

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
November 15, 2010
Merrimack High School – Cafeteria**

PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Vaillancourt, Vice Chairman Thornton, Board Members Barnes, Ortega, and Swonger. Also present were Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, Business Administrator Shevenell, and Student Representative Jacqueline McLavey

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Vaillancourt led the pledge of allegiance.

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

2. Approval of November 1, 2010 Minutes

Board Member Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to approve the November 1, 2010 minutes.

Board Member Barnes requested the following corrections.

- Page 2 of 14, fourth paragraph, fourth sentence, change the word “vote” to “are registered to vote”
- Page 2 of 14, fourth paragraph, sixth sentence, change the words “voting districts” to “number of voters”
- Page 3 of 14, first paragraph, second sentence, change the words “going to” to “allowing the town to use Merrimack High School as”
- Page 4 of 14, sixth paragraph, first sentence, remove the words “, especially when it is an election day,”
- Page 4 of 14, eleventh paragraph, first sentence, after the word “voters” add “and lack of sufficient parking was also mentioned.”
- Page 5 of 14, eleventh paragraph, first sentence, remove the word “could” to “and voter counts are traditionally quite small for”
- Page 5 of 14, eleventh paragraph, first sentence, after the word “school” add “to”
- Page 5 of 14, eleventh paragraph, first sentence, after the word “with” add “voting”
- Page 8 of 14, sixteenth paragraph, first sentence, change the word “raising” to “razing”
- Page 14 of 14, second paragraph, first sentence, change the word “Pearce” to “Pierce”
- Page 14 of 14, second paragraph, second sentence, change the word “Pearce” to “Pierce”
- Page 14 of 14, second paragraph, third sentence, after the word “weekend” add “during the Halloween walk at Wasserman Park.”
- Page 14 of 14, second paragraph, fourth sentence, before the word “she” add “During the Parks and Recreation Meeting,”
- Page 14 of 14, second paragraph, fourth sentence, after the word “that” add “the”

Board Member Ortega requested the following corrections.

- Page 2 of 14, fifth paragraph, fourth sentence, change the words “not if school was in session” to “that the school can only be used as a polling place if school was not in session.”

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following corrections.

- Page 5 of 14, fourth paragraph, first sentence, change the words “she agrees to have” to “having one polling location would be ideal, but she has concerns.”
- Page 6 of 14, fourth paragraph, first sentence, change the word “build” to “built”
- Page 7 of 14, fourth paragraph, fourth sentence, change the word “state” to “stated”
- Page 9 of 14, third paragraph, second sentence, change the word “where” to “were”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, fourth sentence, change the word “made” to “saved”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, fifth sentence, change the word “made” to “saved”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, sixth sentence, remove the words “dropping the maximum rate to 6.7%”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, seventh sentence, change the word “made” to “saved”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, eighth sentence, change the word “made” to “saved”
- Page 12 of 14, fourth paragraph, eighth sentence, change the word “outer” to “out of District”
- Page 12 of 14, seventh paragraph, second sentence, change the words “Personnel trained” to “Personnel were trained”

The motion passed as amended 5-0-0.

3. Public Participation

Barbara Publicover, 75 Amherst Road, spoke as the Facilitator of the Merrimack Special Education Parent Support Group. She informed the public that an event entitled “An Overview of Special Education in Merrimack” will take place on Wednesday, November 17, 2010 from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the Merrimack Middle School Library. She stated that the event is a panel discussion of various special education administrators and staff from within the School District followed by a question and answer session.

4. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants under \$5,000

- Target Take Charge of Education Program to Merrimack Middle School for \$131.43

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that parents participated in a program at Target for educational supplies.

Vice Chairman Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Ortega) to approve the gift and grant under \$5,000.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Consent Agenda

- Approval of the Capital Improvement Plan for 2011 - 2017

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Swonger) to approve the Consent Agenda.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. Consideration: Offering the Health Savings Account Option

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Account Executive Debie Clayton from the Local Government Center.

Debie Clayton stated that the Local Government Center offers a Health Savings Account (HSA) available to the Merrimack School District members. She indicated that HSA qualifies as a high deductible health plan which is something that the School District can offer in addition to the current medical plan(s).

Debie Clayton stated that Lumenos is a health savings account and qualified high-deductible health plan. She indicated that Lumenos appears as a traditional indemnity program which is the type of plan where members could go wherever they want, whenever they want and the member does not need to select a primary health care provider from the network or obtain referrals for any care. She stated that with this plan the member could choose to access care inside or outside the Lumenos network. She noted that the Lumenos network is quite vast and the member would pay less out of pocket. She stated that the calendar year deductible for the Lumenos plan would be \$2,500 for a single person plan or \$5,000 for a two person or family plan. She indicated that if the member chooses to access care inside the Lumenos network that would become their maximum out-of-pocket exposure in any calendar year. She indicated that if the member chooses to access care outside the Lumenos network that would become an additional cost sharing responsibility after the member reaches their deductibles. She noted that the member would share 70/30 which means that the member would contribute 30% towards the cost of those bills and the plan would pay 70%. She stated that if a member receives care outside the Lumenos network that would increase their potential calendar year out-of-pocket exposure to either \$5,000 per person or \$10,000 for two persons or family.

Debie Clayton noted that the Lumenos plan does not come with a Caremark Prescription Drug benefit card. She stated that any and all prescriptions purchased at the local pharmacy or through the mail order plan would be subject to the deductible. She noted that this plan is attractive because any and all preventative care benefits are paid for at 100% if they are accessed within the Lumenos network. She stated that the plan is also attractive by the way the District chooses to create, establish and fund the health savings account. She indicated that Anthem does have a preferred health savings account vendor, Mellon Bank. She noted that several other banks (Citizens Bank, TD Bank, and Laconia Savings Bank) are currently established and set-up to work with health savings accounts, and if you are currently a customer of that bank, the bank might be willing to waive many, if not all, of the set-up fees. She noted that the School District might be able to work with the local banks to make this plan more attractive for its members. She stated that once the HSA is established it works much like most savings banks with the exception of the fact that the monies are being put aside through payroll deductions on a pre-tax basis. She indicated that once the HSA is set-up the member would have a debit card and/or a checkbook to pay for healthcare when the member goes to access care. She stated if a member goes to the doctor, they show their Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield card so that visit can be applied toward the member's deductible. She noted once the bill comes in the mail, the member could use the debit card or the checkbook to pay for that bill. She stated not only is the bill applied toward the deductible, the bill is paid for out of the member's HSA on a pre-tax basis. She indicated if the member goes to the pharmacy and needs to pay upfront the member can use the debit card or checkbook. She stated that any monies not being used at the end of the calendar year will rollover indefinitely from year to year without a maximum. She noted that the Internal Revenue Service established for 2011 an amount of \$3,050 for a single person plan and \$6,150 for a two persons or family plan as the maximum that an employer can deposit into the member's HSA.

Debie Clayton stated that Lumenos continues to be a Local Government Center health trust benefit that can be offered as an additional choice and all of the other benefits that the members take advantage of will remain exactly the same.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that this has been an informational gathering session. She indicated that there has been a lot of discussion at the Budget Committee level regarding the possibility of offering this option to the Merrimack School District employees.

Board Member Swonger thanked Debie Clayton for the information. He asked if the plan deductible can be changed from an annual basis to a fiscal basis. He asked if the plan deductible was set-up by design or statute.

Debie Clayton stated that those changes could not be made. She indicated that every medical benefit at Anthem Blue Cross/ Blue Shield is under a claims processing platform of a calendar year and, as of right now, that can not be changed.

Board Member Swonger asked if the member would be tied to a particular bank offering the HSA. He asked if the member could use any bank they wanted.

Debie Clayton stated that the member could use any bank they wished. She indicated that the District could choose to have the member use a preferred bank, but the member could then choose a different bank if they wanted.

Board Member Swonger asked how long the HSA plans have been around. He asked what the historic growth rate of premiums would have been.

Debie Clayton stated that these plans were rolled out on November 1, 2008. She indicated that these plans are fairly new and there is no type of experience to look back on. She noted that there has been slow to little interest in this type of plan designs because the only time an employee group becomes interested in this type of plan is contingent upon whether or not the employer is funding and at what level is the employer funding the HSA.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if the employer or the employee was the one donating the money.

Debie Clayton stated that it could be either. She indicated that it could be one or the other or a combination of both.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if the District would be the one to decide if it were the responsibility of the employer or the employee.

Debie Clayton stated that is correct.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked what type of fees the bank might be charging for an HSA.

Debie Clayton stated that she was not sure what the local bank(s) were charging, but she did supply a list of fees Mellon Bank charges for an HSA. She indicated that all banks are charging fees to set-up a HSA.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if the HSA would be something that the employer or the employee would immediately put the money into at the beginning of the year or would that be something contributed to on a payroll basis.

Debie Clayton stated that it could be a combination of the two. She indicated that the employer could put a lump sum in the beginning of the plan year and then the employee could contribute on a payroll basis.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked what type of average employee would choose this plan.

Debie Clayton stated if the School District chose to fully fund the HSA then everyone may choose to become a member. She indicated that she cannot answer the question unless she knows what the employees are going to see as the money in their HSA. She noted that she has seen School Districts roll out this plan without putting any money into the HSA which led to no enrollment by the employees.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if the plan can be set-up that the School District fronts the money and then the payroll deduction goes directly to the specific bank.

Debie Clayton stated the minute the employee or the employer deposits any money into the HSA it becomes the property of the employee. She indicated that strategically funding the HSA would be a key part to making this type of plan attractive and successful.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if the HSA would be a lower cost option and less of a contribution on part of the employee.

Debie Clayton stated that was correct.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked why the School District would offer another option. She asked if there was another employee audience that is asking for this type of plan.

Debie Clayton stated that she did not know.

Board Member Swonger stated that employees most likely not to use the full deductible would be looking at this type of plan.

Board Member Barnes asked if the Internal Revenue Service maximum amount of \$3,050 was an employer or account contribution.

Debie Clayton stated that \$3,050 is the maximum that could be deposited into a HSA in 2011 by either combination of employer or employee.

Board Member Barnes asked if the HSA goes over the maximum is the difference considered taxable.

Debie Clayton stated that was correct.

Board Member Barnes asked about rolling over the HSA.

Debie Clayton stated that the Internal Revenue Service dictates what can and cannot be done with the HSA. She indicated that one thing the Internal Revenue Service states is that the minute money is deposited into the HSA it becomes the property of the employee and it has the ability to be rolled over indefinitely from year to year.

Board Member Swonger stated that there is a distinct difference between HSA and healthcare reimbursement accounts. He indicated that healthcare reimbursement accounts are to be used or the money will be lost from year to year. He noted that a HSA is meant for plans like this where you have high deductibles because you use it a lot. He asked if an employee could have both a HSA and a healthcare reimbursement account.

Debie Clayton stated that the employee cannot. She indicated that the employee could not have a flexible spending account with a medical reimbursement portion. She noted that the HSA monies, which are pre-taxed, can be used to pay for the deductible on the health plan or it could be used for other services such as uncovered dental services, acupuncture, or chiropractic visits.

Business Administrator Shevenell asked if the out-of-pocket is in a calendar year, can you do an open enrollment that is a calendar year that lines up the calendar year payroll deductions with the calendar year liability at \$2,500.

Debie Clayton stated not unless the actual bargaining agreement had a December 31st end to it. She indicated that the School District would need to have a contract backing the change in the open enrollment date.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that if an employee is hired on July 1 the employee has six months to accumulate that \$2,500 out of payroll checks or the employee could be liable for that maximum in that calendar year, but only in six months.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated if anything the employee contributes into the HSA is the property of the employee. She asked if the employee no longer works for the School District, what happens to the money in the HSA.

Debie Clayton stated that the HSA continues to become property of the employee and the employee could COBRA their health plan and access the HSA or use the plan for items not paid for by other plans.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked whether the employee uses the HSA until it runs out and Debie Clayton affirmed that.

7. Focus on Academic Opportunities for Merrimack High School Students

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Merrimack High School Principal Ken Johnson.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that this is an opportunity to showcase to the Board a small sample of the academic opportunities that are afforded to students at the Merrimack High School.

Principal Johnson stated that Caitlin Ortega will discuss the Science Olympiad Team and Nick Deraney will discuss the Biodiesel Team. He indicated that athletics aside, the students of Merrimack High School have met with remarkable success in academic co-curricular areas. He noted that the success rate has been so great that the students often go on to regional and national competitions. He indicated, for example, teams such as Science Olympiad, First Granite State Challenge and Quiz Bowl, Lifesmarts Program, Biodiesel Team, Environ Club, Rocket Club, Drama Festival, Mock Trial, Destination Imagination, and Academic Decathlon Team. He stated when a team is successful in athletic competition, those teams go on to playoff scenarios and their post-season transportation costs are planned and built into the operating budget. He indicated when an academic team qualifies for academic playoffs; they have to hustle to fund raise, pay out-of-pocket, or for lack of funding and time, simply do not go. He noted that this limits the students' academic opportunity and limits the students' ability to be the best that they can be. He stated that the School District does not do this with an athletic team and he is hopeful that this will no longer continue to be done with the academic teams. He and other members of the High School Administration believe that the School District should anticipate the student's success and budget for the student's post-season academic success by assisting those teams with post-season transportation costs.

Caitlin Ortega stated that the Science Olympiad is a non-profit organization that has tournaments to improve science within schools and try to generate interest among students in different fields of science. She stated that the team prepares for State and National tournaments where each student takes part in four or five events. She indicated that study events include anatomy and physiology to build events that include Mission Impossible where you build a Rube Goldberg Machine. She stated that the team was founded in 2009 with 15 students. She noted that the 2009 team went on to win the State championship and, therefore, went to the National tournament in Georgia. She stated that the team placed 50th out of 60 teams with a high individual placement of 27th. She indicated that in 2010 the team had 30 students. She noted that the team won the State championship and, therefore, traveled to the National tournament in Illinois. She stated that the team placed 30th out of 60 teams with a high individual placement of 15th. She stated that there are 40 students in the team this year. She indicated that every year the students have had to pay an increasing amount of money to attend the championship and tournament. She stated that there are enough students for three teams to compete in the State championship and one team to compete in the National tournament.

Nick Deraney stated that the Biodiesel Crew was created to educate the community about energy awareness, pollution and recycling. He noted that the crew enjoys producing bio-diesel and incorporating other alternative fuel sources such as battery and electric powered devices. He indicated that the crew likes to stay up to date on latest technological advances and alternative energy as well as participating in events beyond the traditional high school level. He stated that each year since 2006 the crew has participated in the Social Entrepreneurial Student Leadership competition. He indicated that this competition is an eight week event designed to help students focus on projects that help their community by making it a better place. He stated that the crew has participated in the Lemenson-MIT Invent Team for the past three years. He noted that the crew goes to MIT for three days to showcase some of the crew's accomplishments to others as well as view other crews' accomplishments across the country. He stated that the crew has attended National conferences every year such as the Biodiesel Conference, International Green Chemistry Conference, and the National Algae Conference. He stated that Merrimack High School is the only high school participating at each of these Conferences. He stated that this past year the crew has submitted a publication for *Silver Quantum Dots* to the National High School Journal of Science and created a product called the *Biobuddy* which is a small scale biodiesel processor where its rights have been sold to Turner Industries and is now

being manufactured. He stated that in 2009 two students were sent to the National Algae Association Conference in Houston, Texas. He noted that the individual student cost to attend the conference was \$600. He stated that two students were sent to the International Green Chemistry and Engineering Conference in Washington, DC to participate in a few workshops. He noted that the individual student cost to attend the conference was \$450. He stated that in 2007, 2008 and 2009 students were sent to the National Biodiesel Conference. He indicated that students were unable to attend this conference in 2010 because of the cost. He noted that the individual student cost to attend the conference was \$700. He stated that in 2008 students were invited to the Oakridge Laboratories to present the *Biobuddy*. He noted that the individual student cost to attend the conference was \$600.

Board Member Barnes commended both teams on their efforts. She asked if the costs incurred to attend the conferences and competitions vary from year to year based on the location.

Nick Deraney stated that is correct.

Board Member Swonger asked how the Administration plans on budgeting across the wide diversified amount of groups.

Principal Johnson stated that money would be used to assist the students in attending these diverse functions. He stated that this is different from the athletic playoff analogy where it is a set season year to year where it can be planned, but you can't anticipate each piece of success with these diverse groups. He indicated that a decision could be made toward an appropriate sum to assist the students when they achieve greatness at the local and state level which then calls for them to attend the regional or national competition. He noted that the students often get two weeks to fund raise in order to attend the regional or national competition.

Board Member Swonger stated that he would like to make a policy for the way the funds would be given out. He noted that he would not like to see all the funds being used for fall activities and leaving nothing for the spring activities.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that if a small amount of funding would be offered to these teams then when the teams go off to a local organization for assistance they would see that the School District has also contributed to their efforts. She stated that the School District would not be able to offer money to each individual effort.

Board Member Barnes asked if the football team does not make it to the playoffs, could that money be used for academic transportation costs.

Principal Johnson stated that the money is budgeted for athletic transportation cost.

Board Member Barnes asked if the money could be shifted from athletics to academics.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the money has always been used for athletic competition and, if it was not all used it would go toward reducing taxes.

Board Member Barnes asked if there were any restrictions from preventing a shift of unused money from athletics to academics.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that there are no restrictions or laws prohibiting the School District from doing that.

Board Member Ortega commended both of the student speakers on their efforts. He asked if this was a preview for some considerations that might be added to next year's budget. He asked if Principal Johnson could produce the post-season budget for sports so a comparison can be made against what was proposed at this meeting.

Principal Johnson stated that it could easily be done.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if there was one particular line item that is being used for athletic playoffs.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that athletics are all in one line item, but that is broken down for anticipated playoffs.

Vice Chairman Thornton indicated that there should be a line item for the playoffs as a pool for athletics and academics.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that additional funds would be placed into the co-curricular category for competitions.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked the students for coming forward and speaking tonight. She stated that the school has traditionally looked at the money to be used for athletic competition and then put toward reducing taxes if it is not all spent. She noted that she expects the high school administration to come forward with a plan, data and a policy for distribution to the Superintendent before it is presented to the School Board.

8. Update on High School Evening Academy

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Merrimack High School Principal Ken Johnson and Program Director Kay Murphy.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that Dylan Sanford was ill and unable to attend the meeting.

Kay Murphy stated that the Evening Academy began during the school year 2007 - 2008 with a mission of both drop-out prevention and helping students stay on track for graduation. She indicated that when the state adopted RSA 193.1 the commitment to the program's mission was reinforced. She noted that students were generally recommended for participation in Evening Academy by their guidance counselors based upon their demonstrated performance. She stated that word of mouth and other forms of publicity have sparked an interest in the program. She noted that students are allowed to take one course per semester and receive credit only after a rigorous evaluation of their performance. She stated that a brochure is printed yearly listing the courses to be offered and the process for signing up for the program. She noted that the brochures can be found in the guidance office, main office of the high school and the Merrimack Public Library. She indicated that students can also seek counseling with her regarding personal and educational issues either before or after class. She noted that family finances have been a big issue for these students. She stated that many parents have asked for a payment plan or a reduction in the fee (these are considered on a case by case basis). She noted that some students do not have sufficient food at home and the program provides snacks for students between the end of their school day and the start of their Evening Academy class. She stated that the teachers find that students who are not hungry will have better success in the classroom.

Kay Murphy noted that the Advisory Board meets regularly to assess the program and offer suggestions for enhancing its offerings. She stated that one example of change was offering classes from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. She indicated that the students preferred to take the class directly after the end of the school day. She stated that Evening Academy introduced Nova Net to English, Mathematics, and Biology. She indicated that Nova Net is a comprehensive research based flexible and engaging on-line courseware for high school learners. She stated that Nova Net meets State and National standards that assist the students in meeting their individualized needs in a standards based environment. She noted that Nova Net has been instrumental in helping the Evening Academy stay true to its mission in helping students stay in school and stay on track for graduation. She stated that students often come to the Evening Academy because they are having serious academic, social and/or personal crises or issues that warrant this kind of support. She noted that the Evening Academy mission is simple by providing an opportunity for such students to stay in school and on track to graduate. She stated if the Evening Academy can accomplish this they have succeeded.

Kay Murphy indicated that when the Evening Academy first started they primarily had seniors with the expectation and hoped to go on to graduation. She noted that the Evening Academy now has seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen attending classes. She stated that 94% of the first semester students passed the course and 98% of the second semester students passed the course. She indicated that the Evening Academy is offered for the first and second semester. She stated that fewer students enroll in first semester classes compared to second semester. She noted that the Evening Academy has doubled in its enrollment from its start in 2007.

Principal Johnson stated that Merrimack High School is one of two Class L schools with a drop out rate of less than 1%.

Board Member Swonger asked how many students start Evening Academy and drop out.

Kay Murphy responded last year one student from each semester.

Board Member Swonger asked if there was a sense of whether or how many prospective students are prevented from participating because of the tuition.

Kay Murphy stated that no student is turned away because each student should have a chance to graduate. She indicated if a student or parent approaches her because they cannot afford the class, she will always ask for some type of contribution for ownership to the program.

Board Member Barnes asked for the average grade level of the participating students.

Kay Murphy responded that it was primarily seniors that participated in the Evening Academy.

Board Member Barnes asked if the program had any juniors falling behind.

Kay Murphy state that the program has juniors (not as many as the seniors), a couple of sophomores and one freshmen.

9. Consideration: Offering a Course of Study in Chinese Culture/Language

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Merrimack High School Principal Ken Johnson.

Principal Johnson explained about five years ago he approached Superintendent Chiafery with an idea about a cultural and educational exchange program with China. He indicated that over time, the exchange program would afford opportunities to the Merrimack High School students and teachers as well as the Merrimack School District. He noted that the success of the exchange program with the Bin Hai Foreign Language School in Tanggu, China is well known and well documented through video, pod casts, photographs, artifacts, and personal testimony of students, teachers and administrators. He stated that over the past four years, the Merrimack cultural and educational exchange program has succeeded where others have failed, leaving no rival in New Hampshire. He indicated that this is a model program that is relevant, has practical application, and is forward thinking.

Principal Johnson stated that in today's world our connection to the people of China is like no other. He noted that ABC News is broadcasting from China every evening this week at 6:30 p.m.

Principal Johnson stated that he would like to keep the cultural and educational exchange program moving forward. He noted that he has evidence that the momentum and support for the program is there and continues to grow. He indicated that the program inspired the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce to arrange a trip to China last month to explore business opportunities. He noted that 95 citizens made the trip to China. He stated that many, if not all, of those citizens were from Merrimack. He indicated that the experience was so successful that the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce is planning on sending more citizens to visit China next year. He noted that the gift of the terracotta warrior from the Chamber of Commerce is displayed proudly inside a glass case in the Merrimack High School foyer. He indicated that the warrior is testimony and symbolic of the partnership that the Merrimack High School has with the Merrimack Business Community.

Principal Johnson noted that the New Hampshire Department of Education supports the China initiative. He stated that over the past three months he has been working with a representative from the New Hampshire Department of Education regarding Merrimack's China initiative. He noted that he has contacted the head of the Confucius Institute, which is in the early stages of development, at the University of New Hampshire seeking assistance in helping bring a Mandarin teacher to Merrimack High School at a minimal cost to the Merrimack School District.

Principal Johnson stated that the number of Merrimack High School students that desire to travel to China continues to grow. He noted that most recently, parents that see the relevance and potential of this program came before the Merrimack School Board with a Petition requesting that Mandarin be offered at the Merrimack High School. He indicated that this act was not prompted by him. He noted that the China Exchange Program is a model program that lacks a course of study in Chinese culture and language. He stated that a study of Chinese culture would provide understanding and context. He noted that a study in the language of Mandarin would only enhance the practical application inherent in the program. He stressed the fact that Merrimack High School needs both Chinese culture and language so the students will be able to understand the Chinese people and communicate with them in their language as they have learned, at a very young age, to communicate in our language.

Principal Johnson indicated that only twelve New Hampshire High Schools offer a course of study in Mandarin. He noted that Merrimack High School students would have an opportunity to study both strategic defense languages, Arabic and Mandarin. He stated that the Merrimack School District could build a forward thinking program around this. He noted that the Merrimack students would have a competitive advantage as they apply to colleges or universities. He also noted that this would provide the Merrimack students with countless career opportunities.

Principal Johnson asked that the Merrimack School Board consider a course of new study in Chinese culture and language along with a teacher to make it all happen.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the Administration has had conversations with Principal Johnson and his team about moving forward with a pilot program. She indicated that she would like to start with a part-time instructor at the Merrimack High School. She noted that she would like to engage this instructor with the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce, hoping that the community would feel as though they had some insight into the school system. She indicated that the instructor could teach the Merrimack High School students a portion of the day and then, perhaps, during the early evening help the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce group prepare for their visit to Beijing next year.

Superintendent Chiafery indicated that this program would not be part of the operating budget. She stated that she would like to have a meeting with the Trustees of the Trust Funds to discuss this program. She asked the School Board to weigh in on how they felt about the program.

Board Member Ortega asked what the process was when the Merrimack School District brings in a professional to teach.

Principal Johnson indicated that there is more to it than just putting a teacher in place. He noted that Assistant Principal Smith has been in charge of investigating the other twelve schools in New Hampshire that are offering Mandarin. He stated that Assistant Principal Smith is analyzing the curriculum and seeing what would be appropriate for Merrimack High School.

Board Member Ortega asked if Principal Johnson has heard that the Chinese language is extremely difficult to learn. He asked if the success rate of learning Chinese has been lower than learning other traditional languages.

Principal Johnson indicated that he spoke with other Principals, Assistant Superintendents and Superintendents about the China program. He stated that Merrimack High School generated student interest in the program by allowing the student to travel overseas and stay with families in China. He indicated that he would like to have a hosting situation for the Chinese students and teachers involved in the exchange program. He stated that some of the schools lead with the Chinese language and had no plan for practical application or real experience. He indicated that allowing the students to travel has created a greater interest and commitment in learning the Chinese language. He noted that the Confucius Institute offered a four week course in Mandarin and several of the Merrimack High School students involved in the China program attended that course at the University of New Hampshire. He stated that Merrimack High School took a different approach to getting the program off the ground and that seems to make sense to the students.

Board Member Barnes asked if the Chinese culture and language was one or two courses.

Principal Johnson stated that the program would be a combination of both the culture and the language. He noted that when the students went to China, the Chinese attempt to teach us the culture first and then the evolution of their language.

Board Member Barnes asked if there are any education grants available.

Principal Johnson stated that when he explored the US/China grants there were so many strings attached to those dollars and mountains of paperwork to be filled out without any guarantee of receiving the grant. He noted that the China program has been successful because it was built on relationships without the assistance of the governments.

Board Member Barnes asked if the money would be Federal or State based.

Principal Johnson stated that the money comes from Federal grants.

Board Member Barnes asked if Principal Johnson had a number of students that have committed to taking the coursework.

Principal Johnson stated that the coursework has not been offered yet. He indicated that the Administration wanted to confirm the School Board's interest before he made a promise to the students on something that he could not deliver. He indicated that there is student interest at the high school level as well as other school levels.

Board Member Swonger asked what the long-term vision is for this program. He asked if it was a long term goal to replace one of the major languages such as French or Spanish. He asked if Mandarin would be a third language offered to students starting in grade 5 and ending in grade 12.

Principal Johnson stated that in the short term Mandarin would be offered alongside French and Spanish at the high school.

Board Member Swonger asked if Merrimack High School had a cultural component with Arabic.

Principal Johnson stated that that there is a cultural component in the Arabic program. He indicated that what is relevant to the students is not having to master the language, but having a sense of the culture. He noted that there are career opportunities for students who have studied either one or both Arabic or Mandarin.

Board Member Swonger asked if the School Board could have an update on Assistant Principal Smith's findings of how the other twelve schools in New Hampshire run their language program. He asked what the pros and cons would be, how many offer language, and how many offer language and culture. He asked if the Board could be informed of the night-time adult education possibilities with a certified educator working with the Merrimack Chamber of Commerce.

Principal Johnson indicated that he would like to participate in the night-time adult education class.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that she would support the pursuit of the Chinese program. She asked if Principal Johnson could find out what would be needed to get the Chinese language taught at Merrimack High School. She asked if the program was looking for enrollment next year.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the program would be introduced next year.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Student Representative Jacqueline McLavey if she had any thoughts about how this type of program would be received at the high school.

Student Representative McLavey stated that she liked the idea of learning Mandarin and how it would be tied into the cultural aspect of the language. She stated that Mandarin would be a unique option like Arabic. She indicated that when students think of the Spanish or French option, they think more about speaking the language and not so much about the culture. She noted that the program is an awesome idea because of the relationship with China. She stated learning Mandarin would get the students more interested in the program with China. She asked if it would be possible for one of the Bin Hai teachers to come over for a few weeks to our school and help out with the class after the program was up and running.

Principal Johnson stated that he was thinking the same thing. He noted that the Chinese teachers would be excited to come here and offer assistance in an existing class.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she greatly supports this initiative and the exchange program. She indicated that there are success stories with students that learned Arabic. She mentioned that a former Merrimack High School student stopped Superintendent Chiafery in the market and explained that they are basically employed as a result of the Arabic study they did at the Merrimack High School. She noted that many students who got the opportunity to travel in the China program stated that it would have been very helpful if they were able to study the language. She indicated that it would be a reasonable thing to go to the Trustees of the Trust for the pilot funding of this program. She noted that adding this program to the operating budget was not the thing to do at this time.

The Board was in agreement in supporting Administration's request to move forward with their efforts. Superintendent Chiafery stated that Principal Johnson and the Administration would like to go forward and pursue different ways of funding.

10. Establish School Board Budget Hearing Dates

Superintendent Chiafery indicated that the following dates would be good for budget reviews:

- Monday, December 6, 2010 – delivery of budget at the School Board meeting;
- Thursday, December 9, 2010 – meeting at the James Masticola Elementary School in the All Purpose Room to discuss budgets for food services, special services, James Masticola Upper Elementary School, Merrimack Middle School and Maintenance; and
- Tuesday, December 14, 2010 - meeting at the James Masticola Elementary School in the All Purpose Room to discuss budgets for the Library, Masticola Elementary School, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, Merrimack High School and Central Office.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that any particular inquires to the budget could be discussed at the School Board Meeting on December 20, 2010. She indicated that the budget needs to be approved on Monday, January 3, 2011.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that Board Member Swonger would not be able to attend the meeting on Tuesday, December 14, 2010. She indicated that any questions Board Member Swonger had would be addressed at that meeting.

Superintendent Chiafery clarified that the warrant articles would be discussed on Monday, December 20, 2010 and follow-up questions could be discussed on January 3, 2011.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that Board Member Swonger would present his questions prior to the December 14th meeting.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Superintendent Chiafery to provide the Chairman of the Budget Committee Andy Schneider with the School Board Budget Hearing dates and the Chairman of the School Planning and Building Committee Rich Hendricks with the dates the School Board would be discussing the warrant articles.

11. Review Deliberative Session Dates

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the deliberative sessions need to take place between March 5, 2011 and March 12, 2011. She noted that the deliberative sessions would take place on the following dates:

- School District - Monday, March 7, 2011 with an alternate date of March 8, 2011
- Town of Merrimack - Wednesday, March 9, 2011 with an alternate date of March 10, 2011

Superintendent Chiafery indicated that the deliberative session would take the place of the normal School Board meeting on Monday, March 7, 2011.

12. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

There were no comments.

13. New Business

There was no new business.

14. Committee Reports

Board Member Ortega stated that he attended the Budget Committee meeting on November 9th. He indicated that Business Administrator Shevenell discussed the 2009 – 2010 Merrimack School District yearend results along with the surplus to reduce taxes.

Board Member Swonger stated that he attended the Merrimack Conservation Commission meeting on November 15th to discuss the Grater Woods parcels owned by the School District and the Town. He indicated that the parcels abut each other and the Commission would be looking at the parcels as one unit for conservation management purposes. He noted that the Commission also discussed the recent history, longer history, and current state of policies and procedures, and the direction of the stewardship plan.

Board Member Barnes stated that she attended the Program Evaluation Review Committee (PERC) on November 7th with Chairman Vaillancourt to discuss consistent standards for subject matter with Arts and Science. She noted that the Committee reviewed the jewelry course proposal.

Board Member Barnes stated that on November 7th she attended the New Hampshire School Board Association Legislative Update Meeting in Concord, NH. She indicated that everything from healthcare to retirement funding was discussed to lay the groundwork for the upcoming January, 2011 Legislative meetings. She noted that 1/3 of the attendees were District Representatives for the State Convention and 2/3 of the attendees were from School Districts trying to get an understanding of what was going on. She indicated that there were many questions regarding donor towns vs. receivership towns.

15. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

16. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:31 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to enter a non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II (a)(b)(c).

The motion passed 5-0-0 by a roll call vote.

At 10:20 p.m. Board Member Swonger moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.