

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
December 5, 2016
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Overview of School District's Title I Grant including Information about Assurances Regarding Homeless Students and Students in Foster Care

Chair Barnes invited Title I Coordinator Project Manager Susan Luhrs and Homeless Liaison/Social Worker Jodi Hanley to the table.

Ms. Luhrs began by stating that the Merrimack program is a supplementary tutoring program for students in grades one through eight. The program currently employs 23 certified teachers to provide reading and or math interventions to over 500 students.

Title I students receive an extra half an hour of direct math instruction four days a week. These small group tutoring sessions are offered to students who need to accelerate their learning in order to meet grade level expectations.

The Fountas and Pinnell leveled literacy intervention program for reading levels A to Z and hands on materials and educational software are utilized for math instruction. Title I tutoring is highly valued by administrators, teachers and parents in the Merrimack School District, based on feedback.

Pre and post assessment data reveals the gains students have made. Anecdotal stories offer more positive feedback.

Title I is in a transition this year with the move from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) at the national level. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 is a federal law that provides federal money for homeless shelter programs and is part of this change. In the 2016-2017 school year foster care students' unique needs will be a focus for collaboration and joint decision-making between child welfare agencies and educational agencies.

Out-of-District Coordinator Stacy Conty has been designated as the district point-of-contact person for Merrimack. She and Jodi Hanley will coordinate the services to be provided.

Jodi Hanley spoke about what steps have been taken to date to identify the homeless and foster students in the Merrimack School District. The goal is to connect the students and their parents with all of the available services for which they are eligible. She has identified 25 students to date and knows there are more. As awareness builds among school staff, she receives more referrals.

There are funds allotted to this program. Some of the uses include paying for field trips and school pictures. Area businesses and agencies also help provide needed services to homeless families.

Chair Barnes asked about the take home practice books.

Ms. Luhrs responded that the books are paper books that are part of the leveled literacy intervention tutoring program.

Student Representative Sernik asked if there are plans to expand the search to identify more of the homeless students in the district.

Ms. Hanley responded that the education of the staff is very important and that there is some unawareness of the existence of her position. There are posters in the schools to make students aware of the services available to them.

Board Member Thompson preferred the word displaced over the word homeless.

Ms. Hanley responded that she does not blindly call any family. She checks with other staff and guidance counselors for background information first.

Superintendent Chiafery complimented Ms. Hanley on her work to date. She is the only person working on this situation. As the numbers have grown she has brought in more helping agencies. She also complimented Ms. Luhrs for her work putting together the information for a state audit. The state auditor praised Ms. Luhrs for her exceptional work on preparing for the audit and her leadership in the South Central Region.

4. Third Review of New School Board Policy

Service Animals

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud the board's questions from the last meeting and the answers from Attorney Christina of the School Boards' Association.

Question #1: Should "student or employee's disability" be replaced with "individual"?

Answer: Yes-that is acceptable. Pertinent federal law (see below) does refer to "individual" and does not limit the scope of this law to students and/or employees.

Question #2: Board asks about "regular volunteers" and whether they should be covered under this policy; as opposed to the "occasional" volunteer.

Answer: Replacing all references to “students” or “employees” with “individuals” or “persons” would clarify the Board’s intent to be clear that this policy applies to all persons on school grounds-parents, staff, visitors, students, etc.

Question #3: Can the district deny access to any individual who does not have the proper veterinary records?

Answer: Pertinent federal law states:

“A public entity shall not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal. Generally, a public entity may not make these inquiries about a service animal when it is readily apparent that an animal is trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability (e.g. the dog is observed guiding an individual who is blind or has low vision, pulling a person’s wheelchair, or providing assistance with stability or balance to an individual with an observable mobility disability).”

Question #4: Board asks if policy should require that the animal owner produce some kind of standard certificate indicating the dog has been trained and is immunized.

Answer: As noted above, federal law states the school district shall not require documentation relative to whether or not the animal has been trained as a “service” animal. However, the law is silent as to immunization records.

If the service animal will be on school grounds regularly (the animal is needed by a student or a staff member) then requesting this information would be helpful, especially in an emergency. I would not recommend requesting or requiring this if the animal is on school grounds on a limited or non-recurring basis (for example, a one-time visitor).

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that included with these answers is a reference to the provision cited as supporting evidence; (28 CFR 35.104), S 35.136 Service animals.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if in previous conversations Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin has come across situations where someone has called a non-service animal a service animal.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud the supporting evidence from the federal law under (f) Inquiries that states in part: “A public entity may ask if the animal is required because of a disability and what work or task the animal has been trained to perform. A public entity shall not require documentation, such as proof that the animal has been certified, trained, or licensed as a service animal.”

This law applies to service animals, not comfort or emotional therapy animals.

The policy will be moved to the consent agenda for the next agenda.

5. Overview of Proposed 2017-2018 School District Budget

Superintendent Chiafery opened her remarks by sharing the process and planning involved in the budget proposal.

She began by speaking about the warrant articles. After the last school board meeting she, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell and Director of Maintenance Tousseau met and discussed the warrant articles.

The Merrimack High School Family and Consumer Science Room cabinets and countertops were installed in 1977 and have been on the cut list for the past couple of years. She expects that there will be asbestos behind them and suggests that this replacement project be combined with the asbestos abatement project. The abatement project is budgeted at \$265,000.00. The replacement of the cabinets and countertops is budgeted at \$45,000.00. The combined cost would be \$310,000.00.

The two other warrant articles involve paving. First, the budgeted amount for the bus loop around the Merrimack High School is \$196,174.00. The second is the paving project is for O'Gara Drive from the end of the bus loop to Baboosic Lake Road for a cost of \$186,844.00.

Superintendent Chiafery proposed waiting on the second project until the new SAU office is built. This could then be bundled with the paving project for the newly designed parking lot.

Superintendent Chiafery then spoke about the declining enrollment at the high school (7), middle school (19) and upper elementary school (18) and the increasing enrollments in the K-4 (9) and the Preschool (11) for a total of a minus of 24 students overall.

Superintendent Chiafery proposed transferring two fifth grade teachers to two of the elementary schools to balance the class sizes. She also requested a .5 kindergarten teacher and a .5 groundskeeper. The groundskeeper position would cost \$20,266.00.

All of the major contracts are in effect for next year. The Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association will be in year three of a three year agreement, the Merrimack Teachers Association will be in year two of a three year agreement, and the Building Administrators and Directors will be in year three of a three year agreement.

In regards to employee benefits the guaranteed maximum rate increase for health insurance is 9%. Costs are decreasing as employees migrate to lower cost plans.

New Hampshire Retirement rates continue to climb. The professional staff rate is up 10.8% and for classified staff it is up 2%. This is considered to be a major item in the budget.

Last year's cut items will be asterisked in this year's budget so that board members may easily spot them. This year's budget is requesting that these items be reinstated and there are no requests for anything additional.

Money is being requested for a new math series for the entire K-8 spectrum.

The Special Education budget is requesting additional funding for increased psychological testing and consultations, split air conditioning systems, a new vendor for transportation, and a replacement van to transport students to jobs, etc.

The maintenance items include the HVAC unit on the roof of the high school at a budgeted cost of \$539,827.00, the roof at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School at a budgeted cost of \$612,825.00 and the sidewalks for the Merrimack Middle School at a budgeted amount of \$98,660.00, and repairs to the sidewalk at Merrimack High School at a budgeted amount of \$55,000.00.

The entire budget amount requested is \$70,857,339.00, an increase of \$1,385,182.00 over this year's budget of \$69,472,157.00 for a percentage increase of 1.96%.

The default budget is \$70,888,120.00.

The proposed administrative budget is \$30,781.00 less than the default budget.

The school board needs to have the budget process concluded by January 17th in order to pass it over to the budget committee in time for review.

Vice Chair Schneider asked for clarification on the approved operating budget figure for last year.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the warrant articles are not included in the budget amounts. The food service and the federal funds are also not included in this figure.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she has presented only the administrative budget.

Chair Barnes asked about the status of building up the capital reserve fund.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the fund now stands at about \$157,000.00.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she held off on budgeting more funds in this budget based on the needs in this year's budget proposal.

Chair Barnes noted that the issue had been strongly vetted during the past budget round.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the thought process in putting the budget together was to give the board a budget with the things that are mandatory. This results in a bare bones budget. Other needs might be on warrant articles.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that she is in favor of building up the capital reserve fund and would like to see some amount either in this year's budget request or some amount as a warrant article.

Chair Barnes noted that this would need to be a separate warrant article.

6. School Board Budget Hearing Dates

Superintendent Chiafery presented the proposed budget dates, times and presenters. The proposed dates are December 19, and January 2, 5, and 10. She requested that board member's questions be forwarded to her so that responses may be prepared in time for the meeting.

One of the meetings was a possible conflict with the Merrimack Safeguard meeting until it was shared that the meeting was postponed until February.

Board Member Thompson shared that he will be away on business for the December 19th and January 10th meetings.

Vice Chair Schneider stressed the need for a quorum in order to vote on the budget on January 17, 2017.

7. Approval of November 21, 2016 Minutes

Board Member Schoenfeld moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the minutes of the November 21, 2016 meeting.

The motion passed as proposed 5-0-0.

8. Consent Agenda

• Educator Resignation

Deborah Manna Guidance Department Merrimack High School

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

The motion passed 5-0-0.

9. Other

a) Correspondence

Board Member Thompson heard from multiple people in regards to the field being delayed by one year and from parents in regards to the start time for the high school day.

Chair Barnes received correspondence in regards to the turf field and the communications committee.

Vice Chair Schneider received correspondence in regards to a panel that his child was part of and he had questions.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that she also received correspondence about the communications committee.

b) Comments

There were no comments.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

12. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

13. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m.

The motion passed 5-0-0.