

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
Monday, June 3, 2019**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

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

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 Comments

There were no public comments.

3. Legislative Update

Ms. Rosemarie Rung provided an update to the School Board regarding Bills which were acted upon and Bills which were held back for the following year. She said one number that remained the same was the \$219,500 that Merrimack would receive which they could either apply to the budget with voter approval or return it to the taxpayers.

Ms. Rung noted education funding was going to have a bigger emphasis on the percentage of the student population that was eligible for free and reduced lunches. She pointed out in order for Merrimack to receive its fair share of funding there needed to be an effective communication plan to ensure that people who were eligible or may be eligible for free and reduced lunch applied for it. Ms. Rung said the amount of funding Merrimack received was weighted on the percentage of participants in the free and reduced lunch program.

Ms. Rung explained the first thing that had to be done when creating a bill was to draft an LSR (Legislative Service Request) and the person who submitted the request was the prime sponsor. She further explained that it may get reviewed by state agencies, additional people could sign on as co-sponsors, it was assigned a Bill number and then would be assigned to a House/Senate Committee. She said the timing of the LSR was very important because if

it did not get submitted and cleared, it did not become a Bill. She further said the period in which Legislative Service Requests could be submitted was between September 4th and September 20th. Ms. Rung asked the Board if they had any issues which would require a legislative remedy, they should meet with her in August to discuss it.

Chair Barnes thanked Ms. Rung for coming to the meeting.

4. Preschool Progress and Projections

(Ms. Kara Cave and Mr. John Fabrizio)

Ms. Kara Cave, Preschool Coordinator, stated the process started out with the Child Find team which consisted of an educator, a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist and a physical therapist. She pointed out that children as young as 2 ½ years old were referred to the program through their Early Intervention Programs. She said once they received a referral for a child, a meeting was scheduled within 15 days to gather information. She further said the child was called back in when they were approximately 33 months of age and testing was conducted in all germane areas to determine eligibility. She said once they determined eligibility they wrote an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and the child would start working with them as early as the day after their third birthday.

Mr. John Fabrizio, Director of Special Services, addressed the Board and said one of the indicator reports the DOE (Department of Education) had was the Indicator 12 Report and pointed out that Merrimack School District was 100% compliant.

Mr. Fabrizio said once the students were in the program they continued to be monitored by a system called Preschool Outcome Measurements (POMs).

Ms. Cave explained the purpose of POMs (Preschool Outcome Measurements) was to identify the effectiveness of special education preschool to see how the programs were doing and to see how each child was making progress. She said they took all of the preschool children when they started a program and assessed them in all skill areas, pointing out they assessed them again mid-year to monitor progress and again during the last six weeks of the program, which was unique to Merrimack. She said they sent the information to the Department of Education once per year so they could ensure that all children were making progress throughout the year.

Mr. Fabrizio commented 95.8% of the students that were measured in the Merrimack School District were making progress, noting the state target was 80%.

Mr. Fabrizio stated indicator B looked at early language skills and literacy skills to see if the child were improving. He further stated the state target was 80% and the students were at 100% in the Merrimack School District.

Mr. Fabrizio said the percentage of preschool children with IEP's who demonstrated improved use of appropriate behaviors was 100% and the state's target was 77.5%.

Ms. Cave reported they had looked at the last nine years' worth of data for the Merrimack Early Education Program (MEEP) to monitor the progress. She said in 2010 and 2011 they had a total of 80 students and of those, 25 were identified as students requiring special education and 52 students were typical peers. She said in the 2018 - 2019 school year there was a total of 170 students in the program and of those, 85 were identified as needing special education and another 85 were typical peers. Ms. Cave stated on average there could be as low as one referral per month and as high as eight referrals as was the case in February of 2019 and they continued to get referrals. She further stated the trend was that they were receiving a lot more referrals for students who were having challenging behaviors at their childcare centers, children who were not exposed to early learning opportunities and many of the students had articulation issues and it was difficult to understand them. She said they were also starting to see a lot of anxiety in younger children.

Ms. Cave said the MEEP (Merrimack Early Education Program) was very popular for the typical peers and the registration process was very competitive. She said there were 28 family's who would have loved to be part of the program and were currently on a waitlist.

Mr. Fabrizio commented that he had sent a memo to the School Board regarding a Request to Increase Personnel in the Merrimack Early Education Program (MEEP) at the James Masticola Elementary School. He indicated he highlighted some regulations and laws that were required under IDEA and the state regulations in an attempt to maintain. He said one of those was to try to maintain a 60/40 split with typical peers versus students with need. He further said the split was ideally five students with need and six who were typically developing. Mr. Fabrizio said their goal was to try to keep the number of students between twelve and fourteen per class which would include one teacher and two paraeducators unless there was a student with significant needs which would have had to require additional support.

Mr. Fabrizio said they were at capacity with fourteen students in every classroom and felt it was time to expand the program and requested another full-time preschool teacher at the James Masticola Elementary School as well as two paraeducators to be in the same classroom.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked, regarding the percentage of improvements, indicated it said “substantially increased” and asked what that meant. Mr. Fabrizio replied it meant when they began the survey they had numbers which were below the state averages and over time, they had increased them to a more significant ratio.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated there were certain areas of disabilities that were skyrocketing across the board and asked if it were specific to Merrimack or was it a broader trend. Mr. Fabrizio replied he did not have solid data to share but they were seeing children with behavioral disorders in preschool and it was on the radar at the national level.

Board Member Schneider stated one of the questions which frequently came up was when the typical peers came into preschool they used the MEEP program as a preschool program just like they would some of the other providers in town. Board Member Schneider noted, for full disclosure, that his son was part of Kids, Inc., which was the precursor to the MEEP program, as a coded student so he understood the concept. He further noted, however, there was a lack of knowledge surrounding the way the tuition was charged for the peer students in the program. He asked if the requested additional staff would allow for the entire waitlisted students to attend the program. Ms. Cave replied if they added a classroom there would be a morning session and an afternoon session which would allow them to accept eight typical peers in each session, taking sixteen off the waitlist.

Board Member Schneider asked what the typical tuition was. Ms. Cave replied if a child attended two days per week the tuition was \$130 per month, if a child attended three days per week the monthly tuition was \$150 and if they attended four days per week the monthly tuition was \$170.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked how the children were benefiting from the program, both typical and those that were receiving early intervention. She asked how it affected their learning as they went through the school years. Mr. Fabrizio replied students who were comfortable in their environment learned better, the students learned social and emotional well-being and they were exposed to early numeracy and literacy skills.

Chair Barnes asked if there may be a need for additional staff mid-year as more children aged into the program. Ms. Cave replied the staff they were currently requesting would be enough for the entire next school year. Ms. Cave also said they were going to start a playgroup the following year which would begin in September and be for 2-year old children who may be turning 3 on October 1st or October 15th. She further said the children would be invited to attend one day per week for 2.5 hours and a teacher, a speech therapist and two motor therapists would be doing activities with them.

Chair Barnes asked where the preschool children would go for the other half of the day. Ms. Cave replied one of their classrooms was for full-day preschool and pointed out it was for the students who were diagnosed with autism or challenging behaviors which were not successful in other classrooms. She said the students went to a variety of different daycare programs.

Superintendent Chiafery added that they involved the Directors at area preschools in the conversations about the programming for full-day kindergarten and said they had a great deal to do with the implementation of full-day kindergarten. She said the school district was probably more aligned with those facilities in the last two years as they had been in a long time and she felt that was important.

Board Member Nunez said she had the opportunity to be a substitute at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School and she felt the program was incredible.

Board Member Schneider commented that while he understood the value of the MEEP (Merrimack Early Education Program) and he was not opposed to what was being asked, he felt it would be helpful, as part of preparing for the next fiscal year, if they took a look at the tuition for the peer group. He further commented that he would like input from the administration as to whether or not they might be able to charge a little bit more.

Board Member Schoenfeld made a motion to suspend the two-week rule and approve the request to hire an additional certified special education teacher at a cost of \$65,000 and two paraeducators at a \$30,000 each for the 2019 – 2020 school year. Board Member Schneider seconded the motion.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there would be an additional cost for benefits. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied benefits were included in the amounts.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

5. Request for the James Masticola Elementary Preschool to be part of the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)

(Ms. Susan Balestrieri Beaudry & Ms. Nancy Hilliard)

Ms. Beaudry addressed the Board and stated the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services commissioned the NSECE (National Survey of Early Care and Education Study) for the first time in 2012, she noted prior to that early care in education had not been looked at in the United States for twenty years. She said in 2012, they interviewed center-based and home-based daycares as well as parents and based on that data they commissioned the

NSECE study to better understand the progress and they also expanded it. She said they would be speaking with neighbors and grandparents who perhaps watched children for free after school. She further said in 2012 they discovered that number made up 1/3 of daycare providers who were off the grid. Ms. Beaudry said they wanted to do the same thing in 2019 and the information would be used to help make policy decisions. She further said the study would be commissioned again by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Children and Families which was the agency that administered the childcare subsidies across the country.

Ms. Hilliard stated she was very happy to be participating in the study. She further stated they were talking to various child care providers to find out what their background was, what was keeping them in the field and what might have been hindering their participation.

Ms. Hilliard explained they were not naming the students or identifying the parents and the results of the study would only be reported statistically.

Board Member Schneider said privacy and data sharing was a hot topic for the School Board as well as the state.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if the information gathered from the teachers would remain confidential. Ms. Hilliard replied it would.

Ms. Beaudry noted that the end of the school year was June 18th and they would need to have access to the teachers prior to that date.

Chair Barnes commented that she felt it was important to get the data and get support from the federal government. She further commented that she felt the study was not impactful to the district but it was impactful to education as a whole and she was in favor of it.

Board Member Schneider made a motion to waive the two-week rule and allow the Merrimack School District to participate in the survey. Vice Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

6. Report Regarding School Bus Driver Shortage

(Mr. Greg Stinson, Student Transportation of America Regional Vice President and Ms. Michelle Bancroft, Operations Manager)

Mr. Stinson stated the number one challenge the industry currently faced was the availability of qualified school bus drivers. He further stated in the past few years, on average, the

attrition rate was 25%. He said in an effort to address the attrition rate they updated their facility and provided a professional environment for employees. He added they maintained high increases (approximately 7%) for their employees every year.

Mr. Stinson pointed out they had hired a couple of full-time driver recruiters in the State of New Hampshire. He said there would be an Open House the following Saturday from 9:00 a.m. through 2:00 p.m. located at 534 Daniel Webster Highway. Mr. Stinson emphasized that even though they had times when they were critically short in staff they would never compromise the integrity of their selection process.

Mr. Stinson commented they purchased approximately 22 stop-arm cameras in an effort to catch any potential vehicle violators. He also commented that they were talking about doing some public service announcements in the fall to help prevent a possible tragedy from occurring.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the State of New Hampshire passed legislation to form a study committee to look at the driver shortage and one of the recommendations was to allow drivers to collect unemployment compensation during the summer months. He further stated, to date, it had not gone anywhere and currently, the recommendation was to form another study committee. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the district worked closely with Student Transportation of America in distributing flyers at the elementary schools advertising the open positions in the hopes of attracting stay-at-home moms who may have been interested in becoming a school bus driver.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated the school bus driver shortage was not specific to New Hampshire, it was national. She asked if there were any insights as to why there was a shortage. Mr. Stinson replied there was increasing regulation which was more specific to medical clearance and the unemployment rate was going down. He said it was an industry-wide problem. He said he appreciated the relationship and support of the Merrimack School District.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there was information regarding the open positions for school bus drivers on the districts' website. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied from time to time it was posted on the website but he would make sure it was on the website.

Vice Chair Guagliumi said she appreciated the purchase of the stop-arm cameras because it ensured offenders were caught. Ms. Bancroft stated the buses which were outfitted with the cameras were the ones that drove on D.W. Highway.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there were cameras inside of the bus. Mr. Stinson replied all buses were equipped with inside cameras.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked how the current attrition rate of 25% compared with the last ten years. Mr. Stinson replied it was significantly higher.

Board Member Schneider said he believed every bus should have a stop-arm camera. He asked how many buses did not have a stop-arm camera. Mr. Stinson replied eventually all of the buses would be equipped with stop-arm cameras, noting it would probably take approximately one year before all buses had them.

Board Member Schoenfeld stated from the sheer number of people who passed school buses, she was wondering if there was anything in the pipeline that would address the ways buses were configured. Mr. Stinson replied it started with routing and they limited anyone crossing busy streets. He further replied from an industry standpoint; it was currently just cameras. Mr. Stinson added that although the children were extremely safe once on the school bus, loading and unloading were the most dangerous times.

Chair Barnes asked how many bus routes were in the district. Mr. Stinson replied there currently 39 routes.

Mr. Stinson noted that the bus drivers collected unemployment over the summer, however, they were not exempt from having to apply for other jobs, which was required as part of receiving unemployment benefits. He added the school districts who operated their own buses did not qualify for unemployment.

Chair Barnes thanked Mr. Stinson and Ms. Bancroft for coming to the meeting.

7. Review and Approval of the Document Entitled “General Assurances, Requirements and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs”

(Superintendent Chiafery)

Superintendent Chiafery said the Board had information regarding the FY 2020 Federal Funds General Assurances, Requirements and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs. She further said the Federal Compliance Officer, Mr. Timothy Carney, at the New Hampshire Department of Education, had requested the 16-page document be shared with all members of the School Board. Superintendent Chiafery pointed out the School Board Chair and herself had to initial the bottom of every page and the last page required their signatures which indicated they were trying to adhere to the assurances.

Vice Chair Guagliumi made a motion to approve the authority of Superintendent Chiafery and Chair Barnes to complete the documentation and not to place it on the consent agenda. Board Member Nunez seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

8. Schedule – Summer Board Meeting Dates

(Chair Barnes)

Chair Barnes said the proposed meeting dates for the summer would be July 15, 2019 and August 19, 2019.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated that she would likely be able to call into the July 15th meeting but would not be able to attend. She said she would be able to attend the August 19th meeting.

9. Request to Hire at Will

(Superintendent Chiafery)

Superintendent Chiafery said every year she came to the Board and asked for their permission to hire at will because they were in a competitive market. She said if she did hire someone she would give them a conditional contract and then they would wait for the Superintendent to nominate and the School Board to elect them during one of the School Board meetings held in July and/or August.

Vice Chair Guagliumi made a motion to approve the request for the district to hire at will during the summer months when there was only one School Board meeting held in July and one held in August. Board Member Nunez seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

10. New School Board Policy

(Superintendent Chiafery)

- Second Reading of the Data Governance and Security Policy

Chair Barnes stated the item would be placed on the consent agenda for the next School Board meeting.

11. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants Under \$5,000

(Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell)

- Anonymous Donor to the Reeds Ferry Elementary School for \$651.69

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the generous gift for \$651.69 was received to cover the negative lunch balances of all students at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School.

- St. Patrick's Parade Committee to Merrimack High School National Honor Society for \$1,200

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell the gift for \$1,200 was for the National Honor Society members to carry banners in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Manchester, NH.

Board Member Schneider made a motion to accept the gifts with the School Board's sincere thanks. Board Member Schoenfeld seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

12. Consent Agenda

(Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin)

- Approval of K-12 Physical Education Curriculum
- Approval of Early Admission to Kindergarten and Grade One

Educator Resignations

- Ms. Kathleen Barnfield, Special Education Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Laraine Fay, 5th-grade teacher, James Masticola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Kimberly Kelliher, Kindergarten Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Educator Retirements

- Ms. Karen Eagan, Special Education Coordinator, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Teacher Nominations

- Ms. Molly DesRoches, Grade 1 Teacher, James Masticola Elementary School
- Ms. Alexandra McCafferty, Grade 5 Teacher, Masticola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Meghan Pearson, Grade 2 Teacher, Masticola Elementary School

Administrator Nominations

- Ms. Michaela Champlin, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Superintendent Chiafery noted the above list took care of those teachers who were reduced in force and currently there was no one on the reduction list.

Board Member Schneider made a motion (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) to accept the consent agenda as presented.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

13. Other

a) Correspondence

Chair Barnes stated the Board had a copy of the Special Education report which indicated the Merrimack School District met the requirements and plan indicators 4B, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 7 & 8.

Chair Barnes stated that she received correspondence from a citizen who was concerned about students' food instability at home. She said she had already reached out to the administration and they were discussing what options, as a district, they could offer.

b) Comments

Superintendent Chiafery commented there were some funds in the 2018 – 2019 budget for the School Resources Officers (SRA) to receive specialized training. She said two

SRO's received the training and then provided training to the leadership team. She said there would also be training for staff.

Chair Barnes announced the Longest Day Hot Dog Sale would be held on Thursday, June 20th from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in the parking lot of Our Lady of Mercy Church and benefited the Alzheimer's Association.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin stated that Ms. Amy Larkin-Perez, who was the Physical Education & Health Chair at Merrimack High School, nominated the district's Mental Health Committee for outstanding achievement to the Governor's Council on Physical Activity and Health. He further stated it was the first year that mental health was included in the Council which indicated a student's mental health was as integral to their success in school as their physical health. Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin announced the Merrimack School District was awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award for its Mental Health Committee.

Superintendent Chiafery commended the Reunion Committee at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School for conducting a 50th reunion that was very special for all that attended on June 1st.

Chair Barnes commented a walkway was commemorated at the event and a lilac tree was planted in dedication of Superintendent Chiafery and her years of service to the district, noting she started her career at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School in 1978 as the Assistant Principal.

14. New Business

There was no new business.

15. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

16. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

17. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 8:50 p.m. Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) & (c).

The motion passed 5-0-0 by a roll call vote.

At 9:14 p.m. Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 5-0-0 by a roll call vote.