

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District
School Administrative District Unit #26
November 20, 2017
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

Superintendent Chiafery 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. Opportunity for Parent Feedback on School District's Homework Protocol

Chair Barnes opened the session by explaining the Homework Protocol and reading aloud the Homework Policy. She explained that the protocol is a practice and implementation of the policy. The policy is designed to be a general practice or rule on how we conduct business.

The Homework Policy states:

Homework is a constructive tool in the teaching/learning process when geared to the needs and abilities of students. Purposeful assignments not only enhance student achievement, but also develop self-discipline and the associated good learning habits. As an extension of the classroom homework must be planned and organized, must be viewed as purposeful to the students, and should be evaluated and returned to students in a timely manner. Teachers may give homework to students to aid in the student's educational development. Homework should be an application or adaption of a classroom experience and should not be assigned with disciplinary purposes. A teacher shall carefully explain to his or her students how homework assignments relate to the grading system.

Adopted June 2, 2008

Legal References: New Hampshire Code of Administrative Rules: Section 8

Chair Barnes invited members of the audience to the microphone to voice their concerns.

Parent Rhonda Fleming of 15 Powder House Road, spoke in favor of not grading homework. This is based on her past experience where not all homework had been graded for accuracy, rather only for completion.

Parent Claudia Tretheway of 27 Blossom Lane, voiced her confusion on the need for the change. She noted that homework appears as a grade in *PowerSchool*.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that one area of confusion among teachers, students, and parents is that *PowerSchool* has limited options for entries. One option is to enter the code of zero, which some saw as a grade, leading to confusion. Another option is letters which some also assumed was an actual grade. Administration is aware of this issue and is already looking to address it for all involved.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that the *PowerSchool* system uses the asterisk to track that something was passed in but not be counted in the final grade. This is a quirk in the system.

Chair Barnes noted that the board will be re-visiting the homework issue at the January meeting to assess the data to date as it pertains to the impact on students.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Mrs. Tretheway if her daughter's homework is being graded for accuracy and returned.

Mrs. Tretheway responded that there are inconsistencies in how teachers are managing the protocol.

Student Representative Puzzo shared that the practice is inconsistent among his teachers.

Mrs. Tretheway stated that more pre-planning should have happened before the roll-out.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that even within teams there is not always consistent practice as wide latitude is given. This is not unique to the district. The purpose of the protocol was to introduce some consistency to the process. In regards to the issue of pre-planning there was tremendous dialogue within the district and this will continue.

Mrs. Tretheway raised the issue of extra credit options in the math program.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin clarified that the extra credit question refers to differentiated instruction. This conversation has already begun at the high school level. Strategies and practices that demonstrate understanding are already being developed and put into practice.

Parent Robert Bevill of 12 Blair Road, began his remarks by praising the teachers and the opportunities provided by the Merrimack School District. He attributes his older children's post graduate success to their experiences in the Merrimack K-12 environment.

Mr. Bevill expressed his concerns over why homework will no longer be included in the student's final grade. He shared voluminous information that he has gathered from the Homework Summit, reviews of prior school board meetings, personal meetings with administration, readings of the homework policy and the homework protocol, social media postings, peer-reviewed studies on homework, conversations with other parents and personal experiences of his own children still in the school district.

He noted that his children still have homework but that it is now referred to as other work. He noted inconsistencies and confusion on the new protocol.

Mr. Bevill referred to the legal reference Chair Barnes cited when reading aloud the homework policy. He noted that it comes from Educational Rule 306.14, which states that:

“As of July 2015, each school should have an instructional program which includes a policy on homework, including its relationship to the grading system.”

Mr. Bevill would like to see a grading policy created for each of the schools.

Mr. Bevill sees the current homework policy as not based on a body of evidence at the individual teacher's disposal. He sees great value in homework as it also leads to higher grade point averages (GPA's) which can lead to better access to scholarships and college acceptances.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin thanked Mr. Bevill for commenting on the pleasant two hour conversation they had in regards to this issue. He noted that they agree on the goals, but differ on the means. Homework has the same purpose and power as it always did. He acknowledged some confusion with the roll-out. He agreed that homework contributes to higher GPA's and noted the value of a student developing self-reliance. The concern is that the higher GPA accurately reflect the student's true understanding of the material.

Mr. Bevill disagreed. He sees the new protocol as taking away the teacher's autonomy.

Chair Barnes commented that to make changes now would negate any data collected on the impact of the new protocol. She noted that even among the three parents who spoke tonight that there is no uniformity of opinion on the issue. She shared that the weekly building Leadership meetings share the impacts and questions that arise and discuss what refinements need to happen in their buildings.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that the January meeting include data on youngest and oldest students and those with Individual Educational Plans (IEP's).

Vice Chair Schneider will be looking for how the utilization of homework applies to competency.

Board Member Thompson spoke to the home audience and asked that they go to the teacher if they are unclear on the protocol or if the child is experiencing test anxiety.

Board Member Thompson asked for clarification on the policy and questioned if it needs to be individualized for each school.

Chair Barnes noted that as a member of the New Hampshire School Board Association the policy can be reviewed and clarified before the January meeting.

Mr. Bevill asked what drove the decision to no longer count homework grades and also what criteria will be evaluated and discussed at the January meeting.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the district is in the early stages of beginning of an elementary standards-based report card. The question as to what should be in the report card began with equity, understanding the material, and grade integrity.

While this applies to a K-6 report card, the issues apply to all students K-12.

Chair Barnes responded to the question of what make up the criteria to be assessed. She stated that the first piece will be to take in the data on the impacts on student outcomes. This information will direct the next step. She noted that the Communications Committee will accept parent and student feedback and add this to the discussion.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that she will be looking at patterns of student performance. This can be rounded out by the parent and student experiences and comments to provide a full picture of the impact of the protocol.

Mr. Bevill asked that the board look at page 19 of one of his handouts. It refers to the Baltimore School Systems two-tiered approach to homework. He expressed his willingness to work on a homework manual for the district.

Mr. Bevill would like to know what the rubric will be in regards to formative assessments. He is concerned about the impact of the new protocol on students when they compete for scholarships against students from neighboring districts.

Resident Carol Lang of 7 Wilson Road, began her remarks by stating that her daughter has already graduated and that she is in favor of the protocol. She stated that grades should accurately reflect subject mastery. She has attended Mr. Bevill's earlier presentation, viewed the school board meetings and tried to stay abreast of current issues. She expressed concern that there appears to be disparity among teachers as to how to implement the protocol. She asked what will constitute data for the board's January discussion.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that one area of assessment will be how students engage in homework as a behavior. Teachers are challenging themselves to find meaningful ways to inspire students to value the practice of homework. The success of this will lie outside the area of a grade. Its success will be the student's developing a good habit of mind.

Ms. Lang expressed concern on how this is measurable.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that this will take time to develop. Feedback from teachers and parents will address specific questions and responses over time will be tracked.

Ms. Lang questioned how homework will be differentiated based on individual student needs.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that this is addressed in the policy. Homework is given to address broad areas of need that vary among students.

Ms. Lang reiterated her concern that mastery of the material should be the goal of any homework protocol.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that not grading homework allows for differentiating it to address various student's needs. She also spoke on the value of qualitative data in shaping an understanding of the impact of the homework protocol on students.

Student Representative Puzzo asked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin to distinguish between classwork and homework. He shared that some students think that work given during the last fifteen minutes of class cannot be graded as classwork.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that this is untrue.

4. Request to Conduct Speak Up Survey

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

Director Rose asked permission to once again conduct the survey run by Project Tomorrow, a national non-profit in support of education. The district conducted this survey in 2015. It is anonymous and voluntary and open to students, teachers, parents and community members. The data is then shared back to the district, state and nationally. The survey will be open until January 19, 2018.

Board Member Thompson asked how students will opt in or opt out and was told students would do this on their own time. She would only advertise that the survey is open to those who wish to participate.

Board Member Guagliumi asked how the advertising will be communicated.

Director Rose responded that in the past it was advertised on the district website, on the Patch, the Merrimack Journal and School Messenger.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to waive the two week rule to give permission until the next board is seated to allow Director Rose to advertise the Speak Up Survey.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Presentation of the Merrimack School District Special Education Procedures Plan

Chair Barnes invited Director of Student Services John Fabrizio to the table.

Director Fabrizio, in his primary role as overseeing the laws and rules that govern special education in the state of New Hampshire, approached the board with notice of changes to the standards for education of children with disabilities.

Director Fabrizio has updated the manual and is asking for approval of the updated manual. He reviewed the table of contents for the board and highlighted the changes. The manual is available as a link on the district website and in hard copy in the Student Services Office.

6. First Quarter Curriculum Review

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin provided an update of the recently implemented K-12 math curriculum, and the newly adopted K-8 math program, Envisions 2.0. During August Academy math educators received two days of Envisions training. This was followed up last week with a train-the-trainer professional development model that was customized with one day of training for each grade level. All current work involves teachers and is not a top-down approach.

The elementary report card work continues with research on best practices and has already seen early agreement on reporting categories and scales.

Elementary literacy practice continues to be refined and made compliant with recent changes in state law in dyslexia training. The reading, writing and literacy block continues to provide support to students and teachers.

The newly adopted Science curriculum is in place and the high school team is taking advice from teachers to ensure a smooth roll-out.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin complimented Principal McGill, Director of Library, Media and Technology Rose, Assistant Principal Bill Morris and the myriad of staff members for the enormous work they have done to bring these endeavors to fruition.

Board Member Thompson thanked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin for his continued evaluation of the districts programs.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there has been any parent feedback on the new math program.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that the direct feedback is that it is hard; the curriculum is rigorous and language-based.

He noted that the online component is a star piece of the program. The trainer from Pearsons Educational has shared a link on their website for parents to avail themselves of when questions arise.

Board Member Thompson asked if there will be a way to see the results for students who are strong in math but not in language arts to see if there is improvement as they move through the program.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that the math program be made a separate agenda item for a future meeting.

Chair Barnes commented on the value of parents learning how to ask the right questions to assist their children in their learning.

7. Update on the Physical Education/Health Curriculum

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin invited Principal Adam Carragher and the team to the table. He introduced the members of the team as educators Shawn Croteau, James Mastricola Elementary School, Rick Greenier, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, Jen Saucier, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, Amy Larkin-Perez, Merrimack High School and Maggie Croteau, Merrimack Middle School. The committee began their work over three and a half years ago and represents all K-12 students. They are using the Understanding by Design protocol to guide their work.

The team showed a PowerPoint and took turns speaking on their work. They began by sharing the Merrimack Physical Education K-12 Mission Statement:

The goal of physical education is to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and competence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity. (Shape America, 2014)

The national standards were used as a reference point and translated in both elementary and high school language. The scope and sequence is used at the elementary level to ensure all standards are addressed.

The changes since the last curriculum review in 1990 were outlined. They are the inclusion of kindergarten, adoption of the new SHAPE National Standards, utilization of the Understanding by Design protocol, a fluid and progressive K-12 skill development component, game classifications in a spiral curriculum, integration of wellness and tactical concepts, and a focus on being user friendly and student centered.

The Health Mission Statement reads as follows:

We study health to acquire the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make smart, safe, healthy decisions that reduce risk-taking behavior and promotes overall well-being.

Once the Physical Education work is finished work will begin on the Health component. The team will follow the Understanding by Design protocol and focus on developing a scope and sequence for the middle school curriculum.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if the Health curriculum will then be offered in the elementary schools and was told a curriculum will be developed for the elementary schools as part of this work.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if high school students will be allowed to opt out of physical education if they are involved in athletics.

Educator Larkin-Perez responded that the team looked into this and cannot yet find research to validate a link between high school athletics and a lifetime link to exercise. Part of the new physical education program will be to explain the reasons and health benefits of doing something as opposed to athletics which stresses becoming the best and winning at that sport. The benefits of muscular fitness, cardiovascular endurance and flexibility over a lifetime are explained to students as a part of the program.

Students who participate in varsity and junior varsity level sports are allowed to earn physical education (PE3) credits. Previously students could get physical education (PE2) credits but upon reviewing the data it was discovered that students were not using the open block in their schedule to take more academic courses.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that the new competencies dictates the work of the curriculum committees.

Board Member Thompson asked if the district has considered collaborating with the Merrimack Youth Association (MYA).

Educator Greenier responded that the sports offered in the after school program differ from those offered by the MYA.

Chair Barnes asked how the curriculum will address students with limited abilities.

Educator Larkin-Perez responded that at the high school level they have limited staffing.

Educator Saucier responded that at the elementary level students are offered adaptive physical education

8. Request to Conduct National Youth Tobacco Survey at Merrimack Middle School (one 7th grade and one 8th grade class)

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin asked Principal Caragher to speak on the survey.

Principal Caragher shared that the survey has been in place since 1999. It now includes information on e-cigarettes. Twenty-five seventh grade students and twenty-five eighth grade students will take the paper and pencil assessment. It will be given as an opt-out survey. It is expected to take about 45 minutes to complete.

Vice Chair Schneider asked for clarification on the opt-out issue. The permission form appeared unclear.

Board Member Thompson referenced the recent RSA that stated that school surveys are now opt-in and asked for legal confirmation on SB43.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that legal counsel will be contacted for clarification.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if the class would be a homeroom.

Principal Caragher responded that his understanding is that a random class would be selected and the Department of Health and Human Services representative would administer the survey under the guidance of the class teacher.

Vice Chair Schneider asked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin if this survey has any connection to the district's association with Safeguard or if it is a random selection.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that it appears to be random.

Principal Caragher added this is the first time the district has been selected for the survey in the last nine years.

Chair Barnes noted that data collection is scheduled to take place February through May, 2018.

Board Member Guagliumi asked to put the item as a future agenda item.

9. Outcome from October Water Testing for Six Schools

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared the results of the October 2017 water testing of the six schools.

The results of the PFOA levels for the schools are:

Reeds Ferry Elementary School:	17 ppt
Merrimack High School:	20 ppt
James Mastricola Elementary School:	18 ppt
James Mastricola Upper Elementary School:	<2 ppt (to be re-tested)
Merrimack Middle School:	19 ppt
Thorntons Ferry Elementary School	5 ppt

All of the schools tested below the recommended 70 ppt threshold.

Vice Chair Schneider asked about the PFOF's.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the results are less than the report limit of four.

Board Member Guagliumi asked when the next round of tests will be conducted.

Chair Barnes responded that testing will be done as needed.

Board Member Guagliumi asked to see the data in graph form including the back-up data and the soil testing.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell will chart the data points.

Board Member Thompson expressed concern that the number of 70 ppt as a safe number was based on a study of adults, not children.

Chair Barnes asked for a place on the website where all of the accumulated data can be shared.

10. Approval of November 6, 2017 Minutes

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the minutes of the November 6, 2017 meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

11. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

Board Member Guagliumi expressed her appreciation for the curriculum reviews.

Chair Barnes appreciated receiving a snapshot of the current enrollment figures that is provided once a month and noted the increase of forty students since September, 2017.

12. New Business

There was no new business.

13. Committee Reports

Board Member Guagliumi has attended two PERC meetings since school began this year. Film literacy and creative writing, philosophy, introduction to business, experimental photography in concert with chemistry, and AP literature and comparative politics are all under review.

Board Member Thompson attended the Parks and Recreation Committee meeting and shared the board's approval to survey the Timmons property. They continue to seek out properties for possible fields.

Chair Barnes attended the New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA) meeting and heard a presentation from the New Hampshire Retirement System.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items

14. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:35 p.m. Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to enter non-public session per RSA 91-A: 3, II, (a)(b)(c).

A roll call vote was taken. The motion passed 5-0-0.

At 10:41 p.m. Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn the public meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.