

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
October 7, 2019**

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

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

Excused: Board Member Schoenfeld

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. Request to Conduct Research at Merrimack High School to Support the Development of a Mobile App to Support Healthy Relationships for Students in Grades 9 - 12

Chair Barnes invited Ms. Delilah Smith from the Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire to the table.

Ms. Smith addressed the Board and stated her organization wanted to conduct a project throughout the State of New Hampshire.

Ms. Smith stated that the Prevention Innovations Research Center was a center that looked for external funding to conduct research in the field. She further stated once the research was conducted it would inform their practice. She said they looked at violence prevention and response-based features.

Ms. Smith explained when they were first notified that they received funding for the project they met with Dr. Carl Ladd, who was the Executive Director of the New Hampshire

School Administrators Association and talked a lot about the schools that were doing some really great work and Merrimack was one of those schools, particularly the work that was being done surrounding Social and Emotional Learning and Curriculum Development.

Ms. Smith said their work in the area included developing self-awareness and looking at Social and Emotional Learning. She further said the proposed project goal was to develop a mobile App (Application) for high school students which encouraged healthy relationships and supported Social and Emotional Learning through the use of technology.

Ms. Smith commented they received funding from the National Science Foundation to develop the mobile Application. She further commented the project had the support of the New Hampshire Deputy Department of Education Commissioner, Ms. Christine Brennan as well as Dr. Ladd. Ms. Smith stated upon completion of the project, New Hampshire schools would be given access to the mobile Application and would be encouraged to use it.

Ms. Smith pointed out the project had three phases, adding that schools could choose to participate in one, two or all three of the phases.

Phase I – Designing the Application

- **Timeline:** October through the end of December.
- **Goal:** To understand how high school students use mobile Application and what they would like to see in an Application
- **Objective:** Conduct interview with key administrators, conduct focus groups with teachers and professional staff and, conduct focus groups with parents as well as students.

Phase II – Prototype Development and Feedback

- **Review:** Review the data collected and create prototype.
- **Objective:** Conduct two to four Focus Groups with teachers, parents and hopefully three to five focus groups with students.

Phase III – Delivering the Final Product

- **Timeline:** September 2020 – December 2020
- **Procedure:** Students will be asked to download the Application and complete a survey about their usage of the Application. ***Parental consent must be given to students under the age of 18.***

- **What to Expect:** PIRC (Prevention Innovations Research Center) will examine high school students' usage of the Application and work with schools to monitor the Application's usage.

Ms. Smith said one of the features of the Application would be a "Time to Leave" feature in which a fake call or text could be sent in an effort to help someone get out of an uncomfortable situation. Ms. Smith further said another prevention-based feature that had come up was "Expect Me" which was a feature where a student could notify three friends or family members that they were leaving school and heading to work, etc. Ms. Smith also said they had received great feedback around the GPS (Global Positioning System) feature, pointing out that particular feature could be disabled or enabled.

Ms. Smith stated another possible resource was the "Find Help" feature which would allow students to contact a guidance counselor or the police department if they felt they needed to.

Board Member Schneider commented the GPS (Global Positioning System) function of it might affect one's privacy and if the application were to be put in place the School Board would have to discuss the way it would be used.

Superintendent McLaughlin clarified that what Ms. Smith and her colleagues were asking for was to use Merrimack students, parents, and faculty as beta-testers to try to understand what information needed to be developed that would be the most helpful. He clarified it was not about asking the district to adopt an Application that would be required.

Board Member Nunez asked if the Application could be customized to meet the needs of the Merrimack School District. Ms. Smith replied if and when the Application was developed it could be customized to the district. Board Member Nunez inquired how the student's privacy would be maintained while collecting the data. Ms. Smith replied it was completely confidential and they were not collecting names. She further replied they would only collect the year of school the student was in as well as the student's gender.

Superintendent McLaughlin asked Ms. Smith to explain what IRB was. Ms. Smith replied in order to conduct any type of research they had to provide the IRB (Internal Research Board) with all of their information including how they would conduct the research, how they would ensure personal data was not collected and it was under a high-level of scrutiny. She said they were close to getting IRB approval.

Chair Barnes suggested the School Board should waive the two-week rule if they were in favor of it.

Chair Barnes asked if the Board would have access to the results of the research. Ms. Smith replied in the affirmative.

Vice Chair Guagliumi made a motion (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to allow Prevention Innovations Resource Center at the University of New Hampshire to conduct research at Merrimack High School to support the development of a mobile Application to support healthy relationships for students in grades 9 through 12 and to waive the two-week rule.

Discussion:

Board Member Schneider said while he was in favor of the concept of allowing students, staff and parents to participate he wanted the district to be very cautious that participation was not forced and it was kept anonymous.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

4. Planning and Building Committee Recommendation Regarding SAU Consolidation and Related Property Use

Mr. Rich Hendricks, Chair of the Planning and Building Committee, addressed the Board and said the Planning and Building Committee met with Superintendent McLaughlin and they looked at the project in its entirety, much like a “whole campus approach.”

Mr. Hendricks, referring to a sketch viewable to all, stated the plan was merely conceptual and would be vetted by a professional engineer. He said the objective of the presentation was to ask the Board to look at a new district central office as part of a redesign of the entire high school campus. He said the Planning and Building Committee wanted to ask the School Board to add money into the upcoming year’s budget to have a full, comprehensive master plan prepared by a professional engineer and design company to show, when looked at in total, how the area would look when it was completely done and how it would help not only the school district but the community as well.

Mr. Hendrick’s said the property consisted of an 8,000 square-foot office building. He further said he felt the School Board should delay voting on the central office until at least April of 2021, which would allow the Committee and the Board time to review the costs and the plans.

Mr. Hendrick’s said the Planning and Building Committee’s suggestion was to remove the former SERESC (Southeastern Regional Educational Service Center) building which was owned by the school district. He noted the primary reason the school district purchased the

property was for the land the building sat on. Mr. Hendrick's said until the final layout of the property was made, removing the building would save the district approximately \$40,000 per year in heat and maintenance. He pointed out the possibility of renovating the building was not very encouraging and added past tenants did not maintain it and additions were put on several times. Mr. Hendrick's added the property could be used for parking until the final layout was decided upon.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stressed the purpose of purchasing the property was always stated as being acquired for the land. He said if the building itself could have been renovated and been beneficial to the district it would have been a bonus.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said Sullivan Construction had taken a look at the building and the logical next step was to use the property as it was intended.

Mr. Hendrick's pointed out the property could accommodate three tennis courts which would be beneficial to the school district and would enhance the town's recreational facilities.

Mr. Hendrick's stated one possibility was to make O'Gara Drive a one-way between the hours of 2:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. for the buses that were exiting the facility.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated parents had reached out to her in the past regarding the parking issue at the high school and felt it was very important to look at safety and maximize the parking.

Vice Chair Guagliumi said she would be interested in looking at ideas for meeting space in the new proposed central office. Mr. Hendrick's replied meeting space would be part of the proposed design.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented she was very excited about having on campus tennis courts because the current courts are not in close proximity to the high school.

Board Member Nunez asked if there would be discussions surrounding the existing buildings and their use. Superintendent McLaughlin replied all of the buildings were part of the proposed plan.

Board Member Nunez asked if a turf field could be incorporated. Mr. Hendrick's replied there was not enough room for a turf field.

Board Member Schneider commented he felt it was very important to have someone who “did it for a living and come in with no preconceived notions of where a building was” and start with a clean slate.

Board Member Schneider said he felt the School Board should budget for the money to plan, budget for the money to take down the Brentwood building and have discussions until April of 2021, and then present it and get the buy-in from the voter’s in town.

Vice Chair Guagliumi said she felt one option is to consider one of the other houses for community (adult) education or tutoring.

Board Member Nunez commented she felt it was very important that the plans be transparent and suggested there be a huge communication effort surrounding exactly what was being planned.

Chair Barnes stated, moving forward, she felt it was very important for the Planning and Building Committee meetings to be recorded and televised because presently the meetings were being held in a conference room at the high school.

Board Member Nunez suggested the Planning and Building Committee should be a standing agenda item and announce it one month prior to encourage public participation.

5. Opportunity to Enhance Support for Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) Implementation

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio introduced Mr. Bill Wilmot, Facilitator for the Merrimack School District and Mr. Adam Caragher, Principal, Merrimack Middle School.

Mr. Caragher addressed the Board and stated he was very excited about the implementation of Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) and said if it was designed properly the needs of everyone involved would be met.

Mr. Wilmot stated the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI) was the foundation created by Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook fame. He further stated they had a grant program called Effective School Practices to support the whole child. He said CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology) applied for the grant and was looking for middle schools to partner with which is why they reached out to Superintendent McLaughlin and Mr. Caragher.

Mr. Wilmot said Mr. James Basham was the Senior Director of Learning & Innovation and Mr. Steve Nordmark was the Director of Business Development at CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology.) He said for this project, Mr. Basham would be the principal researcher. He further said one of the things they had designed was called Learning Designed and was an online platform for teachers to learn from each other regarding Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) and provided resources and support for on-going implementation.

Mr. Wilmot said the New Hampshire Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) Innovation Network was in its third year and the Merrimack Middle School and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School participated the previous year. He further said currently there was a team in every school in Merrimack as well as a district team, noting Merrimack was the only district that had a team in every school as well as a district team who looked at the whole picture.

Mr. Wilmot pointed out there were 7.6 people per Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) team but Merrimack had unusually large teams, especially at the high school. He said there were 63 Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) teams across the state of which 7 were in Merrimack and represented 68 schools. He added 480 educators across the state participated in the network of which 75 or 16% were Merrimack educators and approximately 21,000 learners were being taught.

Mr. Wilmot commented the Chan Zuckerberg Grant was committed to ensure that every young person entered adulthood with the skills and abilities they needed to reach their full potential and each teacher was equipped with the mindset, tools, and practices needed to support their students learning and development.

Mr. Wilmot said if Merrimack Middle School chose to partner with them the school would receive \$50,000 over a two-year period to support the Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) implantation. He said in addition to the money there would be more resources and support from CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology.) Further, Mr. Wilmot stated it was a research project which looked specifically at the question of whether or not it increased curiosity and self-direction among students and that research would be made available to the Merrimack Middle School. Finally, Mr. Wilmot said teachers would become credentialed as an associate, core, and practitioner level credentials in Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) which normally individual teachers would have to pay for.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted they were asking that the School Board place the item on the Consent Agenda for the following meeting.

Board Member Schneider asked what the parental consent would be for students since they would be filling out a survey and could it reach a point at which not enough people would sign up making it not so helpful. Mr. Wilmot replied it helped that the school was large and even if they got 10% it would have been meaningful but it more of a question he felt should be answered by the researchers to understand better what they would be looking for.

Chair Barnes pointed out that the Merrimack School District had committed to Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) and they were excited about what it would bring to the table.

6. Information about School Rankings

Superintendent McLaughlin said the issue of graduation rates had been a concern. He said Mrs. Putney recently spoke at a School Board meeting and the goal was not to say they didn't have a problem or they didn't think there was any way to fix it but it was to say they acknowledged it but also understood how the graduation rates were calculated. He said the way the graduation rates were calculated was sometimes misleading so the rest of the story needed to be heard.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented there were still some students who dropped out and there was no question the district needed to do better about that, however, the percentage was not as high as 13% and people may assume that without knowing the entire story.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the issue of school rankings had also come up and he thought it was a fair question because the district was asking the taxpayers to support a very significant school budget.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented on how the school ranking number was developed was not often shared. Superintendent McLaughlin said the two most publicized and most frequently cited school rankings came from *US News*, *World Report* and *Niche*. He further said in 2018, seven out of the ten top high schools in the country, according to *US News* and *World Report* were charter schools. He said in 2019, seven of the ten were from traditional public schools, most of which were magnet schools with three being charter schools, so what changed? He said last years' number one school dropped to number three in the current year and the current years' numbers one school did not even make the previous years' top ten list at all and last years' number ten school, a magnet school for science and technology jumped six places in one year. He said he wondered if, year to year, there was that much fluctuation. He further said the methodology in how the rankings were calculated changed. He said in 2018 and in all the prior year's high schools were ranked on the College Readiness Index which was a measure based entirely of high school student's performance and participation on AP (Advanced Placement) and International Baccalaureate exams which meant 100% of rankings were based on standardized tests. He said if the focus was on AP

(Advanced Placement) or International Baccalaureate exams to the exclusion of other kinds of instruction and assessment then one could assume a certain type of result. Further, Superintendent McLaughlin said in 2018 the best schools had the highest participation and achievement rate on two standardized tests of all other schools and in 2019, the methodology changed. He further said in 2018, using the AP and International Baccalaureate criteria, only 2,700 schools were ranked because not every high school in the country had an International Baccalaureate program, the Merrimack School District included. Superintendent McLaughlin stated in 2019, more than 16,000 high schools were ranked. He said the data that produced the rankings did not come from high schools but rather from third-party sources.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented in 2019, *US News* and *World Report* created six indicators for their 2019 rankings. He said College Readiness accounted for 30% of the total ranking and was based on participation rate, which was 25% and something called quality adjusted participation rate which was worth 75%. He further said the 25% and the 75% combined equaled the 30% for the College Readiness score and the participation rate was derived from the number of twelfth-graders in 2016 – 2017 who took at least one AP (Advanced Placement) or International Baccalaureate test in their senior year divided by the total number of seniors. He further said the quality adjusted participation rate was the number of twelfth-graders in 2016 – 2017 who took and passed AP (above a 3) or the International Baccalaureate (above a 4) divided by the total number of twelfth-graders.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated that schools that did not have an AP program or an International Baccalaureate program scored a zero in the ranking and because of that Merrimack High School would get half of the possible points because they did not have an International Baccalaureate program.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the College Curriculum Breadth was worth 10% and was derived from the percentage of twelfth-graders who took and the percentage who passed multiple AP (Advanced Placement) and IB (International Baccalaureate) exams. He pointed out, again, if the Merrimack School District did not have an IB exam then they only qualified for half of the total points.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented math and reading proficiency were based on the state's grading systems and each students' score for each subject was compared against students in other schools within the state which was worth 20%. He further said that math and reading performance was also derived from math and reading state assessments but was compared to what *US News* predicted for a school with its demographic characteristics in the state. He said *US News* and *World Report* calculated that for a district "like Merrimack or like Claremont with certain demographics" that it should do "this well or that well" on average. He added the sub-heading of what that said was "less racially diverse schools are

expected to do better than more racially diverse schools.” Superintendent McLaughlin stated there were many things that were not calculated in that situation, for instance, the variance of learners and the proportion of students with a variety of learning challenges, not necessarily identified students but human beings.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the underserved student performance was worth 10% which measured learning outcomes only among black, Hispanic, and low-income students.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted that some students came into the district as sophomores and they successfully graduated as seniors but they weren’t calculated into the graduation rate because they were not there as freshmen.

Superintendent McLaughlin also noted that students who had accidents, injuries, illnesses, and family crises made it impossible for them to graduate in four years and graduated in their fifth or sixth year were also not counted in the graduation rate.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated Niche school rankings were based on opinions from real parents and students on such things as the college prep programs, the quality of the cafeteria food, academic achievement, sports, diversity, and the quality of school administration. He said the methodology was very complicated. He further said it was based upon response rates and the highest response rates were considered more accurate than the lower response rates. He said they evaluated the data derived from surveys for each factor to ensure value and then did a Z-Score which is a distance from the average which was produced after each factor was processed, assigned a weight to each factor, and to ensure a fair and balanced representation of the data an overall score was assigned for each school.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented it was her understanding that they did not have a way of actually confirming who was reporting to them. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he did not know what a representative from Niche might say but he felt Vice Chair Guagliumi’s comment was an accurate one.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated NICHE obtained their information from:

- The United States Department of Education
- The Private School Universe Survey
- The Common Core Data (derived from the National Center for Education Statistics)
- School Attendance Boundary Survey
- Niche K-12 Student & Parent Surveys
- American Community Survey (from the United States Census Bureau)
- Uniformed Crime Report (from the FBI - Federal Bureau of Investigation)

- National Climatic Data Center (from the NOAA – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration)
- Topologically Integrated Geographical Encoding & Referencing – TIGER
- County Business Patterns (from the United States Census Bureau)
- Zip Code Business Patterns (from the United States Census Bureau)
- Food Environment Atlas (from the U.S. Department of Agriculture)
- Volunteering & Civic Life in America (Corporation for National & Community Service)
- Open Street Map

Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud a statement which was on the Niche site as summarized below:

Claim Your School

Get access to manage your schools' profile on Niche.

Track Engagement

- See user activity for your Niche profile plus your competitors

Update your Data

- Help us keep your data as up-to-date as possible.

Upgrade to Premium

- Showcase your school and motivate next steps.

Superintendent McLaughlin said in his ten years working for the Merrimack School District he had never spent any time trying to promote or sell the Merrimack School District on a site like Niche. He further said perhaps it was time he did because apparently there was a way to do it so one could actively manage the perception and, therefore, could influence the rank.

Chair Barnes commented she felt the words “motivate next steps” sounded like “loading the deck in your favor so your school ranks higher” which was more like extortion rather than validation and accurate data.

Superintendent McLaughlin said his intention was not to discredit any of the aforementioned companies. He said in his role as Superintendent he was willing to own whatever the Merrimack School District needed to be better and would work hard to make it better but, at the same time, he was not prepared to have things like school rankings be used against this or any school without fairly talking about how they were derived.

Superintendent McLaughlin said judgment without understanding or context was unfair and inaccurate. We commit ourselves every day to acknowledging what could be fixed and set about to fix it. We will always seek to control and correct what is possible to control and correct but no school or school district can control where it was, how diverse it was, how safe the town or city it lied within was, who the students were or what they needed to be successful. He said those were things they could not control. Further, Superintendent McLaughlin said they took everybody and always tried to do the best they could with them.

Board Member Nunez stated she really struggled with school rankings and comparing district to district frustrated her because she did not know what was happening in surrounding districts.

Vice Chair Guagliumi agreed with what Board Member Nunez had said and suggested the information regarding school rankings should be available on the school's website to ensure the materials were available for people who were watching at home.

Board Member Schneider wondered if the School District was doing themselves a disservice by not having a group own the Merrimack School District on Niche to promote it. He said if people were putting emphasis on Niche results and there was a way the district could say factual information to improve the ranking rather than turning a blind eye to it, why not?

Board Member Nunez recognized there were restrictions surrounding student surveys but there were no restrictions surrounding graduate surveys. She suggested graduates could take that opportunity to share their experiences during their time at the Merrimack School District.

Vice Chair Guagliumi, replying to Board Member Schneider's suggestion regarding Niche, said she would not be in favor of it because she did not agree with their methodology. Board Member Schneider replied he felt the district needed to take a proactive role in communications or they would always fight the social media battles.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the district was taking a more active role in communications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Board Member Nunez suggested a districtwide newsletter be sent out, perhaps on a quarterly basis.

7. Preparation of School Board Budget Message

Chair Barnes stated every year each Board member provided their own ideas of what they wanted to see come out of the school budgeting process. She asked if members could put their thoughts together by October 14th and send them to her via email then at the next meeting she could present the combined message.

8. Resolution Proposals for Consideration by the NHSBA Delegate Assembly

Chair Barnes noted she was still on the Executive Board of the NHSBA (New Hampshire School Board Association) so she would abstain from taking part in any decisions made by the Board because of the direct influence she would have as an Executive Board member.

9. Approval of September 16, 2019 Minutes

Board Member Schneider made a motion (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to approve the meeting minutes from September 16, 2019, as amended.

Page 15, line #580 – “she said she had shared this parents concern with Mrs. Putney, Merrimack High School and to Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio as well as Chair Barnes” was put in place of the paragraph – Guagliumi

The motion passed 4-0-0.

10. Consent Agenda

a) Educator Retirement

Ms. Linda Murgo, Merrimack Middle School

b) Consideration of Restructured Human Resource Office

Board Member Schneider made a motion (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

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

- Fidelity Charitable to Merrimack High School for \$200.00

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the above gift was being given to Merrimack High School and was in memory of Christopher Lamoureux who was a 2016 graduate of Merrimack High School who tragically passed in an automobile accident in August of 2019. He further said Christopher's interest was in the area of the Automotive Department so the gift would be used by the Automotive Department.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) to accept the gift from Fidelity Charitable in the amount of \$200.00 with the School Board's sincere gratitude.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

12. Other

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Comments

There were no comments.

13. New Business

There was no business.

14. Committee Reports

Board Member Schneider noted there had been a Planning and Building Committee meeting and they came together and agreed on the direction of the SAU consolidation.

15. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments on agenda items.

16. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:48 p.m. Board Member Nunez made a motion (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3 II (a) (b) (c).

The motion passed 4-0-0 by roll call vote.

At 10:17 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 4-0-0.