

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Town Hall Meeting Room  
October 3, 2016  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

**Absent:** Student Representative Sernik was excused from the meeting.

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

**3. Update on K-12 Science Curriculum Development**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin introduced committee members Assistant Principal Bill Morris, Science Department Chair and Keith Tanner, sixth grade teacher at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

Mr. Morris announced the other members of the committee. They are Jeff Caron from Merrimack Middle School, Allison MacGuire from Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Rebecca Vandenberg from Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, Jamie Cordeiro from James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, Joan McMahan from Merrimack Middle School, and Patrick Scott from Merrimack High School.

The teacher led and teacher vetted committee work has been shared with the school board for the past five years. Early in the process the committee decided that all students receive instruction in life, physical and earth sciences in each grade K-6.

Elementary teachers piloted the drafts of each strand and provided feedback to the committee. Feedback was used to revise the strands. Teachers and school administrators were part of the transparent process. Once the document is approved by the school board it is expected to be seamlessly implemented.

Mr. Tanner spoke about the work of the science curriculum committee during the 2016-2017 school season. Last year the committee continued its bi-monthly meetings and also met for three full days during this past summer.

During the past year the committee updated all of the K-6 teachers' binders to reflect all of the revisions made that were based on teacher feedback. High school teachers had the opportunity to review the middle school binders to look for balance of rigor and inquiry based on the performance indicators.

Committee members' conversations focused on how to integrate the science curriculum across all content areas. The committee reviewed the K-8 curriculum and examined how the trajectory of the big ideas linked to the concept of enduring understanding and how they span across all grade levels. They then insured that the performance indicators were representative of the big ideas.

At the end of the school year feedback will be solicited from the middle school teachers similar to as it was done with the elementary school teachers.

The science curriculum drafts for the middle school grades were completed and will be implemented this year utilizing the same process that was used for the elementary schools.

Mr. Morris shared the science curriculum committee's plan for the high school for this school year.

The focus will be on the creation of science curriculum documents. High school science teachers will continue the process already established by the committee to revise the competency documents. Teachers in each discipline will work with the science curriculum revision committee. Representative Patrick Scott and Merrimack High School Science Department Head James Davis will guide their work.

The committee continues to follow trends in science education at the state and national level and is confident that the curriculum being developed can absorb these trends.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there were any curriculum adjustments made based on the recent NECAP test scores.

Mr. Morris responded that the committee has thoughtfully included inquiry throughout the curriculum.

Board Member Thompson asked if the committee is also looking at the impact of homework.

Mr. Morris responded that the committee looks at what the students need to know and how to design the best lessons to teach this material.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin added that there is an ongoing conversation within the district on the topic of homework. Homework is seen as the place to practice what students have learned. The challenge is finding the right balance between homework and free time.

Board Member Thompson asked about the collaboration between content areas.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that collaboration between departments is more common at the high school level. August Academy is the opportunity for elementary teachers to work across grade levels and the curriculum development piece is developed apart from this.

Mr. Tanner provided an example of collaboration by noting that a recent grade six math unit involved data collection and was matched to a science lab experiment that also involved data collection.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that recent visits from the schools showcased the growing amount of complementary learning and cross pollination that is going on in the classrooms.

Board Member Thompson noted the very large homework load elementary school students seem to carry.

Mr. Morris thanked Board Member Thompson for raising the point of homework.

Chair Barnes noted that as the science curriculum committee builds from the elementary grades up, there should be some feedback from the upper grades in regards to students' ability to develop skills.

Mr. Morris responded that because the committee works across all grade levels there is constant feedback. Students are coming prepared to be good thinkers.

Vice Chair Schneider challenged the committee to ask the school board for additional money if a "move-the-needle" idea comes along.

Chair Barnes thanked Mr. Morris and Mr. Tanner for their great work.

#### **4. Science NECAP-Review of Results for Spring 2016 Administration**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin referred members to the handout they had received in their packets prior to the meeting that revealed the science test results for grades 4, 8 and 11. He noted that the NECAP tests recall more than it does inquiry.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin prefaced his review of the test scores by stating that the Merrimack School District has developed more authentic assessments over the past three years and the results have shown to be fairly stable. The need to improve test scores around inquiry has led to imbedding inquiry into more lessons.

A review of the test results shows that there has been little change overall during the past three years.

Chair Barnes asked if the students are taught in line with passing assessments or to absorb content.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that lessons are taught with a focus on content.

Board Member Schoenfeld noted the statewide phenomenon that inquiry scores are lower across the board.

Board Member Thompson asked to be made aware of areas where other schools are excelling.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the state will not release data on other districts. He does take advantage of opportunities to speak with colleagues about "best practices."

Vice Chair Schneider observed that the last year of testing for grades 8 and 11 revealed a five to seven percent increase in level one students.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the imbedding of inquiry across the curriculum is the right direction to move but the test results are sometimes slower to be noted. He stressed the importance of triangulation, looking at multiple data points. It is important to teach the principal instead of unrelated facts. NECAP assesses one kind of thing and we are increasingly veering away from this towards more application driven assessments.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there has been any talk at the state level about changing any standardized tests to more accurately reflect the inquiry based teaching.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that due to the re-authorization of ESSA, test changes are in flux.

Board Member Schoenfeld noted that the 2015-2016 fourth grade mean score of 440 gives the impression that there are many students on the cusp of moving from level two to level three and that over time the inquiry based approach looks to bear fruit.

Chair Barnes commented that there are almost too many data points and that it is easy to get lost in a single report. The many science related programs and extra-curricular tell a better story of where the district is in regards to science.

## **5. Board's Response to the Proposed Capital Improvement Plan 2017-2023**

Vice Chair Schneider noted that most of the bonded debt will be paid off in 2019-2020 and that it would be better fiscally to move the field upgrade at the Merrimack High School to 2020-2021 when the only bonded debt left is that for the middle school. The amount of bonded debt that would be retired would equal the new amount needed for the field if spread over several years.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to move the field to 2020-2021. It was originally put on the capital improvement plan by the school board for 2022-2023 then moved by the budget committee to 2019-2020.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if the reason given for moving the field to 2019-2020 was for cost savings or because the field was in need of attention.

Vice Chair Schneider responded that the answer is debatable but that the field is very usable and moving it to 2020-2021 shows the voters that the school board is looking at the bonded debt and making sound financial decisions.

Chair Barnes called for a vote on the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that he is prepared to approve the CIP tonight but advised putting the paving project on a warrant article so that the voters can have a say in some of the decision making.

Chair Barnes responded that communication is going to improve this year with the implementation of the new Communications Committee and that the school board welcomes feedback from the community.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the CIP as amended.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

#### **6. Board's Response to New Policy: Student Members of the School Board**

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the amended policy.

The motion carried 4-1-0. Board Member Thompson voted against.

#### **7. Board's Response to the New Hampshire School Board Association's (NHSBA) Resolutions**

Chair Barnes asked if members had any resolutions to propose.

Board Member Thompson spoke in opposition to the "opt-in" policy in regards to student participation in surveys. He would also like to see more communication going home to parents on the process involved in an "opt-out" policy.

Chair Barnes had made contact with the legal counsel for the NHSBA in regards to an opt-out resolution and he was in favor of a resolution on the issue.

Chair Barnes and Board Member Thompson will work together to craft a resolution to present to the school board members in two weeks.

Vice Chair Schneider observed that putting forth this resolution this year might give the appearance of being in conflict with the newly formed Communications Committee.

Chair Barnes noted that this initiative would be very helpful to cooperative districts that share one superintendent.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that this initiative if passed would have a state-wide impact. She noted the tight time frame in the process and advised that Chair Barnes and Board Member Thompson meet soon to craft the resolution in time for the next school board meeting in order to move it forward.

#### **8. Year-end Surplus to Reduce Taxes and F/Y 2016-2017 Adequacy Grant**

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell detailed the make-up of the surplus this year that came to about \$4.9 million dollars.

The Adequacy Grant became known to the Merrimack School District this past Friday afternoon and it revealed a reduction of state aid of about \$928,000.00 which was up \$400,000.00 from last year. This is due to declining student enrollments, declining enrollments in special education, and declining enrollments in free and reduced lunch. This was not deducted from the \$4.9 million dollar surplus.

This was offset by the 25 year Stabilization Grant passed in 2016 that provides a descending scale of 4% each year.

Of the current surplus \$3.3 million dollars is part of the current appropriation. The rest of the surplus is from savings realized in the areas of salaries, benefits, maintenance, and special education.

On the revenue side there was a one million dollar settlement from HealthTrust.

The increase in the surplus this year over last year is about \$500,000.00.

Chair Barnes asked what the money amount impact is on the tax rate.

Assistant Superintendent for Business responded that the change will be about fifty six cents a thousand, half of which is due to losing about one million dollars in state aid; something beyond the control of the school board.

Board Member Guagliumi asked what part of the surplus was from the budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the budget surplus is \$3.3 million dollars.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that the default budget combined with the loss of state aid results in a net amount lower than last year to be returned to the taxpayers.

Board Member Thompson asked for a breakdown of the new budget and revenue summary and the changes.

## **9. Board's Message to the Superintendent for 2017-2018 Budget Preparation**

Chair Barnes read aloud the statement from the board.

### **Merrimack School Boards' Budget Message for 2017-2018**

#### **Overview:**

The Merrimack School Board is committed to providing a top quality education and we can best do that with a budget that is palatable to the taxpayer.

As a board we have faced a new challenge in the 2016-17 budget year—working from a default budget. This situation has put us in a position to make cuts that impacted students and infrastructure. After the election, we had to cut a heat system at the high school which continues to deteriorate and we have no possible maintenance option available if it fails. We cannot take such risks going forward.

The Board is committed to improving communication and with that we need to be prepared to have information ready for our constituents to support the need for expenditures and define the consequences if those funds are not afforded to the district in the April election. As budgets are

prepared this supporting information needs to be collected and prepared for easy access to the people we serve.

Knowing we work with districts in comparable demographic markets we will also want to collect data from these schools to see where Merrimack's funding requests lie. Where are we spending more, less, and the same? This information will allow the Board to take an objective look where we are and where improvements can be made.

We need to maintain our commitment to improving, maintaining, and expanding our technology infrastructure. We need to fund those efforts that will not only maintain academic standards, but expand on them based upon the studies and measurements that we have made to identify areas for improvement. These enhancements/expansions need to be specified in the budget and the intended outcome of the additional investment must be shared. We need to find areas where savings can be achieved and areas where we can make economic cuts that will not impact education.

### **Staffing Goals:**

For educational/program budget items – Fund staffing appropriate across all levels. Within the high school, fund appropriately for the evolution of the teaching levels. Specifically, if you see a trend to more honors, or more lower-level, or that the comprehensive level is the main focus – let's make sure our staffing is appropriate. (i.e. We don't want to artificially limit the number of honors kids that might make the cut just because of budget/staff forecast – let's make sure we have flexibility in this area.)

### **Maintenance Goals:**

For any big ticket items in maintenance (or generally), and they're not "critical" for the year (meaning we could live without them), we would like to consider presenting that expenditure via a warrant article. This makes the funding of capital items more proactive, and gives more voter granularity. Examples include a replacement truck/van, which would normally not be covered as a Capital Improvement Plan item.

For the CIP items, we would like to see some items put in a warrant article. For some board members and the School Planning and Building committee, paving comes to mind. We want to include the voters in the process and not place all big ticket items into the operating budget. We will be able to educate voters on the specific items on warrants and their necessity to the district. They have to be expenditures where a delay will not intensely impact operations if not elected in the next budget year. That being said, we cannot make cuts at the expense of infrastructure. Making decisions that are "penny-wise and pound-foolish" with spending will place a greater burden on future boards in excess on the lesser cost of maintenance being supported by this board.

### **Budget Cuts-Past & Present:**

As we discuss next year's funding we must also understand the impact of past budget cuts. Whether it is the cut list or via budget meetings by the board, what was the impact of requests that have been asked for before but haven't been approved. We expect some of these items may

be current requests in the upcoming year's budget. Also, are there any departments that they feel have fallen behind due to cuts or requests that haven't been approved. In addition to the budget we also want the pre-budget book cut lists (those that do not make it to the Board's table.)

**Current Educational Initiatives Needing Budgetary Attention:**

Regarding the need for budgetary attention, both of the goals below are of high (and increasing) levels of interest at the national and regional level – and both are already receiving an admirable amount of focus from educators within the district. These are:

- 1) Resources for evidence-based initiatives that support student emotional and behavioral health initiatives across K-12;
- 2) Resources to expand successful collaboration/integration of general education and special education services, to the benefit of all students in the district.

As we strive to deliver the best quality education for all students, we identify these two evolving areas as those which will continue to need support from the Board.

**Conclusion:**

We are asking for this year's budget to have an unprecedented amount of information – with the goal of presenting and defending a budget to our constituents that will allow the Merrimack School District to maintain and improve operations and infrastructure in service to students, staff, and taxpayers. Data-driven decisions will allow us to balance the interests to all we serve in our roles.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that with the defeat of this past operating budget he sees things differently and agrees that a new approach needs to be taken and supports giving the voters more decision-making choices coupled with the information needed to make an informed choice.

Board Member Guagliumi expressed interest in seeing more information on what is going on in other districts, especially in the area of all-day kindergarten. She would also like more data from the superintendent's office on the feasibility of this idea.

Board Member Thompson welcomed constructive feedback from the public.

Chair Barnes noted that past decisions might lead parents to assume that all-day kindergarten will be an eventuality.

Superintendent Chiafery shared that it is her intention to have the three elementary school principals come before the board to discuss all-day kindergarten. But this has been set back by the default budget. She cautioned prudence on maintaining the trust of the voters in regards to budget requests.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that the lack of voter knowledge of the school budget could be alleviated by the Communications Committee with a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes the budget in a more easily consumed format.



**10. Approval of September 19, 2016 Minutes**

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the minutes of the September 19, 2016 minutes.

The motion passed as presented 5-0-0.

**11. Consent Agenda**

**a) Educator Resignations**

Jaclyn Moore, Education Technology Integrator, James Mastricola Elementary School  
Douglas A. Pauley, Automotive Teacher, Merrimack High School

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

The motion passed 5-0-0.

**12. Other**

**a) Correspondence**

There was no correspondence.

**b) Comments**

Chair Barnes sent kudos to the Merrimack High School football team and band for their performances this past Friday night. They were featured on the 5:00 p.m. news hour on WMUR during which time the band played the Star Wars theme. The football team also honored a young boy, “Mighty” Max Mendez, age 7 for his fight against leukemia.

Superintendent Chiafery added that an enormous amount of food was collected through Merrimack Cares and she lauded the community effort.

Board Member Guagliumi agreed and stated that this is a reflection of the good quality community that is Merrimack.

**13. New Business**

There was no new business.

**14. Committee Reports**

Vice Chair Schneider shared from the minutes of the District Wellness Committee’s minutes. Highlights included how the HealthTrust funds will be spent and planning for a future lime disease presentation.

Vice Chair Schneider attended the SERESC meeting and noted that there are more frequent meetings with the change in leadership and a more hand-on approach is being taken by the new board of directors.

Board Member Thompson attended the Parks and Recreation Committee and shared that the annual Halloween Party is scheduled for October 28<sup>th</sup> at Wasserman Park from 5-8 p.m. He also learned that the dog park has been approved.

Chair Barnes attended the NHSBA board of director's meeting on September 21<sup>st</sup> and heard a presentation by the director of the NHIAA on the topic "The Growth of Life as an Athlete" which covered issues of keeping athletes safe in heat conditions and transgender athletes. A second speaker was the New Hampshire Special Education Association director who addressed the challenges of special education funding and delivery and charter schools. The day also included the opportunity to meet with the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Principals Association and learn about the mentor program for up and coming principals.

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

There were no public comments.

### **16. Manifest**

The Board signed the manifest.

Board Member Schoenfeld moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

The motion passed 5-0-0.