

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
Tuesday, September 03, 2019**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Members Nunez, Schneider, and Schoenfeld. Also in attendance were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Student Representative Johanna Koroma.

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

There was no public participation.

3. Introduction of Student Representative to the School Board

Chair Barnes introduced Johanna Koroma, a senior at Merrimack High School and welcomed her as the new Student Representative to the Board for the 2019 – 2020 school year.

4. Summer Instructional Initiatives

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio summarized a PowerPoint presentation and started by explaining the Extended-Year Program (ESY) was provided during the summer months to work with children who had severe disabilities. He said 25 students at the high school attended the Extended-Year Program; 59 students at the Merrimack Middle School and 135 at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School (pre-kindergarten to grade 4) which was a total of 219 students. He stated the number reflected approximately one-third of students who were identified with disabilities.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio pointed out there were three distinct programs with three different coordinators, Ms. Nancy Romero, the elementary coordinator; Ms. Susan Wheeler, Merrimack Middle School coordinator and the high school

coordinator was Ms. Christine Reinart. He said there was a pre-kindergarten to grade 4 program, a grade 5 to grade 8 program, and a freshman year through age 21 program. He said planning for the ESY Program occurred all year long and determined what services students needed as well as how many speech and language pathologists the school district needed in addition to nurses, teachers and paraeducators. He said there was a total of 109 staff members who supported the 219 students in the ESY Program.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio shared that another program the school district offered was the Summer Reading Program for grades kindergarten to grade 7. He said the program was in place to help students who were below grade level in reading. He further said each student paid a tuition fee of \$15.00 and the class sizes ranged from 8 to 15 students per class. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented the reading program received very positive feedback.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated there were 60 students enrolled in the 8.5 Program. He further stated the 8.5 Program consisted of a 90-minute class each day followed by a 16-minute session in which a school counselor and students met. He said they talked about things like team-building, social and emotional learning, and building kids ability to adapt. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio noted there was no charge for the 8.5 Program and transportation was provided transportation.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio pointed out that there was also a Credit Recovery Program which had an enrollment of 48 students. He said there were two 130-minute classes each day and students paid \$150 for tuition and earned a half credit for each course they successfully completed throughout the summer. He further said there were some students who had to make up a competency which had a fee of \$50 per student. He said the Credit Recovery Program consisted of five teachers and four paraprofessionals.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked why the school district charged for the high school programs. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied the philosophy behind it was that the students already had the opportunity to earn the credit but did not.

Superintendent McLaughlin added the rationale behind it was that some students needed to feel “a little skin in the game.” He said students already had an opportunity to earn the required credits prior to taking the recovery classes. He said he felt the students may have more ownership and participation if they and/or their families were required to make a nominal commitment.

Vice Chair Guagliumi requested the School Board revisit the topic after they had the opportunity to look at the overall strategy for the school district and how the students were supported.

Chair Barnes pointed out that the Evening Academy also had tuition requirements. She said she felt it was about making sure the programs were available to all students and not just the people who had the means to take advantage of the programs.

5. Overview of the School District Summer Construction Projects

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented the summer was very busy with various construction projects. He said four major infrastructure improvement projects had passed in the budget and each one was required to maintain the school district's current infrastructure at the level they were accustomed to.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the summer construction projects as summarized below:

1. Boiler replacements at the James Masticola Elementary School

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the district chose a boiler system which had four units that were chained together in an array with two boilers in each unit. He said if one boiler went down then the other seven could take over to heat the schools. He added the boilers were made by Bosch and were specifically made to work with natural gas.

Superintendent McLaughlin asked how old the boiler was prior to it being replaced. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied it was at least 35 to 40 years old. Superintendent McLaughlin asked what the typical life-expectancy was of such a boiler. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied it was approximately 35 to 40 years. He further said the school district had a maintenance contract with Honeywell who maintained all of their mechanical equipment.

2. Switchgear and Transformer at the Merrimack High School

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that the district hired an electrical engineer to work with the State Fire Marshall to develop a design and a set of stamped plans. He said when they started to develop the initial design they learned they had to run all new conduits and cables which required them to dig trenches in order to pull the large wires to the building.

3. Parking and Drainage Repairs at the James Mastricola Elementary School

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the voters passed a Warrant Article which allowed for \$325,000 to replace the parking lot.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted after the parking lot was ripped up they reconfigured the sewer pipes, the stormwater pipes and the roof drains so they went where they were supposed to go. He also noted that the grade in the center of the parking lot was increased by 2 ½ feet.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said he felt the signage at the James Mastricola Elementary School should be changed to allow people to easily know where the main entrance and office was. He said it was important for parents, the fire department, and the police department to know as well.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell pointed out that not only were there 25 parking spaces gained but there was also an overhead light pole in the parking lot.

4. Parking Repairs at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the repairs to the parking lot at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School also included it being dug up and resurfaced. He further said the school district worked closely with the Town of Merrimack because both School Street and Bishop Street respectively were town roads.

Chair Barnes asked if there were Board members who had questions or comments.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented that she was excited to hear the parking lots were done and felt one of the biggest benefits to it was the safety advantages. She also said the plans had originally indicated there would be a garden or some greenery by the entranceway and she asked if this part was completed as well. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the landscaping did not work out because they had to make it a fire lane.

6. Summer and School Year Maintenance of School District Property

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the total amount of square footage of all of the school district's facilities was 663,000 square feet and for insurance purposes, there was a building evaluation, which was the cost to replace the buildings, of \$120 million. He added the contents of the buildings, which included furniture and

computer equipment, was even a little more. Further, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the maintainable acreage, which included the fields and the grassy areas around the schools consisted of 50 acres and was maintained all year round. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell pointed out there was a lot of square footage to go through over the summer to ensure the cleanliness of the buildings. He said the staff approached the massive task in an almost military-style to ensure all of the buildings were cleaned and disinfected by the beginning of the school year. He noted there were strict policies and guidelines in place regarding cleaning which had to be met and it required a lot of manpower. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the buildings in the Merrimack School District were always kept in the best of shape.

Chair Barnes asked if there were members of the Board who questions or comments.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented a number of families had moved to Merrimack over the summer and he had the occasion to hear how gratified they were to be in a community where the schools looked so good. Further, Superintendent McLaughlin thanked the community for their continued support in understanding the importance of maintaining their buildings. Superintendent McLaughlin thanked the entire maintenance staff for their efforts.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented she felt it was important to note that the maintenance and custodial staff did a certain amount of work which was not visible to the community and felt it was important to highlight that work.

Chair Barnes pointed out that by spending relatively little to maintain the buildings was far better than requesting money to build a new facility.

7. August Academy 2019: An Overview

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio opened his comments by saying it was a pleasure to work with the entire staff. He said part of what was discussed at the August Academy was the future of the Merrimack School District and its new leadership team.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said one of their efforts included creating teams of educators from pre-kindergarten through grade 12 who taught across the board; including special educators and service providers.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) program was launched and all six buildings and the leadership team participating.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented that the keynote speaker was Mr. Steve Maguire, who was a teacher at Scituate High School. He said Mr. Maguire's message was "Every Kid Deserves a Champion."

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio noted every staff member (650 people) was included in the Academy; including administrative assistants, nurses, and technicians. He said the staff learned more about a respectful workplace as well as emotional control in the workplace. He added the paraeducators and the kindergarten instructional assistants learned more about trauma from experts.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, referring to their commitment to the Universal Design Learning network, said the facilitators of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were from an organization called CAST which was an educational think tank based out of Wakefield, MA. He also said Mr. Bill Wilmont, would be the lead facilitator for the Merrimack School District for the next three years.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was an approach to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all students by setting clear, rigorous goals while anticipating barriers and proactively trying to minimize those barriers.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said there were three big areas of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which was neuroscience, architecture, and learning. He further said "neuroscience" meant everyone had their individual needs and everyone learned them in different ways.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, referring to the "architecture" portion of the program, said the lessons needed to be built with the idea that everyone had to be able to access it. He further said one of the messages which were delivered at the Academy was it may not be "necessary" for some students but it was good for "everyone."

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, referring to the "learning" portion of the program, shared that it was further broken down into three categories and all three categories had to be present to be able to learn.

- Engagement – How learners engage.
- Representation – How learners perceive and comprehend information.
- Action and Expression – How learners act on their understanding.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated that he asked educators to set clear and rigorous goals for their students, anticipate the barriers for students, and look at the design options.

Chair Barnes asked if there were members of the Board who had questions or comments.

Board Member Schneider asked how many school districts were part of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) network. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied 54 schools were participating in the UDL network but the Merrimack School District was the only district which was participating as an entire district.

Board Member Schneider asked if the Department of Education supported Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied the state encouraged the program.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked what portion of the August Academy was well received by the staff. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied the opportunity to have teams went very well. He further replied they had four mini-workshops set up three different times throughout the day and the educators would learn, for example, what an expert learner was. He said two or three members of the team would attend the workshops and learn about the topic and then return to the home teams and share what they learned. He also said that he felt there still needed to be a deeper understanding of how it affected the instructional planning.

Superintendent McLaughlin added Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was a three-year commitment and they were doing it because they were aware there were things the Merrimack School District could do better. He said one could not expect a different result if things were done the same way. He also said they had been talking about “understanding” for years; pointing out it was different from “knowing”.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted the school district had been following certain standards for years which were intended to prepare students to be college and career ready but said that meant something very different from what it did in 1982.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the Merrimack School District was comprised of students who were very accelerated and students with significant challenges and those students were part of the “all” of the school district. He said it required a lot of effort to include “all” in learning if one was guided by standards and expectations. He further said every student deserved to be instructed in a way that supported their ability to learn.

Board Member Nunez asked what the plan was for new hires relative to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and how they would adopt it from the start. Superintendent McLaughlin replied currently, all of the new hires were part of the initial roll-out. He further replied the hiring process in the school district was critical and they needed to understand if candidates not only had experience with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) but if they were flexible thinkers. Superintendent McLaughlin commented that the actual training for UDL was not that complicated once the potential employee was sure they were ready to absorb it.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said training for new educators or educators who may need a second dose of training to understand the program would be developed through the teams coming back together and sharing information.

Board Member Nunez asked how they would know if the program was effective. Superintendent McLaughlin commented that the question of accountability and measurability was a good one. He said currently a lot of the perceived effectiveness was published in terms of school rankings and although it mattered quite a bit, progress towards a goal was never part of a school ranking. He further said they would be looking for students to name the learning style which worked best for them and advocate for themselves.

Board Member Nunez commented she thought implementing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) program was incredible. She asked if a student may or may not feel any different in a classroom environment with a teacher that was slowly learning UDL as their new way of instruction.

Board Member Schoenfeld felt it was incredibly important to reiterate for a long time they had asked certain students to accept limitations and they were now saying that was not an acceptable educational practice.

Board Member Schneider commented that he felt the School Board and the administration got knocked around a bit because of placement and rankings. He further commented that he understood everyone learned differently and it showed that the school

district was trying to make a difference and he applauded the administration and staff for implementing the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) program.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented as a Board they were going through a significant paradigm shift and they needed to remind themselves that teachers, just like kids, would also learn with their unique brains and would adopt change at different rates.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if it made sense to make the Universal Design for Learning program a standard agenda item for discussion. Chair Barnes indicated she agreed and it would be integrated into future agendas.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked how the powerful momentum gained from attending August Academy could keep going. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied one of the major themes discussed at the Academy was sustainability. He said one of the things, pertaining to the UDL initiative was to bring the teams together multiple times throughout the year. He also said the UDL leadership team would meet monthly. Additionally, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the group of educators that planned the training for the Second Step implementation from pre-kindergarten through grade 5 had been meeting all summer long.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the district's leadership team had also met over the summer. He said one of the things recognized as part of those meetings was that the leadership team needed to have structures in place to motivate each other.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said Ms. Allison Jackson was the Assistant Director of Student Activities at Rhode Island College and she worked with the leadership team to give them an opportunity to look at their values. He said some of the core values the leadership team decided were very important and would follow was bravery, honesty, kindness, and innovation.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented we heard a lot of information at the meeting and asked if it might be time to revisit the logic model for the district as it had been a number of years since it was last revisited. Superintendent McLaughlin agreed to at least review it. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied some of the leadership teams' last iteration was to bring things to a student-centered focus. He reiterated that a lot of the work they were currently doing was exactly what they were trying to accomplish with the goals set for by the logic model.

Chair Barnes suggested that perhaps it would make sense to marry the language of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) language with the logic model.

Board Member Nunez commented teachers and administrators faced so many more challenges than they had in the past and things continued to change. She further commented she was very proud that the Merrimack School District wanted to reach every child which was why the topic of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was even being discussed.

Board Member Nunez said she felt the Board and the administration needed to ask what they were doing right but more importantly, where there opportunities for improvement and growth so they could continue to focus on the children.

Chair Barnes commented that she reviewed what the School Board had done at the August Academy which included budget discussions. She also said she the administration and the Board had very good collaboration with each other and she thanked Superintendent McLaughlin for inviting her to speak at the August Academy.

8. Approval of August 19, 2019, and August 26, 2019, Non-Public Minutes

Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes from August 19, 2019, as presented.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Board Member Schoenfeld moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes from the August 26, 2019, non-public minutes, as presented.

The motion passed 4-0-1. (Abstained – Nunez)

9. Consent Agenda

Educator Nominations

- Mr. Kyle Adams, Family Consumer Science Teacher (FACS)
Merrimack Middle School
- Ms. Laura King, Math Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Ms. Kelly Trepaney, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack Middle School

Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

10. Other

a) Correspondence

Chair Barnes stated that all members of the Board received correspondence from a constituent regarding LGBT content questions.

Chair Barnes commented she received an additional email from a parent who requested that forms be updated to be more family-centric, regardless of family design.

b) Comments

Chair Barnes thanked the Merrimack Police Department for their message regarding safety and going back to school.

Chair Barnes also thanked the administrative team for their work on August Academy and wished them all the best for a successful year.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated, with the anticipation of budget season, that he wanted to provide some forecasting with regard to some of the items that might be included on future agendas. He said if members of the public had a little bit of prior knowledge they may choose to attend a meeting or ask some questions.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared that on September 16th, Ms. Sharon Putney, Principal, Merrimack High School would give a presentation regarding the graduation rate and the complexity of it. He said they would continue the dialogue with respect to student outcomes and how homework fit into the larger schema of student outcomes.

Superintendent McLaughlin said October 7th they would talk about school rankings because for some people it provided an effective means to determine effectiveness. He said, however, that was not the only means to determine effectiveness. Superintendent McLaughlin also said the Planning and Building Committee would provide recommendations to the School Board, particularly concerning the combined SAU/SPED building and related property use on October 6th. He said on October 21st the Capital Improvement Plan would be discussed as would some conversation regarding requirements and philosophy surrounding class size and student/teacher ratios.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared that the Board would be discussing the Guaranteed Maximum Rate if it was known, and its impact on the budget at the November 4th meeting.

He added they would also discuss unfunded mandates as it related to budget impacts at the November 4th meeting.

Chair Barnes noted the dates of the above meetings would be posted on the school district's Facebook page.

11. New Business

There was no business.

12. Committee Reports

Board Member Schneider noted that the Planning and Building Committee had met the previous week and both Superintendent McLaughlin and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell were in attendance. He said the Planning and Building Committee wanted to take a bit of a step back with regard to the proposed SAU/SPED building design and take a more holistic view of the campus area around the high school.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There was no public comment.

14. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:18 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to adjourn the public meeting.

The motion passed 5-0-0.