

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
February 1, 2010
Merrimack High School - Cafeteria**

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Vaillancourt, Vice Chairman Thornton, Board members Coburn, Robertson-Smith, and Swonger and Student Representative Ortega. Also present were Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, and Business Administrator Shevenell.

1. Call to Order

Chairman Vaillancourt called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. a) National Anthem – Merrimack High School Chamber Choir

The Merrimack High School Chamber Choir sang the National Anthem led by Director Ken Dugal.

b) Other Musical Selections

The Merrimack High School Chamber Choir performed the Star Spangled Banner, Auld Lang Syne, and the American Anthem under the direction of Director Ken Dugal.

c) Presentation of Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge Dedication Ceremony

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Representative Bob L'Heureux.

Representative L'Heureux explained that the Chamber Choir performed at the recent dedication of the Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge. He added that twelve Pearl Harbor survivors were in attendance at the dedication and that the Department of Transportation had highlighted the Chamber Choir's performance in one of its periodicals. Representative L'Heureux distributed DVDs containing the dedication ceremony to Mr. Dugal, each choir member, the Superintendent, and School Board members.

Jody Vaillancourt thanked the choir and Representative L'Heureux for making the evening special.

3. Merrimack Middle School Student Recognition

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Principal Debbie Woelflein and Assistant Principal Adam Caragher, Art Teacher Audra Saunders, and Students Jessica Silva and Jennifer Petz.

Ms. Saunders reported that Jessica Silva and Jennifer Petz had each won a separate art contest.

Jessica Silva won the Merrimack Lions Club Peace Poster Contest. Jessica illustrated the power of peace through water color, color pencil and glitter. The Lions Club presented Jessica Silva with an award at a Lions Club dinner.

Jennifer Petz won the New Hampshire Association for Middle Level Education Art Contest. Jennifer illustrated the day and a life of a middle school student. Jennifer Petz's illustration is on display at the Department of Education and will be displayed at the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) Annual conference and dinner on June 3, 2010.

Board member Swonger appreciated the students' inspiration and talent.

Board member Robertson-Smith emphasized that art is as important as the fundamentals.

Chairman Vaillancourt and Vice Chairman Thornton thanked the students for sharing their art work with the Board.

4. Approval of January 19, 2010 Minutes

Board member Swonger moved (seconded by Board member Coburn) to approve the January 19, 2010 minutes.

Board member Swonger requested the following changes to the January 19, 2010 minutes.

- Page 2 of 5, section 6, the words "Word Press" should read "WordPress".

Board member Robertson-Smith requested the following changes to the January 19, 2010 minutes.

- Page 1 of 5, seventh line, remove Board member Robertson-Smith's name. She was not in attendance at the meeting and did not second the minutes.

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the January 19, 2010 minutes.

- Page 2 of 5, section 5, after the second paragraph, review the tape and add Chairman Vaillancourt's comments regarding her request that middle school teachers share their concerns with the administration.

The motion passed 4-0-1 with Board member Robertson-Smith abstaining.

5. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

6. Request to Administer Cheating/Plagiarism Student Survey at Merrimack Middle School

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Principal Debbie Woelflein, Assistant Principal Adam Caragher, and Librarian Laura Denehy.

Principal Woelflein stated that educators need to be recertified every three years. That process requires them to set three year goals which include some work with data relative to student learning needs.

Ms. Denehy explained that her plan focuses on the areas of academic integrity, creating new and different types of projects that include the concept of academic integrity with a focus on plagiarism. Her goal is to help students to write more naturally; to be able to take information from all different resources and integrate them in a way that is effective. Her first step is to survey the students for information.

Ms. Denehy asked the Board for permission to administer a cheating and plagiarism student survey to three seventh grade teams and two eighth grade teams.

Board member Swonger suggested that Ms. Denehy's survey results may be of value to the high school English department.

Board member Coburn stated that teaching students about plagiarism was very valuable.

Board member Coburn stated that she supported the survey knowing that the intent of the survey was to teach students to do better with the knowledge imparted to them versus trying to catch them plagiarizing content.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that if the Board were to take action on Ms. Denehy's request at this meeting it would need to waive the two-week rule.

Board member Swonger moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to approve the administration of the cheating and plagiarism student survey at Merrimack Middle School waiving the two week rule.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the Board would look forward to receiving the survey results when done.

7. Information Regarding Middle School Team Configuration

Board member Swonger explained that one of the cuts made to the budget was a proposal to remove a seventh grade team from the middle school. He thought it would be useful to get past the simple math of 324 students divided by 12 teachers equals 27 students in a class. He stated that it is not that simple. He asked Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher to speak about the options under consideration.

Principal Woelflein reported that Budget Committee members asked for more detail about how the middle school administration and staff would respond to a reduction in staff for the 2010-2011 school year.

Principal Woelflein reported that several guiding principles must be followed. They are state and federal requirements, state school approval standards, district goals, student well-being and success, commitment to the team model, and scheduled time for collaboration and training.

Principal Woelflein highlighted three basic approaches to meeting the principles if there were fewer staff members at the middle school.

- Redeployment of staff to help reduce class size, considering qualifications and experience
- Redesign of the school schedule to distribute students on a team among more than four core areas
- Modifications to the manner in which unified arts are offered to students

Board member Robertson-Smith asked if the cuts should come to fruition, how the district would fund a consultant to assist with the middle school configuration.

Principal Woelflein responded that a WestEd consultant is currently funded through Title IIa, Professional Development Federal funds. If a consultant is needed to help with the configuration at the middle school, a portion of the consultant's time would be reallocated.

Board member Robertson-Smith stated that she understands the guiding principles, but still doesn't know what the middle school configuration will look like. She stated that currently, four teachers are not funded. She expressed her concern that a quality education would not be delivered with the reduction of four teachers at the middle school.

Principal Woelflein responded that the middle school reconfiguration work would begin in March. She noted that this task would involve some dedicated time that would include input from all staff and committee work.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that she appreciated the information presented by the middle school administration and requested that it be given to the Budget Committee. She believes that the administration will accomplish the assignment.

Board member Swonger stated that the District has available resources to help problem solve, has the physical space, and has highly qualified teachers in several areas. If the middle school had one fewer team, modifications would have to be made to the unified arts schedule.

Board member Swonger stated that he felt it would be premature to spend time on a task that could change direction at the deliberative session.

Board member Swonger acknowledged that the reconfiguration task is a very difficult one, but not impossible with the capable and talented staff. He stated that he appreciated all the conversations, thought, and effort that have been put into this topic.

Board member Coburn stated that she does not feel that task is getting away from simple math. The enrollment numbers compared to the empty rooms and staff does not mean there is an empty room and the staff member to cover that room.

Board member Coburn stated that in a previous board meeting, Principal Woelflein asked the Board to consider the reduction in force for another year and not to put it forward in 2010-2011. She agreed that the discussion about a reduction of staff had been brought up three and four years ago. She stated that in the minutes of December 2006 the administration, on all counts, had spoken highly of the middle school model and the emphatic desire not to stray from the middle school model.

Board member Coburn would have liked for Principal Woelflein's discussion with the staff earlier in the day to have been held in August. She believes that it would have been impossible because the middle school administration and staff are being put upon and done unto. This was not included in the first round of budget cuts. She stated that it is not the right time, nor the right group to reduce staff.

Board member Coburn asked Principal Woelflein if redeployment of staff included staff from other buildings.

Principal Woelflein responded that the middle school staff has the qualifications needed.

Board member Coburn expressed concern over the possibility of thirty seventh grade students wanting to take prealgebra; twenty-seven students in a science class; and many students having to be placed in Cluster Academic Instructional Periods (CAIP) rather than taking a world language class because of the reduced staff.

Board member Coburn stated that she was not comfortable working to a deadline; but, it is something that needs to be done. If the Board is not comfortable with an item that gives unrest such as raising the class sizes to 27 and 28 students in the seventh grade, then the reduction of staff needs to be reconsidered.

Board member Coburn wished the reduction in staff had been known in August. She disagreed with Board member Swonger's comment that this has been discussed for years. She recalled hearing that the administration did not want to alter the team teaching approach at the middle school and that the budget cycle was not the time to reduce staff.

Board member Coburn stated that the taxpayers deserve more accountability on large ticket items and care and keeping of the schools.

Board member Coburn expressed her displeasure over the fact that the reduction of four teachers at the middle school was not articulated over the course of the school year and is only being brought up during the budget cycle.

Principal Woelflein responded that it is not her intention for fewer students to take world language. Rather, when the number of students taking world language was reviewed, it was felt that two world language teachers could meet that need.

Principal Woelflein stated that she and Assistant Caragher are very committed to the middle school model.

Board member Swonger stated that the idea that middle school class sizes would push the line of the state approval standards was not factually supported. The state approval standards would allow a maximum size of thirty students. Home room, which is not a class, would be at twenty-seven students. He felt that a creative unified arts schedule could help reduce the class sizes.

Board member Swonger agreed that there is no control over the number of students wanting to take prealgebra; but felt assured the district would accommodate that need, whatever the number.

Board member Swonger stated that an advanced science class could draw from science classes to help reduce class sizes. This solution could be used to enhance curriculum as well as reduce class sizes and not just as a way to reduce budgets.

Board member Swonger stated that the reduction of staff at the middle school was not proposed initially, but that it had been discussed internally. He felt comfortable moving forward with the reduction of staff at the middle school.

Chair Vaillancourt stated that there were similar discussions during previous budget cycles. She stressed that changes to the middle school team model was not being discussed.

Chair Vaillancourt questioned how to preserve the middle school model while being financially responsible with the number of staff. She felt that there was enough time to figure this out until such time as specific positions could be discussed publicly.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she is in support of the reduction of staff at the middle school and that she was willing to review any proposal from Principal Woelflein.

Chair Vaillancourt thanked Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher for their participation.

8. Update on Study to Consolidate the Superintendent's Office and Special Education Office

Rich Hendricks, Chairman of the Planning and Building Committee reported that the Planning and Building Committee narrowed its considerations for the consolidation of the Superintendent's Office and Special Education Office down to three alternatives.

- Construct a new office at the site donated by the town located near the high school parking lot.
- Construct a new building at the existing special services location.

- Renovate the first floor space at the upper elementary school for the special services office and build a new superintendent's office at one of the two sites above, which ever is cost effective.

Mr. Hendricks reported that once funding is available for an engineering or architecture study, and then contractors can submit estimates for the job which will provide the Planning and Building Committee with better cost estimates.

Board member Swonger thanked Mr. Hendricks for his leadership in keeping the momentum of this project moving. He anticipates a warrant article for construction and/or renovation to produce a consolidated SAU and special education office.

9. Planning and Building Committee's Approval of a Naming Request

Rich Hendricks stated that the Planning and Building Committee had received a request to name the butterfly garden at Reeds Ferry Elementary School after Barbara DeVore, a former teacher.

He reported that the recommendation of the Planning and Building Committee was to name the butterfly garden at Reeds Ferry Elementary School after Barbara DeVore.

Board member Swonger stated that Barbara DeVore took enrichment projects and broadened them into the entire school community.

Chairman Vaillancourt extended her appreciation to the Planning and Building Committee for reviewing applications. She noted that the naming of the butterfly garden would appear on the February 15, 2010 consent agenda.

10. Merrimack School District Home-School Communication Survey

Chair Vaillancourt introduced Mark Merrifield, Technology Coordinator at Merrimack High School.

Superintendent Chiafery reminded the Board that the administration wanted to move forward with two efforts relative to communication. The first effort, that was just established, was an internal blog for the elementary level teachers to begin to discuss literacy efforts. The second effort was district and school communications with families.

She informed the Board that Mark Merrifield had created a home to school communication survey.

Mark Merrifield reported that he created the home to school communication survey and would be willing to analyze the data and provide the Board with a report and recommendations. He suggested linking the survey to all the school web pages for exposure, the PowerSchool daily bulletin, the parent teacher groups and a notice on the report cards.

Mr. Merrifield offered to provide a follow up survey to teachers and/or students as well as a follow up Logic Model survey.

Mr. Merrifield suggested that the results from the home to school communication survey could be compared to the results of the Endicott survey, a New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) self study survey.

Board member Robertson-Smith asked if the survey was electronic, how those individuals without internet access at home would complete the survey.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the elementary school principals are prepared to include the survey with the report cards.

Board member Robertson-Smith, Board member Swonger, and Student Representative Ortega express their support for the home to school communication survey.

Chair Vaillancourt expressed her appreciation to Mr. Merrifield for his initiative and looks forward to seeing the results.

11. Remaining Articles on 2010-2011 Warrant Article to be Addressed

Business Administrator Shevenell distributed and read an updated 2010-2011 warrant article to the Board. He explained that he had been waiting for input from the Department of Revenue Administration and legal council to respond on proper wording for the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Warrant Article (Warrant Article 3).

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that should Warrant Article 3 fail, the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association (MESSA) contract that was voted on in April 2008 would continue. He explained that Warrant Article 3 identifies the cost increase per the new agreement. The cost increases per the old agreement are already in the 2010-2011 budget as well as the default budget.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted that the MESSA contract contained a healthcare concession.

Board member Swonger stated that this was the second year in a row that MESSA and the Board negotiated. He thanked all involved.

Business Administrator Shevenell asked the Board to vote on the Warrant Article 3 in preparation for the February 2, 2010 Budget Committee meeting.

Board member Swonger made a motion (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to move Warrant Article 3 forward to the warrant as printed.

Board member Robertson-Smith stated that she was not comfortable voting on the motion because the last discussion that the Board had on this was December 21, 2009; therefore, she would abstain.

Board member Coburn stated that she would have felt more comfortable having Warrant Article 3 presented to her earlier so that she could ask questions that are not appropriate to ask in public. She doesn't want to abstain on the motion. She noted that she would put forth a vote, but was not pleased with the way the Warrant came forward.

Vice Chair Thornton asked if it was possible to break into non-public session to answer questions so that Board members would feel comfortable voting on the motion.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that a non-public session had not been posted on the agenda. She stated that the board could schedule a special board meeting prior to the budget hearing on February 9, 2010.

Chair Vaillancourt stated that it is a board member's prerogative to abstain or say that they are not comfortable with a motion. To say that this Warrant Article was not brought forward properly is inaccurate. She added that the Board is under huge time constraints. It was noted that the negotiations were not settled until January 20, 2010 which was after the previous school board meeting. Business Administrator Shevenell just received the information from the Department of Revenue Administration and the legal council today.

She stated that the Board did have a non-public meeting in which the negotiation team made their intent very clear and that they were in the very final stages of negotiations. She would have appreciated a phone call from any board member if there was a concern about this Warrant Article. She stated that she did not want to schedule a special board meeting. She asked the board to move the motion forward.

The motion passed 4-0-1 with Board member Robertson-Smith abstaining.

Business Administrator Shevenell read Warrant Article 4, a trailer article that has traditionally followed bargaining warrant articles.

Board member Swonger moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to move Warrant Article 4 to the warrant as printed.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

12. Presentation of School Calendar for 2010-2011

Superintendent Chiafery presented the Board with a proposed 2010-2011 school calendar. She stated that her recommendations were based on input from the Leadership Team, the Merrimack Teachers Association and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association. She also referenced the Hudson School District calendar for consistency with the high school vocational program.

Superintendent Chiafery highlighted three teacher workshop days at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. She added that this was requested by the six principals.

Other calendar changes include no school the day before Thanksgiving Day and winter recess would be February 21 through 25, inclusive of Presidents' Day.

Superintendent Chiafery highlighted four Monday holidays; Labor Day, Columbus Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and Memorial Day. She reported that schools are required by law to observe Veterans' Day and Memorial Day.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that the teacher workshop day on March 23, 2011 paralleled Hudson's school calendar. The teachers' half day workshop on January 14, 2011 would feed into a long weekend and also work well with the high school final review schedule. The April 12, 2011 teachers' half day workshop will occur on a voting day.

Board member Swonger expressed concern that a two day school week would encourage a full week of absence. He asked for attendance data on the days prior to a three day holiday week. He stated that if the last day of school were to be June 16, 2011 then it could allow for a known graduation date.

Student Representative Ortega stated that she was pleased to see the Columbus Day holiday as a day off.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Superintendent Chiafery to provide the Board with the pros and cons of teachers' half day workshops, for future planning.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that there have only been two teachers' half day workshops to draw from.

13. Second Review of New Policy

- **Student Conduct**

Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the edits made to the Student Conduct policy.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the Student Conduct policy would appear on the February 15, 2010 consent agenda.

14. Other

- a) **Correspondence**

Chair Vaillancourt noted that she provided each School Board member with copies of emails to the Budget Committee members.

- b) **Comments**

There were no comments.

15. New Business

There was no new business to report.

16. Committee Reports

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she attended the Merrimack Cable Advisory Committee meeting on January 21st. She reported that Comcast customers will need to obtain a digital transport adapter for their television sets. Discussions are underway with Comcast regarding fiber cables to the schools.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she and Councilor McCarthy would meet, after the budget process, to discuss updating the Public Access Center Use Guidelines.

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that she attended a Merrimack Drug Advisory Council Coalition meeting on January 28th. The Coalition began working on the Logic Model in preparation for the continuation of the Community Safeguard Grant that is due February 22, 2010.

Board member Coburn reported that she attended the New Hampshire Athletic Directors Association's and New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association's Scholar Athlete Awards Ceremony in Concord. Seventeen Merrimack High School students received recognition.

17. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Andrew Silva of 28 Merrymeeting Drive and Budget Committee member thanked the School Board for its help during this budget season.

18. Manifest

At 10:05 p.m., Board member Coburn moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.