

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
March 16, 2015
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

PRESENT: Chairman Ortega, Vice Chair Barnes, Board Members Guagliumi and Schneider, Student Representative Crowley, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, Business Administrator Shevenell.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Ortega called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
Chairman Ortega led the Pledge of Allegiance.
Chairman Ortega excused Board Member Powell due to business travel.

2. Approval of February 16, 2015 Minutes

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to approve the minutes of the February 16, 2015 meeting.

Board member Guagliumi requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 4 line 177 rephrase to say Educators and students were asked by Board Member Guagliumi to share their first coding project.

The motion passed 3-0-1 with Chairman Ortega abstaining.

3. Public Participation

Natasha Bairamova of 26 Crosswoods Path Boulevard suggested that the School Board consider adding 20 minutes to each school day and eliminate the April and February vacation weeks for one vacation week in March.

Chairman Ortega stated that Ms. Bairamova's questions and concerns regarding the 2015-2016 school calendar would be discussed later in the meeting.

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

Business Administrator Shevenell presented a gift from Target – Take Charge for Education in the amount of \$100.71 for Merrimack Middle School to be used for classroom supplies.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Barnes) to accept the gift with sincere thanks.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

5. Consent Agenda

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the following teacher retirements.

- Marcia Parzick, Speech Language Pathologist at Masticola Elementary School
- Susan Ruggeri, Special Educator at Merrimack High School
- Jon Van De Car, Technology Educator at Merrimack High School

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to accept the consent agenda as presented.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

6. Second Review of Proposed School Calendar for 2015-2016

Chairman Ortega explained the proposed 2015-2016 school calendar was posted on the district's website for parents to view. He noted the tentative first day of school is September 8th due to Labor Day being September 7th. The proposed last day of school is June 17th which is one day later than the 2014-2015 school year before the make-up days as a result of snow days. He reported the Board received feedback from 78 of approximately 1,500 families.

- Twenty families supported the calendar as proposed.
- Forty-one families would prefer to have school start before Labor Day.

Chairman Ortega explained the current teacher contract specifies that teachers will not report to work sooner than the Monday before Labor Day. Therefore, if the first day of school was to occur before Labor Day, teacher workshop days would need to occur throughout the school year.

- Twenty-eight families thought if the first day of school occurred before Labor Day the last day of school would be earlier in June. (Chairman Ortega stated that would be the case without a change in contracts.)
- Eleven families cited concerns over summer camps that finish in August and leave a long gap before the start of school.
- Twenty-five families mentioned consolidating the February and April vacation weeks into one week.
- Two families said they like the February and April vacations.
- Nineteen families suggested counting the number of teachable hours rather than school days.
- A small number of families suggested conducting school on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.
- A small number of families suggested no school on Presidents' Day, not to observe Columbus Day, not to observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day, not to observe Christmas eve, and shorten the Christmas break. Seven families suggested "blizzard bags", which is work prepared online by teachers for students to complete when school is cancelled.

Chairman Ortega addressed Ms. Bairamova's question regarding trends with the calendar by stating that the statistics are similar to past years with the exception that Labor Day is late. In the past, the parents who responded preferred the first day of school being the day after Labor Day which would allow for teacher workshops to occur before the opening of school.

Superintendent Chiafery reported all districts in the South Central region, with the exception of the Manchester School District have adopted 2015-2016 school calendars. She reported all schools begin between August 26 and September 2. Merrimack's Teacher Collective Bargaining Agreement puts a restriction on the start date. All districts use school days, not instructional hours to measure time. The districts in the South Central region are Nashua, Hudson, Salem, Bedford, Goffstown, Hooksett, Candia, Auburn, Timberlane, Windham, Pelham, Chester, Litchfield, Londonderry, Derry, and Manchester.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that a plan has to be approved by the Department of Education to use blizzard bags and it is renewed on an annual basis. There are nine districts including Charter Schools currently using blizzard bags.

Chairman Ortega suggested that flexibility for the beginning of school be kept in mind when the next contract is negotiated.

Chairman Ortega asked Superintendent Chiafery to draft another proposed calendar that would spread teacher workshop days throughout the school year to allow for an earlier first day of school.

Board Member Guagliumi asked about constraints regarding bussing agreements or vocational instruction.

Chairman Ortega said that the district is required to observe Veterans' Day and Memorial Day. He explained that students attending vocational programs in Nashua and Hudson would miss two weeks of instruction if Merrimack changed the vacation schedule and those districts did not.

Business Administrator Shevenell said bus the contract is for 180 school days.

Vice Chair Barnes suggested that the Presidential Primary and April election days be considered as possible teacher workshop days.

Chairman Ortega summed up by asking the Superintendent to consider the start of school before Labor Day with teacher workshop days spread out during the school year and to consider the Presidential Primary and April election days as possible teacher workshop days.

Vice Chair Barnes asked that Columbus Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day not be considered as teacher workshop days.

Chairman Ortega agreed that Columbus Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day should not be teacher workshop days. He stated that some parents asked why the district does not observe Presidents' Day. He explained that one holiday is not valued more than another. Historically, Presidents' Day is too close to the February vacation week.

Board Member Guagliumi said Columbus Day is important to parents.

Chairman Ortega added students participate in sports tournaments which are held on Columbus Day.

Board Member Guagliumi is grateful for the parent feedback and expects that it will increase in the future.

Vice Chair Barnes suggested using Survey Monkey to ask parents specific questions. The use of blizzard bags could be a survey question to determine if parents would commit to having students do the assigned work since 80% of students would need to complete the blizzard bag work in order for it to count as a makeup day.

Board Member Schneider stated that the Board needed to look at what to do next year. He felt it was not appropriate to debate the holidays but rather the teacher workshop day schedule. He felt it would be unfortunate to lose the August Academy but noted that teacher workshop days had occurred on election days in the past.

Board Member Schneider noted that a change from 180 days to teachable hours would not be simple. He stated it would be difficult to calculate instructional hours between the various grade levels due to schedules, study halls, etc. He requested that the board seriously look at what makes sense for the future. Teachable hours would need to be negotiated in the teachers' contract.

Vice Chair Barnes noted that the Merrimack Teachers Association and School Board will begin negotiations for the next Agreement in October.

Board Member Schneider suggested the topic of changes to the calendar start during the summer.

Board Member Guagliumi asked for clarification on the number of snow days and delayed openings there have been this year.

Chairman Ortega replied there have been four snow days and five delayed openings in school year 2014-2015.

Board Member Guagliumi pointed out that if we counted teachable hours the four snow days and the five delayed openings would need to be made up.

Chairman Ortega said five delays of two hours means students would have lost ten additional hours above the four snow days.

Board Member Schneider stated when you choose to have teachable hours you can build in days or just add hours.

Chairman Ortega thanked the 80 families that provided him with feedback on the proposed calendar. He stated there needs to be a more systematic way to gather feedback and the board should plan ahead and look at the options.

Chairman Ortega felt blizzard bags are busy work rather than quality instruction time.

Vice Chair Barnes noted that students will not be engaged in learning on hot days in late June.

Board Member Schneider suggested the school year be restricted so it does not end so far into June. He felt blizzard bags were hit or miss.

Chairman Ortega said it has more to do with the last day of school; it is still hot in August and September.

Superintendent Chiafery clarified that teachers, per contract, cannot begin the 2015-2106 school year any earlier than August 31, 2015.

Superintendent Chiafery offered to revise the 2015-2016 school calendar with September 2, 2015 as the first day of school for students.

Board Member Schneider questioned when other districts were beginning school.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she would have to review the calendars from the other districts before she could answer Board Member Schneider's question.

Chairman Ortega noted that the Superintendent would provide the Board with a revised 2015-2016 school calendar to either modify or approve at its meeting on April 6, 2015.

7. Scheduling the 2015 Graduation Date

Superintendent Chiafery announced that the graduation date is June 13, 2015 at 10:00 a.m.

8. Review the Status of the 2014-2015 School Calendar

Superintendent Chiafery reported to date there have been four snow days (two in January and two in February) and the scheduled makeup days are June 17, 18, 19 and 22.

Superintendent Chiafery asked the Board for approval to petition Commissioner Barry for a one day waiver for the January 27, 2015 snow day which was a blizzard and a declared state of emergency by the Governor.

Chairman Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to authorize Superintendent Chiafery to request a waiver from Commissioner Barry for the January 27th, 2015 snow day.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

9. Other

a) Correspondence

Chairman Ortega reported that he received many emails regarding the 2015-2016 school calendar.

b) Comments

There were no comments.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Committee Reports

Student Representative Crowley reported that a dodgeball tournament would be hosted by the National Honor Society on March 17th at 6:00 p.m. at the high school gymnasium. She noted that admission is \$3.00.

Board Member Schneider reported that Merrimack Safeguard met Thursday, March 5th. He stated that different groups such as educators and law enforcement personnel would be interviewed to gain their perspectives.

Vice Chair Barnes reported that the Parks and Recreation Committee met. The Easter egg hunt will be held on April 18th at 10:00 a.m. at Wasserman Park.

Vice Chair Barnes also reported that the Board of Directors of the New Hampshire School Boards Association met on March 11th. She was able to meet with members of Jeanne Shaheen's office, Senator Kelly Ayotte's office, Congresswoman Annie Kuster's office and Congressman

Frank Guinta's office. They sent their specialists in education to talk about the Association's goals, platform and Federal Government impacts. The topics discussed were:

- Civil Rights Data Collection
- Finding the Stability of Funding Mechanisms (grants)
- Title I Funding
- Nutrition
- Demands for Information

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that Civil Rights Data Collection creates a lot of work for central office personnel. The required information is very difficult to breakdown and is a massive undertaking.

Board Member Schneider noted that he received correspondence about assessments.

12. Public Participation on Agenda Items

Hillary Maye, 60 Middlesex Road thanked the Board for the information regarding the 2015-2016 school calendar. She found the process to be very enlightening. She was surprised only 80 families gave feedback. She suggested that in the future the calendar could be sent home with students rather than made available online.

Natasha Bairamova, 26 Crosswoods Path Boulevard thanked the Board and said the meeting was very informative. She asked the Board to review school calendars of other districts to see if any of them might work for Merrimack. She was surprised only 80 of 1,500 families responded. She felt Survey Monkey might be a good tool to use in the future and suggested that the Board provide reasons why certain holidays have to be taken.

13. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to enter nonpublic session.

The motion passed 4-0-0 on a roll call vote. Board Member Guagliumi voted in favor, Board Member Schneider voted in favor, Vice Chair Barnes voted in favor, and Chairman Ortega voted in favor.

At 9:01 p.m. the meeting adjourned.