

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Town Hall Meeting Room  
June 6, 2016  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

**Present:** Chair Barnes, Board Members Powell, Guagliumi and Thompson, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

**Absent:** Vice Chair Schneider.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Public Participation**

Parent Michelle Landry of 2 Wasserman Heights read from her written comments in opposition to changes being made to the honors program and the new comprehensive course level at Merrimack High School and their impact on incoming freshmen. Mrs. Landry feels that the changes keep many deserving students out of the honors program. The new comprehensive level provides support for those on the cusp of honors level work but offers no challenge for the highest level students in this class. She feels that the school should provide equal support for all students. She was concerned that incoming freshmen who wished to participate in either honors English or honors Social Studies, but not both, will be unable to participate in honors level work. She strongly advised the high school administration to re-evaluate the offerings and open the honors program offerings to more deserving students.

Eighth grade student Dillon L. voiced his frustration with not being accepted into the honors program due to a single required essay he wrote while not at his best health. He suggested an early appeals process or adding additional honors classes to accommodate all of the students who are qualified for them.

Parent Eric Faust of 5 Lilac Court, began his remarks by complimenting those involved in creating the comprehensive classes. He then asked the school board to open the program to more of the deserving students who were not accepted into them.

Chair Barnes closed public participation.

**3. Focus on Reeds Ferry Elementary School**

Chair Barnes invited Principal Kim Yarlott, Assistant Principal Nick Coler, Art Educator Mary Beth Donovan-Olson other educators and students.

Principal Yarlott thanked the School Board for their invitation for Reeds Ferry Elementary School to present an overview of their school year.

Principal Yarlott then framed the presentation by stating the essential question, “How does art education enhance inquiry learning across core curriculum?” She explained that the presentation would look at the art and music standards through the lens of performing, creating, connecting and synthesizing.

Before the student presentations, Art Educator of the Year for the State of New Hampshire Mary Beth Donovan-Olson was acknowledged with a round of applause from the School Board panel and the audience after remarks by Principal Yarlott.

First grade educator Emily McElwain and students Riley, Andre, Penelope and Levi were invited to the table.

Educator McElwain stated the essential question that students explored: “Where do symmetry, shapes and patterns exist amongst living things?” Students applied these concepts in a unit on the life cycle of a butterfly. Riley cut out shapes to create a symmetrical butterfly design. Andre folded circles in half to create symmetry.

Educator McElwain shared that students also studied a variety of shapes in order to then create new shapes. Penelope created a self-portrait by looking in the mirror and noting the circle shape of her eyes. Levi’s self-portrait used lines, rectangles, and circles.

Second grade educator Allison MacGuire and students Kaley, Jordan, Haley and Ava were invited to the table.

Educator MacGuire explored the essential question “How does art help us to understand the diversity of our culture and become better citizens?” Students worked on fiction stories and created pictures to explain parts of the story. Kaley painted herself flying just like a character of a young girl from the book, Tar Beach. Jordan painted himself flying over his favorite place, a football field, duplicating the scene from the book in which the young girl flies over her favorite place, the George Washington Bridge.

Educator MacGuire stated another essential question students explored: “In what ways do the arts connect us with society and deepen our understanding of the world around us?” Haley shared her cityscape and shared how it would be different from Merrimack by stating that the buildings would be bigger, there would be more people and it would be busier. Ava spoke about the difference of horizon lines in a landscape and a cityscape. The landscape horizon would be straight and in a cityscape it would be varied due to the different heights of the buildings.

Third grade educators Johanna Rockwell and Lindsay Caban and students explored the essential question “How do the arts develop and change our understanding of the world around us?” Erin learned the shapes and sizes of the planets which helped her to visualize them when creating her pastel collage of the solar system. Charlene explained how she used white and black to show the effects of the sun.

A second essential questions third graders explored was “How do the arts support diversified points of view, perspectives, and opinions?” Madison explained the perspective of a cardinal

when looking down from a tree. The bird would see things on the horizon as small and blurry. Gabby drew a red fox in the foreground of her drawing so that it would be easier to see instead of in the middle ground or background.

Fourth grade educators Noel Rosenswaike and Nicole Funicella and students explored the essential question “How is art reflected through life sciences?” Students compared the human and owl skeletal systems. Fareeha drew the three different owls she had seen and noted the different colors and feathers. Marquessa shared her drawing depicting the curved noses she had observed on the owls as well as the difference in their feathers.

Another essential question explored in fourth grade was “How does knowing the context, history and traditions of art forms help us to create works of art and design?” Students researched artists and presented biographies of fashion designer Coco Channel (student Emily) and sculptor Mary Edmonnia Lewis (student Maddy).

Educator Donovan-Olson thanked the students and the audience for their attention and turned the microphone over to music educator Emily Isaac.

Educator Isaac’s students explored how music is used in different context and daily life and focused on Jazz singers and a Jazz dance. Students then performed two acts from their show, a jazz dance and an improvisational set utilizing the xylophone.

Students then shared their knowledge of jazz greats Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong. They provided background on the jazz legends and closed with a rounding rendition of “All Jazzed up Tonight” that was enjoyed by all.

Principal Yarlott returned to the table and thanked all of the students, parents and teachers for attending and presenting.

Board Member Thompson appreciated how the arts were integrated into the other subject areas.

Board Member Guagliumi remarked on the confidence the students displayed and thanked the entire Reeds Ferry family for their wonderful work.

Board Member Powell thanked everyone involved for all of their hard work.

Chair Barnes thanked everyone for the well-thought out presentations.

#### **4. Comprehensive Level at Merrimack High School**

Chair Barnes invited Merrimack High School Principal Ken Johnson and department chairs Ron Delude, Rob Huckins, Jan Moynihan-Cooney and Christine Reinart to the table.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin welcomed the high school team to the meeting.

Principal Johnson opened by sharing his response to a parent email that he had received earlier in the day in regards to the new comprehensive courses. In his response he explained that the requirements for a student to be accepted into the honors level program have not changed. The changes were brought about for two reasons. The number of Merrimack High School seniors

applying for college has risen to 90% and the NEASC accreditation expects to be implemented before the next accreditation.

Language Arts Department Chair Moynihan-Cooney then stated that the four criteria for acceptance into the honors program are:

1. the grade assessment on a test all seventh and eighth grade students take
2. a written assessment of student's best work and an on demand written assessment
3. seventh and eighth grade grades
4. teachers recommendations

She added that all of the students who were accepted into the program were recommended by their language arts teachers. The high school language arts and social studies teachers meet with the middle school teams to evaluate the writing and then make their recommendations.

Principal Johnson noted that the number of students accepted for the 2016-2017 school year increased from 28 last year to 45 students next year. Further no student who is qualified has ever been turned away.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney added that a student's bad day that is reflected on assessments will not impact his/her ability to be chosen for the honors program. After the process is completed, students who did not get into the honors program have the opportunity to re-apply after each semester. This is explained to the student and in a written letter that is sent to their home.

Science Department Chair Davis noted that that new comprehensive course will combine the current college prep and standard levels.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney added that the new model will allow all students in the comprehensive and foundations classes to access the special education teachers. The projected outcomes/benefits are:

1. a more rigorous education for more students
2. increased support for struggling students
3. increased heterogeneous grouping with inherent academic and social benefits
4. better preparation for upcoming NEASC reaccreditation
5. promotion of RTI initiatives

Special Education Department Chair Reinart spoke about the new learning supports for incoming freshmen in the new comprehensive classes. They are:

1. Each content team (Math, English, Science and Social Studies) will include Learning Support from Merrimack High School Special Education Department.
2. Learning Support (LS) staff will provide individual and small group support to struggling learners within each classroom. Their work will be supervised by a Learning Specialist in the content area.
3. In place of general studies, Comprehensive Grade 9 students will attend Comprehensive Grade 9 studies and have access to content teachers and Learning Support staff from each content area.
4. Success in School and Math skills centers will provide additional support to students who need further re-teaching and practice of new skills from the content classes.

Social Studies Department Chair Huckins spoke about the Summer Institute. The new offerings will be designed to promote success in the comprehensive level courses for the upcoming year. Students who are assigned to these courses by the middle school will be required to take them. A student's failure to take the preparatory course will result in a file review to determine placement into a foundations or comprehensive level course. These courses are tuition free and award one credit.

Math Department Chair Delude stated that previously students who were enrolled in the springboard program will now be enrolled in freshman experience and credit recovery aspects of summer school will not go away. Additionally, more opportunities will be available for students who missed a second semester competency. Letters were mailed out to students who were considered good candidates for the Summer Institute. Students who did not receive letters but are interested should contact the high school.

Board Member Powell asked if students who are successful at the comprehensive level will have the opportunity to apply for honors level credit.

Language Arts Department Chair Moynihan-Cooney responded that the process for applying for honors credits will remain the same. Struggling students will now have more supports in place for them.

Board Member Powell asked about the weighted grade and if this will change.

Math Department Chair Delude responded that this will not change.

Board Member Powell asked why the letter was only sent to targeted students and not all students.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the introducing of special educators and support staff into the new model is very involved. The new structure allows the special educators to flow in and out of the classes to provide assistance.

Board Member Guagliumi asked for clarification on the changes which was provided by Principal Johnson and Special Education Department Chair Reinart.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin spoke about the supports and instructional strategies that will be implemented next year.

Board Member Thompson asked about the honors program and if the math test given in grade seven is part of the evaluation piece.

Language Arts Department Chair Moynihan-Cooney responded yes.

Board Member Thompson commented that not all students should go to college, some are better suited for trades. He asked where Merrimack is in addressing this.

Principal Johnson responded that he thinks the district is doing what it needs to do to assist all students.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the college and career ready standards guide the district decisions.

Board Member Thompson stated that he would appreciate data on other school districts success stories.

Chair Barnes spoke about her concerns about the rigidity of the honors program. She noted that 65 students who wanted to be in the honors program as freshmen were not accepted into it. She stated that none of the supports being proposed are for these students.

Language Arts Department Chair Moynihan-Cooney responded that teachers are notified prior to classes beginning alerting them to those students who were denied entry to the honors program. Students are monitored and those who appear to be able to move into the honors program are re-evaluated and then invited to move into honors.

Chair Barnes asked why only half of the students who applied were accepted and asked if additional students could be enrolled in honors and then rolled back if they were unable to keep up with the class. Why can't an honors program with supports be created for these students?

Board Member Powell stated that he wanted the rigidity of the honors program needs to be maintained for the integrity of the program.

Principal Johnson commented that colleges prefer to see students do well in a comprehensive class and then move into honors and do well. Students who are enrolled in an honors class and do not do well are not viewed as well.

Chair Barnes asked how a student petitions to move from two separate classes into the honors English/Social Studies class after the first semester.

Language Arts Chair Moynihan-Cooney responded that this would be a simple scheduling issue for the guidance department.

Principal Johnson added that all of these options are dependent on staffing.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that work is ongoing to define the honors program. The honors expectation will not change but a support system for those on the cusp is under consideration and depends on staffing.

Board Member Powell suggested this issue be addressed more deeply at a future meeting. He noted that no changes are being made to the honors program for next year.

Principal Johnson then segued into talking about the Senior Weeks activities that are upcoming and that commencement is scheduled for Saturday, June 11<sup>th</sup>. During the ceremony there will be a memorial for former student Ashley Guindon, who was killed on her first police patrol.

## **5. Outcome from Soil Sampling at Reeds Ferry Elementary School**

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared the results of soil sampling done by RFP Environmental. The State of New Hampshire and the EPA have no established action levels for

PFSA or PFOA in soil. The State of Vermont has a screening level of 300 parts per billion. The highest soil sample PFOA was at 1.2 ppb with a combined PFOA's of 10.1 ppb. total.

Board Member Thompson noted the test sites were on areas of active activity. He would like to see results from passive areas.

## **6. Sampling for Lead in School Drinking Water**

Superintendent Chiafery shared that she had received an e-mail on May 17<sup>th</sup>, after the last School Board meeting, about the possibility of lead in the schools' drinking water. She distributed the information to all of the principals and the Merrimack Village District.

Concurrently, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell became aware of the lead issue and was advised by the State DOE to test the water fountains and kitchen faucets for lead. The test results are expected in about three to four weeks after the testing is concluded. Lead testing must be done first thing in the morning in order to test on the first draw. Facilities Director Touseau will oversee the testing.

Past testing never showed problems with lead.

Board Member Thompson asked if testing for other contaminants can be considered when testing for lead and was told yes.

Board Member Powell asked if the DOE Building Aid Department would be providing any monetary assistance and was told no.

Board Member Thompson asked about the status of requesting water filters.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that next Friday the company will visit Reeds Ferry Elementary School to evaluate what type of filter might be installed to bring the PFOA count as close to zero as possible. A price estimate will follow.

Board Member Powell noted that the Reeds Ferry Elementary School water supply is town based but that the fields are irrigated by a well. He suggested the fields be tested also.

## **7. Outcome of Indoor Air Quality Testing at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School**

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared results from a comprehensive study that was conducted due to staff concerns that had been raised throughout the school year.

Problems with mice, a discolored ceiling grid, and radon will be addressed. There were no noticeable issues with CO2 levels, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds or moisture.

Board Member Guagliumi commented that while radon is prevalent in New Hampshire, now would be a good time to test all of the schools for lead and radon.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell raised the idea of adjusting the Capital Improvement Plan to move up the timeframe for replacing the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School roof.

## **8. Approval of May 16, 2016 Minutes**

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Powell) to approve the minutes of the May 16, 2016 meeting.

The motion passed as presented 4-0-0.

## **9. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants under \$5,000**

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell presented the following for gifts/grants:

A gift from the U.S. FIRST Program of Bedford, New Hampshire in the amount of \$3,000.00 to the Merrimack High School. The proceeds are to be used by the U.S. FIRST Robotics Team Chop Shop 166 for expenses incurred during the 2015-2016 build season.

A gift from Merrimack residents Gerald and Tracy Bull in the amount of \$1,000.00 to the Merrimack High School. The donation is in memory of Emma Cook and is to be split between the music and theater programs.

Two gifts from the Target Corporation that totaled \$596.23 to the Merrimack High School. The gift is to help fund student activities and community service activities with students.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to accept the gifts and grants as presented.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

## **10. Consent Agenda**

### **a) Educator Nominations**

Jeannette Cote, Language Arts Coordinator, Reeds Ferry Elementary School  
Meaghan Donegan, Kindergarten Teacher, James Masticola Elementary School  
Alice Donahoe, Grade 4 Teacher, James Masticola Elementary School

### **b) Educator Resignation**

Timothy McMahon, PASS Teacher, Merrimack High School

Board Member Powell moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to accept the consent agenda as presented.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

## **11. Summer School Board Meetings**

Superintendent Chiafery proposed July 18<sup>th</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup> for the two summer school board meetings.

The members of the school board agreed on the proposed dates.



## **12. Other**

### **a) Correspondence**

Board Member Guagliumi received correspondence in regards to program changes at the high school and leveling of courses, the related agenda item on tonight's agenda and the canine at the high school.

Chair Barnes received correspondence regarding the agenda item relating to the comprehensive course levels.

Board Member Thompson received correspondence on the agenda item relating to the comprehensive course levels and on the canine issue.

### **b) Comments**

There were no comments.

## **13. New Business**

Board Member Powell announced his resignation effective June 17, 2016. He will be moving out of Merrimack. He regarded his tenure on the board proudly and thanked everyone he had the privilege to serve with.

Chair Barnes referred to RSA 197:26 Vacancies. She noted the protocol for applying for the position with a deadline of June 17<sup>th</sup>. The vacancy will be filled by the July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Superintendent Chiafery reminded the board about the upcoming June 14<sup>th</sup> joint meeting with the Town Council to address polling sites.

Superintendent Chiafery brought the board's attention to the need for extended day kindergarten for special needs students. She recommends contracting with the Nashua Adult Learning Center.

## **14. Committee Reports**

Board Member Powell attended the Health Care Cost Containment Committee and watched a live demo of a web based chat with a live doctor. This option could replace many urgent care visits.

Board Member Guagliumi attended the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting where the rental of Wasserman Park's facilities was discussed. Summer movie times were also revealed for Abby Griffin Park.

She also attended Merrimack Safeguard where the introduction of the canine in the middle and high schools was discussed. This will happen at assemblies this week. She recommended notifying parents about the educational intent and introduction of the canine into the schools.

Chair Barnes attended the District Parent Group meeting where the year in review was conducted. Goals, programs, funding, artist in residence, murals in two schools, a future playground at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and SERESC summer programs were discussed.

Chair Barnes also attended the Grater Woods Sub-committee meeting where trail development walks were discussed. The Chamber of Commerce is looking into a mountain bike race to raise scholarship funds. The new property that was added to Grater Woods has trail development work taking place.

## **15. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

Parent Eric Faust of 2 Wasserman Heights shared that he is a licensed engineer, scout master, and youth lacrosse coach in Merrimack. He agreed with Chair Barnes position that the honors program as proposed for next year's freshman class is too rigid and should be modified to create another opportunity to more students to enroll.

Parent Michelle Landry of 5 Lilac Court came to the microphone to respond to the information presented by the high school team in regards to the new program changes. She shared her son's disappointment with not being accepted into the honors program. She did not feel the criteria was made clear to parents and disagreed with some of the points made during the high school presentation. She summed up by asking the consideration be given to creating an honors English class and an honors Social Studies class for the incoming freshmen.

Parent Eric Faust of 2 Wasserman Heights returned to the microphone to state that if there is demand and the students are qualified then the class should be created to accommodate them.

Parent Michelle Landry of 5 Lilac Court returned to the microphone and asked for clarification on what constitutes a teacher recommendation.

## **16. Manifest**

The board signed the manifest. Board Member Powell moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to adjourn the meeting at 10:15 p.m.

The motion passed 4-0-0.