

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
March 14, 2011
Merrimack High School Cafeteria
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

1. Call To Order

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

Chairman Vaillancourt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Ronni Karlsberg as the new Board Secretary. She also extended the Board's sincere appreciation to Sandy Swanson for taking the minutes for the last few months.

2. Approval of February 28, 2011 Minutes

Member Ortega moved (seconded by Member Barnes) to approve the February 28, 2011 minutes.

Member Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes.

- Page 2 of 9, section 5, correct the spelling of his name from "Oretga" to "Ortega"
- Page 2 of 9, section 6, add Representative Thomas
- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 5 from the bottom, remove the word "removal". The sentence should read ".....did not find a reference that the training requirements will be removed from House Bill 370,..."
- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 5 from the bottom, last line, change the word "it" to "the broad language in the anti-bullying law..."
- Page 4 of 9, paragraph 3 from the bottom, add "The retirement system is broken. It is an unfunded mandate. Perhaps we should look into a class action suit."
- Page 5 of 9, section 13, paragraph 3, change the word "dependence" to "dependent".
- Page 5 of 9, paragraph 4 from the bottom, should also state that "There is no agreement from the Town of Merrimack with the District to share that expense, even though it could be."
- Page 6 of 9, section 7, paragraph 4, change the spelling of the word "council" to "counsel".
- Page 6 of 9, paragraph 5, add "to address the possible increase in expenditures " after "...\$1 million..."

Member Swonger requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 9, section 13, is out of order. It reads section 6 to 13 to 7. He asked that it be renumbered to be consecutive.

Vice Chairman Thornton requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 6 of 9, paragraph 6 from the bottom, add "with support from the Board" to the first sentence.

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 9, paragraph 4 from the bottom change the word “ability” to “credibility”.
- Page 5 of 9, paragraph 3 from the bottom, change the number “four” to the number “5”, and change the date of “March 15, 2011” to “March 14, 2011”.
- Page 5 of 9, paragraph 6 from the bottom, add the word “annually” after “\$4,000”.
- Page 6 of 9, paragraph 1, add the word “the” before the word “Governor’s”
- Page 6 of 9, paragraph 4, the first sentence should read “Chairman Vaillancourt stated that legal council advised against reducing the \$1 million to address the possible increase in expenditures from the budget at this time.”
- Page 6 of 9, paragraph 6, last sentence should read “She stated that personnel will most likely be put on notice by April 15, 2011.”
- Page 8 of 9, paragraph 2, change the words “the tax impact” to “healthcare costs”.
- Page 8 of 9, paragraph 4, remove “He adds... year after year” and change to “He added that the benefit to the tax payers is going to benefit us in terms of lower healthcare costs in the long term”.
- Page 8 of 9, section 16, paragraph two, first sentence should read “Board Member Swonger along with Superintendent Chiafery and Business Administrator Shevenell went before the Planning Board...”

Member Barnes requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 9, paragraph 3 from the bottom, in reference to the school calendar, add an “s” to the word “calendar”.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

3. Approval of March 3, 2011 Minutes

Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to approve the March 3, 2011 minutes.

Board Member Swonger requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 2 of 2, paragraph 3, remove the words “Her goal was”.

The motion passed 4-0-1 with Member Ortega abstaining.

3. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

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

Presented by Business Administrator Shevenell:

- To Merrimack High School from Boy Scouts of America for \$1,184.46 for general donation to the Athletic Department
- To Merrimack High School from the Merrimack Quarterback Club for \$500 to assist in the cost of an equipment shed.
- To Thornton’s Ferry Elementary School from Barnes and Noble for \$665.51 to be used for general education supplies.
- To Thornton’s Ferry Elementary School from Target for \$396.51 for educational and instructional supplies.

Member Swonger asked for details about the donation from the Boy Scouts of America, including what Troop number gave the gift. Business Administrator Shevenell will bring details to next meeting.

Member Barnes mentioned the article in the Nashua Telegraph regarding the Eagle Scout and his contribution of athletic equipment for training. She felt that he deserves special recognition.

Vice Chairman Thornton recognized and praised all fund raising efforts.

Member Barnes moved (seconded by Member Swonger) to approve the Gifts/Grants under \$5,000.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Team's Report about Robotic Competition at the Verizon Center

Student Hannah Brunelle introduced FIRST Team members Matt Soucy, Stephanie Landry and Ben Rogers. The students announced:

- Matt Soucy received the very prestigious Dean Student Award
- The Team received the Regions Chairman's Award which is the most prestigious award at the regional competition.
- The Team is eligible to attend the nation competition in St. Louis.
- The Team received a banner for display

Board Member Swonger asked if there were fundraising efforts in place to help raise the funds for the trip to St. Louis.

Stephanie Landry responded that fundraising plans are underway, especially with the sale of light bulbs.

Board Member Barnes offered support for their fundraising efforts through public participation at board meetings.

Hannah reported that donation information is available at www.chopshop166.com. The team's e-mail address is 166.first@gmail.com.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked the students for sharing their success with the Board and the public.

6. Participation of Upper Elementary Students in a Dartmouth College Research Project

Chairman Vaillancourt introduced Principal Marsha McGill and Dr. Michelle Tine of Dartmouth College.

Principal McGill asked the Board for permission for sixth grade students to participate in a Dartmouth College research project.

Dr. Tine explained the purpose of the Research Project was to investigate whether or not students' environment affects their "Working Memory". Students in rural, urban and suburban neighborhoods will be studied. Dr. Tine said that Working Memory is a better predictor than a student's IQ for academic achievement. Parental permission will be required prior to participation in the study.

Vice Chairman Thornton expressed concern that students who participate in the study will miss one half hour of class instruction.

Principal McGill responded that participation in the study could become a learning experience for the students in the area of research projects. She noted that the study would be scheduled for a time that would cause the least amount of interruption in the classroom.

Chairman Vaillancourt questioned how Merrimack was chosen to participate in the research project.

Dr. Tine responded that communities were chosen based on the median income. She emphasized that parents will not be asked for income information. The income level is based on the number of students who take part in the National School Lunch Program (free and reduced lunch). Merrimack has less than 10% students participate in the program, therefore placing the Merrimack in the less needy category.

Dr Tine explained that students are randomly picked to participate in the survey. One hundred students will be asked; it is estimated that there will be 50 to 70 students who will take part in the study.

Board Member Swonger requested that the students not participating in the survey be informed about the project and why they were not chosen to participate.

Board Member Ortega asked when the project would be completed and when the survey results would be available and if aggregate results could be shared in return for the students' time investment.

Dr. Tine responded that the project would go through the end of the school year. She anticipated data collection from James Masticola Upper Elementary School to occur in March, April or May of 2011. Dr. Tine stated that the survey results would share how the school responded, not individual students.

Member Barnes stated that she would be interested to see the parents' response on how their children reacted and responded to being studied once the study concluded.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained to Principal McGill and Dr. Tine that the Board would not render a decision at this time. The item will appear on the March 21, 2011 consent agenda unless a board member was to request that it appear as a separate agenda item.

7. Reconsideration of Merrimack High School as Sole Polling Site

Superintendent Chiafery presented the board with draft copies of the 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15 school calendars. She explained that she identified the election dates on the respective calendar based on the dates received from Moderator Lynn Christenson. This was her first consideration

Superintendent Chiafery explained that the floor covering for the high school gym was to be considered when discussing whether or not to use the high school as the sole polling site for Merrimack. This was her second consideration.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that the high school has an 8 year old tarp that covers the basketball playing surface (89 ft. 10 in. long by 57 feet 6 inches wide). Superintendent Chiafery would prefer a floor tarp cover the entire gym floor (127 feet long by 71 feet 6 inches wide) for election days. The estimated cost of the flooring and storage device is \$11,000.

Superintendent Chiafery feels that there is the need to make sure that the Merrimack School Board and Town Council are in agreement to purchase the floor covering. As of this date, there is no formal agreement to purchase the flooring. This was her third consideration.

Superintendent Chiafery suggested that the School Board and Town Council discuss the purchase of a high school gym floor tarp at a future joint meeting after the new town manager is on board.

If an agreement is reached, then the floor covering and storage device could be purchased in the 2012-13 school year, when the one polling site could begin.

Chairman Vaillancourt agreed that it is too late to use the high school as the sole polling site for school year 2011-12; however, it could be considered for the 2012-13 school year.

Board Member Ortega calculated that the cost savings of having one polling site in Merrimack won't occur for six years when factoring in the purchase cost of the flooring. However, it does benefit the town and it addresses the traffic issue at the St. James polling site.

Board Member Swonger stated that the Board and the Town are not in a position to purchase the floor covering this year. It has not been included in the budget.

Chairman Vaillancourt commented that the process of purchasing the floor covering is too rushed. She is uncomfortable making any decision without conversation between the Town Council and the School Board. She also suggested that a single polling place needs to be publicized before the elections.

Board Member Barnes stated that if funding for the floor covering were to be available through town funds, then the School Board should be open to consideration.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she doesn't feel the calendar for 2011-12 should be changed to accommodate the one polling site.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the January election date was uncertain. It would be hard to calendar an election date for the first sole polling site when the January date is unknown. She preferred to begin the sole polling site on a year when all election dates could be identified.

8. Information Regarding Early Release Days

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin summarized the District's initiatives. Many are required trainings and some keep Merrimack ahead and current in the field. All have an impact on students and teachers.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that teachers need to be recertified every three years. Professional Development offerings can not meet the certification needs of all teachers.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that there are seven contractual days that teachers are required to attend. They consist of 2 parent and teacher conference days, 1 planning day, and 4 days related to professional development opportunities.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin passed out half day teacher workshop survey results. He explained since inception of the half day workshops there have five opportunities to use them. Results from the survey found that student learning is not adversely affected by half day workshops in the opinion of the

majority of surveyed teachers. Therefore interruption is not significant enough to eliminate the half workshop days.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that IPDP stands for Individualized Professional Development Plan and that CPI training is Crisis Prevention Intervention.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if one polling site would eliminate half day workshop days.

Superintendent Chiafery clarified that there would be opportunity for half day workshops, but not during presidential election years.

Board Member Ortega questioned the interpretation of the results of the survey. He would like to understand why a rating of 3 or below was given with positive results being close to the combined negative and neutral scores.

Board Member Swonger stated that the original reason for half day workshops was to help keep teachers in the classroom.

Board Member Swonger asked if the goal to lessen the need for substitute teachers had been accomplished.

Board Member Swonger stated that he did not believe the half day workshops had addressed the issue of lead teachers being out of the classroom.

Board Member Swonger asked if the half day workshop was just as beneficial as one half of a complete workshop day.

Board Member Swonger questioned how a compressed class schedule affects student learning as well as addressing parent concerns about daycare on half day workshop days.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded by stating that if half day workshops were eliminated, then more substitutes would be needed. He exemplified the bullying law as one example of good use of half day workshops.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that it is recognized that there is value in half day workshops and that the leadership team realizes the need for refinement.

Chairman Vaillancourt also expressed concerns about the amount of time teachers are out of the classroom. She questioned how else the District could comply with the mandate for teacher training.

Board Member Barnes stated that her concern was the half day class time included lunch, which takes away from instruction. She questioned how much learning is accomplished in 3.5 hours of school at the elementary school level.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that lunch is required by law.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that all initiatives are important. She also felt the list of initiatives was very helpful and could be used as a reference in the future.

9. Approval of School Calendar for 2011-2012

Board Member Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to accept draft A of the 2011-12 school calendar.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

10. Scheduling the 2011 Graduation Date

Superintendent Chiafery announced that high school graduation would be held on Saturday, June 18, 2011 at 10:00 a.m.

Student Representative McLavey will inform the student body of the graduation date.

11. Actual Health Insurance Rate for 2011-2012

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that the actual insurance rates for 2011-12 increased by 3.9%.

Chairman Vaillancourt compared the 19.8% insurance rate increase in 2010-11 to the 3.9% insurance rate increase in 2011-12.

Board Member Swonger felt that it was important to note that part of the teacher contract that is on the ballot this year changes the point of service plan to the health maintenance organization.

Board Member Ortega asked how much the dollar savings would be.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded, all things equal, the cost savings will be \$240,000.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that it is important to understand that the health insurance concessions of the teacher contract are every bit as important as the salary adjustments. It affirms for her that getting those concessions is absolutely the right thing to do.

12. Discussion Regarding Possible Additional Expenditure for Retirement Costs

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that the \$501,000 amendment was voted down at the deliberative session. She acknowledged the need to reduce the 2011-12 budget by \$1 million dollar to accommodate the potential shortfall to the New Hampshire Retirement System.

Board Member Swonger stated that he would like to identify more than \$1 million in the event there are additional unexpected expenditures. He suggested that the District no longer subsidize \$150 per student for drivers education, the number of paraprofessionals be reviewed, and the Capital Improvement Plan items be reviewed.

Board Member Ortega reminded the Board Members to prepare for the worst and to review everything in the budget. He stated his priority is classroom teachers. He suggested sports, furniture, the number of assistant principal positions and capital projects be reviewed.

Vice Chairman Thornton suggested that the Board consider eliminating two more teachers at Merrimack Middle School, the number of assistant principal positions, Capital Improvement Plan projects and any area not mandated by the state should be considered.

Board Member Barnes suggested consideration be given to reducing at least one assistant principal and the high school late bus. She suggested that perhaps the ridership fund it, including an administrative fee. She expressed her desire for more automation in place of the current paper method.

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that two late bus runs had already been reduced to one late bus. She would consider eliminating the late bus rather than self funding because of administrative costs. She stated that the late bus enables some students to participate in activities that they would not be able to otherwise.

Student Representative McLavey stated that most students who take the late bus home do so to hang out with friends, not to attend clubs and sports activities.

Chairman Vaillancourt proposed a tiered approach to reducing the 2011-12 budget by \$1.5 million. Tier one would include the items identified in the \$501,000 amendment presented at the deliberative session. Tier two would consist of an additional \$500,000 reduction, tier three would consist of another \$500,000 reduction that would include Capital Improvement Plan project(s).

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Superintendent Chiafery to consider reducing positions other than classroom teaching positions, for example, the language arts coordinator positions. She also suggested high school department heads take on the obligation of teaching one more class. She suggested that Gateway at the high school and the Merrimack Middle School be reviewed. She asked Superintendent Chiafery to present her proposal for more reductions at the March 21, 2011 meeting.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she felt the legislators heard the School Board's message regarding funding and that hopefully they will provide funding for next year with less funding in future years.

13. Representation on Master Plan Advisory Committee

Chairman Vaillancourt read a letter from Robert Best, the chairman Merrimack Planning Board, asking for a School Board representative to attend the Master Plan Advisory Committee. She noted that the difficulty for a School Board member to commit to an added responsibility. She proposed Tracy Bull, the School Board's representative on the Town Center Committee and she share representation. She would propose they both attend the first couple of meetings together and then alternate attendance at meetings.

The School Board and Tracy Bull were in agreement with shared representation on the Master Plan Advisory Committee.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Superintendent Chiafery to respond to Mr. Best, informing him that the Board would like two representatives to share the position and ask if that would work for the Committee.

14. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

Board Member Barnes attended the New Hampshire Destination Imagination regional competition. She reported that teams will be attending the state competition.

Board Member Ortega added 11 teams from the Merrimack School District attended the Destination Imagination regional competition, including 2 “rising star” teams consisting of first and second grade students. Four teams will be attending the state competition.

Vice Chairman Thornton reported that she received positive reaction to the Challenge Day experience at Merrimack High School.

Student Representative McLavey explained that the Challenge Day retreat was held over three days. One hundred students and 25 faculty members participated each day. The purpose was to open up to others by discussing things never talked about with anyone else. She reported that students felt connected at the end of the day and it was taken very seriously. Next year 25 students will repeat the Challenge Day experience with 75 different students. She stated that funding for the activity did not come from the operating budget. Fundraising efforts have already begun for next year.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that Merrimack High School was introduced to the Challenge Day program by Amy Larkin-Perez, Linda Mandra, and one other counselor.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the Board is not looking forward to additional reductions to the budget. She addressed the staff by stating that the Board will be as transparent and above board as possible. She will clearly outline the steps and directions and will be as clear with proposals and intentions as possible.

15. New Business

No new business to report.

16. Committee Reports

Board Member Barnes reported that Program Evaluation and Review Committee (PERC) received a presentation from Rebecca Vandenburg regarding the science curriculum.

Board Member Barnes reported that the Grater Woods Subcommittee met and final refinements of the document are underway. She emphasized that emergency personnel have access to the Grater Woods property through the middle school access in emergency situations.

17. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Gary Krupp, 4 Ministerial Drive, stated that he preferred electronic communication methods between schools and parents. He was not aware of the state subsidy for driver education students. The use of study hall for driver’s education training was beneficial to his child.

Mr. Krupp asked if the Dartmouth College survey could be conducted outside the school day.

Mr. Krupp asked if the half day workshops were contractual.

George Markwell of 127 Indian Rock Road reported that traffic entering the Masticola Complex continued to be doubled parked along Baboosic Lake Road in the morning. He recommended a bussing study to see if school busses were really necessary.

Mr. Markwell stated that he was surprised that positions were being eliminated and would prefer to eliminate the entrance projects and have larger healthcare concessions. He stated that the teacher contract was wrong for Merrimack and that the teacher pay raises were wrong.

Debra McLaughlin spoke as president of the Merrimack Teachers Association. She reported that the teachers were in support of the contract and that it is right for the teachers, the Merrimack School District and the community.

18. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 10:10 p.m. Vice Chairman Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Swonger) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.