

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
November 21, 2011**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Vaillancourt, Vice Chairman Ortega, Board Members Barnes and Thornton, and Student Representative Yates. Also present were Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, and Business Administrator Shevenell. Board Member Markwell was excused from the meeting.

1. Call to Order

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

Chairman Vaillancourt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of November 7, 2011 minutes

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Ortega) to approve the minutes of the November 7, 2011 meeting.

Student Representative Yates requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 6 of 7, Comments section, change the date of the theatrical performance to November 17 through November 19, 2011

Vice Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 7, last paragraph, change \$55,000 to \$110,000.
- Page 6 of 7, under Committee Reports, paragraph 2 from the bottom, add “as it relates to the high school athletic field charge” after the word “...deadline”.

Board Member Thornton requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 7, Section 6, paragraph 6, should read “...agreed that it would be nice to have all board members’ input on the budget at the board meeting”.

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 5 of 7, paragraph 7 should read: “Chairman Vaillancourt added that she has a concern about releasing the money for this project because of pending legislation to the New Hampshire Retirement System that could cause the school district to have to increase their contribution level. However, since nothing has changed at this point, the only increase in the expenditures from the budget that will be needed is \$200,000. That leaves a remaining \$992,075 in the budget that was set aside or reserved and not expended due to the uncertainties in legislation that could have possibly impacted our budget.”

3. Public Participation

Joe Kearns, 4 North Jebb Road, stated that he received his tax bill and was concerned that the largest part of the bill is the school district's responsibilities. He suggested that the board use more restraint in their spending.

Dana Hickey, Dirt Road, Merrimack, asked about the budget cycle for the municipality and the school board.

Chairman Vaillancourt responded with the dates of the upcoming budget meetings of the school board. On December 5th at the regular school board meeting, the budget will be initially rolled out with the Superintendent presenting the budget to the school board. December 8th at 7:30 p.m. is the first budget hearing. December 12th at 7:00 p.m. is a budget hearing. December 15th at 7:00 p.m. is scheduled as a tentative snow day for budget hearings. December 19th is the regularly scheduled school board meeting. She added that the board could be taking action on the budget either on December 12th or and/or December 29th.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that all agendas for budget meetings would be published on the web site. She added that public participation is very important and encouraged people to attend. She also stated that it very important that public participants be well informed before participating in the meetings. She noted that the website for the district and for the dates of meetings is www.merrimack.k12.nh.us.

The budget committee hearings will be held in January and February, followed by a budget committee public hearing and then the deliberative session in March. The final vote on the budget will be taken at the polls in April 2012.

4. Consent Agenda

- Teacher Nominations

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin announced the following teacher nomination:

- Kimberly Ramsey, 4th grade teacher at Thorntons Ferry School.

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

The motion passed 4-0-0.

5. The High School Arts Program: A Closer Look

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin gave a brief introduction to the high school arts program. He noted that art can keep students engaged in learning, art supports the full dimensions of a child's learning and the arts are a key to exploring and gaining mastery in other subjects. He added that there are a lot of very talented students in our district.

Joann Wegman, chair of the high school arts department made several points about the art department at the high school while a slide show was projected:

- The students are heterogeneously grouped. They learn the basics and then if they are interested they move on to specialized groups within the department.
- The computer graphics course is one of the first in the state to be offered.
- There are two after school groups for students. They are the glass club and the local chapter of the National Art Honor Society.
- Math and science are integrated into all the art classes.
- Visual problem solving, decision-making and critical thinking are included in all art classes.
- Many classes participate in service projects within the district.
- Pottery class for the empty bowl project will be held on November 29th and December 1st at 3:00 p.m. The empty bowl project raised \$3,000 last year. This year's empty bowl project will be held on April 4, 2012 in the high school cafeteria at 6:00 p.m.
- All the art teachers in the district determine the curriculum.
- Youth Art Month will be held in March 2012. All students' art from the district will be showcased in one place at the same time.
- The names and designs of students of Merrimack High School that have become successful in the art world were presented during the slide show.
- Ms. Wegman stressed that "the arts can make a difference".

Board Member Barnes appreciated the slide show. She added that at Reeds Ferry Elementary School there is an art show where students proudly share their work.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that art can reinforce many of the course competencies. He questioned how the math and science skills are included in the art curriculum.

Ms. Wegman responded that the competencies for the art classes are based on state standards that include critical thinking skills.

Chairman Vaillancourt commended the arts curriculum in the school district. She added that the community service art projects are amazing and how important it is that the art programs can cross boundaries.

5. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act: Requirements and Responsibilities for Compliance

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that the 504 policy is a requirement of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which protects quality education for people with disabilities. He introduced Emile Carter, Assistant Principal of James Masticola Elementary School, explaining that she is the point person who helped develop the revised 504 policy.

Assistant Principal Carter explained that it is a requirement for every school to have a vigorous 504 policy and that through an act of Congress in 2009 many changes had been made to the previous policy.

Assistant Principal Carter explained that there are three areas of focus: 1) consideration of the new laws, 2) consolidation of all the forms and creation of uniformity across the district and 3) consistency within the district. At this time, Merrimack is in sync with the federal regulations, has more clarity of the purpose of the 504 regulations, has developed a mission statement and has listed an area of frequently asked questions.

The facilitators and coordinators on the committee are Georgianna Tebbetts, Julie DeLuca, Jane Hoover, Matt Bigelow, Melissa Beaubien, Becky Thompson, Deb Barker and Mark Walczak. This committee will continue to meet on an ongoing basis.

The Mission Statement reads:

In the Merrimack School District, we strive to provide our students with an education that matches their needs as they progress through development stages and supports their growth in the context of an educational setting. In order to accomplish this, a 504 Plan provides eligible students with accommodations that allow them access to their learning equal to students who do not require accommodations. The determination, development and implementation of accommodations are shared responsibility between the student, the parent and the school.

Board Member Barnes questioned the difference between the 504 Plan and an IEP (Individual Education Plan).

Assistant Principal Carter explained that the 504 Plan allows accommodations to a student's program. An IEP provides modifications to the grade level curriculum.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that the 504 Plan gives disabled students educational access equal to that of any other student who does not have disabilities. For example, an accommodation under a 504 Plan may provide a hearing aid for a student who is hard of hearing or move him/her to the front of the classroom. In contrast, the IEP requires a modification to the specific curriculum for that student who is hard of hearing.

Board Member Barnes asked if the 504 Plan follows a student through their entire education like an IEP.

Assistant Principal Carter responded that the 504 Plan does not follow the student. It is based on the requirement of a student in a specific area at a specific time.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked about the changes that have taken place in the legislation regarding the 504 Plan.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin explained that the designation for students having a 504 Plan has expanded. A major change in legislation is a change in the reporting requirements.

Vice Chairman Ortega questioned the increased student eligibility requirements for a 504 Plan.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that ADHD would now be covered under the 504 Plan as well as medical conditions, such as peanut allergies, seizure disorders, etc.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked how consistency is established.

Assistant Principal Carter explained that it depends on the specific needs of the student.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the best accommodations for the student vary according to the situation. He added that the 504 Plan is not a fixed document and may be modified depending on the needs of a particular student.

Assistant Principal Carter thanked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin for facilitating the initiative. She read the FAQ's of the 504 Plan.

What is Section 504? Section 504 is one part of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which bars discrimination against persons with disabilities.

What is a 504 Plan? A 504 Plan is a document listing accommodations that provide eligible students equal access to his/her education and is based upon individual need.

Why would my child need a 504 Plan? Your child may benefit from a 504 Plan when his/her disability substantially limits or interferes with his/her ability to participate in his/her education or school sponsored programs and activities.

Who is on the 504 Team? The 504 Facilitator, teacher, parent/guardian, student (as developmentally appropriate to participate in all aspects of the 504 process) and other personnel as deemed necessary by the 504 team.

What is an accommodation? An accommodation is any action taken to afford a student equal access to his/her education or school sponsored programs and activities.

How do I access a 504 for my son/daughter? Contact the building's 504 Facilitator.

6. Budget Committee Year End Report

Business Administrator Shevenell appeared before the budget committee on November 8, 2011. Any information on the budget will be posted on the web so that the public will see how the year ended. He explained that the year ended with a two million dollar surplus that went to reduce the tax bills for the school district's portion of the tax rate. He explained that the school district does not have the discretion of retaining the surplus. Any surplus has to go back to reduce the tax rate.

The two million dollar surplus was made up of 1.5 million dollars that was under spent in the budget. There were savings in fuel oil, savings in special education and savings in "pay for performance" which all resulted in coming in under budget.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that on the revenue side, approximately \$200,000 was received in catastrophic aid, which was more than was anticipated. Medicaid reimbursements, which are applied for every year, bring in money.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted that food services initiated some cost cutting measures and a price increase, which resulted in an increase in revenue. The net effect went from a deficit of \$25,000 in 2009-2010 to a surplus of around \$93,000 in 2010-2011. Hopefully that will be recreated next year so that funds will be built up. There may be some items to purchase next year such as the refrigerator and the computer system.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that food services is a special revenue fund where any surplus does not go back to reduce the tax rate. Instead, it goes back to the food services program.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Business Administrator Shevenell to explain the food services budget.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that food services is a special revenue fund, separate from the regular fund. There is no tax impact. It must be budgeted as an expenditure and as a revenue.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted that it was another good year and that hopefully the district will continue to be in the black in future.

Board Member Thornton thanked the administration for being so careful with the budget.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the Merrimack School District has operated on the philosophy that if you don't need it, you don't spend it. He added that the board tries to operationalize the promise that was made to the voters. They do not spend any more money than is necessary.

7. Other

- Correspondence:

Chairman Vaillancourt noted e-mails pertaining to input about the school calendar.

- Comments:

Superintendent Chiafery noted that Professor Roger W. Lawrence, a volunteer at Reeds Ferry School received a service award from Volunteer New Hampshire.

Chairman Vaillancourt added that Professor Lawrence received this award at the 9th Annual Spirit of New Hampshire Award on November 8, 2011 in recognition of the outstanding contribution by volunteers in 2011.

8. New business

There was no new business to report.

9. Committee Reports

Vice Chairman Ortega, liaison from the school board to the budget committee, attended the meeting of the budget committee on November 8th at Merrimack High School. He explained that agenda items included a year end review of the budget, a presentation by committee member Gary Krupp regarding a tool he developed for historical analysis of budgets and a schedule for future budget committee dates.

Vice Chairman Ortega, as the liaison to the budget committee, requested that accommodations for tables be set up for the budget committee members at the school board budget hearings. He noted that the Town Hall Meeting Room was not conducive to a multiple table layout.

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that she attended the meeting of the Master Plan Steering Committee. She cited the draft copy of the committee minutes. The next meeting will be held on January 17, 2012.

10. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Roy Swonger, 6 Klara Drive, a member of the budget committee encouraged people to participate in the budget process early in the discussions, noting that there is a lot to learn. The information will be posted on line.

11. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:00 p.m. Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Thornton) to recess to non-public session per RSA 91-A:3,II (a), (b), (c).

The motion passed on a roll call vote of 4-0-0.

At 10:05 p.m. Board Member Thornton moved (seconded by Vice Chair Ortega) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 4-0-0.