

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
January 2, 2017
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 7:04 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Formal Hearing on James Mastricola Upper Elementary School Budget for 2017-2018

Chair Barnes invited Principal Marsha McGill and Assistant Principal Bill Morris to the table.

Principal McGill highlighted some of this year's budget item requests. They include the continuation of purchases that support the reading, writing, literacy and math programs.

Assistant Principal Morris highlighted the replacement of the tables in the cafeteria and replacement chairs in the science room.

Both then responded to pre-submitted questions from board members.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: "How did you achieve savings for grade 5 field trips when we are looking at an increase in transportation costs and only 30 fewer students projected: (is there a reduction in a bus?)"

Chair Barnes submitted the question: "How did you achieve savings for grade 6 field trips when we are looking at an increase in transportation costs and 22 additional students projected?"

Principal McGill responded to both questions yes there would be a reduction in buses.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: "Table tennis table for \$400. Is it a 2nd unit? If so, should we add \$50 to match the cost of the one recently purchased?"

Assistant Principal Morris responded that the school currently has six tables and one on order. This will bring them to the goal of seven tables.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: "Math texts – Is this a placeholder for anticipated new text books supporting the yet-to-be finalized Math curriculum that the committee is

investigating? Does this mean the program will be ready for implementation in the 2017-2018 school year?"

Principal McGill responded that while the committee does its work the funds will be used for the current program.

Vice Chair Schneider followed up by expressing his concern that money would be spent on a soon to be replaced curriculum.

Principal McGill responded that most of the money is spent on consumables in the form student journals. If the new program requires different consumables then it will be spent on the newly needed items.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that there is no new investment. The money in this budget item is for consumables regardless of the program.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: "In regards to the table tennis table and stationary bike - are there specific programs that these will be targeted for, or is it more for general use during physical education periods: Are there any opportunities to pursue grants or other sources to help offset the costs?"

Assistant Principal Morris responded that both items are for the general population. There may be other opportunities to pursue funding.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: "Of the various items listed, are any deemed 'critical' for replacement vs something that could be deferred? If we do need to trim the budget, would like to know a 'cut line' for items in this list."

Assistant Principal Morris responded that the three of the four furniture items have already been deferred from last year. The science chairs are a new item and deemed a necessity.

Superintendent Chiafery commented that when the leadership teams met to discuss the budgets; the priority for all was a restoration of the deferred items from last year. She noted the impact on the long-term replacement plan with another deferral.

Vice Chair Schneider responded that he would like to know the minimum number of chairs absolutely needed and what number might be deferred.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the entire team weighs in on prioritizing items for a cut list.

Board Member Guagliumi expressed appreciation that the deferred items are notated in this year's budget proposals and that the tiered levels of suggested cuts was very beneficial to her in her decision making.

Vice Chair Schneider would like to see the tiering show the physical items in the top tiers, over the program items. He would like to see more explanation of physical items that land on the cut list.

Chair Barnes commented that due to the default budget passed last year these deferred items can easily back up each year if not addressed. The school board has a responsibility to future boards to address the deferred items and re-instate them when possible.

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “Why was the cost at 280 in 15/16 with a request of 500 this year again?”

Principal McGill responded that the money was used to repair balances and microscopes. Each set is repaired every other year. The individual who used to do this work has died and hopefully a current science department staff member will be able to be brought on board to continue this work.

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “What is the factor in the decreases to supplies in the 15/16 budget year?”

Principal McGill responded that the decrease is based on the decline in student population from 583 to 542 students.

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “There is reference in the social science text replacement that the current book is from 1983. Had the text been updated in the last 33 years or is that the edition date? If it is, is there a recommended length of time a text should be used from the edition date?”

Principal McGill responded that this amount is for fifth grade atlases.

4. Formal Hearing on Technology /Library/Media Budget for 2017-2018

Chair Barnes invited Director of Technology/Library/Media Nancy Rose to the table.

Director Rose summarized her budget goals for the coming year as to improving infrastructure, continuing the library program, and continue with the restoration of items deferred from last year.

She noted the ongoing plan to create a viable computer replacement plan along with the purchase of more computers to meet student/teacher needs.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “Please be able to address the supply/demand of bandwidth we are experiencing regarding internet access/WIFI and will these infrastructure improvements meet current and future demands?”

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “I would like to know why there is a need for cabling and network switches. Is moving to wireless an option?”

Director Rose responded to both questions by stating that the cabling and switching is over twenty years old and needs to change to keep up with newer protocols. Wireless access points are added as the core infrastructure is upgraded.

The ISP and phone service providers were changed this year resulting in increased bandwidth and more fiber connections. Once the upgrades are finished there will be an option to take back ownership of the infrastructure.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that he has been a proponent of this for many years and complimented Director Rose for managing to build the infrastructure. He thanked Director Rose for this achievement.

Director Rose noted that when she first began working in the Merrimack School District that there was a 2.5 mega service in the elementary and middle schools and it has now grown to a 500 mega service.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there is expansion room available at the high school as the need grows.

Director Rose responded yes because old equipment is replaced.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that the comp closet has seen improvements to accommodate the growth. The closet has been expanded and air conditioning was added.

Director Rose commented that the space issue is at the elementary schools. As the infrastructure grows redundancy is built in so that if there is a server down at one school the overall system will switch the need to an available server.

Board Member Thompson asked if there will be a reduction in infrastructure as the district moves to wireless.

Director Rose responded that the staff desktop computers and the IP phone system still needs jacks and cannot go wireless. While jacks are not being added they do need to be upgraded. To move all of the building to complete wireless would be a very expensive undertaking.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: "With the \$15K reduction in the book line item last year, where were the negative impacts of the lower spend rate? If there are impacts that are there to justify the \$15K to be added back in, what would be the benefits of those added purchases? Examples?"

Director Rose responded that there is still a heavy reliance on books as instructional materials. Merrimack is one of the only centralized school library system in New Hampshire at this time. There is not enough technology at this time to go completely digital.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: "Same question for periodicals (reduction from \$3K down to \$2K last year)"

Director Rose responded that the cut has impacted professional journals, high interest for reluctant readers, and newspaper subscriptions.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “In a similar vein to the previous 2 items, what were the impacts of the reduced budget for FY16-17 in terms of software licensing, and can you provide some examples of where the significant FY 17-18 increases are being driven? Would be good to have some higher level of itemization (such as by library vs classroom technology vs other uses) – but not down to specific line items...”

Director Rose responded that due to the budget cuts last year some of the video streaming and research databases were eliminated and teachers have requested the reinstatement of the databases. Staggered licensing for various items such as security certificates and antivirus software resulted in no funds expended this year as the licenses are for multiple years. Teacher requests for content area tools and databases has increased, especially in science and math. Device management will be investigated next year as an area of cost savings.

On the question of itemization, Director Rose provided a detailed breakdown of how this account is spent. Forty two percent is on district-level use for software such as Adobe, MS, Schoology, video services and the library management system. Ten percent is spent at the elementary level for literacy and on-line books, reading, writing, and literacy programs, skill building programs and data management systems. Forty percent is spent at the high school level for subject specific applications, the guidance department, and a credit recovery system. The additional funds will go towards spam filtering, and technical support.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “Can you provide some high level details of each school and what the focus areas would be? Such as where are more projectors needed vs “Smart board technology” vs. others. Given this has been a multi-year process, would be good to know where the gaps still exist...”

Director Rose responded that this was not part of the capital improvement plan. The goal is to meet with the schools to determine their unique needs. Document cameras were a high demand item especially in the middle school. A new tool that uses an infrared bar on a white board has met with success and takes the place of Smart Boards. All of the schools have iPads, some of which were purchased with SPED and/or Title I funds and have limited use for general education classes. Some of the robotics such as Dash and Dot have been purchased under this budget item. A new option called OSMO works with the iPad to create innovative lessons.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “On line item 6 – expanding and updating classroom computers – is there a ‘critical’ vs ‘can be deferred’ line in this item that could be explored? Should we need to cut, I’d expect this to be an area where we might look at some potential tradeoffs...”

Director Rose responded that district-wide there are about 1,700 computers. At a seven year replacement cycle at a cost of about \$500 per computer, that comes to about \$122,000.00 a year. If the replacement cycle is changed the cost will change.

In response to the earlier question on cloud computing, Director Rose responded that many things cannot go on the cloud due to confidentiality issues. The library system is cloud based and in the Spring certain files will go onto the cloud.

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “Why the difference in expenses in 15/16 and requested this year. Did we add memberships?”

Director Rose added the Consortium of School Networking membership this year.

Chair Barnes complimented Director Rose on her approach to technology and how best to bring it into the classrooms.

5. Formal Hearing on Special Services Budget for 2017-2018

Chair Barnes invited Special Education Director John Fabrizio to the table.

Director Fabrizio began his presentation with an overview of the special education legal requirements. The district is required to provide a free and appropriate education for all in district students ages three to twenty-one in the least restrictive environment.

This year there is a 3.5% increase in the budget proposal mostly due to the need to upgrade the air conditioning in special education areas, new bussing contracts, and a new van.

Over the years there has been a steady decrease in the number of identified special education students (2012-13: 685; 2013-14: 680; 2014-15: 676; 2015-16: 665; 2016-17: 663) with a five year reduction of 22 students.

The special education budget must allow for legally mandated services such as school bussing, even if the parent provides the transportation.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “With increases in support wages per the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association (MESSA) agreement and no staff count adjustments, how are we achieving a savings of \$4,800 in Para-educator salaries at MES?”

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that as Para-educators move with the students they sometimes move into a new building and their salaries are based on years of service.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “With increases in support staff wages per the MESSA agreement and no staff count adjustments, how are we achieving a savings of \$23,000 in Para-educator salaries at MUES?”

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that this is a collective bargaining issue. All new hires start at Step One, regardless of their prior experience.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “Based on increased regulations/standards regarding ESOL, do we need any additional resources to improve student performance with our ESOL-served student population?”

Director Fabrizio responded that there will be no increase in this line item this year.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “Please provide information on the actual transportation costs to charter schools this year and what options we have if we don’t fund this in our budget based on the historical lack of using these funds.

Director Fabrizio responded that this year only one student has transportation based on federal law. This student is being transported by the parents but the funds must legally be available.

Chair Barnes submitted the question: “Please provide this year’s actual costs for paraeducator support in charter schools. If the cost is in line with 2015-16, why would we not want to reduce the amount to \$15,000, closer to the line item than current use of this account?”

Director Fabrizio responded that there are two accounts, a personnel account and an account to support charter schools. Currently about \$20,000.00 is encumbered from these two accounts.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “These co-curricular line items for para-educators is new across all 3 schools (\$50K total). What’s the background as to why these are now needed, and impacts of not having them?”

Director Fabrizio responded that the Dear Colleague letter received by the district in 2013 is the federal reminder to provide these opportunities.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “The 2015-16 expended was significantly higher than budgeted that year, or for 2016-17. It seems to match what you’re budgeting for in 2017-18. What is behind the relatively significant increase?”

Director Fabrizio responded that this is for tutoring. Multiple hospitalizations, mental health needs and injuries have led to a significant increase for the need for tutoring.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “The psychological testing item is increasing across all school levels. Are there increasing needs in the number of students requiring this testing, or are the costs higher, or are there other driving factors?”

Director Fabrizio responded yes to all. Legally, a current version of the test must be maintained at a cost of \$2,000.00 each times 8 sets for a total of \$16,000.00. Another expense is for consultants who are hired for evaluations because the district has no school psychologist.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “Both line items show same placement for 16-17 and 17-18, however the budget amount from last year was significantly less. Were the 16-17 placements both known at budget time last year, and/or they being paid by the school district this year even though not budgeted?”

Director Fabrizio responded yes. There is always significant movement in and out of the district in the special education population. This presents budgeting challenges.

Board Member Guagliumi asked for details on two of the placement options, Lighthouse and Perkins School for the Blind.

Director Fabrizio responded that there is one student at each location. One of the placements is for severely impacted students.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “Similar to my questions with other departments – given the run-rate was \$5K less last year, what were the negative impacts of that reduced funding, and what benefits will be achieved by fully funding this item again?”

Director Fabrizio responded that this was in last year’s computer software account last year. This allows students to take tests and evaluations on iPads. Because this was cut last year, school psychologists spent more time testing students and there was no real cost savings.

Vice Chair Schneider submitted the question: “What options are considered for this district-owned van replacement? Do we consider leasing vs purchase? And where are the ongoing maintenance costs for the two vans captured? It wasn’t clear where we budget the maintenance items, such as those called out in the Maintenance budget...”

Director Fabrizio responded that he had prior discussions with Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell about buying versus leasing. He only recently became aware that the district owns the current van and that it has been maintained by personnel in the Get Set Program. The van now needs to be replaced.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that maintenance has been minimal and has always been subsumed in the maintenance budget.

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “The big question I have is regarding the differences in amount spent in 15/16 and the amount proposed. I’m seeing some account at a 10% increase or more. Example is SEP/tutoring/salary/HS 11K in 15/16 and proposed at 20K”

Board Member Thompson submitted the question: “Also, in the reverse for related services/middle 159K in 15/16 and only asking 100K”

Board Member Thompson stated that these two questions had already been answered to his satisfaction from the earlier responses.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if Director Fabrizio would speak about the Catastrophic Aid process.

Director Fabrizio explained that if the district spends three times the cost of what the state decides is the adequate amount needed to educate a child that year than the district can apply for federal reimbursement funds. The special education department tracks this throughout the year very carefully. The reimbursement comes the following calendar year.

6. Planning Board’s Response to School District’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Superintendent Chiafery shared that at the December 20th Planning Board meeting, Vice Chair Schneider and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell gave a presentation on the School Board approved capital improvement plan.

The Planning Board agreed that the HVAC unit was an urgent need item for 2017-18. The SAU Offices were highlighted as urgent for the 2018-19 year. One option to be considered is to add an extension to the high school to house these offices.

The Planning Board was also very pleased with the sidewalk replacements.

Vice Chair Schneider added some historical perspective to the presentation and explained the thinking of the school board on the capital improvements.

Discussion ensued as to the pros/cons of an addition to the high school for the SAU Offices.

7. Response to Proposed New Hampshire School Board Association (NHSBA) Resolutions

Chair Barnes asked if board members had any comments or questions on the proposals that they were given at the last board meeting.

There were none.

Board Member Schoenfeld will attend the delegate assembly on January 21st as the Merrimack School District representative and vote on the resolutions as approved by the NHSBA board of directors.

8. Approval of December 19, 2016 Minutes

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

The motion passed as proposed 4-0-1. Board Member Thompson abstained.

9. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants Under \$5,000

A gift in the amount of \$500.00 was given to the Merrimack High School by Alliance Energy, LLC. The proceeds are to be used to support the needs of the science department. There are no restrictions.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to accept the gift with sincere thanks.

The motion passed as presented 5-0-0.

10. Consent Agenda

- **Teacher Nominations**

Daniel Leone, School Counselor, Merrimack High School

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the consent agenda as presented.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

11. Other

a) Correspondence

Board Member Thompson had a parent reach out to him in regards to the homework burden and would like to investigate this issue.

b) Comments

Chair Barnes reminded the community that the next meeting is a budget meeting on January 5th to be held at the James Masticola Elementary School at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting will not be shown live as the capability to do so does not exist at that site.

12. New Business

There was no new business.

13. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Schneider and Board Member Guagliumi spoke about an upcoming meeting scheduled at the O'Leary Center for January 19th at 6:00 p.m.

Board Member Guagliumi is still awaiting a poster that can be distributed in print and non-print formats.

Board Member Thompson applauded the Parks and Recreation Committee's recent opening of the Dog Park.

14. Public Comments

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 9:12 p.m.

The motion passed 5-0-0.