

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
October 17, 2016
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Discussion Regarding Proposed Maintenance Items for the 2017-2018 Budget

Superintendent Chiafery opened the presentation by stating that she, Facilities Director Tom Touseau, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell met and reviewed the existing items on the Capital Improvement Plan and also discussed additional items.

Superintendent Chiafery had asked Assistant Superintendent Shevenell to take photos and video of some of the areas under discussion to prepare for this meeting. She hoped to see the board discuss the items presented and to then inform her of what the board thinks is reasonable and doable for the 2017-2018 school year. She asked while deliberating that the board keep in mind the loss of one million dollars in state aid; and that the board is operating under the default budget. Lastly, she asked the board to determine which items should be in the operating budget and which should be on warrant articles.

Superintendent Chiafery requested that the board be prepared to respond at the November 7th School Board meeting.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell then presented the pictures and video and provided details on the items under consideration.

He began by showing pictures of the 40 year old heat wheel that sits atop the Merrimack High School cafeteria. The door hinges rusted and were blown off after a recent rain storm. Water entered and caused a roof leak to the roof that was re-done last year. The current price to replace the HVAC unit is \$529,827.00, an increase of about \$14,000.00 from the quote if the work had been done last year.

The next project would be to combine the paving of a 200 foot section of the bus loop, the section along the east side of the building with the front entrance of the Merrimack High School for a combined cost of \$234,174. 00. The patching of just the bus loop would be \$38,000.00.

The Merrimack High School concrete sidewalk spot repair would cost \$55,000.00. The sidewalk was installed in 2001 and has no granite curbing. Damage is due to plowing, salting and sanding.

Board Member Thompson asked about the purpose of the granite curbing.

Facilities Director Touseau responded that the granite is a stronger material than the concrete and holds up better to the plows. The \$55,000.00 would cover the cost of granite curbing for the entire sidewalk and for repairing the concrete in spots.

To repair O’Gara Drive would cost \$186,844.00 and the cost to install a sidewalk from Merrimack High School to the Merrimack Police Station would be \$88,850.00.

The area that now serves as non-sanctioned parking for high school students would cease to exist unless a curb cut was put in to keep it available.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that this project could be negatively impacted by the impending 2018-2019 construction of a new SAU Office. She suggested that it might be more financially sound to put some of these projects together.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that the final design of the area has yet to be set and he would consider holding off on the sidewalk until the final design impact is known.

Board Member Thompson agreed and saw the sidewalk plan as premature.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the sidewalk is one of the goals of the Town Center Committee in completing a pedestrian loop.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that there are plans from years ago that show parking options across from the back lot at the James Masticola Elementary School. These plans could be resurrected and studied to see if they are still viable.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that the bus loop around Merrimack High School is the biggest need and it would include the fishbowl in front of the building. The project would end where it meets O’Gara Drive.

Board Member Thompson asked if the \$38,000.00 for the bus loop should be included in the budget and the money for the rest of the project go on a warrant article.

Chair Barnes referred to Superintendent Chiafery’s opening remarks advising the board on the approach the board takes in making their decisions.

Superintendent Chiafery stressed that all of these projects are important but the issue of the default budget and the loss of one million dollars in state aid must be considered when the choices are made.

Assistant Superintendent for Business stated that a warrant article that included the entire cost of the project could be worded to state that if the warrant article passes, the operating budget be further reduced by \$38,000.00.

Vice Chair Schneider stressed that the wording needs to be very clear in the warrant article and voter's guide in regards to the \$38,000.00.

The next Capital Improvement Project presented was the Merrimack Middle School sidewalk. Video showed that the sidewalk has deteriorated greatly in the past year and has become a top issue for Facilities Director Touseau. In a conversation with Steve Keach it was learned that concrete sidewalks need to be sealed approximately every five years. It appears this has not been a practice in the Merrimack School District to date. The cost to demolish, excavate and replace the concrete and re-set the granite is estimated to be \$98,660.00.

Facilities Director Touseau stated that he and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell also looked into the option of an asphalt sidewalk. Asphalt would last about ten years. Concrete is expected to last about twenty-five years. There would be no real savings.

Chair Barnes asked if concrete offered any warranty and was told no.

She then asked if all the district sidewalks would eventually be sealed and was told yes.

Another project, the Merrimack High School asbestos removal, would be completed for a cost of \$265,000.00. Currently a visual inspection is conducted bi-annually. Every three years an outside company is contracted to conduct an inspection. The most recent inspection was successful.

Superintendent Chiafery noted that while this is an important project, that the decisions need to be made on which projects are in highest need.

Vice Chair Schneider expressed concern over delaying the asbestos project for much longer and having it suddenly become a matter that needs immediate attention.

Facilities Director Touseau was confident that the project could be safely delayed one year.

Board Member Guagliumi asked what types of things might cause the asbestos to become friable.

Facilities Director Touseau responded that any damage to the tile that causes the asbestos to break up would cause concerns. The tile is sealed at this point and reasonable use should allow the project to be extended out one year.

The last item presented was the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School roof. The replacement cost is estimated to be \$612,825.00. The high cost is because it is six sections.

Facilities Director Touseau noted that several years ago over 72% of the roofs on the Merrimack School District were out of warranty. That percentage has been brought down to 52%. He stressed the importance of continuing to replace the roofs in line with their placement on the CIP.

Chair Barnes asked what percentage of roofs will be out of warranty as of 2018-2019 and that answer was unavailable.

Board Member Thompson asked about the Capital Reserve Fund.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the fund has been depleted, but noted that there is an emergency fund with a balance of about \$177,000.00.

Vice Chair Schneider reminded the board that when the roofs are finally all repaired there is an expected ten to fifteen year time frame in which it is expected that the Capital Reserve Fund can be re-purposed.

Discussion ensued among the board and there was unity on the plan to replenish the Capital Reserve Fund once the roofs are all replaced.

Chair Barnes and Vice Chair Schneider recommended that the new Communications Committee be used to socialize the budget and explain the roofing projects.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that he and Superintendent Chiafery have worked together for over sixteen years and over that time they have developed a plan for capital projects. The communication to the general public would be to share the plan.

Chair Barnes noted that the plan can change when school board decisions are made that alter the plans.

Superintendent Chiafery added that contracts, and state aid fluctuations also impact the Capital Improvement Plan decisions. She commended the school boards over the past several years for their commitment to making improvements in the school district.

Superintendent Chiafery stressed that the HVAC replacement must be in the operating budget. It is the highest priority item.

Board Member Thompson stated that he thinks the Communications Committee will be responsible for how information is disseminated, not information about items such as capital reserves.

Vice Chair Schneider responded that he would like one of the pieces that comes out of the Communications Committee to be ways to disseminate polished presentations.

Board Member Thompson would like to see the information put on the website now.

Chair Barnes noted that the issue is not about making the information available but rather notifying the public that the information is there.

Vice Chair Schneider would like to see a consistent way to disseminate information to the voting public before elections.

Board Member Thompson raised a concern about the Merrimack Middle School. He asked if anything else that is not under warranty is on the horizon.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that he does not see any large expense for the Merrimack Middle School on the horizon.

Chair Barnes stated that the existing Capital Improvement Plan and the new information will be re-deliberated at the next school board meeting. Decisions will be made then on which items will go into the operating budget and which will go on warrant.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell will put the information on the school district website.

4. Board's Response to Proposed Resolution for Consideration at the 2017 NHSBA Delegate Assembly

Chair Barnes and Board Member Thompson worked together to craft the language for a proposed resolution that addressed an "opt-out" policy for schools.

Board Member Thompson read aloud the resolution. It reads:

Proposed Resolution:

The NHSBA supports language in legislation that provides parents' rights to opt-out of content and programs that they feel is not appropriate for their child(ren). However, the NHSBA opposes language requiring parents to opt-in to content and programs for their child(ren). Opt-in language creates undue burden on the school district to account for every student who would participate, versus the few who choose not to participate.

Rationale:

With a heavy paperwork load that opting-in policies would create, it will become increasingly difficult to provide enhanced content to students—as all content with opt-in language would need a full accounting of every child able to participate.

Districts make every effort to communicate to parents the information valuable to their child(ren)'s education. An opt-out procedure still provides them the active role in choosing the content that is best for their children but does not do so at the expense of a district's operational efficiency.

Shannon M. Barnes, Chair
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Chair Barnes shared that she had had the proposed resolution reviewed by the Assistant Director of the NHSBA and was told it will be a good discussion for the delegate assembly.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Chair Barnes) to accept the resolution as read.

Board Member Schoenfeld requested the following change to the resolution:

On the second line change "...that they feel is not appropriate..." to "that they feel are not appropriate..."

The motion passed as amended 5-0-0.

5. Focus on 504 Needs at Merrimack High School

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented information on the status of 504 students in the Merrimack School District. He prefaced his presentation with an explanation of what a 504 plan is and how it might be used.

A 504 plan is a broad Federal Civil Rights law different from an Individual Education Program (IEP) because it covers a variety of disabilities. Its purpose is to provide an education to a student with a disability equal to every other student's education.

An example cited was a student with a broken leg might have a 504 plan that allows the student to leave class early in order to get to the next class on time.

The Office of Civil Rights oversees schools' compliance with 504 plans. A formal process includes the response to a parental request, convening of a team, creation, communication, implementation, oversight and review of the plan. This is very similar to the IEP compliance process.

Currently in the Merrimack School District there are 179 K-8 students on 504 plans managed by an educator in each building. At Merrimack High School there are 171 students with 504 plans previously managed by guidance counselors but now managed by a contracted service paid for with funds from a Title IIA Grant for the past four years. This allows for a dedicated person at the Merrimack High School to manage these plans.

Over the past two years there has been a steady decline in Title IIA funding while the amount of time spent on 504's has increased.

The 504 coordinator's responsibilities involve reviewing all existing 504 plans every September, addressing the status of incoming students' plans, scheduling reviews and eligibility meetings for plan changes and new 504 plans, gathering information from all teachers impacted by the plans, preparing for and facilitating meetings between parents and teachers, writing the 504 plans, completing other paperwork related to the 504 plan, responding to emails and calls from parents and teachers, attending all grade eight 504 meetings every March to ensure accommodations are appropriate for the high school, and making calls to therapists and medical providers to gather information and recommendations about things that would be suggested to be on a plan. There is also a significant amount of administrative work required in this position.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin passed out a graphic representation of the 504 Utilization Statistics for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 Merrimack School District students.

Some of the major reasons for 504 plans in the Merrimack School District in the past two years are as follows: ADD/ADHD, allergies, medical, and the majority for mental health issues.

Some students 504 plans also cover more than one need for an accommodation.

The number of new 504 plans decreased this year but the number of mental health 504 plans dramatically increased.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin highlighted the fact that maintenance for a 504 plan for mental health issues differs significantly from other 504 plans and requires a greater amount of manpower to implement it properly.

Of the 171 high school students with 504 plans 17% are in ninth grade, 32% are in tenth grade, 22% are in eleventh grade, and 29% are in twelfth grade.

The gender breakdown of students on 504 plans is female 50%, male 49% and undefined 1%.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin advised the board to fund the coordinator position at Merrimack High School through the budget and cited several reasons for doing this. It is the right thing to do for the students, continuing to rely on the grant funding the position leads to an eventual endpoint, and the avoidance of any potential problems with The Office of Civil Rights.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if the position is administrative.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that when there is proper coordination and time devoted to meeting with care providers, the issues can be more appropriately addressed. The increase in mental health identifications requires much more time. Having the capacity in-house to address concerns is very beneficial to students.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that while he is in support of this that he would like more data before making a decision to fund the position. He would like to know the costs involved to justify the expense.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if there are noted patterns across the district in the area of mental health.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the mental health issues have increased but that the existing approaches used in the lower grades are working and there are no plans at this time to make any changes.

Board Member Thompson asked if the funding shift could happen on a sliding scale to ease the impact on the budget.

6. Approval of October 3, 2016 Minutes

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the minutes of the October 3, 2016 meeting.

Chair Barnes requested the following change to the minutes: "...page 5, line 240, hyphenate Year-end

The motion passed as amended 5-0-0.

7. Consent Agenda

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to remove the Educator Retirement from the Consent Agenda.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the retirement letter of Todd Wiley on condition that no retirement incentive be paid to this teacher.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

8. Other

a) Correspondence

Board Member Thompson received correspondence from a constituent about having the Merrimack High School football games put on the local access channel.

Superintendent Chiafery shared that she had received information from the Commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE). It stated that the NHDOE will conduct a Regional Listening Tour beginning in November on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation. The Merrimack School District will host one of the public forums on Thursday, November 10, 2016 in the Little Theater at Merrimack High School from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. Feedback is requested on the following four questions:

1. What do you expect from New Hampshire's educational system?
2. What school characteristics are most important to you to improve student learning?
3. What measures of school quality or student success should be included in a school accountability system?
4. In your experience, what are the best ways for the State to support schools to serve the needs of all students?

Interested parties may go to the NHDOE website to respond to the questions or attend the forum and share them.

a) Comments

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin shared that on October 20th Merrimack Safeguard will sponsor a kick-off to the red-ribbon week by holding a concert featuring New Hampshire resident Nicole Pelletier. From 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. information tables will be set up to disseminate information and the concert will follow from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. The event will take place at the Merrimack High School and is free and open to the public.

Chair Barnes shared that the Merrimack High School track is now completed and now available.

Board Member Thompson added that there is a picture on the website.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that visitors to the school have commented very positively on the track.

13. New Business

There was no new business.

14. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Schneider attended the Planning and Building Committee meeting on October 11th. He heard reporting on the data gathering being done on creating funding for turf fields. He asked the committee to continue looking for additional field space on school property. The committee will also continue looking into the siting for a new SAU and Special Services building.

Board Member Guagliumi attended the inaugural core group meeting of the Communications Committee on October 4th. The core group plans to conduct a survey such as was done last year for the school calendar. The core group will meet with the broader committee to shape the survey and bring it to the school board for approval.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that one of the main points brought up at the meeting was the importance of consistency.

Board Member Guagliumi also attended the Merrimack Safeguard meeting and added two additional pieces of information.

The DEA drug take-back day is scheduled for October 22nd at the Merrimack Police Department.

There will be a film shown in the Little Theater at Merrimack High School on October 27th from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. A free screening of the 93 minute film “The Hungry Heart” will be shown and followed by a facilitated conversation on the hidden world of drug addiction.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that this information be put on the school calendar.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell acknowledged the request.

Board Member Thompson asked if there have been any applications for the member-at-large position on the Communications Committee.

Chair Barnes has not received any applications.

Chair Barnes shared details of the visit by Korean students to the Merrimack High School. She noted that these students attend a foreign language school and speak excellent English.

The visitors kicked off a football game with a drum presentation that was followed by the Merrimack High School marching band playing both the United States and Korean national anthems.

Student Representative Sernik shared that one of the groups visited his AP Government class. The visitors showed a PowerPoint presentation on the similarities and differences between schools in South Korea and the United States. After the presentation all of the students were able to speak informally with each other on the topics of politics and culture.

He found this a great opportunity for the Merrimack school district students to become more globally aware.

Chair Barnes shared that there are pictures on the district website from this visit.

Chair Barnes added that when the students first arrived they were welcomed with breakfast snacks and a PowerPoint presentation on life in Merrimack and the Merrimack school system.

Chair Barnes attended the annual Kinder Law Conference as a member of the New Hampshire School Board Association (NHSBA) on October 5th. New and current laws that affect education are always discussed. The keynote speaker was former Chief Justice of the New Hampshire Supreme Court John Broderick. He spoke about the crisis of mental health and the impact on New Hampshire schools and noted that schools are usually where the first signs of mental health issues present themselves. Justice Broderick shared a personal story and that revealed how he began to understand more about mental health issues.

Chair Barnes stated that there is still a stigma around mental health and this causes it to be the undiscussed crisis in New Hampshire. She emphasized the responsibility of the school board to continue to be aware of legislation as they address mental health needs in the district schools.

Chair Barnes attended the Healthcare Cost Containment Committee meeting on October 5th. A Wellness Fair for staff is in the planning stages. The Merrimack School District continues to be a flagship for the HealthTrust provide.

15. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

16. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m.

The motion passed 5-0-0.