

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
Monday, February 18, 2019**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Schneider, Board Members Guagliumi, Schoenfeld and Nunez. Also in attendance were Superintendent Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell and Student Representative Puzzo.

1. Call to Order/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

Mr. Robert Bevill, 12 Blair Road, rose in support of the petitioned Warrant Article addressing the on-going zero grade homework policy. He said the current and former Merrimack State Legislators, both democrat and republican, along with scores of parents and regular citizens signed the petition to get the homework policy on the ballot. He further said they had received triple the number of signatures that were necessary.

Mr. Bevill commented that he felt the homework protocol was enacted without a proper vote of the School Board and based on feeling and not facts. He further commented that the new protocol still required students to complete an average of 60 to 180 minutes of homework per night but without the teacher's ability to include grading the homework as part of the final cumulative grade.

Mr. Bevill said the School Board had originally promised to continue the homework policy only if it was in the best interest of the students, however, the teacher's rejected the homework policy 3 to 1 in two closed anonymous surveys.

Mr. Bevill stated he felt passing the Warrant Article would put Merrimack High School seniors back in fair competition and return them to a level playing field with other students competing for college acceptance and merit-based scholarship opportunities. He said it would also help students at the lower end of the spectrum pass classes and graduate with dignity and grace.

Mr. Bevill asked the School Board to endorse the Warrant Article and if they could not endorse it then he asked the Board to make no recommendation.

Ms. Carrie Chiasson, 19 Powers Circle, referenced that she was in favor of the turf field being installed. She asked that the Board please support the Warrant Article for the turf field.

3. Legislative Update

There was no update.

4. Presentation about Rock the Street, Wall Street Opportunity Provided by Fidelity Investments for Merrimack High School

(Ms. Sharon Putney, Principal; Ms. Linda Mandra, Gifted & Talented Coordinator; Ms. Melanie Hedland, Teacher of Social Studies; Ms. Emily Hartmann, Teacher of Social Studies; Ms. Christina Cuzzi from Fidelity Investments; Ms. Cassie Child, Student and Gabby Whitaker, Student)

Ms. Hartmann presented a video which described the Rock the Street program.

Ms. Hedland commented that approximately 30 students attended the initial 5-week classroom sessions with the representatives from Fidelity Investments. She also commented that approximately 30 students attended the field trip to the Fidelity site in Merrimack and approximately 15 students had continued to have one on one partnerships with their mentors from Fidelity Investments.

Cassie Child stated that Gabby Whitaker and herself both really enjoyed the program. Cassie said they were able to meet women who worked at Fidelity Investments during their classroom sessions. She also said they were provided with information about women who worked in finance, the stock market and learned how few women actually worked in the STEM field.

Gabby said she was very impressed with her experience and learned more about the role that women had in finance and STEM. She further said she very much enjoyed the field trip to Fidelity Investments as she was able to experience the atmosphere of an office, interact with employees and listen to the words of many successful businesswomen.

Ms. Christina Cuzzi, Manager of Community Relations, Fidelity Investments, addressed the Board and stated that through Fidelity's employee volunteer program, Fidelity Cares, their employees lent their expertise, time and often their hands to help make a difference in the community.

Ms. Cuzzi commented that the partnership with the Merrimack School District had begun the year before and was nothing short of amazing. She further commented that Fidelity's Emerging Leader Program was bringing a financial literacy curriculum to a group of students over the course of 12 weeks.

Ms. Cuzzi thanked all of the teachers involved as well as Superintendent Chiafery for advocating for their programs in Merrimack and throughout the state.

Chair Barnes thanked Ms. Cuzzi and mentioned that the State of New Hampshire's Scholars organization recognized Fidelity Investments for the program as well as their work.

Board Member Guagliumi also thanked everyone who had worked on the program and said it was an excellent example of investing in future leaders.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked the students what their motivations were when they signed up for the program. Gabby replied she was already involved in many business clubs and she felt it was right up her alley. Cassie replied she was not sure what career path she was interested in but wanted to find out more about it and realized she liked it.

Vice Chair Schneider asked if there were anything within Merrimack High School or Fidelity Investments which would broaden the scope to not just be focused on women but on men as well. Ms. Cuzzi replied the Rock the Street mission was geared toward women. She also replied they were doing programs like the Emerging Leaders Program, which was open to men and women. She said they were looking at additional programming in the fall with other financial literacy programs which would broaden the audience.

Chair Barnes stated that fifteen of the students were still doing one on one mentorship. She asked what areas of finance the students were being exposed to. Ms. Cuzzi replied the one on one mentoring was geared towards career mentoring. She further replied that Rock the Street had a strict curriculum consisting of investment and savings.

Chair Barnes clarified that Merrimack High School was the only high school selected for the program. Ms. Cuzzi replied Fidelity Investments had only done the program twice, once in Texas and in Merrimack.

5. Board's Response to Budget Committee's Revised Operating Budget on the 2019 Warrant

(Chair Barnes & Dr. Schoenfeld)

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that the Budget Committee was a body that took the budget as put forward by the School Board, reviewed it and went back to the School Board with their own perspectives. She said the Budget Committee had one item which

they felt strongly about and chose to add \$200,000 with the idea that it might be used to kick-start the building project that may occur, to cover the tear down costs of where the red building presently sat.

Chair Barnes commented the area the Budget Committee was specifically talking about was razing the building or leveling it and filling in any holes on the lot. She further commented that she was concerned with the way the proposed addition came about. She said the Board had been talking about the budget since the summer and they spent many nights coming up with a number they felt comfortable putting forward to the voters. She said at no time during that process was there ever a consideration by any of the Budget Committee members to communicate any concern regarding the proposed additional \$200,000.

Chair Barnes stated that the School Board had been transparent, proactive and over communicating the initiatives and felt they had been blind-sided. She further stated they had a SAU/SPED office plan on their Capital Improvement Plan. Chair Barnes stated that while they had a plan to do something with the building, it was not planned to be done in the current year. She further stated they did not even have a Planning and Building Committee report yet. She said her concern was it would be a tax with a statement attached to it which was not appropriately vetted.

Vice Chair Schneider said he did not feel it was prudent to raze a building prior to knowing whether or not part of it was still useable. He also said he was frustrated that there were comments made that they must tear the eyesore down when they could otherwise use the \$200,000 to put some of the education related things back into the budget.

Board Member Guagliumi stated that she felt it could be bonded in a bigger project down the road and it was premature because the Planning and Building Committee was still discussing it. She said she was not in support of the \$200,000 increase.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that she thought the Budget Committee was acting out of the absolute best interest, as they saw it, for the district. She said the Budget Committee had strong opinions and those opinions led to their suggestion and felt the information was valuable.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated one of the things related to the 2019-2020 budget was that they asked for financial prudence and all of the individuals who worked on the budget did so with that in mind. She said she felt what essentially happened was the vacuum that the School Board created on purpose, in order to be fiscally responsible, was then used for a purpose other than something the district might have used it for had they not wrote it down in the first place and that was what concerned her the most.

Vice Chair Schneider commented the question was now if the School Board should support a budget that was proposed to be increased above the default budget.

Board Member Guagliumi asked, hypothetically, if the default budget was approved by the taxpayer's in April, were there any consequences to the current budget. She said although the money would affect the tax rate, nothing would obligate them to spend the money.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the budget presented to the Budget Committee was \$133,000 less than the default budget and then the Budget Committee put \$200,000 back in. He said there would be \$67,000 more than what was presented to the Budget Committee so the School Board's decision would be if the budget failed, would they want to spend the \$67,000 or not.

Vice Chair Schneider said that was only true if the proposed budget passed but if it failed and the default budget was passed then there would be an additional \$200,000. He said if they chose not to do anything, they would take the \$133,000, if the operating budget failed, and return it to the taxpayers.

Board Member Guagliumi said she wanted to make sure there was not an RSA that said there was something they could not spend it on that they were planning on. Chair Barnes replied the budget the School Board presented to the Budget Committee before they had their hearings would be kept whole.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he would like to make a motion that the Board vote on whether or not to recommend the budget as presented by the Budget Committee for the new amount of \$200,000, which was higher than the original proposed operating budget. Chair Barnes stated the proposed operating budget was \$77,854,036.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to recommend the budget as presented from the Budget Committee.

Discussion:

Board Member Schoenfeld stated that her intention was to vote in favor of it predominantly because the budget was a lot larger than the one particular article and she was concerned about potentially putting aside the work of \$70,000,000 plus worth of budget because of one piece.

Vice Chair Schneider said that even though the default budget gave them more money than what they needed, it was based off the default calculations and not calculated based on specific needs. He further stated he wanted to portray the School Board's belief in recommending the budget which had the least effect on the taxpayers.

Board Member Guagliumi stated that she was a very strong supporter of the Budget Committee and felt they had a strong purpose. She said the Budget Committee added many extra eyes on the budget and she welcomed the different perspectives. Board Member Guagliumi commented with that said, she was not in support of increasing the budget in the amount of \$200,000 because she was not in favor of spending it.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he applauded what the Budget Committee went through. He encouraged the Budget Committee members to attend the School Board's budget discussions to obtain context and hear public comment.

Chair Barnes stated that she felt the \$200,000 was governance and that was what the School Board was hired to do and the decisions to operate the district needed to go through them.

Chair Barnes said she felt the \$200,000, because of having a very specific initiative that was not vetted, was a political statement and she did not want the taxpayers to pay a fee for a political statement. She said she would vote against it for those reasons.

The motion failed 1-4-0. (Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Schneider and Board Members Guagliumi and Nunez voted against the motion)

6. Board's Response to Two Petitioned Warrant Articles

(Chair Barnes)

Chair Barnes stated there were two petitioned articles:

1. Turf Field Petition

(By Petition) Shall the District raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,200,000 for design, construction, purchase, installation and original equipping of a new artificial turf field for Merrimack High School; and furthermore, to authorize the School Board and School Community Support Groups to apply for and obtain any donations, gifts, devises, bequests, grants, etc. which may be available for said project and expend any such donations, gifts, devises, bequests, grants, etc. for the purpose of designing, constructing, purchasing, installing and equipping the new artificial turf field?

Chair Barnes indicated the petitioned Warrant Article had been verified by the School District Clerk with a minimum of 25 signatures from Merrimack registered voters but there

was also an expectation that there would be fundraising efforts to offset the cost of the \$1.2 million.

Chair Barnes noted that the Budget Committee had already voted on the petition with a vote of 6-2-1. (Not Recommended by the Budget Committee)

Board Member Nunez stated that she had been in contact with the parent groups who were leading the effort for the turf field. She further stated they were actively seeking fundraising sponsorship and had made significant progress towards acquiring some of the funds. Board Member Nunez said they did not yet have any money in hand but had a plan and they were making significant strides.

Board Member Nunez commented she would vote in favor of the petition, specifically because of the benefits to the school district, the safety of the children and the community.

Student Representative Puzzo asked where the turf field would be placed. Chair Barnes replied it would be placed on top of the grass.

Board Member Guagliumi stated that she would be in support of the petition for a variety of reasons. She said there was a lot of consistent parental support, the safety of the students, the transportation headaches the district was faced with and it would allow more usage of the field.

Vice Chair Schneider said it was interesting to hear the Budget Committee deliberate regarding the petition because there were some valid statements made. He said one of the points they brought up was how tight the timeline was because normally if something as big as the turf field were going to be vetted the conversation would start in September or over the summer.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he felt if the Budget Committee had taken their vote after they saw the plans and had more details regarding the fundraising, they may have voted differently. He said it was very important to promote the field.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that the Budget Committee wanted to see the project bonded. He said School Board had that discussion but when something had a lifetime of twelve to fifteen years, doing a ten-year bond that lasts a little over ten years was not the most prudent way to go.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he felt if the School Board believed it was good for the district, they needed to support it and let the voters decide.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented she felt the field was something that needed to happen and the sooner, the better. She said the full cost was on the petition and the cost would be part of the tax rate. She pointed out the fundraising was not a part of it yet, and that part of it may or may not happen.

Vice Chair Schneider replied he felt Board Member Schoenfeld was correct, however, he pointed out that the fundraising did not need to stop and it did not have to happen in three months. He said the parent group had a target goal of \$500,000 in fundraising.

Board Member Schoenfeld pointed out that it was not fundraising to try to make it happen, it was fundraising to try to reimburse part of what would have been raised in order to make it happen. Board Member Schoenfeld commented that she did not disagree with doing it but she felt it needed to be considered as its own expense and vote on the full sum even if money was not raised in the future.

Chair Barnes stated that some of their most responsible budgeting was done with “a worst-case scenario.” She further stated that there was a board member who was supporting the effort and parents who had made commitments to them. She also said it was not on the ballot yet and felt once it was, it would become very real.

Board Member Nunez said the entire project started out with a few parents who had concerns relative to soccer and transportation to a Bedford turf field and once that concern was raised it snowballed into multiple conversations and broadened into much more than just safety.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to recommend the turf field petitioned Warrant Article.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

2. Homework Petition

(By Petition) Shall the voters of the Merrimack School District , in order to raise academic achievement and return to grade reporting equity for formative assessments, require that the following statement be amended to the “IKB Homework” Merrimack School Board Policy: “At the discretion of the individual teacher, homework assignments will be:

(1) collected, reviewed and graded; and (2) the accumulative average of the semester’s homework grade will be counted towards the student’s total cumulative semester grade.

Chair Barnes stated that because there was no financial impact the School Board did not have to take a position but had a right to take a position. She said Mr. Bevill had

commented, "if the School Board did not agree with him then he preferred the Board not take a position."

Board Member Guagliumi asked, hypothetically, if the homework petition passed, was there any action that the Board was required to do. Superintendent Chiafery replied it would be an advisory role only and it was the Boards will as to what they did with it.

Board Member Guagliumi stated she would like to grant Mr. Bevill his wish and have the School Board not take a vote and not recommend.

Chair Barnes stated if the School Board took a vote on the petition then it would go on the ballot but they had every right to vet the petition because it was on the agenda.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated she felt the Board should take a position. She said she both appreciated and respected the idea that the petition be allowed to run its course as part of the process. She also said to some extent the public relied on the School Board to have a perspective and felt the Board had taken a perspective on the protocol repeatedly and publicly and should continue to do so.

Board Member Nunez stated that she agreed and also felt there was some misunderstanding of the homework protocol. She said what Mr. Bevill had said and what was in the petition was not in line with the homework protocol itself. She further said she felt the Board should communicate their opinion.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that he agreed with Ms. Nunez' statement. He said there were a lot of misunderstandings from both staff and parents as to what it all meant. He said his concern was the petition as written, was to modify or extend the policy and it may have unintended consequences.

Vice Chair Schneider said one of the reasons the protocol was even discussed was the fact that there was a lack of consistency across schools, teachers and departments as to what it meant to assign homework, grade homework and count it. He said there was a belief that if it was not broken then it should not be fixed. He also said he felt it was inaccurate to say the policy was benefiting the district as a whole.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that it reduced the flexibility a parent had because it put all of the ownership at the discretion of the individual teacher. He said there were no guidelines for the way the policy was written and he was not in favor of it.

Chair Barnes stated that she too felt the Board should take a position on it and pointed out that just because the Board accepted testimony did not mean by not responding to it that they validated the accuracy of it. She said most of what was in the petition was not accurate. She further said the homework protocol's validity had been validated by the

Department of Education and revalidated by the lack of action at the State of New Hampshire's Supreme Court.

Chair Barnes indicated homework was presented to the Board as specifically designed to help with intervention and extension; as a measure of what the student did and did not know and was not meant to be a penalty or an endorsement to their GPA.

Chair Barnes stated she felt the homework petition was based on inaccuracies and the Board was doing everything to empower the administration to maximize student output. She said the district would not put a child in harm's way by having a grading system that would put them at a disadvantage.

Board Member Guagliumi stated that she agreed with the points Chair Barnes made. She recommended using social media to relay a statement of facts regarding the protocol because there was a number of inaccuracies which were publicly shared. She also said she wanted to be crystal clear that she supported Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin in the protocol and she admired and respected him.

Vice Chair Schneider commented that for many reasons the Board had remained silent over the past year with their ability to respond to some of the inaccuracies that were in the public. He said it was important to try to figure out a way to communicate some of the specifics around the protocol. He also reiterated that if the Board voted to not support the homework petition it did not mean they were sitting there just saying it was great the way it was because they would continue to work with the administration to make sure the right things were done.

Board Member Guagliumi stated that Board Member Schoenfeld had done some research which was available to the public. Chair Barnes replied they would repost it on the webpage as well as on social media. Board Member Nunez suggested the information also include the Supreme Court's decision as well as a reminder of the appropriate ways for parents to contact the administration relative to the matter.

Board Member Schoenfeld said even if one were to feel the protocol should be rolled back, at some point in time, creating a policy that put something fully at the discretion of the individual teacher was an interesting way of handling it. Board Member Schoenfeld noted that she was an educator with classroom experience. She said the way it was currently, it would lock the school and district out of any real way of mentoring teachers who may or may not be handling homework in a useful way.

Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) not to recommend the petitioned Warrant Article regarding the homework protocol.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

7. Preparation for Warrant Presentations for Deliberative Session on March 5, 2019
(Chair Barnes)

Chair Barnes announced the turf field petition would become Article 7, the homework petition to Article 8 and the budget to Article 9. The consensus of the Board agreed with the changes.

Chair Barnes read aloud the assignments for the Warrant Articles as follows:

- Article 1: Election of Officer for the ensuing year
- Article 2: Acceptance of gifts and property
 - Move - Board Member Nunez
 - Second – Board Member Schoenfeld
- Article 3: MTA contract
 - Move – Chair Barnes
 - Second – Vice Chair Schneider
- Article 4: MTA Contract Trailer
 - Move – Vice Chair Schneider
 - Second – Chair Barnes
- Article 5: Capital Reserve Fund for School District Repairs
 - Move – Board Member Guagliumi
 - Second – Board Member Nunez
- Article 6: Parking lot reconstruction at the James Masticola Elementary School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School
 - Move – Board Member Schoenfeld
 - Second – Board Member Guagliumi
- Article 7: Operating Budget (Budget Committee)

8. Proposed School Calendar for 2019 – 2020
(Superintendent Chiafery)

Superintendent Chiafery stated that she provided the Board with a proposed calendar for the 2019 – 2020 school year. She further stated she used multiple materials to put the calendar together including recommendations from the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association.

Superintendent Chiafery reviewed the proposed holidays and vacations for the 2019 – 2020 school year. She said she knew the School Board had been very good about asking the public and parents what they thought of the calendar and made the assumption the Board would do that again. She said her hope would be if a survey was rendered, they would be able to come up with a final calendar on March 18th.

Board Member Nunez asked if there was a possibility of not having school on Thursday, January 2nd and Friday, January 3rd. Superintendent Chiafery replied if that were to happen then two days would have to be added to the end of the year and parents typically did not want to do that, but it was possible.

Chair Barnes noted the possibility of having no school on Monday, December 23rd.

Vice Chair Schneider suggested that Superintendent Chiafery contact other area districts and ask them if they were working with a 180-day calendar versus an hourly calendar.

9. Approval of February 4, 2019 Minutes

Chair Barnes asked the members of the Board if there were any emendations to the minutes before them.

Board Member Guagliumi mentioned a portion of the minutes regarding “authorizing the administration to spend money for the requirements of the turf field” may have been missing.

Minutes were reviewed and this discussion was not part of the February 4, 2019, meeting.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the minutes from the February 4, 2019, meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

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

- Claire Graham to the James Masticola Elementary School in the amount of \$50.00

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the donation was intended to support families having difficulty with lunch accounts. He thanked Ms. Graham very much for the donation.

- Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Bull to Merrimack High School in the amount of \$1,000

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the donation was to support the Merrimack High School FIRST Robotics team.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Vice Chair Schneider) to accept the gifts with extreme gratitude.

Discussion:

Board Member Guagliumi thanked both donors and noted that the Bull family, as well as Fidelity Investments had been very supportive of the FIRST Robotics program for many years.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

11. Consent Agenda – Dr. Mark McLaughlin

- Administrator Resignation/Retirement

Marjorie Chiafery, Superintendent

- Nomination

Dr. Mark McLaughlin, Superintendent Elect

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

The motion passed 5-0-0.

12. Other

- a) Correspondence

There was no report.

- b) Comments

Vice Chair Schneider stated he felt the Board had made some emotional decisions as they went through the budget season. He said he sincerely hoped the public saw how difficult it could be for the Board to take certain positions.

13. New Business

There was no report.

14. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Schneider stated the SERESC Board of Directors had their monthly meeting and most of the time was spent on two areas; one was looking at the financial status of SERESC and it remained strong. He said the other thing they discussed was the evolution of the executive leadership of SERESC. He said there was a lot of good thinking about getting back to the roots of SERESC.

Vice Chair Schneider stated the District Wellness Committee met and discussed the various wellness activities that were available for staff and students. He said there was also an update on the general nutrition requirements based on what they heard from the federal guidelines. He further said in the past the guidelines were leaning towards all fat-free milk, whole grain foods and low sodium but they had backed off a bit and there would be some reporting regarding it in the upcoming months.

Vice Chair Schneider commented the Health Cost Containment Committee provided \$3,000 to the Wellness Committee to decide how they wanted to spend it across the district.

Vice Chair Schneider noted there was a Wellness Fair and over 200 staff attended with over 20 vendors presenting information about programs and ways to save on costs.

Chair Barnes said she attended a meeting in Concord where Commissioner Edelblut held an audience of Board members regarding his "Learn Everywhere" initiative. She said she was aware there were some questions regarding how to grant credits and where the liabilities would be when a student was off-campus. She further said those items were in the process of being vetted.

15. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Mr. Richard Foote, 129 Indian Rock Road, addressed the Board and asked if the topics of the Board's meeting were available on the website. Chair Barnes replied the budget and the Warrant Articles were on the website.

Mr. Foote said he was particularly interested in the homework petition. Chair Barnes replied there was research done on the value of homework and Dr. McLaughlin had presented a power point presentation to the School Board, and noted she believed it was still available on the website. She said if he could not find something, he was welcome to call the district office.

16. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

17. Adjournment

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to adjourn.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.