

**Merrimack School Board Budget Hearing
Merrimack School District
School Administrative District Unit #26
January 5, 2017 (Thursday)
James Mastricola Elementary School-All Purpose Room**

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.

1. Call to Order

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

4. Budget Presentations

- **James Mastricola Elementary School, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School**

Chair Barnes invited the elementary school administrators to the table.

Reeds Ferry Elementary School Principal Yarlott was the designated spokeswoman for all of the schools on the 2017-2018 budget proposal.

She opened by stating that the proposed budgets continue to reflect the priorities of the district logic model by maintaining progress in the areas of literacy, numeracy, technology and school climate.

Common to all of the elementary school budget proposals is the reinstatement of those items cut last year during budget deliberations, with the furniture replacement a priority.

The math texts are another common budget item.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: “MES and TFS - How did the cost go down on field trips considering transportation costs are increasing by 3.5%?”

Principal Yarlott responded that generally field trip costs may fluctuate based on three factors; increased transportation costs, grade level sizes, and mileage to and from field trips.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: “Please share how your furniture replacement plan is being budgeted in response to managing from a default budget this year. I see RFS and MES covered last year’s cost plus a couple thousand dollars each for additional furniture. TFS does not have such a breakout. Would there have been no furniture replacement in this year’s budget had the cut not have been made to meet the default?”

Principal Yarlott responded that the increase in the furniture replacement costs is because the supplier has raised the prices. The three schools are asking only for the same furniture as last year.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: “Science Online Subscription...TFS - Please tell us a bit about this content and will RFS and MES be instituting it in the future?”

Principal Yarlott responded that once Thorntons Ferry Elementary School adds the Science A-Z on-line resource, that all three elementary schools will be using the same on-line subscription. It aligns with the science curriculum and includes leveled readers, teacher manuals and video clips.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Math text books across all 3 schools. The increase for TFS and RFS for math texts was much higher than that for MES. Given the update to the math curriculum I’d have expected these to be similar across all 3 schools. Can you explain the smaller total for MES, and also talk about whether these are placeholder texts based on the yet-to-be finalized curriculum?”

Principal Yarlott responded that the cost to each school is proportional to the population of each building; thus the range and proposed budgetary increases at each school.

In regards to the placeholder question Principal Yarlott responded: “While there is an intention of adopting a new math program for the 2017-2018 school year, K-8, we don’t want to be hasty in the selection process, thus should a new program not be implemented, the math texts accounts will support our current program and the extra funds that would have been allocated for the new program will go back to the taxpayers.”

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Furniture replacement across all 3 schools - I know we removed the furniture replacement in the 2016-2017 budget work. However, can each school talk about impacts should the desk/chair replacements be done more gradually (such as 25 desks/chairs rather than 50 per school as currently planned)? Do we have desks/chairs that are past a repairable state?”

Principal Yarlott responded all three schools are near finishing the replacement of the desks and chairs. There are a range of four to six classrooms at each building that require new desks and chairs. If two classrooms are done each year the furniture replacement will be completed by 2020.

Principal Yarlott added that the administrators can go back to the table and discuss what makes sense to cut.

In response to the question about repair vs. replacement, the only option is replacement due to the poor condition of this furniture and their age.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: “I was wondering if you could provide more detail on how the numbers per pupil are arrived at for items such as art supplies/English Language arts/physical education. I see that they are the same for each school.”

Principal Yarlott responded that in the past a common amount of money for each supply account was determined to provide budgeting help for this line. That amount divided by the number of students at that time formed this basis for the original per pupil cost. Over time when the cost for supplies has increased, the per pupil amount has been adjusted accordingly.

Board Member Thompson asked Vice Chair Schneider about his thought process on the furniture replacement plans.

Vice Chair Schneider responded that his general thoughts for the district are to consider slowing the furniture replacements.

Board Member Guagliumi responded that she has seen that some of the chairs have been repaired multiple times and do need replacement. She would prefer that the replacement plan stay on track and not be cut.

Vice Chair Schneider called into question the textbook costs and the discrepancies between the schools on this budget item amount.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the Merrimack School District has individual math accounts at each school.

Chair Barnes noted that when items are deferred, that there is often no real savings as the prices continue to increase each year.

Chair Barnes thanked the administrators for their budget proposals.

- **Merrimack Middle School**

Chair Barnes invited the middle school administrators to the table.

Principal Caragher began by stating that the 2017-2018 proposed budget shows a continued commitment to the district logic model through literacy, numeracy, technology and school climate and safety.

The budget includes the adoption of a seventh and eighth grade math program.

Funds have also been requested to create an interscholastic volleyball team and this is reflected in increased costs for athletic transportation, supplies and officials. This item was cut from the budget last year.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: “Are all student field trips student 100% funded? This is the only school in the district without some funding for field trips. Examples of MMS trips I recall are Camp Sargent and A Christmas Carol.”

Principal Caragher responded that the field trips are 100% student funded by student fees specifically for these events.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “MMS testing. Can you explain how the testing/scoring at MMS will be more “Comprehensive” during 2017-2018? What will the results be, and what exactly is needed in this budget item?”

Principal Caragher responded that the funding in that account supports the STAR 360, the universal screening tool. The requested increase is to purchase supplies that support other assessments such as the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), and other math assessments.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Math texts at MMS. Similar to the questions I’ve asked at TFS/RFS/MES/JMEUS - Is this strictly a cost placeholder for the evolving math curriculum, or are there specific details known about the books that are budgeted here?”

Principal Caragher and Vice Chair Schneider agreed that the question had been answered by the previous presenters.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “MMS lab stool replacement. Can you share whether the full 70 lab stools are required during 2017-2018, or can they be more gradually purchased (say only 35 this coming budget year)?”

Principal Caragher responded that is a possibility but it would extend the furniture replacement plan.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: “I see microscope cleaning in multiple schools. Is there a single contract or multiple?”

Principal Caragher responded that the service provider is the same for both the middle school and the high school.

Board Member Thompson asked about the impact of no fundraising.

Principal Caragher responded that he would need to check with the parent teacher group for an answer.

Superintendent Chiafery added that she has heard appreciation and frustration on this issue. Parents have been very vocal and frank about it.

Chair Barnes noted that the middle school is the only one in the district that does not set aside funds to offset field trips and asked if it could be looked at more closely during the next budget cycle.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if the transportation is included in the funding or paid for by parents.

Principal Caragher responded that the transportation is included in the cost per student.

Vice Chair Schneider followed up on the testing budget. He asked if the testing data is used to make decisions within the middle school or if it is to be used for high school decisions.

Principal Caragher responded that the data is used for both.

Assistant Principal D'Amour added that teachers also use the data as a progress monitoring tool and to offer any needed interventions.

Chair Barnes thanked the administrators for their budget proposal.

- **Merrimack High School**

Chair Barnes invited the high school administrators to the table.

Principal Johnson opened by noting the increases in athletic equipment and the reinstatement of items cut from last year's budget.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "Please clarify whether the Driver Ed program is 100% self funded through student fees."

Principal Johnson responded yes.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "Tech Ed at other facilities - Please provide a list of available programs for MHS students at each of these schools and what level of access our students have (# of student slots per program we can take)."

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that we are able to access programs at three area high schools. At Nashua High North, Nashua High South and Alvirne High School in Hudson. None of the slots are guaranteed. There are currently 43 Merrimack students attending these schools.

Chair Barnes asked how often student requests for outside placement are denied.

Assistant Principal Zampieri will get that data and forward it to Chair Barnes.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "MHS co-curriculars - With increased funding to co-curriculars, can you update us as to how additional funds are being utilized to fund programs? This goes back to our board discussion when we were looking to make the default budget number where our student rep suggested that not all co-curricular funds are being spent and we could make the cut from there."

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that while the student representative had suggested last year during the default budget discussions that not all of the funds had been expended and that it was an area that could withstand cuts; it was later realized that last year this account was over-

expended. The fund supports both competitive and non-competitive programs that include U.S. First, Quiz Bowl, Science Olympiad, Interact, National Honor Society, outdoor clubs and the theater department.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "Please share how your furniture replacement plan is being budgeted in response to managing from a default budget this year."

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that in addition to those items mentioned by Principal Johnson in his opening remarks; this year's order includes a cafeteria table, twelve student chairs, eight student desk combos and eight computer tables. A future goal is to replace all of the rectangular cafeteria tables with round tables.

Chair Barnes asked a follow-up on the co-curricular question. She noted that the budget was increased for this year and asked if it is anticipated that these funds will all be spent.

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded yes and that most of the Spring competitions will drain these funds.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "504 coordinator at MHS - I know we've discussed this at previous school board meetings. However, can you share details on how this contracted service will be provided? Is this a specific part-time hire for the school district, or an outside vendor providing the service? Are there background expectations on the person that is brought in (such as knowledge of 504 guidelines)? And will this remain in this format for future budget years, or become a headcount item (full or part-time)?"

Principal Johnson responded this is not a part-time hire for the school district, it is an outside vendor and this will remain a contracted service.

The person brought in is trained in 504 policies, procedures and protocols; and well versed in 504 law.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "Athletic officials MHS - Can you share the reason why the expended 2015-16 amount was \$6,500 less than budgeted, and share whether the run rate for 2016-2017 is aligning with the budgeted amount? (could influence the budget amount for 17-18)"

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that the budget requests are done on what is anticipated for home contests, regular and post-season. Freshman sports are planned but there are sometimes not enough numbers to support offering these teams. He provided specific details and examples from the past.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "Equipment repair MHS - Last budget year was the first time we saw this budget item at \$12.3K for helmet/shoulder pad repair. The amount is replicated this year. Is this something that has an end-point (meaning repairs will be complete), or is this now an annually-occurring charge that we will see moving forward? Background on this item will be helpful."

Principal Johnson responded that the reality is that this piece of the budget was parsed out for the first time in 2015-16 just to simplify it and clarify it for everyone. This is for the re-conditioning of football helmets, shoulder pads and repair of football jerseys and pants that may have been torn. This will be an ongoing cost and should remain constant at least over the next two years.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “MHS transportation to other regional vocational programs-“The expended amount in 2015-16 was nearly \$20K less than budgeted. What is the run rate for the current year (compared to the budgeted amount)? Any trending here we can draw on?”

Principal Johnson responded that the current run rate is \$52,000.00 out of a budgeted \$163,000.

There is no trending that can be relied upon.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Athletic transportation MHS - The 2015-16 expended amount was nearly \$8K higher than budgeted. What is the run rate for the current budget year, and are we budgeting enough in this area?”

Principal Johnson noted the challenges of budgeting for transportation without knowing the away schedules when preparing the budget. He provided a detailed explanation with examples.

Based on the away schedule for 2016-2017 that is now known, increased roster sizes in track and field requiring two busses and bussing soccer players to the Global Premier Soccer (GPS) fields in Bedford for home contests; the allotted amount will be exceeded by between \$6,000.00-\$7,000.00 dollars.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Co-curricular transportation MHS - Do we have a run rate for the current budget year to show whether we’re using the budgeted amount for co-curricular transportation? Is the 2017-2018 budget amount appropriate (meaning are we utilizing and promoting it sufficiently)?”

Assistant Principal Bergeron provided a detailed response on how the funds are used.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Student publications MHS -“the 2015-2016 amount was under-expended by about 25%. Was this a one-time reduction, or a trend to more on-line publication and less need for hard copies?”

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that there are two student publications, The Hawk and Spilled Ink. Spilled Ink, the literary publication, used a different vendor for their annual publication. They plan two publications this coming year. There will be no increase in on-line publications. Hard copy publication will increase.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “More of a question-are the math curriculum changes not impacting text books at MHS during the 2017-2018 budget year as it is in all of the other schools? If not, is there a planned ramp for this change?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that Merrimack High School is participating in the district math curriculum evaluation but will not be requesting texts for the 2017-2018 year budget. Future requests will be determined by that evaluation process.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Math equip MHS - Can you shed light on what each of the graphing calculator packs include? How many calculators per pack, what model and what other items? What are the related calculator materials? What is the number of the small whiteboards being forecasted?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that there are five packs being requested. Three packs have ten calculators each and are the most powerful TI Inspire CX calculators. These three packs makes up a complete classroom set. Each pack includes rechargeable batteries, docking station, unit-to-unit USB cables, unit-to-computer USB cables, and each calculator is a school bus yellow color with the school property stamp on it. A CBL cradle is also included that allows access to real world data.

The other two packs being requested have 30 calculators each and are the TI 84Plus CE graphing calculators. These packs also include the same accessories.

Only one small whiteboard is being requested to cover an existing classroom corkboard.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Athletic equipment MHS - are the 40 lacrosse helmets net-new? Or do they replace existing ones? And can existing ones be repaired (similar to helmet/shoulder pad repair for football)? And will the air ionizers/filters delay the need for HVAC modifications to the locker room areas that has been discussed in the past?”

Principal Johnson responded that the lacrosse helmets are new. Currently students are responsible to buy and maintain their own helmets. Based on best practice guidelines set forth by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), schools are now encouraged to treat lacrosse helmets the same as football helmets. This includes insuring each helmet is recognized by the NFHS as a safe helmet and that outside agency re-condition and certify each helmet as meeting the current safety guidelines.

There will be a spike in the budget year one to purchase them but there will be a small amount needed to replace old helmets and to re-condition the new ones. This change is based on safety.

Board Member Thompson asked if this trend will move to include hockey or other teams.

Principal Johnson responded that more safety innovations are coming and it will most likely expand to soccer also.

Principal Johnson responded to the question on the ionizers, stating that based upon research on four other schools it is hoped the ionizers will solve the problem.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Tech Ed equip replacement MHS-are all the items here replacement for current equipment? Or are these net-new items existing programs?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that these items are to replace existing equipment. The computers in use now are ten years old and they do not support new software. They will be repurposed. The two cameras are older, damaged and worn by the continued use from over 180 students in the photography classes. The lathe replaces a unit purchased in 1976 for which parts are now unavailable or very difficult to procure.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Science equip replacement MHS - are all the items here replacement for current equipment? Or are these net-new items for existing programs?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that the tubes, probes and microscopes are replacements for worn or broken equipment.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: “Athletic equip replacement MHS - related to the helmet and shoulder pad repair budget item-are these typically annual replacements of these items we’ll see in the future, or only part of a program to achieve a repairable batch of items? (trying to reconcile long-term plans for repair vs replacement in this area)

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that this will be an ongoing cost as a certain amount of this equipment fails inspection each year.

Board Member Thompson asked a follow-up question. Have newer practice protocols resulted in less damage to the equipment?

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that while there is less full contact, there is no real difference in equipment repair/replacement needs.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: “I see microscope cleaning in multiple schools. Is this a single contract or multiple?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that it is a single contract. A staff member has cleaned the microscopes for many years.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: “How many computers are out of warranty? Are they being fixed or replaced?”

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that after speaking with Director of Library/Media/Technology Nancy Rose, he learned that about 25% of all of the units in the district are out of warranty but that they are kept running by the technicians.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: “Is there any understanding of what athletic boosters provide yearly to offset costs of the athletic teams?”

Principal Johnson responded that the boosters fundraising does not offset the costs of the athletic teams. Not all teams have boosters. The boosters provide enhancements.

Board Member Guagliumi asked how many of the World Language texts are replaced each year?

Assistant Principal Bergeron responded that the program has grown and this warranted additional texts.

Board Member Guagliumi asked for information on the security cameras in use at the high school.

Principal Johnson responded that the single thing that has affected the school in a positive way is the cameras.

Assistant Principal Zampieri responded that he uses the cameras daily. The cameras have saved numerous man hours in a variety of situations.

Chair Barnes thanked the administrators for the detailed budget proposal.

- **District**

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell outlined the budget proposal for the board. The district budget as a whole is made up of several contractual obligations which include all district professional development, retirement incentives, insurances, dental insurance, long-term disability insurance, and the district debt service. Transportation, health insurance and FICA and NH retirement have increased for a combined over \$700,000.00. The increase in this year's budget is due to contractual obligations.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "The current CBA allows for new plans to be offered which can save the employee and district money on healthcare costs. When can these plans be introduced and implemented, keeping in mind it will not impact the amount we need to budget at this time, but rather achieve savings that we can in turn return to the taxpayer at a later date?"

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the collective bargaining agreement cited in the question only applies to the Merrimack Teachers Association. The Merrimack School Board may offer this new plan entitled Access Blue Site of Service Plan and it would be implemented in July 2017.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "Please provide information on actual transportation costs to charter schools this year and what options we have if we don't fund this in our budget on the historical lack of use of this fund."

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the new charter school's schedule requires a dedicated bus; where the prior charter school did not. The district is investigating the option of using passenger vans. This will be about \$11,000.00.

Board Member Thompson asked a follow-up question about shopping for a new health care provider.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that it could be done but it needed to be done in a methodical way after contacting the Merrimack Teachers Association, according to Article 13 in the contract.

Vice Chair Schneider added that there are three tiers now offered and any changes must be agreed on by the school board and the teachers association. The Access Blue is in addition to what is now offered. This was done during a negotiation side bar.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that over the past couple of years the plan designs have changed to be less costly to both the employee and the employer. However, the employee contribution has also risen.

Board Member Guagliumi asked to see what surrounding districts have seen as increases and compare them to Merrimack's health care increases.

Chair Barnes had recently attended the Cost Containment Committee meeting where this was discussed. The risk pools vary and factor into each district's costs.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "Transportation DW - Has an analysis been done of the existing bus routes and whether we still are using the proper number of busses? Are there opportunities for more optimal spending under the current contract?"

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "Support Staff Improvement DW - the expended amount in 2015-2016 was only about 60 percent of budgeted. Is the run-rate for 2016-2017 improved in this area? (I understand this is tied to the MESSA agreement, but good to understand the spend trending)

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the district is on track to spend about 60% again this year. This has been a consistent trend over the last several years.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: "Total phone costs, I'm wondering if I can get more details on phone expenses district wide. They seem high to me, however it may just be that I don't understand the costs."

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that every year a review is conducted to see where busses will be needed. The bus stops don't seem to change very much over the years. There have been some parental complaints about the length of the routes but this is due to the distances the busses need to travel. The bus company, Student Transportation of America, has GPS on all of the busses and software that enables them in the future to design more efficient routes.

Vice Chair Schneider asked about using the Global Positioning System (GPS) to gather information on the number of students on each bus so that different size busses might be used.

Board Member Thompson had submitted the question: "Total Phone costs, I'm wondering if I can get more details on phone expenses district wide. They seem high to me, however it may just be that I don't understand the costs."

Assistant Superintendent for Business responded that the current phone bill district-wide is around \$80,000.00. This includes about 45 cell phones at a cost of about \$35.00 a month, or \$18,000.00 a year. That leaves \$61,000.00 that is budgeted for this year. There has been a savings over the years thanks to the Voice over Internet Protocol.

Chair Barnes thanked the administrative team for their budget proposal.

5. Budget Discussion

Chair Barnes noted that every department or building has now presented and asked the board members if they have any further questions.

Board Member Thompson would like to hear from the booster clubs and fundraisers directly to better understand their contributions.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that she meets quarterly with these groups. She will extend the invitation at the January meeting and hopes that they will attend a school board meeting in March. She sees this as an opportunity for the board to thank the group members for their hard work.

In the past, board meetings were held in the different schools. This made it easier to acknowledge the contributions of these groups, such as new playgrounds. The decision was made that it was more important that the school board meetings go live, which meant a change to meeting at the Town Hall.

Chair Barnes advised the board members to review the budget presentations they have heard to date. Anything that needs to be discussed should be done at the January 10, 2017 budget hearing. This will allow more time for vetting and public feedback. Voting will be done at the regular school board meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 17, 2017.

Superintendent Chiafery added that possible warrant articles will be discussed at the meeting on January 10, 2017. Warrant articles could be approved in early February.

6. Public Participation on Agenda Items

There was no public participation.

7. Motion to Adjourn

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.