

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
December 2, 2024**

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, 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 was none.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There was none.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

- a. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that there would be an early release day on December 11, 2024. She added that staff would receive a mix of mandatory training and instructional support.

5. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Overview of Proposed 2025 – 2026 School District Budget

Chief Educational Officer Olsen addressed the Board and presented his overview of the 2025 – 2026 school district budget as summarized below:

The school administration is pleased to present to you our budget request for the 2025-2026 school year (Fiscal 2026). This budget was developed from the analysis of numerous sources of data, along with many conversations and listening sessions with educators, our Leadership Team, and the School Board. Our school staff possesses a significant level of understanding of our students' academic and social/emotional needs. It is essential that we respect their valued insight and input toward the development of a budget request that will serve our students well.

In addition to our numerous organizational conversations, over the last year, we have developed a comprehensive three-year Strategic Plan, collaboratively established goals with the School Board, and received a high school accreditation report from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

The administration budget request will be presented in a format that deviates from previous years. The central office administration has developed a slide presentation that will provide a comprehensive overview of the fiscal 2026 budget request and the factors influencing our request. We have also developed a budget template that will clearly articulate any new funds that are being requested for staff, materials/supplies, contract services, other expenses, and school furnishings. The intent is to make it easier for you to discern the nature and need of the new budget requests. The budget template that you will see at the beginning of each school or program budget will provide the following information pertaining to the new budget request:

- Expenditure Category
 - Professional Salaries
 - Clerical/Administrative Assistant Salaries
 - Support Staff Salaries
 - Contracted Services
 - Supplies/Materials
 - Other Expenditures
 - New or Replacement Furniture or Equipment

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the new requests, totaling \$1,638,417.70, represented 46.1% of the requested increase to the fiscal 2025 budget. The bulk of the remaining increase results from collectively bargained salaries and benefits, along with existing essential contracts and a small (5%) inflationary index for existing supply accounts.

He added that the administrator's FY26 budget request was \$96,850,271, which was \$3,551,298 (3.81%) above the FY25 approved budget and \$1,042,205 above the projected FY26 default budget.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that it was essential to have competitive salaries, provide the necessary professional development, and keep up with the maintenance of the district's buildings.

Summary of Fiscal 2026 New Requests

Staffing:	\$ 390,000
Supplies/Materials:	\$ 236,016
Other Expenditures:	\$896,441.70
Furniture/Equipment:	\$ 115,960

Questions/Comments from the School Board

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she was pleased to see the students' test scores go up since the district started to align its curriculum. She said she felt the prior investments were paying off.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that the administration was the people who drove the improvements, and she said she felt they were paid commensurately for their respective positions. She also said she thought it was essential to align the curriculum between all of the schools.

Chair Peters pointed out that the test scores were available on the district's website. She also said she appreciated how the students were assessed using various methods.

Board Member Martin commented that he did not see "an ounce of fat" on any of the proposed changes.

Board Member Halter commented that she felt it was important to continue discussions about the needs of the taxpayers and the needs of the students.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

To be approved at the next School Board meeting.

8. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Martin stated that he had attended the CIA Committee meeting, where they discussed budget items.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she had attended a Parks & Recreation Committee meeting where they discussed the fact that they were still looking for an Assistant Director.

Board Member Halter commented that she had attended a Budget Committee meeting where they discussed how they would present the proposed budget as well as the schedule and location of budget meetings. She added that they reviewed the previous year's budget and the first quarter of the current year.

b. Correspondence

Board Member Rothhaus stated that she had two pieces of correspondence that she was going to forward.

Vice-Chair Hardy stated that she received one piece of correspondence, which she informed the person who to contact.

Chair Peters stated that she received two pieces of correspondence, and she forwarded them to the appropriate people.

c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus commented that Randy and Kathy Mithoefer had recently passed away. She said they had started the hockey program in Merrimack through fundraising and the creation of a Warrant Article over 20 years ago. She expressed her sincere appreciation for their work as well as her sympathies.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Tim Groff, 29 Dahl Road, addressed the Board and made comments regarding who was picking up the cost for the declining state education funding for education.

9. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:36 p.m., Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.