

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
October 17, 2011**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

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

1. Call to Order

Chairman Vaillancourt called the meeting to order at 7:27 p.m.

Chairman Vaillancourt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of October 3, 2011 Minutes

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Thornton) to approve the minutes of the September 19, 2011 meeting.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 7, paragraph 7, should read “Board Member Barnes stated that she was pleased that the 11th graders, now seniors...”
- Page 6 of 7, section 4, 7, 8 and 11, paragraph 8, change all Building and Planning Committee to Planning and Building Committee.

Board Member Thornton requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 7, 2nd paragraph from the bottom, add “at least” before “five years in a row”
- Page 6 of 7, last paragraph, add Thornton after Board Member

Vice Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 7, paragraph 7, second sentence to read “She added that there are a lot of initiatives of which people are not aware”

Board Member Markwell requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 7, section 6, change SALES to SCALES

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 7, section 5, paragraph 3, add “in district” after “students” and change “number or resources on staff to service them” to “level of funding.”
- Page 6 of 7, section 11, paragraph 1, clarify the “steel structure”. Sentence 3 should read “It was determined at the meeting that the building would be a steel structure to make it more affordable, noting that the structure itself would not change but the materials in building the structure would change. It would look like ...”.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

3. Public Participation

Gary Krupp, 4 Ministerial Drive, reported that he worked on a budget project through the summer. It is not an official budget. It is a compilation of the last 7 budgets on a spreadsheet. It can be viewed on his website home.comcast.net/~eegeek and on the Merrimack school website. He will present it to the Budget Committee on November 8th.

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

- Target to Reeds Ferry Elementary School for \$327.09 for educational supplies

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Ortega) to accept the gift from Target.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Consent Agenda

- Teacher Nomination

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin announced the following teacher nominations.

- Kristine Thibault – Part-Time Kindergarten Teacher at Reeds Ferry Elementary School

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) moved to approve the consent agenda.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. Proposed Partnership Agreement Between Southern New Hampshire University and the Merrimack School District

Superintendent Chiafery introduced three women from Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) who had approached the Merrimack School District (MSD) with a proposal for a partnership between the university and the district.

Dr. Heath explained that this is an exciting project that is being phased in. The purpose of the partnership is to provide a continuum of learning for in-service teachers in the MSD and pre-service teachers from SNHU.

Cathy Stavenger who works in the area of developing partnerships is targeting the area of special education and the inclusive classroom. She explained that the students from SNHU would be involved with classes in the James Masticola Upper Elementary and the James Masticola Elementary Schools.

Ms. Arnold will facilitate visits with SNHU students into inclusive classrooms in these schools.

Board Member Thornton asked if the purpose of the partnership is to service Merrimack students as well as university students.

Ms. Stavenger explained that Ms. Arnold will be meeting with students for approximately 2.5 hours a day and would also be supporting the teachers during that time. There will be 15 students to work with teachers who are interested in pairing with them.

Board Member Thornton asked if the 2.5 hours a day would take place after school or in the evenings.

Ms. Stavenger replied that it would take place during the school day.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if this partnership is similar to student teaching.

Ms. Arnold replied the partnership is different than student teaching. She will be on site supervising the university students while they are in the Merrimack schools, unlike student teaching where the classroom teacher supervises the student teacher.

Board Member Thornton asked how long the university students would be in the classroom.

Ms. Stavenger replied that the course meets for 16 weeks. Some of that time will be spent in the classrooms and some of the time will be spent in designated areas where students will receive direct instruction.

Board Member Thornton asked if all 15 university students would be in the classroom at the same time.

Dr. Heath responded that Ms. Arnold schedules up to three students at a time to be in specific classrooms.

Board Member Thornton asked if Merrimack is the only site for the partnership program.

Dr. Heath responded that partnerships have been in place in Hooksett in the past years and are currently in place in Auburn.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked how many volunteer teachers are needed to meet the needs of the course.

Dr. Heath replied that the project would begin with a minimal amount of teachers and would hopefully grow as more teachers become aware of the partnership and want to participate.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked what would be the reason the teachers would volunteer to take part in the project.

Ms. Stavenger replied that some teachers participate because they will receive graduate credit, and some participate because they are excited about becoming part of the partnership.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that in building a relationship with the university through the partnership, a recruitment source could be established. It may result in some of the staff becoming adjuncts at the university and some of the university students becoming teachers in the Merrimack School District.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked how long the partnerships have been in existence in Auburn and Hooksett.

Ms. Stavenger replied that it has been in place in Auburn for two years and in Hooksett for two years.

Board Member Barnes asked who would be the best candidates for the courses offered at SNHU.

Ms. Stavenger replied that courses that are taught at SNHU for Merrimack teachers would not be specific to special education, but rather for curriculum instruction. It is only for teachers working towards their Masters.

Dr. Heath explained that a cohort could be in place for MSD, allowing teachers to work towards a Masters Degree in curriculum instruction. By being part of the partnership there would be a monetary savings for Merrimack teachers taking these graduate classes.

Board Member Barnes asked if once the cohort is established would other teachers be able to take part.

Dr. Heath explained that there might be opportunities for teachers to come into the cohorts at different times because the classes will be staggered. She added that SNHU is looking at this as an ongoing partnership.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that this partnership would be a great way to support Merrimack teachers in their goals for professional development. She explained that the proposed partnership plan would be put on the Consent Agenda for the next board meeting.

7. Merrimack High School Competencies, Assessments, Grading System at Merrimack High School

Principal Johnson began by explaining that class rank will continue to be placed on the transcripts, but will be eliminated from report cards, progress reports and PowerSchool. The reason for the elimination is that discussions of class rank by students proved to be unproductive. He noted that after the school year 2011-2012 class ranks would be available through their guidance counselors. Honor Society will continue, as will the top ten class dinner.

Principal Johnson stated that parents and students have received a copy of the Competency Based Grading System Plan this year and that it will also be placed on the high school web site.

John Snell, head of the science department, explained that research was done over the past four years to come up with the plan that is now the model for the 2011-2012 year at the high school. He added that there will be a huge change in how grading is done, how instruction is handled and how assessments will be structured unless further discussion is warranted.

Peter Petrigno, head of the social studies department, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the plan. He explained that a competency is “a set of skills and knowledge, derived from standards that can be applied and/or demonstrated in a variety of contexts.” It is State mandated that competency-based grading be implemented in the high school and added that the plan is specific to Merrimack. There will be the traditional grades (A-D based on numerical grades) and competency grades (1 through 4 with 4 reflecting the highest level of proficiency)

Traditional grades, he stated, include quizzes, tests, projects, homework, class participation and extra credit work. Competency grades are based on performance on tests and projects. The rubric that is being used is 4 for proficient with distinction, 3 for proficient, 2 for partially proficient and 1 for substantially below proficient. He added that the use of competencies shows areas of strength and areas of growth, and the grades are much more defined.

Jan Moynihan-Cooney, head of the English department, explained that assignment requirements would be described for the students, which includes the competencies of the assignment. She presented an example of a competency in English writing. She noted that there are four competencies in the English department, which include reading, writing, listening/speaking and viewing.

Ray Blank, head of the math department, explained that math has competencies in each course, which are content based, with competencies imbedded in the context. He added that the competencies are department specific.

Board Member Barnes asked if the traditional grading system is eventually going to be phased out.

Principal Johnson replied that there is no formal time line. Each district is responsible for its own determination of when the competency-based grading system is completely implemented.

Board Member Barnes asked how the students would understand their transcripts and how it would affect applying to college when they have standard grading in their freshman and sophomore years and then have competency-based grading while they are juniors and seniors.

Principal Johnson explained that this is a pilot and all areas have not been researched.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that the National Association of College Admissions Officers and the National Association of School Guidance Counselors have issued new guidelines about the college application process because of the competency-based grading system.

Student Representative Yates asked that if a student fails competencies in the last semester of the senior year (listed as incomplete on their report card) would there be time to remediate the course so they can graduate.

Mr. Blank responded that remediation is an area of concern. He added that remediations are being looked at so that they will be fair to all students, especially the seniors.

Mr. Petrigno explained that there should be no surprises. Remediation can begin before graduation, with final assessments showing tremendous growth in mastery.

Board Member Thornton asked how the program will work with children who need “extra credit” to keep their grades up or to prevent them from failing.

Principal Johnson responded that hopefully over time teachers, parents and students will learn the skills they need to master. He explained that for a student who needs an extra credit project to get a higher grade in a class, there is no real merit in that project. Usually their skills and understanding have not been increased by an extra credit project.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that competency-based grading has everything to do with understanding. Whatever is the subject matter, the student should be able to take that understanding and show how the student has profited by that understanding. He added that it is incumbent on the teacher to know what understanding is needed by the students to learn the skills and applications needed to reach the competencies.

Board Member Thornton asked if the plan for competency-based grading would put an extra burden on teachers.

Principal Johnson responded that it does place a burden on teachers and students.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that the plan promotes collaboration, allowing teachers to talk with their colleagues about strategies to use in reteaching students so that they can learn the needed skills.

Mr. Snell stated that the science department had recently had a competency meeting with the teachers where the teachers discussed how the competencies are taught and how they are being met, which shows the collaboration on the project.

Vice Chairman Ortega commented that what is being done now is something that was fully intended to be done for years, which is to measure student’s competencies in terms of the curriculum and what is expected. He added that more structure is being put around what the expectations are.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney responded that different classes did not always have common assessments so the teachers could not share data, but now through collaboration, it can be done. The focus can now be on teaching strategies.

Vice Chairman Ortega noted that the competencies are specific to the individual courses, but wondered if they would differ based on the type of courses the students are taking. For example, would they be different for a college prep course than for an advanced placement course.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney responded that they would be different for different level classes.

Mr. Blank commented that there are four to six competencies for math. Each one depends on the previous one. For example, algebra has different competencies than trigonometry, but students must complete one before going on to the other.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked how the incompletes would be handled.

Mr. Blank responded that with the rubrics, hopefully, remediation would take place earlier in the school year and prior to the last semester of school.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if by removing class rank from the report cards and progress reports are the competencies and class rank being linked.

Principal Johnson responded that one has nothing to do with another.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked beside class rank being fluid and therefore ever changing, what are the other reasons it is being removed from the report cards, PowerSchool and progress reports.

Principal Johnson responded that there are widespread discussions about class rank among the students that are not productive and doing more harm than good. He noted that parents could be in touch with the child's guidance counselor if they have any questions.

Vice Chairman Ortega responded that he did not want any of the students to have esteem issues due to class rank, but for the students going to college it could be a problem since colleges look at class rank.

Principal Johnson responded that the class rank would be on the transcripts that are sent to colleges.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that there are several benefits of the competency-based grading system. She also noted that the board will bring this subject to the table any time if parents or students have concerns.

8. Concept Overview of Proposed Sidewalk for O'Gara Drive

Tracy Bull, board representative to the Town Center Committee, discussed some recent developments by the Town Center Committee. She explained that there is a whole section of O'Gara Drive that does not have a sidewalk to continue the loop that could circumnavigate all of O'Gara Drive, McElwain Street and Baboosic Lake Road.

Ms. Bull continued to report that the original plan in 2009 enumerated a hierarchy of priority and that funding influences the order. She spoke about the Safe Route to Schools Program grant that focuses on grades kindergarten through grade eight and the development of a fitness program.

Ms. Bull spoke about the levels of reimbursement funding. This means that the district pays for the project and then is reimbursed through the grant.

1. Funding up to \$4,900 for the actual building piece
2. Funding up to \$15,000 for the actual travel plan
3. Funding up to \$250,000 for the general grant if a travel plan has been created

Ms. Bull explained that the students and residents use the loop around the high school and the elementary complex on a daily basis year round, as well as some sports teams and physical education classes. She added that construction of the sidewalk would remove some of the unsafe parking areas.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that formal action by the board is not needed for Ms. Bull to continue to pursue the grant.

Board Member Markwell asked about the cost of constructing the sidewalk on O’Gara Drive, noting that the cost of the project should be done based on the cost estimate.

Ms. Bull responded that the “travel plan” needs to be completed prior to receiving any estimates.

Student Representative Yates asked if the sidewalk would be on both sides of O’Gara Drive.

Ms. Bull responded that a sidewalk would be constructed on the west side of the road.

Board Member Barnes asked who the district would be competing with for the grant.

Ms. Bull responded that the Federal government funds the Safe Routes to School Project grants. Applications for the grant need to be filed by the end of March, 2012. Before any applications are filed for the grant money, a travel plan needs to be in place.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if the travel plan is specific to O’Gara Drive.

Ms. Bull responded that the travel plan would be specific to O’Gara Drive.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked that if the plan for O’Gara Drive is estimated to cost \$50,000, would it be logical to apply for a larger grant so that more than one project could be completed, such as Woodbury Drive for an estimate of \$100,000.

Ms. Bull responded that as a sub committee is formed it would deal with this issue.

Vice Chairman Ortega suggested that other items such as Woodbury Drive should be investigated, adding that areas that need construction like O’Gara Drive that provide a Safe Route to Schools do not necessarily have to be on school grounds.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained that the grant for O’Gara Drive is a reimbursement grant, meaning that the district must lay out the money outright and then the district will be reimbursed. The plan would need to be put into the district’s budget. It may not logistically work out.

The board members were in agreement to explore the formation of a subcommittee to prepare a travel plan.

9. Proposed charge for the Planning and Building Committee Relative to MHS Field

Superintendent Chiafery explained that the charge was developed based on what the board wanted to bring to the Planning and Building Committee relative to the Merrimack High School athletic field. She explained that she tried to highlight the most significant items from the board discussions. The most important recommendation is resurfacing the field, while at the same time taking a look at the repair/replacement of the track because of its proximity to the field.

The charge reads:

Work in conjunction with the Superintendent, Business Administrator, Director of Maintenance and High School Administration to recommend the kind of surface that should be used for the athletic field at Merrimack High School.

The investigation will include but not be limited to the following:

- a) Physical condition of the high school track that surrounds the field including its short term and long term needs.
- b) Types of athletic field surfaces used (e.g. natural, artificial, synthetic) their life expectancy, installation and maintenance issues and accompanying costs.
- c) Survey of surrounding school districts and/or viewing of their athletic fields to gain their experience factor.

Board Member Barnes noted that the date of the charge should be changed to March 2011. She questioned the timing of the charge and if the report could come before the board by the first Monday in March so that it would be voted on the third Monday in March.

Superintendent Chiafery suggested that the committee would come forward to the board in March, since the board that charges the committee should be in receipt of the report.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the transition of the board occurs after the first Monday in April. She noted that if the report is received by the third Monday in March, it could be voted on the first Monday in April before the board changes.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that he thought the previous discussion centered around separating the track itself from the field surface as two separate items and to focus the charge on the field.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that actual charge speaks to the surface of the field but that it is almost impossible to speak about the field without addressing the track.

Vice Chairman Ortega replied that if it makes the work easier, he would have no problem to include them both in the charge.

Superintendent Chiafery asked Board Member Markwell, since he is the board liaison to the School Planning and Building Committee, if he thinks combining the two projects is warranted, based on previous discussions.

Board Member Markwell replied that both projects are large undertakings. He added that he would bring the information to the committee and come back to the next board meeting with the information as to whether or not they wanted to focus on the athletic field or both the athletic field and the track.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained that the board does not always give a formal charge to the School Planning and Building Committee on capital projects, however we do typically run projects by them. She asked if the administration has enough information to make a decision or recommendation regarding the track separate from a formal charge regarding the field.

Board Member Markwell responded that the two projects are tied together. He added that realistically, replacing the track would not be completed in 2011. Perhaps it would be in the summer and fall of 2012.

Chairman Vaillancourt replied that it could fall into the budget cycle being worked on now.

Business Manager Shevenell stated that the two projects are related to one another. He added that at some point in time the track would need to be replaced. Timing of this depends on what happens with the field. He said the committee needs to be aware of the track situation when looking at the field project.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if the track needed a major repair or a replacement in the very near future.

Business Manager Shevenell responded that in the next few years the track would probably need to be replaced.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if the track project was not to be placed in the budget would the track still be viable and safe for use.

Business Administrator Shevenell replied that the track would be viable and safe.

Vice Chairman Ortega suggested since both projects lend themselves to be treated as a whole, it should be presented that way to the School Planning and Building Committee.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to move forward with the charge as written with the change of date from 2012 to 2011.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

10. Other

- Correspondence – There was no correspondence
- Comments- There were no comments from the board

11. New Business

- There was no new business

12. Committee Reports

Board Member Barnes reported that she attended a PERC (Program Evaluation and Review Committee) meeting on October 11, 2011. The standards based curriculum and the improvement of the physical education curriculum were discussed at the meeting.

Board Member Markwell reported that he attended the Healthcare Cost Committee meeting on October 5, 2011. The health survey results were highlighted as well as the web portal where questions could be directed to doctors who would give feedback to the teachers. He also announced that the health insurance rate settings for 2011-12 came in at 6% to 7% as compared to the previous rate of 17%-18%.

Board Member Markwell reported that he attended the Professional Development Committee on October 13, 2011. Highlights of the meeting were a discussion on anti-bullying training, the Challenge Day to be held in November and the Master Plan revision that needs to be completed by June, 2012.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Gary Krupp, 4 Ministerial Drive, addressed the board regarding two items on the agenda. The first was the partnership with SNHU and the Merrimack School District. He questioned phase two of the project, where Reeds Ferry School was targeted as a site, even though it is a responsive classroom and not an inclusive classroom. The second was the competency-based grading plan where he questioned having two grading systems at the same time.

14. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:35 p.m. Board Member Markwell 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.

At 10:27 p.m. Board Member Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.