

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack Town Hall Meeting Room
December 19, 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 were present

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 Minutes

Board Member Thornton moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Ortega) to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2011 meeting.

Student Representative Yates requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 2, 1st bullet should read classes
- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 2, 5th bullet should read “Six band members will perform at the All State Band/Orchestra Competition in April.

Board Member Thornton requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 7 of 9, 5th bullet, change the word “and” to “an”

Vice Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 3 from the bottom the last sentence should read, “He stated that there is a unique opportunity to see the continuity of the music program at the Cavalcade of Bands with James Masticola Upper Elementary School, Merrimack Middle School and Merrimack High School all participating.
- Page 3 of 9, paragraph 2 from the bottom, first sentence the company name is Keach Nordstrom Associates.
- Page 5 of 9, paragraph 4, change the sentence to read “Vice Chairman Ortega asked Superintendent Chiafery about the process for the board to use the information presented.
- Page 8 of 9, last paragraph, add “....future agenda to be voted on before the budget deliberations.”

The motion passed 3-0-2 with Board Member Barnes and Chairman Vaillancourt abstaining.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Thornton) to accept the minutes of the Special School Board Meeting on December 8, 2011.

Board Member Barnes requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 2 of 8, change stream line to “streamline”
- Page 2 of 8, paragraph 2 from the bottom, remove “Shannon” and change next word to “questioned”
- Page 3 of 8, paragraph 5, remove the “s” from “transportations”
- Page 4 of 8, remove the comma after Principal Kim Yarlott

Board Member Thornton requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 6 of 8, paragraph 3 from the bottom, should read “...Honeywell after the first year of the program”

Vice Chairman Ortega requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 2 of 8, paragraph 8, insert a space between to and 10 in last sentence
- Page 3 of 8, paragraph 2 from the bottom, change “gamete” to “gamut”

Chairman Vaillancourt requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 4 of 8, paragraph 3, first sentence, remove the “s” from the word “expenses”
- Page 7 of 8, paragraph 5, should read “Board Member Markwell questioned the budget for glass and glass replacement”
- Page 7 of 8, after paragraph 8, add a paragraph that reads “Business Administrator Shevenell responded that he felt confident that the amount would not exceed the \$4.00 per gallon.”

The motion to accept the minutes as amended passed 5-0-0.

3. Public Participation

Carolyn Dube, editor of The Merrimack Patch reported on the National Holiday Light contest. She explained that this is a national contest that awards the best decorated house for the holidays with a \$100,000 award to be donated to the school district in the winner’s home town. The web site for the contest is deckthehouse.patch.com.

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

- Mary Banks to Reeds Ferry Elementary School for \$100.00 for general supplies to support the nurses office

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to approve the Consent Agenda.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Parent Involvement Survey District Summary

David St. Jean, Special Education Director explained the survey that parents of special education students receive. He cited the letter from the New Hampshire Bureau of Special Education, which states, “The Parent Involvement Survey is a requirement of the United States Department of Education (USDOE), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that each State measure the percent of parents of children receiving special

education services who report that school facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities.”

Mr. St. Jean reported the results of the survey, stating that overall Merrimack School District is above the state average. He stated that there has been much progress in the special education program over the past several years which he attributed to the success of the Parent Support Group. This group recently received an award from the Parent Information Center.

Barbara Publicover explained that the Parent Support Group began about four years ago with the purpose of trying to provide a place for parents of special education students to find support in the world of special education and disabilities. She stated that the district was very supportive in the formation and continuation of this group. As a result of the Parent Involvement Surveys, workshops on diet and social skills have been presented. This past year there was a seminar for teachers and parents in November titled “Around the World in Special Education”. Two more workshops will be held in March and in May.

Ms. Publicover stated that the web site for the support group is www.merrimackpact.com. A link can also be found on the Merrimack School District web site.

Mr. St. Jean recommended that parents of young children with disabilities understand the system prior to their children registering for school.

Board Member Barnes asked if there are areas where people can give written feedback on specific questions.

Trish Swonger stated that she has served on the State Parent Survey Committee since 2007. She explained that the survey does not allow for comments. It is a general survey developed so that the results can be measured and compared. The questions are consistent from year to year so that progress can be tracked. She added that if parents have specific questions, the website and phone number for the Bureau of Special Education are provided on the letter that is sent out with the survey.

Board Member Markwell made an observation that some of the questions on the survey are similar and it seems that the answers were dependent on the interpretation of the question by the parents.

Mr. St. Jean responded that a lot of time is spent on looking at the questions. Sometimes the questions seem similar but have different results.

Board Member Markwell stated that he was surprised that there were fewer on-line surveys returned as compared to paper surveys.

Ms. Swonger explained that the results statewide are higher on paper than on-line. She stated that the questionnaires go out in paper form. The paper survey gives the website for the survey, which means that there is an extra step to fill out the survey on-line. It also seems easier to fill out the paper survey because there is a return envelope provided.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if the Merrimack support group was unique to the state, since it was recognized for being a model for other districts.

Ms. Publicover responded that it is not unique. The southern tier of the state has several parent groups. In line with that, Ms. Publicover has been hired by the Parent Information Center to aid other districts in setting up support groups.

Ms. Swonger reported that there are currently ten support groups in the state this year, compared to two districts with support groups in previous years. She added that since the Merrimack survey is used to make things better, it has been used as an example for other districts.

Vice Chairman Ortega thanked the presenters for coming before the board with their presentation. He stated that providing the support group is a much-needed service regarding a very complicated system.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that one of the goals of the district is to improve communication and this support group is a huge proponent of proactive communication. She thanked the participants for this as well as making their presentation to the board.

6. Consideration of Merrimack High School as the Town's Sole Polling Site

Chairman Vaillancourt explained the background of the proposal to consider Merrimack High School as the sole polling site for the Town of Merrimack. Chairman Vaillancourt read sections of the minutes from February 28, 2011 and March 14, 2011 school board meetings that related to prior discussions on the high school as the sole polling place. She added that one of the issues at hand is adjusting the school calendar to provide for voting.

Superintendent Chiafery was asked to go to the Town Manager regarding this issue. She agreed that the school calendar needs to be addressed. It is very difficult to set up the school calendars without the extra burden of inserting the voting days. Different years have different dates for voting, based on whether or not it is a presidential election year. The setting of these dates is done by the Secretary of State and could be different during different elections.

Superintendent Chiafery also addressed the effects on teacher workshops if the high school is used as the sole polling area. There are three teacher workshop days scheduled during the year, which would be reduced to two workshop days if one day is used for polling purposes.

Superintendent Chiafery was asked to make contact with the Town Manager Eileen Cabanel regarding the cost of the floor mats to cover the gym floor for the elections. She stated that the Ms. Cabanel did not have a specified amount in the budget for the floor covering. She added that Ms. Christensen, Town Moderator requested that the school board take a vote in December or January to determine the use of the high school for polling. She would then go to the Town Council to supply fifty per cent of the cost of the mats. Superintendent Chiafery said that there is a line item in the Town Council budget for election costs, which could be used if the decision is made to purchase the floor covering.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to allow Merrimack High School to be the sole polling place for elections.

Board Member Barnes spoke to the motion. She said that the board could plan ahead for every four years to set the calendars. She stated that there would be many benefits to using the high school, including more accessibility for people with disabilities.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that it is a point for consideration, but it has not been approached. She added that she would want to speak to Ms. Christensen about this.

Board Member Thornton stated that she had two concerns: 1) the school calendar and 2) the fact that the board has not formally heard from any Town Councilors regarding the single polling place. She asked if there had been any formal discussion by the Council on this issue.

Chairman Vaillancourt responded that there had been discussion, but no formal vote. The discussion focused on the mats for the gym floor. She stated that the Council is waiting to see if the board votes for the single polling place at the high school.

Board Member Thornton stated that a decision needs to be made jointly with the Town Council and the school board.

Chairman Vaillancourt explained that when it was discussed at the Town Council meeting, there were no objections. They were waiting to see if the board agreed to hold the polling at the high school.

Board Member Barnes stated that if the vote is favorable and the calendar is adjusted there would be no binding decision unless all parties approve the purchase of the floor coverings.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that allowing the high school to be the sole polling place is a separate action from purchasing the floor covering. The issue on the table is whether or not to make the high school the sole polling place.

Board Member Barnes amended the motion and moved (seconded by Board Member Markwell) to allow the board to enter an agreement to have Merrimack High School as the single polling place for town and National elections for the school calendar year 2012-2013, beginning with the 2012 elections.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if the impact on the school calendar would only be for the high school.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that it would affect all teacher workshops throughout the district.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that the board could not decide whether or not to have a single polling place. What the board could do is offer the facility. He asked if there would be adequate space in the other schools to hold the teacher workshops.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that it would be ideal if the high school facility could be used for the workshops, but if needed the other schools would be available for the workshops.

Vice Chairman Ortega stated that there would probably be more times the floor coverings would be used in the high school. He questioned if the Town Council had budgeted \$4,000 for the gym floor mats for the town election costs.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked how many days would be affected if the high school is used to accommodate the elections.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the three workshop days for the school year 2012-2013 are September 11, 2012, October 6, 2012 and November 11, 2012. She added that the three voting dates would be September 11 for the primary election, November 6 for the general election and April 9 for the town elections.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that Saint James Methodist Church is not a good place for polling, but by using the high school as the single polling place would be difficult to accommodate the school calendar. It would eliminate the half-day workshops and professional development days for the teachers.

Board Member Markwell asked where the polling would take place if the motion fails.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that she had not had any discussion with Ms. Christensen regarding that question.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that the main reason to make the change is that St. James Methodist Church is a difficult location for the polling due to the traffic situation. She stated that Moderator Christensen is looking for a better solution. She added that if the motion fails, the three polling places would remain the same.

The motion failed 2-3-0 with Board Member Thornton, Vice Chairman Ortega and Chairman Vaillancourt voting in opposition.

Superintendent Chiafery will speak with Lynn Christensen with the results of the vote.

7. Proposed Modifications to the 2012-2013 Budget

Superintendent Chiafery explained that in order to look at the proposed budget modifications for the 2012-2013 budget, some questions had to be answered. These questions related to glass, trash hauling, the math lab at the high school and the elimination of an administrative assistant at the high school.

Business Administrator Shevenell reported that the amount in the budget for general repairs, including maintenance of the building, electrical, glass and screen replacement and general supplies was \$148,000. Last year the electrical costs were \$11,000 which was up \$4,800. Plumbing was up \$11,000.

Board Member Markwell asked what the actual expenses were, instead of estimating.

Business Administrator Shevenell replied that he will look into the history and will reflect what is going on.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained that the trash is put out to bid each year. Currently there are sixteen 10-yard dumpsters, which get picked up twice a week. Three hundred cubic yards of refuse plus recycling 10 yards of paper and 6 yards of bottles are on an on-call basis. The cost of the whole bid is \$62,000. Mr. Shevenell added that it is not something the school district can do on its own. It needs privatization in order to be more cost effective.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin spoke about the math lab at the high school, which averages 40 visits per week for about 534 recorded visits this year as of last week. When competencies go into effect in the high school, the math lab will be a remediation tool for those competencies. It is difficult to calculate a success rate at this time, but it will be done when the competencies are rolled out next year.

Chairman Vaillancourt noted that 40 visits could be for 40 students, or could be 20 students going twice a week. She asked if teachers are keeping track of the number of students and the number of visits.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that he would try and get more specific information. Next year, quantifying will be much easier.

Student Representative Yates commented that he goes to the math lab before school begins. He added that the teachers tend to keep in touch with the students to see how they are doing. He also said that there is a daily sign in sheet for the math lab.

Vice Chairman Ortega asked if there is a reduction in the number of math teachers, will that affect the math lab.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that it shouldn't change the staffing of the lab.

Superintendent Chiafery spoke about the proposed budget reductions for the 2012-2013 school year. Currently there are ten administrative assistants at the high school – 2 in the district wide library, 2 in guidance, 1 in special education, 1 attendance clerk, 1 receptionist and 3 who service the principal and the assistant principals. One of these positions will be eliminated.

In the reduction plan for Mastricola Elementary School, one of the KIAs (Kindergarten Instructional Assistants) will be eliminated, leaving two half time KIAs at Mastricola Elementary School. In the reduction plan for Reeds Ferry Elementary School one half time KIA will also be eliminated.

Business Administrator Shevenell explained the in the maintenance budget, the following items would be reduced or delayed: parking lot striping, carpeting for Reeds Ferry Elementary School, gym floor covering, roof maintenance at Mastricola Elementary School and painting at Reeds Ferry Elementary School.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin reported that other items to be reduced or delayed are the refrigerator at Merrimack Middle School, binding of books at the library, new books for the library, additional equipment for the music department and special education equipment.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin continued to speak about reductions in the gateway program. A complete review, independent of the budget cycle is being done.

Business Administrator Shevenell spoke about the savings in salaries and benefits for retirees. Currently ten positions are being looked at for reductions.

Board Member Thornton asked if the number of KIAs is reduced would that result in one less kindergarten class.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that personnel in the kindergartens would be shared.

Board Member Thornton asked if gateway teachers would be shared. She stated her concern regarding cutting services to the higher learning students.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin replied that one gateway teacher would service two schools. He added that gateway is an important program. It is currently under review to make it current and efficient. There is a full commitment to make the program even better.

Board Member Barnes stated that she has been to the library at Reeds Ferry Elementary School and noted that the carpet is in very poor condition. She added that perhaps by delaying the project, it would give more time to plan for overall improvements comparable to those at Mastricola Elementary School in the library.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that every building administrator was involved in the decision-making. This year it came down to cafeteria tables or working on the library. It was determined that the cafeteria table replacement was more of a necessity this year than replacing the library rug at Reeds Ferry Elementary School.

Board Member Barnes asked if the refrigerator at Merrimack Middle School is a standard size. She added that perhaps this would be the time for corporate sponsorship to replace the refrigerator.

Chairman Vaillancourt stated that regarding the process, the board would begin their work on the budget. It will start with any additions to the budget then the reductions to the budget. If the board is satisfied, a motion would be entertained to approve the budget and then it would be passed on to the Budget Committee.

Chairman Vaillancourt moved (seconded by Vice Chairman Ortega) to add \$614,469 to the operating budget for the Masticola roofing project. She explained that the roof is leaking and has been repaired numerous times.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Chairman Vaillancourt moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to reduce the operating budget in the amount of \$313,889 with the proposed reductions by the Administration itemized on December 19, 2011.

Chairman Vaillancourt spoke to the motion explaining that the goal was to come in with a level funded budget. Offsetting the cost of this dollar amount would get to the goal of a level funded budget.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Vice Chairman Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjust the line item 100.2620.40.8432.08 in the amount of \$5,680, which is the amount for the floor covering for the high school gym.

Vice Chairman Ortega spoke to the motion stating that since using the facility for the sole polling place was not passed, this is the amount to be removed from the budget.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Vice Chairman Ortega moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to reduce the instructional support budgeted from \$10,000 to \$0.

Vice Chairman Ortega spoke to the motion, indicating that initially this line item was set up to collaborate across teams and represented external consultation. He added that there was no longer a need for consulting services, since the goal was to move forward to use our own staff as consultants and that goal has been met.

Board Member Barnes asked what the impact would be without the consultants.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin replied that it would be a challenge, since everyone is working to capacity.

Board Member Barnes asked if there were any other alternative resources other than the consultants.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin replied that support within the personnel would be continued.

Board Member Barnes asked if “pay for performance” was used, could the staff use their own areas of expertise.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin replied that it would certainly be an area to investigate.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Board Member Markwell moved (seconded by Board Member Thornton) to reduce one administrator from the Masticola Elementary School, which would result in the consolidation of two buildings into one building.

Board Member Markwell spoke to the motion, explaining that we are currently well below the required number of students per administrators. He added that it would be up to the administration to decide which administrator would be eliminated.

Board Member Thornton asked if Board Member Markwell was looking to reduce a principal or assistant principal.

Board Member Markwell replied that he is looking to consolidate two buildings into one, perhaps with one principal and two assistant principals. He added that since there are fewer students now, four administrators at Masticola Elementary School is one too many. This can be compared to the high school, which is planning to eliminate one assistant principal.

Board Member Thornton stated that five years ago there was a proposal to cut one assistant principal at James Masticola Elementary School, which resulted in a warrant article advising against the reduction.

Chairman Vaillancourt reported that in the school year 2007-2008 there were 403 students when the board put an operating budget forward without a vice principal at James Masticola Elementary School. In the school year 2012-2013 there will be 446 students at the James Masticola Elementary School.

Board Member Thornton asked how much restructuring would be needed to combine the two schools into one. She also asked what kind of a cost saving would result in the merger.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that there are three kindergarten through grade 4 classes, with two of them having pre-kindergarten. She stated that she would not be averse to looking at administrators in the future, but this year the focus was on the high school. She added that James Masticola Elementary School and James Masticola Upper Elementary School are separate and distinct schools and a plan would have to be well thought out.

Board Member Barnes stated that there was a concern about going from a school with over 100 students to a school with over 300 students and what kind of an adjustment that would be for the students.

The motion failed 1-4-0 with Board Member Barnes, Board Member Thornton, Vice Chairman Ortega and Chairman Vaillancourt in opposition.

Business Administrator Shevenell addressed the board with figures that he had been asked for pertaining to the initial motion for the budget. He reported that the budget that was brought to the board was \$65,521,075. With the reductions of \$15,680, the budget bottom line would be \$65,505,395.

Board Member Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Thornton) to accept the budget in the amount of \$65,505,395 to be sent to the Budget Committee.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

8. Proposed Change to Reduction in Force Procedures

Superintendent Chiafery explained the three documents concerning the proposed change to reduction in force procedures. They are Article XV, Reduction in Force and Recall Policy from the Master Agreement of the Merrimack Teachers Association, Senate Bill 196 and Article XVI from the Master Agreement of the Merrimack Teachers Association.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that in the past, Article XV, teachers shall be laid off based on grades K-6, grades 9-12 and special education. From the article, she read that “within these classifications, teachers with the least seniority shall be laid off first”.

Superintendent Chiafery continued to state that Senate Bill 196 declares that the legislature wants each district to look at other aspects of reduction other than seniority. This law, which took effect on July 1, 2011, supercedes the Merrimack Teachers Association article. She continued to explain that the criteria to be used should be academic preparation criteria, meaning that professional and support staff should go forward with their education. After academic preparation, the criteria would then be seniority.

Superintendent Chiafery continued, reading from Senate Bill 196, “This bill declares that in cases of nonrenomination or nonreelection because of reduction in force, the reduction in force shall not be based solely on seniority”.

Superintendent Chiafery explained that she has monthly meetings with the officers of the Merrimack Teachers Association as well as officers of the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association. She wanted the officers of the Teachers Association to know where the district is going and why the board was going there, as well as trying to engage them in the consideration of the additional criteria. She also engaged them in deliberation.

Superintendent Chiafery crafted a letter to the Merrimack Teachers Association about the proposal, stating that a decision would not be made before January 2nd at the earliest. She then explained that she would like support from the board.

Board Member Barnes stated that there is a meeting on January 14th of the New Hampshire School Board Association. She would like to bring this topic to them.

Superintendent Chiafery appreciates Board Member Barnes’s suggestion. She explained that in some cases other districts have reduction of force as policy, where Merrimack has it as part of the Master Agreement.

Board Member Thornton asked for clarification of the new law, which stated that reductions in work force cannot be based on seniority but does not identify what the criteria should be for reduction.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that since there are different interpretations of the law, each school system could make the decision for criteria on their own.

Board Member Thornton asked if the leadership team came up with another clarification of the bill.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that classification is not thought of as criteria, as Article XV suggests. She continued to say that in order to not be in violation of the law, the additional criteria is academic preparation.

Vice Chairman Ortega recused himself from any discussion or vote on the subject since his wife is employed as a teacher James Masticola Elementary School.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked if the board thought it necessary to have legal counsel attend the next meeting to discuss the legal aspects of the Senate Bill 196 regarding Articles XV and XVI of the Merrimack Teachers Association.

Board Member Markwell responded that he did not think it was necessary for legal counsel to attend a board meeting since the law supercedes the teachers' contract.

Chairman Vaillancourt asked Superintendent Chiafery if formal action needed to be taken.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she wanted to know that the board was in support of the method she described so she can go forward and speak with the individual teachers affected by the reductions in force.

9. Other

- Correspondence

Board Member Markwell reference an e-mail from Barbara Publicover regarding the Litchfield School District Special Education Department and the possible lack of services received.

Chairman Vaillancourt referenced a letter by a concerned parent about the reduction of an elementary school teacher as well as a reduction in force in the gateway program. +

- Comments

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin reported that Merrimack Safeguard has begun the process of highlighting services monthly in the Merrimack Journal and the Nashua Telegraph.

Business Administrator Shevenell stated that he would e-mail the changes made to the budget to Budget Committee Chairman Andy Schneider.

10. New Business

There was no new business

11. Committee Reports

Board Member Thornton reported that Merrimack Safeguard had a “celebration of partners” which was an open house to make them open and available to the public.

Board Member Markwell was not able to attend the Planning and Building Committee due to a conflict with the budget meeting for the school board.

Board Member Markwell attended the meeting of the Healthcare Cost Containment Committee where members spoke about the personal health analysis. A study will take place with the local government center to look at all the wellness efforts in the district.

Board Member Markwell attended the Professional Development Committee meeting. Discussion included the school calendars. He questioned why the professional development days could not be held during the summer months. He relayed that the answer was that most occur at set time frames throughout the year. Also discussed were the Master Plan update, the parent surveys, the K-12 updates and E-pals, which is a program teachers can use to get instructions on programs and software.

12. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Andy Schneider, 34 Woodland Road, Budget Committee Chairman, thanked the board for their hard work. He stated that the first budget committee meeting would take place on January 10, 2012 and two weeks later the second meeting. As a parent, he encouraged the board to not lose sight of the “whole package” when looking at staff reductions.

13. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 10:07 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 on a roll call vote.

At 10:47 p.m. Board Member Thornton moved (seconded by Board Member Barnes) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.