

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Wednesday, April 22, 2020
Special Remote Meeting**

Due to the state of emergency declared by Governor Sununu 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 Nunez, Schoenfeld, and Schneider. Also present were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Student Representative Koroma.

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:32 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 or by going to sau26.org where a meeting link was provided. She said all comments would be read and written into the record and would include the name and address of the speaker.

3. Information Regarding Last Day of School for the 2020 – 2021 School Year

Superintendent McLaughlin noted that an overwhelming majority of people wanted to go ahead and work through April vacation which would mean the last day of school would be on June 15th. He said the School Board authorized the administration to look at using the number of instructional hours as opposed to the number of school days. He said the elementary school was required to have 945 instructional hours with grades 7 through 12 requiring 990 instructional hours. He added the last day of school using the instructional hours would be on Friday, May 29th, 2020.

4. Information Regarding Summer Activities on School District Properties Given on-going COVID-19 Concerns

Superintendent McLaughlin stated he and the School Board were committed to being good partners with the community in the sharing of their resources. He said there were some concerns regarding health and safety and Governor Sununu had recently closed schools for the remainder of the year. Superintendent McLaughlin stated the school district would take the position that all fields would not be available before they received an all-clear from Governor Sununu and the Department of Health and Human Services in that it would be safe to congregate.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented there were four additional School Board meetings scheduled prior to the end of the school year; two in May and two in June. He also commented that things were changing by the minute and the situation could certainly be revisited but for the present time the fields would remain closed.

5. Information Regarding Reimbursements to Families due to COVID-19 Related Cancellations

Superintendent McLaughlin started by saying he was well aware there had been a number of activities that were scheduled in advance of the COVID-19 virus which ranged from field trips that were not taken to foreign travel.

Superintendent McLaughlin, referencing the middle school's canceled trip to Washington, D.C. noted families would get most of their money back from the tour operator and added they would try to work with the tour operator to make the families whole.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the money for the field trips was in the process of being refunded by the schools. He said in some cases, travel agencies would not refund the balance of the down payment and the district would look at the field trip line in the general fund which had a balance of approximately \$56,000 and could perhaps use that to reimburse families. He said Southwest Airlines was providing a travel voucher for \$200.00 per student who purchased a ticket but said he was trying to work with them to provide them with a refund.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated they had already started the process of refunding the MEEP (Merrimack Early Education Program.) He further stated they processed refunds for tuition from March until the end of the year where parents paid in advance. He also said there were a number of negative lunch balances, especially in

the senior class and there were also a number of accounts that had a surplus in them. He said three options would be provided:

- If they had younger siblings in lower grade levels the parents would be able to transfer the balance.
- The amount in the student's meal account could be refunded.
- They could donate the balance to those who had negative amounts in their accounts.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that parents should call 424-6226 to choose which option they preferred.

6. Information Concerning on-going Planning for Summer School and Extended Year Program

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said he had been in contact with Ms. Heather Barker, Director of Student Services around ESY (Extended School Year), Ms. Deb Fournier who ran the summer reading program at the elementary level (kindergarten through grade 7), Ms. Sue Luhrs, Title I Coordinator, and Mr. Ron Delude who ran the 8.5 and credit recovery program.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated they had put a task force together to start planning so there was some parody and they could do their best in a remote situation for the summer.

Chair Barnes stated they would also address students who were in honor programs who wanted to prepare for AP (Advanced Placement) courses.

7. Updates on Curriculum, Assessment, and Grading

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the leadership team met frequently over the past week and they were trying to make collective decisions as quickly as they could in an attempt to alleviate some of the concerns that were coming from the community. He said the current week the leadership team was focused on the high school as they were aware that it was a difficult time for the seniors.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio shared that they made a decision that the 2nd semester would not impact student's grade point average.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they would not use competency grading for the 2nd semester but would focus on the four to six essential components. He said teachers would establish deadlines and there would be a two-week grace period after the deadlines.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented there were a lot of questions regarding students who did not achieve a passing grade and pointed out those students would receive an incomplete in the course and they would be offered a grace period again for the first month of the quarter the next school year and they would be afforded several options in order to complete that. He pointed out for students in which it did not affect whether they would graduate or not (such as an elective) they could withdraw from that course.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio noted there would be no finals for the current year.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated they would use the state minimum requirement for graduation for seniors.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they were still working with the essential standards for the elementary and middle schools. He added they would do a portfolio assessment at the end of the year and a narrative report on the fourth quarter.

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

Board Member Schoenfeld said it sounded like Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio had done a really superb job of accounting for and creating supports for students who might be struggling with the remote learning environment. She asked Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio to speak to those students who might have worked hard to do things to raise their GPA (Grade Point Average). Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied they had to look at the situation as a whole. He explained grades for high school students for semester one (quarters one and two) would be calculated into their Grade Point Average. Grades for semester two (quarters three and four) would appear as a grade on their transcript but would not be calculated into their grade point average.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated when it came to something like a GPA (Grade Point Average) they could not pick and chose how it was applied and whether it worked for one and not another.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if there was any indication as to how colleges would be handling the second semester of the present year. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he felt most colleges were having conversations about that for the following years' students.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked about the students who had an IEP (Individualized Education Program) or a 504 Plan who would normally get support in school whose grades may have dramatically dropped. She asked how that situation would be handled. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied it was a big part of the conversation that the administrative team had around students who would receive an incomplete. He added the reason for giving a student an incomplete would be to provide them with more time to complete their work.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said if parents had any questions they should reach out to their child's case manager, the 504 Coordinator, or the guidance counselor.

Board Member Nunez asked Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio to elaborate on the decision to go to state minimums. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied it gave a little more flexibility than the current process they were using when it came to the way credits were configured and the way they could offer, for certain coursework, dual credit. He said it allowed for more opportunities for the students to meet the requirement and graduate. He further said there was a minimum of 20 credits for a high school diploma.

Board Member Nunez commented she would not want anyone to think the Merrimack School District was lowering their standards but was trying to make the best of a very difficult situation and encourage the students to learn in a way that worked best for them.

Vice Chair Guagliumi suggested the district should look at the data and determine what particular areas of study were especially challenging during the time of remote learning. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he was sure they would drill down to that level.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented that everyone had to recognize that when school started up again, in whatever form, it would not look the same as the implications of the

COVID-19 virus had been too profound of an event. He said there would be impacts on students that would take time to accommodate.

Board Member Nunez stated while she appreciated focusing on the here and now she would like to take a proactive approach in the event schools could not open in September. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio indicated he agreed with Board Member Nunez and mentioned he and the administration had already begun that conversation.

Vice Chair Guagliumi asked if a pass/fail grading system would be used at the elementary level. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied they would be graded on essential standards and essential components.

8. Approval Meeting Minutes of March 16, 2020, March 17, 2020, and April 11, 2020

Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to approve the meeting minutes of the March 16, 2020, meeting as presented.

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

Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the meeting minutes of the March 17, 2020, meeting as presented.

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

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to approve the meeting minutes of the April 1, 2020, meeting as presented.

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

9. Consent Agenda

Educator Retirements

Mr. Allen Lemay, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack High School

Mr. William Sawyer, 5th grade teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Ms. Carolyn Dailey, Special Educator, James Mastricola Elementary School

Mr. Jeff Marvelle, Special Educator, Merrimack Middle School

Ms. Patricia Tyler, Guidance Counselor, Merrimack High School

Ms. Susan Weghorst, Library Media Specialist, Thornton's Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Kathleen Walczak, Special Educator, Merrimack High School

Ms. Linda Mandra, Gifted & Talented Teacher, Merrimack High School

Ms. Deborah Lane, 2nd Grade Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Educator Resignations

Ms. Karen Hoffman, Special Education Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Paula Childs, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School

Ms. Aurelie Coenen, Kindergarten Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Kathleen Hoppa, Guidance Counselor, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Shannon Sweeney, Math Teacher, Merrimack Middle School

Ms. Danielle Coplin, Science Teacher, Merrimack Middle School

Educator Nominations for 2020 - 2021

Superintendent McLaughlin explained there was also a list of nominations and elections of the professional staff for the 2020 – 2021 school year.

Board Member Nunez moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

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

10. Other

a) Correspondence

Chair Barnes mentioned the School Board received correspondence from a couple of people who participated in the adult baseball league in Merrimack regarding the use of the fields in the district over the summer which was forwarded to the administration.

Chair Barnes stated the School Board also received an email from a candidate for office who asked them to retake the vote on the Warrant Articles.

Chair Barnes also stated there were a couple of parents who reached out to the School who provided feedback on the remote learning experiences they had. Further, Chair Barnes stated they sent the communications to the schools in which the respective children were attending.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that she too received e-mails from parents which described the experiences they were having regarding remote learning which contained both kudos, challenges, and suggestions. She said she also received inquiries about the use of the fields in the summer months. (Board Member Schoenfeld pointed out she did not know if the e-mails she received were duplicates of the e-mails Chair Barnes received.)

Vice Chair Guagliumi commented she received the same type of e-mails and they would be forwarded to the administration.

b) Comments

Chair Barnes mentioned that one of the pieces of correspondence was about Warrant Articles. She said the two biggest Warrant Articles were regarding the election of officers and the budget but there were also a number of Warrant Articles put forth because they were good for the district to have but were not in a position where they became operationally negatively impactful so they did not have to happen immediately but did have to happen eventually. She said under the present economic conditions if it was not feasible to support it they expected a “no” vote from the constituents. She added, unfortunately, as a Board they were unable to change their official position as they were made final at the Deliberative Session in March, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and would appear as such on the ballot. Chair Barnes wanted to clear in that the School Board would not see a “no” vote as a lack of support for the district of the School Board’s hard work as well as the hard work of the leadership team.

Board Member Schneider stated he agreed with what Chair Barnes had to say regarding the Warrant Articles.

Board Member Schneider commented he received correspondence from a couple of voter's around what efficiencies or what things they had not had to pay in terms of infrastructure and operating costs during the change to remote learning. He said they talked a little bit about reimbursing parents for money spent on field trips and said the School Board had voted to allow the free lunches to be distributed which was an expense. He further said they also had picked up potential savings by the refund of the fuel cost by the bus company and potential others.

Board Member Schneider said there was also federal money that would be coming into the school districts. He asked if the School Board could have an overall summary of the pluses and minus to give voter's an idea of how it may impact the end of the year budget at the next meeting.

11. New Business

There was no new business.

12. Committee Reports

Chair Barnes stated on April 9th the Professional Development Committee via Zoom to make sure the recertification process was moving forward for teachers.

Chair Barnes mentioned there were requests for reimbursements and proposals were reviewed and approved at the meeting as well.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Chair Barnes read aloud from public comments she received as summarized as follows:

Ms. Karen Vadney, 2 Danville Circle – “Today we received an email sent by Mr. Zampieri on behalf of Mr. Merrifield. The contents of the e-mail stated that the grades for semester 2 would not count toward the GPA (Grade Point Average.) I am struggling to understand how this is equitable when I have students who have been working hard and have been getting their work in on time. This penalizes students who are striving to do their best in these unusual circumstances. For example, my senior could be impacted by a lack of scholarship opportunities and my freshman could lose future academic opportunities, achievements, and awards. My children are disappointed by this decision.” To quote my daughter, “I don't go to school for grades to not count.” “Is there any opportunity to select opt-in or other considerations with regard to the GPA?”

Gavin, a 10th grader, said “after learning that the Board moved to make grades not count toward the GPA I have some very serious questions and concerns. Many students have worked very hard through the 3rd quarter and throughout the remote learning. It feels as if those students are not being treated fairly by not counting grades towards the GPA. I understand it may be hard for some students to do remote learning and that was why the decision was made but is that really fair to everyone or just students who are struggling? Why should students who are not struggling be punished and not have their grades counted toward the GPA? Is it possible for students to opt or opt not to have their semester 2 grades count toward their GPA? If a student is doing well, shouldn't they be allowed to count it? I think the students should have the choice as to how they feel it should count pertaining to their situation. I hope you feel that way as well.

Ms. Katharine Hodge, 44 Belmont Drive, “first let me congratulate the School Board and all of the educational staff for the fantastic job you have done to continue the education of all of our students. Can you please give some direction on how honor students will get information and materials for their summer program projects.”

Ms. Kristi Bradley, 8 Abbey Road, “one, will we be meeting the hours of instructional teaching hours if some teachers are only assigning students work on PowerSchool learning for students to complete independently. Many local schools are providing Zoom lectures for the high school students. Will Merrimack be using this avenue for instructional hours in the near future?”

Ms. Nicole Barrett, 8 Elm Street, asked: “what happens if we paid in cash for a 7th grade field trip and not a check, will we be getting a reimbursement?” Chair Barnes replied the reimbursements would go out regardless of how the money was received.

Ms. Amber Roche, 15 Beech Street asked: “will you be announcing the last day for teachers/support staff?”

Ms. Alyssa Smokler, 26 Beacon Drive, “I was just wondering like surrounding towns, is it possible for each child to get a Chromebook each year. It seems other schools that already have material on their Chromebooks are using online databases and are more familiar with them. It would even help out over the summer with continuing to develop. I never knew the district has so many subscriptions or parents would not have to pay the yearly amount to purchase Microsoft products due to them already having a Microsoft account. In my opinion, small things like this would go a long way for some families. In addition, I would be willing to help with the cost. I believe Bedford parents pay \$300.00 upfront and approximately \$150.00 each year for maintenance and technical support services.”

Ms. Jenna Hardy, 59 Peaslee Road, “in regard to the high school grading not figuring into the GPA (Grade Point Average) for the second semester I have several concerns regarding this which I will reach out to separately. I would love at some point for the administration and the School Board to address whether this will be noted on student transcripts. As a parent of a junior who fully expects that his senior year might be disrupted in some fashion with remote learning, it is concerning to me that there is a real possibility that his entire GPA will be based on his first two years and the first semester of his junior year. Combined with his inability to take the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) this has a real impact as he is looking at colleges and one of the first questions they ask about is the GPA. At the very least, I think it is extremely important for there to be some notation on their transcripts to know our particular district handled this situation.

At 9:35 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to adjourn.

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