

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room  
April 15, 2013  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Chairman Ortega, Vice Chairman Powell, Board Members Barnes, Markwell and Schneider, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, and Business Administrator Shevenell. Student Representative Crowley 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. A moment of silence was observed for the tragic bombing at the Boston Marathon.

**2. School Board Reorganization**

Chairman Ortega explained that at the beginning of each School Board session following an election, the board reorganizes and elects a Chairman and a Vice Chairman.

Vice Chairman Powell moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to retain Christopher Ortega as Chairman of the Merrimack School Board.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that Chairman Ortega had done an excellent job and has taken the board through some tumultuous periods. He added that Chairman Ortega should continue in the position as Chairman.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Chairman Ortega thanked the board for their confidence in him.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to retain Vice Chairman Powell as the Vice Chairman of the Merrimack School Board for the upcoming year.

Board Member Barnes stated that Vice Chairman Powell has done an exemplary job as Vice Chairman with positive support for the Chairman.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

**3. Approval of April 1, 2013 Minutes and the April 8, 2013 Minutes**

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2013 and April 8, 2013 meetings.

Board Member Schneider requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 6 of 11, last paragraph above section 7, should read, “Board Member Schneider stated that the melding of the three different elementary schools into the single elementary school at JMUES, allows...”

- Page 8 of 11, paragraph 2 from the bottom should read, “Board Member Schneider stated that in industry when participating in conversations and it is known that you are an employee, it is good to include a statement that it is a personal opinion. Perhaps this can be included in the guidelines for the district.”
- Page 9 of 11, paragraph 1, sentence 1 should read, “Board Member Schneider stated that in the policy he noticed that there was no differentiation between social. ....”
- Page 9 of 11, paragraph 3, should read, “Board Member Schneider stated that sometimes the privacy you would worry about on the internet is more than on the intranet.”
- Page 11 of 11, under Comments, change “Town Council Meeting” to “Town Meeting”.

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 11, paragraph 2 from the bottom, correct the spelling of Sarah Heimberg.
- Page 6 of 11, third bullet should be “Jog and Jaguar”.
- Page 7 of 11, eighth bullet, should be “provided” instead of “provide”.
- Page 7 of 11, ninth bullet, remove the words “not an accusation”.
- Page 10 of 11, paragraph 9, change “moderation” to “the modifications”.
- Page 10 of 11, paragraph 12, sentence 2, remove the word “not” before the word “needed”.
- Page 11 of 11, under Comments, Vice Chairman Powell, not Chairman Ortega will attend the April 9<sup>th</sup> meeting with Board Members Schneider and Markwell.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

#### **4. Public Participation**

Barbara Publicover, 25 Amherst Road, the facilitator for the Special Education Parent Support Group, reminded parents about the parent involvement survey for the Special Education parents. It is due by May 10<sup>th</sup> and can be completed on the district web page. She also stated that there is a Preschool Parent Support group for Special Education.

#### **5. Commitment to Board Code of Ethics**

Chairman Ortega explained that every year after an election and reorganization, the board commits to a Code of Ethics.

The Merrimack School Board Code of Ethics was read by Chairman Ortega, Vice Chairman Powell, Board Member Markwell, Board Member Barnes and Board Member Schneider.

Each member of the board signed the Code of Ethics document and returned them to Superintendent Chiafery.

#### **6. Consent Agenda**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the following items for approval:

- Kathleen Flood, Speech/Language Teacher, James Mastricola Elementary School
- Thomas Putney, Technology Education Department Chair, Merrimack High School
- Norma Riley, Math Educator, Merrimack High School
- Paula Warren, Special Education Teacher, James Mastricola Elementary School

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

The motion carried 5-0-0.

## **7. An International Experience**

A presentation was made by French and Arabic teacher Mohamed Defaa and students Hannah Dutton, Jeff Marchesano and Chase Terranova, highlighting their 17 day trip to Morocco. The presentation was highlighted in a slide show which included the cities that were visited: Kenitra, Rabat, Cassablanca, Fez, Marrakech, Moulay Driss (The Holy City), Vullubillis (the city of ancient Roman ruins) and Sidi Slimane (Mr. Defaa's home town) Mr. Defaa explained that he applied for a grant to fund the trip, but the grant was denied. Therefore they had only a short time to put the trip together and to get local funding from businesses and families.

Mr. Defaa explained that the students stayed with host families, other than two nights in a hotel, many of whom were relatives of his. The drivers that were used to transport the group were also family members. He added that for him, it was "going home" and seeing his family. He explained that he was from Morocco and wanted to share his growing up experience with the students. He added that one of the most moving parts of the trip was when they drove onto one of streets of his home town and opened the doors of their van to share gifts they had brought from the United States and how excited, happy and appreciative the people of the city were.

Board Member Barnes stated that the presentation showed how immersed the students were in learning about Morocco. She asked the students what language was spoken during the trip.

The students responded that they had taken either French or a combination of the two and that mostly French and English were spoken. Mr. Defaa explained that the Arabic spoken in Morocco is different than the Arabic taught in the high school, which made it more difficult to speak in Arabic while there.

Board Member Barnes asked what the people in Morocco wanted to know about the students.

The students responded that they generally wanted to know about America, including the price of things such as cell phones and about religion. The students felt that the other students they met at the partner school in Marrakech were all very welcoming.

Board Member Barnes asked if they were going to make presentations to the lower grades in the district so the children could think about taking Arabic in the upper grades.

Mr. Defaa responded that a grant was submitted for an after school program to introduce the lower grade students to the program. Unfortunately the grant was declined. He added that they are not defeated and would extend the program to the eighth grade students.

Board Member Barnes added that it would be important to share the information with the younger grades so they could get acquainted with the classes available in foreign languages other than French or Spanish.

Mr. Defaa stated that the blog they put together really helped to introduce the community to the Foreign Language program, since there are some people in town who don't even know that the Arabic program exists.

Vice Chairman Powell asked if it was difficult to get the donations they brought to Morocco and if it was difficult to transport them.

The students responded that getting the donations was very last minute; they only had 25 days to get them together. In the future it is hoped there would be time to collect more donations. The donations were brought either in the extra suitcase that Mr. Defaa brought, or stuffed into their own suitcases.

Vice Chairman Powell applauded the group for bringing gifts to the people in Morocco as an act of kindness. He added that these students were wonderful ambassadors representing the town of Merrimack.

Board Member Markwell asked if there was a lot of anxiety with the planning an execution of the trip.

The students responded that there was the normal anxiety of being away from home for 17 days and going to a foreign country. They added that everyone was so hospitable, that whatever anxiety there was during the planning diminished when they got there.

Mr. Defaa stated that there was a lot of anxiety on his part, from organizing, funding and hoping it would be a positive experience for the students.

Board Member Markwell asked the student what activities they participated in during the evenings.

The students responded that there were really no activities at night. Sometimes they were located in very rural areas and there was really nothing to do. Most of the time dinner was served late so there was no time to go out even if there was somewhere to go. Most of the time they were too tired to go out.

Board Member Schneider asked what the dates of the trip were and if once the group returned and reported on their trip, if the students who did not go wished they had gone on the trip.

The students responded that the dates of the trip were from February 21 through March 12, 2013. The students and Mr. Defaa stated that there were several students who wished they could have gone on the trip. Both the students on the trip and those in his classes that did not go had assignments to complete which included reading, but the students on the trip stated that they were so busy there was no time to read.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the group had made a similar presentation to the Rotary, which was received very well. At that time she asked how the students would use their study of Arabic in the future and asked them to answer the question for the Board.

The three students responded to Superintendent Chiafery's question. Hannah stated that she hopes to join the Peace Corps after college and hopes to return to Morocco. Chase stated that she was going to Art College and may not use Arabic, but was glad she had taken it. World travel would be in her plans for the future. Jeff explained that he was going to college for Chemical Engineering but was sure he would travel to French-speaking countries in the future, which would make use of his years of studying French.

Chairman Ortega thanked the students and Mr. Defaa for their presentation and for being such excellent ambassadors from Merrimack, from New Hampshire and from the United States. He added that it was clear that the trip had many benefits to the students, their teacher and the people of Morocco.

## **8. Summary of Professional Development Activities – April 9 Workshop Day**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that any professional development that teachers receive is designed to enhance the learning experiences for students. Highlights included:

### Elementary school teachers

- Outside facilitators were used to gain traction in a new way of approaching literary instruction.
- K-6 teachers focused on transitioning to Common Core State Standards.
- Grade level teams spent the day as colleagues across all grade levels, with all grade one teachers together, all grade two teachers together, etc.
- Professional learning team (PLT) facilitators and an assigned administrator led the groups. There will be similar focus on math at a different time. Their task was to review the common core standards for literacy and to compare those standards to the current NECAP standards to see where there are parallels.
- There was a gap analysis to determine what standards are in common that are not being taught now, what resources are needed, what the training needs are and what instructional strategies are needed to be well prepared to be ready so that the students can be well supported with the Common Core Standards

### Middle School

- SCALES (Strategies for Collaboration for Learning Essential Standards) leaders worked to lead a transition on Common Core Standards that are based at the middle school.
- They are facilitating work on understanding what those Common Core Standards will be, and how and if they relate and intersect.
- They partnered with a facilitator who they had worked with before so there would be continuity.
- They have begun to develop Formative Assessments which are those that are implemented occasionally and the data from those assessments is used by teachers to come to decisions regarding what they have to do.

### High School

- The day was spent exploring the relationship between Common Core Standards and their developing competencies.
- They had the guidance of a person they had before for consistency.

There was a great opportunity to participate with the Nashua Community Health Division

- K-12 participants included guidance counselors, school psychologists, nurses and behavior specialists.
- The focus was on mental health issues
- The entire day focused on issues on mental health that was facilitated by a partnership with The Institute on Disabilities at UNH.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin concluded by stating that the focus of the day and any professional development is to help teachers help students.

Board Member Barnes asked how much different the Common Core Standard initiatives are from the NECAP standards.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin replied that New Hampshire is very lucky because the NECAP standards that have been in place for some time are not terribly different from the Common Core State

Standards that are going to become operational in Merrimack. He added that in Merrimack there has been a focus on standards being the driving force of what is done. The idea of standards is not new to people in Merrimack. The chief difference has to do with application. The Common Core State Standards for Literacy and Math are all about application. This year the focus was on gaining familiarity with the Common Core State Standards and next year the focus will be on instructional implementation of the Common Core Standards. That is the chief difference.

Board Member Barnes stated that his explanation would give parents and students comfort in knowing that there will not be a drastic difference in the standards.

Board Member Schneider asked that, since the school calendar for next year has already been set with the dates for teacher workshops with time being spent at the beginning of the school year on the next steps of the implementation.

Superintendent McLaughlin responded that one goal of the April workshop was to establish a need. The teachers' work on April 9<sup>th</sup> will dictate how the future plans are formulated.

## **9. School Board Committee Assignments for 2013-2014**

Chairman Ortega explained that the board assignments would be the same as last year unless any board member would like to change assignments, which should be submitted to him over the next week. He would then review the requests. He added that continuity is important.

Board Member Barnes asked if a board member wanted to switch assignments with another board member, it would be done among the board members and reported to the Chair versus submitting all the assignments that needed reassigning.

Chairman Ortega responded that if two board members worked out such an agreement that would help him with the final assignments.

## **10. Other**

### **a. Correspondence**

Vice Chairman Powell stated that an email was received after the election from an individual who wanted to know how the board would move forward since the consolidation of the SAU/SPED building was defeated at the election. He forwarded the email to Rich Hendricks, Chair of the Planning and Building Committee.

### **b. Comments**

Chairman Ortega apologized for not stating that Student Representative Crowley was excused from the meeting.

## **11. New Business**

Board Member Schneider asked if there is a plan of action between the board and the Planning and Building Committee since the consolidation of the SAU/SPED buildings did not pass at the election. He added that money was budgeting to potentially repair the special services building if the warrant article did not pass.

Chairman Ortega stated that this would be a future agenda item. He added that money is in the budget for repairs to the special services building should the warrant article not pass. This money was designated to be used to replace the foundation and drainage to make the building useable.

Board Member Schneider stated that the public needs to be made aware of the long and short term contingency plans.

Board Member Markwell asked about the roof repairs to the high school.

Chairman Ortega stated that this project will be put on as a future agenda item for the board since the money was already budgeted for.

Board Member Barnes stated that, for clarity, the board voted in favor of the amount of the warrant article which came back from the Budget Committee so that the bottom line number was already approved.

Board Member Schneider stated that just because the bottom line was increased, it doesn't mean that it has to be expended for that purpose All the Budget Committee can do is increase the bottom line. The board can determine how it can be used.

Chairman Ortega stated that the vote had been taken was to recommend or not recommend, which is different than saying the board approved the additional funds

## **12. Committee Reports**

Board Member Barnes attended the Merrimack Safeguard Meeting on April 4, 2013. They discussed the website updates and the Police Department Drug Take Back Program. This program is going to be a year-round program, not just one or two days a year. There will be a camera installed at the police station to monitor who, when and what was happening at the police station regarding the drug take back program. They also reviewed their Year in Review report, which is the document used in applying for grant money.

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

Tracy Bull, 5 Independence Drive, stated that she was glad to see the board's positive response to the Morocco trip. She explained that when the grant was refused, Mr. Deffa made an excellent presentation to all the parents of his students explaining the trip and the need for funding. He stated that any parent, whether their child was or was not participating, could go on the trip as a chaperone. She added that she would have loved to have gone, but her son was not able to go due to other school commitments. She felt that the students were well supervised and well taken care of.

## **14. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:02 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.