

**Special Merrimack School Board Meeting
August 9, 2010
Merrimack High School – Cafeteria**

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Vice Chairman Thornton, Board members Barnes, Ortega, and Swonger. Also present were Superintendent Chiafery, and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Chairman Thornton led the pledge of allegiance.

Vice Chairman Thornton called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Vice Chairman Thornton announced that Chairman Vaillancourt and Business Administrator Shevenell would not be in attendance and had been excused from the meeting.

2. Request for a Part-Time World Language Teacher at Merrimack Middle School

Vice Chairman Thornton introduced Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher.

Principal Woelflein explained that there was a need for a part-time world language teacher due to an unexpected increase of seventh grade students wanting to enroll in Spanish classes. She reported that the number of students enrolled in world language classes would result in class sizes between 34/35 students per class and that twelve students were on a wait list for seventh grade Spanish. She explained that if all students were placed in world language classes, the world language class size would result in 37 or more students, which exceeded the state classroom size standards.

Principal Woelflein recommended hiring a part-time teacher for approximately 9 hours a week. She noted that enrollments in the eighth grade Spanish and French classes had increased but that no extra assistance was needed because each classroom met the state classroom size standards.

Principal Woelflein stated that the Merrimack Middle School eliminated one world language position based on the pattern of students interested in world languages in October 2009. She noted that the world language enrollment figure was divided by four teams each for seventh and eighth grades rather than three teams each for seventh and eighth grades.

Principal Woelflein stated that the schedule for 2010-2011 was not developed until the Town voted on various teaching positions in April. Once it was made clear that fewer teachers were needed, a committee was created to comprise the new schedule.

At the beginning of this school year, Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher decided to use PowerSchool to comprise schedules for the students. PowerSchool is the District's student information management recording and analysis software that is being used by Mastricola Upper Elementary and Merrimack High School. Teams were scheduled into the last week of school so the teachers would know their teams and the students would have the teams listed on their report cards.

Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher examined the trends and found that more students were requesting world language and staying in world language than in the past four years. Principal Woelflein did not want to have to ask some students not to take a world language.

Board member Swonger asked how many students had requested Spanish and French this year to last year.

Assistant Principal Caragher stated that he did not have specific numbers for Spanish compared to French, but last year 398 of 696 students enrolled in world language. This school year the number increased to 406 of 655 students enrolled in world language.

Board member Swonger asked if the 9 hour per week part-time position included benefits.

Principal Woelflein responded that a 9 hour per week part-time position would not include benefits.

Board Member Ortega asked how many students the schedule could accommodate within the limits, how many students were on the waiting list, and what the impact would be to the students that were not able to take a world language class.

Principal Woelflein responded that the maximum number of students per class was 30, per the state standards. In order to meet the class size standard 4 or 5 students would need to be removed from a world language class. She referenced the wait list of 12 students.

Principal Woelflein reported that all French classes consisted of 30 students and were full. Students who wish to take French are being encouraged to take Spanish instead, even though those classes are full with a wait list.

Board Member Ortega asked how many classes have more than 30 students.

Assistant Principal Caragher responded that 33 students exceeded the state class room size standard.

Board Member Ortega asked for the cost of a part time teacher for 9 hours per week.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the overall cost for would be between \$10,000 and \$12,000.

Board Member Ortega asked if it was fair to say that even with the recalculation of three teams, there still was a drastic impact on the demand of the world language program.

Principal Woelflein stated that more students are staying in the two-year world language program.

Board Member Ortega asked how feasible it would be to find a person who was willing to take a job for 9 hours a week.

Principal Woelflein stated that the position could be filled with a qualified teacher.

Board Member Barnes asked what the Spanish class sizes would be if a part-time teacher was hired.

Assistant Principal Caragher responded that the class size would be between 25 and 27 students.

Board Member Barnes asked how many students dropped the program mid year because it was not a good fit, academically.

Principal Woelflein stated that those trends were reviewed and fewer students have dropped out of the program.

Assistant Principal Caragher stated that trends over the past years have decreased between seventh and eighth grade. The decrease was 5% last year compared to 20% last year and 17% the year before.

Board Member Barnes asked if knowing what is happening with the trends, is this a one year plan.

Principal Woelflein stated that it would not be an issue next year because the student population would decline.

Board Member Ortega asked how the \$10,000 - \$12,000 additional expense would be handled.

Principal Woelflein stated that the money used for the after school program, about \$4,500, would be more beneficial to the students in world language than the after school program.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the differential would be made up with the after school program contribution and the District would make up the rest from personnel savings that currently has \$200,000 to cover the cost of the part-time teacher.

Board Member Ortega asked if the District has \$200,000 in personnel savings, would it not be beneficial to keep the after school program and fund the entire amount through personnel savings.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the intention was to have Principal Woelflein look at the middle school budget to make a contribution for this request.

Board Member Barnes stated that the middle school budget should not be cut and the after school program should stay status quo on behalf of the students.

Board Member Swonger asked if the budget would be impacted for 2011.

Principal Woelflein stated that it would be for that year.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked how many students were serviced by the after school program.

Principal Woelflein stated that it was very effective for a core of students. Approximately 40 students were invited to attend the after school program. Approximately 20 to 25 students attended on a regular basis.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that she favored the trade and the \$200,000 was a surplus that should be going back to the tax payers.

Principal Woelflein stated that if the funding for the after school program was not there, assistance would be offered in other ways.

Board Member Barnes stated that the demands for academic excellence are increasing not decreasing and the students' needs for a support program may decrease and increase, but she would be in favor of keeping the after school program at this point.

Board member Swonger stated that he would be reluctant to cut the after school program. He would like to see that the money for the part-time position be taken from personnel savings.

Board member Ortega stated that the administration should use its best judgment and how to pay for the part-time position and that a closer look should be made at the after school program for the next budget cycle.

Board member Swonger moved (seconded by Board member Ortega) to approve the request for a part-time world language teacher at Merrimack Middle School and to waive the two week rule.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

3. Outcomes from the Reconfiguration of Seventh Grade Teams at Merrimack Middle School

Vice Chairman Thornton introduced Principal Woelflein and Assistant Principal Caragher.

Principal Woelflein reviewed the seventh grade with one fewer team. She reported that the school followed the state approval standards and requirements, looked at the teacher curriculum, qualification, use of technology, district logic model, student well-being, and success to move into the world of standards based instruction. The Merrimack Middle School chose to redeploy staff to help reduce class sizes considering qualifications and experience.

Assistant Principal Caragher stated that the Merrimack Middle School staff was very talented and flexible. An example would be the gateway teacher who also has an up-to-date science certification to assist in the science department labs. Merrimack Middle School has extra rooms, one of which will be used for an extra science lab, to help benefit the students and teams.

Principal Woelflein noted that having an extra classroom for each of the seventh grade teams enables the science teacher to do a lecture format in the classroom. They looked at staff that could move from seventh to eighth grade and vice versa and those movements actually provided good transitions for the students. Things are going to look very much the same as they are.

Board Member Ortega asked if the schedules were set for the school year 2010-2011.

Principal Woelflein stated that most of the schedule was created. Some changes will need to be made with the approval of the part-time world language teacher.

Board Member Ortega asked for a more detailed presentation once class sizes were finalized.

Board Member Ortega asked what the student numbers would be in any particular course at any particular time.

Principal Woelflein stated that class sizes would average 27 students, which is below the state class size standard.

Board Member Swonger stated that even though the average number of students per class was above state standards, eliminating one team essentially gave each team a science lecture room, and in turn, the science lab class size was lower than the state standards by using the remaining science labs.

Principal Woelflein stated that those accommodations made it easy for each team to schedule the lab in advance.

Board Member Swonger stated that he was proud to see the science department move in a direction that the students could see what would be expected in a high school environment.

Board Member Barnes asked when final numbers would be available for review.

Principal Woelflein stated that the information would be available the last week of August.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked what the student to teacher ratio was for the science labs.

Principal Woelflein stated the science classes are around 27 students. The labs would be divided into 13 or 14 students each.

4. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Matt Publicover, 75 Amherst Road, Merrimack, NH asked if the gateway teacher was going to do classroom work. He questioned what would happen to the gateway program.

5. Manifest

Board member Swonger moved (seconded by Board Member Ortega) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion carried 4-0-0.