

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
September 7, 2010  
Merrimack High School – Library**

**PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES**

PRESENT: Chairman Vaillancourt, Vice Chairman Thornton, Board Members Barnes, and Ortega. Also present were Superintendent Chiafery, and Business Administrator Shevenell.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Vaillancourt led the pledge of allegiance.

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

Chairman Vaillancourt announced that Board Member Swonger and Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin would not be in attendance and had been excused from the meeting.

**2. Approval of August 23, 2010 Minutes**

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to approve the August 23, 2010 minutes.

Board Member Barnes requested the following corrections.

- Page 3 of 13, paragraph one, first sentence, – change the word “Member” to “Vice Chair”
- Page 4 of 13, paragraph one, seventh sentence, change the word “would” to “could”
- Page 4 of 13, paragraph one, eighth sentence, change the word “would be” to “is”
- Page 4 of 13, paragraph two, first sentence, change the word “would” to “could”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph three, first sentence, change the word “Committee member” to “Vice Chair”

Vice Chairman Thornton requested the following corrections.

- Page 2 of 13, paragraph three, first sentence, note when Board Member Barnes arrived to the meeting
- Page 3 of 13, paragraph six, tenth sentence, remove the word “a”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph two, first sentence, replace the words “discussed the” with “discussed with the”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, seventh sentence, change the word “work” to “works”

Board Member Ortega requested the following corrections.

- Page 3 of 13, paragraph six, sixth sentence, remove the word “lot”
- Page 3 of 13, paragraph six, sixth sentence, change the word “lost to building” to “allocated for”

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following corrections.

- Page 3 of 13, paragraph four, third sentence, review the tape to clarify the use of the words “structurally sound”
- Page 3 of 13, paragraph six, first sentence, change the word “is” to “would need to be”
- Page 3 of 13, paragraph six. Chairman Vaillancourt expressed concern that Mr. Hendrick’s opinion would be perceived as fact.
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, third sentence, replace “do this” with “reconfigure the existing space at the upper elementary school for the Special Services offices”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, fourth sentence, change the words “School Board” to “Administration”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, fifth sentence, change the words “upper elementary school project” to “proposed combined Special Services and SAU offices project”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, fifth sentence, change the words “because it did” to “because the Planning Board thought that it would”
- Page 5 of 13, paragraph twelve, fifth sentence, change the words “to complete” to “to reconfigure the space at the upper elementary school”
- Page 6 of 13, paragraph two, the third sentence should read “He stated that the meeting this evening was just a quick update and with all of the problems with the reconfiguration of space at the upper elementary school the committee did vote unanimously to take this off the options.”
- Page 8 of 13, paragraph seven, first sentence, change the word “School Board and the School District Planning and Building Committee” to “Administration and the School Planning and Building Committee”
- Page 8 of 13, paragraph seven, add “prior to the plan coming before the School Board” to the end of the first sentence
- Page 9 of 13, paragraph two, first sentence, change the word “in” to “about”
- Page 11 of 13, paragraph eight, remove the second sentence
- Page 13 of 13, paragraph two, first sentence, change the “August 9<sup>th</sup>” to “July 19<sup>th</sup>”

The motion passed as amended 4-0-0.

### **3. Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

### **4. Consent Agenda**

Superintendent Chiafery announced the following teacher resignation and teacher nomination.

- a) Teacher Resignation
  - Frances Garon, Special Education Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- b) Teacher Nomination
  - Melissa Terry, Pre-School Teacher, James Masticola Elementary School

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Ortega) to approve the consent agenda.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

## **5. Reflection on the Teaching Experience in China**

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Jeff Capone a videography teacher at Merrimack High School and Tray Sleeper a science teacher at Merrimack High School.

Mr. Capone and Mr. Sleeper presented the Board with a documentary series they created during their eight week teaching exchange experience while in Tanggu, China last year.

Mr. Capone stated that last year was the third year Merrimack High School students participated in a student exchange program with China. He explained that during the 2009-2010 school year students traveled to China for two weeks. One week was spent with a host family; the second week was spent touring China. The student exchange program overlapped with Mr. Capone's and Mr. Sleeper's eight week visit in China, which was beneficial to all.

Mr. Sleeper reported that he integrated the Merrimack High School culture while teaching conversational English to Chinese students.

Mr. Capone reported that he and Mr. Sleeper created podcasts of their experiences in China. The podcasts were sent electronically to Merrimack High School for students and staff to view.

Mr. Sleeper emailed daily journal notes to the high school for students and staff to read.

Mr. Sleeper highlighted the terra-cotta warrior replica currently on display in the main entrance at Merrimack High School.

Mr. Capone reported that pictures and video clips from the China exchange programs from 2007 to present were available at [www.youtube.com/MHSvideographyonline](http://www.youtube.com/MHSvideographyonline).

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked Mr. Capone and Mr. Sleeper for their representation of the Town of Merrimack, the State of New Hampshire, and the United States.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked how long their work days were while in China.

Mr. Capone responded that it was an eight-week long day.

Board Member Ortega asked how the trip impacted them professionally. He also asked if they could talk on a personal or professional level about what they intended to do in the school and what the China trip brought out.

Mr. Capone responded that he became adaptable to any situation that came to light.

Mr. Sleeper stated that Chinese students stayed in one classroom while the teachers move from classroom to classroom. Chinese students receive very little hands-on activity. For example, they only have one or two labs per semester. A Chinese chemistry teacher asked Mr. Sleeper to teach a chemistry class so the teacher could learn what the Merrimack students were learning in chemistry.

Board Member Barnes asked how many students within the District were interested in learning the Mandarin language. She asked if the student body had been surveyed. She asked what was the lowest grade level where students expressed an interest in learning Mandarin.

Principal Johnson stated that Merrimack High School would receive 22 students and 6 teachers from China on Sunday, September 19<sup>th</sup>. He invited the Board and the Administration to attend a traditional welcome breakfast at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, September 20 in the high school cafeteria

Board Member Barnes asked for the grade levels of the 12 students that participated in the China exchange program last year.

Mr. Sleeper stated that participation came from 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Board Member Barnes asked where the interest in the Chinese exchange program began.

Principal Johnson stated that the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students have inquired about the program and the parents are aware of the program. All principals within the School District have expressed an interest in sharing some type of experience in the future.

Mr. Sleeper stated that the interest in learning Mandarin was really anecdotal at this point.

Mr. Capone stated that when the Chinese teachers, Vivian and Winter, visited Merrimack last year they hosted a voluntary Mandarin/Chinese class and found that the Merrimack students were interested in the class.

Principal Johnson stated that he spoke to a fellow principal who tried to start a China exchange program by offering a Mandarin language course. The program collapsed in a period of time because there was not enough interest in China. The reason why Merrimack has such a huge interest in China is because Merrimack offers the cultural, personal and professional experience first.

Board Member Barnes asked if you could do it over, what would be done differently to prepare the students knowing that the students did not have knowledge of the Mandarin language.

Principal Johnson stated that several of the students purchased *Rosetta Stone* to learn some fundamentals of the Mandarin language.

Board Member Barnes asked if the number of student participants was based on a number or a perception of the students' ability to cope in a foreign culture.

Mr. Sleeper stated that the students' ability to cope was as important as being open minded.

Mr. Capone stated that they look for students who are open and willing to participate with a group of Merrimack students with whom they might not already be friends.

Principal Johnson stated that the China exchange program began four years ago with 6 students, then 8 students, then 12 students, and now 17 students. He stated that they consider student to teacher ratio and that staff will include one female teacher and one male teacher with previous China exchange program experience. There has not been a formal cap on the number of students who participate in the program.

Mr. Sleeper stated that he was interested to hear that the students thought the group size could not be too large.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she is hopeful that the entire community will embrace this program. She reported that the Chamber of Commerce already has 100 people interested in going on their trip to China. She stated that she would like to see Mandarin offered as a foreign language.

## **6. New Hampshire Special Education District Report**

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced David St. Jean, Director of Special Education for the Merrimack School District.

Director St. Jean stated that Special Education is highly regulated by the Federal Department of Education and the State of New Hampshire. He stated that under Federal regulations there is a State Performance Plan that the Commissioner of Education uses to evaluate all the Special Education Programs once per year according to federally mandated criteria. He added that an annual determination letter states if district meets the requirements, needs assistance, needs intervention, or needs substantial intervention. There are penalties assigned if school districts do not meet the criteria.

Director St. Jean reported that the Merrimack School District received a perfect score and met all the State requirements.

## **7. Review Agenda for Joint Town Council and School Board Meeting**

Superintendent Chiafery stated that there would be a joint meeting between the Merrimack Town Council and the School Board on Monday, September 13, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. at Merrimack High School in the cafeteria. Agenda items will include:

- Outcome of the July 4<sup>th</sup> midway
- Update on the Community Safeguard Drug-Free Grant
- The expansion of the community TV studio
- Update on the South Fire Station
- Share concerns about what is happening with Grater Woods and the Master Plan
- Joint business efforts between the Town of Merrimack and the School District

## **8. Initial Considerations for the 2011-2012 Budget**

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that last year she offered up the opportunity for every board member to speak to Superintendent Chiafery and the Administration about what they would look for in the budget. She explained that this year the Budget Committee would be offering up a budget message to Superintendent Chiafery by the end of September.

Chairman Vaillancourt provided board members with an opportunity to speak to Superintendent Chiafery regarding their thoughts and concerns for the 2011-2012 budget.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if Superintendent Chiafery could prepare a simple and conservative budget. She stated that she understood that contracts needed to be honored and money needed to be spent. Given that everyone is headed into another year of recession, she requested that the School District do its part to try and keep the tax rate down and keep things as affordable as possible. She stated that large ticket items would be a hard sell and recommended that they be put off another year.

Board Member Ortega echoed Vice Chairman Thornton's concerns about the economy. He added that the School District, Administration, and Budget Committee did a fine job with the situation of declining enrollments. It was managed in a way that continued the quality education in Merrimack with an attempt to keep a level funded budget. He stated that the School District should look at the same opportunities, if they exist, and make recommendations based on the fact that the School District has some big ticket items on the list.

He stated that the Capital Improvement Plan has a million dollars worth of projects in the next dozen years and that there have been discussions about bonding and consolidating some projects. He stated that it was a shame that a Capital Reserve Fund was not available to draw from for these projects. He stated that he would like for the School District to rebuild the Capital Reserve Funds over time so this does not happen again in the future. He stated that other programs such as the technology plan, the need to update monitors in the library and the need for foreign language programs also need investment. He stated that the School District needs to look realistically at the things that no longer need funding. He stated that if the School District could try and minimize any impact to the taxpayers in the coming year it would go a long way.

Board Member Barnes stated that communication and clarity needed to be addressed (i.e. acronyms). She stated that the School Board needed to look at the return on investment with regards to academics. She stated that the School Board needs to better communicate what the students and the District gets in return with regard to academic performance. She used the example of calculating the academic ROI would be when introducing Mandarin as a foreign language. She noted that a student applying for college with Mandarin in their high school academic courses could have an advantage over other applicants. She stated that when considering budget cuts academic loss, who would benefit and what benefit would be lost needs to be discussed. She stated that the Capital Improvement Plan was necessary. The longer items are delayed the more expensive they become. She stated that she wants to know how students are impacted by budget decisions. She stated that the Board needs to look at every number.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she shared the opinion of all the board members. She stated that the Board has come in under the default budget because the Administration is so good at budgeting for the School District. She would be looking for:

- A connection to the logic model, even in tough economic times
- Data driven decisions
- Appropriate staff levels based on the enrollments
- Items which are absolutely necessary
- Maintain a commitment to the technology plan
- The furniture replacement plan

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she could not see putting money into a Capital Reserve Fund until ten years from now because of the number of projects that need to be funded every year.

Chairman Vaillancourt suggested that the Board have more discussions with the Administration after the presentation of the budget in December. She stated that Superintendent Chiafery, Business Administrator Shevenell, and the Budget Committee met and talked about contractual obligations and other items that were coming up in this budget cycle.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the School District should take a look at the Capital Improvement Plan when creating a budget for next year to look at and revisit what was not addressed last year (i.e. asbestos removal and library carpet at Reeds Ferry). He stated that there is support for the technology plan and the furniture replacement plan. He stated that the School District would not have a bond issue of \$300,000 in 2012-2013. He suggested that the Board might want to look at the Capital Reserve Fund for roof projects.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she will begin the budget process with a visit to each school to view those items that principals and assistant principals feel need tending to. Lists from last year will be reviewed and compared to needs that may have occurred since last October.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she anticipates that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) report will come out in October and that it will guide her thinking relative to the high school budget. She anticipates that technology will be an area needing improvement. All students, no matter what their post-secondary experience will be, are going to be involved with technology; therefore, we need to be doing more of it. We need to embrace technology in all of its forms faster and in a cost effective way.

Superintendent Chiafery acknowledged the importance of staying up with furniture replacement plans.

She stated that the NEASC report identifies what is being done relative to drop-out prevention. She noted that evening academy is a course recovery program. Springboard to Success improves middle school to high school transition for some students. Both programs need to continue to be funded. The ten week summer reading program helps to maintain reading levels. It benefits learners that struggle and have the greatest difficulty not to have more difficulty.

Superintendent Chiafery asked if there were programs that needed to be spoken of on their own as compared to a line item in the budget. She explained that the process she is implying is to have initial discussions before the detail work.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the administration understands the economy and feelings of unsettledness. The district needs to do whatever it can to make the taxpayer feel that the district is trying to be very responsible while offering quality education.

## **9. Other**

### *a) Correspondence*

There was no correspondence to report.

### *b) Comments*

Superintendent Chiafery announced that Antonio G. Paradis, Ph.D., Executive Director of SERESC (Southeastern Regional Education Service Center), had passed away on August 31, 2010. She stated that Dr. Paradis was a visionary, understood the importance of technology, and helped the Merrimack School District with professional development. She stated that he is a legend and a huge contributor to the Merrimack School District and the State of New Hampshire.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that sixth grade students were very excited about the computer lab class, especially the size of the computer screen.

## **10. New Business**

There was no new business.

## **11. Committee Reports**

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that the Drug Advisory Coalition (formerly known as the Drug Advisory Council) met on August 26<sup>th</sup>. She stated that the committee was formed into a coalition to keep in compliance with the Community Safeguard Drug Free Grant. She stated that the Drug Advisory Coalition has a new Director, Betsy Abrahams of the Nashua Youth Council.

Board Member Barnes stated that Grater Woods Committee would meet on Thursday, September 9, 2010. She stated that the committee met on August 26<sup>th</sup> and that Business Administrator Shevenell was in attendance. She stated that the committee discussed trails and appropriate uses of the map. She stated that the Stewardship Plan was still a work in progress and that the committee was looking at obtaining mapping software from Garmin to map the GIS component to add contour lines to the map. She stated that the maps do not have School District boundaries on them and it is difficult to see the boundaries. She stated that the boundary information is important to have for marking and signing the trails on School District property for limited activity such as ATV and hunting activities. She stated that all of the data needs to be combined into one map so the School District can determine that its best interests are being represented.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that Matt Caron from the committee has been asked to obtain the software to collect some data and GIS points which will overlay one of the Town GIS maps. He stated that once this process is completed it will be a lot easier to determine where things are and what context the trails are being developed in.

Board Member Barnes stated that the Grater Woods Committee talked about developing a brick yard trail. She stated that quite a bit of the trail is on school property. She stated that the Board would like to review any finalized plan for new trails or any work to be done on trails to see how that all works into the School Board's big picture. She stated that she would be bringing up the question to the Committee on Thursday. She stated that she would mention the Board being apprehensive to allowing the plan to go forth and allowing them access to the property as it relates to the School District in the context of maintenance and safety.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that there is continued discussion about creating new trails and new projects without there being an overall approved Master Plan. She stated that she does not support the building of any new trails, especially if we don't have maps that clearly define where the Town and School boundaries. She is absolutely against the cutting or creation of any new trails and, from prior Board discussions, feels that most of the Board Members are in agreement.

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

Tracy Bull of 5 Independence Drive stated that she is a parent of a student that participated in the 2009-2010 China Exchange. She stated that the teacher exchange program has had a huge positive impact on the students. She stated that the families back home thought the computer videos that unraveled while the students were in China became indispensable as they were able to see how things transpired on a daily basis. She stated that her daughter's experience of interacting with the two exchange teachers was incredible and life changing. She stated that her daughter, a college freshman, has now decided to pursue education because of the China Exchange Program. She stated that her daughter was able to learn some Mandarin using *Rosetta Stone* and *My Mandarin for GameBoy* before and during the trip to China. She noted that her college freshman daughter tested as second year Mandarin. She stated that the School District should really consider teaching Mandarin.

## **13. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:53 p.m. Vice Chairman Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to enter a non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II (a)(b)(c).

The motion passed 4-0-0 by a roll call vote.

At 10:00 p.m. Vice Chairman Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Ortega) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 4-0-0.