

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room  
February 17, 2014  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

**1. Call To Order**

Chairman Ortega called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Chairman Ortega led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Approval of the February 3, 2014 Minutes**

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes of the February 3, 2014 meeting.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 4, line 144, correct the spelling of DECA

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 4, line 110, change the word “he” to “Business Administrator Shevenell”
- Page 4 of 4, line 156 and 157, the sentence should read, “On February 11, 2014 the committee will have a public hearing which will be attended by Board Member Markwell as an alternate to liaison Schneider who will be out of town.”

The motion to accept the minutes of the February 3, 2013 meeting as amended passed 5-0-0.

**3. Public Participation**

There was no public participation

**4. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants under \$5,000**

Business Administrator Shevenell presented a gift to the James Masticola Upper Elementary School from Music and Arts of Frederick Maryland for \$200.00 to be used for visiting artists.

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to accept the gift from Music and Arts for \$200.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

## 5. Presentation of and Board's Response to a Petitioned Warrant Article

Mr. Tim Tenhave, 72 Amherst Road, presented a Petitioned Warrant Article to the board. He noted some of the reasons for this Article, which calls for the elimination of the Budget Committee and the addition of two members to the school board:

- The Budget Committee is limited in what it is able to do.
  - It cannot direct how the money is spent.
  - It can only vote the bottom line.
  - The school board and administration can choose whether or not to act on recommendations by the Budget Committee.
  - It does not face the consequences of the budget.
  - The Budget Committee acts for a short while and then does not meet again until the early fall.
  - Tax payers do not ask questions of the Budget Committee, they ask them of the School Board.
  - The Budget Committee is a second set of eyes, but does not have much responsibility.
  - If the Budget Committee is eliminated and the school board is increased to seven members, there will be a more diverse group of people to put the budget together.
  - There are seven members on the Town Council and that works very well. The School Board would work very well with seven members.
  - He hopes the school board will vote for a new structure of the board and the elimination of the Budget Committee so that the school board would be solely responsible for the budget.

Board Member Markwell stated that with seven members of the board, the meetings would last longer than current meetings. The Town Council, which has seven members, meets weekly in order to cover all the agenda items. If the number of members of the board increases to seven, the school board would have to meet more often in order to cover all its agenda items. He added that he thought the Budget Committee does not significantly change the budget, but they are a second set of eyes. He stated that he would not support this Petitioned Warrant Article.

Board Member Schneider asked about the process to recommend the Petitioned Warrant Article.

Chairman Ortega responded that it is a two-step process. First Mr. Tenhave would put forward the Petitioned Article. The board would ask clarifying questions about the intent and then they would deliberate on whether or not to recommend the Petitioned Warrant Article.

Board Member Schneider asked why the two parts of the Petitioned Warrant Article, the elimination of the Budget Committee and the increase in the number of members on the school board, were put together and what research was done to come up with the number of board members to seven.

Mr. Tenhave responded that the RSA states that the school board has to have an odd number of members with the maximum being nine (9) members. He added that two years ago when he first presented this, he did not include changing the number of school board members. Last year he chose not to propose any changes to the Budget Committee or board. This year he spoke with members of the public who felt that if the Budget Committee is eliminated, they would be comfortable with increasing the number of members of the school board.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that the Petitioned Warrant Article states that the proposed change would not take place until 2015. He asked what would happen in the interim year when there is no Budget Committee and the school board remains at five members.

Mr. Tenhave responded that he hoped next year the board would expand the length of time to manage the budget. There would be a year without a Budget Committee and a seven member board so the board would have to be more diligent.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that the interim year would mean that only the five member school board would be responsible for a sixty eight million dollar budget. If the Petitioned Warrant Article passes, he would like to see the seven proposed board members elected prior to the Budget Committee being disbanded. He did not feel comfortable with five board members managing such a huge budget alone.

Chairman Ortega asked for clarification. He stated that in Mr. Tenhave talking about the relevance of the Budget Committee, he spoke about the number of uncontested number of positions that came up in the committee. He would like to know how that equates to the relevance of the committee itself.

Mr. Tenhave responded that it makes him wonder how many people want to be involved in the Budget Committee or whether people feel there is value in the Budget Committee when there are not even enough people running for the vacant seats on the Committee.

Chairman Ortega responded that since the Town Council has expanded to seven members, there have been a number of occasions when Town Councils have run uncontested.

Mr. Tenhave responded that is unfortunate.

Chairman Ortega read the Petitioned Warrant Article IV:

*Shall the District, pursuant to RSA 32:14,V, rescind the adoption of Article 7 of the 2006 School District Warrant that established a school district budget committee; and furthermore, shall the District, pursuant to RSA 671:4, increase the number of the school board to seven (7) members as well as changing the number of members elected each year to be either two (2) or three (3) members, depending on how many members' terms of office expire in that year?*

*If this article is approved, the District shall elect four (4) members to the school board at the 2015 District meeting, to bring school board membership to seven (7) members. Three (3) of these members shall be elected to a three (3) year term and one (1) member shall be elected to a two (2) year term. Subsequent elections shall be either two (2) or three (3) members elected per year, with all terms being three (3) years in length, per RSA 671:4.*

Chairman Ortega stated that the Petitioned Warrant Article was not recommended by the Budget Committee with a vote of six (6) in favor, two (2) against and three (3) in abstention.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to not recommend the Petitioned Warrant Article.

Board Member Schneider stated that when he was the Chairman of the Budget Committee two years ago, he did not support the elimination of the Budget Committee, but did support the concept of studying the addition of two members to the School Board. There are very few towns the size of Merrimack that have a school board larger than five members. He asked if it makes sense for the Budget Committee to not have a role, what the challenges are and what the ramifications are. He felt that eliminating the Budget Committee and adding members to the school board without investigation is unacceptable.

Board Member Barnes stated that the Budget Committee was originally established as the Community Budget Committee that dealt with all the big ticket items coming through the Town of Merrimack and the School District. She added that the school board has a combined interest with the Budget Committee.

Like the board, they are an elected committee. The members are very accessible to the public with any questions. The Budget Committee gives the voters a second set of eyes during the budget process. She added that she would like to see a combined committee again as a Community Budget Committee.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that there needs to be more investigation and alternatives to determine what is best for the district and the town. He added that he did not feel this Petitioned Warrant Article is the right option at this time. He was pleased working with the Budget Committee during the budget process over the last two years. He would, therefore, not support the Petitioned Warrant Article.

Chairman Ortega stated that the suggestions about refining the budget process were collaborative and cooperative with the Budget Committee. He added that the budget is large with a lot of money to manage. Currently twelve (12) members of the Budget Committee serve as an appropriations committee. With the board of five (5) members, that makes seventeen (17) people who look at the budget in an insightful and illuminating way with additional avenues of inquiry to make everyone more comfortable. He stated that he is not going to recommend the Petitioned Warrant Article.

The motion to not recommend Petitioned Warrant Article IV passed 5-0-0.

## **6. Merrimack Middle School Technology Education Program**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin introduced Sue Heimberg and Ron Krikorian, teachers of Technology Education at the middle school. He stated that we are in a digital age and are trying to get our youngest learners to use technology as consumers and as an avenue to help them explore ways they can be productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He added that middle schoolers are at a critical age in their development.

Mr. Krikorian stated that Merrimack Middle School students are developing skills in gaining knowledge that will allow them to succeed as they face the challenge of understanding and using technology, being at home or in the future work place. The classroom experiences are enriched with science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The program is divided into three (3) parts: Vocabulary, Modules and Building Projects. Students spend most of their time with modules.

Ms. Heimberg spoke about the vocabulary program. The first five to ten minutes of every day is spent learning new technology words. In some cases it may be reinforcing prior knowledge by using terms familiar to them from other classes such as math and/or science. In other cases it may be introducing them to terms for the first time. Either way, they are trying to increase their ability to communicate and relate these words to the activities they complete in their classes.

Mr. Krikorian explained the Modules portion of the class in the middle school:

- Students work in pairs for seven days at one of twelve modules to complete hands-on activities.
- Each module deals with one of today's major technologies such as electricity, transportation and computer technology.
- Initially, students answer ten questions on a pre-test which touches upon topics in the module.
- Students are assessed in several ways over the seven-day schedule. They are formally tested by the teacher three times in addition to answering multiple-choice questions on the computer. Some assessments are a team effort, while others are a one-to-one on the computer. Test questions require students to do research.
- Students have a small library at their workstations known as a module. They are required to look at a workbook to find the answers to the problems.

- Another main category is interpreting graphs and charts.
- Math problems are incorporated.
- Students follow computer instructions in order to perform hands-on activities such as flight simulators, programming a robot or designing and building bridges.
- Extra credit hands-on challenges are available and make-up work is scheduled for those in need.
- Upon completion of the module, new partners and modules are assigned.
- Guidelines published by the State of New Hampshire that are covered by the middle school program.
- Students are constantly solving problems as they design, build, evaluate and observe their work.

Ms. Heimberg highlighted some of the Building Challenges. Students are given certain materials to accomplish a specific goal. They are expected to work together and solve a specific problem. Students are very creative in their solutions. The New Hampshire Technical and Curriculum Guide supports these types of activities.

A video that shows the importance of technology outside the classroom is shown to the students each year. It ties together the relevance of technology education to future career choices and the world outside the classroom.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted that Mr. Krikorian has been with the program since its inception and acknowledged the inspiring video.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin spoke about the application of knowledge and how it relates to this knowledge of technology.

## **7. Preparation for Warrant Presentations for Deliberative Session on March 5, 2014**

Chairman Ortega asked for members of the board to be prepared to move and second the Warrant Articles at the Deliberative Session on March 5, 2014 except for the Petitioned Warrant Article and the Operating Budget Warrant Article.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that he felt that Chairman Ortega should be the person to move Warrant Article III, the gas conversion, because of its importance.

Article II, the gifts and property, will be moved by Board Member Barnes and seconded by Vice Chairman Powell.

Article III, the gas conversion, will be moved by Chairman Ortega and seconded by Board Member Markwell.

Vice Chairman Powell asked if the next time the board meets is at the Deliberative Session on March 5, 2014.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that there is a board meeting on March 3, 2014. The District Moderator will attend the meeting and discuss the Warrant Articles.

## 8. Proposed School Calendar for 2014-2015

Superintendent Chiafery felt it was important for her to bring to the board the process that was employed and some background information on crafting the calendar.

- The faculty and the administration were very pleased with the August Academy, which meant that all the Professional Development was done the last week of August and would like to see this continue.
- She and Board Member Barnes attended a quarterly District Parent Group meeting which consisted of the leadership of the parent groups from all six schools. These sixteen parents were not only pleased with school beginning after Labor Day, but also weighed in on the Columbus Day holiday.
- She is taking that information and moving forward as well as taking into consideration the Massachusetts February and April vacations.
- She also reviewed Nashua and Hudson's calendars because Merrimack students attend those schools for career classes. She noted that these calendars are never the same as the Merrimack calendar. For example, Hudson starts the same day as Merrimack, but Nashua begins before Labor Day. Other than that, the calendars are very similar.
- It is important to her, per the Collective Bargaining Agreements of the Merrimack Teachers Association (MTA) and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association (MESSA) that they weigh in on the calendar.
- This year she promised the board she would go before the South Central Regional Superintendents meeting to find out if they would be interested in at least contemplate going forward with a week in March for a vacation week instead of vacations in February and April. She could not get any districts interested in this. Nashua and Hudson were not interested in a March vacation.
- The only days that must be no school days are Veteran's Day, November 11<sup>th</sup> and Memorial Day, May 30<sup>th</sup>.
- She is putting before the board the August Academy and not starting school until September 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- She put in Columbus Day as a holiday, specifically because of the feedback she received from parents.
- In November, there are three days for the Thanksgiving Holiday, which is the same as Nashua and Hudson. The MTA finds this significant.
- In December, the vacation dates are December 24<sup>th</sup> through January 2<sup>nd</sup>. It is not a full two week vacation so that school is not pushed out too far in June. Hudson has the full two week vacation, but Nashua is the same as Merrimack.
- January 19<sup>th</sup> is a day off for Martin Luther King Day.
- The February and April vacations match those of Hudson and Nashua. They are February 23<sup>rd</sup> through February 27<sup>th</sup> and April 27<sup>th</sup> through April 1<sup>st</sup>.
- May 25<sup>th</sup> is Memorial Day
- If there is no inclement weather the last day of school will be June 15, 2014.

Chairman Ortega stated that he had asked Superintendent Chiafery to put out a request for parental feedback on PowerSchool regarding the calendar. This was done last year. All board members will receive the responses and the summary prior to voting on the calendar.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that arrangements have been made for the calendar to be put on PowerSchool for parents of students grades 7 through 12 and for the students in preschool through grade 6 a memo and a copy of the calendar will be sent home with the students next week.

Board Member Schneider asked about the District Parent Group feedback concerning Columbus Day as a school day.

Superintendent Chiafery stated the parents did not want school on Columbus Day because of the soccer tournaments that are held throughout the area. The parents felt that they were at a disadvantage in having school that day.

Board Member Barnes added that the Columbus Day holiday school closing affects academics, sports and music. The World Cup Soccer final rounds are held on Columbus Day so parents have to make a choice between sending their children to school or to the championship games. Also, music programs occur that weekend as well as PSAT testing preparedness programs.

Board Member Schneider commented on soliciting the feedback on the proposed calendar. He wanted to make sure that the public is made aware that feedback is needed. He would like to have a notice on Merrimack TV as well as on the website.

Chairman Ortega agreed that he would ask Merrimack TV to run a notice about requesting feedback on the calendar.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the notice for feedback will be going out this week and has to be back by March 10<sup>th</sup>.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that he was made aware that there were some students in the Career Technical Program (Vocational Technology) that were affected because Nashua begins classes before Labor Day and Merrimack begins after Labor Day. He asked what would be done with those students so they do not fall behind in their work.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the major difference in the calendars of Nashua, Hudson and Merrimack is the start date and the fact that their Professional Development days are threaded throughout the year and are not front-loaded. Once the calendar is approved she will see what she can do about the start dates for the students in the Career Technical Program.

Vice Chairman Powell asked about crafting the calendar around educational hours as opposed to one hundred eighty (180) days.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she would need to discuss this with both collective bargaining units, especially the Merrimack Teachers Association.

Board Member Barnes noted that November 4<sup>th</sup> is the Federal/State Election Day and that the polls will be open at the James Masticola Upper Elementary School.

Superintendent Chiafery added that the April and November elections will be held at the upper elementary school and the National Presidential Election in 2016 will be held at the high school. The district Moderator will discuss this when she attends the March 3<sup>rd</sup> board meeting.

Board Member Markwell stated that he is opposed to having the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, November 26, 2014, as a day off from school. He is not sure about Columbus Day. He realizes that no calendar is perfect and he is hoping that there is more feedback from parents. He would rather see Presidents Day off instead of Martin Luther King Day.

Board Member Schneider asked if Superintendent Chiafery has a cross-section of other districts in the state regarding their calendars.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she focuses her energy on Nashua and Hudson.

Board Member Schneider thought it would be consistent if the board knows what other districts in the state do regarding the day before Thanksgiving.

Chairman Ortega stated that the calendar is a topic we hear the most about. Last year 60-80 people responded with their feedback. He realizes that the board will never hear from everybody, but would like to hear from more parents this year when the notice is sent out.

Board Member Schneider added that we are not the only part of the country that has two winter/spring vacations (in February and April).

## **9. Teacher Performance and Evaluation Project Update**

Superintendent Chiafery stated that this is a massive effort that affects a number of people and they are giving due diligence. She added that in December she needed part of the model to be reviewed and so the committee looked at it to perhaps be readdressed. At that time she asked the members of the committee to remain in place and go forward with this project because they are critical to the implementation of this model. They put it together and developed it. They will remain as a committee.

Superintendent Chiafery added that she continues to meet with members of the MTA and they understand the importance of this new teacher evaluation model. They understand the significance of the process of change and especially how difficult it is to change a model that has been in place for thirty-three years. The bottom line is that all of them are committed to improving the teacher evaluation model which is going to impact student learning and student achievement.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin reported that the Teacher Performance and Evaluation Committee (TPEC) has been working for over one and a half years to develop a tool and process for teacher evaluation. They are now at the point where it is important that the staff understands it. Therefore, they have developed a presentation to share with all the staff. Presentations have been made at two of the schools and the others will be completed after the February vacation.

He added that there is a great team consisting of Vice Chair Powell, John Fabrizio, Laurie Allen, Barb DeFrancisco, and various members of the committee. They have a consistent message to each building. When it is finished, all the educators would have heard the same information. Starting in January, the process began with a sense of the training that will take place with the thirty-six evaluators. This is going to be an ongoing enterprise. Because this is a rubric-based model, any educator can ascertain similar information when they go into classrooms. Training is going to be supported by Susan Villani of Learning Innovations WestEd, who has been the primary consultant on this project. This is important because the district has worked with Learning Innovations WestEd over the years and they are very familiar with the district.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the Leadership Team is very important to this process. When TPEC finished their work they passed it on to the Leadership Team. The Team should know an educator's performance is looked at in terms of student growth. They have used weekly leadership meeting to begin to discuss what kind of student growth measures might be used at the elementary, middle and high school levels. The Leadership Team has also discussed the use of surveys but has not come to a conclusion because the element that was missing was the educators themselves who are the people to be measured and therefore they would have a lot to say on the topic.



Superintendent Chiafery added that the MTA went to the National Educators Association (NEA) of New Hampshire and got them to support a consultant to come to Merrimack. He came in February and spent time with designated educators and members of the Leadership Team. Out of that came a Student Measures group which will be overseen by Superintendent Chiafery. They will determine what is best for the students and for the district.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted an email address, [tpec@merrimack.k12.nh.us](mailto:tpec@merrimack.k12.nh.us), is intended to provide an opportunity for teachers who may have questions for the people who created the rubric and the process. The TPEC will be meeting on March 6, 2014 and March 20, 2014 to review any questions that come in after the presentations at the schools. It is very important that the TPEC group is run by process. No one person is TPEC, they are a collective committee.

Superintendent Chiafery added that in the spring the model will be piloted. To that end, in March, she and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin will call out teachers who will participate in this pilot. They will probably be those teachers who have already gone through the recertification process. The actual pilot will probably be in May. They will be taking back input to find out what worked and what has to be refined. They need to seek the approval of the model by the MTA and the school board. By the end of May or beginning of June they would be able to get through the process. There will be training throughout the summer.

Vice Chairman Powell added that the questions and the answers coming onto the internet will be available on the shared drive by all educators and other district employees. He feels that the two sessions already held were very positively received. The process that Superintendent Chiafery and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin have put together is a very good process and is ahead of the game. If it is not ready this year, it will be put aside and be presented at another time.

Board Member Schneider stated that the school board members do not have access to all the information, in particular the PowerPoint presentation to the staff. He feels a little disconnected.

Vice Chairman Powell responded that the board will not have access at this time, but probably after all the presentations are made to the six schools.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the board received all the information and the rubric in the fall.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that he would be more than happy to provide the information to the board after the four other buildings have received the PowerPoint presentation.

Chairman Ortega stated that he understands the challenges presented with student growth measures. That takes time and he appreciates everyone's desire to move forward. He asked that, as the pilot is presented in March and approval in May and roll out in the fall, where the student growth measures fits into that cycle.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that they did not want to hold up piloting. They do not have to have the student measures until 2015 per the Department of Education. She felt that it would probably be before that. They want to try it out with the idea that if they do not get the data they want, they need to change it. This is about students showing growth throughout the year. She would like to get this underway and field test it and put it before the educators in the fall.

Chairman Ortega added that this is a tool to be used to improve and is not set in stone but is refineable. He wanted to make sure that we didn't wait until it was perfect, recognizing there may be external requirements that allow us some extra time. He wanted to use this time to pilot and refine it so that when the time comes they will be ready for it.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that Ms. Swonger, one of the members of the committee, said, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good" and she kept reminding the committee of that. He stated that we are doing the best we can. It is a very complicated process. If they are careful and mindful of what they hear, it will close to perfect.

Chairman Ortega extended the board's appreciation for the committee members' extended commitment.

## **10. Other**

### **a) Correspondence**

Chairman Ortega stated that he was in receipt of correspondence from a parent regarding the school district calendar.

Chairman Ortega received an invitation from the Merrimack Public Library inviting the public and the board to an information night on February 19, 2014 from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. regarding obtaining a seismograph in Merrimack to be linked into the Weston, MA observatory.

Board Member Schneider reported that he received an email regarding Common Core Standards.

### **b) Comments**

Vice Chairman Powell stated that filing period for school district offices is February 19, 2014 through February 28, 2014.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the Leadership Team met with the Merrimack Police Department regarding the debriefing of the active shooter training in the fall as well as plans for the upcoming spring and the fall. She noted how much the Merrimack Police Department does for the district.

Board Member Schneider stated that he thought the board should be more pragmatic about messages regarding school closings and dismissals.

## **11. New Business**

Here was no new business to report.

## **12. Committee Reports**

Student Representative Crowley gave a report from the high school:

- She stated that taking the Tech Ed course in the middle school was very helpful to her current education.
- Because of the snow days, class pre-enrollment has been extended until Wednesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> for the high school and middle school.
- "Mr. MHS" contest is Thursday at 7:00 p.m. in the school cafeteria

Board Member Barnes attended the Program Evaluation Review Committee (PERC) on February 11th. There was a presentation about the possibility of having a Mandarin 4 course in the future.

Board Member Markwell attended the Budget Committee Meeting on February 11, 2014. It was a very important meeting because it was the time for a public hearing. Unfortunately there was no public in attendance. The reduction and overall cost of the roofing project was discussed, which changed the bottom line of the budget.

Board Member Schneider reported that the Merrimack Safeguard Meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather. The next meeting will be in March.

Chairman Ortega attended the Healthcare Cost Containment meeting. The focus of the meeting was participation and the health assessments. The committee set a health assessment survey completion rate of 70% for 2014. There is a strong desire to hit that mark. Participation thus far is below that and strategies to reach the people and get the word out were discussed. The next meeting is Wednesday, March 5, 2014.

### **13. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

There were no comments by the public on agenda items.

### **14. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:45 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.