

**Merrimack School Board Budget Hearing
Merrimack High School - Cafeteria
January 8, 2014
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

Present: Chairman Ortega, Board Members Barnes, Schneider and Markwell, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, and Business Administrator Shevenell. Vice Chairman Powell and Student Representative Crowley were excused.

1. Call to Order

Chairman Ortega called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Ortega led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

Jody Vaillancourt of 35 Greenleaf Street expressed her appreciation to the Board for addressing comments from the public at a previous meeting regarding the unified physical education class. She was disappointed that the response was a comparison of a class being offered compared to a class being run. She would have preferred to know why the class was not run. She asked for clear communication with students regarding why a class does not run in the future.

3. Budget Presentations

James Mastricola Upper Elementary School:

Principal Marsha McGill and Assistant Principal William Morris presented the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School budget.

Board Member Barnes asked if the reduction in the gifted and talented account was related to a shift from gateway to gifted and talented.

Principal McGill responded that the reduction in the account was a result of sharing the teacher of gifted and talented with James Mastricola Elementary School.

Board Member Barnes asked why the science field trip account that supports the trip to the Museum of Science in Boston was reduced by \$300. She also questioned why the social science field trip account that supports trips to the Independence Museum in Exeter and the Enterprise City in Dover were reduced by \$2,300.

Principal McGill responded that Project Safeguard is now held on campus eliminating the need for transportation. The field trip to Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, MA was replaced with a trip to the Independence Museum in Exeter, NH.

Board Member Barnes asked if use of email was the reason for the reduction in the postage budget. She questioned if the proposed budget for postage would accommodate a postage rate increase.

Principal McGill responded that the use of email was a small factor. The proposed budget was based on a three-year average. The proposed budget for postage would cover the increase in postage rates.

Board Member Barnes asked for an update of the furniture replacement plan.

Principal McGill reported the replacement of desks and chairs is complete. The proposed furniture replacement account will support the purchase of five kidney tables, four tables and four bookcases. The remaining bookcases will be purchased over the next two or three years.

Chairman Ortega explained that the proposed science budget includes the purchase of two additional high-power, electrical microscopes and the replacement of two high-power, electrical microscopes which would bring the inventory up to forty-four. He questioned if the number of microscopes needing to be replaced over time would slow down the inventory goal of fifty-two high-power, electrical microscopes.

Principal McGill explained there are currently 40-42 microscopes in use at the upper elementary school. Some of the older microscopes do not have the required power needed for the science program. The goal is to have enough microscopes for two classrooms. The two classroom sets will eliminate the need to transport the microscopes between the first and second floors of the building which will reduce the chances of damaged microscopes. She expects the next two budgets will contain replacement and new microscopes before leveling off to just replacing when needed.

Superintendent Chiafery read the following prepared question from Budget Committee Vice Chairman Gary Krupp.

Budget Committee Vice Chairman Krupp asked if the Project Safeguard account was covered via grant money. If so, where does it show up as revenue.

Principal McGill replied that Project Safeguard is not supported by any grant money.

Merrimack Middle School:

Principal Deborah Woelflein and Assistant Principal Adam Caragher presented the Merrimack Middle School budget.

Board Member Barnes noted the transition from gateway to gifted and talented which reflects a reduction in the number of participating students. She questioned why the proposed budget was level funded.

Principal Woelflein replied the account supports school-wide field trips and enrichment opportunities.

Board Member Barnes asked for an explanation for the need for an increase in focused progress monitoring for students below grade level in skills.

Principal Woelflein responded that the proposed budget reflects the actual need in the areas of testing and scoring.

Board Member Barnes asked if the five-year furniture replacement plan was designed for comparable funding amounts in each year.

Assistant Principal Caragher responded that the proposed budget for furniture replacement was the first of a five-year plan.

Board Member Schneider asked if the proposed budget for athletic supplies represented a consistent level of investment each year.

Assistant Principal Caragher explained that the proposed budget for athletic supplies supports the replacement of athletic supplies, equipment and uniforms on a rotating basis.

Board Member Schneider asked if the new science text would support the changes in the life science curriculum.

Principal Woelflein responded yes.

Board Member Schneider asked if the replacement of the technology education equipment was for software or hardware.

Assistant Principal Caragher responded that the replacement of technology education equipment would replace outdated modules consisting of both software and hardware.

Superintendent Chiafery added that the object code for the modules made up of hardware and software would not be appropriate listed as software.

Board Member Markwell asked if the proposed budget for gifted and talented would be enough to support the needs of the students needing enrichment.

Principal Woelflein responded yes.

Merrimack High School:

Principal Kenneth Johnson, Assistant Principal Richard Zampieri and Assistant Principal Peter Bergeron presented the Merrimack High School budget.

Board Member Schneider asked if the fluctuation in the budget amounts over time in the technology education/instructional equipment repairs account were a result of planned larger maintenance or equipment repairs.

Principal Zampieri stated that the decrease in the 2013-2014 budget was the result of an intentional decision to sharpen many of the saws once per year rather than twice. The proposed budget for 2014-2015 represents the amount needed to sharpen the saws twice a year in case once a year sharpening is not sufficient.

Board Member Schneider asked for an explanation why there was a reduction in the athletic transportation account and the co-curricular transportation account remained the same.

Principal Johnson responded that the reduction in the athletic transportation budget was the result of better budgeting.

Assistant Principal Bergeron added that the budget includes the transportation costs for championship games. He highlighted the fact that the athletic director is in his second year and has more knowledge of the scheduling and the associated costs.

Assistant Principal Bergeron provided the Board with an itemized list for the co-curricular transportation budget of \$30,000.

Board Member Schneider asked if the reduction in the world language supply account was a result of purchasing additional world language equipment.

Principal Johnson replied yes.

Board Member Schneider asked why there has been a fluctuation in the budget for computer education supply over previous years.

Principal Johnson explained that the previous budget amount was reduced too much.

Board Member Schneider asked for an explanation for the increase in the co-curricular membership fee account.

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that the budget increase in the co-curricular membership and fees account is representative of an expansion in the program plus increases in the cost of membership fees.

Board Member Schneider stated that he would appreciate a list containing all the co-curricular activities.

Board Member Barnes asked what is not covered in the co-curricular budget.

Principal Johnson responded that it was never the intent to cover all the costs associated with co-curricular activities. The intent has been to increase the co-curricular transportation budget to help defray the co-curricular activities.

Board Member Barnes expressed her desire for any unused co-curricular transportation funds to be returned to the families of students that incurred out of packet expenses for co-curricular activities.

Chairman Ortega emphasized that it was never the intent of the Board to fully fund co-curricular activities. The intent was to increase the funding year to year.

Board Member Barnes stated that the level funded budget did not allow for an increase in the support for co-curricular activities.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the co-curricular transportation budget in 2012-2013 was not fully expended. The itemized list for the \$30,000 co-curricular transportation budget is an effort to make sure it is properly expensed.

Board Member Barnes stated that she would have preferred the itemized list for the \$30,000 co-curricular transportation budget be included in the budget book.

Board Member Barnes asked how the shift from gateway to gifted and talented impacted the budget.

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that all students at the high school have an opportunity to access the gifted and talented program.

Board Member Barnes questioned how the increase in postal rates would be addressed with a reduction in the postage budget.

Principal Johnson responded that the only mailing requiring postage occurs at the end of the school year.

Board Member Barnes asked which classes are being offered in the school year 2014-2015 that were not offered in 2013-2014.

Assistant Principal Zampieri replied the classes that were listed in the 2013-2014 program of studies but not run include Networking Fundamentals, Unified Physical Education, Alternative Energy. Classes that will be offered in 2014-2015 that are not in the 2013-2014 program of studies include 3D Animation, FIRST Robotics Engineering, Selected Topics in Physics, Earth and Space Science (college prep level).

Board Member Barnes asked for a list of combined classes that will be offered in 2014-2015.

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that combined classes can be two of the same class but different levels or two different classes. Currently this year the combined classes include Arabic 3 and Arabic 4, French 4 and French 5, English 4 Fundamental and English 5 Fundamental. Student demand will determine combined classes for next year. The combined classes of differentiated levels include Drawing, Health, Sculpture, Painting, Accounting 1, Marketing 1, Asia and Africa Studies, Women's Studies and Elements of Music.

Board Member Barnes asked which advanced placement courses are not classroom based.

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded classroom-based advanced placement courses consisted of English 12, Calculus, Statistics, Biology, Chemistry, U.S. History and Psychology. The Virtual High School (VHS) advanced placement courses included Government, Computer Science and Economics. There are a variety of others available. Advanced placement physics is not offered this year.

Board Member Barnes asked for a list of college credit eligible classes.

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded the college credit eligible classes include English 12, The Running Start Program, a marketing class, Accounting 3 and students who successfully complete the Academy of Finance Program and also receive a B+ average in Accounting 1 and 2.

Board Member Barnes asked for a recap of the implementation of physical education credit for sports participation.

Principal Johnson reported 41 waivers were requested and 41 waivers were approved. He explained the breakdown of the 41 waivers were 13 students added an elective, 9 students added a study hall, 6 students requested early release, 3 students added an independent study, 3 students requested a modified schedule, 3 students submitted for extra credit, 2 students requested for second semester and 2 students added a lunch.

Principal Johnson added the impact was a minimum number of classes increase in class size: however, the class size did not exceed the minimum standard of 30 students.

Board Member Markwell asked if the lower postage budget was the result of the use of PowerSchool.

Principal Johnson replied yes. He clarified that all requests for reports to be mailed to a parent(s) are mailed.

Superintendent Chiafery read the following prepared questions from Budget Committee Vice Chairman Gary Krupp.

Budget Committee Vice Chairman Gary Krupp noted the gifted and talented programs at the elementary level are exclusive to those students tested at the gifted level. Why the high school doesn't follow a similar model. What percentage of funding is used exclusively for gifted and talented students? Many of the enrichment activities listed are funded by various Parent-Teacher Groups and the other schools. Does MHS PTA offer similar assistance for enrichment activities?

Principal Johnson responded the difference is the high school parent teacher group does not fundraise. He stated that potentially all students could benefit. The high school gifted and talented program is activity based.

Vice Chairman Gary Krupp noted a pretty significant reduction in the proposed postage budget. What is behind the savings? Is there some reduction in required mailing?

Principal Johnson concurred with Superintendent Chiafery's response that the high school will mail reports when requested. The progress reports are issued through PowerSchool and do not require postage. The end of the year report cards will be mailed and require postage.

Vice Chairman Gary Krupp noted the VOIP savings are impressive. He asked what the cost to install the system was. Are there plans to extend the VOIP network to realize more savings?

Business Administrator Shevenell responded the entire cost to install the VOIP system was \$131,000 over a period of two three-year leases, \$43,800 annually. The VOIP system core is located at the high school. It is sized and configured to encompass the entire district over time.

Chairman Ortega highlighted the fact that the proposed high school budget includes full-funding for the Challenge Day program and the purchase of a clay recycling machine for the art department.

4. Budget Discussion

Chairman Ortega reported the school board would hold another Budget Hearing Monday, January 13, 2014 followed by a work session on Tuesday, January 21, 2014.

Chairman Ortega asked the board members if they wanted any department to return on January 13th for further discussion. He also asked the board members if additional instructions or follow up was needed from the Administration.

Board Member Schneider expressed his desire to discuss Warrant Articles at the January 13, 2014 budget hearing.

There were no other requests from board members.

5. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

At 8:30 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to adjourn the public meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.