

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
October 6, 2025**

Present: Ms. Lori Peters, Chair; Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair; Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member; Ms. Rachel Paepke, Board Member, and Mr. Matthew Brown, Student School Board Representative.

Not Present: Ms. Jenna Hardy, Board Member

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Dr. Kathleen Scholand, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum; Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business; and Matthew Brown, Student School Board Representative.

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 none.

3. RECOGNITIONS

a. VOYA Unsung Heroes Award

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the following employees had received the VOYA Unsung Heroes Award for their work with the Hydroponics Garden.

- Julie DeLuca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Brooke (Ross) Concannon, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Jackie McMahon, Nurse at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Cinzia Bibb, Nurse at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the district had begun the budget process. He said that there would be additional restraint and seclusion training with the district's legal team.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand commented that there would be an early release day the following Friday, for students and staff would work on their Vector trainings via online webinars regarding bullying, sexual harassment, child abuse, and blood-borne pathogens. She noted that P.E. Health teachers in K-6 would continue to work with the Catch Health virtual training, and at the high school, there would be a presentation on Artificial Intelligence for teaching and learning.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Scholand stated that the paraprofessional staff would be completing a Needs Assessment Survey to ensure their professional needs are met.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Scholand commented that she had recently visited all of the school's guidance counselors to discuss the 504 programs, ensuring consistency across the district.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that the Professional Development Committee would meet on October 9, 2025, and there would also be a Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Committee meeting at the end of the month. She added that if the School Board approved the Artificial Intelligence policies, they would put together an Artificial Intelligence working group.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the roof and gym floor projects at James Masticola Elementary School were nearly complete.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said that the administration was also starting to work on the 2026-2027 operating budget.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters said she had attended the Homecoming game, and they won.

Chair Peters said the School Board would present its budget message at the next meeting.

Chair Peters noted that they had begun discussions with the Merrimack Teachers' Association regarding negotiating a new contract.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Brown said that the class of 2026/27 had a big mattress fundraiser, and it was a success. He noted that the marching band would participate in the Salem Band Show Invitational on Saturday. He welcomed all the newly inducted members of the National Honor Societies and said the class of 2028 would have a fundraiser at Papa Gino's the following day.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Comparison Data

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand reviewed iReady data, noting it was the benchmark assessment data for fall, winter, and spring. She also reviewed the New Hampshire State Assessment System (SAS) data from the spring of 2021 to the spring of 2024. She noted that the data from 2025 was embargoed, and she would update the Board after obtaining it.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand commented that the 2024 iReady data, compared to the 2024 SAS data, indicated that grades 5, 6, 7, & 8 all had higher proficiency results in the spring NH SAS. She said that was a good indicator that the Wit & Wisdom program was effective.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand said that when looking at mathematics, the curriculum's strength was in grades 3 and 8. She said the NH SAS data was also higher than the iReady data. She said that this led to what might be considered weaknesses, and it would make sense to explore different options in mathematics.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Camp Invention

Cathy Goodman and Kimberly Morgan, Co-Directors of Camp Invention, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation that explained what Camp Invention was. Amanda Lessard, Assistant Director, was also present, while Mary-Elizabeth Hauver, also an Assistant Director, was not present.

Ms. Goodman explained that Camp Invention was a summer day camp program featuring hands-on STEM adventures and led by qualified local educators.

Ms. Goodman added that 174 campers from grades K-6 attended the summer program, and 35 high school students volunteered as Leadership Interns. Amy and Ella, Leadership Interns, shared their experiences with the Board and how much they enjoyed it.

The students shared their inventions with the School Board, including claw machines, mission control panels, penguin launch pads, and an illusion workshop.

Ms. Goodman thanked all who were involved for making Camp Invention a success. She reviewed activities for the 2026 program.

The School Board collectively thanked the staff and students of Camp Invention, stating they were all very impressed with their projects!

b. Artificial Intelligence Update

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that some of the topics that would be discussed during the professional development session would be:

- Community Trust & Teacher Empowerment
- Curiosity & Collaboration
- Teacher Empowerment
- Efficiency & Authenticity
- Personalization

- Equity & Access
- Student Agency, Curiosity, & Discernment
- Future Ready Creative & Critical Thinkers
- Accountability & Integrity
- Taking Ownership & Responsibility

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that they were examining successful AI implementation to achieve seamless integration and growth, while also empowering educators through professional development in AI. She added that the district was partnering with AI Navigator for its professional consulting services.

Board Member Paepke asked if equipment needed to be purchased, which would affect the budget. Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand replied that she did not think “it would be a heavy lift,” but she would look further into it.

c. Enrollments as of October 1, 2025

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the pre-K through grade 12 enrollment was 3,375. He added that there were 23 students out of district and 150 students who were homeschooled, and he said he would keep the School Board updated.

d. 2026 – 2027 Budget Process Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the steps involved in the development of the process:

- Step 1: Gather the Data
- Step 2: Development of Site-Based Budget Requests
- Step 3: Present Initial Budget Request
- Step 4: School Board Action
- Step 5: Budget Committee Action
- Step 6: The Deliberative Session

e. 2026 – 2027 Budget Meeting Dates

The School Board reviewed the proposed 2026 – 2027 budget meetings.

Board Member Paepke suggested adding two snow dates. Chair Peters replied that she would look into what dates would work.

f. Student Safety

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the Merrimack School District’s Threat Assessment process. He explained the differences between a credible threat and a non-credible threat. He added that the district had a crisis management plan in place that was updated frequently. He said that the district also had primary and alternate evacuation reunification sites. He said many of the details of the plans remained confidential at the request of the Merrimack Police Department.

g. Other

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that she and Chair Peters would attend the Planning & Building Committee meeting the following Wednesday, where Chair Peters would outline expectations for the coming year.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus also pointed out that she attended the Harry Watkins Forest Meeting the prior week, where she found out that in his Will, he left forest areas on Lawrence Road and Mitchell Street to the Town of Merrimack for the schools. She said she would like to ask the Planning & Building Committee to obtain a complete history on him and then make a dedication in his honor at one or more of the schools.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to request that the Planning & Building Committee obtain a complete history of Harold Watkins and come up with a plan to honor him in the schools. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

Chair Peters commented that she would also discuss a Building Utilization Audit with the Planning & Building Committee, noting that Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell would work closely with that Board to complete it. She added that the lower level of the SAU building had to be shut down due to safety concerns, and all employees had to be relocated.

7. POLICIES

a. Student Use of Artificial Intelligence (EHAGA)

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve policy (EHAGA) Student Use of Artificial Intelligence. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

b. Staff Use of Artificial Intelligence (EHAGB)

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve policy (EHAGB) Staff Use of Artificial Intelligence. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

c. Revision to Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and District Anti-Discrimination Plan (AC-R)

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the revision to policy (AC-R) Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and District Anti-Discrimination Plan. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

d. Revision to Annual Notice of Contact Information for Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Plan (AC-R-2)

MOTION: Board Member Paepke made a motion to approve the revision to policy (AC R-2) Annual Notice of Contact Information for Non-Discrimination, Equal Opportunity Employment, and Anti-Discrimination Plan, as amended. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. September 15, 2025 – Public and Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Paepke made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from the September 15, 2025, meetings, as presented. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

- b. September 27, 2025 – Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the non-public minutes from the September 27, 2025, meeting, as presented. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Resignation

- Matthew Castonguay, Classroom Teacher, JMUES

- b. Teacher Nominations

- Beth Stevenson, Classroom Teacher, JMUES

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

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

- a. Committee Reports

Vice-Chair Rothhaus encouraged the Board to find out more about the Harry Watson Forest presentation, noting that it was extremely interesting.

- b. Correspondence

Chair Peters commented that she had received multiple correspondence regarding the incident at the middle school, and she forwarded them to the administration. She said she also received some correspondence regarding the letter sent out by the Director of Student Services, and Chief Educational Officer Olsen addressed those concerns.

- c. Comments

There were none.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:52 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Chair Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.