

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
March 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 March 3, 2014 Minutes

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to approve the minutes of the March 3, 2013 meeting.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 8, line 201, and throughout Section 6 (Summary of NECAP Results) should be Smarter Balanced (add a “d” to “Balance”).
- Page 5 of 8, line 199, and throughout Section 6, should be NECAPs (“s” should be lower case).
- Page 5 of 8, lines 217 and 221, correct the spelling of Bellemare.
- Page 6 of 8, line 244, should read, “. . .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”.
- Page 7 of 8, line 318, change the word last word in the sentence, “money” to “dollars”.
- Page 8 of 8, line 337, add an “s” to “Board”

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 8, line 168, add the word “Wednesday” before the date November 26th.
- Page 4 of 8, line 184, delete the phrase “the number of”.
- Page 5 of 8, line 209, should be a “single data point”.
- Page 5 of 8, line 217, delete the words “in Nashua”.

The motion to accept the minutes of the March 3, 2014 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 from Life Touch to James Masticola Upper Elementary School for \$1,130 for the 6th grade Enterprise City Program.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to accept the donation from Life Touch, with appreciation.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Consent Agenda

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the following item for approval:

- Teacher Resignation/Retirement:
 - Cheryl Wolff, Speech/Language Pathologist at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Vice Chairman Powell moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. National History Day: An Overview

Mr. Peter Petrigno, head of the History Department at Merrimack High School, explained that National History Day is not a single day, but a year-long process for high school and middle school students across the country to participate in extensive research of primary and secondary sources. These students conduct detailed analysis on their research, form their own conclusions and then present their findings on the project.

Mr. Petrigno made a PowerPoint presentation. Highlights included:

- National History Day came to their attention a few years ago when the high school was in the process of developing their competencies.
- The competencies in the social studies department are Research, Comprehension, Analysis and Evaluation.
- A video was shown on the National History Day National Competition at the University of Maryland. Each year about two thousand five hundred students compete for awards.
- Past Merrimack participants in National History Day were highlighted.

Lindsey Seibert, History teacher at Merrimack High School, explained that the theme this year is Rights and Responsibilities. This gives the students the choice to pick whatever project they want and fit it into the theme and call it history. She added that it gives students the opportunity to research something they are interested in. Students spend six to nine months on their projects.

Lindsey Johnson, Social Studies teacher at Merrimack High School, explained that when students select their topic and they begin their research, they can decide what type of project they can create to express their research. They have the options of creating research papers, group or individual websites, an individual or group performance, creating an exhibit, or creating an individual or group documentary. Once they have shown their project to judges, they must defend their work and their research. She added that recently a panel of judges from Plymouth State College came to Merrimack to see the projects and to give the students the opportunity to defend their work and make changes if necessary. On April 12, 2014 the State competition will

be held at Plymouth State College. They are hoping to have thirty-one students compete. The National competition will take place at the University of Maryland from June 16 to June 19, 2014.

Student Megan Murphy presented the website she developed on the Irish Potato Famine. Students Amanda and Adrianna presented the website they created on The Spanish Inquisition.

Mr. Petrigno added that National History Day projects give students the opportunity to express their knowledge in several ways. They are actively engaged in their research and thinking and forming their own conclusions.

Board Member Barnes asked about the grade levels of students who are participating in this year's competitions.

Mr. Petrigno responded that sophomores and juniors will make up the thirty-one students participating this year. He explained that these projects are required in the World History and US History classes as a component of their final summative assessment, counting for 50% of their final exam grade.

Board Member Barnes asked what kind of fund raising is done to send the students to the competitions.

Mr. Petrigno responded that there is some in-house funding to transport the students to Plymouth State College. However, there is no funding for the National Competition and students have to rely on parental financial support.

Board Member Markwell asked if there are any outside sponsorships for students that cannot afford to go to the Nationals.

Mr. Petrigno responded that the funding is general from the parents. He added that a couple of years ago they received a small donation from the Rotary Club.

Board Member Markwell asked how many awards are given out at Nationals.

Mr. Petrigno responded that first and second place awards in each of the categories in the high school and middle school divisions, as well as special awards from various organizations are given out at Nationals. He proudly added that the History Channel presented an award to the students from Merrimack at a past National competition.

Board Member Barnes asked about the cost to attend the National competition.

Mr. Petrigno responded that there are bus and/or airfare costs, as well as the entrance fees and the cost of room and board. He estimated that the cost is around six hundred dollars (\$600.00) per student to attend the National competition.

Board Member Barnes asked how many students of the thirty-one will be going to Nationals.

Mr. Petrigno responded that first the students compete at the State level. That will determine the number of students attending Nationals.

Chairman Ortega asked about the criteria for students to attend the competitions, even though the projects are required for the history courses.

Mr. Petrigno responded that there is an in-house fair with professors and graduate students of Plymouth State College in collaboration with Merrimack teachers to determine first, second and third place winners. Third place winners are alternates in the event first or second place winners are not able to attend the competitions. There are two award winners in each of the categories.

Chairman Ortega explained that the reason there have been questions from the board about funding is that the board, over the last few years, has taken steps to fund educational programs such as National History Day, Science Olympiad and FIRST Robotics in addition to funding sports competitions. He thanked the students for their presentations. He remarked that they showed all the characteristics of life-long learners.

7. Test Security Relative to Statewide Assessments

Chairman Ortega explained that a few months ago Board Member Schneider asked a question about testing and security relating to the submittal of test results i.e. using the “cloud” for results. He introduced Mr. Michael Schwartz from the New Hampshire Department of Education.

Mr. Schwartz stated that he has worked in a variety of roles at the New Hampshire Department of Education, many of which have been in data, security and assessment collection. He explained the three handouts he provided:

- Frequently Asked Question regarding privacy and security of student assessment data
- Title XV which explains how data is collected and how it is managed
- NH House Bill 1587 which is currently before the New Hampshire House

Highlights of his presentation included:

- The primary purpose of collecting data is about improving student instruction.
- i4SEE stands for Initiative for School Empowerment in Excellence which was the name given to the collection of data beginning in 2005.
- The data they are allowed to collect is very limited. It is data used for accountability and assessment and improving schools.
- It is important to have laws that identify and constrain the data.
- Neal Kurk is the State Representative from the Town of Weare proposed House Bill 1587. He is the number one State Representative helping insure and having a concern for the privacy and security of data. The Department of Education has worked very closely with him.
- This new law and the implementation of Smarter Balanced will be more secure and will provide more protection and limitations in terms of the type of data that is collected than they had with NECAP.
- Data is protected by Federal and State Laws. Federal and State laws do not allow data to be shared with either the Federal or State governments.
- The Legislation passed in 2005 stated that the data collected must isolate the name from any other data. The data base for names is not connected to any other data.

- There is a Twenty Five Thousand Dollar (\$25,000) fine for incidents of the misuse of the data. If student data is shared outside the state of New Hampshire, it is a Class D Felony.
- The new law strengthens the protections. It specifies data that cannot be collected.
- The physical servers sit in a secure site in the Office of Information Technology in Concord, NH. There is no use of the “cloud”.
- The Department of Education is collecting this data to help the schools and improve instruction for every student.

Board Member Schneider asked about the pending legislation and the difference between the NECAP data and the Smarter Balanced data.

Mr. Schwartz stated that the issue should not be with the privacy of data, but instead should be about the quality of Smarter Balanced and the Common Core.

Mr. Schwartz stated he has not heard anything about more data needed for Smarter Balanced as compared to the NECAPs. The data collected is basic data including gender, race and Special Education involvement. He added that there are two things that a testing entity needs to do. First is to make sure the right student takes the right test. Secondly the test company analyzes the data to see student results in certain areas. The legislation prevents the connection between these two pieces. The identifying person will get identifying data and that data cannot be connected to any analysis the testing company does around the test results. That was not the case for NECAP but is the case for Smarter Balanced.

Board Member Schneider asked if the State does everything in-house when it comes to data and backing-up the data. He also wanted to know if the data storage is contracted out.

Mr. Schwartz replied that everything is done by the State. They maintain their own servers. Separately, Smarter Balanced may collect data, and perhaps put it in the cloud. The data we release to them will not have student information. It will be de-identified data. By law it will not include the student ID.

Board Member Schneider asked if there is any utilization of the data coming out of Smarter Balanced that the State is looking at in terms of broader assessments of individual teachers or anything along those lines.

Mr. Schwartz responded that Smarter Balanced will be used to identify accountability for schools. At the teacher level, the State has not looked at future accountability. That is up to the schools and the district.

Vice Chairman Powell asked about the current status of HB 1587.

Mr. Schwartz responded that HB 1587 went through a sub-committee of the Department of Education, making sure the legislation is as strong as it can be. The Education Committee unanimously voted in favor of the bill. He thinks the bill is now going to the full House. If passed, it is supposed to be effective July 1, 2014.

Chairman Ortega thanked Mr. Schwartz for attending the meeting and for the explanations.

Board Member Markwell stated that some people have fears about rolling out the Common Core. He stated that he thinks it is an ongoing process in terms of the security of student data collected by the government. Data is always going to be a problem. He thinks this legislation is a good move and he is glad to see New Hampshire pioneering this kind of legislation to protect the students. He thanked Mr. Schwartz for his presentation.

8. Board's Response to Proposed 2014-2015 School Calendar

Chairman Ortega explained that the board members received correspondence regarding the school calendar earlier in the day. He added that the solicitation for parental feedback was done through PowerSchool, notices sent home with the younger students, Merrimack TV and the Merrimack Forum. Responses were received between February 19th and March 10th. He added that thirty-nine responses had been received. Overall, twenty-one people of the thirty-nine who responded (54% of the responses) were pleased with the calendar. He noted that he tried not to leave out any responses. He also noted that the twenty-one people who agreed with the calendar said they agreed or disagreed with other dates, but he did not count their responses in the specific areas.

Columbus Day	8 people agreed to close school (21%)	6 people wanted school in session (15%)
Day before Thanksgiving, November 26 th	2 people were happy to close school	4 people wanted school in session (10%)
Martin Luther King Day	No one explicitly wanted that day off	6 people wanted school in session (15%)
Christmas Vacation	4 were happy with the closing dates (10%) 2 people wanted the whole week off, including December 22 nd and 23 rd .	1 person thought it would better to shorten the vacation 1 person noted that it would be good if school is in session on December 24 th .
Single Spring Vacation instead of a February and an April vacation	10 people were in favor (26%)	5 people wanted it to remain as two separate vacations (13%)
Post Labor Day Opening	14 people were happy (36%)	1 person preferred starting before Labor Day
Presidents' Day	2 people wanted that off (5%)	
Vacations	2 people thought Merrimack vacation should align with the Massachusetts vacation.	1 person was not in favor of aligning with Massachusetts.
	1 person wanted the vacations to align with Nashua private schools. 1 person wanted to align the calendar with Manchester.	
Snow Days	3 people mentioned snow days and the desire to look at alternatives such as the Blizzard Bags for students to complete their work at home.	3 people suggested longer school days to replace the hours lost for snow days.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chair Powell) to accept the calendar as presented.

Board Member Barnes stated there does not seem to be a huge desire to change the calendar as it is written, since only thirty-nine people responded to the board's quest for feedback. Having 54% of respondents in favor of the calendar speaks to going forward with the calendar as presented.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that he does not feel a limited number of responses should dictate whether we accept or do not accept the calendar. He added that Superintendent Chiafery put the calendar together which works for the district goals, and the board should support what she has done.

Board Member Schneider supports the motion. Given what we know and what we heard, he is inclined to keep the calendar as it is.

Board Member Markwell stated that he is not in favor of the day before Thanksgiving to be a day off. It may difficult for some parents who work to make arrangements for their children that day. He added that he thought that Columbus Day is an unnecessary day off. It should be an instructional day. These two days, if school is in session, could mean that school would be going far into June. For these reasons he will not support the motion.

Chairman Ortega stated that the board appreciated the people who took the time to respond. In a district of fifteen hundred families (1,500), thirty-nine is not fully representative. But that is the data they received and it is important.

Chairman Ortega stated that the proposed calendar starts on September 2, 2014, which is the day after Labor Day. School will end on June 15th as planned, and has eight make-up days built into it. If it is a mild winter the students will be out on the 16th of June. If it is a bad winter, the schools will be in session until Jun 25th. He added that he thinks the calendar is solid.

The motion passed 4-1-0 with Board Member Markwell in opposition.

9. Response to Parent Query Regarding Extended Length of School Days for March through June 2014

Superintendent Chiafery reviewed that at the last school board meeting a letter was presented to the Chair from Ms. Pitten and Ms. McIntyre. Copies of the letter were sent to all the principals as well as to herself. She therefore thought it important to take the letter to the Leadership Teams for consideration. Highlights included:

- We currently have thirty-one students that are involved in technical education in Nashua and Hudson. The last day of school for Nashua is currently June 23rd. The last day of school for Alverine High School in Hudson is Wednesday, June 25th. Therefore if we were to end school on the 13th of June, our thirty-one students would miss a lot of instruction. All the schools in the South Central Region have similar end dates because everyone experienced the same amount of snow days this year.
- When you are looking at getting into hours, rather than days, this would have to be brought before the Merrimack Teachers' Association and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association because changing the days to hours is considered changing working

conditions. The Merrimack Teachers Association contract specifically states that there are one hundred eighty teaching days and seven in-service days of school for the year.

- John Fabrizio, the Director of Special Services, has already planned for the extended learning days for the special education students.
- Instructional time will impact students participating in after school athletics and other events.
- Discussions are already in place for final exam week and graduation.
- In the last seven years, including this year, the amount of snow days taken are two years of two days, four years of five days, and one year of seven days. The earliest we have ended is June 18th. The latest we have ended is June 24th.

Based on these reasons, Superintendent Chiafery recommended keeping the school calendar as is, and hopefully ending the school year on Friday, June 20th.

Chairman Ortega stated he would entertain a motion related to the extended length of school days to make up for the extensive snow days if a board member were so inclined.

Vice Chairman Powell raised a Point of Order. He stated that the board did not ask for this to be addressed as New Business and therefore he does not think a motion is needed.

Board Member Markwell would consider adding a longer school day as an option for negotiations on renewals of the next contracts. This would allow the board, in an extremely aggressive winter year, to have a clause to maneuver within the calendar to stay on track to be out of school on June 24th.

Board Member Barnes stated that we cannot have a policy of the board unless it is agreed on by both parties. We need to look at the needs of the district. Therefore she did not think there should be a motion on this position because it goes against the grain of what the negotiations are.

Board Member Markwell responded that he didn't necessarily mean negotiations, but as something to be considered as part of the line-up of what the board puts on the table.

Board Member Schneider stated that to switch mid-year from days to hours, approval is needed by the Department of Education. He supports the concept but it would have to be done for a full year.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the year we had extenuating circumstances was due to the ice storm. The calendar was modified, still staying with 180 days of school. Presidents Day was turned into a snow day for students. A teacher workshop day scheduled in March was turned into a snow day and there was a half day at the end of the year that was used for staff. She added that they worked within the calendar itself.

10. Scheduling the 2014 Graduation Date

Superintendent Chiafery met with Principal Johnson. They conferred that the date for graduation will be Saturday, June 14th at 10:00 at Student Memorial Field. She invited all the board members to attend.

11. Other

a) Correspondence:

Chairman Ortega received correspondence from a parent, separate from the issue of the 2014-2015 calendar, with a request to look at blizzard bags and extending the school days for this year due to extensive snow days.

Chairman Ortega read a letter from Police Chief Mark Doyle regarding the board meeting on March 3, 2014. Chief Doyle stated that he felt compelled to address a concern that was raised by the Town Moderator, Lynn Christensen, regarding the safety and security of the upper elementary school during town voting. He stated that for his officers and staff, safety and security are a top priority. Never have the school staff or Ms. Christensen ever spoken with him or his staff about the officers not providing an adequate level of security. He thought that it was important to insure the board and the staff that their highest priority in all the schools is the safety and security of the faculty, staff and students. After receiving the letter, Chairman Ortega contacted Chief Doyle and expressed the value of the partnership the board has with the Merrimack Police. The chief assured him that he was never in doubt.

b) Comments

Chairman Ortega and Vice Chairman Powell attended the Town Council Meeting, at the Council's request, regarding the O'Gara Drive tennis courts. There was recognition that it is the town's responsibility to maintain the tennis courts and that the courts have not been maintained, resulting in a breach of contracts with the board and the National Parks Service. There were two motions entertained. The first one failed. The one that was passed was a statement by the Town Council that no future enhancements would be done to the O'Gara Drive tennis courts. They directed the Town Manager over the next six months to determine the process as well as the cost for identifying either an alternate location or an alternate location and/or purpose. Even if the O'Gara tennis courts are closed, the Council could apply to have an alternate recreational use somewhere else. The expectation is that in six months-time the board will be contacted regarding the easement agreement.

Chairman Ortega reported he attended a meeting at the upper elementary school earlier in the day with Superintendent Chiafery, Principal Marsha McGill, Lynn Christensen, the Town Moderator and Diane Trippet, the Town Clerk. They reviewed the means of access to the polling site in the gym. He expressed the board's desire to secure the front entrances, as it is secured every day, and to use the external doors to the gym as the entry point for voters. The issue of lines was discussed. It was pointed out that the ramp to the external door is extremely steep. Additionally there are no external handles on those doors. He made a suggestion that those doors could be used for the general public and the disabled voters would enter through the All Purpose Room. He was told there are regulations that state the access into or out of the building has to be the same for all voters. Tom Touseau, Maintenance Director, was invited to the meeting to see what he thought could be done to the external area to make it more acceptable to use the back door as a sole entry point for voting. They talked about the adjustments that can be made to minimize the impact of keeping those doors open. They also discussed a change in the busses for drop off and pick up the students. He is not sure the building can be locked this year. Hopefully for subsequent elections, things will be in place to keep the front entrance secure.

Board Member Barnes asked to look at the before school activities to see how the students would enter the building on Election Day, especially for the 6th grade band students.

Board Member Schneider stated that he would like a debriefing from Principal McGill after the election.

12. New Business

Board Member Markwell stated that he received calls from a couple of people regarding an eighty home subdivision being built near Madeline Bennett Lane. This will potentially affect the traffic flow to the middle school. The subdivision will be on Old Blood Road with an outlet onto Madeline Bennett Lane. He added that the board should have input and it should be an action item for them. He thanked the people who brought this issue to the board.

Chairman Ortega stated that the subdivision off of Old Blood Road will be called Chestnut Hill. There were a lot of concerns at the Planning Board about the intersection of Old Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane and the impact on school and general traffic. The owner of the project, through his attorney, felt that the school district should be consulted on this project.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that he has been in contact with the attorney and the engineer to set up a meeting to go through the proposal so that the board and those involved in the project understand our traffic patterns and concerns. At that point it may be appropriate to have them come before the board with a presentation.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that when he spoke with the attorney, he was in favor of such a meeting to get the board input. Business Administrator Shevenell added that he would like to get the meeting together with the attorney, the engineer, and the middle school administration. There are some small details to discuss before the board starts discussing issues such as the proposed intersections.

13. Committee Reports

Student Representative Crowley gave her report:

- She congratulated all the winter sports teams for a great season, including the basketball team that is in the State finals this weekend.
- She wished good luck to the math team who are competing at Plymouth State College in the Math State Tournament.
- Next Friday is the Student Council sponsored Sadie Hawkins Day.

Board Member Schneider reported that on March 6th he met with Merrimack Safeguard. They are getting ready to submit the next five-year grant. The major focus areas are alcohol and prescription drugs, education and community involvement. The grant application will be submitted by the end of March.

Board Member Barnes attended the Celebration of Song on March 11th. Participants were students from Thornton Ferry Elementary School Chorus, the Reeds Ferry Elementary School Chorus, the James Masticola Upper Elementary Chorus, the Vocal Workshop from James

Mastricola Upper Elementary School, the Merrimack Middle School chorus, the Merrimack High School chorus and Chamber Choir. She added that the talent of voice in the district is fantastic, as is the collaboration and growth that comes from the students' talents.

Board Member Barnes attended the Professional Development Meeting on March 13th. They reviewed submissions and the submission form which will provide the correct information. They are in the middle of reviewing the Individual Professional Development Plan (IPDP) binders which are three years of compiled work and used for recertification.

Board Member Barnes attended the Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Dinner. They raise money at the event for scholarship programs for Merrimack graduates.

Board Member Markwell attended the Healthcare Cost Containment Committee meeting on March 5th. He was introduced to Bill Byron who is the new HealthTrust representative. They went over the Guaranteed Maximum Rate and some of the things that hurt the district this year. They also went over the Health Screening results.

Vice Chairman Powell attended the Teacher Performance and Evaluation Committee meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to answer questions that have arisen from the rollout of the rubric and the process for each building. The high school is the last building for Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin's presentation. He added that he has not heard any negative comments as of yet. The committee will convene again to answer any other questions that may come up.

Chairman Ortega stated that he attended the Merrimack High School Talent Show. He added that Student Representative Crowley performed as a talented singer and song writer, taking second place in the competition.

14. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

15. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:45 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Members Schneider, Markwell and Vice Chairman Powell) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.