

Merrimack School District Budget Committee
Information Session
January 28, 2020

No quorum was possible so the Budget Committee held an informal information session. The following is a summary of discussion between various department heads and Committee members.

Food Service: David Dziki, Department Head

- The proposed budget reflects the costs of providing food service at all six Merrimack public schools.
- The department is upgrading its computer software to a new program (Mosaic) which will work in conjunction with Power School and will eliminate the need for computer servers in each school.
- Food Service is a special revenue fund. The funds received by the department stay with the department.
- In order to receive Federal reimbursement funds, USDA requires lunch equity. The cost that paying students are charged must be greater than or equal to the cost of reimbursement rate for free meals.
- Last year the lunch price was increased 25¢ for all students.
- A packet of information about the free lunch program is provided to students on the first day of school. In addition, the District is notified about any student/family who is receiving food stamps and occasionally, teachers refer students in need.
- Federal regulations require that each meal contains a protein, a grain, a fruit, a vegetable and milk. Recently the grain requirement was reduced to allow 50% whole grain, instead of 100% whole grain.
- If students do not have sufficient funds to pay for a lunch on a given day, they are allowed to charge a lunch.

Library & Technological Services: Nancy Rose, Department Head

- Each school has at least one staff member responsible for library and technological services at that school.
- The department is working to increase the number of high school students who have Merrimack Public Library cards so that students can use public library licensed databases, etc. instead of the District purchasing them as well.
- The District computer replacement cycle is approximately every 5 years.
- The District ratio of devices available in school for students is 1 to 4. Optimal ratio would be 1 device per student. However, the ratio in the lower grades is 1 device to 2 or 3 students.
- The software line in the budget increases each year which includes anti-virus software and software to ensure that the District is in compliance with NH law on confidentiality.
- The department budget still includes book binding and Ms. Rose noted that the re-bind seems to last longer than original binding.

- The District does regular back-ups and is working to add service redundancy as well as off-site cloud storage of information.
- Technology is not always the answer. The District is looking into implementing the Universal Design for Learning (U.D.L.)
- The District Network allows and supports students who bring in their own devices.

Student Services: Heather Barker, Department Head

- The new department head is working to re-assign staff and re-allocate current resources to meet student needs.
- The department is currently serving 685 students. This is approximately 15.6 % of the total student population. The state average is 16%.
- The department must adhere to federal and state laws which require a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for disabled students.
- The District receives state aid and “catastrophic” aid to help off-set some service costs.
- Ten years ago, there were 70-90 “Out-of-District” (O.D.P.s) The District has worked to create programs in-district to meet the needs of these students. Currently, there are 20-30 ODP.s
- If a child with an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) that calls for an ODP moves into the District, the District will assume the costs associated with that ODP and review the IEP to determine if something else is appropriate.
- An IEP is a plan for any child with an educational disability that provides specialized instruction, modifications and accommodations. Each IEP is specific and unique to that student and includes goals, objectives and benchmarks as well as a progress monitoring system. A 504 plan provides reasonable accommodations and modifications for disabled students.
- The District believes in early prevention and early intervention programs. There are a lot of para-professionals and support staff at the pre-school and kindergarten levels.
- The District is financially responsible for provision of Special Education services for an eligible student at a charter school, but is not responsible for the provision of Special Education services if the student is attending a private school.
- Investment in additional staff to reduce class sizes or student/teacher ratio can potentially pay dividends in student services.
- At one time, there was a state funded “YES” program which provided social or emotional services for children who were educationally disabled or “at-risk” children who were potentially involved in the court system. The District has continued the program by funding “YES” providers who work directly with such students.

Maintenance: Tom Tousseau, Department Head

- The current proposed budget includes some items that are not usually in the budget:
 - Replacement of the high school choral risers.
 - Replacement of pressure relief valves on boilers. The insurer inspects the schools every two years and has recommended these valves be replaced.
- Repair of the Middle School sports field
 - Field repairs will be a warrant article.
 - The field at the middle school is often unusable.

- The repair project will make the situation better and may fully resolve the problem.
- If the initial drainage repairs do not solve the problem, under-field drainage will have to be installed. The drainage repair would still have to be completed before the under-field drainage could be installed.
- The District does not have a cost estimate for installing under-field drainage.
- The swale at the field will be addressed as part of this initial repair project.
- Replacement of some windows at the high school.
 - Window replacement will be a warrant article.
 - There may be asbestos in the caulk outside the windows.
 - The caulk will be tested.
 - Many of the windows are only secured/locked using a piece of wood.
 - District tradition has been to break large maintenance projects into smaller sub-projects, undertaken over several years rather than bonding the repair and doing the whole project at one time.
 - A bond requires a 60% majority vote.
- Master plan study
 - The purpose of the study is to develop a site plan; an engineering design.
 - High School maintenance projects were not included in the plan, but could be.
 - The study will be a warrant article.
- Lights and Utilities during “off-school” hours.
 - All schools have automatic temperature set-backs when schools are not in use.
 - Custodial staff are in buildings until 11 PM during the school week.
 - School security lights are motion sensitive.
 - Many school buildings are used at night and during the weekend.
- Brentwood (Red) Building
 - The cost to maintain the building is approximately \$23,000 per year.
 - School board decided not to include demolition in the proposed budget or as a warrant article this year.
 - There may be economy of scale to demolish this building during any construction project that might occur on the site.
 - Most people agree that building will be torn down eventually.
 - The Merrimack Police Department has used the building for “active shooter” training.
- Roofs
 - There are almost yearly roof replacements in the C.I.P in an attempt to replace out of warranty roofs as well as keep budget level.
 - There are 11.25 acres of roofs in the District.
 - Normally roofs can last about five years over the warranty.
 - A vendor was hired to evaluate the roofs and provide a report.
 - The roofs are evaluated yearly.
 - The roofs in the C.I.P. scheduled for replacement this year can be put off.
 - Roof bids requirements now specify a longer warranty period.
 - The District awards a bid to the lowest bidder as long as the bidder has good recommendations and is using an installer approved by the manufacturer of the roofing products.

District Wide: Superintendent Dr. M. McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent J. Fabrizio and Assistant Superintendent for Business M. Shevenell

- The District Wide budget includes items of contractual nature, benefits such as health insurance, the retirement incentive, transportation, staff development and debt service.
- By contract the District must fund 7 early retirement requests from teachers who are over 50 years old and have been with the District for at least 7 years.
- The guaranteed maximum health insurance increase for next year is 8.4%.
- Unemployment costs were reduced as the result of a quote from the carrier.
- Transportation for charter and private school busing was reduced based on the average of the 5-year actuals.

The next Budget Committee meeting will be Tuesday, February 4, 2020 at Merrimack High School. It will include a review of warrant articles and work session on operating budget.