

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
March 21, 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.

**7:15: Public Hearing to Accept/Expend Gifts/Grants over \$5,000**

Chairman Vaillancourt welcomed and opened the public hearing at 7:15 p.m. David St. Jean, Special Education Director, along with Business Administrator Shevenell made a presentation regarding ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act).

David St. Jean explained the purpose of the federal funds entitled to the Merrimack School District for 2010-11 is to improve the quality of educational services offered for students with disabilities while stimulating the economy. The one time entitlement to the District is \$971,811.00 which is part B (ages 3-21) of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Preschool (ages 3-5) IDEA funds.

David St. Jean requested the Merrimack School Board authorize the acceptance and expenditure of the remaining balance of the ARRA funds in the amount of \$425,854.00. He explained that the grant is not part of the Merrimack School District budget, and that the federal funds must be expended by the end of September, 2011. If it is not spent, the district will lose the remainder of the funds.

David St. Jean presented charts which explained that previous AARA funds were used for ongoing teacher training, while this expenditure of \$425,854.99 will be used for equipment and materials. The chart identified four categories: Literacy in the amount of \$26,000 for software and supplies, math in the amount of \$26,000 for software and supplies, technology in the amount of \$230,425.00 for supplies and the environment in the amount of \$141,429 for supplies and furniture.

Board Member Swonger asked Business Administrator Shevenell to explain the difference between the ARRA funds and the Ed Jobs grant. Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the supplement is specifically earmarked for special education as part of the ARRA grant, while the Ed Jobs grant is specifically tied to teachers' benefits and salaries, without funding for special education.

Board Member Barnes questioned if the defibrillators would be stored in the nurse's offices. Business Administrator Shevenell responded that the current defibrillators were purchased eight or nine years ago and needed to be replaced. The new equipment will be placed in public locations to be readily available for anyone in need, instead of in a locked nurse's office where they would not be available after school hours.

There were no comments from the public.

Chairman Vaillancourt closed the public hearing at 7:41 p.m. She stated that the information will be addressed during the agenda item #5 during the public meeting. She then called for a one minute recess.

## **1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Vaillancourt called the meeting to order at 7:42 p.m.

Chairman Vaillancourt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **2. Approval of March 14, 2011 Minutes**

Board Member Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to approve the minutes of the March 14, 2011 meeting.

Board Member Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes.

- Page 3 of 11, section 5, sentence 1, change the spelling of “Rodgers” to “Rogers”.
- Page 4 of 11, paragraph 6, remove the word “the”
- Page 4 of 11, paragraph 4 from the bottom, add “and if aggregate results could be shared in return for the students’ time investment”.
- Page 4 of 11, paragraph 3 from the bottom, remove the word “indicate” and insert “she could share”
- Page 4 of 11, paragraph 1 from the bottom, change the word “rendered” to “render”.
- Page 5 of 11, paragraph 3 from the bottom, section 7, after “not occur for six years” add the phrase “when factoring in the purchase cost of the flooring.”
- Page 6 of 11, section 8, paragraph 4, insert the word “teacher” before “.....survey results”.
- Page 6 of 11, paragraph 5, add the phrase “in the opinion of the majority of surveyed teachers” after “Results.....affected by half day workshops”.
- Page 6 of 11, last sentence, insert “with positive results being close to the combined negative and neutral scores.”
- Page 8 of 11, section 11 paragraph 4, the sentence should read “Board Member Ortega asked how much the dollar savings would be” and remove “....was gained...point of service”
- Page 8 of 11, section 12, paragraph 3, add the word “classroom” before the word “teachers”.
- Page 8 of 11, section 12, paragraph 3, change spelling from “capitol projects” to “capital projects”.
- Page 10 of 11, top of the page, Student Representative McLavy should be changed to Student Representative McLavey

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes.

- Page 8 of 11, second to last paragraph. She stated that what she meant in asking her questions and making her recommendations was that maybe the late bus should be funded by the ridership (including the administrative fee) and in no way did she suggest the reduction in bussing for kindergarten students.

Board Member Swonger requested the following changes to the minutes.

- Page 4 of 11, section 6, paragraph 5, the word leaning should be changed to learning.
- Page 4 of 11, paragraph 7, change the word “suburban” to “less needy”
- Page 8 of 11, section 12, paragraph 1, should read “potential shortfall”

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the minutes.

- Page 5 of 11, paragraph 1 from the bottom, change the word “Counsel” to “Council”.
- Page 7 of 11, paragraph 1, change the word “workshop” to “workshops”.
- Page 7 of 11, paragraph 8, substitute “changed” for “change”.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

### **3. Public Participation**

Barbara Publicover of 75 Amherst Road spoke as the facilitator of the Merrimack Special Education Parents' Support Group. She announced that a free workshop entitled Around the World of Special Education Roles in One Day will be held on April 2, 2011 at the Parent Information Center in Concord. The agenda for the six hour workshop will include going through the entire process of special education. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the Parent Information Center at [www.PICNH.org](http://www.PICNH.org) or at the support group's website [www.merrimackpact.com](http://www.merrimackpact.com).

She stated that special education parent involvement surveys will be sent out on April 1<sup>st</sup>. Information from the surveys will be used in the Merrimack School District when meeting with David St. Jean, Special Education Director, to make changes if needed and discuss the positives and negatives of the Special Education program. Chairman Vaillancourt added that there is a notice on the District home page about the survey.

### **4. Consent Agenda Presented by Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin**

#### **a) Teacher Resignations**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin announced the following teacher resignations.

- Mary Kiernan, World Language Teacher at Merrimack High School
- Sandra Cohen, World Language Teacher at Merrimack High School
- Karen Demyanovich, Reading Teacher at Merrimack High School

#### **b) Approval of Dartmouth College Research Project at the Mastricola Upper Elementary School**

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

The motion passed 5-0-0.

### **5. Board's Response to Acceptance and Expenditure of Gifts/Grants over \$5,000**

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that by way of process the Board will follow the same process as it did the last time David St. Jean came before the Board in September 2010. Questions may be asked, and unless otherwise specified, this item will be put on the consent agenda for the April 4, 2011 meeting.

Board Member Swonger stated that the presentation by David St. Jean showed how the remaining funds would be spent, and that it is a good use of the funds. He was pleased that technology is being upgraded in the special education department and that the monies will come from the ARRA funds as opposed to the school budget.

Board Member Barnes commended David St. Jean for bringing information and knowledge to the members of the Board. She was especially pleased with the use of the i-pads, acknowledging that the District is looking for new techniques in teaching those with disabilities, which represents the spirit of the funding.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she would place the acceptance and expenditure of the AARA funds on the Consent Agenda provided there were no concerns from the Board.

**6. Summary of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Results presented by Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin.**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that the No Child Left Behind Act requires that all schools be proficient or above by the year 2014. Every two years the benchmark for performance goes up.

Since it is better to look at long term results as opposed to yearly result, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin examined the performance over the last six years. He stated that there has been a positive trend in all the grades. He also stated that the State results show the same growth as the Merrimack School District.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the district is outperforming other communities, as well as the State. The district's results improved from last year.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin shared with the Board that Principal Johnson felt NECAP scores did not necessarily reflect the quality work of students or teachers. There has been approximately a 25 point gain in reading, and a 10 point gain in math. It is possible that students need to be motivated. As an idea primarily offered by the students, there is an interest in putting the students' NECAP scores on their transcripts. There is also a real effort to reconfigure the testing environment.

Board Member Swonger thanked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin for the information. He questioned what is being asked and how it is being asked. He also asked if anything has been done to eliminate the weaknesses. He questioned the strategies planned to get to the last 15% in order to reach the 100% mark by the year 2014.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that there has been an effort to manage instruction that would be familiar to students, such as asking multiple choice questions, increasing familiarity with the format of the tests and trying to parallel their language to the language of the NECAP.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that there is a collaborative assessment project by the leadership team and the teachers, in which more than fluency is expected. Efforts have intensified to engage students in analytical tasks which require a lot of thinking ("habits of mind").

Board Member Ortega questioned how it is decided that students in grades three through eight and grade 11 are tested and students in grades nine and ten are not tested. He stated that if students in grades nine and ten were tested there might be a better trend line.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that this format is not just in New Hampshire. He added that he didn't know the reasons for the gaps.

Board Member Ortega noticed that reading seems to hold its own in proficiency up through grade eleven, but that math seems to "fall off the cliff". He questioned our assessment in that area.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that in working with Math Department Chair Ray Blank, he looked at what the skill sets for incoming grade nine students are that would help students better prepare for tests in grade eleven. He added that he doesn't like to blame the test, but that the test is developed by humans, which means it is subject to error. There have been times when questions are so difficult they have been removed, particularly in math. He believes there needs to be continuous investigation.

Chairman Vaillancourt said in talking about course requirements, they are consistent up through grade eight (i.e. reading and writing). She felt that perhaps the eleventh grade students are focusing and honing in on specific job paths and don't necessarily focus on the math. She added that if the high school wants to upgrade the requirements for math, then the students may lose their electives and opportunities to branch out, which could be harmful to the students' overall education. She agreed that there should be dialogue with the people who create the tests. She also agreed that testing in grades nine and ten would be a far better indicator of performance.

Board Member Barnes asked if the analysis and interpretation part of the test is given at the end of the testing day or is it spread throughout the testing process. She also questioned the timing of the tests as to whether they are given at the beginning or end of the day and if they are not conducive to the students' schedules, could they be changed.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the analysis and interpretation is spread throughout the testing and that the district is not able to manipulate testing as far as what parts are given and when the parts are given. He added that our District's assessment model is geared to look at and respond to students' demonstrated needs over time.

Chairman Vaillancourt suggested that anyone should contact Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin if they need more explanation. She said it is scary to look at the 100% proficiency requirement in 2014, cautioning people that the NECAP results are not the be all and end all of what the District can do and what our students are capable of doing. She added that she is proud of our results and that the Merrimack School District should be proud.

## **7. Further Discussion Regarding Possible Additional Expenditure for Retirement Costs**

Superintendent Chiafery reported that at the March 14, 2011 School Board Meeting the Board directed her to propose a \$1.5 million reduction in the budget to be completed in three tiers of \$500,000 each.

Tier One: The first \$500,959.76 has already been defined.

Tier Two: The proposed reduction of \$502,117.85 would include:

- savings in health insurance costs (the difference between the estimated cost and the actual cost)
- reductions in transportation, office equipment, advertising, and contracted services
- elimination of two teaching positions at the high school and the Lyons Road paving project

Tier Three: The proposed reduction of \$500,703.00 would include:

- reductions in transportation; middle school art, music and science equipment; high school family and consumer science, health, physical education, science and computer equipment; and elementary school furniture
- elimination of the Reeds Ferry and Thorntons Ferry entrance projects, Thorntons Ferry asbestos abatement project and cafeteria tables and one 71 passenger school bus.

Superintendent Chiafery noted two concerns about the possible elimination of one assistant principal at the high school. First, there will be a new town manager and a new police chief and the concern for the potential removal of the school resource officer (SRO) at the high school. If the school resource officer position is eliminated, then the roles of the three assistant principals at the high school become very important in the short term. Secondly, concerning the anti-bullying law, there will be more intensive investigations than in the past which would be done by the assistant principals.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the district wants to reduce the utilization of outside consultants. Until this point, the outside consultants have informed the Language Arts Coordinators who, in turn, have overseen the implementation of the logic model. The Language Arts Coordinators will come before the Board to present their responsibilities.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin expressed concern over the suggestion that high school department heads teach more classes. He explained that department heads have serious and prolonged work around competencies and reorganization efforts. Their function in this area would cease to exist if they were to become full time teachers. If a teacher is eliminated, the department heads could absorb some of the students, but not all. Approximately fifty students would be without a teacher and specific teacher duties and obligations would be affected.

Chairman Vaillancourt confirmed that the budget reductions are a process. Formal decisions would not be made at this meeting. She said that at the April 4, 2011 meeting there would be serious conversation about the three tiers. She asked that all board members think about how to handle the process at the next meeting.

Board Member Swonger stated that from a process perspective there should be a list of staffing in its entirety in terms of pink slips. He felt that he did not want a specific vote yet and that the final decisions be made with a final set of information.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained that the State budget outcome will impact staffing issues. Decisions regarding staff can not wait until June because staff contracts need to be issued by April 15, 2011.

Board Member Ortega questioned the combination of the instruction of the reading and World Language teachers at the high school.

Superintendent Chiafery spoke about the retirement incentive. When putting the budget together, the expectation was for twenty-five kindergarten through grade twelve teachers to apply for the retirement incentive. The three resignations received today were not part of the plan. The open French teacher position can be closed out. She explained that a high school teacher is expected to complete a Masters Degree program this year and therefore will be able to teach an English class.

Board Member Ortega questioned the reduction in the School Board advertising account. Superintendent Chiafery explained that the expenditure represented advertising for positions within the District.

Board Member Ortega questioned the instructional support of the contracted services of Dr. Kim Boothroyd. Superintendent Chiafery responded that \$10,000 remained in the account and that Dr. Boothroyd would be contracted for less time.

Board Member Ortega stated that parents are concerned about the length of time their children are on the busses. He said that taking a bus out of the rotation could have a negative effect on students and the amount of time they are on the bus instead of in school.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that currently students in grades kindergarten through grade four ride the bus together, students in grades five and six ride together, and students in grades six through twelve ride together. He could review a model where grades kindergarten through grade six ride together

and grades seven through twelve ride together. That model may provide some efficiency that could reduce the number of busses by at least one.

Chairman Vaillancourt responded that she would like the Administration to do a thorough study of removing a bus and/or setting up a two-run system. There was concern expressed about placing first grade students with sixth grade students on the same bus.

Superintendent Chiafery responded the upper elementary students are elementary level not middle school level. Upper elementary students could be very responsible for lower grade children and therefore not cause a problem.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that there is no perfect scenario but that it should be looked into with the bus company before the end of the 2011-2012 school year. Business Administrator Shevenell reported that the school district has already started speaking with other bus companies.

Board Member Barnes stated that she was not concerned about reducing the asbestos abatement in Phase three. Superintendent Chiafery stated that there is no safety issue and that the asbestos abatement would be deferred to another year. She would rather remove the abatement than lose staff.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained that there is no friable asbestos in any of the buildings. The district is not in asbestos violation. The abatement will definitely be taken care of. It may just take longer than expected. If there is an asbestos emergency, the money has to be part of the operating budget. She stated that the district tries to keep capital projects steady so as not to cause tax spikes. She added that Administration was asked to look at cuts that were sustainable adding the capital improvement projects have not been taken lightly.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that when she proposed the 3 tiers of possible reductions, she considered the charge that the School Board gave to her which included not increasing class size or diminishing any programs we have in place now.

Vice Chairman Thornton stated that she prefers the phase two reductions over the phase one reductions. The retirement incentives will hopefully result in no pink slips being issued. It was nice that the three positions that were eliminated could be attained through attrition. She agrees that looking at the bussing schedules and combining routes to save money is a better idea than eliminating positions in the schools. She also agreed that capital improvement projects will have to be removed and put into a future budget.

Chairman Vaillancourt expressed gratitude to the Administration. She stated that it is obvious that everyone has been pulling together on this effort and that she is very proud of this District. She is also proud of the Board for preparing for the possibility for an increase in expenditures of another million dollars.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the professional staff has to be notified by April 15<sup>th</sup> and that support staff has to be notified by May 21<sup>st</sup> of any pink slips. She reported that any staff member in tier one was notified today, March 28, 2011 and that the issue is going to be raised again.

## **8. Other**

### **a. Correspondence**

There was no correspondence

**b. Comments**

Board Member Swonger congratulated the middle school for a successful school play. He thanked the volunteers, staff, and the orchestra for the full production.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked Student Representative McLavey for her dedication and dependability.

**9. New Business**

There was no new business.

**10. Committee Reports**

Board Member Barnes reported that the Greater Woods Committee met Tuesday, March 15, 2011. Business Administrator Shevenell and Member Barnes now have access to the work area to review the draft versions of the document. They would be getting notification of when the newest version of the document is available for review of accuracy. The document needs to live on its own. She stated that they are clear about emergency personnel access to the property and also access for routine maintenance. Basically, status quo for the last year was reiterated at the meeting.

**11. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

There were no public comments on agenda items.

**12. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:35 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) 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.

At 10:06 p.m. Board Member Swonger moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Thornton) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 5-0-0.