

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
July 14, 2025**

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

- **Student Welfare**

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

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Ms. Kathleen Scholand, One-year Interim 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

There were no public comments.

3. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

1. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen welcomed Dr. Kathleen Scholand, One-year Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reminded everyone that they were looking for a Director of Special Education.

2. Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand said she was happy to join the team. She said summer programming had begun for students. She added that Camp Invention had been held at the James Mastricola Elementary School, and it was a great success. She thanked Cathy Goodman and Amanda Lessard, who were the camp directors.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand explained that teachers were also busy working on some content area curriculum development and revision projects happening in math, science, social studies, world languages, and the unified arts.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that the district received the preliminary allocation for the Title I Grant, which was approximately 40% of what they anticipated for their funding. She said, however, that the three other Title programs they participated in — Title II, Part A: Professional Development; Title III, Part A: Language Instruction for English Learners; and Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment — were currently on hold.

Board Member Paepke asked how much the 40% was and if they expected to receive the balance. Ms. Scholand replied that she hoped to receive the rest, but noted they had asked to be level-funded in the current year.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said there would probably be \$300,000 held back in Title funds, but the big one was the IDEA Grant, which was \$1 million, and nothing was forthcoming. He stated that services were still mandated to be provided by the school district, but they were no longer receiving government funding.

Board Member Halter pointed out that the money would have to be spent on the programs the following year, and regardless of whether they received reimbursement or not, the excess burden would directly affect local taxpayers.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus suggested it would be prudent to set aside \$1 million to cover unfunded mandates.

Board Member Paepke asked if the district had the cash flow to cover its current expenses. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that they were currently okay.

3. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the windows, which were approved two years prior for the James Masticola Upper Elementary School, would finally be installed over the summer, and the roof would also be installed.

4. School Board Update

Chair Peters stated that on June 19, the Board and administration had met for the annual Goal Setting meeting. She said that in September, there would be a comprehensive presentation regarding the goals.

Chair Peters also said the School Board participated in the July 4th parade.

Chair Peters stated that she enjoyed seeing the amazing projects at Camp Invention.

4. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Educational Funding Discussion

Chair Peters stated that the New Hampshire Supreme Court had ruled that the Per Pupil Advocacy Grant was too small and said it should be approximately \$7,300; however, she said the disappointing part of the ruling was that two of the justices said the legislature had to take it up in a “timely manner.” She said she would have preferred an actual deadline.

Chair Peters read aloud a portion of what Governor Ayotte said as summarized below:

“The court reached the wrong decision today. The fact is that the State of New Hampshire is in the top ten in the country when it comes to funding our children’s education. We are evaluating the ruling to determine the appropriate next steps.”

She added that on the New Hampshire Republicans' Facebook page, they used a graphic from the World Population Review on per-pupil spending in New Hampshire, and it ranked seventh in the nation’s per-pupil cost. She said, however, that they were 50th in the country for the state portion of the per-pupil cost.

Board Member Halter commented that New England had one of the highest costs of living in the country, which meant that goods and services were more expensive.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen suggested that a sales tax in New Hampshire could provide more revenue.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said that she disagreed with Governor Ayotte’s opinion and agreed with the Business Enterprise Tax.

Board Member Hardy stated that the district was losing money and noted that it was the state representatives' job to go to Concord and represent them. She said that the school had no revenue streams and no means to offset the financial imbalance.

Chair Peters stated that she would draft letters to be sent to the state representatives and also request that a specific date be set, rather than in a “timely manner.”

b. August 2025 Leadership Retreat Discussion

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the district’s annual leadership retreat would be held on August 7th & 8th where they would discuss goals for the upcoming school year, including safety and reunification procedures, and the bullying investigation processes, among others.

c. Cell Phone Policy Discussion

Chair Peters explained that the law had changed, so cell phones were now banned from “bell to bell.” She read aloud from the new law, as summarized below:

“School Boards shall develop and adopt a policy governing student cell phone use in schools. Such a policy shall prohibit the use of personal devices by students during the school day and be implemented schoolwide, with approved exceptions determined by the student’s medical, disability, or language proficiency needs. Such policy shall be developed in collaboration with any applicable local educator associations and school district parents and shall be reviewed and updated annually. School district policy shall not prohibit students with disabilities from using a device to support their learning as identified by their IEP (Individualized Education Plan)

developed under §504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29USC §794 or are required to support emergent multi-lingual students with appropriate language access programs and services pursuant to Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

Chair Peters asked if the law included iPads, Smartwatches, Beats Headphones, Kindles, and other similar devices. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the conversation was currently being had with legal counsel.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she would like to know the intent behind the actual law. She said there was a lot of information that needed to be fleshed out. She also asked what might happen if a teacher asked a student for their cellphone and the student said no.

Board Member Paepke inquired about the law's application in elementary schools, particularly when parents felt compelled to ensure their children's well-being.

Board Member Hardy asked if the law would include teachers.

Board Member Hardy also mentioned that the communication system between Merrimack Middle School and the Merrimack Fire Department was not functioning. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that they would continue that conversation.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said that it would be extremely important to push the information out to the parents/community and the students.

6. POLICIES

Chair Peters stated that the School Board was going to hold off on discussing the below policies and encouraged members of the Board to contact Sandy Swanson, Naomi Halter, and her with edits or questions:

- a. Second Review of School Guidance and Counseling Program Policy (JLD)
- b. Second Review of Revised Behavior Management and Intervention Policy (JLDBA)
- c. Second Review of Accommodation of Lactation Needs Policy (CAN)
- d. Second Review of Revised Daily Physical Activity Policy (IMAH)

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. June 2, 2025, Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to accept the public minutes of the June 2, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- b. June 16, 2025 Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the public minutes of the June 16, 2025, meeting, as presented. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Resignations

- Kelly Chiappetta, Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Keith Tanner, Classroom Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

b. Educator Nominations

- Jennifer Gagnon, Classroom Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Melissa Zupkosky, Classroom Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Emma Eafrazi, Special Education Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Ash (Julia) Saladino, 1-year Special Education Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Michelle Labbe, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Ryan Ziegler, Technology Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Mandy Tran, Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Erika Fenstermacher, Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Austin Fox, Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, as presented. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were none.

b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Rothhaus stated that she had received a telephone call from a former teacher at Pinkerton Academy. She said she would forward the information to the administration.

Chair Peters stated that she and the Board had received correspondence regarding a parent concern, including one from a parent who wanted to meet with the Board. She also mentioned that she had received correspondence from an involved community member who provided the Board with some information that he was passionate about.

c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she had attended a gathering where a number of recent Merrimack graduates were present. She said she asked each one of them if they were prepared for college, and they all said that they were very well-prepared.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:20 p.m., Board Member Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.