

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Wednesday, April 1, 2020
Special Remote Meeting (via Zoom)**

Due to the state of emergency declared by the Governor regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, and the subsequent Emergency Order #12, Chair Barnes determined that the physical presence of a quorum within the time required for School Board action was not reasonably practical, and therefore, the members of the School Board participated remotely.

Present via Zoom: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Members Schoenfeld, Nunez, and Schneider. Also present via Zoom were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Excused:

Student Representative 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 Guidelines for Remote Meeting

Chair Barnes stated a link was provided on the district's Facebook page for the public to provide comments and the public could also comment via sau26.org. She said if the public chose to comment then a name and address would need to be provided for the record.

3. Response to School Board Members' Questions Regarding Impacts of COVID-19 on School District Operations – Tabled

Chair Barnes stated item #3 would be tabled and become the last agenda item as she felt a lot of what Superintendent McLaughlin planned to cover during the meeting would most likely address some or all of the questions and concerns.

4. Update on the Impact of COVID-19 Emergency on School District Operations

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the district announced school closures on March 13, 2020. He further stated on Sunday, March 15, 2020, Governor Sununu announced the closure of all schools in New Hampshire which became effective on March 16, 2020.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted on March 16, 2020, all of the schools in the Merrimack School District were closed and all personnel with the exception of administrators and custodians were in place, noting administrators were present to plan for remote learning and custodians to ensure the schools were safe places for the educators to come in the next day. He said on March 17, 2020, the Merrimack School District was open for teachers to develop their plans and on that same day, the teachers were given the option to work remotely. Superintendent McLaughlin said the announcement that Governor Sununu made on March 15, 2020, for all schools to close was originally only supposed to be closed until April 3, 2020. He added the first day of remote learning in Merrimack began on March 18, 2020, which was only five days after the last day of school on March 13, 2020.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the lunch program also started on March 18, 2020, as well as the Chromebook distribution initiative. He said the plan was to continue remote learning until April 3rd but it became clear after listening to health updates that it may not be the case, and indeed, on March 26, 2020, Governor Sununu issued the “stay at home” order and also delayed starting school again until May 4, 2020. He continued by saying Governor Sununu reiterated the possibility of having instruction in the schools and to date, the Merrimack School District elected not to do that.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the closure of schools for an entire month meant a significant change in the way instruction needed to be delivered as well as grading and assessment. He said the goal for this meeting was primarily about the instruction plans as well as the assessment plans. He said the intent was to inform the School Board about the administration’s efforts to maintain good planning moving forward while things were moving quite rapidly.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared that everyone that he had come in contact within the district during the ordeal had absolutely given their all and risen to the occasion. He further said the district’s bills were being paid and the payroll was being met for both employees and vendors and if they had to do that from a remote location that could be accomplished. He said the payment to employees and vendors was in accordance with the CARES (Corona Aid Relief and Economic Security) Act and the Bill made it clear that local LEA’s (Local Educational Agencies) “shall to the greatest extent practical continue to pay employees and contractors during the period we are in.” He further said the goal was

two-fold in that it was to keep people off of unemployment so they were not collecting from the state as well as to maintain loyal employees. He said they were utilizing the custodians on a daily basis to ensure that the buildings were clean and disinfected. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared that STA (Student Transportation Association) was delivering approximately 100 meals per day and Caring Hands, who had the smaller buses delivered where the bigger buses could not go. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared they had currently delivered 95 meal per day with approximately 225 people going through the makeshift drive-thru at the front of the high school. He said the district had served 2,515 meals to kids and families who were in need.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the State of New Hampshire was in line to receive \$37 million from the federal government which would be apportioned out to those districts who followed the CARES (Corona Aid Relief and Economic Security) Act which stated they needed to keep people employed and if they did not do that the district would miss aide that may come to the Merrimack School District.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell mentioned that STA (Student Transportation Association) would provide the district with a fuel credit because they were not running their diesel buses on all of the routes they normally did.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell shared they had also been working with each school to deliver instructional materials to everybody's home who were not able to get to a school, he noted a few days prior they delivered 124 instructional packets utilizing STA (Student Transportation Association) and Caring Hands.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the leadership team had spent over 70 hours since March 15th trying to come up with a plan for curriculum and instruction. He thanked the community and the educators for rallying.

5. Information Concerning Grading and Assessment During Remote Learning as a Result of COVID-19

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented they began the new way of instruction and assessment by identifying expectations of the educators. He shared that a brochure had been developed for the educators which indicated they should follow the recommendations of the CDC (Center for Disease Control) and be mindful of their own health. He also said the brochure talked about the responsibilities to the school as a community and the responsibilities to the students and families. He said educators were responsible for daily attendance and had to report to their administration if they were working remotely, if they were in the building, and what they were doing. He further said

they had to be available during the regular school day and collaborate daily with their colleagues and teams to meet the needs of all learners, including special educators, Title I teachers, which included ESOL needs, and guidance needs.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated educators continued to have daily and weekly meetings with the departments and special education throughout the process. He further stated educators continued to utilize remote learning platforms online such as PowerSchool Learning, he pointed out that some were in the form of analog packets and they ensured technology was provided to families who needed it.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they would continue the effort of social and emotional learning and made sure the teachers were checking in with the well-being of all students.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated they were all still learning online instruction as they went along. He said the last time students were in front of them was on March 13th. Preparations for online learning took place from March 16th through March 20th. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio explained one of the decisions they made was to adjust the third quarter and noted while the reporting period was originally supposed to end on April 3rd, the new date would be March 20th. He said it would encompass all of the work that was completed when students were physically present. Further, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio explained from that point on the fourth quarter would begin which would be done remotely. He said students would have until April 13th to turn in any work that was assigned them prior to March 13th and teachers must notify all of the students of the work they were owed. He added that teachers had until April 17th at noontime to finalize the grades.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio explained that report cards would be accessible via PowerSchool at the high school, middle school, and upper elementary school on April 24th. He further noted report cards for the elementary schools would be distributed via email on April 24th. He said parents were welcome to request a hard copy through the guidance office at the high school and through the main offices at all of the other schools.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio addressed grading and assessment for the fourth quarter. He said some of the Merrimack High School students were considering two-year colleges, four-year colleges, trade schools, military service, or was moving on into the workforce, pointing out that it was important to continue to provide the students with meaningful learning. He said they needed to consider the rigor and the reasonableness of all of the things they put forward to the students.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio explained that they would not use competency grading for students for semester two (or the third and fourth quarters) and students would receive their earned grade.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the department heads would start working on assessments with multiple ways to show what the students understood and would use the Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) principles. He said the district had seven Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) teams in place and they would find different ways to show what the students knew, perhaps in the form of a project, a traditional test, or a writing assignment.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated they were expecting students to be honest and pointed out they were not able to monitor them at the level they could in the classroom. He also stated they would continue to provide guidelines regarding etiquette around video and talk about conferencing as well as using Zoom.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the middle school and high school would finalize grades on April 17, 2020. He said they would use a pass/fail grading system when it came to unified arts and physical education.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the teams had met multiple times regarding reporting, grading, and assessing at the elementary school level and it was a challenge. He said report cards would be issued to parents on April 24th.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated he was a former elementary school administrator and shared that in his experience it was a lot of showing what the students knew, listening to them read, and watching a them do a math problem.

Additionally, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they would make their best effort to maintain the students' skills and move them forward by providing them with enriching materials. He also said they would continue to use the Envisions Math Program and the lessons were being sent home. He said they had the ability to do some assessments and, therefore, could offer extensions or remediation where needed.

6. Discussion of Instructional Schedules through May 4, 2020

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the short-term schedule had transitioned to more of a long-term need. He said the district would continue to provide continuous learning opportunities to students through remote learning. He

shared a major change, required by the Governor's expectations regarding remote learning was that they were going to move to a four-day instructional model. He said teachers would be allowed to have one flex day per week to collaborate, plan, and to work with their group of peers as well as other educators to prepare as they moved forward.

Additionally, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio shared some parents had multiple children and they wanted to make sure they were not overwhelming them but providing a rigorous, good curriculum that hit the essential components.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted the four-day model did not take away from the 180-day requirement.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio the elementary school (pre-K through grade 6) level would have 30-minutes of instruction per subject four days per week. He said at the secondary level they would continue to use PowerSchol Learning as a platform. Further, he said teachers would continue to communicate weekly regarding assignments and deadlines for students.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio shared that the flex day would be on Tuesday's at the secondary level (grades 8 through 12) and at the elementary level it would be on Wednesdays.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented that students would have time to complete unfinished work on the flex day, there would be no new assignments on those days, and paraprofessionals would still be available via Zoom, email, phone calls, and any other means of communication available.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated contracted service providers would continue to provide services during that time and special educators would continue with IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings in collaboration with educators to ensure they were meeting the particular needs of the students.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented there were multiple resources available to support families and on the bottom right-hand corner of the district's website there was an icon entitled Merrimack Family Resource Guide for social and emotional well-being and added they would be adding resources. He further commented if a resource could not be found parents and students should reach out to the guidance department in their respective buildings for assistance.

Vice Chair Guagliumi suggested perhaps high school honor students could mentor younger students. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he had heard of many stories of people who wanted to help out and more information would follow.

7. Review of Community/Staff Survey Responses Regarding Possible Suspension of April Vacation due to Impacts of COVID-19

Chair Barnes reviewed the results of the survey as follows:

Staff – 442 Respondents: 327 – In favor of suspending April vacation.
 115 – Not in favor of suspending April vacation.

Parents – 3,026 Respondents: 2,489 – In favor of suspending April vacation.
 537 – Not in favor of suspending April vacation.

8. Discussion/Decision Concerning Possible Suspension of April Vacation due to Impacts of COVID-19

Superintendent McLaughlin pointed out if April vacation was suspended then the last day of school would be June 15th and if they did not suspend it the last day of school would be on June 22nd.

Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to suspend April vacation in favor of instruction for that week.

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

3. Response to School Board Members' Questions Regarding Impacts of COVID-19 on School District Operations – (Tabled from earlier in the evening)

Chair Barnes commented that the time to take SAT's (Scholastic Assessment Test) had come and gone for the juniors and there had been some talk about that happening sometime over the summer. She said when information came out on AP (Advanced Placement) exams she assumed there would be a push out to students enrolled in those courses.

Superintendent McLaughlin replied the May 2nd SAT exam had been canceled and presently, the College Board had not canceled the AP exams. He added he would share additional updates as he received them.

9. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Chair Barnes read aloud public comments that were sent via the web forum as well as emails summarized below:

Ms. Kit Cargile, 9 Kingston Court, asked if there was an initiative to improve remote learning with additional tools like Microsoft team's classroom features instead of PowerSchool learning?

Ms. Terri Clyde, 3 Haise Way, asked how would the district IEP's (Individual Education Plan) be coordinated with the out-of-district LEA (Local Education Agency) that were due in April?

Ms. Brenda Lyons, 55 Walnut Circle, asked what was happening with SAT's for juniors and what was the plan for them to take the test and how would it impact their college application?

Ms. Jennifer Marcoluongo, 32 East Chamberlain Road, commented she was unsure how she wanted to vote with regard to the possible suspension of April vacation without knowing whether school would resume or not. "My thoughts are if we go back to campus then we all need a break that week before, however, if we do not then I can certainly see the justification in ending school early by working through the break."

Mr. Stu Moncreaf, 2 Fields Farm Road, requested the schools provide actual instructions to students over Zoom or whatever platform was being used. "Currently, our child's school is sending a slew of information and task lists home and relying on parents to provide the instruction. This is counter to the term remote instruction that Superintendent McLaughlin refers to in his emails. Parents need the help of the school to provide the necessary instruction to the students. A morning and afternoon session for 30 to 45 minutes should be happening each day."

Ms. Kim Elliott, 78 Jessica Drive, stated her only input was about flexible scheduling. "For my family, it is really working for my kids to be able to complete work on their own time schedule. I am not sure if a real-time option is being considered where kids need to be present at certain times. This would be complicated for many families who are sharing devices. I am grateful to the teachers and the administration who have been figuring this out and building the plane as we are flying it."

Chair Barnes noted if any family needed additional devices, they could contact the district to get Chromebooks so each child could have a device.

Ms. Jessica Perez, 67 Middlesex Road, asked if all teachers could please include which school they were from, the grade level they were teaching or even what class they were addressing. "I would also like to make sure that the links and this random adult asking for my child to Zoom is legitimate."

Ms. Shea Hanlon, 10 Owls Court, asked to please advise if students were allowed to return to school and if an option would be provided to parents who did not want their child to return to school and wanted to continue homeschooling remotely for the rest of the school year or in this case, another month.

Ms. Jennifer Marcoluongo commented that she felt unified arts at the elementary level was almost unreasonable to expect as mandatory. "My children are getting through their days and we prioritize everything else. If at 2:00 p.m. we are all spent then we are not doing unified arts. My suggestion would be to find a way to combine unified arts into the regular instruction, for example, writing could include an additional 15 minutes that considers art or the fact that the student is learning the computer and technology much more than they normally would. Daily recess, as my family does, should be considered as physical education. Additionally, my kids are doing things like musical theater, yoga, ballet, and tap online as well."

Mr. James McGee, 33 Woodward Road, commented as parents they were juggling multiple online students simultaneously. He said he fully endorsed a flex day that would be counted as an "on day" for students. "Families need a flex day to manage multiple online student Zoom meetings in a single household with a finite number of connected devices. I feel it should be counted as a regular school day."

Ms. Jennifer Greenwood, 8 Cottonwood Lane asked about streamlining how the students turned in homework that was not online.

Mr. Bob Bevill, 12 Blair Road, commented that "he wanted to thank everyone making this time successful for all of my children. My only comment is while I appreciate that each principal, teacher, and group unit are trying their best to provide support to parents and students in their own way, this really needs a coordination of effort. The sheer volume of emails and expectations are overwhelming. Parents are being inundated with emails from the school district. Can we exchange reducing the amount of daily email communications and increase the number of informational sources on websites, logs, PowerSchool, and PowerLearning."

Ms. Jenna Hardy, 59 Peaslee Road, "I would like to thank the School Board, the administration, and the teachers for the impressive job they had in rolling out remote

learning in real-time over the past few weeks. My children seem to have barely missed a beat and I can hardly believe what our teachers have come up with on such short notice. Even my child who has an IEP is receiving services at home. I think the pass/fail option at the high school level was an overly simplistic solution.”

Mr. Rick Morgan, 18 Clinton Court, asked when the last day of school for seniors would be. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he would have a discussion with Mrs. Putney and the date would be announced as soon as possible.

Mr. Robby Reisman, 8 Iris Drive, commented his concerns regarding canceling April vacation were as follows: “we, like some other parents, have no childcare arrangements for June 15th and I think the kids will need a break before the end of the year.”

Ms. Susan Gosselin, 37 Burt Street, commented with a shorter third quarter would the fourth quarter carry more weight and grades. Having a senior will now have a failing grade for quarter three and quarter four will be an uphill battle hoping he can still graduate.”

Vice Chair Guagliumi suggested posting the answers to as many questions as they could including questions regarding graduation on the COVID-19 webpage. Chair Barnes replied she would discuss that with Ms. Nancy Rose.

At 9:10 p.m. Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to adjourn.

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