

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District
School Administrative Unit #26
March 19, 2018
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES**

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

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

There was no public participation.

3. New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS) Presentation on NHRS Employer Outreach

Chair Barnes invited Mr. George Lagos, Executive Director of the NHRS and Public Information Officer Marty Karlon to the table.

Executive Director Lagos began by referring members to the folders he had provided to them in their packets. He provided this as additional information and focused his presentation on a PowerPoint demonstration.

The NHRS was established in 1967 to provide retirement, disability, death benefits and to eligible members and their beneficiaries, a post-retirement medical subsidy.

The plan sponsor is the state legislature under RSA 100-A. The plan is implemented by the NHRS.

The pension is funded by members, employers and trust fund assets. Membership is comprised of employees, teachers, police and fire departments. The average annual pension benefit per person is about \$21,084 for teachers.

At the end of the last fiscal year the trust fund was at about \$8.29 billion dollars.

The unfunded liability at the close of FY 2017 was about \$5.04 billion dollars. There is a method in place to amortize the liability through 2039 via employer contribution rates. Full annual payment is a constitutional obligation.

A 2015 actuarial analysis recommendation was to update mortality assumptions as retirees are living longer, especially teachers. Two additional recommendations were to reduce the assumed rate of return from 7.75% to 7.25% and adjust the payroll growth assumption for teachers from to 3.00% 3.25%.

Member contributions are set by statute.

Employer contributions are actuarially determined by the trustees. The rates are separate for employee, teacher, police and fire groups.

The unfunded liability costs are born solely by the employer and currently account for more than 70% of the aggregate employer rate.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell asked if there might be a time when the employer rates might trend down instead of up.

Executive Director Lagos responded that inaccurate actuary rates created a span of years where the pension was underfunded. The variables of interest rates, inflation, and other fluctuations make this difficult to determine. Once the unfunded liability is paid back in 2039 there should be a dramatic change to the benefit of the employers.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if potential legislation that might address double-dipping could affect the pension.

Executive Director Lagos replied yes, and an example is that this could result in a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).

Mr. Karlon noted that in 2011 the state participation rate of 35% disappeared and this resulted in significant impacts on local property tax rates. There is a sentiment in the state house to re-visit this and restore some of the subsidy.

Chair Barnes noted that even if the school district moved from the existing pension system to a privatized system, the unfunded liability still needs to be paid.

Board Member Thompson asked about the rate of returns in 2011, 2012, and 2016.

Executive Director Lagos replied that the pension system operates on a fiscal year and not a calendar year. The stock market uses a traditional year measurement.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell asked for clarification on the 32 hour rule.

Currently the legislature has pending legislation in HB 561 (passed by the Senate) and back in the house for reconsideration and a vote. It would allow for more flexibility for seasonal employees.

The employer contribution rates for the 2018-2019 fiscal year are comprised of a normal cost of 2.07%, unfunded liability of 13.63% and a medical subsidy of 1.66% for teachers. This adds up to a rate of 17.36%.

Superintendent Chiafery asked if the last year of the medical subsidy was 2008.

Executive Director Lagos replied yes, that it applied to teachers and was supposed to expire in 2008 but was extended by the legislature to July 2009. This drove up teacher retirement rates at that time.

Executive Director Lagos commented that he will be attending a meeting tomorrow with the actuaries and anticipates that the teacher rate could possibly be lowered from 3% to 2.75%.

Mr. Karlon spoke about the Decennial Commission recommendations.

The Commission made 12 recommendations in six subject areas; funding, working after retirement, Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)/Temporary Supplemental Allowance (TSA), Group I age 65 adjustment, trustee terms, and the commission schedule.

No wholesale changes to the plan were recommended.

This resulted in the filing of legislation.

HB 1805 will study dollar amortization, and increasing trustee terms.

HB 1823 will look at layered amortization in regards to paying off the unfunded pension liability.

HB 561 looks at working after retirement.

HB 1756 looks at Temporary Supplemental Allowance (TSA)/Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA). It would provide a onetime \$500 payment to current retirees who make less than \$30,000 annually from their pensions.

HB 1757 looks at the retirement age.

NHRS reaches out to members via its website (www.NHRS.org), education sessions, online presentations, email lists, and e-newsletters.

Board Member Thompson asked if the unfunded mandate adds about 3-4% to the annual school budget and was told yes by Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

4. Review of Parent Responses to the Proposed School Calendar for 2018-2019

Chair Barnes read the questions and responses into the record. A total of 1,192 responses were received.

1. *Do you support having NO SCHOOL on Columbus Day? (10/8/2018)*
Yes 54% No 46%
2. *Do you support having NO SCHOOL on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving? (11/21/2018)*
Yes 72% No 28%
3. *Do you support having NO SCHOOL on Martin Luther King Jr. Day? (1/21/2019)*
Yes 57% No 43%
4. *Do you support having NO SCHOOL on President's Day (2/18/2019) recognizing the following week is February vacation?*
Yes 28% No 72%

5. *With teacher workshops being held prior to the first day of school, we have scheduled the first day of school to be the day after Labor Day. Are you in support of continuing this scheduling structure?*

Yes 88% No 12%

6. *How many students do you have in the Merrimack School District?*

1 42%
2 46%
3 10%
4 1%
5 1%
6+ 0%

7. *What level of school are they in? (choose all that apply)*

Elementary 52%
Upper Elementary 27%
Middle School 25%
High School 39%

8. *Do you have internet access in your home?*

Yes 100% No 0%

9. *How many devices (computers, laptops, tablets) do you have that students can use for schoolwork?*

0 1%
1 17%
2 29%
3 24%
4 13%
5+ 17%

10. *If school is closed, are your students taken to a childcare facility?*

Yes 13% No 87%

11. *If YES, does the facility have resources (internet, computers) your child(ren) can use to complete schoolwork?*

Yes 36% No 64%

It was noted that the survey was an on-line survey. It was a piece of the on-line registration process where emails are gathered and used later to send out relevant information to parents.

Vice Chair Schneider recommended finding ways to reach those who have not yet submitted an email to ensure they are reached.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that it is critical to have email access for high school students. If blizzard bags are implemented this becomes a serious issue.

Board Member Thompson stated that it appeared that about 20% of the student population have not submitted electronic access to the district and saw this as a problem that needed attention.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell referenced an earlier paper survey in regards to the re-configuring of the schools and thought that the percentage of parent input is a very valid sample.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that this is the fourth year of this survey and the number of respondents continues to trend upward and that this survey should be continued.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated that having an e-mail does not mean a student has home access to the internet.

Board Member Thompson asked about the possible option of a half-day of school on the day before Thanksgiving and was told that parents had expressed difficulty finding childcare for a half-day.

5. Board's Response to Proposed School Calendar for 2018-2019

Chair Barnes noted that the parent feedback from the survey coincides with the proposed calendar.

Vice Chair Schneider noted the confusion the make-up days sometimes present to parents and suggested adding some additional information. Parents would be advised to not make plans for their students without taking these days into consideration.

Board Member Guagliumi added that it might be helpful to note how many snow days there have been over the past few years to guide parents in their decision making.

Chair Barnes shared some feedback she had received in regards to the school calendar. They included creating a long term five-year calendar, longer school days, and eliminating one of the winter school vacation weeks.

Board Member Guagliumi noted that the vacation weeks were raised in the open response portion of the parent survey last year and suggested it be an actual question on next year's survey.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that in her prior discussions with teachers, they are not in favor of eliminating a vacation week.

Chair Barnes stated that the question would need to be formulated and consequences noted. Students who take courses in outside districts would lose three weeks of instruction.

Board Member Guagliumi would not be in favor of creating a five year school calendar.

Board Member Thompson asked for a higher level discussion on extending the school day.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that first it would have to be agreed upon by the teachers association. It would need to be presented by January.

Vice Chair Schneider reminded the board of the Amherst School District's presentation to a past school board that discussed counting teachable hours versus teaching days. He agreed it would be a good idea to revisit the process.

Board Member Thompson moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the 2018-2019 school calendar as presented.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that the notation on snow days be added to the motion.

Board Member Thompson amended his motion (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider).

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. Scheduling the 2018 Graduation Date

Superintendent Chiafery referred board members to a letter in their packets from Merrimack High School Principal Johnson asking that the date be set for Saturday, June 16, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

Board Member Guagliumi shared that parents have expressed frustration with the late notice and asked if the date could be set earlier in the year.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the law requires 175 days for seniors. Starting school after Labor Day drastically reduces the possible options. School districts that hold their graduations off-site and need to schedule the venues way in advance. Extensive snow days in the past have found them struggling to meet this requirement.

Merrimack also holds its professional development in August but this eliminates the option of a late in the year professional development day being turned into an actual school day when needed.

Board Member Guagliumi asked what might be the repercussions if the graduation date was set later in the month of June.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the goal is always to have the seniors graduate sooner rather than later. Many of them have jobs waiting for them. The weather is the control factor.

Setting the graduation date too soon could result in a postponement which could also cause people's plans to be greatly disrupted.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that the school calendar show the date that graduation will be announced.

Chair Barnes stated that the third Tuesday of March is when the graduation date will be announced.

Board Member Thompson asked to see the date set as early as possible. If school will still be in session then the graduation could be a procedural ceremony.

Board Member Guagliumi asked that the topic be re-visited over the summer.

Chair Barnes stated that the graduation date is now set for Saturday, June 16, 2018.

7. Update on the Tentative Last Day of School

Superintendent Chiafery informed the board that the last day of school is tentatively scheduled for Friday, June 22, 2018.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum McLaughlin is currently calculating instructional hours for the elementary, middle and high schools.

To date the state board of education has given no waivers.

Board Member Thompson asked if the full day for kindergarteners would be a possibility again this year.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that this would only be done if necessary when counting teachable hours.

Vice Chair Schneider agreed that the board should have further discussion on this issue.

8. Board's Response to the Proposed Voter Information Guide

Chair Barnes reviewed the warrant articles.

Board Member Thompson asked if a link to the town website could go on the guide to assist residents with discerning where they should vote.

Vice Chair Schneider had previously suggested including Quick Response (QR) codes.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted the space limitations.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that on article 5, the tax impact should be changed to say "up to \$.04 cents..."

Vice Chair Schneider commented on article 7. The fourth paragraph should say "The planning process will ..."

A spelling mistake was noted in the third paragraph. RPF should be changed to RFP.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that in regards to article 8, it should be made clear that the grant is a guaranteed minimum amount. How Keno will play into this amount is still unknown.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that the Keno is not a factor in the first year.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that in article 9, the default operating budget is higher than the proposed operating budget. He would like this highlighted for voters.

Board Member Thompson asked why candidates running for office are not on the guide and was told it is a space issue. He asked if a link could be provided.

9. Approval of March 5, 2018 and March 12, 2018 Minutes

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to approve the minutes of the March 5, 2018 meeting.

Board Member Guagliumi requested the following changes to the minutes:

- Page 2, line 62: change to say "Board Member Guagliumi questioned the impact of enrollments most likely being spread across many grade levels."

Chair Barnes requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 1, line 38: Correct the spelling of Flately to Flatley

The motion passed as amended 4-0-1.

Chair Barnes abstained.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to accept the minutes of the March 12, 2018 meeting.

Board Member Thompson requested the following change to the minutes:

- Page 10, lines 418-420: Please note that Board Member Thompson was referencing a point made earlier in the meeting by Mr. Bevill in regards to his daughter's failing grade.

The motion passed as amended 4-0-1.

Board Member Schoenfeld abstained.

10. Other

a) Correspondence

Student Representative Puzzo shared that the Merrimack High School band will be attending the Large Group Festival this coming Friday.

Vice Chair Schneider and Board Members Thompson and Guagliumi received multiple correspondence in regards to the last day of school and the graduation date.

Chair Barnes received correspondence on multiple issues relating to school district operations.

Board Member Thompson received correspondence from a parent in regards to an incident at the high school the week prior.

b) Comments

Board Member Guagliumi noted that an action item from the meeting last week was for Chair Barnes to work with Attorney Peahl to draft a decision. There is an initial draft at this time.

11. New Business

There was no new business.

12. Committee Reports

Board Member Thompson noted that the Professional Development Committee met but weather conditions prevented him from attending.

Board Member Guagliumi attended the Merrimack Safeguard meeting the prior Thursday and discussed an upcoming event at the O'Leary Center where the AOK presentation will be made by Sarah Heimberg. The Mental Health Committee will also be in attendance and a raffle will be held.

Vice Chair Schneider attended the SERESC board meeting on March 12th. The by-laws were changed by the board of directors and the re-structuring will allow for a more diversified board. The changes will change the board from a membership board to a service delivery organization.

Vice Chair Schneider also reviewed the provisional purchase and sale agreement entered into by the school board.

Chair Barnes had a conflict and was unable to attend the Healthcare Cost Containment Committee. She was running the executive board meeting for the NHSBA.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

15. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn the meeting at 9:16 p.m.

The motion passed 4-0-0.