contest and placed 5th. He also said 7th-grader Kylie K. competed in a national Ice Hockey competition, and her team made it to the semi-finals.
- Brendan McWalter, Music Teacher, Merrimack High School, informed Chief Educational Officer Olsen that they had two district concerts, the Celebration of Song, and the Cavalcade of Bands.
- The Merrimack High School Chorus and Concert Band traveled to Bow High School to participate in the NH Music Educators Association’s Large Group Festival, and they did very well.
- The Merrimack High School Science Olympiad team competed at the 2025 New Hampshire State Tournament held at St. Anselm College and finished in 3rd place, with only half of the team being able to attend.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that Susan Luhrs, Federal Funds Bookkeeper, recently went through an audit with the Department of Education. She said she did very well and appreciated her hard work.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the state had decided to make a change in how the district reported data to them. She thanked Luda Balanovich, Systems Manager, for all of her hard work.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that ACCESS testing had been completed, noting that ESOL teachers were required to do the assessment annually. She also said that the New Hampshire SAS window opened on April 1st.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said on April 16th that students in grades 9 through 11 would participate in the pre-SAT or the SAT.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that there would be two family engagement activities with Sarah Sherman. She said the first one would be held on April 16th via Zoom on Practical Home Supports for Students with Anxiety, ADHD, and Autism. She added that the second one would be held on April 23rd (in-person) at the Merrimack Middle School library at 4:00 p.m. regarding the IEP process.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that Mike Dumais, Assistant Director of Maintenance, would be retiring after 34 years with the district. He wished him all the best in his future.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters reminded everyone that the following day was election day and encouraged the residents to vote.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Haddad reported the following:

- An Outing Club would be starting at Merrimack High School.
- Chop Shop 166 had completed their district events and would move on to the "Worlds" in Houston, TX.
- Spring sports were starting.
- Students took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.
- The Merrimack High School building would host the state Quiz Bowl finals.
- The Student Council was hard at work regarding Spirit Week and the prom.
- The Students Against Destructive Decisions Club were planning the mock crash.
- In response to a Right-to-Know request and an issued complaint made to the Commissioner of Education, Frank Edelblut, the administration decided to no longer allow students in the Cultural Equality Club to go to the elementary schools and read the book ***Promise*** by LeBron James. Student Representative Haddad commented that the students were sad and angry about the decision, and he had been told that the students did not feel that the book had anything to do with DEI (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion) but was about kindness. He said he felt scared when kindness got banned, and everyone just sat down.

Chair Peters commented that she, too, was disappointed with the decision.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen proposed that the names of residents who had made Right-to-Know requests should be published. He said that oftentimes, it was very costly, time and labor-intensive, and in some cases, the same person made multiple requests. Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would double-check with the school district's attorney and relay that information to the School Board.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion on Warrant Articles/Review Voters Guide

Chair Peters explained that every resident should have received a voter's guide in the mail.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the Warrant Articles.

b. Review of the Draft Letter Regarding the Spending Cap Legislation

Chair Peters stated that after the Board's last discussion regarding New Hampshire's Fair Funding letter and adding the additional tax cap legislation that passed the House, she drafted a letter. She read the letter aloud as summarized below:

Dear Governor Ayotte,

On behalf of the Merrimack School Board, we are writing to express our concerns about the equality and long-term viability of New Hampshire's funding of public education. We implore you to back laws and programs that:

1. **Determine and increase state-level funding sources for education.** The main source for funding for public education in New Hampshire is local property taxes, which have led to substantial inequalities among areas and an unmanageable burden on local taxpayers. School districts throughout the state are forced to make more tough decisions that impact staffing, student services, program offerings, and class sizes in the absence of adequate state-level financial streams to sustain education. To boost statewide investment in public education, we respectfully ask that the legislature and administration investigate and implement new or improved revenue choices. The common need to guarantee that all students, irrespective of their residence, have access to a sufficient and fair education ought to be reflected in these solutions.
2. **Raise the state's share of funding for public education.** When it comes to the proportion of state funds allocated to public education, New Hampshire has the lowest percentage in the country. School districts are forced to either increase local taxes or cut back on services for students as costs climb, particularly those associated with special education, transportation, buildings, and health insurance. This process exacerbates inequality between communities with varying levels of property wealth and tax bases and is unsustainable.

We urge the state to reconsider how it finances education and to significantly increase its share of local school budgets in order to fulfill its constitutional duty to ensure that every child receives a quality education. This would improve the consistency of high-quality educational options across the state and lessen the financial strain on local property taxpayers.

3. **Oppose any legislation that would cap local school districts' budgets at the state level.** The principle of local control has long been supported by the people of New Hampshire. Every town or city is in the best position to recognize and address the educational needs of its citizens and children. A statewide tax cap would undermine this tradition by restricting the ability of locally elected boards and town meetings to decide on appropriate spending levels based on local priorities, needs, and values.

Such a cap would jeopardize our capacity to deliver necessary services and uphold high standards for teaching and learning, in addition to limiting our ability to adapt to shifting educational demands. As a fundamental component of New Hampshire's governance, local control must be maintained and supported.

We implore you to promote equitable, sustainable, and responsible education policies by standing alongside your local communities. The moment has come for significant reforms that acknowledge the role that public education will play in the future of our state. We appreciate your dedication to our children and your ongoing devotion to the people of New Hampshire.

Respectfully,

To be signed by all members of the School Board.

- c. Merrimack High School Graduation Date

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the Merrimack High School graduation ceremony would take place on Saturday, June 14, 2025.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that the expected last day of school would be Wednesday, June 18, 2025.

6. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Facilities Naming Recommendation from the Planning & Building Committee

Mr. Gage Perry, Vice-Chair of the Planning & Building Committee; Mr. Joe Sanborn, Track Coach & Science teacher; Mr. Jason Wright, Assistant Coach; Mr. Pat McGrath, Former School Board Member; Mr. Mike Monahan, Former Track Coach; and Mr. Brent Whitney, Track & Cross Country Coach were present on behalf of the request.

Mr. Sanborn addressed the Board and said he and his colleagues were present to request that the name of the school's track be after a person who had dedicated his life to shaping the lives of thousands of students, both in and out of the classroom. He said Mr. John Snell had been a dedicated leader in Merrimack for decades, and they felt it was appropriate to honor his tangible contributions.

Mr. Wright explained that the first-ever "John Snell Alumni Mile" on the track. He said it had tremendous support, and he had already received many entries.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she had spoken with the Athletics Director, who was in a Master's Class on naming buildings. She said one of the concerns was that if there were an emergency, there might be some confusion regarding going to Memorial Field or the track. She added that one of the options they discussed was having a plaque that was flat on the ground. Board Member Rothhaus said she felt that it may help to minimize any confusion while still honoring Mr. Snell.

Chair Peters stated that the School Board gladly accepted the recommendation from the Planning & Building Committee to name the track in honor of Mr. John Snell. She said the Board would place the item on the next meeting's agenda so that they could discuss matters such as funding, etc.

b. Update on Request to Fidelity

Board Member Rothhaus stated that she was happy to report that she had a Zoom meeting with Ms. Carolyn Shaughnessy, Program Officer at Fidelity Investments. She said Carolyn carefully listened to the School Board's request regarding assistance with funding the new SAU building. She added that, unfortunately, the Board's request did not currently meet Fidelity's criteria for receiving money. Board Member Rothhaus explained that the amount of funds that Merrimack would have had to have been 80% of their goal.

Chair Peters suggested that the Board should also reach out to Budweiser, BAE, and Elbit Systems, in addition to Fidelity Investments.

c. Review & Approval of the Document Entitled "FY26 General Assurances Requirements and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs"

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the document had to be reviewed and approved on an annual basis.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the document entitled "FY26 General Assurances Requirements and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs." Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

7. POLICIES

a. Second Review of Food and Nutrition Services: Anti-Discrimination and Civil Rights Complaints (ACF)

Chair Peters asked if there were members of the Board who had questions or comments. There were none.

b. First Reading of Revised Title I Parent Involvement in Education Policy (KB)

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

c. Review of Title I Parent Involvement in Education Appendix KB-R(1)

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said they were reviewing policies to compare them to the New Hampshire School Board recommendation. She said they were looking to have the document aligned since the last time it was adopted in 2007.

Chair Peters asked if there were members of the Board who had questions or comments. There were none.

Chair Peters noted that the policy would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. March 3, 2025 – Non-Public Minutes

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. March 17, 2025 – Non-Public and Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to accept the non-public minutes and public minutes of the March 17, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5– 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Teacher Resignations

- Jennifer Gonzalez, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Elizabeth Dumais, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Michael Smith, School Counselor, Merrimack Middle School

b. Administrator Resignations

- Amanda (Amy) Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Districtwide

c. Teacher Retirements

- Maryanne Sabat, Special Education Teacher, James Mastricola Elementary School – 31 years of service.
- Jeannie Wagner, Special Education Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School – 41 years of service.
- Line Keane, F.A.C.S. Teacher, Merrimack Middle School – 28 years of service.
- Philip Carle, Woodworking Teacher, Merrimack High School – 35 years of service.
- Pamela Foster, Technology Education Teacher – Merrimack High School – 24 years of service.
- Karen Hammes, School Nurse, Merrimack High School – 13 years of service.
- Harry Hewitt, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack High School – 25 years of service.
- Marla Jones, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School – 36 years of service.

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chair Peters noted that the School Board would regretfully accept the resignation of Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle. She said Amy had been a crucial member of the team, and they were excited for her future but were also very sad that she was leaving the district.

Student Representative Haddad commented that he felt Ms. Dumais was one of the finest people he had ever been taught by. He said she was a role model and a mentor. He also said Mr. Hewitt was another incredible professional whom he was extremely lucky to have had as a teacher. Finn wished them both the best of luck in the future.

Board Member Rothhaus and Vice-Chair Hardy stated that the school was losing some incredible teachers.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle had an extraordinary impact on the Merrimack School District, and they were profoundly grateful for her service.

d. Administrator Nomination

- Shane Rozamus, Assistant Principal, Merrimack High School

e. Non-Union/Director Nomination

- Matthew O'Brien, Director of Extended Learning Opportunities and Graduation Pathways, Merrimack High School.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Administrator Nomination and the Non-Union/Director Nomination. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were none.

b. Correspondence

Chair Peters stated that the Board received a number of "Right-to-Know" requests, noting that some of the Board members were included and some were not, but pointed out that the number of requests was extensive. She said she received an email regarding the election and candidates requesting a School Board opinion, to which she replied, "The School Board did not take an opinion on candidates, and they did not make recommendations or prohibitions."

Chair Peters commented that she also received an email from a parent of a special education student who thanked the district for the work they did regarding special education.

Chair Peters also said that she received a few emails that she forwarded to the administration, as that was the proper chain of command.

c. Comments

Board Member Halter commented that before the Board made its decision regarding the Facilities Naming Recommendation, the logistics of the process would be discussed. Chair Peters replied that the Board would receive all of the information prior to the next meeting.

Board Member Martin thanked the School Board and the members of the Merrimack community for the opportunity to serve on the Board. He said he learned a great deal.

Student Representative Haddad commented that he agreed the students should not be forced to use Chromebooks only and not use their personal laptops at school.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:30 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Chair Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.