

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District
School Administrative Unit #26
June 19, 2017
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room**

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

Absent: Board Member Guagliumi was excused from the meeting. Student Representative Sernik has graduated and was excused from the meeting.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Focus on Student Voice and Inquiry at Reeds Ferry Elementary School

Chair Barnes invited Principal Yarlott, Assistant Principal Coler, educators and students to the table.

Principal Yarlott provided context on the nights presentations and explained the integrated practices concept that guided the decision to move from a 5 day instructional calendar to a 10 day instructional calendar. Two days were devoted to writing, and two days were devoted to integrated practices (IP).

An IP day focuses on a unit of study that is grounded in essential questions focused on higher order thinking. This is based on student inquiry that encourages students to wonder. The “I wonder” question is one students use frequently throughout an IP unit.

Grade 1 students shared their learning. Students learned about how chickens hatch. They began by asking questions. The students worked together in groups and with other classes to read books and watch videos to answer some of their questions.

Grade 2 students unit of learning focused on the continents. Their culminating activity was to focus on a particular continent and to create a final product. Examples included replicas of landmarks, dragons, a large mural, rain forest animals, and aboriginal boom-a-rangs. Students presented their learning to other classes and their families.

Grade 3 students investigated big ideas such as how climate impacts how and where we live. Groups chose different biomes to research, and used a structured process to conduct their research. Students enjoyed choosing who to work with and what to learn.

Grade 4 students focused on the regions of the United States. They focused on the essential question “What makes your region unique?” Multi-source research was guided by teachers, the school librarian and gateway teachers. Students were challenged to find the answers on their own which was a new experience for them. They liked being able to choose their own partner, working with students from other classes, and visiting other classrooms to learn from different teachers.

Teachers came to the table and answered board members’ questions.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked how teachers helped students face the challenges of active learning.

The response was to remind students that their questions would guide their learning so they needed to think of interesting questions. Teachers noticed that these IP units allowed them to dig much deeper into the units than in the past.

Vice Chair Schneider asked why kindergarten students did not present and what these students did on IP days.

The response was that in a 2 ½ hour day there was not enough time. Teachers taught a modified inquiry and problem solving process. They had the students begin to start wondering to prepare them for next year.

Board Member Thompson asked if teachers noticed big growth from students who participated in this program last year.

Grade 4 students showed a significant increase in research skills. Grade 3 students showed a better ability to work well together. Less confident students felt more empowered than in past years.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if teachers saw instances of students wanting to go above and beyond teacher expectations.

There were many instances of this in first grade. In other grades students would do outside research and enthusiastically share it with other classmates.

Chair Barnes asked the students if they found active learning to be a helpful way to learn. She noted that in the past, teachers told students what they would be teaching and now they tell students what they will be learning. She noted that all of the students were nodding their heads yes.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin asked the teachers what they wondered when the administration brought to them the concept of a 10 day schedule.

One concern was the impact on reading and math groups. This problem was addressed within the units. Reading and math scores actually increased.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that not knowing what the outcome will be is not a reason not to try something new. He appreciated the teachers working through the process.

Chair Barnes acknowledged Principal Yarlott's being named the New Hampshire Elementary School Principal of the Year and praised her leadership skills.

Chair Barnes thanked Assistant Principal Coler's service to the Merrimack School District and wished him success as he moves into a Principal position at a Massachusetts school.

4. Initial Discussion Regarding the Development of a Proposal for Full-Day Kindergarten

Chair Barnes invited Superintendent Chiafery to speak.

Superintendent Chiafery invited the elementary school principals to the table and asked them to present information to the school board.

Principal Yarlott shared that the administrators had visited other schools that were in their first year of a full-day kindergarten. These schools shared their planning processes, research and issues they faced during their implementation year. To date, 103 Supervisory Administrative Unit (SAU) districts already offer all-day kindergarten and across the country the rate is 78% of public schools offering all-day kindergarten.

Principal-elect Romein shared results of various research that validated the value to students from all-day kindergarten. Improvements were noted in academic and social emotional areas. She noted that the team will continue to seek out research on the topic.

Principal Bellemare spoke about the importance of addressing the impacts on space utilization, staffing, furniture and programming needs. There will also be transparency on the potential impacts to community partners who currently offer educational services and child care services to many of the Merrimack School District families.

Vice Chair Schneider expressed concern about the spacing and staffing issues and asked what in particular has been investigated to date.

Principal Bellemare responded that they have no details yet but they have already planned to have some information to share at a second presentation.

Board Member Thompson asked if the research can be made available electronically for the board to access.

Board Member Schoenfeld noted her support for all day kindergarten. She noted that the key is to implement it correctly.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there has been pushback in the districts the administrators had visited. He asked that if parents initially funded the half-day programs were they then funded by the school districts when they moved to full-day programs.

Principal Bellemare noted that there is theme and variation to this point. She noted that this will be further investigated going forward.

Superintendent Chiafery commented that this benefit should be offered to all students and not only to those who can afford to pay for it. The importance of all-day kindergarten is one she would like the board to commit to for all students regardless of ability or willingness to pay.

Chair Barnes asked about enrollment projections.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that they expect between 60-80 students.

Chair Barnes asked about the after-school program impact.

Principal Bellemare responded that it will be expanded to accommodate the additional students.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin asked the principals to share their observations on the three full days of kindergarten they just held to make up for snow days.

Responses noted that the participation rate ranged from the high 90's to 100%. All of the principals thought the experience was very successful.

Chair Barnes noted that full-day kindergarten is a great opportunity for the school district. She thanked the principals for their preliminary information.

5. Second Review of Proposed Board Policy

- **Wellness**

Principal Bellemare thanked the board for their insight and recommendations on the proposal. She highlighted the changes for the record.

Let it be noted that the proposed policy was read into the record at the school board meeting of June 5, 2017. The suggested changes read as follows:

The first bullet point changed the word "instruction" to the word "education."

The last sentence under the Nutrition Guidelines and Education will be changed to read "Schools shall be mindful of the availability of balanced food options during celebrations and events."

The board recommended that the committee be responsible for monitoring compliance but upon review the state statute puts the responsibility with the school district.

Board Member Schoenfeld thanked the committee for the language changes and the flexibility they will provide to the school district.

Chair Barnes noted that the proposed policy will move to the consent agenda for the next meeting scheduled for July 17th.

6. Fourth Quarter Curriculum Review

- **Focus on K-8 Mathematics Program Selection**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin invited the members of the district math team to the table. He noted that this committee has been working on the math curriculum for over two years. They focused their work on two tasks. The first was to develop a comprehensive standards-based K-12 math curriculum. The second task was to select a tool to use in support of the developing curriculum.

To reach this stage the team engaged in intensive research, curriculum review, teacher training to pilot the three different program options, and then survey and assessment.

Twenty three teachers in the district were trained in two of the three proposed curriculums and were then asked to teach them to their students. This allowed for a more informed evaluation.

At the end of this process the team chose Envisions by Pearson Education for the K-8 and algebra programs.

Details showcasing the breadth of this work were presented via a PowerPoint presentation.

Vice Chair Schneider asked about the status of the high school math program. He asked if there is a risk to choosing a different program for the high school.

Math Department Chair Ron Delude responded that Pearson Education has not yet finalized the high school curriculum. The Math Team did not see a downside to choosing a different publisher for the high school curriculum.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that the math curriculum is a K-12 scope and sequence program. The supporting tools don't change this.

Vice Chair Schneider asked how the program will be rolled out.

Principal McGill responded that the process will be similar to that used when the science curriculum was rolled out. The initial rollout will be to teachers who can teach and evaluate and suggest changes.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if part of the rollout could include parents.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that there is no perfect program. He asked that everyone have patience as the program is adjusted to the needs of the Merrimack School District.

Board Member Schoenfeld noted the importance of parents in the equation. She then noted that all of the options appeared palatable based on the evaluations.

Board Member Thompson asked how long the teachers had access to the separate programs before they taught them to students.

Principal-elect Romein responded that the range was from one to two weeks. This did not include their training sessions. The teachers also had time to sit with the trainers and facilitators.

Board Member Thompson asked if the new program fits into the budget.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that he is in negotiations with the publisher at this time.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if teachers felt they had enough time to teach the new options to properly evaluate them.

Assistant Principal Coler responded that based on anecdotal evidence gained from conversations with teachers the answer is yes.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if the publisher will provide district-wide training and if so, will it be free.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that he is confident that as a part of the package he is negotiating; that training will be made available during August Academy.

Chair Barnes asked how students will transition from the existing program to the new program.

Principal McGill responded that the transitions will be different at various grade levels. Traditional algorithms will continue to be taught.

Chair Barnes suggested that there be opportunities at Parent Nights to present the new program.

Chair Barnes asked if a goal is to better measure the impact of inquiry.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the Smarter Balanced assessment model already better assesses inquiry. It measures the difference between knowing and understanding.

Chair Barnes asked about supplementary materials that the district is developing to support areas of curriculum not supported by the new program.

Principal McGill responded that no matter what math program is in use, fact fluency is critical to early math understanding and it will continue to be emphasized.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin added that as he had stated earlier, there is no one program that fits all of the needs of a district and therefore, supplementary materials will be needed.

Chair Barnes asked if the Title I math teachers were engaged in the evaluation process.

Assistant Principal Coler responded yes, as were the special education teachers in regards to the interventions components.

Chair Barnes asked if there was any input from neighboring districts who are currently using Envisions.

There was no information at hand.

Chair Barnes thanked the team for their work and wished them good luck on the rollout.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin took a moment to thank two members of the committee who are moving on to positions out-of-state.

7. Review of Comprehensive Level at Merrimack High School

Chair Barnes invited Merrimack High School Principal Johnson to the table.

Principal Johnson began by stating that the introduction of the Comprehensive Level program instituted a huge cultural change in the high school and noted the challenges students and teachers faced during this transition.

He referenced the comprehensive report he had provided to the board earlier and read the conclusion into the record. It reads as follows:

Conclusion

During the 2016-2017 school year, Merrimack High School implemented a change from a homogeneous ability grouping structure to a heterogeneous Comprehensive class structure for 80 percent of the Grade 9 class.

The benefits of the comprehensive class model at MHS are:

- Struggling learners have access to a rigorous curriculum, rich classroom discussion and strong peer models in the Comprehensive classroom.
- Instead of a parallel system of special education supports, **all** learners can access learning support from special education partners and general education teachers in each classroom.
- Instead of the stigma of being assigned to a special education support center, all learners have equal access to the academic skills centers operated by Learning Support Staff who are also partners to teachers in the Comprehensive classrooms.
- Intervention is more proactive as students can remediate competencies and redo tests as well as relearn challenging material as soon as they need assistance by accessing the teacher for guidance and the academic skills centers for the content area for relearning and remediation.

Moving forward into tenth grade, it is hoped that students will be better able to self-advocate, and begin to take ownership of their education.

The challenges going forward are to continue teacher training and collaboration meetings, training of up to 4 days for grade 10 Comprehensive teachers, and to continue to differentiate instruction. There is also a need to increase the rigor of the Foundations level.

In summation, Principal Johnson noted that while this is only one year of data, he is very pleased with the initial success of the Comprehensive model.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked about the data points that referred to failure rates.

Principal Johnson responded the rates shown were per student and the results are more positive than might appear when looking at the data.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked about the Foundations classes and if students in these classes might feel isolated.

Principal Johnson responded that more work needs to be done to reduce the class sizes of the Foundations classes. However, embedded in these classes are the skills that enable students to move to the next level.

Vice Chair Schneider asked for more information on students' ability to access the learning center next year.

Principal Johnson responded that there will be a plan devised this summer to provide all-day access for next year's students.

Board Member Thompson asked if colleges will look at the additional credit a student earns in a less positive light.

Principal Johnson responded that it should show the student as self-motivated which would be a positive reflection. In conversations with area colleagues, Principal Johnson sees this as a model that will be adopted by more schools going forward.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin added that colleges spend a considerable amount of time on remediation. A student who has already gone through this process is better equipped to explain their academic needs and get the assistance needed.

Chair Barnes asked what adjustments and refinements are needed for next year.

Principal Johnson responded that there were fluctuations in the time needed for collaboration. There needs to be built in time for collaboration as the program expands. Improvements in communication as to when students should access the learning centers will also be addressed.

Board Member Thompson asked if peer tutoring is a part of the learning center offerings.

Principal Johnson responded no, but it is a good idea to investigate. He will look into if it could be credit-bearing.

Chair Barnes thanked Principal Johnson for the information on the Comprehensive Level that was presented at the Eighth Grade Parent Night.

8. Approval of June 5, 2017 Minutes

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the minutes as presented.

The motion passed 3-0-1.

Board Member Schneider abstained.

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

- **Barbara Wolf to James Mastricola Upper Elementary School for \$250**
- **Wentworth Place Association to Merrimack School District for \$285**
- **Lions Club of Merrimack to Merrimack High School for \$1,000**

A gift was presented by Barbara Wolf to James Mastricola Upper Elementary School in the amount of \$250.00. The gift was to sponsor Mrs. Robinson's grade 5 class for the American Independence Museum in Exeter, NH.

A gift was presented by Wentworth Place Association to the Merrimack School District in the amount of \$285.00. The funds will be used to cover expenses for homeless students not covered by Title I. The funds will be dispersed at the discretion of the homeless liaison or social worker.

A gift was presented by the Lions Club of Merrimack to the Merrimack High School in the amount of \$1,000.00. The funds will be used to purchase and implement adaptive technology for students with disabilities. The Lions Club would like the grant recipient (Mrs. Gerber) to document the use of the items and give a presentation at a future Lions Club meeting explaining the need for the items.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the generous gifts as presented.

The motion carried 4-0-0.

10. Consent Agenda

a) Educator Resignations

Lindsey Bates, Merrimack High School, Social Studies

b) Educator and Administrator Nominations

Stephanie Sekela, Merrimack Middle School Part-time World Language
Nicholas Seymour, Merrimack High School, Social Studies teacher
Michaela Wojtas, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, Grade 2 teacher
Alisha Hansen-Proulx, James Mastricola Elementary School, Assistant Principal

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

The motion carried 4-0-0.

11. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

Board Member Thompson noted his interest in the integration going through the district going forward.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that several people have commented to him about their concern over the bus parking move to Daniel Webster Highway from its current location at Star Drive.

12. New Business

Superintendent Chiafery shared some of the upcoming agenda items. They include the results of the water testing, discussion about engaging an architect to address the consolidated Special Services and SAU building, and discussion about a possible partnership with Manchester Community College relative to auto body studies.

13. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Schneider attended the SERESC Board of Directors meeting on June 12th at which the status of the building was discussed. Services will continue as usual for the next school year. The viability of SERESC is also in discussions.

Chair Barnes provided an update on the bridgework that was done by Bambi Lane. It is near the outdoor classroom and provides safer, dryer passage for students.

Chair Barnes noted that an Eagle Scout project on town land will be on the Town Meeting agenda. The land is used as an outdoor classroom by the James Masticola Elementary School students. Approval for this project will come from the Town Council.

14. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

15. Manifest

The board signed the manifest at 10:01 p.m.

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

The motion carried 4-0-0.