

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
March 4, 2013**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Ortega, Vice Chairman Powell, Board Members Barnes and Schneider, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, Business Administrator Shevenell and Student Representative Crowley. Board Member Markwell was excused from the meeting.

1. Call To Order

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

Chairman Ortega led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of February 18th Minutes (Bond Hearing Minutes and School Board Meeting Minutes)

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes of the February 18, 2013 Special Meeting.

The motion passed 3-0-1 with Vice Chairman Powell in abstention.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Powell) to accept the minutes of the February 18, 2013 Board minutes.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 2 of 11, section 5, paragraph 3, change “expressed” to “stated”.
- Page 3 of 11, paragraph 6, sentence should read “Nancy Rose stated that efforts are being made to create a curriculum of skills that will address digital citizenship and ethical and responsible use of technology.”
- Page 5 of 11, paragraph 5, second sentence should read, “.....it was with apprehension that she made the motion to reduce the budget by \$1,024,000.” Delete the rest of the sentence and add another sentence that reads, “It was to preserve educational related funding in light of the majority of the board’s directive to Administration to deliver a level-funded budget.”
- Pages 7 of 11, last paragraph, second sentence should read “She stated the consequences of changing the vacation schedule would result in a loss of fifteen days for the students who attend vocational programs in Hudson and Nashua.
- Page 9 of 11, paragraph 4 after the bullets, add as a last sentence, “All the New England states take these tests in the spring of the school year.

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 11, paragraphs 5 and 12, should be “legal counsel” for both.
- Page 7 of 11, paragraph 3 after the bullets, should be “Columbus Day has been....”
- Page 8 of 11, paragraph 2, first sentence, change the word “implemented” to “implement”.
- Page 9 of 11, first sentence after the bullets, change the word “probably” to “probability”.

- Page 10 of 11, section 13, paragraph 4, last sentence should read, "...it is his intent to discuss with the Town Center Committee the easement proposal and a school board representative as an agenda item in the near future."

The motion passed as amended 4-0-0.

3. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

4. Confer with School District Moderator Lynn Christensen, in Preparation for Deliberative Session

Chairman Ortega explained that in advance of the Deliberative Session, the board meets with the School District Moderator, Lynn Christensen, to make sure the board knows what is going to happen and that the board is coordinated in terms of the effort.

Ms. Christensen stated that she was aware that in Article 6 there is a different number for the 2013-2014 school year than is listed in the Article.

Chairman Ortega stated that there will be an amendment to change that number to reduce it by \$134,647, therefore making the number \$633,753.

Ms. Christensen stated that there does not need to be an amendment. She added the School Board could move Article 6 as printed, with the exception of the number (\$768,400) becoming the number (\$633,753). The board would be dealing with a single motion and not have to worry about an amendment.

Chairman Ortega stated that the School Board might be concerned because the Board's vote on Article 6 was based on the earlier number as opposed to the amended number. He added that it would then have to be acted upon again. He asked if Article 6 could be read as written followed by the amendment.

Ms. Christensen stated that it could be done either way but it is cleaner to proceed without an amendment.

Chairman Ortega asked that if it could be done either way, it might be clean to just read and explain the amendment and then vote.

Ms. Christensen stated that would be the more confusing way to do it. Anyone who would want to speak to Article 6 would have to speak to the amendment. Therefore another level would be introduced by adding the amendment.

Chairman Ortega stated that because he had concerns, he spoke with the School District attorney who recommended Article 6 be read followed by the amendment.

Ms. Christensen stated that the process of not adding an amendment has been approved by the court system. She stated that the board has to decide how they want to handle it and then, either way, she would take care of it.

Board Member Schneider explained he had a concern about the Budget Committee being able to take a re-vote after the deliberative session. He added that the Budget Committee voted 0-1-10 in anticipation that some amendment was going to be made to change Article 6.

Ms. Christensen explained that traditionally, after the deliberative session, the various boards and committees take a vote on how the articles will be put on the ballot.

Chairman Ortega stated that in light of this information, he would like to go back to the School District attorney and discuss the information presented by Ms. Christensen.

Ms. Christensen stated that the School District attorney call her as well.

Chairman Ortega agreed that he would let the attorney know to call her.

Ms. Christensen asked if there were any issues in dealing with Article 8.

Chairman Ortega stated that there were no issues with Article 8 as it was written. He noted that the votes associated with Article 8 represent both the School Board (5-0-0) and the Budget Committee (10-1-0) votes on Article 8 as written.

Ms. Christensen presented a list containing the number of voters who voted in Merrimack at various elections since 1996. She noted that the numbers are pretty consistent unless there was something extraordinary on the ballot. She added that in 2005 and 2006 there was a spike in numbers because of the zoning changes due to the Premium Outlet Mall.

Ms. Christensen continued, stating that in a couple of the other years, there was a spike because of who was running for election. The November 2010 general election, which is generally a low turnout because of it being a non-Presidential race, there was a significant number of republican sweeps that made the numbers erratic. It was the same in 2002 with some significant open seats. She added that the November 2011 General election had 3,140 voters and the 2012 November General election had 15,003 voters.

Chairman Ortega asked if Ms. Christensen thought the number of voters would be consistent for the April 2013 elections.

Ms. Christensen responded that she felt it would be a very low turnout. She added that for now the consolidated central office and special services Warrant is the only item on the ballot. The Board has one contested race and the Town does not have any. She also noted that the consolidated special services and central offices building had drawn attention and interest before. It probably would not make the turnout at the polls any greater.

Board Member Schneider asked if Article 2 (the consolidated special education and central office building) would have a multi-media presentation from Rich Hendricks at the deliberative session.

Chairman Ortega stated that there would be a presentation similar to the one made at the bond hearing.

5. Consent Agenda

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the following item for approval:

- Teacher Nomination:
 - Rachel Schneider, Special Education Teacher at Reeds Ferry Elementary School

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

The motion passed 4-0-0.

6. Second Review of Proposed School Calendar for 2013-2014

Chairman Ortega stated that at the last meeting the Administration presented the proposed school calendar for next year. He added that the Superintendent had collected data that would answer some of the Board's concerns.

Superintendent Chiafery referred to the question by Vice Chairman Powell that asked about the proposed calendar relative to the Hudson and Nashua school calendars. He was also interested, as was Board Member Barnes, in the number of students in the Vocational Education (VocEd) programs. She stated that there are currently 35 students (which is the average) attending either Alvirne High School in Hudson or Nashua High School North and Nashua High School South.

Superintendent Chiafery did an investigation regarding the Hudson and Nashua school calendars, which have already adopted for next year. The similarities and differences were:

- Columbus Day is observed in both Hudson and Nashua.
- Holiday recess is similar for Hudson, Nashua and Merrimack (December 24 through January 1).
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day is an exact match.
- Winter Recess (February 24 through February 28) is an exact match.
- Spring Recess (April 28 through May 2) is an exact match.
- First day of school for Merrimack and Hudson is the same. Nashua starts before Labor Day.
- Thanksgiving Recess is different. Hudson matches the proposed Merrimack recess (3 days). Nashua is 2 days.
- Nashua is taking Presidents' Day off. Hudson and Merrimack are not.

Superintendent Chiafery looked at specific days that were raised by members of the Board.

At the last School Board meeting, Vice Chairman Powell and Board Member Barnes asked about attendance on Columbus Day. Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the last twelve years:

- Nine of the last twelve years Columbus Day has been a day off.
- Two of the last twelve years were half of a school day and half of an early release day.
- One of the last twelve years (2003) Merrimack had school on Columbus Day.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that because the computer system had changed in 2005 it was not possible to see the exact attendance on Columbus Day without performing a deep investigation.

At the last School Board meeting Board Member Barnes asked about attendance on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the last twelve years

- Ten of the last twelve years have been a day off on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- One of the last twelve years (2006) was a teachers' workshop on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- One of the last twelve years (2004) school was in session on Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Superintendent Chiafery stated again that because the computer system had changed in 2005 it was not possible to see the exact attendance on Martin Luther King Jr. Day without performing a deep investigation.

Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the last twelve years for the Thanksgiving Recess.

- Eleven of the twelve years have been a three-day recess
- One of the twelve years (2009) was a two-day recess

Superintendent Chiafery referred to a sheet that showed the attendance for the 2008 and the 2009 Thanksgiving Recess for each of the schools. In 2008 (the three-day recess) the numbers were pretty consistent. In 2009 (the two-day recess) the number of absences for the Wednesday before Thanksgiving doubled compared to the other days.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that at the last School Board meeting Board Member Schneider said he was interested in the number of instructional hours as compared to the 180 school days on the calendar. He had also stated that some changes probably would not be for next year (2013-2014) but he would be interested in looking at an outlying year. She stated that she is in pursuit of this information.

Chairman Ortega stated that the Board had asked for input from the public regarding the school calendar. Twenty-seven (27) emails were received with people weighing in on the calendar. He added that he is inclined to ask for more input and in doing so he drafted the following memo:

The School Board has been in receipt of the school calendar for 2013-2014 from the Administration. School Board members are interested in seeking parents' opinions about it. You can view the proposed calendar on the district's website at www.merrimack.k12.nh.us. Please submit your comments to Chris Ortega, School Board Chair by March 14, 2013. Thank you for sharing your thoughts. The Board will approve the 2013-2014 calendar either at its meeting on March 18, 2013 or April 1, 2013.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that in looking at the twenty-seven responses, the flavor of the responses are speaking very heavily to the elimination of having two separate vacations in February and April and combining them into one. He also felt that Chairman Ortega's statement has to recognize that even if everyone wanted to combine the vacations, it is not going to happen this coming school year. So he felt that there should be a disclaimer or get the word out that any expected changes would not be for 2013-2014.

Board Member Barnes stated that people need to understand the impact of some of their suggestions, such as "What does it mean if we have school on Columbus Day", or "What does it mean if we combine two vacation weeks into one?" She added that if the vacations were combined, the students in the vocational education program would lose fifteen days of productive instruction. She stated that she does not want the Board to look indifferent to the feedback because they are looking at what is best for the total student body.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that the Board needs to solicit general feedback. He suggested a survey of the parents and suggested surveymonkey.com.

Board Member Schneider agreed that more input is needed. He stated that the Board needs to come to a decision on the calendar fairly soon. He said the Board would also note some trends that need to be looked at and see their impact on the future. Some short-term adjustments may have to be made so that there will be some closure.

Chairman Ortega stated that what was needed was to act on the proposed calendar for next year. The board has received input from twenty-seven families in a 1,500 family district (1%). More feedback is

needed. He added that the Board is not putting it out for a line item veto. He stated that he has a concern with doing a detailed survey because it is a very time intensive process to be constructed properly. He stated that the Board has a responsibility to look at the feedback, access it and make the decisions that are in the best interest of the students and the district.

Board Member Schneider asked Chairman Ortega to attach a copy of the proposed calendar with the memo he intends to send out, as well as putting it on PowerSchool for the upper grades and sending home a copy to parents of children in the lower grades. He also suggested sending a communication to parents on the final approval of the calendar and the factors that went into making the decisions regarding the proposed calendar.

7. Other

Correspondence

- Chairman Ortega repeated that there had been twenty-seven responses to the request for feedback on the school calendar.
- Chairman Ortega stated that he had received correspondence from a parent looking for the proposed graduation date for 2013. He told the parent that this item would be on the agenda for the next School Board meeting.
- Board Member Schneider reported that he received an inquiry from a parent regarding the social media issue.

Comments

- Chairman Ortega stated that there are two meetings scheduled immediately after the Deliberative Session. One is for the Budget Committee and one is for the School Board, so that re-votes can be taken.

8. New Business

There was no new business

9. Committee Reports

Student Representative Kiera Crowley reported the winner of the Mr. MHS contest was Kyle Krupp. The runner-up was Danny Powell, Vice Chairman Powell's son. The Pep Rally was a huge success and everyone had a good time.

10. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

11. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 8:20 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 4-0-0.