

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
November 18, 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.

2. Approval of the November 4, 2013 Minutes

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes of the November 4, 2013 meeting.

Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 7, paragraph 3, second sentence, change “hence” to “enhance”.
- Page 6 of 7, last four paragraphs should be moved to page 5 of 7, at the bottom of section 8, **2012-2013 Budget Year-End Review.**

The motion to accept the minutes of the November 4, 2013 meeting as amended passed 5-0-0.

3. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

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

Business Administrator Shevenell presented a gift from the Town of Merrimack to James Masticola Elementary School for \$963.00 for Lego League registration and field kits for students.

Vice Chairman Powell moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to accept the gift from the Town of Merrimack in the amount of \$963.00.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Consent Agenda

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the following items for approval:

- a) Teacher Nominations
 - Kimberly Frye, Grade 4 teacher at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- b) Approval of Souhegan Trail Easement

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

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. Presentation of the Safe Routes to School Travel Plan for James Mastricola Elementary School and James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Tracy Bull, Merrimack Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Travel Plan chair, introduced the members of the committee in attendance as well as acknowledging the members of the Committee who were not present.

Matt Waitkins of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission gave a PowerPoint presentation focusing on what the Safe Routes to School Travel Plan is, why it is important, the local process, the accumulated data, key issues, recommendations and the next steps to be taken. Highlights included:

- The Safe Routes to School Travel Plan encourages children to walk or bike to school.
- Several survey questions were answered. Through graphs the presentation showed parent/student responses to questions regarding walking, biking, bussing and driving to and from school.
- Only 3% of the students at the Mastricola complex walk and bike to school.
- Key issues include concerns about safety, traffic conditions and sidewalks.
- Infrastructure recommendations were made for Baboosic Lake Road, Bishop Street, School Street, O'Gara Drive, Hillside Terrace, Woodbury Street, Church Street, and Daniel Webster Highway.
- Parents who were surveyed are very supportive of the idea of Safe Routes to School.

Ms. Bull reported that in the last few weeks the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) made a decision to go ahead and grant all the applications up to round six of the application process, therefore exhausting all the funds intended for round 7. That means the program is going to evolve under a new umbrella, the Transportation Alternative Program (TAP). It is not known how this is going to look and will probably not be known until after the first of January. It is important to know that everything that has been done in Merrimack would provide projects that would probably qualify under the new TAP program. It will just have a different reimbursement structure than before.

Board Member Markwell asked if there were discussions related to fixing the infrastructures. His concerns were that there would be empty busses running and using gas and the highways if the students bike or walk to school. Funding those empty busses would be funded by taxpayer money.

Ms. Bull stated that SRTS is not designed to eliminate bussing. It is designed to create opportunities for students to bike and walk to school. The number of students on the buses will fluctuate with inclement weather and student activities. She does not envision this being a problem.

Ms. Bull recommended that the committee continue and be a free-standing committee to the school district, not the Town Center Committee, so issues can be addressed from an educational standpoint. She also suggested that certain town officers be kept involved on the committee.

Board Member Markwell stated that he sees the biggest problem being the parents driving the children to and from school, not the biking and the walking. He added that he would like to see something done that encourages parents not to drive their children to and from school.

Board Member Barnes stated that some students have before school activities and have to be driven to school because their bus schedules do not meet their needs. She added that the staff at JMUES does a good job controlling the traffic, so it is not a problem. She added that the Safe Routes to School program will benefit the before school, during school, after school, nights, weekends and holidays programs and will serve beneficial for the entire community, not just the students.

Board Member Schneider stated that it is important to have the busses available for inclement weather even for those children who choose to walk or bike on a regular basis. They are also needed for students who cannot bike or walk to school because they may be carrying instruments or school projects. He added that there are inherent benefits for the schools and activities around the complex with the SRTS program.

Chairman Ortega thanked everyone on the committee for their time and effort. The document lays out a great road map for how we get there and what we have to do and it will be a useful tool. He thanked Ms. Bull on behalf of the board for being the school board liaison to the TCC and the chair of SRTS subcommittee.

Ms. Bull added that the final draft document will be found on line, hosted by the NRPC. She will distribute the link to that site.

Board Member Schneider asked if the incident with a crossing guard being struck by a vehicle a few weeks ago resulted in changes made to the bus route because of the SRTS.

Principal McGill responded that after the accident the system was changed to reduce the number of vehicles on Baboosic Lake Road and not use School Street for the 8:10 a.m. drop-off.

Ms. Bull responded that one recommendation of the subcommittee is to develop some satellite drop-off points. The accident with the crossing guard occurred after the most recent steering committee meeting. Therefore the change that was made was not due to the travel plan.

7. Proposed Eagle Scout Project

James Jolly is a junior at Merrimack High School and a member of Boy Scout Troop 424. He made an excellent presentation regarding his proposal to create a runnable trail that connects Merrimack High School to the trails at Wildcat Falls for the cross country and track teams to use. The trail starts behind the lower softball field, along a ridge avoiding any wetlands, under the power lines and through a wooded area and across a small stream.

Chairman Ortega explained that the intent is to put this proposal on the Consent Agenda for the next meeting on December 2, 2013.

Board Member Schneider asked how James intended to make sure the tree roots are not running through the new trail, causing dangers to the runners. He also asked if any boulders would be removed.

James responded that the new trail would be wider than the existing path and that there would not be any issues with tree roots or boulders.

Vice Chairman Powell complemented James on his presentation. He asked James who would be responsible for the maintenance of the trail after he graduates from the high school next year.

James explained that the trail is popular enough with runners from the cross-country teams that the maintenance would not be a problem.

Chairman Ortega stated that with the easement agreement, the Town Center Committee has the responsibility to take care of this trail.

Board Member Barnes asked about fundraising for the project.

James responded that there are few costs associated with the project. Most of the work will consist of clearing the branches and brush with the help of the Boy Scouts in his troop and family and friends. The only expense would be the materials for building the bridge over the stream. He added that there are monies available from the Conservation Commission and companies such as Lowes and Reeds Ferry Lumber that support Eagle Scout projects.

Board Member Barnes stated that she hoped that Student Representative Crowley would keep the board informed about James' fundraising efforts.

8. Request to Conduct a Student Survey to Support Doctoral Research

Ms. Nicole Rheault, Language Arts Coordinator at Masticola Upper Elementary School, explained her proposal to conduct research for her Doctorate degree at JMUES. The project description is:

This study is proposed to investigate the blending of a writing workshop with Web 2.0 tools to enhance students' opportunities to engage in authentic writing experiences. The researcher seeks to determine whether or not blending online writing experiences within the writing workshop influences student self-perception and the experience of writing. The researcher will implement an exploratory case study design in one fifth-grade classroom of approximately twenty-six students and one teacher.

Board Member Schneider asked what the impact would be on the regular curriculum.

Ms. Rheault responded that the curriculum will not change at all. The project will change how students communicate with each other about their writing. She added that her plans would be made available to any teachers in the school who want to implement the plan.

Board Member Schneider asked how she plans to monitor and educate the students while providing a safe environment.

Ms. Rheault responded that she intends to have the children learn about using technology responsibly. They receive some of that instruction in computer labs, but she intends to put a greater focus on this responsibility. The use of SchoolWorld allows the students to blog in a protected environment. The classroom teacher will control access to the blog and will password-protect all students' writing.

Board Member Barnes asked why Ms. Rheault chose to work with fifth graders.

Ms. Rheault responded that she wanted to work with an educator she has never observed in her role as Language Arts Coordinator and she will not be observing that teacher in the future. She added that the NECAP writing scores results for 5th graders will aid in her research.

Board Member Barnes asked if all the students in the classroom will be participating.

Ms. Rheault responded that there will be an informed parent consent form. She will engage in a meeting with the parents explaining the research. They will be giving permission for the student to take the surveys and participate in the research.

Board Member Barnes asked about the timeline.

Ms. Rheault responded that she will begin working with the classroom teacher in December, 2013 and with the students in mid-January, 2014.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin added that Ms. Rheault understands the board's two week rule and is willing to work around it if need be.

Vice Chairman Powell asked how doing the study will affect her daily job duties.

Ms. Rheault explained that this project falls within her job description. As the Language Arts Coordinator, one of her duties is coaching teachers and looking at the best practices. This project will enhance the work she does.

Vice Chairman Powell asked what happens to a child if their parent(s) do not give permission to participate.

Ms. Rheault responded that their classroom work will not be affected. If they do not have permission to participate, they will not participate in the surveys or any of the research but they will have the same experiences. This will not change any of the work they are doing.

Chairman Ortega stated that he would like to put Ms. Rheault's proposal on the Consent Agenda for the next meeting on December 2, 2013. He commended her on pursuing her doctoral degree and the benefits it brings to the district.

9. Review of District Parent Involvement Survey

John Fabrizio, Director of Special Education Services, introduced the three parent members of the support group. They were Barbara Publicover, Trish Swonger and Michele Watson. He explained that the Parent Involvement Survey is a requirement of the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that each State measure the percent of parents of children receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.

Ms. Swonger gave a brief history of the project in Merrimack. She explained that the 2012-2013 survey is the sixth survey conducted in Merrimack. The questions have remained exactly the same for the past six years. She added that a 15% response rate is considered a statistically approved rate. Merrimack has had valid responses for the past six years and has exceeded the target given by the state. The state participation rate is 37% and Merrimack's participation rate is 54%. She added that Merrimack has been an example for other schools to follow.

Ms. Watson spoke about what the parent support group has done based on the results of the survey.

- Resources are listed on the website for parents to get links to other programs and meetings.
- In March, the group will have a program focusing on activities during the summer that are available for students with special needs.
- Last spring they had a presentation regarding what programs are available at the high school for special needs students.
- In October there was a program that showcased Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) which was very informative for parents and staff.
- In December, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin will speak about the standards-based curriculum and how it affects students with special needs.

Ms. Publicover stated that last year the parent support group wanted to put more emphasis on the pre-school and so a parent support groups was formed. There was little attendance at the meetings, but those in attendance offered much information and voiced their concerns. She noted that as a result of establishing this group, there was a difference in the pre-school survey results. She added that the group will begin sometime in January, 2014. She stated that the support group is committed to continue working with pre-school parents.

Mr. Fabrizio stated that the parent support group will focus on using e-mail for the surveys as well as using the website. Using technology has been proven to be a better way to communicate with parents.

Board Member Schneider asked if Merrimack's participation is improving at a similar rate as the State.

Mr. Fabrizio responded that the group needs to be more technology based. He added that overall performance in all areas have shown improvement. There are still areas that need improvement. When the percentages are lower than previous years, they always ask "why" and how to fix any problems that exist.

Ms. Swonger responded that she has six years of statistics comparing Merrimack to the State and other districts similar in size and make-up. In general, Merrimack has exceeded the rest of the state.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that it will be important to share the information from this survey with the public and to show them what has been done in response to the results. The support group wants to highlight some of the areas and track them back and tell parents how significant their participation was, which led them to take action. It gets harder every year to ensure active participation. If parents are not given the results of what is being done based on the survey, it will become harder and harder to have parental participation.

Ms. Publicover agreed that the district needs to continue to have connections with parents. She added that the survey is done in March and they must look back at what was done the previous year in response to the past year's survey.

Chairman Ortega congratulated the participants on the results they have received, noting that the support group has been used as a model all over the state.

Board Member Barnes asked for the website for the group.

Ms. Publicover responded that the website is www.merrimack.pacp.com.

10. Guaranteed Maximum Insurance Rate for 2014-2015 and Initial Discussion Regarding the Creation of a Trust Fund for Future Health Premiums

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that he received the Guaranteed Maximum Rate (GMR) for this year, which is 11.4% increase. He explained that in 2004-2005 the rate increase was 23% and then for a couple of years the increase was 23% to 26%. One year the increase was down by 1.6%, but the following year it was 23%. This year there is an estimated \$800,000 increase in the budget based on the 11.4% increase.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted RSA:20-c Trust Funds Created for Specific Purposes, Section III, that allows a trust fund to be created to maintain health insurance funds for the benefit of any employees or retired employees.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that at the last Budget Committee meeting they talked about the law that was recently passed that allows school districts to retain surplus funds that could be used for emergency expenditures or tax rate stabilization. That is one way to pay the health care premiums. Establishing a trust fund is more specific and he thinks perhaps that the public would look at the potential establishment of such a fund as a way to do the same thing. He explained that the district has a Capital Reserve Fund for emergencies that can be used for repairs and reconstruction of buildings and grounds. There is also an Expendable Trust Fund which is the Special Education Trust Fund which allows the board to use that money for any unanticipated situations that happen throughout the year concerning Special Education. If a trust fund is set up for the health care costs, it would be like the Special Education Trust fund, using the money for a specific purpose.

Business Administrator Shevenell asked if the board wanted to have the proposed establishment of a trust fund for health care premiums as a warrant article. He would put the warrant article in legal written form for viewing purposes.

Superintendent Chiafery informed the board that the district representative, Debbie Clayton, was at the last Healthcare Cost Containment Committee meeting and announced the 11.4% increase. She will return in January and do a profile of Merrimack.

Superintendent Chiafery added that the district is going to get surplus money from the HealthTrust and after the employee share is taken care of she and Business Administrator Shevenell think that the surplus would put in a trust fund. She stated that they wanted to put this before the board before the budget is completed.

Vice Chairman Powell asked if any other districts have set up trust funds under the RSA198:20-c.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that he was not sure of the count, but he is sure that such funds have been established. He would send out an e-mail to obtain this information.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that he needed more clarification as to whether this fund would be exclusive to the employees' portion.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that if you lower the entire portion, it would include the employees' portion.

Board Member Barnes asked if the 11.4% increase is the same for all three insurance plans in the district, the JY plan, the HMO and the PPO.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that it is the same for all the plans.

Board Member Barnes stated that she felt the trust fund is too specific. There are too many other areas where the surplus money could be used. She added that she would not be in support of this becoming a warrant article.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that he would get a legal opinion on this. The 2% retainage of surplus is specific to tax rate stabilization or emergencies. If there is a big insurance spike, that certainly would be a tax rate stabilization. You would have to get permission from the Chairman of the Department of Education in order to use those funds.

Board Member Schneider stated that the way the warrant is crafted will make a big difference.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the warrant article would not be wide open. It would be “up to” an amount.

Chairman Ortega stated that we know we have monies that have been reserved for a specific purpose. This is a specific purpose and there are some questions worth pursuing.

Vice Chairman Powell stated that he would like to know the parameters of the RSA which deals with the retention of a surplus. When it comes to taking care of the benefits of our employees and taxpayers, he does not like the Department of Education Commissioner making the decisions.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she would like to know the guidelines for the Commissioner to approve expenditures.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the HealthTrust is going to enter into a process or method each year where the district will be given a refund check. It will be the district’s responsibility to distribute these monies to the employees and retirees that are no longer employed by the district but still carry the insurance. This will generate a tremendous amount of work for the district.

Chairman Ortega asked why premiums are paid and then a rebate given. It seems that instead of taking what they need, they are taking more money and then returning it to us.

Vice Chairman Powell asked if the Health Insurance Trust has a reserve. He wanted to know why they have to collect extra money. He also wanted to know who runs the trust.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that the LGC used to run the trust, and now it is the Board of Directors of the Health Insurance Trust that is in charge. There are also state statutes that must be followed.

11. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

There were no comments.

12. New Business

There was no new business.

13. Committee Reports

Board Member Schneider reported the November Merrimack Safeguard meeting did not have a quorum and that items for discussion will be heard at the December meeting.

Board Member Schneider attended the Budget Committee meeting on November 12, 2013. Business Administrator Shevenell presented a review of last year's budget and answered a lot of questions by the committee members. The committee also talked about their schedule for the upcoming budget sessions, including deadlines for questions.

Board Member Barnes attended the Professional Development Committee meeting on November 14, 2013. They went over the reimbursement of mileage per IRS statues. They approved updated reimbursement and credit hour submissions. She added that she felt the biggest thing the Professional Development Committee does is find effective communication tools throughout the buildings so people have a good understanding of the process to earn professional development funds, including continued education funds, and get them properly documented.

Board Member Barnes and Vice Chairman Powell were not available to attend the Program Evaluation and Review Committee (PERC) meeting on November 12, 2013. She asked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin to comment on the new course-work proposals. Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin reported that there were two course proposals for the technology department at the high school. These were the 3-D Animation course and the First Robotics Engineering course. These proposals were taken under advisement for the next PERC meeting.

Board Member Barnes reported on the Grater Woods meeting. They discussed her role on the committee and how they still have to vet through the Memo of Understanding for any projects coming up. She told the committee that the process is to go through Business Administrator Shevenell. She explained that her responsibility on the committee is to find out what the long term goals of the committee are.

Chairman Ortega reported that he attend the Town Center Committee Meeting on November 18, 2013. They discussed the Safe Routes to School Travel Plan, the trail easement and the closure of Church Street.

14. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

15. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 10:15 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to recess to non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II (a), (b), (c).

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