

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
December 4, 2019**

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.

Present: Chair Barnes and Board Member Schneider. Also in attendance were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Excused: Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Member Schoenfeld, and Student Representative Johanna Koroma.

Participating via Telephone: Board Member Nunez

Chair Barnes noted that Board Member Nunez was participating via telephone as she was ill and under the terms of the state law RSA 91-A:2.III.(a) all votes would be taken via roll call.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Legislative Update

State Representative Rosemary Rung addressed the Board and stated she had sent the members of the School Board an Excel spreadsheet that contained a list of over 760 “LSR’s” (Legislative Service Requests.)

Ms. Rung commented she wanted to establish a process in which herself and the School Board had very good communication and she was serving the needs of the School District adequately. She asked the School Board to review the LSR’s (Legislative Service Requests) and flag any items that were of particular interest. She said she would then communicate with Town Council regarding Bills of mutual interest. She further said the Bills would be available to view in a PDF format on the New Hampshire General Court’s website.

Ms. Rung suggested that the session year be wrapped up in June by asking the School Board what their legislative goals were for the following year.

Superintendent McLaughlin and Chair Barnes thanked Ms. Rung for attending the meeting.

4. Request to Conduct Research

Ms. Mary Quigley, Music Educator and Master's Degree student, addressed the Board and stated she was present to discuss a research project. She further stated her thesis project was on the value of assessment in an inclusive general music classroom. Ms. Quigley said she chose the project because she had a strong interest in the relationship between the inclusion in the classroom and assessment techniques, specifically in general music. She further said there were many studies that concerned the inclusion of students who had special needs and there were also studies about assessment, pointing out, however, there were very few studies that connected assessment techniques and inclusion and demonstrated that music teachers were teaching the students according to their abilities.

Ms. Quigley said in order to determine the value of assessment techniques she would conduct on-line music teacher surveys and would also observe a classroom. She further said she felt the Merrimack School District was ideal for her research project.

Board Member Schneider asked if the survey would be an "opt-in" or "opt-out." Ms. Quigley replied it would be an "opt-in" and the students who were asked to participate in the survey would receive "opt-in" forms.

Chair Barnes stated the request would be placed on the Consent Agenda and the School Board would vote on it at the December 16, 2019, meeting.

5. Review of the New Hampshire Statewide Assessment System (NHSAS) Results

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated academic achievement in New Hampshire was measure by examining both student performance and student participation as well as honor student performance. He said the percentage of proficiency was in three separate areas; math, English/language arts, and science. Additionally, he said student achievement levels were evaluated and divided into four categories; proficiency levels I and II, who were proficient, and proficiency levels III and IV who were not proficient.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said over the past ten years there were four different assessments used which made it very difficult to identify patterns that were in place.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio pointed out that the School District had a revised math curriculum, a revised science curriculum, the implementation of the social/emotion curriculum at grade levels pre-kindergarten through grade 5, the Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) network, the EPEC (Educator Performance and Evaluation Committee) model was in place to help educators grow, and a systematic review of all of the internal data.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they were in the process of the Standards-Based Report Card (kindergarten through grade 6) which would help them align the standards, there was on-going math training, they continued to look at the Next Generation standards for science, cognitive coaching, continuous training for the staff through the language arts coordinators, and continued to learn about Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) for the remainder of the staff who were not initially part of the cohort.

Moving forward, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said he was hopeful there would be a revision in the alignment of all of the language arts curriculum, a revision in the alignment of standards competencies pre-kindergarten through grade 12, and the alignment of interventions into a multi-tiered system.

Board Member Schneider commented moving forward, he would be looking for an improvement in the area of science. Superintendent McLaughlin commented they needed to continue to educate the educators, and therefore, the students as to what higher-order, inquiry-based meant because that was what the college and career ready assessments were asking the students to do. He said the new science curriculum was an inquiry-based curriculum.

6. Overview of the Proposed 2020 – 2021 School District Budget

Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud from his budget message as summarized below:

“The 2020 – 2021 School District budget reflects the realities of an enrollment projected to increase by between 30 and 50 students annually through the next five years. It also reflects the School District’s on-going commitment to ensuring the construction of a solid foundation for all of our students but particularly, our youngest learners, upon which they can stand securely as they proceed through their school years to emerge well-prepared to be college and career ready.

The Merrimack School Board has asked the School District’s administration to pay close attention to three inter-related areas in its construction of the 2020 – 2021 School District budget. The areas outlined by the School Board are:

- *Infrastructure Management*

- *Student Outcomes*
- *Fiscal Prudence*

The summary of the School District's budget will likewise be presented in the context of three broad categories:

- ***Infrastructure Management***

Of the six schools in the Merrimack School District, five are between 50 and 70 years old. These aging and well-used buildings, like all such facilities, require on-going maintenance and on occasion, require significantly more than typical upkeep to protect the assets that lie inside. The most important of which are the school-aged children of our town. Over the last ten years, the taxpayer has seen fit to support the infrastructure of our schools by authorizing approximately \$10 million for maintenance projects. This investment has paid for new and/or partially new roofs on each of our school buildings, has provided newly paved and/or expanded parking lots, new heating systems, fire alarm panels, updated electrical systems, water filtration systems, secure entrances, and safe and energy-efficient windows, to name just a few infrastructure projects that have been implemented, not to beautify our facilities, but to enhance student safety and to optimize student learning.

The maintenance component of the School District's budget reflects those same goals, as does, of course, the School District's Capital Improvement Plan which was presented to the School Board for its approval on November 18, 2019. However, since the budget is also a reflection of the priorities of those constructing it this years' budget asks the School Board to place the James Mastricola Elementary School and the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School roof which currently resides on the 2020 – 2026 Capital Improvement Plan on a Warrant Article asking the town to consider the merits of this request in a separate vote from the School District budget in order to prioritize another competing and more compelling current need – student outcomes.

- ***Student Outcomes***

The most important mission of the school system, beyond ensuring its student's safety is to educate students to be successful in whatever ways they define success. For some that means college, for others that means a career in a trade directly out of high school and for others, it may mean military service. In each case, however, it is a specific mission of the public school system to ensure readiness for whatever next step a student wishes to take once he or she leaves the pre-kindergarten through grade 12 system. That readiness is predicated on a strong foundation. Early

childhood education, specifically defined here, as pre-kindergarten through grade 2 is the primary means of ensuring the development and maintenance of that foundation for all future success.

Every effort to secure student's academic, social and emotional foundation yields multiple benefits with two inter-related benefits being of chief significance in the context of this budget, student outcomes, and long-term cost savings. Put simply, investment in our earliest learners during a period of significant psycho/social transformations creates the conditions for future academic success. This is achieved chiefly by providing student's access to contemporary curriculum matched with equally contemporary resources, well-trained teachers able to provide differentiated and responsive instruction and class sizes and classroom supports that ensure the kind of significant and qualitatively different kinds of attention required by our youngest learners. These are not luxuries for our students. Research and our own experience suggest that these investments are necessary to achieve the outcomes that our students deserve and that this Board has asked the administration to pursue. Further, such investments yield significant long-term financial savings. For example, personnel costs and resources associated with the necessary remediation of academic and social and emotional delays in older students could be redeployed or saved in the context of an even stronger early childhood experience for our youngest students.

Over the last ten years, the School District's student population has indeed declined. In the last decade, the population has declined as much as 13% and that much has been quite public. What has been significantly less well-known is the associated reduction in force of our professional staff during that time. During that same ten-year period, the School District reduced its staff by 30 full-time positions or approximately 8% from its high point. This reduction has been made slowly and proportionately over the period of student population decline constrained by state minimum standards for class size which articulate both required and suggested maximum student/teacher ratios. Information about class size and student/teacher ratios was shared publicly at a School Board meeting on October 21, 2019. At that same meeting, the administration shared information that information according to demographers at NESDEC (the New England School Development Council) that the School District has relied upon for over 20 years, enrollment is projected to increase in Merrimack by between 30 and 50 students annually over at least the next five years. This should make sense to residents who have seen significant residential construction projects appear throughout the community over the last years. Additionally, and far less well known to the public, are the number of families who reside in long-term accommodations at Merrimack hotels, particularly impacting the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.

In the spirit of the missioner of public education, we welcome all of these families and their children and will do whatever we can to create the conditions for their success. The increased enrollment projected now at 52 more students next year than this year, coupled with our growing understanding of the requirements of a strong foundation for our earliest learners leads the administration to include the addition of four full-time teaching positions in this year's budget. These positions are to be deployed as follows:

- *Thorntons Ferry Elementary School – One full-time kindergarten teacher*
- *Thorntons Ferry Elementary School – One full-time first grade teacher*
- *James Masticola Elementary School – One full-time first grade teacher*
- *Reeds Ferry Elementary School – One full-time first grade teacher*

In addition, included in this budget is a request for three full-time kindergarten and instructional assistants which will be deployed in each of our three lower elementary schools.

These positions chiefly represent the academic student outcomes objectives of this budget reflecting both a trend towards increased enrollment and a prioritization of a more personalized student-centered educational experience for our youngest learners.

Further, this budget is impacted chiefly by the addition of one full-time System of Care Coordinator which reflects another reality felt every day by educators in our classrooms but not perhaps efficiently understood outside of the school environment. To be specific, students are experiencing significant mental health and behavioral challenges at increasingly younger ages and we must proactively deal with this new reality in order to create the conditions for their long-term success. The primary function of this new role is to facilitate a comprehensive planning and support process focused almost exclusively on student's social and emotional needs as a necessary component of their future success. This position will serve all the schools under the direction of the Director of Student Services and in partnership with the School District's leadership team.

The costs associated with these positions roughly equals the dollar amount over the default represented by this proposed budget. The cost associated with the proposed personnel increases is \$406,744 and the amount that this budget is over the default is \$403,329.

- **Fiscal Prudence**

The construction of this budget as in all previous budgets is impacted by the same realities that affect all budgets, rising costs. This year's budget stands at \$81,117,846. The 2019 – 2020 budget which was approved by the voter's last April was \$79,034,477. The difference in this year's proposed budget is \$2,083,369. That difference is almost entirely comprised of non-discretionary obligations which are listed as follows:

- *8.5% increase in health costs*
- *3.9% increase in dental cost*
- *3.25% increase in professional staff contracted salaries*
- *Proportional increases in FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act) and New Hampshire Retirement due to wage increases*
- *3.0% increase in support staff contracted salaries*
- *5.5% increase in utilities*
- *3.5% increase in transportation costs*

These increases, all non-discretionary, without adding one cent of discretionary items, amounts to an automatic increase of approximately \$2 million over last year's approved budget. In addition, many year's see impacts to the School District's operating budget brought about by decisions and/or mandates that come with no associated financial supports. This year's revenues, for example, are impacted by an approximately \$300,000 decrease in Medicaid reimbursements brought about by decisions made at the state level. This shortfall must be made up through increased taxation at the local level. This information was shared with the School Board at its September 16, 2019, meeting. The total non-discretionary increases are then modified by the reduction of debt service interest in the amount of \$53,038 and the conclusion of our heating and lighting retrofit project in the amount of \$467,482. Excluding the personnel request outlined above, a site development study and funds to demolish and remove the current Brentwood building, the district budget as presented in all its categories is below the default and virtually level-funded.

In just over four years, the Merrimack School District will be debt free. Given the significant capital and program investments made in the School District over the last twenty years, this is a singular achievement made possible by the partnership between the past and current School Boards and administrations. This budget reflects a continued march toward debt freedom and will allow us to contemplate future growth in capital and other projects while maintaining a long-held School Board goal of stabilizing the tax rate through predictable and steady budgeting. This budget reflects a solemn responsibility to the taxpayer, who in states like New Hampshire, bears all

of the costs associated with educating its communities' children. This responsibility is matched, however, with another equally important responsibility to provide the conditions for optimal student outcomes in the context of ever-rising fixed costs. The process that follows next will seek to determine through extensive dialogue by multiple town entities and the participation of citizens the best balance between these two imperatives for all of the School District's constituents.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared the tentative Budget Hearing dates as follows:

- December 16th – Technology, Library Media, Maintenance, and Food Service
- January 6th – James Masticola Elementary School, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School
- January 7th – Merrimack High School, Merrimack Middle School, Student Services and the District budget.
- January 21st – Additional meetings if necessary, Warrant Article discussion
- Snow Date: To be determined in January

7. NHSBA Delegate Assembly

Chair Barnes said the item would be tabled until the next School Board meeting when Vice Chair Guagliumi would be in attendance.

8. Approval of November 18, 2019, Non-Public Minutes

Board Member Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the non-public meeting minutes from November 18, 2019.

The motion passed 3–0–0 by a roll call vote.

9. Other

- a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

- b) Comments

There were no comments.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Committee Reports

Chair Barnes stated the Greater Woods Subcommittee met on November 18th where they discussed trail maintenance and clean-up plans and the 2020 schedule was established. She noted two of the meetings would be held at the outdoor classroom.

Chair Barnes said the Parks & Recreation Committee met on November 19th and the Winter Holiday Parade would be held on December 8th at 1:00 p.m. followed by the annual tree lighting.

Chair Barnes also said the Parks & Recreation's budget was reviewed and there would be some impacts to the School District. She noted they would be doing some basic maintenance to the skate park but did not plan on doing any maintenance to the basketball courts at the end of O'Gara Drive.

Chair Barnes shared they were reviewing the community events because attendance was so high and parking was affected. She mentioned the School District may be called upon in the future to see what they could bring to the table.

Chair Barnes commented the New Hampshire School Board's Association Board meeting was also held on November 19th where they voted on the resolutions which would be heard the Delegate Assembly.

12. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Ms. Rosemary Rung addressed the Board and said she had participated in a Rutgers University program about building leadership and engagement with students in the political process. She further said she read a book entitled "Gracie goes to Washington" to all of the fourth graders at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School.

Ms. Rung said she disappointed to hear about the science assessments and suggested the School Board do some benchmarking and look at other School District's who scored very high.

13. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Non-Public Session – RSA:91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – in Training Classroom

- Student Welfare

The non-public session was canceled due to lack of a quorum.

At 8:24 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Chair Barnes) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 3-0-0 by a roll call vote.