

**Special Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Monday, November 2, 2020**

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Barnes, Board Members Schneider, Rothhaus, and Hardy. Also present were Superintendent McLaughlin, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio.

Excused: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Guagliumi led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Prior to beginning the meeting, Superintendent McLaughlin stated that Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell was unable to attend the meeting and was excused.

2. Public Comments

Chair Guagliumi stated public comments could be sent to publiccomment@sau26.org or by going to www.sau26.org where a meeting link was provided. She said all comments would be read and written into the record but noted the name and address of the speaker had to be provided.

There was no public participation.

3. 2019 – 2020 Budget Year in Review

The discussion was tabled until the next School Board meeting as Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell was not in attendance.

4. Second Reading of School Volunteer Policy (IJO)

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said there were some edits to the School Volunteer Policy as pointed out below:

The acronym “FERPA” was spelled out in its entirety to the “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.”

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented that Board Member Rothhaus had asked at the last meeting if the District could ask volunteers about pending criminal charges. He said he consulted with legal counsel and that language could not be added to the policy. He added however, that language could be added to allow for the Superintendent to develop procedures for annual sign-offs and the District could ask if there were any changes in criminal status within the previous year.

Proposed added language:

“School Volunteer Application Selection”

The Superintendent is authorized to develop additional procedures for selecting and approving volunteers.

“Procedures for School Volunteers”

All school volunteers are required to undergo a background investigation and a criminal records check prior to volunteering. A school volunteer means an individual who provides services to the District without pay and any form of compensation, and including but not limited to the following.”

5. Update on Developing Plan Concerning Remote Learning Impacts on School Cancellation due to Inclement Weather

Superintendent McLaughlin commented on October 5th the administration asked the School Board if they would like to use the capacities gained during COVID to offset no-school days due to inclement weather.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio provided an update by sharing that the group consisted of a representative from every level in almost every building.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the District had no control over internet accessibility for those staff/students who did not live locally or in an area that did not have adequate reception. He also said there was no question that if there was a Nor'easter and there was no power there would not be school.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented there would be a final review of the proposal with the leadership team and it would then be presented to the School Board.

6. School Board Message to Administration Concerning 2021 – 2022 Budget

Vice Chair Barnes read aloud her budget message as summarized as follows:

My budget message for administration is definitely different this year. When this message was written this time last year we had never imagined being where we are today. I would say that the ability to deliver a strong education in a safe environment has taken on new meaning from our past conversations and it should be the guiding principals to take this budget through its process. Things that are the same in prior needs are the need for detail. What outcome will the expenditure support and what is the consequence if it is not funded? What was wanted for but not asked for because we are not wanting to overburden the taxpayer, and what benefit would those expenditures bring to district operations when we will eventually have no choice but to put those items in a future budget.

When it comes to the heart of the budget, these are areas of concern from my perspective:

1. Infrastructure improvements (Technology)

Updating and upgrading the District's bandwidth and access to that bandwidth within all facilities is essential. We are in the midst of deploying some more student devices in addition to those students who have brought in their own devices. This demand will be maintained at a 1:1 level for all students and staff in the buildings going forward.

2. Device Procurement

We have brought forward technology to get devices deployed that are nearing the end of their useful lives. Having a device refresh plan to ensure that we are not leaving students without technology access is a commitment we will need to maintain going forward.

3. Facility Maintenance/Upgrades

Maintaining and upgrading where needed. Facilities where we have a need to replace aging equipment and upgrade those that may not meet current performance standards. We saw considerable projects in recent budgets for equipment that, in some cases, dated back over forty years.

4. Curriculum Supports

Continue in procuring those platforms that we will need to deliver both in-person and remote instruction, expecting that we will be doing that in the future.

5. Continuing and/or expanding programs we need to continue to ensure educational outcomes. Provide additional supports to maximize Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programming in addition to the programs we are currently supporting in all core curriculum areas.

6. Safety

In all areas including cleaning/sanitization, cameras – upgrading old models and expanding coverage in the District where appropriate and facility management for things like drainage, paving, etc.

Though the budget is not designed to manage revenue, having information provided throughout the budget season in the areas of available funding examples are E-Rate, Cares Funding, etc. that the Merrimack School District can access to avoid taxation to fund these initiatives is exceptionally important.

As we keep the needs of the taxpayer in mind it would be a value to know what funding we are pursuing to offset costs.

Board Member Schneider read aloud his thought as summarized below:

It is difficult to understand exactly where we will be for the 2021 – 2022 school year, remote, hybrid, or fully returned to the classroom. However, I believe the District has to make sure it's prepared to handle whatever situation we may be in at that time.

Much of the budgeting and planning that has been undertaken during the 2020 – 2021 school year has been reactive and flexible given that the understanding of how to teach students and keep them safe is continually evolving. The challenge for the 2021 – 2022 budget process is to make sure that we focus on what is needed to achieve a teaching model that will likely forever include a remote aspect into the future. In that spirit, here are some of the focus areas that I see:

1. Look closely at the spending on things such as field trips, and other expenses incurred for in-person instruction that involves going outside of the school grounds for educational purposes. What should we plan to retain, what should we plan to start backing away from, and are there areas where we should try to increase.
2. Look at the sports spending and, in particular, impacts on transportation and practices outside of the District's grounds. What will be available, what should we change, etc. Do we reduce the breadth of sports that we offer and what would the financial impacts be based on the situation?
3. Look at the staffing levels – both quantity and expertise to make sure that the remote versus in-person selection of subject offerings are better aligned and consistent.
4. Look at the technology required to allow for more simultaneous remote in-class options for teachers where the class makes sense. This is a growing area and one we should look at investing in to help provide flexibility for teachers as well as to give parents more confidence in remote versus in-person choices won't impact the curriculum that the students might receive.
5. Look at the quality of the air within the buildings and determine what level of spend there should be to help improve air quality where it is worse. If it is widespread then look at ways to start phasing in what we heard earlier from the Honeywell proposal or aspects of it and plan for it over multiple budget years.
6. Delay items that are not required, specifically some of the items that were Warrant Articles during the last election or two. Items like the plan for the Merrimack High School complex, bleacher replacement, and Brentwood aspects. Be realistic of the ones that are critical versus the ones we would like to have and make sure the School Board has a clear understanding.

Overall, this year may show a spending/planning trend different than in the past and if increases are needed in certain areas make sure they are justified and clearly qualified so the taxpayers have

complete clarity. If there are options to reduce spending, call them out but not at the sacrifice of the educational product that we deliver to our students.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she hoped the focus would be on the mission statement and that the District understood the needs at the present time. She said there was more of an understanding regarding the deficits and surpluses they had and could look at areas they felt were critical to the students' needs moving forward.

Board Member Rothhaus said there were areas of great concern such as an increase in 504 Plans because of the increase of anxiety and depression. She said she was a strong supporter of clubs and athletics but understood the District would have some critical needs they did not have in the past.

Board Member Hardy read aloud her comments as summarized below:

This being my first budget message and being new to this process, I felt sure that I would agree with and echo the sentiments of my fellow Board members and that has certainly been true. However, as I thought through the values that were important to me as a parent and a community member at this particular time in our world, there are a few things that jumped immediately to my mind.

Considering this pandemic and the unprecedented impact on public education, I think the budget will need to be flexible enough to be realistic both in the perfect world scenario we are all hoping for next year and also for what could be an extended COVID impact scenario which may be our reality.

We need to be prepared to extend some of the safety, educational, and social and emotional protocols and plans that we have in place in order to plan properly for a worst-case scenario. In the event that we do resume full, normal operations next year, district, administration, and curriculum leaders need to anticipate the adjustments that we will inevitably need to make to address the significant educational impacts to all students. What we do know is that we cannot start our next full academic year assuming that all kids are where they will need to be in order to move on as usual.

We need to do the work now of recognizing and anticipating the depth of that deficit and create a budget that appropriately supports addressing those needs in multiple ways across all grade levels.

As a result of my participation in just one Curriculum, Instruction and Technology (CIT) Committee, it is obvious to me that a critical investment that will continue to need to be made in various types of educational support technology, both for students and educators. We need to move forward with the meaningful real-world technology integration that allows us to create learners who are prepared for the world beyond the Merrimack School District.

One of the most important things I think we need to address is an investment in educational excellence, success, and outcomes for all students. We do a great job with special education and we have to continue that but we need to do an equally good job at meeting the needs of our gifted, advanced, and driven students as well as meeting the needs of kids who do not necessarily fall into one of those two categories.

Many of our students need a greater opportunity to be involved in trade opportunities or other non-traditional educational paths to success.

Chair Guagliumi read aloud from her comments regarding the budget summarized below:

I would like to see budgeting that supports our students and their learning as the highest priority. It should always be this way but it is especially true this year. We must also provide the best quality of education while still being sensitive to the burden that our taxpayer's face. I am expecting innovative and creative approaches to accomplishing this while especially in light of the current pandemic.

I would like to see continued focus on budgeting that supports strategic planning and proving the educational product that we deliver, and on-going and remedial supports as a result of this pandemic. It's not just how we are dealing with this pandemic now but how we will deal with it moving forward to help bridge the gap of any deficits that might be occurring.

We need to continue attention to the maintenance of our existing facilities. With that, I mean keeping our CIP (Capital Improvements Plan) on track.

I remain focused and concerned about items that continue to be important to me such as the quality of our education, student and staff safety, communications, and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure.

As a result of the pandemic we need to ensure our IT infrastructure continues to receive a high priority and 1:1 devices should be considered. We also need to have infrastructure in place to support flexibility into the 2021 – 2022 school year. I hope that most of our students will be back next fall, however, if the pandemic is still active there will certainly be many families who will continue to want their kids to have remote and homeschooling options. We need to provide support to these families and narrow any inequities such as course offerings or experience, such as specialists in the elementary schools. These kids and families need to feel that they are an important part of the school community and most importantly, ensure that they are able to thrive.

In addition, I would like to continue to explore a couple of ideas/items.

- Options for improving student outcomes and graduation rates.
- Ensure that our textbooks are maintained and we have an appropriate inventory.
- Explore resources to track and manage things like mentor systems and to create systems of mentoring or tutoring.
- Increase proactive afterschool and weekend options for student support.
- I would like the administration to be focused on the facts throughout this process and I encourage as many details and visibility as possible. For example, please include breakouts and descriptions of expenses wherever possible.

7. Approval of October 5, 2020, School Board Minutes

Vice Chair Barnes made a motion (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the October 5, 2020, minutes as presented.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Chair Guagliumi)

Chair Guagliumi noted the non-public minutes from the October 5, 2020 meeting would be on the next meeting's agenda.

8. Consent Agenda

Educator Nomination

- Ms. Anne Marie Morgan, Part-Time Preschool Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

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

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

9. Other

- Correspondence

Board Member Rothhaus stated she received correspondence from Mr. Bill Boyd, a member of the Town Council who expressed concerns about families approaching him regarding teenage anxiety and depression. She said he asked if the School Board felt there was a need to increase 504 services and what were some of the ways the District was responding to the needs.

Board Member Rothhaus reiterated that Jessica Yarlow from Public Health would hold a flu clinic at the Merrimack Public Library between 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. She said Mr. Yarlow was wondering if they should hold the clinic at the library or in a van outside of one of the schools. (The clinic would remain in the library)

Board Member Schneider commented that he received a communication from a constituent who had concerns regarding snow days.

Board Member Hardy said she received a communication from an elementary school parent who highlighted the challenges of remote learning. She also said she received a communication from a high school parent who highlighted some challenges students were facing regarding hybrid learning.

Chair Guagliumi said the School Board received a communication from a parent who was concerned about the elementary level education. She said her concern was specific to the specials that were being offered.

- Comments

There were no comments to report.

10. New Business

Chair Guagliumi commented that she would like to coordinate a strategic planning session to discuss what their vision was. She asked the Board to let her know what their availability was during the month of January.

Chair Guagliumi also commented on the possibility of creating a Policy Committee to ensure that all of the policies were up to date and to review older policies.

11. Committee Reports

Board Member Hardy shared they had the first Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology Committee meeting. She said she thought the committee would benefit teachers and students because it would remove silos and fully integrate the curriculum needs with technology support.

Board Member Hardy also shared she attended the Budget Committee meeting and they had training for new members. She also commented that former School Board member Naomi Schoenfeld had joined the Budget Committee.

Board Member Schneider noted the November 5th Budget Committee meeting had been postponed.

12. Public Comments on Agenda Items

There were no public comments.

At approximately 7:55 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Barnes) to adjourn.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.