

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Town Hall Meeting Room  
June 20, 2016  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

**Present:** Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Schneider, Board Member Thompson, Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

**Absent:** Board Member Guagliumi.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

Chair Barnes closed public participation.

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

Chair Barnes invited Principal Bridey Bellemare, Assistant Principal Julie DeLuca and other educators and students to the table.

Principal Bellemare opened the presentation by stating that the focus would be one of process over product. She shared the school's journey since being designated as a "Needs Improvement" school in 2005. She noted that Thorntons Ferry Elementary School's culture has evolved from one of "How do we work differently in our classrooms and throughout the school?" to a more rigorous question of "How do we continue to develop and foster a culture of shared leadership?" Through a long process of teacher buy-in and self-evaluation staff evolved into a supportive, collaborative community. This ongoing journey will be showcased in tonight's presentations.

Through a series of pre-recorded sessions and in-person presentations students and staff explained and demonstrated how the culture and processes at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School empowers them to "Fail Forward" in teaching and learning.

First grade educators Collette Flanders and Kim Kelliher spoke about a project entitled "Journey North International Tulip Garden Project." The project involved life cycles, math measuring skills and timelines, and collaborating with other students to problem solve when animals got into the garden. One creative proposal was to build a carrot fence. The successful student solution to the critter problem was to gather all of the soccer goals from around the school to surround the garden.

Education Technology Integrator Denise McLaughlin, Library Media Specialist Sue Weghorst and Physical Education educator Jen Partham then came to the table to speak about “Wonder Workshop.”

“Wonder Workshop” was developed at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School as an offshoot of “Genius Hour”, a Google program designed to encourage 20% of the day be devoted to free creative time. It directly relates to the inquiry process. In this literacy based program, each educator chose a story that had a problem that needed to be solved. The first graders came up with their individual solutions and shared them with their small groups. They then had to decide on group solutions. After the project was completed, students returned to their classrooms and reflected on the questions:

1. What was your challenge?
2. What problems did you have along the way?
3. How did you overcome your problems?

Grade four educators Barbara DeFrancisco and Christine Soucy led students on “An Amazing Race” project. Collaboration and teamwork, creativity and imagination, and critical thinking and problem solving were the core concepts surrounding this unit. Working in small groups, students chose to complete a challenge from one of five regions of the United States. Challenge options were:

1. Plan an RV vacation trip for them and three friends all of whom had varied interests such as history, culture and sports. The trip would include the cost of all of the activities, the mileage and the route.
2. Create a resort near a major geographic feature and market it to get people to visit it.
3. Open a farm to table restaurant and create a menu based on local resources.
4. Design and stock a store similar to a Sam’s Club that would serve the needs of the local community.
5. Create a stamp showcasing the culture or history of the region and convince the U.S. Postal Service to issue the stamp.

Students enthusiastically embraced the project, reaching out to the art teacher for assistance with graphic design and the technology teacher for presentation ideas. Educators then shared samples of the student created postage stamps, menus, and brochures. This project kept students positively engaged right through the last days of the school year.

Parent Nicole Dalbeck-Joyal and her daughter Summer then came to the table to speak about their “Helping Team.” Mrs. Dalbeck-Joyal was very impressed that students are seen as individuals both academically and socially and that this is so valuable to a child’s development. Student strengths are also noted and given room to grow and shine at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. Summer spoke about how “Girls on the Run” was so helpful to her and how her teachers always made school better.

Assistant Principal Julie DeLuca provided closing comments. As educators held the school banner, she proudly proclaimed that Thorntons Ferry Elementary School was named the Elementary School of the Year for the State of New Hampshire. She then invited questions from the School Board members.

Board Member Thompson thanked the presenters and noted the connections to the real world.

Vice Chair Schneider thanked everyone and noted the achievement of moving from a needs improvement school to the best in the State.

Chair Barnes spoke about the collaboration within the schools and within the district. She had attended the awards ceremony for Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and lauded the school's presentation. She thanked the school family for their well-deserved success.

#### **4. Focus on Merrimack High School's FIRST Team: Chop Shop 166**

Chair Barnes invited the members, advisors and robot to the table.

Chop Shop 166 designs and builds robots.

Members all took turns eloquently explaining who they are and what they do. Members shared their experiences this past year through an excellent, detailed power point presentation, which included video clips, music, photos, and members' academic stories. The team experienced tremendous success this past school year and finished in the top 1.5% of all FIRST teams in the world, finishing 56<sup>th</sup> in the World Championships.

Part of the mission of the FIRST experience is for members to reach out in the schools and the community to share their interest in STEM related activities. An idea for the near future is to plan and implement a Girl Scout Science Fair and to resurrect the mothballed Cardboard Boat Regatta.

The FIRST team instituted a program in 2009 called Build-a-Bike that to date has renovated and donated over 100 bikes to local social services agencies. The team also participates in Adopt-a-Road, a Backpack program for the Nashua Soup Kitchen, Operation Santa which is coordinated by BAE Systems and w this year Cards for Soldiers.

The robot is taken to parades, pancake breakfasts and many other community events to spread awareness and hopefully spark interest in science.

The members closed by highlighting and thanking their sponsors, advisors, and the Merrimack School District for their support.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that the FIRST team raises the bar year after year. He commended all involved for their excellence. He asked if STEM might eventually be changed to STEAM to include the arts, especially in the design area.

FIRST team response was to note that there is an animation portion to the competitions and that FIRST does embrace the arts. A recent partnership with the Disney Corporation further addresses the arts.

Board Member Thompson asked how many hours went into building the robot and as the members conferred it was decided that it is well over 300 hours.

Board Member Thompson also appreciated how much the FIRST team gives back to the community.

Chair Barnes thanked the coaches, Mr. and Mrs. Petrovich for their decade's long support and mentorship to the program. She also thanked the students and applauded them as excellent ambassadors for the Merrimack School District. She noted that the success of the FIRST team is an important reason for the continued support for co-curricular activities.

Superintendent Chiafery asked if anyone on the team knew how many engineers have come out of the FIRST program since its inception 21 years ago.

Mr. Petrovich responded that he does not know how many, but that many return to mentor or assist in various ways.

## **2. Re-opening of Public Participation**

Chair Barnes re-opened public participation to accommodate those who were unaware of the fact that the meeting had started one hour earlier than it usually does.

Parent Chad Girard of 25 Donovan Park came to the microphone to speak on behalf of his two daughters who will be entering 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade in September. He spoke on the issue of the early start time for school. He has researched the issue and found evidence that a later start time would positively impact academic success. Mr. Girard asked the School Board to consider changing to a later start time.

## **5. Request to Increase Part-Time Kindergarten Teaching Position to Full-Time at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School**

Superintendent Chiafery referred to a handout she had provided to board members prior to the meeting. It projected the kindergarten enrollment figures as well as the budget amounts for the 2016-2017 school year and compared them to this past year.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that while the class size is 14, the double sessions mean that the educator actually teaches 28 kindergarteners. She stressed that importance of educators need to individually tailor the teaching for each student. She requested that the half time position be expanded to full-time to better address the learning needs of these students. She asked for a decision at tonight's meeting.

Superintendent Chiafery then asked Principal Bellemare if she would like to also speak on the request.

Principal Bellemare added that the increasing class size diminishes the one-on-one time these young students need in the younger grades.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if a possible solution would be to move a teacher from Reeds Ferry Elementary School to Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the numbers have risen at both schools. Her proposed solution provides some flexibility in case additional students enroll before school begins.

Vice Chair Schneider agreed with the proposal.

Board Member Thompson asked if there is an annual increase in new students over the summer.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that parents go to the individual schools to register and that it is a fluid situation. She thinks this proposal will be the best solution. If need be, transferring a teacher is always an option.

Vice Chair Schneider agreed with being pro-active and not waiting to late into the summer to address an issue.

Board Member Thompson stated that he thought the population was decreasing.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that this is the first kindergarten class projected to be under 200 students.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to approve the request to increase the part-time kindergarten teaching position to full-time at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, and to waive the two-week rule.

The motion passed 3-0-0.

## **6. Approval of School Polling Sites**

Chair Barnes began by referring to the joint meeting with the Town Council that resulted in the thought to offer the Merrimack Middle School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School for consideration as voting sites for the upcoming elections.

Vice Chair Schneider spoke in favor of offering the Merrimack Middle School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School as a second site. He expressed concern that school will be in session on election days and that the promised police presence be in place.

Both sites were suggested because they are ADA compliant, parking is available, and a separate entrance will be available for voters so students are not disturbed.

Board Member Thompson noted that at the May 16, 2016 School Board meeting it was stated that the Merrimack Middle School was not ADA compliant and asked for clarification.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that since that meeting she, Police Chief Doyle and others actually took a wheelchair through the entrance, measured the doorway and discovered that the doorway and ramps met the acceptable standards.

Board Member Thompson reiterated his concerns for the students' safety during drop-off and pick-up on election days.

Chair Barnes noted that at the joint meeting it was recommended that drop-off and pick-up concerns be re-visited before the national election.

Superintendent Chiafery and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that the first election on September 13, 2016 is only one week after school begins. They agreed that consistency will be very important as well as the police component.

Vice Chair Schneider clarified that school will be open for the September 13<sup>th</sup> election and closed for the November 7<sup>th</sup> election. He asked if there will be additional egress for voters on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Superintendent Chiafery responded yes.

Board Member Thompson asked if the cost of the election will be paid by the town and was told yes.

Chair Barnes did not agree with the additional egress for the November 7<sup>th</sup> election. She preferred a consistent pattern of expectation.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to approve Merrimack Middle School and James Masticola Upper Elementary School as approved polling sites.

The motion passed 3-0-0.

Chair Barnes stated that she will email Town Manager Cabanel and Town Council Chair Harrington to inform them of the decision.

## **7. Approval of June 6, 2016 Minutes**

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Chair Barnes) to approve the minutes of the June 6, 2016 meeting.

The motion passed as presented 2-0-1. Vice Chair Schneider abstained.

## **8. Acceptance of Gifts and Grants under \$5,000**

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

A gift from the Town of Merrimack in the amount of \$1,275.00 to the James Masticola Upper Elementary School to support the Lego League Team with registrations and field kits for students.

A gift from the Guild of New Hampshire Woodworkers in the amount of \$1,275.00 to the Merrimack High School. The funds are to be used to expand the hand tool joinery curriculum by purchasing brand new woodworking tools.

A gift from the Wentworth Place Association, a senior community, in the amount of \$425.00 to the Merrimack School District. The funds are to be used to assist homeless students with expenses not covered by Title I funds.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to accept the gifts and grants with great appreciation.

The motion passed 3-0-0.

## **9. Consent Agenda**

### **a) Educator Nominations**

Jeremy Shambaugh, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School  
Catherine Sherman-Pires, Librarian, James Masticola Elementary School  
Christopher Whiteman, Technology Education Teacher, Merrimack Middle School

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

The motion passed 3-0-0.

## **10. Request to Hire at Will**

Superintendent Chiafery requested that, as in past years, the School Board grant administrators authority to offer conditional contracts to candidates for professional staff openings. This permission would extend to the September 6<sup>th</sup> School Board meeting.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to allow the superintendent to hire at will until the September 7<sup>th</sup> school board meeting.

The motion passed 3-0-0.

## **11. Other**

### **a) Correspondence**

Board Member Thompson received correspondence in regards to a later start date for school, event notification prior to events, and the high school comprehensive level courses.

Chair Barnes received correspondence about parking at the Merrimack High School for graduation and the limited seating, candidate signs, and considering full-day kindergarten.

### **b) Comments**

Board Member Thompson commented that senior Matt Spettel gave a very moving speech at graduation.

## **12. New Business**

Chair Barnes stated that on June 30<sup>th</sup> there will be a special meeting of the school board to interview candidates for the open seat on the board. The meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. in the Merrimack Memorial Room and will be taped but not live. The two applicants are Councilor Bill Boyd and Dr. Naomi Schoenfeld.

## **13. Committee Reports**

Vice Chair Schneider reported that the Planning and Building Committee met and discussed some preliminary findings as they related to the charges presented to them by the School Board. The committee shared that there appeared to be no issues with moving the SAU and SPED building to the proposed site but that the skate park should be re-located to a new location if this occurs.

Board Member Thompson attended a Professional Development Committee meeting. The amount of reimbursement for travel expenses was discussed.

Chair Barnes attended the Parks and Recreation Committee as an alternate. The meeting was held at Wasserman Park and topics covered include moving the fallen soldier monument from Frazier Square to Wasserman Park, an Eagle Scout project to create a dog park, summer concerts and movies. There are still openings for memberships on the committee and also for summer camp at Camp Naticook.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if the state approved transition of the tennis courts to grass space will be part of the September Planning and Building report out discussion or if it will be brought up sooner.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that site work will be done before a formal request is presented to the school board. The dispensation of the tennis courts will not impede or conflict with this site work.

The consensus was that the issue could wait until the September school board meeting.

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

There were no public comments.

## **15. Manifest**

The board signed the manifest. Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to adjourn the meeting at 8:38 p.m.

The motion passed 3-0-0.