

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
March 3, 2013
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

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 11, 2014 and February 17, 2014 Minutes

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to approve the minutes of the February 11, 2014 meeting.

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 1 of 2, line 24, change the word “savings” to “project”.
- Page 1 of 2, line 26, correct the amount to One Hundred Eighty Seven Thousand Six Hundred Thirty Nine dollars (\$187,639).
- Page 1 of 2, line 28, change the word “clause” to “amount”
- Page 1 of 2, lines 28 and 29 should read, “Board Member Markwell asked if the contingency amount of Eighty Thousand Dollars (\$80,000), which is included in the project cost, is not all used, will there be an increase in the estimated savings.”

The motion to accept the minutes of the February 11, 2014 minutes as amended passed 4-0-1 with Board Member Schneider in abstention.

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to approve the minutes of the February 17, 2014 meeting.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 1 of 11, line 39, add an “s” to the word “Art”.
- Page 4 of 11, line 189, change “pretest” to “pre-test”.
- Page 8 of 11, line 368, change the word “Education” to “Evaluation”.
- Page 8 of 11, line 374, change “Board Member Powell” to “Vice Chair Powell”.
- Page 8 of 11, line 375, after Barb DeFranciso, it should read, “and various members of the committee.”
- Page 10 of 11, line 491, add a space between February and 11th.

Board Member Schneider requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 11, lines 137 through 139, the sentence should read, “Board Member Schneider stated that when he was 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.”

- Page 3 of 11, line 140, change the word “roll” to “role”
- Page 3 of 11, line 141, the sentence should read, “He felt that eliminating the Budget Committee and adding members to the school board without investigation is unacceptable.”
- Page 8 of 11, line 351 should read, “Board Member Schneider added that we are not the only part of the country that has two winter/spring vacations. (February and April).”
- Page 9 of 11, line 419, should read, “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 requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 11, line 153, add the phrase “at this time” at the end of the sentence.
- Page 10 of 11, line 489, should be “Mr. MHS” contest.

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 2 of 11, line 62, add the word “be” after “there will”
- Pages 8 through 9, change all occurrences of “TEPC” to “TPEC”
- Page 10 of 11, line 450, change the paragraph to read, “Chairman Ortega extended the board’s appreciation for the committee members’ extended commitment.”

The motion to accept the minutes of the February 17, 2014 meeting as amended passed 5-0-0.

3. Public Participation

Kathy Pitten, 8 Rimmon Court, presented a proposal made by herself and Patty McIntyre, regarding extending the school days for fifteen to thirty minutes each day in order to make up for the excessive snow days. If the board implements this idea, it would be possible to keep the last day of school on or closer to June 15, 2014. She explained that thus far five days of school have been missed, or thirty hours that would have to be made up. She added that if there is enough support for this proposal, she feels that it could be implemented this year. She stated that Amherst had extended their school day in the past due to excessive flooding in the town.

4. Confer with School District Moderator Lynn Christensen in Preparation for Deliberative Session and Voting at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Ms. Christensen stated that the Deliberative Session will be held on March 5, 2014 at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School. She has seen the proposed Warrant Articles that will be proposed at the April 8, 2014 town election at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School. She added that she does not expect a huge turnout at this election.

Ms. Christensen added that with the change to the secure main entrance to the school, the flow through the school and the bus details have been worked out. The bus details will not be changed. The only change will be the dismissal of walkers, who will be leaving from the gymnasium instead of the all-purpose room and they will be walked to where their parents are waiting for them. She added that she has been working with the Merrimack Police Department on the traffic flow that will minimize any impact to the school.

Chairman Ortega asked if she anticipated more police presence at this election than in the past.

Ms. Christensen responded that they would not add extra police officers to the duty. She explained that the two officers will be in stationary places to prevent the general public from wandering through the school.

Chairman Ortega stated that one of the major concerns of the board is the security of the building, especially when the students are there. He asked if a walk-through could be done to better understand the details of the traffic flow and dismissal.

Ms. Christensen responded that she is outside on the traffic details when the students are entering and exiting the building during elections. Her utmost concern is to ensure the safety of the students. She added that it is important to have Principal McGill at the walk-through since she is very involved with how the traffic flow works.

Superintendent Chiafery asked how many people are registered voters in Merrimack and how many are estimated for the April 8th voting.

Ms. Christensen responded that there are presently eighteen thousand voters (18,000) registered voters in Merrimack. Based on the filings for offices and the proposed Warrant Articles, she is not expecting a huge turnout at the April 8th election. She estimated that there would be about two thousand (2,000) voters. She added that they are prepared to deal with a larger turnout if needed.

Board Member Barnes asked Ms. Christensen if she could attend a future board meeting after the walk-through. She felt it would help the board members visualize the flow of voters on Election Day.

Ms. Christensen responded that she would be happy to attend another board meeting after the walk-through and before the election. She also stated that the front door of the school will be the entrance for the voters. It is not feasible to use the side and back doors because the voter lines would extend outside the building. The flow is much better using the front door and having the lines contained in the building. She added that Principal McGill is satisfied with the plan as it stands.

Chairman Ortega noted that at the General Election last November at the high school, there were extremely long lines. He asked how this would be different at the upper elementary school.

Ms. Christensen responded that at the high school there is a way having internal lines. At the upper elementary school, if the side door, where the dumpsters used to be, is used as an entry and exit, there is no place to run the lines of voters other than outside.

Board Member Schneider asked if the walk-through would show where the lines of voters would be.

Ms. Christensen responded that there will be two lines; one for the voters and one for voter registration. With both of these lines coming into the building, it is better to have the lines inside the building, thus using the front entrance of the school for voter entrance and exit. She added that she is willing to listen to any suggestions from the board.

Chairman Ortega reported that he spoke with Principal McGill and her preference would be to not open the secure entrance, but would be willing to do whatever works.

Ms. Christensen stated that they have come up with a reasonable compromise for safety and voter access.

Board Member Schneider asked Chairman Ortega if he anticipated the walk-through to include the flow of the students on the busses but also the vision of where the voter lines would be inside. If so, he would like to join the walk-through.

Ms. Christensen invited all the board members to join in the walk-through. If the board could come up with an alternative, she would be happy to listen.

Board Member Barnes stated that the Deliberative Session on Wednesday will be held in that room where they can look at the lay of the room. She added that it is important to have the walk-through during school hours to see the student traffic and the timing of it.

5. Second Review of Proposed School Calendar for 2014-2015

Chairman Ortega gave a brief review of the school calendar discussion at the February 17th board meeting. After Superintendent Chiafery presented the proposed calendar for 2014-2015, there was discussion regarding feedback from the parents. He noted that parents received notice of the need for feedback either through PowerSchool or through notices sent home with the younger students. The deadline for receiving feedback is March 10th. He added that he has received messages from thirty-three (33) parents as of 5:00 p.m. on March 3rd. These responses have been forwarded to the board members.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she was asked to query other administrators in the South Central Region to find out what they do about the three days off for Thanksgiving, which next year includes, Wednesday, November 26th. There are eighteen schools or districts that reported back to her. There are five that are in session on that day, eleven that are off that day and two that are undecided.

Board Member Schneider wanted to discuss the calendar in terms of the presentation by Ms. Pitten earlier in the evening.

Chairman Ortega spoke about the proposal by Ms. Pitten and Ms. McIntyre presented. The proposal is to increase the length of the school days in order to make up the snow days. He did not think they realized that there is more to getting this done than it seems. There would have to be discussions with the State, the transportation company and the staff. He added that this will be taken under advisement. He also stated that he would like to hear from Superintendent Chiafery about the ramifications of making such a change.

Board Member Schneider referenced the loss of days in Amherst due to the flooding a few years ago, as Ms. Pitten spoke about. If the proposal was to be accepted, it would mean switching the number of teachable days to instructional hours in the middle of the school year. This is not an easy thing to do. For this year, he would be willing to listen to ideas, but he thinks it is more work than people expect.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she will look into the proposal and its ramifications. If there are extenuating circumstances, such as flooding or an ice storm, the Commissioner of Education has to be contacted to see what can be done. She added that most people do not understand the details of making such a change.

Board Member Barnes stated that the teaching staff, support staff, and transportation issues would be affected by this kind of change. She thinks that there needs to be a plan in place should those extenuating circumstances come up. She added that the make-up days are built into the yearly calendar.

6. Summary of 2013 NECAP results

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that this is the last time NECAP results will be presented because of Smarter Balanced results in the future. He summarized the fall 2013 NECAPs by comparing current results with the year immediately preceding. He added that we do not celebrate great results, nor do we lament poor results. Each year presents an entirely new cohort of students for each grade (The tests are for students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11). The assessment represents a single moment in time and therefore cannot be seen as definitive. In Merrimack, they always employ multiple measures over time. They use benchmark assessments, competency assessments, mid-terms, unit exams, comprehension checks, fact drills and a host of other formative assessments to help teachers help students to determine where they are at a particular point in time and to identify those areas that they need to improve upon. It is single data point. He provided a very quick overview by grade:

| Grade | Students who are Proficient or Proficient with Distinction in Reading | Students who are Proficient or Proficient with Distinction in Math |
|-------|---|--|
| 3 | 82% | 76% |
| 4 | 76% | 77% |
| 5 | 80% | 82% |
| 6 | 81% | 72% |
| 7 | 75% | 70% |
| 8 | 75% | 64% |
| 11 | 83% | 50% |

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that we have three-quarters of our students who are either Proficient or Proficient with Distinction.

He noted the Nashua Telegraph article February 17th that describe NECAP results over an eight year span. The article stated that Merrimack has the poorest results in the region, especially Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. He spoke with the Superintendent of Schools and Principal Bellemare at Thorntons Ferry. He spoke with the author of the article who admitted he had done inaccurate arithmetic. Merrimack was at par or slightly in excess for all surrounding school districts in that period of time of eight years. The next day there was a correction in the newspaper and on line. Principal Bellemare reassured the parents of the students in the school that they are a school that excels and is certainly on par with schools in the area.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin went over the results of the NECAPs this year. He noted the areas that need focus are Analysis and Interpretation in Reading and Numbers and Operations in Math. He also noted that many students moved from Proficient (level 3) to Proficient with Distinction (Level 4). Merrimack School District is slightly ahead of State results.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin added that there has not been a single trend for three years. We have seen moderate fluctuations from year to year with some significant increases and some moderate decreases. Over the span of years from 2005 to 2013 we have seen an average of 10% growth in math and reading. We take the NECAP results for what they are worth and we match that with all the other assessments used. That results in knowing where a student is, what a student needs to do to improve and to provide data to the teacher.

Board Member Barnes asked if we look at and compare the students as they move up in grades i.e. compare a grade 4 student with that student as a student in grade 3.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that we do have cohort tracking which he could share with the board.

Board Member Barnes stated that we are the only state that offers NECAPs in the fall, which saves money in the delivery of the tests. Other states test in the spring so a third grader in New Hampshire will be tested in the fall in the third grade on the knowledge gained in second grade, where a Massachusetts third grader will take the same test in the spring based on third grade knowledge gained in third grade.

7. Other

a) Correspondence

Board Member Schneider reported that he has received several comments on the Common Core. He also received a question regarding educating the parents about the Smarter Balanced Assessment. He told the parent there will be an upcoming informational meeting.

b) Comments

Superintendent Chiafery spoke about the presentation she and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin made at the last board meeting regarding the Teacher Performance & Evaluation Committee. She stated that she had spoken about student growth measures. They would deliberate about them and then come before the board with their findings. She stated that she had made a misstatement regarding surveys. She spoke about student and parent surveys. She wants to make sure that everyone understands that they are student surveys and not parent surveys.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that Merrimack has the opportunity to pilot the Smarter Balanced Assessment in the state. The purpose of the pilot is to field-test questions, to field-test capacity for technology and to provide that data back to Smarter Balanced to help them refine the test. There is no definitive test yet. It is a work in progress. Four schools will be piloting the program. They are Merrimack High School, Merrimack Middle School and Reeds Ferry and James Mastricola Elementary Schools. Testing will take place from March to April. The upper elementary school had a field test last spring, so five of the six schools have been involved with the pilot program. It is yet to be determined which grades will be tested and whether the testing will be in Math or Literacy. A letter will be forthcoming to the students in these schools which will include parent options.

Board Member Schneider asked if it Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin's intent to come before the board with people from the selected schools to share the experience once the pilot is completed.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that he would return to the board with findings after the pilot.

Board Member Markwell asked about the parent options that would be included in the letters sent home regarding the pilot.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the option would be whether or not to have their students included in the pilot.

Board Member Markwell asked about the privacy issues involved in taking the new tests.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the information obtained will be used to clarify student data. There will be no names or identifying information about the students.

Board Member Markwell stated that it is his understanding that there will be deeper profiling on Smarter Balanced as compared to the NECAPS.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin clarified that the State Department liaison stated that no student information will be collected that is not on the NECAPS.

8. New Business

There was no new business to report.

9. Committee Reports

Board Member Barnes attended the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting on February 19, 2014. The new director, Matt Kasperius, gave the Director's Report. The Winter Carnival had not been held at that time, but Board Member Barnes heard it was successful. Staff is being hired for summer camp at Wasserman Park. The tennis courts were not discussed. They talked about the program to check boats going into the lake.

Board Member Barnes attended the Professional Development Committee meeting on February 20, 2014. They received the IPDP binders which are Professional Development binders used for certification. They make sure all the criteria are being met. It is three years worth of work put into one binder, which shows a tremendous amount of work.

Board Member Markwell attended the seismograph presentation at the Merrimack Public Library on February 19, 2014. Information regarding how the seismograph would be set up was given. Pamphlets full of information were handed out. Information will also be available on line. They are in the process of fund raising. The money would come from donations, not tax payers' dollars.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin clarified a point on the Smarter Balanced pilot program. He had stated that no names of students would be used for the pilot program. Scott Mantee, the State Department liaison, stated that no student information will be collected for Smarter Balanced that is not currently collected for NECAP. The information collected for NECAP includes name, grade, and student identification number.

Board Member Markwell stated that it is his understanding that Smarter Balanced is going to go a lot deeper in profiling the students than previous testing. He added that there is legislation that speaks to preventing detailed profiling of students.

Chairman Ortega suggested that when the board meets to discuss the pilot program some of these questions will be answered from the test and data collected.

Board Member Schneider stated that his request was that when they talk about the testing they also talk about data privacy. It may be interesting to get some information from Mr. Mantee when the pilot is complete. Perhaps he could attend a board meeting and questions can be asked.

Board Member Markwell added that the legislation he spoke about was from the New Hampshire School Boards Association.

10. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

11. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 8:55 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.