

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District
School Administrative Unit #26
Monday, February 19, 2018
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 and Student Representative Puzzo.

Board Member Guagliumi was excused from the meeting.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

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

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

Merrimack High School senior Liam spoke in favor of the new homework protocol. He stated that it puts more responsibility on students and better prepares them for college.

Merrimack High School Junior Chris read aloud a letter written by his classmate that was against the homework protocol. The letter expressed the student's worry about her lower grades this year because her homework is no longer factored into them.

Merrimack High School Junior Marin spoke in favor of the new homework protocol. She noted that she now has more time to work on her college art portfolio, engage in other activities and has less stress. She received straight A's for the first time under the new homework protocol. The policy also appropriately puts more responsibility on students.

Marin then read aloud a letter from a classmate also in favor of the protocol.

Parent Jenna Hardy of 59 Peaslee Road grew up in the Merrimack school district and has four children in four different Merrimack schools this year. She praised the pro-active steps taken to improve safety in the schools, such as the double doors. She asked what safety protocols are in place and if there is a place for her to participate in any groups that address this issue.

Merrimack High School Junior Chris returned to the microphone to comment that he struggled with the implementation of the protocol. He had begun the year in higher level classes and dropped to lower level classes. He expressed concern that students might lose out on scholarships due to the new protocol. One area of confusion is when teachers give out classwork the last five minutes of class and expect it turned in the next day.

Merrimack High School Senior Liam returned to the microphone to add that he has used this extra free time to join school clubs, exercise and socialize with friends.

Chair Barnes thanked the guests for their input.

3. Parent and Teacher Survey Results Regarding the Homework Protocol

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin shared handouts with the board members and noted his appreciation for the students who spoke out on the homework protocol.

He began by stressing that the Homework Policy has not changed. It states that homework is a tool to be used by teachers to provide practice that should be reviewed and returned to students in a timely manner.

The change is in the practice related to grading and how it should be used. The implementation of this protocol proved to be a challenge for students, teachers and parents.

The parent and teacher surveys were designed by Learning Innovations West Ed to provide objective data. Due to state law students were unable to be surveyed as the surveys were considered non-academic.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that once these results are shared tonight they can be posted on the district website.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud questions and responses from both surveys.

The Homework Survey parent results are as follows: (906 total responses)

1. Please select the grade cluster for your child. If you have more than one child in the school system, please select one child for the purposes of completing this survey.

<i>K-4</i>	<i>270</i>
<i>5-6</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>7-8</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>9-12</i>	<i>309</i>

2. Has your child exhibited a different attitude about homework since the revised practice went into effect this Fall?

<i>Yes</i>	<i>398</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>508</i>

3. Please explain your answer to the question above. (745 responses)

4. Is your child more or less likely to complete homework since this revised practice went into effect?

<i>Less Likely</i>	<i>259</i>
<i>No Change</i>	<i>585</i>
<i>More Likely</i>	<i>62</i>

5. *How much ownership do you feel your child is taking over his/her homework since the revised practice went into effect?*

<i>Less Ownership</i>	232
<i>No Change in Ownership</i>	581
<i>More Ownership</i>	93

6. *How often do you discuss the importance of homework as helpful practice with your child and actively encourage them to engage in it?*

<i>Never</i>	22
<i>Rarely</i>	53
<i>Sometimes</i>	231
<i>Often</i>	600

7. *How have your discussions about homework changed since it became ungraded?*

<i>I do not encourage my child to complete homework as much as before.</i>	55
<i>Our discussions about homework have not changed</i>	653
<i>I encourage my child to complete homework more than before.</i>	198

8. *Which of the following statements best describes YOUR understanding of the main purpose of the revised homework protocol?*

<i>To give students more free time after school</i>	106
<i>To provide a more accurate understanding of what a student knows and is able to do</i>	402
<i>To raise the standard for achieving a high grade</i>	92
<i>To make it easier for more students to achieve a high grade</i>	68
<i>Other</i>	238

9. *Which of the following statements do you think best describes YOUR CHILD'S understanding of the purpose of the revised homework protocol?*

<i>To give them more free time after school</i>	281
<i>To provide them more accurate understanding of what they know and are able to do</i>	228
<i>To raise the standard for achieving a high grade</i>	72
<i>To make it easier for more students to achieve a high grade</i>	43
<i>Other</i>	282

10. *How much motivation do you feel your child has to complete his/her homework since the revised practice went into effect?*

<i>Decreased motivation</i>	288
<i>No change in motivation</i>	565
<i>Increased motivation</i>	53

11. *What do you think will happen over time, as your child gets used to the revised practice?*

They will feel less motivated to complete their homework. 410
There will be no change in motivation. 409
They will feel more motivated to complete their homework. 87

12. *How do you think the revised practice will affect your child’s academic grades?*

My child’s grades will decrease. 358
There will be no change to my child’s grades. 422
My child’s grades will increase. 126

13. *If you answered “decrease” or “increase” to the questions above, do you think the changes to your child’s academic grades are likely to be temporary or permanent?*

Temporary 24
Not sure 325
Permanent 253

14. *How much do you agree with the following statement: In the Merrimack School District, homework is still a required and necessary component of my child’s overall instruction.*

Strongly disagree 104
Disagree 172
Agree 376
Strongly Agree 254

15. *What is the MOST IMPORTANT way the homework practice can be improved?*

Better communication about the purpose to students, parents, and teachers 175
More consistency in the implementation of the practice among teachers 148
More timely and responsive feedback from teachers on homework assignments 113
Suggestions for how I can help my child use homework productively 85
Make homework count just a little, to make it seem important 243
Other 142

16. *Do you have any other feedback for Merrimack School District related to the homework policy? (441 responses)*

The results of the Homework Survey for teachers are as follows: (132 responses)

1. *Please select the grade cluster you work with primarily.*

K-4 29
5-6 18
7-8 26
9-12 59

2. *Have your students exhibited a different attitude about homework since the revised practice went into effect this Fall?*

No 36
Yes 96

3. *Please explain your answer to the question above. (115 responses)*

4. *Are your students more or less likely to complete homework since this revised practice went into effect?*

Less Likely 93
No Change 38
More Likely 1

5. *How much ownership do you feel your students are taking over their homework since the revised practice went into effect?*

Less Ownership 83
No Change in Ownership 41
More Ownership 8

6. *How often do you discuss the importance of homework as helpful practice with your students and actively encourage them to engage in it?*

Never 1
Rarely 4
Sometimes 36
Often 91

7. *How have your discussions about homework changed since it became ungraded?*

I do not encourage my students to complete homework as much as before. 3
Our discussions about homework have not changed. 74
I encourage my students to complete homework more than before. 55

8. *Which of the following statements best describes YOUR understanding of the main purpose of the revised homework protocol?*

To give students more free time after school 12
To provide a more accurate understanding of what a student knows and is able to do 71
To raise the standard for achieving a high grade 14
To make it easier for more students to achieve a high grade 3
Other 32

9. Which of the following statements do you think best describes YOUR STUDENTS' understanding of the purpose of the revised homework protocol?

To give them more free time after school	68
To provide them more accurate understanding of what they know and are able to do	23
To raise the standard for achieving a high grade	9
To make it easier for more students to achieve a high grade	3
Other	29

10. How much motivation do you feel your students' have to complete their homework since the revised practice went into effect?

Decreased motivation	97
No change	32
Increased motivation	3

11. What do you think will happen over time, as your students get used to the revised practice?

They will feel less motivated to complete their homework.	72
There will be no change in motivation.	47
They will feel more motivated to complete their homework.	13

12. How do you think the revised practice will affect your students' academic grades?

My students' grades will decrease.	82
There will be no change to my students' grades.	40
Most students' grades will increase.	10

13. If you answered "decrease" or "increase" to the question above, do you think the changes to your students' academic grades are likely to be temporary or permanent?

Temporary	3
Not sure	61
Permanent	35

14. How much do you agree with the following statement: In the Merrimack School District, homework is still a required and necessary component of a student's overall instruction.

Strongly disagree	14
Disagree	27
Agree	47
Strongly agree	44

15. *What is the MOST IMPORTANT way the homework practice can be improved?*

<i>Better communication about the purpose to students, parents, and teachers</i>	32
<i>More consistency in the implementation of the practice among teachers</i>	16
<i>More timely and responsive feedback from teachers on homework assignments</i>	4
<i>Suggestions for how parents can use homework productively</i>	14
<i>Make homework count just a little, to make it seem important</i>	36
<i>Other</i>	30

16. *Do you have any other feedback for Merrimack School District related to the homework policy?*

(61 responses)

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that there were 906 pages of open responses.

Elementary parents and teachers were both supportive of the change in protocol and saw no decrease in motivation.

A significant number of secondary parents and teachers were not in favor of the revised protocol. These parents also think their children do not understand the value of homework.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin provided some historical background on the revised protocol. About 18 months ago the district undertook an initiative to revamp the elementary report card. This involved a discussion on its effectiveness and value as a tool. This led to a need for a district-wide protocol on what goes into a grade and what the grade should represent. The discussion included the purpose and value of homework and its place in a student’s grade. Research bears out that homework should be recognized as a behavior of mind and not necessarily reflective of a student’s understanding of the subject matter. The revised protocol was implemented to more accurately reflect the student’s enduring understanding of the subject matter.

The issue was raised in regards to the inequity in students’ homes as it relates to homework assistance. A desired outcome of the revised homework protocol would be that the motivation to engage in homework is based on an awareness of homework as a good habit and not as connected to the student’s grade.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented on the importance of recognizing the tension between parents and school districts in regard to grades. She asked Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin if he knows of any situation that shows where not grading homework leads to a less accurate portrayal of student knowledge.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin has not encountered this among the Merrimack district teachers he has been in discussions with on the homework topic. When a student takes work home there is no way to establish what assistance the student did or did not have in order to complete the work. Ultimately, the goal is for teachers to know what a student knows and does not know.

Board Member Thompson shared feedback he has garnered from various sources. The feedback includes having department heads review the grading breakdown, consistent access to homework assignments, time parameters on homework, the expected homework load in honors classes, classwork to be done only in class, flexibility for students to focus on their areas of need, inconsistency of corrected and returned homework, grading homework for a grade instead of for completion, and the meaning of a grade.

Vice Chair Schneider referenced the pie charts shown on the survey results. He suggested that the protocol be implemented at the elementary level and grow up the grades with the students.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he has yet to hear where competencies fits into the homework protocol and grading.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin responded that newly emerging standards-based report card reflects the competencies. Competencies reveal what you know and can demonstrate.

Chair Barnes noted the importance of competencies but wants consideration given to those students who can prove their knowledge after remediation. She expressed concern that as the culture changes in how the district measures student success; that more student supports be explored such as tutors, study clubs, and additional teacher help. Ultimately the goal is a better prepared student, especially when applying to colleges.

Student Representative Puzzo spoke in favor of the homework protocol. He uses his newfound free time to work on his film project. His personal experience is that there is tremendous inconsistency in teachers' understanding of the homework protocol.

Board Member Thompson noted that many parents are not aware of the remediation option. He would like to see students' better able to self-advocate for additional academic help.

Board Member Thompson noted that the number of homework assignments should be more consistent also.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that some districts use a student's completion of homework as a gage when looking at remediation as an option.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin noted that students learn at various paces and that it is important that a variety of assessments be used to show the student's progress.

Board Member Schoenfeld spoke as a college professor who sees students arrive with A's and B's and find they are not prepared for the academic challenges.

Board Member Thompson stressed his interest in seeing department heads clearly outline the breakdown of what goes into a grade.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin will post the survey results on the district website.

4. Review Outcome from Budget Committee's Public Hearing and Work Session

- **Reconsideration of Operating Budget Based on Budget Committee Modification**

Chair Barnes invited Board Member Schoenfeld to speak on the additional \$6,000 that has been added to the budget.

The funds would be used to pay for the two school resources officers' participation in two trainings. The A.L.I.C.E. training covers dealing with an active shooter and is estimated at \$1,878.00. The 2018 National School Safety Conference held in Florida this July is a five day conference providing national level training and is estimated at \$3,368.00.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the new operating budget is \$74,817,416.00 as approved by the Budget Committee.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to retake the vote on Article 9 for a revised operating budget amount of \$74,817,416.00 with the default budget the same.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that in the past items have by-passed the school board budget hearings and gone directly to the Budget Committee and he does not want to see this become common practice.

Board Member Thompson agreed and noted that the Superintendent's Office and the school board are always open to ideas.

Chair Barnes commented that this item was presented outside of the school board's meetings and questioned if the police department had been asked if they are able to release these officers for this training. The school board enjoys a very healthy relationship with the police department and the spirit in which the additional funds are requested is important to student safety.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

Vice Chair Schneider spoke about Article 7 and noted that questions arose at the Budget Committee meeting. Questions on what to do with the property dominated the discussion. Vice Chair Schneider stressed that his observation is that the first step is to procure the land and property. Then a discussion can be had on what to do with the property. He re-iterated his position that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to acquire the property.

Chair Barnes agreed with the importance of this property to the district.

5. Warrant Presentations for Deliberative Session on March 8, 2018

Chair Barnes gave out the assignments for the warrant articles.

Article 2 will be moved and presented by Board Member Thompson and seconded by Vice Chair Schneider.

Article 3 will be moved and presented by Chair Barnes and seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld.

Article 4 will be moved and presented by Board Member Schoenfeld and seconded by Chair Barnes.

Article 5 will be moved and presented by Board Member Guagliumi and seconded by Vice Chair Schneider.

Article 6 will be moved and presented by Board Member Thompson and seconded by Board Member Guagliumi.

Article 7 will be moved and presented by Vice Chair Schneider and seconded by Chair Barnes.

Article 8 will be moved and presented by Board Member Schoenfeld and seconded by Board Member Guagliumi.

Article 9 will be the responsibility of the Budget Committee.

6. Proposed School Calendar for 2018-2019

Superintendent Chiafery presented the school calendar for the 2018-2019 school year. She referred board members to information in their packets from the Merrimack Education Support Staff Association (MESSA); and a parent letter listing the upcoming Jewish holidays. The Massachusetts school calendar was also considered, prior parent survey results were reviewed, and the Leadership Team also weighed in on the calendar.

August Academy is scheduled from August 27-31 and the first day of school is scheduled for Tuesday, September 4th. Consideration was given to parents who requested that school begin after Labor Day.

Additional days off are:

- Columbus Day, October 8
- Parent Conferences, October/November
- Veterans' Day (observed), November 12
- Thanksgiving Recess, November 21-23
- Holiday Recess, December 24 to January 1
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 21
- Winter Recess, February 25 to March 1
- Parent Conferences, February/March
- Spring Recess, April 22-26
- Memorial Day, May 27
- Tentative Last Day, June 14
- Make-up Days, June 17 to 21

Vice Chair Schneider asked if the schools are only closed for presidential elections and was told yes.

Chair Barnes noted that the electronic survey has yielded high results from parents on the school calendar. She asked if the board would like to use the Technology Survey to get input on the blizzard bags.

Board Member Thompson was in favor of including the blizzard bags in the survey.

Superintendent Chiafery asked if the school calendar and the blizzard bags could be kept separate due to the need to get the calendar approved.

Chair Barnes suggested that the survey be out to the parents by March 5th or 6th. The data could be compiled and reviewed and a decision made at the March 19th meeting.

7. Approval of February 1, 2018 Non-Public Minutes and February 5, 2018 Public Minutes

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to approve the February 1, 2018 Non-Public Minutes.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to approve the February 5, 2018 public minutes.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

8. Consent Agenda

- **Approval of Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS)**

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin presented the consent agenda to the board.

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

The motion passed 3-1-0.

9. Other

a) Correspondence

Student Representative Puzzo received texts from students in regards to the Homework Protocol, one for and one against.

Superintendent Chiafery shared a letter the district Student Services director had received from the New Hampshire Department of Education. It speaks to Indicator 11 and notes the district's continued 100% compliance.

Board Member Thompson received numerous correspondence in regards to the homework discussions.

Chair Barnes shared that Board Member Guagliumi had received correspondence in regards to school security concerns.

Chair Barnes received correspondence in regards to the election process for school board membership.

b) Comments

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell provided a status report on school security. He accompanied Scott Lambertson of the New Hampshire Department of Homeland Security, Emergency Management Division on a walk of three of the six schools. Mr. Lambertson was impressed with the measures taken to date such as the airlock entrances, security badges, and the security cameras and he has provided valuable feedback.

Each school visit lasts for about four hours and results in recommendations and a formal report. The report will not be made public but will be used when planning future budgets.

Staff are encouraged to question adults not wearing badges or proper identification. Frequent sub-contractors are made aware of this procedure.

The district has already submitted emergency plans to the state using the template provided. Each school's plan is about 150 pages long and an output is a flipchart that can be accessed in an emergency.

The other three schools will be assessed in mid-March.

Vice Chair Schneider added that the district was part of a past grant that allowed for participation in the COP 9-1-1 program that provided panic buttons for classrooms.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that Mr. Lambertson was surprised to see that all of the school offices have standard issue police radios. When the red button on top is hit the police know exactly where to respond.

Superintendent Chiafery added that the district has received notification of approval of a grant to purchase more security cameras for the middle and high school. The grant was written by Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Board Member Thompson commented that he voted against the TIMMS survey due to issues with some of the language and wording of the questions.

Board Member Thompson applauded the security measures in place at the schools.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Schneider attended the SERESC Board of Directors meetings on February 12th where the new by-laws were discussed.

Vice Chair Schneider attended the Planning and Building Committee also on February 12th but there was no quorum. He took the opportunity to discuss the Brentwood property.

Two other committee meetings were snowed out.

Board Member Schoenfeld attended the Budget Committee meeting.

Student Representative Puzzo reported that the Robotics Team will be attending competitions in March.

Chair Barnes commented that Student Representative Puzzo participated in the Band Ensemble.

12. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Parent Jenna Hardy of 59 Peaslee Road applauded the board on their thoughtful questions and agreed with all of Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin's comments on the homework protocol.

She was extremely grateful for Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell's work in the area of school security. She feels confident sharing this information now with other parents.

Parent Robert Bevill of 12 Blair Road asked if the board had researched his earlier request for feedback on Ed 306.14 which states that each school is required by law to have its own instructional program. This is in regards to the homework policy versus the protocol.

To date he has not received any feedback from the school board.

He noted that the survey was only announced by voicemail and that not everyone received the email. He found it interesting that the teachers had a closed forum and he heard from many teachers who wanted the homework to count.

Mr. Bevill stated for the record that he is against the homework protocol as it stands now. He thinks the argument for it has been set in a paradigm that provides the impression that students are cheating. This revised protocol will negatively impact students on IEP's and other hardworking students.

He sees the homework protocol as a campaign issue in the next school board election.

Mr. Bevill took exception with some of the questions and the wording of other questions.

Parent Jenna Hardy of 59 Peaslee Road returned to the microphone this time to speak as a former educator. She noted that very often parents did their children's homework or sat with them to review it before it was turned in. The new protocol will provide an accurate portrayal of what a student can do.

13. Manifest

The board signed the manifest.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to enter non-public session per RSA 91-A:3,II (a)(1) at 8:44 p.m.

A roll call vote was taken. The motion passed 4-0-0.

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

The motion passed 4-0-0.