

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Merrimack School District, SAU #26  
Wednesday, April 15, 2020  
Special Remote Meeting**

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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:** Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Members Schoenfeld, and Schneider. Also present were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Student Representative Koroma.

**Excused:**

Board Member Nunez

**1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Public Participation Guidelines for Remote Meeting**

Chair Barnes stated public comments could be sent to: [publiccomment@sau26.org](mailto:publiccomment@sau26.org) or by going to sau26.org where there was a meeting link provided. She said all comments would be read and written into the record and would include the name and address of the speaker.

**3. Discussion Concerning the Extension of Remote Learning in the Merrimack School District**

Superintendent McLaughlin said he felt it was important for the School Board to have a meeting because they had begun the fourth quarter and there were some significant decisions that needed to be made given the fact that it was getting close to the end of the year. He said at the current moment the state would continue remote learning until

May 4<sup>th</sup>, however, he suspected that Governor Sununu would extend remote learning but he did not know for how long.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the overwhelming feeling of the community was for the district to continue to work through April vacation and pointed out the School Board had approved that at the previous meeting which meant the last day of school would be June 15<sup>th</sup>.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared that one of his concerns was that he was not at all sure that the conditions would be safe enough for the students to return to school on May 4<sup>th</sup> and was not sure when it would become safe for the students or the teachers. He said he was fairly certain that remote learning needed to happen for the remainder of the year and he was looking for feedback from the School Board.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if the School Board had the authority to close the schools and if the state come back and say everybody must reopen. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he did not operate under the assumption that he had the authority to close the schools in Merrimack without the School Board's approval. He added there had been a consistent lack of clarity from the state, although he acknowledged they were all working hard and he was not assigning blame. Superintendent McLaughlin shared the best counsel he had received regarding the situation was to say that local control would be the appropriate way to view decisions. He added there were already districts in New Hampshire who had made the decision to continue remote learning until the end of the school year. Superintendent McLaughlin said he felt it would be difficult for the state to say that any school district that was working to support its community in the best they saw fit could not do that.

Vice Chair Guagliumi suggested that they might want to wait a couple of more days to see how everything played out and hear what the Governor Sununu's decision was to avoid unintended consequences in the event the Governor instructed and end to remote learning.

Chair Barnes commented she leaned towards Superintendent McLaughlin's position because parents needed time to make arrangements, and teacher's needed time to adjust lesson plans to a remote environment.

Board Member Schneider commented he was comfortable making a decision sooner versus later but he felt they needed to be mindful that if a decision was made in the other direction there could be issues that impacted their ability to do remote learning.

Board Member Schneider asked if it might be more pragmatic to wait until the next School Board meeting which would be held on April 22<sup>nd</sup> to make a decision.

Superintendent McLaughlin replied he wanted to have the conversation at the present meeting but he would do whatever the School Board wanted. He added he was not sure when Governor Sununu was going to say anything with regard to how long remote learning would last.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented that she agreed with Board Member Schneider in that she would like to see what Governor Sununu had to say. Superintendent McLaughlin replied that was perfectly reasonable, however, he noted they needed to be careful in thinking about what it would mean to come back in the current environment. He said he was sure there were parents who would not want to send their children back to school in May so there would need to have a two-tiered system where some students were taught in school and some students continued with remote learning which he did not feel would have a good outcome.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the state required 990 of instructional hours for high school and secondary schools and 945 instructional hours for elementary school. He said if they used the calculations for instructional hours the high school's and secondary school's last day would be June 5<sup>th</sup> and the elementary schools would be May 28<sup>th</sup>.

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented, without question, she agreed with ending the school year early.

Chair Barnes asked the members of the School Board if they wanted to make a determination regarding hours versus days. Vice Chair Guagliumi replied she was fine with that.

Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) that the School Board design the conclusion of the school year to meet the state's guidelines for instructional hours versus days which would make the last day of school between May 28<sup>th</sup> and June 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Discussion:**

Board Member Schneider commented he felt the School Board should wait until they had all of the facts about the way the school year would be prior to making a decision of days versus hours. He added he felt the formal decision should be made at the same time as the hours versus days decision.

Chair Barnes commented the teachers and students had been putting in some exhausting hours to make the most of the educational environment and she said she felt having an end date would help to define what content they needed to focus on and deliver it by the end of the year.

**The motion passed 3 – 1 – 0 by a roll call vote. (Nay – Schneider)**

Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) to extend remote learning for the remainder of the 2020 school year to end on May 28<sup>th</sup> or June 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Discussion:**

Board Member Schoenfeld asked Superintendent McLaughlin what the benefits were of making the decision immediately. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he understood some of the hesitations and that it was predicated on the belief that the local district did not have the authority to determine when the last day of school was. He further replied he did not feel that was clear and he did not know for sure. However, Superintendent McLaughlin stated there was a precedent in the State of New Hampshire for local control and he thought the likelihood of Governor Sununu or the Commissioner saying: “hey, Merrimack, Milford, and Rochester, you jumped too soon and now you are going to have to back to the well and figure it out was highly unlikely.” He further stated there was uncertainty of whether they were starting back to school very soon, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, or if it was going to be another day in May or the end of the year. Superintendent McLaughlin said every day they did not have that information it made it a little bit trickier for the teachers and the students. Board Member Schoenfeld commented she felt any vote the School Board took needed to be predicated on the fact that they did not actually know if the decision would hold even though the chance of being overridden was extremely small.

Chair Barnes commented they had consulted with legal counsel extensively regarding the situation but reminded the members of the Board how many times they had spoken about student safety. She said they could not ensure student safety or the fact that students may have the virus but present no symptoms and bring it home to someone who would not be able to tolerate it.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell announced he just received an email from Mr. Carl Ladd, Executive Director of the New Hampshire School Administrators Association which stated: “it appears likely that the Governor will be announcing tomorrow that schools will remain in remote learning through the end of the school year.”

Superintendent McLaughlin said it was the time of year that the School Board would typically nominate and elect the teachers for the following year. He further said because they had gone entirely remote it made it a little bit trickier to do that but would like to do it at future meeting.

**The motion failed 2 – 2 – 0 by a roll call vote. (Nay – Guagliumi and Schneider)**

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) that the School Board approve the extension of remote learning until the end of the year based on the Governor supporting that decision and should the Governor come up with another decision to continue in-school learning then the School Board would hold an emergency meeting on Monday, April 20, 2020.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if the motion could be revised to state if the School Board had the control and authority under the circumstances to be able to make that decision then the Board would make the decision to extend remote learning through the end of the school year. Board Member Schneider replied he was fine with that suggestion.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Guagliumi) that the Merrimack School District vote to approve remote instruction through the end of the school year based on the fact that the Governor would either state that remote learning would continue from a state-level or provide the district's with the authority to chose that and if the Governor came up with a different decision then the School Board would have to vote on it at a later time.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.**

#### **4. Update on the Assessment of Student Progress During Remote Learning**

Superintendent McLaughlin stated in order for the school year to count using remote instruction the district was obliged to maintain instruction. He further stated as a school district they were accountable for providing instruction and some version of an assessment.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented semester two at the high school would use earned letter grades for assessments. He said they would use that system with the understanding that Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) practices that were in place and students had multiple ways of turning in work and showing what they knew.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the administrative team was having multiple conversations around grade point averages and what to do with students who were failing.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted the individual departments were working on what would be the four to six most important things that a student should be instructed in and then assessed on so that they could be sure there was integrity to the experience they had.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the same method was in place at the middle school, pointing out the students would have a two-week grace period to turn work in.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, referring to the elementary school level, stated that they needed to look at what the essential components of each subject were.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated they would not send out traditional report cards but would ask the students to put together a portfolio which would reflect what they learned during the period of remote learning, he added they would work with students and parents as to what the portfolio would look like.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked if there was any data thus far that showed how students were doing with remote learning; how many were completely disengaged versus how many were engaged. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied overall there was a very high number of participation and they were reaching out to those students and families who were not engaged.

Chair Barnes asked if there were any indications that students needed access, via Chromebooks, that had not yet received them from the district. Ms. Nancy Rose replied they were still taking requests for Chromebooks and she continued to get them to the students.

## **5. Update on High School Graduation Considerations**

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the plan was to have graduation at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. He said it seemed increasingly likely that could not happen, although he shared they had not entirely given up on the idea.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated at the present time student and community health and wellness had to be their top goal. He said they had some leeway to hope for the best which

was the reason why they were not prepared to provide a definitive answer at the present time.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared that one alternative plan was to push the graduation to July 10<sup>th</sup>. Superintendent McLaughlin noted, however, they were not sure July 10<sup>th</sup> would be any more feasible than June 13<sup>th</sup>.

Superintendent McLaughlin ensured the administration would leave no stone unturned in trying to figure out what they could do that provided the marker that the students wanted and deserved.

## **6. Public Comments on Agenda Items**

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

Mr. Don McLaughlin, 4 Kyle Road, asked if any decisions had been made regarding the 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip to D.C. and would the money be refunded even if the optional insurance was not purchased.

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive, wrote it was obvious that the quality of education via remote learning would not rise to the level of in-school education and recommended that the School Board establish an Ad Hoc Committee comprised of parents, teachers, specialists, administrators to address the transitional needs from remote learning to the classroom to be prepared before that time comes. She said one option that may be worth consideration was to develop blended classrooms for one to two years where a multiple-grade curricular could be implemented in one class. She said the loss the students were facing presently could be made up and absorbed through such a model. She further said the classrooms were successfully used in Merrimack in the late '90s, early 2000's to enable students from readiness to "catch-up" to their chronological peers by grade 3. Ms. Rung added she felt parents working from home were facing incredible stress trying to fulfill their work responsibilities while supporting remote learning for their children. She said she felt it was impossible for them to do both and she recommended that the district communicate specific expectations and support for parents in those circumstances. As a State Representative, she said she was eager to advocate for any action at the state level that would help support the school district during this time.

Ms. Carolyn Morin, 12 Brenda Lane, asked if the district would be looking into using hours for compliance with instruction this year versus counting the required 180-days given the circumstances and in that it was a difficult situation for parents and families navigating

remote learning. She said other districts were doing that and taking into account the emotional strain on families, especially those with elementary aged children and younger.

Ms. Kelly Rodriguez, 3 Cobblestone Place, commented as a family with two students in the elementary school if it was decided to close the school for the remainder of the year, she hoped the district would consider closing academics as well which would allow them to enjoy their families.

Ms. Kimberly Miranda, 1 Franconia Drive, asked if they ended up with remote learning for the rest of the school if there would be summer school this year.

Ms. Miranda asked about the children who had more intensive needs where remote learning wasn't feasible. She said it had been difficult to meet all of the requirements.

Ms. Rhonda Fleming, 15 Powderhouse Road, thanked the entire administration for the excellent job everyone was doing. She said her mind was truly blown with how quickly Merrimack was able to get remote learning initiated and she knew a lot of work was done in the background. As for the decision as to whether or not it continued for the remainder of the year, she said she trusted and supported whatever decision was made to help offset the spread of the virus.

Ms. Fleming shared an idea for graduation. She said although she did not have a senior, her heart broke for the Class of 2020 as well as their parents. She suggested that Merrimack High School partner with the Milford Drive-In and do some sort of drive-in graduation. She said her vision was that each student could prepare a video of themselves, ideally in a cap and gown, and submit it and the principal could also create a view for each student reading their name and holding up their diploma.

Ms. Kimberly Cillo, 13 Briarwood Drive commented that Governor Sunun went on the news at 5:30 p.m. and said he would release the information regarding schools but all said, it was most likely that the students would physically go back to school.

Ms. Cheri Roy, 106 Wire Road asked how the extension of remote learning would affect the seniors.

Ms. Becky Valez, 3 Greatstone Drive commented she felt it was too early to make a decision extending remote learning to June 15<sup>th</sup>. She asked the district to please wait as there was no way to know what the situation would be in two weeks. She said high school finals could not be given on the honor system and parents may have to return to work and would need schools to be in session and in addition to that, special needs students would lose skills. She said in spite of the great effort made by the teachers and staff, the students' learning situation was not optimal. She said her daughter was a sophomore and was already learning a lot less than she would have in a classroom setting. She added she felt



ending school according to the number of instructional hours in late May or early June would put her further behind.

Ms. Valez stated the students were always doing just as many hours of work so she didn't understand how counting instructional hours would end the school year early. She also mentioned VLACS was already a remote system of learning, and if there was a reason why they couldn't tap into that system using the teachers from the district.

Ms. Dawn Cote, 11 Hadley Road commented if the end of the school year was three weeks early it would end what little consistency the students had when so much of their life was upside down like friends, sports, parents' schedules, etc.

Ms. Cote mentioned that other districts had gone to a pass/fail system and if it was decided to go to a pass/fail system for the fourth quarter if they would possibly consider a pass/fail system for the third quarter because some classes had very few assignments and some kids were negatively impacted because the quarter was shortened.

Ms. Barbara Sousa, 4 Griffin Street asked if kids with special needs and on IEP's could be addressed because they were struggling.

Ms. Shannon Rand, 1 Blair Road asked how it would affect teachers and staff when the schools closed.

Ms. Jane Simek, 37 Sarah Drive asked with virtual classes continuing would they revisit the class requirement for physical education, music, and art? She said she was a parent who was homeschooling three children and they just did not have the time for those activities.

Ms. Kerry Arguin-Newton, 4 Ries Drive commented the seniors, including her son, had worked hard all four years they had been in high school. She said they were missing so much of the fun part of being seniors. She asked that graduation be held even if it had to occur in July or August due to safety concerns and even if the number of guests had to be limited. She said she would also like to introduce the idea, if possible, that some senior events be held in the days prior to graduation, possibly supervised by volunteers, staff, and/or parents.

Ms. Arguin-Newton also mentioned it put a lot of additional stress on the kids when assignments were timed.

Mr. Zachery Oser, 4 Haines Terrace commented on the revised motion to extend remote learning unless the Governor announced something contrary on Friday. He asked what if the Governor announced nothing on Friday, and did the extension stand or would an emergency meeting be required on Monday.

At 9:35 p.m. Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.**