

**Remote Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Monday, January 25, 2021**

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

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.

2. Guidelines for Public Participation for Remote Meeting

Chair Guagliumi 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 but noted the name and address of the speaker had to be provided.

3. Public Participation

Vice Chair Barnes read the following e-mails into the record summarized below:

Ms. Amy Goodridge, 33 Ellie Drive

I was very happy to hear that K – 4th-grade students will be going back full-time. This is long overdue and so important for their development.

Ms. Lisa Wetherbee, 1 Longa Road

I wanted to write in about your decided time of quarantining for families of someone with COVID-19 in the household. Recently, we had COVID in the family. My son, who attends the James Masticola Elementary School has been seriously affected by the recommended quarantine time that you have decided on. This fourteen days after the affected person ten days is absolutely ridiculous. My son tested negative. I can see if you would like to have him quarantined for an additional ten days, however, asking for fourteen days is unrealistic. My son has been out of school since January 13th which was the day I tested positive. Now he will be out until February 10th. That is four weeks of missed school. My son is on an IEP as he has a learning disability. Remote learning has been hard enough and now we have to find a way to keep him up-to-date and on his plan while missing school an extra entire week based on your protocols. The fact that you will not allow families to take a simple test to see if they are negative and be allowed back into school is absurd. Also, the fact that you will not allow families to switch to remote learning during times like this is a huge, unnecessary hardship. Why can't families decide to go back and forth between the remote learning or in-school? Other school district's in our state allow this on an as-needed basis. This whole idea that's been proposed will likely make people never tell the school system the truth. People would rather not tell when they get COVID than go through four weeks of quarantine. I really think the school needs to reevaluate the length of time for quarantining. What you have decided on is over the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines and we are failing our children.

Dr. Dawn Breault, 69 Patten Road

I was wondering if James Mastricola Upper Elementary School could start the four days per week of instructional time before February 8th. Given there are no significant class changes like one would see at the high school with semester-based classes I feel strongly that it should be considered as an option.

4. Board Consideration of Proposed Instruction and Learning for Grades 5 - 12

(Full Exhibit is Available on the Merrimack School District's Website)

Board Member Schneider commented he had heard concerns from several parents that they would be sitting their kids down for six hours of Zoom calls on the days they were home. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied while using concurrent instruction it did not mean that kids would be sitting all together working step and track with stand and deliver. He said there were variants in activities by the teachers, small group instruction, groups working independently, and some working via Zoom directly with the teachers.

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Chair Guagliumi) to accept the plan for grades 5 - 12 as presented with the caveat that the administration shall have the flexibility to modify the plan as it deemed fit to achieve instructional goals and based on conditions and response.

Vice Chair Barnes clarified the students would have two days of in-class instruction, two of Zoom, and if for some reason the four days of instruction could not be met there would be reinforcement and reteaching.

Discussion:

Chair Guagliumi commented she would be more comfortable with a start date of March 1, 2021, rather than February 15, 2021. Vice Chair Barnes the flexibility was built into the motion. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated he felt the second semester had to be started with the combined cohorts or stay in the present cohort model. He said it had to be one or the other.

Superintendent McLaughlin suggested adding a potential start date of either February 8, 2021, or February 15, 2021. He said he wanted to confirm the date with the administrative team.

Board Member Rothhaus commented she was in favor of starting February 8, 2021. She added she did not like the word "flexible" as it pertained to this motion. Superintendent McLaughlin replied his interpretation of the word "flexible" had to do with whether the plan was implemented on February 8, 2021, or February 15, 2021. He added the fundamentals of the plan would not shift.

Board Member Rothhaus stated she would not vote in favor of the motion on the floor because she felt there was too much of a grey area and it was too flexible.

Board Member Hardy stated she would not vote in favor of the motion on the floor because she did not feel a switch to in-person for two days and then be on Zoom for two full days was in the best interest of the students.

Board Member Schneider suggested the motion should be “accept the model as proposed but offering administration the flexibility to implement as appropriate and the second semester to officially start on February 8, 2021.”

Vice Chair Barnes amended her motion (seconded by Chair Guagliumi) to accept the model as proposed but offering administration the flexibility to implement as appropriate and the second semester to officially start on February 8, 2021.”

The motion passed 4 – 1 – 0 by a roll call vote. (Nay – Board Member Hardy)

5. Review of Draft Letter to Governor Requesting Prioritization of Vaccines for New Hampshire Educators and Staff

Chair Guagliumi shared a draft letter that she addressed to the Governor to request educators and staff working with children be moved up to the 1B phase of the vaccination plan. She read the draft letter into the record as summarized as follows:

Dear Governor Sununu,

Thank you for your ongoing efforts and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am writing on behalf of the Merrimack School Board (SAU 26) to respectfully request that effective immediately you move educators, staff, daycare workers, and any others who work with children into vaccination phase 1B of the New Hampshire COVID-19 vaccination plan.

It is my understanding that you strongly support the reopening of schools in the state as many do and I also understand that New Hampshire is one of the few states in the country that has not followed CDC guidelines to prioritize teachers by vaccination phase 1B. If this is true it is disappointing. Regardless, you have the opportunity and authority to help those who work with New Hampshire’s youngest and most precious vulnerable citizens to ensure that they also feel safe in their work environment, particularly given the close proximity of people in these spaces. I implore you to do the right thing and to help us provide safer spaces for employees in the schools and daycare centers in New Hampshire.

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Hardy) to endorse the letter as presented.

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

6. Proposed Memorandum of Agreement between the Merrimack School Board and the Merrimack Teacher’s Association Regarding the use of Sick Time

Superintendent McLaughlin read aloud the Memorandum of Agreement into the record as follows:

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN MERRIMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT AND THE MERRIMACK TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION

This Memorandum of Agreement (“MOA”) is entered into by the Merrimack School District and the Merrimack Teachers’ Association, NEA-NH (“Association”). Hereinafter, the term “Employee”

will refer to any employee represented by the Association and covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreement in effect for the period July 1, 2019, through June 30, 2022.

WHEREAS the District and the Association wish to preserve the health of students, employees, and community members during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic;

WHEREAS some employees have requested remote assignments due to documented medical conditions which pose a significant risk to the employee given the potential for exposure to COVID-19;

WHEREAS the District has granted employee requests for remote assignments where possible but given the needs of students, the District has not been able to grant all such requests; and

WHEREAS the parties wish to allow employees with documented medical conditions whose requests for remote assignments could not be granted the opportunity for paid sick leave.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Parties agree to the following provisions and modifications to the Collective Bargaining Agreement ("CBA"):

1. Employees who are unable to work due to a documented medical condition that poses a significant risk to the employee's health if exposed to COVID-19 will be granted a leave of absence and will be permitted to use up to twenty (20) days of accrued sick leave during said leave. Any remaining leave time will be unpaid.
2. The Parties agree that provision in the Article 11.2 of the CBA prohibiting the use of sick leave for non-illness reasons is temporarily waived for the duration of this MOA.
3. The parties agree that this MOA shall set no precedent or past practice and shall not be used in any proceedings except to enforce its terms.
4. The parties agree that this MOA does not replace the current Collective Bargaining Agreement which is still in full force and effect except as explicitly modified by this MOA or other negotiated agreements between the Association and the District.
5. The Parties recognize that this MOA may include topics which are not mandatory subjects of bargaining and, to the extent it does, the Parties reserve the right to assert or refuse to negotiate such subjects in any future negotiations, and any obligations created herein shall expire with this MOA. The Parties also acknowledge that the purpose of this MOA is to address health and safety issues created by a global pandemic in order that schools may reopen for the 2020-21 school year. The Parties acknowledge that conditions may change and it will be necessary for the parties to be flexible and to cooperate with one another to adapt to any changes. The Association agrees it will not file any grievance or ULP related to a provision in this MOA without first consulting with the Superintendent and attempting in good faith to reach a mutual resolution. The Board reserves the right to assert that provisions which relate to non-mandatory subjects of bargaining are not subject to the grievance process or the provisions of RSA 273-A:5.

6. The parties agree that this Memorandum of Agreement is temporary and will only be in effect for the 2020-2021 school year or until the World Health Organization's Director General declares the COVID-19 Pandemic to be finished or the Governor of New Hampshire's state of emergency declaration expires, whichever comes sooner.

Merrimack School District
School Board Chair

Merrimack Teachers' Association
President

Chair Guagliumi stated item #6 would be placed on the next meeting's agenda for further discussion.

7. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Vice Chair Barnes read the following e-mails into the record summarized below:

Ms. Sarah Leland, 149 Naticook Road

I am a parent of high schoolers and an employee of the district. Please vote no on the revised 5th-grade through 12th-grade model. Kids do not need another upheaval, and they do not need a new schedule or new teachers. The cameras are not meant for schools and should not be forced to try to meet educational needs if the Wi-Fi can't support it. It is not good for students or teachers.

Meaghan, Class of 2022 Student

I am a junior at Merrimack High School and I am writing you to encourage you to not support the newly proposed learning plan. As a student, I have attended one of my classes like this both remotely one week and in-class the other. Being part of the half remote was very difficult. I found it very difficult to keep up with the in-class students simply from just not being there. This may seem like a good idea but I believe both students and teachers will struggle with the adjustment. In addition, I would like to recognize the Suicide Prevention Policy presented at the last meeting, I appreciate it very much, however, I think Merrimack High School needs to address an issue that I feel has existed all throughout high school, counselors not doing enough. If Merrimack truly wants to focus on suicide prevention they need to not just introduce new solutions but also solve the problems that already exist. I appreciate all that the School Board has been doing during these difficult times and I thank you all.

At approximately 9:15 p.m. Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Hardy) to go into a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c).

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

At approximately 10:28 p.m. Board member Hardy moved (seconded by Board member Schneider) to adjourn the public session.

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