

**Remote Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Monday, February 1, 2021**

6:00 p.m. – Non-Public Session RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)

- **Student Welfare**
- **Staff Welfare**

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. Stefanie Binette, 42A Wire Road

While I am sure you are receiving hundreds of emails praising the schedule change to 4.5 days, I am speaking as one of the parents who disagrees. I have researched, and while I see the benefits you are insisting are there, I believe the risks outweigh them greatly. Cutting down social distance between children just seems irresponsible. As a parent to a kindergarten student, it is hard enough trying to enforce the 6-feet, 3-feet is practically nothing at all. While young children do seem to be faring better with COVID, I'm wondering if anyone is considering the teachers and staff that could potentially die from it. Exposing the staff when they have not been vaccinated, and don't look like they will be anytime soon, shows a complete disrespect for their lives and the risks they're taking for our children. In November we went full remote due to staffing, had that problem been fixed? You're now looking to add to a teacher by filling their classroom. Will there be more staff to help enforce distance? Will there be plexiglass barriers put in? While I see the benefits to the children, I think shoving them back in full time when we've literally just come off a two month remote, is completely unrealistic. The number of times we've had to restructure, readapt to a new schedule, is pure insanity. Stick with the hybrid and finish this year.

Ms. Dianne Connelly, 12 Vanden Road

Now that the new learning model has been approved I would like to bring up a concern about the start date for implementing the change. During a previous School Board meeting, Mr. Schneider brought up the concern about starting this right before February vacation. However, that concern did not carry over into the discussion during the meeting when you all voted.

An email was sent from MHS indicating that the change will begin the week of February 15th. I would encourage you to reconsider this and make a fresh start for everyone after February vacation. It seems counter-productive to start the new plan the week before vacation. Why not let kids remain in the routine that they are accustomed to and then start the new model after vacation?

Ms. Adrienne Bernazzani, 10 Patten Road

I'm very happy with the new proposal of 4 1/2 days of Zoom rather than 2! I wish it was done sooner, to be honest, but I'm very glad it's being done now for the sake of my kids. They do much better with the teacher rather than with me!

Ms. Jen Alexander, 4 Cardinal Court

I am writing to you with concerns regarding the decision to be made this evening about the switch to full in-person and full remote, but first: I am saddened by the decision to not allow our students to enjoy one snow day this year. Do you not recall being a kid and loving to get a random day off to play in the snow? Just because we have the remote option, does not mean we have to use it every time. Let them be kids – they grow up too fast as it is.

As a parent of two students in full remote, I am wondering why we were not surveyed if we felt there was a need for a change? I know you have heard from upset hybrid parents about wanting their kids in school full time, but what about us? There is a lot to be said for consistency this year and mixing things up for our students this late in the game when there is not actually an issue is confusing and concerning for many of us. Those of us that chose full remote assumed the extra responsibility and understood fully the need for us to help our kids throughout the day on both their "live" days and on the independent days, and we are working hard to manage it all and help support the education of our children. While of course, we want our children to have as much instructional time as possible, we are still at the height of this pandemic! Making them sit on a screen for 4.5 days is not going to be productive or sustainable. More screen time **does not** equate to better or more productive learning. Since my last letter to you, my boys' classroom size just grew by two students and is now at 25 kids. I hope in the last two weeks since my last plea, that you took time to drop by some of the remote classrooms to see for yourselves how challenging it is for teachers to engage and meet the individual needs of just half their students at a time. Please know that while I am not an expert in elementary education, I do have significant experience in online education over the last several years and I hope that you hear me when I say the model is going to have to completely change at this point if you think this is going to work. I hope if this change is made, you are prepared to provide resources including extra adult support for breakout sessions, training, etc. to support your remote teachers in being effective online all day, every day. They have not been trained for this, and should not be hung out to dry, and neither should my children who are lost in a mix of 23 other kids.

One last thing that doesn't impact my family, but that I wholeheartedly disagree with is sending students and teachers back full time. I've heard that the Board is very focused on data. The one

piece of data that I haven't heard mentioned by the Board is the fact that 48 out of 50 states have chosen to prioritize teachers into an early vaccine group. New Hampshire, as you know, is not one of those states, and is unfortunate that you and the community are feeling the burden of that decision made by the Governor. Surely, if 48 states think that teachers are deemed a priority, that **does** mean that transmissions are happening in schools, and sending them back full time without proper measures is reckless and proving to the community that you do not care about the teachers and staff's health. Had teachers been given the opportunity to get vaccinated in this group, then I doubt you'd have any complaints in 6-8 weeks about going back full time. At the very least, you should care enough to provide each of the teachers with N95 masks to reduce their risk of exposure. Here's another piece of data: Cloth masks, which are what most wear these days, as released in an article on January 28th, 2021 from [CNN](#) can be as little as 28% effective, especially when social distancing measures are not adequately in place. Other countries have completely banned the use of cloth masks as well because there is **data** that suggests they are not effective. (Here's a link to another [CNN article full](#) of data about countries banning cloth masks).

Thank you for taking the time to read through this and for keeping the health and safety of all your staff and students a priority, including the well-being of your remote students.

Ms. Angie Amadeo, 8 Owls Court

I am writing as a parent of a full remote 3rd-grader and I also happen to be a full remote first-grade teacher in another district. I am writing to request that the School Board pause, and call a separate meeting to discuss the remote program and students. In listening to these Board meetings it is apparent that sadly the remote students are an afterthought and decisions are made primarily to cater to the group that is demanding full in-person learning without listening to two key groups. First off, the teachers. I don't recall seeing a survey done by the school staff who will be in charge of providing this education that the Board is voting on. As a parent, I would like to see a survey of their thoughts on opening schools fully with "3-feet or under" social distancing and full classes in the small Merrimack classrooms in addition to surveys done by the remote teachers and remote student parents. As a remote parent, I did not receive a survey asking if I wanted my child's schedule to change to four and a half full days of Zooms. Many remote parents I have talked to have gotten used to the routine and blend of live days and independent days and while more instruction with the teacher sounds ideal, in a remote setting more does not equal better. I could not teach my own 20 remote students all at once. I have the flexibility in my district to break my class size in half and teach to half the class at a time. It would be nearly impossible to teach to the entire group in the virtual setting all at once for the academic blocks. I have tried. It is hard to focus on children as individuals and engage them in a huge group and have an understanding of what they know. Students get frustrated that they can't be called on enough and they seem to get lost in a sea of faces in little squares on a screen and I get frustrated that I can't give them the attention they deserve. Breaking my class in half and teaching to half at a time works out so much better. This is what the remote teachers in Merrimack have been doing in the two cohort model. Changing it now doesn't make sense. I feel like Merrimack remote teachers may feel the same. I wish they were asked. I feel the Board needs to seek more input from Remote Teachers and parents before changing the model on them by combining the cohorts which I believe will set back our remote children. This is data that directly comes from Merrimack and we deserve to know that data.

Lastly, Dr. Fauci and Biden did say that they wanted schools to re-open within 100 days, however, I was part of Dr. Fauci's presentation the other day that was directed at teachers. He said that this "may not be the case" as schools need to be fully safe for this to happen and he spoke at length

about the importance of teachers being vaccinated. Please do your duty and make the health of our staff a priority. If they are forced to teach to full-sized classes before being vaccinated, I fear for their health and I predict classrooms and schools will be forced to go remote anyways due to quarantines and shutdowns and staff shortages which are happening in many districts around us (Manchester and Nashua which we are directly in the middle of). Why change everything right now? Vaccines are coming. Keep the staff safe. We've made it this far without one staff or student death in our community based on the safety precautions that have been taken. Why would you throw all that away by flirting with disaster at the absolute height of this pandemic in the dead of winter by re-opening fully? We are nearing the end of this marathon of a pandemic. Please do the right thing. Wait.

Ms. Stephanie Saxton, 38 Maidstone Drive

I have watched almost every School Board meeting since this pandemic came upon us all. I admit when the choice of hybrid or full remote was an option, I at first thought it would be ok for my kids to be on campus twice a week. However, I quickly changed my mind thinking if this should happen they would not be able to see their grandmother who has underlying health issues. I then quickly changed my mind and with a family decision, kept my three children home fully remote ever since. I have never been happier with the way things have been. As I just mentioned I have three children, oldest son is a senior this year (which is another topic of concern where I feel nothing is being done for the Class of 2021 but I digress), my middle son is in the 8th-grade, and my youngest daughter is in kindergarten.

I know on tonight's agenda the topic of having either fully in-person or fully remote 4 days a week for K-4 and I have to say for a parent of fully remote children, I am highly against this decision. I feel like my children already have enough screen time especially my 5-year-old. Adding longer sessions of screen time on young children is not good for their health considering my 5-year-old daughter now has to wear glasses all day.

I would like you all to really think about the effects this is having on us fully remote parents. We all chose, including the children, to be fully remote for all kinds of different reasons and none of us want to change the way it's going, especially for the younger children who are in kindergarten.

I know these times are tough, I get it, we all get it. If you should pass the 4 days a week for K-4 for fully remote children, there will be a lot of unhappy parents and children more so than now who will feel like you are NOT taking our thoughts into any kind of consideration whatsoever. You all will be making our fully remote children and parent's lives a lot more difficult than it really should be.

Please, I really wish you will take this and hopefully the many others who have spoken up into consideration and have a heart and think of the children for once and NOT just the parents who want their kids in school because it's too difficult having them home. There are a lot of us parents and children that want to be home because we feel it's a lot safer than being in school considering just last week the high school had another outbreak right when hybrid started back.

Ms. Nicole Tomaselli, 11 Knollwood Drive

I am writing to let you know that **I am in support of a change away from the hybrid model** of instruction for our K-4 students. In a recent communication sent to families from the

Superintendent, he stated that we should make improvements to our educational delivery wherever we think we can make them and this is your opportunity to do so.

Districts all over the state and country and wrestling with staffing and spacing issues. We need to have a plan and long-term strategy that allows for **as many instructional hours as possible for ALL of our students** - we need to get this done.

To expect that any student in grades K-4 in Merrimack schools has had adequate exposure, modeling, or training this year to be able to do **"independent learning" is ridiculous**. You cannot send students off to work independently when they do not have the established routines, basic skills, or executive functioning to do so.

Up until this point our students have gotten 2/5ths of the education they need this school year, while taxpayers continue to fully fund the district for 5/5ths. I understand the many factors that went into choosing a hybrid model in August but now there is substantial proof both locally and nationally that there has not been substantive transmission in school communities. A January 29th report by the CDC indicates among 17 rural Wisconsin schools, reported student mask-wearing was high, and the COVID-19 incidence among students and staff members was lower than in the county overall (3,453 versus 5,466 per 100,000). Among 191 cases identified in students and staff members, only seven (3.7%) cases, all among students, were linked to in-school spread. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7004e3.htm>

We **CANNOT** continue on a path that short changes our bright-eyed, eager, curious and youngest student population. The toll the disconnection from school is taking on youngsters is beginning to be documented as well. This report published by the CDC in November of 2020 sites emergency room visits by young people up 30% since April 2020 due to mental health crisis. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm>

Beginning in April 2020, the proportion of children's mental health-related ED (emergency department) visits among all pediatric ED visits increased and remained elevated through October. Compared with 2019, the proportion of mental health-related visits for children aged 5-11 and 12-17 years increased approximately 24% and 31%, respectively.

All of our students need and deserve direct contact and instruction 4 if not 5 days a week. If we cannot accommodate them spacing wise then we need to ask other districts how they are doing it - I think you will find that **while our students are "learning independently" other districts are "zooming in the room" to ensure that daily contact and instruction continues to happen.**

Here is a list of NH school districts who are "fully in or fully remote" according to an informal poll that was recently posted to the Educators of 603 group: Salem, Hudson, Littleton, Mascenic, Londonderry, Pelham, Nottingham, ConVal, Sanborn, Kingston, Newton, Seabrook, Litchfield, Gilford, Chichester, Gilmanton, Hennicker, Greenland, Rye, Newfound, Fremont, Epping, Groveton, Candia, Brentwood, Weare, Stoddard, Hopkinton, Hollis, Brookline, Exeter, Kensington, Newfields, Stratham - there may well be more than this and I would be happy to do a more diligent search for you if that information is needed. Certainly, I would look closely at ALL of the precautions and procedures that these school districts have put into place to prevent outbreaks and positive clusters. Salem and Londonderry are neighboring districts of similar size and population - if they can figure this out then we should be able to as well.

I thank you each for your service to our community, as I know these positions are voluntary and thankless. You have a real opportunity to set the direction with this vote tonight, I would welcome the opportunity to talk to any or all of you in more detail if necessary.

Ms. Rebecca Wurst, 21 Carriage Road

It came with great disappointment, but not shock when my email pinged that tomorrow was going to be a remote day. You seem so keen, Mr. McLaughlin, to speak as to how these kids are going to school through a pandemic and need grace. For the second time this year, when Mother Nature tells us to take pause, you have again forced us to continue on. How is that giving grace? I refuse to subject my kids to the insanity.

No longer do I speak of you as a Superintendent that supports his educators, but one that seems clueless as to the complexities of teaching and child-rearing at the same time. There is no reason or need for tomorrow to be remote, yet here we are again.

I can assure you that the Martel Boys will not be:

- Looking at a computer screen
- Joining a zoom
- Writing an essay
- Doing math worksheets
- Logging into Canvas
- Meeting with their special education providers

What will the Martel Boys be doing, you ask?

- Building a snowman
- Read a book
- Shoveling
- Playing with their dog
- Sledding
- Playing a family game
- Sipping Hot Chocolate
- Take a deep breath

These students (not just talking about mine) need grace. These educators (not just the ones that work with my kids) need grace. They need a moment to breathe because it has almost been a year and we don't really know what normal looks like anymore. And for that matter, any chance you get to give normalcy, why on earth are you not giving it?

Ms. Alicia Goguen, 46 Lamson Drive

I will start off by saying I am understanding and supportive of the decision to get our kiddos back in school and I am saddened by the time lost and know that this has not been an easy year for anyone.

But, as a parent who has chosen fully remote, the idea of switching to 4 1/2 days on Zoom is something that we are not on board with. We have been in school for 5 months now and have settled into a routine that is working for our family. These kids and their teachers have now formed

a connection and routine that they have become used to, the small class size allows for less distraction and more abilities for the teacher to give individual attention and instruction. The meeting lengths with necessary breaks in between work well, and the independent instruction days are clearly laid out and expectations are clearly defined by the teachers and we have found a way to work on them that is well for our family.

I am concerned that a 2nd grader should not, and possibly could not, be sitting at a screen for 4 or 4 1/2 days. I believe that a teacher who has settled into a routine and formed a connection with a class for 5 months, should not now have to double these class sizes and rethink her teaching methods and schedules.

I do want to get my daughter back in school. The decision to stay remote has not been one that has been made easily or quickly. But, ultimately it was made because of the consistency it could provide in an otherwise inconsistent year, because of the flexibility it allows for a family who is trying to make the best of an unprecedented year, and because I wanted to keep my daughter with the same teacher that she has become close with and classmates she knows.

From the remote perspective, I say please let us stay consistent in the schedules that we are used to, with the teachers who have worked so hard to get us where we are at.

Mr. Bryan J. Townsend, II, 5 Merrymeeting Drive

I urge you to vote against the proposed K-4 plan of a return to full-time, in-school instruction. COVID-19 cases are high in Merrimack. These numbers are significantly higher than when this Board originally deemed the environment too unsafe for full-time, in-school instruction. I recognize that a minority of towns in this state have returned to full-time, in-school instruction. However, they have done so adhering to strict social-distancing measures and after implementing added safety measures (e.g. plexiglass barriers for students' desks). This plan lacks these common sense safety controls. Recent emails from administrators are only offering "attempts" at social distancing of three (3) feet. This plan has wholly failed to make note of *any* additional safety measures, like plexiglass barriers, to protect our children, teachers, and other staff. This is to say nothing of the fact that the vast majority of teachers and staff are not yet vaccinated.

If there were few COVID-19 impacts in the hybrid model in Merrimack, I could at least understand the Board beginning the process of developing a plan for a return to full-time, in-person instruction. But, this is not the case. As I write this, my son (a second grade student at Reeds Ferry), is required to quarantine until 2/12/21 due to close contact with an infected individual in his classroom. I am aware of additional clusters of individuals at his school (at this same time) that are under mandatory quarantine after contact with COVID-19 positive individuals. This is all with *half* the class sizes and *doubles* the social distancing mandate that appears in your current K-4 plan.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote against the proposed K-4 plan. As always, thank you for your time and attention.

Ms. Jen McInnis, 8 Evergreen Drive

My kids are in kindergarten and third grades. We would much prefer hybrid, for sure until after the February vacation.

The half-size class sizes are hugely beneficial to both hybrid and remote cohorts. Remote needs the lower class size. In-person requires appropriate social distancing. Please reconsider.

Mr. Chris Buck, 2 Chestnut Circle

As a father of two children in the District, with my oldest daughter in first-grade, it concerns me greatly that we're not yet back to full-time instruction. I wonder and worry about, how much better prepared students will be in Districts that have moved to full-time, Districts like Portsmouth. I worry, sincerely, that my girls are going to constantly be playing catch-up. What am I supposed to tell them when they are applying to colleges. Will they have preferential treatment since they lost a full year of full-time instruction?

Speaking of Portsmouth, one of the most affluent districts in the state, it highlights a growing disparity between the haves and have nots. More affluent families and districts can either afford private tutoring, or have a greater tendency to have already returned to full-time.

A Yale University study has found that the disparate approaches to returning to normal school instruction is "widening educational inequality and that the learning gaps created by the crisis will persist." (Yale News, Jan. 5, 2021).

Another Yale study found that childcare is not associated with the spread of COVID in a community.

Taken together, it seems clear that the risk of increased community transmission in schools does not outweigh the harm from not properly educating our children.

Online, or remote education, is not working. Our kids don't learn this way.

I can't imagine the stresses teachers are under. I can understand the reluctance to adopt in-person education. I can understand the fear associated with that possibility. While I have compassion for that, the essential duty of the school system is to adequately educate our kids. We should aspire to do more than just adequately educate them, though. We should aspire to give a superior education. That is not possible in the current framework.

How much education takes place on a screen? I think back on my own childhood and it seems obvious that most of the learning takes place in the minutes between instruction, in learning how to function with other people, how to get along, how to negotiate life with my classmates. These critical lessons are not coming through in Zoom.

What should be driving this decision are the needs of the children. While relevant, the anxieties of the teachers are not the primary concern. There is enough evidence out there to support the idea that, "where there's a will, there's a way." We can make this work. We can put measures in place to protect everyone, and educate everyone.

As a taxpayer and parent, I urge the School Board to provide for the best possible education. Aspiring for anything less is giving up.

4. Preparation for the School District Deliberative Session

Ms. Lynne Christensen, School Moderator, commented she anticipated having an in-person Deliberative Session on Tuesday, March 9, 2021, as doing it by Zoom would present some problems. She said she would anticipate that people who attended would wear a mask, although she would make provisions for those who could not wear a mask.

5. Review of K-4 Parent Survey

Superintendent McLaughlin commented that he understood there were some people who objected to the idea that they did not ask parents if they were interested in hybrid/remote or full-time. He said that they were specifically trying to determine the feedback regarding the remote option or a full return.

Superintendent McLaughlin also noted that there had been no final decisions made with regard to returning to school but that he felt it was very important that parents understood there were implications to that decision including space restrictions.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio reviewed the results of the K-4 (including all three elementary schools) family survey as summarized below:

266 – Remote Students (22%)
943 – Opted to Return In-Person (78%)

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said the class sizes across the three schools if they looked at a full return to school. He said there were a couple of indications that they would have to use long-term substitutes that were certified in elementary areas in a first grade classroom at the James Masticola Elementary School and one in a second grade classroom at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that in addition to the PPE (personal protection equipment) the District already has, he purchased plexiglass dividers and would purchase more if need be to ensure that every student at every desk had one. He said they still maintained the deep cleaning, the fogging, and they continued to run the HVAC systems 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

Board Member Schneider commented that data was very important in his mind and felt there were some things that perhaps may not have been asked as part of the survey.

6. Board Consideration of Proposed Instruction and Learning Plan for Grades K-4

Board Member Rothhaus stated that public health experts were expressing that schools could reopen safely and they were not recommending that they delay due to vaccinations.

Board Member Hardy commented that she felt a full, in-person model for at least the youngest students was a possibility and she was in favor of the proposal. She further commented that she was in favor of having the plexiglass dividers and would like to see the implementation of a daily health test for parents to fill out and/or the purchase of thermometers so children could be checked upon their arrival at school.

Board Member Hardy said she felt the needs of remote students were different but needed to be equitable. She added she felt there should be an added open line of communication with parents of remote students to ensure they knew that equitable may look different in a remote situation.

Chair Guagliumi shared that she was in agreement with Board Member Hardy's comments but did not support the full return occurring on the 15th and would rather wait until two weeks after the end of winter break because families would be traveling.

Superintendent McLaughlin pointed out that Merrimack was the only School District in the state who had dedicated an administrator (REAL) Remote Education Academy of Learning to deal with remote issues. He said it was not possible to run a full, remote, and quasi remote model to make it work for an individual family. Further, Superintendent McLaughlin said overall the proposed plan offered more instructional contact time with teachers, which was what the School Board had asked for.

Board Member Schneider said he was fully on board with the need to get students back into school and suggested they wait until after the winter break to make the change. He also said he felt it was important to be as transparent and self-explanatory to parents and staff as to what the model would look like. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio said they had been getting whatever detail they could out to the public as they had them.

Board Member Hardy moved (seconded by Chair Guagliumi) to approve the proposal as presented for the full return of in-person students for grades K-4 to begin Monday, March 15, 2021.

Discussion:

Chair Guagliumi stated she fully supported the motion on the table but would like to have continued updates given to the public regarding the School District's preparedness.

Chair Guagliumi recommended that administration come up with a parent attestation in an effort to help maintain the safety of the students and the staff.

Chair Guagliumi said there was no doubt that the School District had to take precautions that were inconvenient but necessary given the seriousness of the situation.

Superintendent McLaughlin shared there had been some challenges with the custodial staff and the administrative support staff at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School. He said in addition to that they had challenges related to two classrooms and after performing contact tracing they were able to confirm it was contained to two classrooms. He said those students had to go remote for a period of time.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented those situations would likely continue to happen at least for the remainder of the school year.

Board Member Schneider commented he would be inclined not to support the motion on the table because he felt the March 15, 2021 date might be a little early. He also said he did not agree with the administration saying that they did not know what the plan would look like. He said he wanted more details about what a classroom was going to look like with plexiglass, etc. Superintendent McLaughlin replied he did not want to give the impression that they did not have a plan. He said they had a plan that they put in place for hybrid right through the first semester and the Board had communicated that plan well. He further replied that until the students were actually back in school it was somewhat difficult to predict exactly how it would all look like.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the plan was guided by student safety and trying to provide the best education they could during a pandemic.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she wanted to get kids back into the classroom and she felt the Board had some great conversations at the meeting. She added she would support the motion as presented.

**The motion passed 3 – 2 – 0 by a roll call vote.
(Nay – Vice Chair Barnes & Board Member Schneider)**

7. Board’s Response to Draft Warrant Articles on the 2021 Warrant

- Article #1: To elect all necessary School District officers for the ensuing year.
- Article #2: Shall the Merrimack School Board be authorized to accept on behalf of the District, without further action by the voters, gifts, legacies, and devices of personal or real property which may become available to the District during the fiscal year?

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

- Article #3: Shall the District approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Merrimack School Board and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association which calls for the following net increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels over the amount paid in the prior fiscal year.

Year	Estimated Amount
2021 – 2022	\$253,920
2022 – 2023	\$257,813
2023 – 2024	\$267,499

and further, raise and appropriate the sum of Two Hundred Fifty-Three Thousand Nine Hundred Twenty Dollars (\$253,920) for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at the current staffing levels.

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

- Article #4: Shall the District, if Article #3 is defeated, authorize the School Board to call one special meeting, at its option, to address Article #3 cost items only.

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

- Article #5: (Special Warrant Article) Shall the District vote to authorize the School Board to enter into a 10-year lease agreement in the amount of Four Million Dollars (\$4,000,000) for the purpose of improving classroom ventilation through the purchase and installation of unit ventilators and associated controls for the Merrimack School District and further to raise and appropriate the sum of Ninety-Eight Thousand Five Hundred Fifty-Six Dollars (\$98,556) for the first year’s payment for that purpose. This lease agreement contains an “escape” clause.

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

- Article #6: Shall the District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special Warrant Articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the Warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purpose set for therein, totaling \$81,875,163. (Should this Article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$81,918,937 which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by the previous action of the District or by law, or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.)

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

8. Second Reading of Suicide Prevention and Response Policy (JLDBB)

Chair Guagliumi commented the item would be placed on the next meeting’s Consent Agenda.

9. Approval of Meeting Minutes

- January 12, 2021

Board Member Hardy moved (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to approve the minutes of the January 12, 2021 meeting as presented.

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

- January 14, 2021

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Hardy) to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2021 meeting as presented.

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

10. Other

- a. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi commented that the Board had received numerous emails in support and in opposition of the proposed return to school plan.

Board Member Hardy shared that she received an email from a parent requesting end-of-year dates such as graduation. Superintendent McLaughlin replied they had not yet determined the end-of-year dates. He said they would likely begin to talk about it in early March.

- b. Comments

There were no comments to report.

11. New Business

Chair Guagliumi commented at the last School Board meeting she had pulled the item entitled “Memorandum of Agreement” and wanted the public to know that the Board was taking it under advisement.

12. Committee Reports

Board Member Schneider commented there were two Budget Committee meetings where they went through all of the departments and overall he had not heard of any changes. He said the following evening the Budget Committee would review the Board’s votes on the Warrant Articles. He added there would be a public hearing regarding the budget on February 9, 2021.

Vice Chair Barnes commented that the Parks & Recreation Committee met on January 20th and the ice rink was open at Watson Park. She said the winter carnival was scheduled for February 20th and attendance would be limited due to social distancing and registration was required. She said they were also taking registrations for winter/spring/summer camps and they were hiring for open staff positions.

Vice Chair Barnes also commented the New Hampshire School Board's Association held their delegate assembly online and all resolutions were passed and at the end of the meeting the delegation requested the Executive Director to send a letter to Governor Sununu regarding the reprioritizing of vaccines for teachers.

Board Member Hardy said the CIT Committee had met where they discussed course proposals at the Merrimack High School and had a presentation from a middle school teacher regarding a software package called Pear Deck.

Board Member Rothhaus mentioned she had reached out to the Building and Planning Committee regarding the ventilation and they were in support of it.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

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

Ms. Laura Lacroix, 5 Whittier Road

I wanted to write regarding the return to 4.5 in-person days. I have two children who attend the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and I have been very impressed with everything the school and children have done to remain safe while they have been in the building. For me personally, I know my children need to be in school more and really have more time in person with their teachers and to be around children their own age and less time in front of Zoom. I fully support a return to school however the timing couldn't be more concerning. To bring kids back the week before vacation and then have them return right after vacation is really careless if that is what's decided unless canceling February vacation is on the table. We have the opportunity to go back which is amazing but the timing needs to be right. Waiting for a 10-day quarantine after February vacation and returning after that would be the responsible thing to do for our school staff and children.

I am hoping the Board proposes a return to school after February vacation when the proper quarantine has been completed.

Ms. Kristin Tevepaugh, 2 Grouse Lane

I would like to express my opinion regarding a change in scheduling for fully remote students. As a parent and an educator, I made the choice to have my high school children be fully remote. This choice was not made lightly, as I have a current senior and a child with specialized needs. I made the choice for consistency in scheduling for my children during a time when consistency is so hard to come by as well as the inability of any school to ensure 100 percent mitigation, no matter how hard people may work to make it safe.

My senior was not given the opportunity to take her AP (Advanced Placement) classes or her honors classes, as they were not being offered to fully remote students. This was part of the sacrifice my child made in order to be a fully remote student.

Now, 5 months into the school year the proposal is to have remote students shift to 4 full days of computer time. This is not what will benefit my children and it will throw a wrench into a schedule that has been working for 5 months.

My children's teachers and providers have been fabulous, and the smaller class sizes have been more than beneficial and have kept learning rigorous.

I understand the time and effort the administration has put forward since the start of the pandemic and I am extremely grateful. I would merely like the board to consider not having fully remote students be in Zoom calls 7 hours a day for 4 days. (I will not get into the literature on what The Academy of Pediatrics recommends) Little focus is being given to those students that have been remote since the onset and how these proposals will cause an upheaval in their schedule.

Ms. Jen McInnis, 8 Evergreen Drive

Hearing the findings of the survey, I wish to highlight that there is no way to know from that who would prefer hybrid over face to face. I for one put both my kids in full time in school but would prefer hybrid until daily cases in southern New Hampshire lowers.

Just looking to highlight that the survey does not capture those of us who are ok with hybrid.

Ms. Kelli Wright, Turkey Hill Road

Students should return back to school full-time. School Districts across the state and bordering Merrimack have been full-time since September with no issues or increased COVID concerns. Our children are suffering and not getting a quality education. They deserve better than what remote is providing and so do the parents. We need to work to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads. We can't be doing both our jobs and the schools.

I posted this on Facebook after getting an amazing message from my son's teacher literally the week hybrid started up! Please know it is long....but give you a glimpse into our struggle and what my kid's ages 6, 7, and 17 need!!!

Some children and families can thrive on remote learning and homeschooling. I'm beyond happy for you and wish you nothing but champagne wishes and caviar dreams, always have and always will, but like others, WE ARE NOT THAT FAMILY. Remote brings tears, bad behaviors, stress, anxiety, screaming, disappointment, confusion, lack of patience, the "I just don't care and I give up attitude" for everyone in our house. The kids "hate school" and don't want to learn. I become the worst possible me in every situation and I hate myself for it. I try to be better...the kids try...but for us...it's not the right choice.

In Decker's words "remote is crap mama!"

In AJ's words "I can't concentrate, get anything done and I just lose all desire to want or care anymore! I don't even want to go to college now"

Rushton just screams, cries, and says he doesn't want to anymore.

And then we have today. Today the kids went back to hybrid. I gave them fresh haircuts, they put on nice clothes, they had their backpacks at the ready and went off to finally see their teachers and some classmates they haven't seen in months.

I got work done...without yelling...without stress without having to stay up until 2:00 a.m. and back up at 6:00 – 7:00 a.m. to work again. I was focused. I might actually sleep tonight!! I was able to have a conference call with AJ's counselor and set up assistance for him going forward. Uninterrupted by screaming, crying, or a computer slamming.

And when they all got home I was able to put my time and attention into them, listen to their day, hug them and hear them say " I missed you mom, but I had a great day! Look at what we did in school."

I haven't heard those words in forever. I hate you; you're mean, sure, I hear those words often lately but "I missed you but I had a great day!, nope. Best words and best feeling.

AJ told me yeah he hates getting up early but he really needed and missed being in school. He actually felt good and confident trying to learn new topics. His OCD, Anxiety and ADD...all in check today.

And then this.....I got this email from Decker's teacher. Decker has been a challenging kid, especially with remote. He's stubborn, too smart for his own good, and a few other choice wordsbut he went back and gave his teacher his best! He was respectful and focused. Behaviors we have not seen in ...well I can't remember when really.

Not all days will be like this in school. I get it...but they wanted to learn and go back. They missed it. I missed it. Today was a win. All families need a win when it comes to their kid's education.

They are excited for tomorrow. I'm excited for tomorrow and we haven't felt like that in a long time.

I know others celebrated today with the hope of a better tomorrow on a different level, but today, today I celebrate this little piece of hope for my children's future.

Please understand our community needs school back!

Mr. Wolfram von Schoen, 4 Conservation Drive

As for K-4, I dearly hope that there will be no longer any discrimination of remote students by cutting them out of any courses that are being offered to on-premise students.

The 46% of high school courses remote students are currently being deprived of are an outrage that we should not allow to be repeated. I urge the Board to ensure if this.

We should also avoid splitting the schedules and resources between remote and on-premise as we did in the fall, avoiding the additional needs for staff resources that ended up causing the District to go fully remote in November 2020.

Mr. Wolfram von Schoen, 4 Conservation Drive

The equity for remote families is a delusion!! This dedicated staff member for remote learning the Superintendent speaks of is absolutely without any impact and of no value that we can see! Doesn't matter if we are the only District in the state throwing money at the problem!

I and my wife have shown the School District since spring 2020 how dysfunctional the online learning platforms are, how grading is being neglected and delayed, how students and parents are flying blind until after the grading period ended and it's too late for the student to fix anything, platforms are being used in random ways with no visibility nor standards, assignments are inaccessible for students, the migration to Canvas was and is haphazardly done to the point

that teachers are lamenting to parents that they are without guidance, 46% of high school classes offered to hybrid students were denied to remote students, most of which college prep, honors, and AP classes! It is disastrous! Calling this an outstanding support and performance is not recognizing any facts whatsoever!

At approximately 9:50 p.m. Board Member Rothhaus moved (seconded by Vice Chair Barnes) to adjourn.

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