

**Merrimack Special School Board Meeting  
December 12, 2011  
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room**

**PUBLIC SESSION MINUTES**

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

**1. Call to Order**

Chairman Vaillancourt called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Vaillancourt highlighted the following meeting dates:

- December 19, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Meeting Room
- January 2, 2012 at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Meeting Room
- Budget Committee meetings in January and February
- Deliberative Session in March

**2. Public Participation**

Mike Malzone, 8 East Chamberlain Road, noted that his property taxes increased 10%. He stated that he would like the school district budget to be reduced by 5% to 10%. He expressed his disappointment that the meeting didn't begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. He asked if the school district had addressed the process for showing movies that were deemed inappropriate for student viewing.

**3. Budget Discussions**

• **Library**

Nancy Rose, Director of Library Services presented the library and technology budget. She reported the most noticeable item in the library budget is the transference of software from the school budgets to the library budget which will allow for central purchasing, greater savings and ensure equity.

The library budget reflects additional purchases of electronic titles, the elimination of a map item due to access to more on-line geographic maps and the elimination of instructional media such as DVDs. She announced the first year of a five year data projector plan.

Board Member Barnes stated that technology needs to be expanded upon. Other than the data projectors she did not see additional technology such as expanded PowerSchool, IP telephony and outdated school servers in the budget.

Mrs. Rose responded that there wouldn't be an extra cost for the expansion of PowerSchool. The voice over IP project is behind schedule and the infrastructure planning is on hold due to budget constraints.

Board Member Thornton asked for clarification on the reason for the decision to consolidate the software and licensing.

Mrs. Rose replied that she anticipates a cost savings as a result of the consolidation.

Board Member Markwell asked what can be expected in savings when the district goes to a hosted PBX voice over IP system.

Mrs. Rose responded that the hosted system is a managed voice over IP service that is combined with the district ISP and the managed weigh in circuit service contract. The monthly cost will be about the same or less, it will not be more.

Board Member Markwell asked if the expenses for camera maintenance could be reduced if the maintenance department were to perform maintenance on the cameras.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that the cost of maintaining the surveillance cameras is part of the maintenance budget. He noted that the maintenance personnel do not have the expertise required to maintain the surveillance cameras.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that capital expenditures are being avoided as a result of the phone upgrade.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if the cost for data projectors will be the same amount annually.

Mrs. Rose explained that the budget for future data projectors will not include the mounting brackets and installation costs.

- **Merrimack Middle School**

Principal Debbie Woelflein announced that Assistant Principal Caragher was not in attendance due to the birth of his son.

Principal Woelflein reported an increase in the student supplies due to an expected increase in student enrollment.

Principal Woelflein reported an increase from a .3 Spanish teacher position to a .5 Spanish teaching position to accommodate the increase in the number of students taking World Language at the middle school.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she received positive feedback from parents with regards to the new half team at the middle school. Parents are pleased with the accommodation, class sizes, and the delivery of the curriculum.

- **James Mastricola Upper Elementary School**

Principal Marsha McGill and Assistant Principal William Morris presented the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School budget.

Principal McGill reported that the upper elementary school budget is approximately 1% lower than last year.

Board Member Barnes asked for clarification on the teacher ratio at the fifth and sixth grade levels.

Principal McGill explained that the number of teachers fluctuate according to student enrollments. Principal McGill expects to have 13 fifth grade teachers for a ratio of 25.3 to 1 and 12 sixth grade teachers for a ratio of 25.1 to 1 next year.

- **Merrimack High School**

Principal Ken Johnson introduced Assistant Principals Richard Zampieri, Peter Bergeron and Cheryl Smith.

Principal Johnson reported a decrease in many line items as a result of the decline in student enrollment. He reported that the increase in the co-curricular transportation account is reflective of the desire to assist the academic teams strive for success in the post season. A portion of the cost of the Challenge Day program was also included in the budget for next year.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that, per her request, the high school administration provided the board with 2011-2012 course enrollment numbers for specific subjects at the high school as well as information about the math lab.

Vice Chairman Ortega thanked the administration for supporting a portion of the travel costs for post season co-curricular participation.

Vice Chairman Ortega inquired about a process that would ensure equity between fall and spring post seasons for co-curricular activities.

Principal Johnson responded that both the advisors and administration project the estimated post season travel costs.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked for clarification on the budget for athletic officials.

Assistant Principal Bergeron explained that the budget for the athletic department includes expenses for one or two teams from each season to participate in playoffs. The difference between the budgeted amounts compared to the expended amount is reflective of the actual number of teams that participated in the playoffs. Also included in the athletic budget is a slight increase in the stipends for the individuals who sell tickets, announce the game and keep score.

Assistant Principal Bergeron stated that often times the NHIAA will not cover playoff expenses incurred by the hosting school. Examples of playoff expenses include the officials and police.

Vice Chairman Ortega questioned the difference between English class sizes compared to the size of the math classes.

Assistant Principal Smith explained that the teaching capacity from existing resources resulted in five additional math classes resulting in lower class sizes this year as compared to last year.

Vice Chairman Ortega referred to the enrollment handout and stated that he thought class sizes for second semester world history (college prep) and civics (college prep) seemed high.

Assistant Principal Smith stated that the second semester schedules are still a work in progress.

Board Member Thornton asked for input regarding the effectiveness of the security cameras at the high school.

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that the high school has two camera systems referred to as DVR1 and DVR2. He explained that DVR1 consists of 26 cameras (all internal shots) and DVR2 consists of 18 cameras (nine internal and nine external shots).

Assistant Principal Zampieri stated that the internal cameras are used more than the external cameras. The high school cameras are referenced five to fifteen times a day for investigations, altercations, witnesses, thefts, missing items, and situations involving students cutting class.

Board Member Thornton asked if there had been any cost avoidance as a result of the security cameras.

Assistant Principal Zampieri stated that there was no data on cost avoidance because it was difficult to determine.

Assistant Principal Bergeron emphasized that the cameras have been very useful in solving inside and outside issues at the high school.

Business Administrator Shevenell noted that the request for middle school cameras was the same as the high school, but fewer in number.

Board Member Barnes asked about the technology class enrollment number.

Chairman Vaillancourt clarified that technology enrollments were not included in the handout. She explained that she asked for enrollments of subjects with the largest enrollments and the areas discussed during previous budget meetings.

Board Member Markwell asked if the high school administration knew about the bon fire at the high school prior to Thanksgiving and if a permit had been obtained.

Assistant Principal Bergeron explained that the high school football team has tried to begin a tradition of a bon fire prior to the Thanksgiving Day game. A request for a fire permit would be part of that process.

Board Member Markwell questioned why there was a 3% increase in the language arts and science salaries.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that the 2.75% increase in the budget lines Board Member Markwell referenced was probably due to the grouping of experienced teachers on the higher end of the salary scale.

Chairman Vaillancourt spoke to the extensive amount of time high school administrators spend on investigations. She noted that the use of security cameras has dramatically reduced the investigation time.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Principal Johnson for data on the number of students that use the high school math lab as well as the effectiveness or success rate of the students who utilize the math lab.

Board Member Markwell questioned the function of the ten administrative assistants at the high school.

Principal Johnson reported two administrative assistants in the guidance department, two administrative assistants in the special education department and four administrative assistants in the main office for a total of eight.

Superintendent Chiafery requested time to be able to investigate the ten high school administrative assistance positions.

- **Central Office**

Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin and Business Administrator Shevenell presented the proposed 2012-2013 budget for the central office.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that the district wide budget encompasses benefits, health insurance, dental insurance, retirement, workers compensation, and long term disability.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported the health insurance options averaged an overall increase of 6%. He explained that the transportation contract will go out to bid at the end of the current school year. The transportation budget for 2012-13 reflects an increase of 10%. The increase was based on fuel prices and input from other districts.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported the debt service (the 1997 high school addition) decreased by \$378,000. The next bond (the 2000 high school addition) will drop off in 2021.

Board Member Barnes asked if there would be an opportunity to consolidate bus routes as a result of a new transportation contract.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded that the moderate decline in student enrollments couldn't translate into the reduction of buses. He would rather not consolidate bus routes given the unknown information at this time.

Business Administrator Shevenell added that two buses cover the one later bus run. The late bus transports between 8 and 30 students daily.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that two or three years ago the number of late bus runs was reduced from two to one.

Board Member Markwell stated that he asked the administration for a zero tax impact budget. He noted a 1.45% increase over the 2011-12, per the budget summary. He questioned why the \$590,346 tax impact.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the 2012-13 budget is \$300,000 less than the 2011-12 budget. He stated that the 2012-13 budget is less and the revenues will be less, also.

Chairman Vaillancourt clarified that Board Member Markwell asked for a zero percent tax impact. The board's consolidated message to the administration stated that the board would support the administration's efforts to create a level funded budget.

Vice Chairman Ortega expressed his desire for quality buses and maintenance in the next bus contract.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that he was under the impression that funds to support outside consultants would go away. He asked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin to speak to the district wide instructional support account.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the district wide instructional support account allowed for an instructional coach to provide teachers with the ability to self monitor

and to provide a series of strategies in the area of reading and writing and literacy. He explained the improvements and efforts in the area of reading exposed a need for improvements in the area of writing.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked for an explanation of the types of situations that would require a substitute.

Superintendent Chiafery responded professional development leave (in district and out of district), sick leave, bereavement leave, jury duty, and family medical leave.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked for the average rate of pay for a substitute.

Business Administrator Shevenell responded the rate of pay for a substitute teacher is between \$75 and \$90 a day.

Vice Chairman Ortega questioned why the budget for substitute teachers at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School was more than Reeds Ferry Elementary School when Thorntons Ferry School has fewer teachers.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the number of year-long substitutes could explain difference.

Vice Chairman Ortega questioned why the substitute account remained level funded when the number of staff was less.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that the leadership team is currently evaluating the use of substitutes. The budgeted amount for substitutes may be adequate for the needs this year as apposed to an over expending similar to last year.

Board Member Thornton noted that the substitute budget was reduced last year by \$50,000 and that the level funded substitute budget for 2012-13 reflects that same reduction.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the number of teachers has been reduced, but the training requirements have been increased. A few examples are: Title IX training, bullying training, behavior training, alternative assessment training and the recertification needs of teachers.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she anticipates being able to provide the board with a rendering of the substitute budget at the end of the year.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that 70% of the school district budget is salaries. Two components of the largest increases over the years have been healthcare costs and contribution levels to the New Hampshire Retirement System.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated costs that have been assumed by the state will be assumed at the local level in the near future.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that the district has the ability to control the healthcare costs. One example of the district's commitment to reduce healthcare costs is reflected in the current Master Agreement Between the Merrimack School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Business Administrator Shevenell to report the actual amount the district would have spent additionally, over what is budgeted now, if it were not for the change in the cost driver and change in the plan.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported a total net savings of \$156,000. He stated if the same healthcare plan had been maintained by the teachers and the contribution percentage rate of 85/15 had been maintained for the blue choice, the district would have had to add \$656,000 to the 2012-13 operating budget. However, the teacher pay increase for 2012-13, without the consideration of the reduction in force, would have been approximately \$500,000.

Chairman Vaillancourt thanked the Merrimack Teachers Association for their extremely productive creative problem solving during negotiations.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated there are many factors that affect the tax rate. To determine any budget's impact on the tax rate with accuracy at this time would be impossible.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that the only revenue source for the School District's budget is local taxes. The School District can not save a year end surplus, unlike the town. She reported that the school district returned a \$2 million surplus to the town last year.

### **Budget Discussion**

Chairman Vaillancourt announced that it is her intent to add the cost of the roof project to the operating budget. She is still striving for a level funded budget. The current budget is \$301,000 less than last year. The roof project will cost \$615,469. Chairman Vaillancourt asked the administration to reduce the budget by another \$314,000.

Superintendent Chiafery asked if the consensus of the board was still committed to the furniture replacement plan and the data projection replacement plan.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that he is still committed to the furniture replacement plan and the data projection replacement plan. He supports additional sustainable reductions.

Board Member Barnes concurred with Vice Chairman Ortega. She noted that the five year furniture replacement plan turned into a seven year plan because of various delays. She recommended that the administration identify areas of opportunity due to the decline in enrollment. She would not support any impact to the instruction or result in negative consequences to the students.



Board Member Thornton anticipates the furniture replacement plan will become ongoing annual costs; therefore, she is less committed to a specific time frame. She believes that technology costs should be placed in the operating budget. She would like to see the high school technology goals stay on track because high school students will enter a mature world where technology is very important.

Board Member Markwell supports the continuation of a solid and sound infrastructure. He supports continued improvements in the area of technology. He would sacrifice furniture before reducing staff. He stated that this was the wrong year to give raises to anyone. He would have supported healthcare concessions without pay increases. He hopes staff loss is minimal, but with pay increases expects that staff reduction will be reality.

**4. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

Gary Krupp, 4 Ministerial Drive, stated that the major reason for the increased budget is due to salaries and benefits which is 70% of the budget. He noted that the special education budget increased 17% over the last seven years and the maintenance budget increased 23% over the last seven years. He stated that when salaries increase the employer's federal withholding contributions also increase. He questioned if the increase in federal withholding contributions had been calculated into the healthcare savings as reported earlier.

At 8:55 p.m., Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.