

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
February 7, 2011  
Merrimack High School – Cafeteria**

**PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES**

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

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Vaillancourt led the pledge of allegiance.

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

Chairman Vaillancourt announced that Board Member Ortega was absent from the meeting.

**2. Approval of January 24, 2011 Minutes**

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Swonger) to approve the January 24, 2011 minutes.

Board Member Barnes requested the following corrections.

- Page 5 of 6, last paragraph in section 10, add the words “to be voted on by the students at Reeds Ferry Elementary School” to the end of the sentence.
- Page 6 of 6, third paragraph, third sentence, replace the words “an inconclusive” with the word “favorable”.
- Page 6 of 6, fourth paragraph, second sentence, replace the word “noted” with the word “shared”.
- Page 6 of 6, fourth paragraph, third sentence, add “as it needs to be decided between the School Board and the Town Council” to the end of the sentence.

Board Member Swonger requested the following corrections.

- Page 2 of 6, second paragraph, second sentence, remove the word “upset”.
- Page 3 of 6, section six, third paragraph, change the words “sixth and seventh” to read “seventh and eighth”.
- Page 4 of 6, fourth paragraph, first sentence, change the word “please” to “pleased”.
- Page 4 of 6, fourth paragraph, second sentence, change the word “please” to “pleased”.
- Page 4 of 6, fifth paragraph, second sentence, change the word “numerousy” to “numeracy”.

The motion passed as amended 4-0-0.

**3. Public Participation**

Kim Vitchkoski of 9 Coles Rock Road requested that February school vacation be the week after the week of President’s day. She felt that last year the decision was made without enough input from parents.

#### **4. Consent Agenda**

- Approval of Revised Policy for Administering Medication to Students

Board Member Swonger moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to approve the consent agenda.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

#### **5. James Mastricola Upper Elementary School Students' Participation in Smart Market**

Chairman Vaillancourt welcomed Principal Marsha McGill and Gateway Teacher Dennis Pymm.

Principal McGill reported that students at James Mastricola Upper Elementary participated in a Smart Market program sponsored by the Manchester Union Leader and Fidelity Investment.

Principal McGill announced that the Wall Street Wonders Team from James Mastricola Upper Elementary School won the elementary school level competition. She introduced students Justin Calautti, Pooja Agrawal, Kyle Annick and Bryce Stack, four of the eight member team.

Mr. Pymm explained that the Smart Market program required students to create their own invention, become the chief executive officer of that company and create an advertisement to sell that product to the rest of the class. Students were asked to select one company from the stock market for their company to invest in. Students followed their respective stocks over a ten week period.

Mr. Pymm reported that of the fifty schools that participated in the Smart Market program the Wall Street Wonders Team won first place in the elementary division for making over \$11,000.

One student explained that he chose to invest in Sony stock because he has Sony products at home. A second student chose to invest in Manpower stock, a temporary employment agency, because of the number of people out of work due to the economy. A third student followed the stock for HAWK, a fuel cell production company, because of the trend and interest in saving energy. A fourth student decided to follow the Family Dollar Store stock because the stock remained consistent during a difficult economic period.

Mr. Pymm explained that stock brokers from Fidelity Investment came to the school to explain to the students how the stock market works. He explained that the awards presentation at Fidelity Investments included a tour of the facility.

Vice Chairman Thornton congratulated the students for their success in the Smart Market program competition. She also thanked Mr. Pymm for organizing the Smart Market program for the students at the upper elementary school.

Board Member Swonger noted that the students' stock selection process was very realistic.

Board Member Barnes asked the students if they monitored the stock market since the completion of the Smart Market program. Two students responded that they have continued to monitor the progress of their Smart Market program stocks as well as other stocks of interest.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked Principal McGill, Mr. Pymm and congratulated all students who participated in the Smart Market program. She noted that she found it rewarding to hear about real world experiences and programs that occur within the schools.

The students displayed the Smart Market program plaque and a related article and picture that were published in the Union Leader newspaper.

#### **6. James Mastricola Upper Elementary School Teachers' Request to Administer Class Surveys**

Principal McGill introduced fifth grade teachers Laurie Allen and Ashley Meehan. She explained that Mrs. Allen and Ms. Meehan were both pursuing Masters degrees at New England College. Each teacher wanted to facilitate a class survey as part of their action research project.

Mrs. Allen stated that she was completing her Masters degree in education leadership and administration. She explained that she based her action research project on how does feedback affect student learning and does the type of feedback affect it differently.

Ms. Meehan stated that she is completing her Masters degree in education and curriculum instruction. She explained that the topic of her action research project was fluency and the connection to comprehension.

It was reported that the deadline for the action research project data collection was March 11<sup>th</sup>.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked the Board to consider waiving the two week rule so that Mrs. Allen and Ms. Meehan could administer the surveys in time to complete their respective action research projects.

Vice Chairman Thornton explained that the Board had received copies of both surveys. She emphasized that neither survey contained any identifiable information and that the surveys were very brief.

Mrs. Allen stated that she would send a letter home to parents requesting their permission to use the data collection in her action research project.

Board Member Swonger stated that he supports data driven decision making and liked the idea that student input would be part of the data being collected. He asked if the teachers had plans to share the results of the survey with the students.

Ms. Meehan responded that her survey was a student self assessment. She wants the students to see themselves as readers at the beginning of the project and explain how have they grown and developed by the end of the project.

Mrs. Allen responded that she plans to share her survey results with the students.

Board Member Barnes appreciated the willingness of Mrs. Allen and Ms. Meehan to share their survey results with the Board.

Board Member Barnes asked if a specific percentage of students needed to participate in the survey for it to be considered valid.

Mrs. Allen and Ms. Meehan both responded that they were not aware of a student percentage requirement for their action research project.

Board Member Barnes moved (Board Member Swonger seconded) to accept the presentations to administer class surveys at James Masticola Upper Elementary School and to waive the two week rule.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

## **7. Merrimack High School Students' Participation in For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST)**

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Merrimack High School student Hannah Brunelle. Hannah Brunelle, the chairman's lead for the sixty member FIRST team introduced Nick Plant the team captain, Kiel Duggar the co-captain, James the mechanic's lead, Stephanie Landry a chairman's member, Ben Rogers, Nick the electrical lead and Matt the software lead.

Hannah Brunelle thanked the School Board, Merrimack High School principal and assistant principals, and Superintendent Chiafery, the custodial staff and the technology education department for their support over the years.

Ben Rogers stated that the competition was organized by For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST), a non profit organization founded in 1989. For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) designs programs that motivate young people to pursue education and career opportunities and build self confidence, knowledge and life skills. The Merrimack High School FIRST robotics team offers \$4,000 in college scholarships each year.

Ben Rogers explained that during the six week build season the team will design, manufacture and assemble a robot for competition. The Merrimack High School robotic team, Chop Shop 166, was founded in 1994.

Accomplishments of Chop Shop 166 include:

- Web Site Excellence Award (2004) (2008)
- Engineering Inspiration Award (2005)
- Safety Award (2006)
- Judge's Award (2008) (2010)
- Gracious Professionalism Award (2008) (2010)
- Innovation in Controls Award (2009)
- Hosted the first ever Beta Testing Regional (2010)
- Attended the 2010 National Championship Competition (2010)
- Selected to be a Controls System Beta Test Team (2010)

A long term goal of Chop Shop 166 is to continue to increase women's participation and leadership in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math. Another goal for Chop Shop 166 is for the alumni to attend college.

Chop Shop 166 community involvement includes:

- Robot demonstrations at public events
- Collect and donate soda can tabs to the Shriners Hospital
- Collect trash on McElwain Street to improve the appearance and the environment
- Mentor local Lego teams including a two-week Lego camp during the summer
- Host an annual post season competition and fundraiser, Mayhem in Merrimack
- Build bikes for charity

Hannah Brunelle ended the presentation by announcing that the Chop Shop 166 robot will be unveiled on February 18, 2011. The Granite State Regional Competition will be held on March 4 and 5, 2011 at the Verizon Wireless Center in Manchester. The Mayhem in Merrimack Competition will be held on June 5, 2011.

Board Member Swonger stated that the FIRST program integrates software, electronics and mechanical engineering techniques and encourages the participation of community mentors. He encouraged students to become involved in engineering and technology. He also encouraged everyone to attend the competition in March.

Hannah Brunelle noted that this year the national FIRST competition would be held in St. Louis, Missouri.

Board Member Barnes asked if funding was a challenge and if one area was impacted more than another.

Hannah Brunelle responded that BAE Systems is funding more FIRST teams; therefore, funding from BAE to the Merrimack FIRST team will be reduced. The reduction in funds would affect the scholarship amounts.

Board Member Barnes asked if the entire team attended travel events.

Hannah Brunelle responded that approximately 75% of the team will attend any given event. The cost of the attending events is offset by fundraising efforts.

Student Representative McLavey congratulated the team for its many achievements over the past seventeen years.

Vice Chairman Thornton congratulated the team for its accomplishments. She expressed her appreciation for the team's involvement within the community.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked the students for attending the meeting. She noted the time commitment and the dedication of the FIRST team. She stated that the younger students who attend the summer Lego camp look up to the high school FIRST team.

The students demonstrated their robot which is still under construction.

## **8. Proposed School Calendar for 2011-2012**

Superintendent Chiafery presented the Board with two drafts of the 2011-2012 school calendar. She explained that draft A represented a standard calendar inclusive of two early release days. Draft B represented a request to consider Merrimack High School as a sole polling site.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that she received input from the Merrimack Teachers' Association and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association, reviewed the Department of Education's recommended school calendar and reviewed a Massachusetts school calendar.

Board Member Barnes spoke to draft A and suggested that the March half day teacher workshop day take place on a Friday in consideration of family schedules, daycare arrangements and family time.

Chairman Vaillancourt responded that, traditionally, teacher workshop days have not been held on a Monday or a Friday.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that effort has been made not to have teacher workshop days on the same day of the week for class schedule reasons.

Board Member Barnes suggested replacing the full teachers' workshop day in March with a half-day workshop. She suggested replacing the half day workshop on April 10<sup>th</sup>, which is a voting day, with a full teachers' workshop day.

Board Member Swonger favored a full day teacher workshop day on April 10.

Board Member Swonger reported that attendance during a two day school week was compared to a three day school week was reviewed last year. The outcome of the comparison indicated that attendance on Monday and Tuesday were not affected either way. Therefore, he was satisfied with the proposed three day Thanksgiving Recess.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that her family enjoyed the half day teacher workshop on the Friday before the Monday holiday in January 2011. She would consider swapping the March 28<sup>th</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup> workshop days.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that the Board was very aware of the Massachusetts school vacation weeks in February 2012 and April 2012.

Superintendent Chiafery addressed school calendar draft B. She explained, in the event the high school became the sole polling site, she arbitrarily established February 14<sup>th</sup> as a third voting date for calculation purposes until such time as the Secretary of State announces the date for the primary elections. She added that during the school year 2012-2013, a teacher workshop day would need to be moved from August to the fall election date.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that School District Moderator Lynn Christensen would attend the February 28<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss plans for the March 7<sup>th</sup> deliberative session.

Board Member Swonger expressed his concern over the possibility of not being able to schedule teacher workshop days far enough in advance to accommodate an outside speaker. He suggested that the February workshop day may have to be designated as an internal workshop.

Board Member Swonger suggested that the election date could be identified as a non school day in lieu another holiday such as the Columbus Day holiday.

Vice Chairman Thornton asked if Lynn Christenson could provide the Board with the cost information relative to one polling site. She questioned whether the Town or School District would purchase the large floor mats that are necessary to cover the gym floor.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the town may assist with the purchase of the floor mat and that the topic would be discussed at the next joint meeting between the School Board and Town Council.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the main reason for the request to have one polling site is for safety reasons. She noted that the traffic pattern on Daniel Webster Highway at the St. James Methodist Church polling site is dangerous.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if other school districts within the South Central Region were avoiding the Massachusetts vacation weeks in February and April.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that inclement weather postponed the meeting where that information would have been discussed.

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that one parent had notified her that the teachers' half day workshops were inconvenient.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that District has not had many half day workshop experiences to reflect upon. She stated that the half day concept is important to the educators. The placement of the half day workshops is important to parents.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she would like to accommodate the moderator's request for one polling place but questioned how the School Board would be able to publish a school calendar without knowing the voting dates.

Board Member Swonger recalled the time when there was potential that the New Hampshire primary would occur in December. He stated that teacher workshop days could become disruptive and get out of control if they were tied to the primary date.

Board Member Barnes felt that one solution to Board Member Swonger's concern would be to schedule internal workshop days on election days.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the same parent that provided her with input regarding the half day workshops would prefer one March vacation week replace the two February and April vacations. If that was not possible, she requested that the February vacation week not be the same as the Massachusetts school vacation week.

**9. Mandarin Chinese and Chinese Culture Course at Merrimack High School for 2011-2012**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the China Exchange program created an interest in learning the Mandarin Chinese language and Chinese culture. He explained that Principal Johnson approached the Trustees of the Trust Funds to request funding for one year for a Mandarin Chinese teacher to teach a Mandarin Chinese and Chinese Culture course at Merrimack High School during the 2011-2012 school year. The Trustees of the Trust Funds awarded the District \$50,000 to hire a half-time teacher to teach Mandarin Chinese for one year to students in grades ten through twelve.

Board Member Swonger expressed his appreciation for the efforts made to find an alternate funding source. He asked what course title or place holder title would appear in the program of studies booklet.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that for a variety of other reasons the roll out for course registration will be different this year. The additional time may allow for a few course details to be published in the program of studies.

Board Member Swonger asked why the course would be pursued as two different levels of an introduction course as opposed to other world languages such as Spanish I and Spanish II. He stated that it appeared to be a college prep Mandarin Chinese course and an honors Mandarin Chinese course.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin offered further clarification to Board Member Swonger's question at the next Board meeting.

Student Representative McLavey asked if students would have the option to apply the Mandarin Chinese grade to their grade point average or not, similar to the current health course.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that he would take Student Representative McLavey's question under advisement.

Board Member Barnes asked for clarification on the number of years the Trust Funds would fund the Mandarin Chinese course.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that Chris Christensen, head of the Trustees of the Trust Fund, hoped that the District would consider the Trust Fund's contribution as seed money. The Trustees of the Trust Fund are interested in possibly supporting an array of programs as compared one. She stated that if the Mandarin Chinese course is successful it would be her hope that the District would fund the course in future years.

Board Member Barnes asked for clarification on how the course would accommodate the various grade levels.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin offered that further clarification would be forthcoming when more course details were available.

Chairman Vaillancourt confirmed that many details regarding the Mandarin Chinese course still needed to be defined and thanked the Trustees of the Trust Fund for the \$50,000.



**10. Discussion Topics for Meeting with Legislative Delegation**

Chairman Vaillancourt announced that Merrimack's Legislative Delegation would be attending the February 28, 2011 meeting. The Board expressed an interest in discussing New Hampshire retirement, House Bill 39 (the removal of technology, world language, art and music from the core curriculum standards), the new bullying law as it relates to the mandatory training requirement, and the future direction of building aid.

**11. Third Review of New Policy Regarding Pupil Safety Violence Prevention (Bullying)**

Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the Pupil Safety Violence Prevention (Bullying) policy. She noted that the draft policy is representative of the Board's edits, input and questions.

Superintendent Chiafery reported that she and Attorney Barrett Christina discussed the section of the policy entitled bullying or cyber bullying of a pupil prohibited. She explained that the section speaks to behavior that occurs off school property or outside a school sponsored activity/event if the conduct interferes with the pupil's educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operations of the school or school sponsored activity/event.

Superintendent Chiafery reported that Attorney Christina stated that the administration has the responsibility to at least investigate the situation. The current legislature has expressed concern over the wording of the current bullying policy. Attorney Christina recommended that the Board approve the Pupil Safety and Violence Prevention (Bullying) policy realizing that changes to the law are anticipated and that the language will be clarified over time.

Superintendent Chiafery referenced Vice Chairman Thornton's concern over how to handle a bullying case if the student doing the bullying is not a student in the Merrimack School District and the student being bullied is a Merrimack student and the bullying interferes with his/her educational opportunities.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that the Merrimack School District would not have jurisdiction over students outside the Merrimack School District. She added that if a situation occurred that involved two school districts the superintendents and/or principals would converse about the incident and determine action to be taken.

Superintendent Chiafery suggested that the Pupil Safety Violence Prevention (Bullying) policy be placed under the consent agenda for February 28, 2011.

Superintendent Chiafery expects the Memo of Understanding between the Merrimack School District and the Merrimack Police Department to be presented to the Board on either February 28, 2011 or the first Board meeting in March.

**12. Other**

a) Correspondence

Chairman Vaillancourt reported receipt of one email from a parent regarding the 2011-2012 school calendar.

b) Comments

Superintendent Chiafery acknowledged the passing of Cheryl Pearsall, a paraeducator in the district for the last ten years.

Chairman Vaillancourt expressed condolences to her family, friends, and the school community.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that there have been accusations by specific members of the Town Council in public settings and forums that the School District and the current School Board have not made tough budget decisions. She felt the need to defend those accusations by stating that the District and School Board have taken all reductions-in-force very seriously. She stated that she did not appreciate the comment that the School District has not made tough choices regarding staffing levels and the comparisons to other districts with huge reductions-in-force. She reported that over the last six years, including the 2011-2012 budget, the teaching staff has been reduced by 37 teachers, which represents 10% of the teaching staff. She acknowledged the importance of the School Budget Committee's work.

Chairman Vaillancourt echoed Vice Chairman Thornton's sentiments.

**13. New Business**

There was no new business to report.

**14. Committee Reports**

Board Member Swonger reported that he attended the Budget Committee working session in place of Board Member Ortega. He stated that approximately twenty different amendments were proposed to the budget. He reported that all amendments to the budget failed whether they added or subtracted from the bottom line. The Budget Committee's final budget was exactly the same as the School Board's budget.

Board Member Swonger announced that the public hearing on the Budget Committee's budget would be held February 8, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. at Masticola Elementary School in the all purpose room.

Vice Chairman Thornton reported that the Merrimack Safeguard Committee met on January 27 to discuss and vote on the committee bylaws. She explained that the Merrimack Safeguard, formerly known as the Merrimack Drug Advisory Council, was instrumental in applying for the grant that pays for the resource officer at the middle school. The Merrimack Safeguard Committee maintains the federal grant and ensures that all grant requirements are met, such as the committee bylaws. The committee creates a presence with parents and students and is aligned with Beyond Influence, a Nashua based organization. She added that effort is spent addressing underage drinking and drug use in the area.

Chairman Vaillancourt emphasized that the federal grant pays for the school resource officer/juvenile officer position at the middle school and not the operating budget.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the federal grant provides \$125,000 a year for five years for Merrimack Safeguard with the possibility of acquiring an additional five year grant. He added that the Merrimack Safeguard is no longer a school district committee. Merrimack Safeguard is a group of Merrimack citizens representing twelve different sectors of the community.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that the Merrimack Safeguard welcomes interested community members to serve.

Vice Chairman Thornton reported that the District Parent Group reviewed the online lunch program payment plan. She also reported that Tracy Bull, the School District Representative on the Town Center Committee presented information pertaining to the Town Center Master Plan.

**15. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

There were no public comments to report.

**16. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:32 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 4-0-0.