

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
December 16, 2024**

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 Chair Peters, Chair; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Vice-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; Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business; and Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the regular meeting to order.

Chair Peters, on behalf of the entire School Board and the administration, stated that their thoughts and prayers were with the Madison, WI, community.

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

Ms. Maureen Tracey, 17 Burt Street, addressed the Board regarding the SAU building. She said she had recently visited the SAU building and found it to be very outdated and dangerous.

3. BUDGET QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

a. Merrimack Middle School

Mr. Chrigus Boezeman, Principal of Merrimack Middle School, and Ms. Kathleen Hoppa, Assistant Principal, were present to discuss and answer questions regarding the proposed budget needs at the middle school.

Question: From the School Board. Please explain the changes to the language program that have occurred/are occurring.

Answer: Ms. Hoppa commented that all 7th-graders, with very few exceptions, took a quarter each of exploratory Spanish and exploratory French.

Question: From the School Board. If a student only does a full year in 8th grade, how does that impact their placement at the high school?

Question: Do 8th-graders who do not take the entire year get more of the exploratory course?

Answer: Ms. Hoppa replied that the 8th-grade world language offerings were both one-year-long courses. She said the following year would be the first year that credit-bearing French or Spanish.

Comments: Mr. Boezeman said the Title I Reading & Math Programs were fully staffed. He said the Academic Advisory was available so that everyday students could have an opportunity to see a teacher or get some extra help; he added that the Performance Arts groups included Concert Band and Chorus and had been very successful.

Mr. Boezeman added that a breakfast program had been added to the middle school and had proved to be successful.

Question: From the School Board. Could you explain what the Blick Econo Etch Model II Press is and its purpose?

Answer: Mr. Boezeman said that the focus of the budget for fiscal year 2026 was on the Unified Arts Programs. He said the Visual Arts class had been working on printmaking. He said the teachers were hoping to make an investment and purchase another press.

Question: From the School Board. Are students certified in CPR? If so, who certifies them?

Answer: Mr. Boezeman also said that in the health class, teachers provided the students with hands-only CPR instructions. He said they were hoping to get an additional CPR mannequin so both health teachers could use them at the same time. He said they did not offer any CPR certification.

Mr. Boezeman added that the Music Department had purchased keyboards in 2004 so students could be exposed to music theory and practice-based keyboarding techniques. He said in 2008, they began a two-keyboard-per-year replacement program.

Mr. Boezeman said they would like to expand the offerings in the Technical Education area by including digital content creation. He said they hoped to purchase some digital cameras.

Mr. Boezeman commented that over the past few years, the school nurse had received a number of donations for consumables, primarily for hygiene products. He said he would like to incorporate some money into the budget so the nurse would not have to rely on donations and run out of products.

Question: From the School Board. How much bottled water gets handed out? It is a tiny thing in terms of the overall budget, but we are wondering about giving them dixie cups to use at the water bubbler instead of bottled water.

Answer: Mr. Boezeman replied that the nurse used bottled water for some students who needed it. He said they did not have a water bottle filling station. He said the nurse sometimes had to pay for the small bottles of water out of her own pocket and was hoping it could be put in the budget.

Question: From the School Board. When was the last time coaching stipends went up? Are you having any issues recruiting or retaining coaches?

Answer: Mr. Boezeman replied that he was not able to find any increases in the stipends for coaches in approximately ten years. He said he was hoping to increase the stipend of the middle school and assistant coaches to the same as the freshmen coach at the high school.

Question: From the School Board. Is there already a girl's B-Team for soccer? What other schools have a B team? How many middle schools offer lacrosse?

Answer: Mr. Boezeman also said that he would like to expand the opportunities for male athletes in soccer by trying out having a B-Team. He commented that there were about six B-Teams in the tri-county league. He also said they currently did not have a B-Team for females.

Ms. Hoppa said that students had been asking for a lacrosse program at the middle school in the spring, and they would love to offer that. She added that Amherst, Hollis, Milford, Londonderry, and Bedford all had lacrosse B-Teams.

Question: From Board Member Halter. Regarding account 100-2134-07-8610-21 (health supplies), why was this over budget in 2023-2024, and have you budgeted enough for FY26?

Answer: Mr. Boezeman replied that he believed it was due to the purpose of AED pads and batteries, but he said he would verify it.

Question: Board Member Rothhaus asked what it might cost to have the 7th and 8th graders be certified in CPR as well as using the AED machines.

Answer: Mr. Boezeman replied that he agreed.

Comment: Board Member Halter noted that even though there were several requests for new equipment (block printing press, alcohol awareness goggles, band saw, and a few others) there were other new requests the prior year that were not included in the FY26 budget, so it was not just increases. She said, overall, the additional equipment lines were down a little bit. (by approximately \$2000) from FY25.

b. Merrimack High School

Mr. Steve Claire, Principal of Merrimack High School, and Ms. Jill Hanlon, Assistant Principal of Merrimack High School and Mr. Richard Zampieri, Assistant Principal of Merrimack High School, were present to discuss and answer questions regarding the proposed budget needs at the high school.

Mr. Claire started the discussion by stating that the proposed budget for the high school included an overall increase of less than 10%, with many line items having decreased or being level-funded.

Mr. Claire said the decision to move the Merrimack High School library budget from the district's technology budget to the Merrimack High School budget was part of the reason for the increase. He said the significant increase in the Athletics' Officials Home Game Management line was due to the request to have a Merrimack, NH, police detail at every home game and match for safety reasons.

Comment: From the School Board. We like the summary of how everything is moving around, and we appreciate that you are being mindful of the best places for different items, even though it means quite a bit of movement.

Question: From the School Board. There were a few supply lines with requests for more equipment due to increased enrollment – can we have a list or summary of class offerings and how many students were in each?

Answer: Mr. Claire replied he had provided Chief Educational Officer Olsen with that list in October.

Comment: Mr. Claire replied that this request was to purchase new blue football uniforms, as the current uniforms were purchased in 2019. He said they also wanted to purchase new championship banners for athletics and academic teams, as well as volleyball standards and lacrosse nets.

Comment: From the School Board. We are glad to see the investment in championship banners for the non-athletic activities!

Question: We would like to see a comparison between athletic spending and co-curricular spending, including the number of kids served in the various sports and activities.

Answer: Mr. Zampieri replied that he did not know what the current spending was, but he said there had been 498 athletes signed up for one or more sports to date, and the advisors for all of the co-curricular clubs had submitted their numbers for the fall and estimates for the winter and spring and over 936 were signed up to participate in one or more sports or clubs.

Comment: Mr. Claire replied that with the discontinuation of the Gifted & Talented Program, the co-curricular lines had a lot of movement. He said supply and transportation lines within the co-curricular budget had been increased to include the costs that were formally covered by the Gifted & Talented Program. He added that the co-curricular membership line had been reduced even though they had added three Honor Societies for music, science, and Spanish by moving the athletic memberships to the administration member line, which was where they belonged.

Mr. Claire stated that the lodging costs for the music department's festivals had also been moved from co-curricular memberships to co-curricular travel. He added that the budget line under computer education was used from the 6th-grade through 12th-grade Technology Coordinator had an overall decrease; however, many of the individual line items showed significant increases and decreases. He said the supply and equipment line had a drastic decline.

Mr. Claire said there was a request for new civics textbooks, which were necessary because the New Hampshire Department of Education required students to pass the civics exam as a graduation requirement. He said the textbooks currently being used were published in 2009.

Question: From the School Board. Regarding the school store's point of sale system, what are they using now? Can you please provide more information about the school store as well?

Answer: Ms. Hanlon replied that the students from the business and marketing classes were running the school store. She said they were currently using cash only, and it limited the amount of sales they had. Having a point-of-sale system was a computerized system, and it would also assist with keeping inventory.

Question: From the School Board. We would like to know if you know yet how close the estimate for the cost of PSAT testing is for FY25.

Answer: Mr. Claire replied that PSAT 9 costs approximately \$9.00 per assessment, and PSAT 10 costs approximately \$18.00 per assessment. He said the total cost of the pre-SAT and the SATs would be approximately \$12,000.

Question: From the School Board. How many teams made it to the final four round competitions?

Answer: Mr. Claire replied that three teams made the tournament, and the boys' and girls' soccer teams both made it to the quarter-finals. He said the football team had made it to the preliminary round of the tournament and lost to Pinkerton in the first round of the tournament.

Question: From the School Board. There are a few new lines for field trips. Are these new trips or moving funds for more transparency?

Answer: Ms. Hanlon replied that the line item regarding field trips was already occurring but that they were accounting for them better.

Question: From Board Member Halter regarding line item 100-2725-24-8519-31, how many kids were using this so far? (Athletic transportation)

Answer: Mr. Claire replied that approximately 120 – 130 had used it for practice to date, but it changed based on bus driver availability.

Question: From the School Board. What is the anticipated Logic and Rhetoric class?

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that it had not definitely been decided, but they were working on it. Ms. Hanlon added that it came from the new (unfunded) graduation requirement from the state, and the course was entitled the “Art of Arguing.”

Question: From the School Board. We understand the need for police at events that draw big crowds. Is this increase intended to provide police at all home games, regardless of crowd size? Was this the school district's decision or the Merrimack Police Department, or was it a required change? Do any other high schools in New Hampshire have police detail at every event?

Answer: Mr. Claire replied that he and Chief Educational Officer Olsen had started discussing the matter after there had been some school shootings at athletic events in other areas. He said that at that time, they decided to offer a police presence at all of the sporting events, not just the ones that were most attended. He added that in August, he and Chief Educational Officer Olsen met again and discussed if they wanted to continue with that practice, and they decided they would put it in the proposed budget due to safety concerns. Mr. Claire said that while he understood the chance of a violent event occurring was rare, it was certainly still possible.

Comment: Board Member Rothhaus said she had spoken with the Superintendent of Schools at Pinkerton Academy, and he said they only had a police detail at games where they knew there would be a large turn-out or two competitive teams were playing. She said that while she agreed some events warranted a police presence, she did not feel that the district could financially sustain having that presence at every event.

Comment: Board Member Martin said he understood that would bring peace of mind to all of those in attendance, and if they had any evidence that they considered worrisome, he would be entirely in favor of a police presence. He said, however, that he felt they would have a closer look at having a police presence at every event.

Comment: Chair Peters suggested that they look further at events where there had been issues. She also said that not every event would draw large crowds, and there would be an increased possibility of violence.

Comment: Vice-Chair Hardy stated that she felt it would be a good idea to parse it out a bit and agreed that some events would draw more crowds than others.

c. Additional Sessions with Departments, if needed:

There was none; however, Chair Peters noted that the following Wednesday, the School Board would discuss any changes they wanted to make to the budget.

Comment: Board Member Rothhaus requested that, in the future, all of the Athletic Directors attend the budget meetings.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. December 2, 2024 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 2, 2024, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Chair Peters)

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Wendy Thomas, 10 Wildcat Falls, addressed the Board and said she was one of the State Representatives representing Merrimack. She said 140 Education Bills had been filed, and they knew nothing about them except the titles at that point. She added that one of the most alarming ones was to remove any CAP from school vouchers, which would blow the entire program up. She said she was keeping an eye out and would keep the Board informed.

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he felt a good alternative to having a police detail at all school events might be to create some auxiliary group of parents who could have some community training that could assist at some school events.

Student Representative Haddad addressed the Board and said he had some concerns about the amount of the stipend that the Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) teachers received. He said presently, an ELO teacher was paid \$150.00 for half of the year. He said he felt the stipend should be increased to \$200.00 or \$300.00 per semester. Board Member Rothhaus replied that she felt that money should be funded in a different line item because the course had been created.

Ms. Shannon Rand, 1 Blair Road, addressed the Board and stated that she felt it would be great if the school district could share what other ways the Booster Clubs could collect money, other than cash, as well as any other information that may help them.

MOTION: At approximately 7:25 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.