

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
September 7, 2021**

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Barnes, Board Member Hardy, and Board Member Peters. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Yarlott, Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen, and Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. RECOGNITIONS

- a. Ryan Carlson's Eagle Scout Project

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott recognized Eagle Scout Ryan Carlson and noted the project Ryan spearheaded surrounding replacing cabinets and countertops in the teacher's lounge at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School.

- b. Louis Normandin's Years of Service

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell recognized Mr. Louis Normandin's 30th year anniversary as a maintenance mechanic and shared that he would be retiring from the Merrimack School District. On behalf of the entire District, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell wished Mr. Normandin well.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Natalie Reyes-Silverman, London Court, addressed the Board and stated this was her second pandemic and she was never forced to be vaccinated, wear a mask, or not be able to attend school full-time. She noted that her public comment at the August 23 meeting was not accurate and asked that it be changed. (Recorder's Notation: Natalie Reyes-Silverman's statements at the August 23, 2021 school board meeting were verified and stand as is based on a review of the video recording of the meeting.)

Ms. Sarah Lach, 51 Cota Road, addressed the Board and said she felt if there was an "opt-out" for the use of masks then it was not a mandate.

State Representative Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive, addressed the Board and said positive COVID cases were rising. She said she felt it was important to mandate masks in schools or they would be moving backward.

Mr. Bill Pflingston, 17 Jessica Drive, addressed the Board and said he did not feel there was evidence to warrant a mask mandate.

Ms. Heather Robitalle, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and said she felt once there was an opt-out for the use of masks the efficacy went down. She added COVID had long-term effects for some people.

Ms. Heather Callahan, 5 King Henry Court, addressed the Board and stated the World Health Organization advised against the use of masks for children aged 5 and under and did not recommend the use of masks for children under 12 and still wanted her child to receive the education which he was entitled to.

Ms. Tiffany Castellucci-Trant, 419 South Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said she was not in favor of the mask mandate. She said she felt the mask mandate violated the parents' rights to raise their children as they saw fit.

Ms. Jennifer Greenwood, Dahl Road, addressed the Board and stated she felt parents should decide whether or not their child needed to wear a mask.

Ms. Alyssa Smokler, Beacon Drive, addressed the Board and stated she was not in favor of the students wearing masks.

Ms. Erin Alukonis, 6 Mulikin Road, addressed the Board and said she agreed with the policy the Board had put in place regarding masks. She said she felt the use of masks should be the parent's decision.

Ms. Erin Pagan, 33 Mallard Point, addressed the Board and stated she felt the use of masks should be up to the parents.

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board as the Chairman of the School District Budget Committee and said he was hoping they could begin a discussion about what the common interests were amongst the School Board and the administration relative to educational initiatives and how the Budget Committee could help support those goals.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATE

a. Superintendent Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said professional development had begun the previous week and was looking forward to a successful beginning to the school year. He said some professional development topics included using Canvas as the student-learning management system, and Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL). He added there were approximately fifteen different sessions offered during three separate time periods.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen added Dr. Robert Brooks, a nationally renowned author and speaker spoke with staff about resilience and motivation, and Dr. Allison Roy discussed the impact of stress and anxiety in the development of children and adults.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen asked for the community's support in keeping the kids in school and unless it was for religious reasons, to consider getting the vaccine as it was one of the mitigating strategies. He said the District website has COVID data that contains information regarding the positivity rate.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the administration was in the process of rewriting the guidance regarding quarantining and isolation in a user-friendly document and would be posted on the District's website the following day.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that beginning that week people who had given many years of dedicated service to the School District (20, 25, 30, 35, & 40 years) would receive a thank you card and a pin indicating their years of service from the Merrimack School District.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen also wished those who celebrated Rosh Hashanah a good year.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott said “Handwriting without Tear” was a program that was new to the pre-school and teachers had received training regarding it. She said there was also a cohort of kindergarten teachers who would also be piloting the program in the coming years.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated, in response to a previous public comment, that the previous April a \$4 million lease/purchase was approved for a unit ventilation upgrade in the schools. He said the contract was signed, the order was placed, and the work would be forthcoming.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the bleachers at the Smith Gymnasium, and the James Masticola Upper Elementary School APR were complete. He said the new floor including striping was also complete and noted all of the projects were paid for by the Trustees of Trust Funds and cost approximately \$350,000.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained they had gone through every single fountain and performed testing for lead in the water and would have a full report that would be posted on the website the following week.

c. School Board Update

Chair Guagliumi noted the Merrimack Teachers Association (MTA) contract and the Advise and Confer were up for negotiations in the current year.

Chair Guagliumi requested a meeting between the School Board, Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen, and administration to discuss areas of focus and goals.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented he felt it was important to include the teachers and the community in that discussion.

c. Student Representative Update

Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative said she was currently a high school junior at Merrimack High School and looked forward to being the Student Representative.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Rescind Motion from August 23, 2021, Meeting

Chair Guagliumi commented that both motions from the last meeting had considerable overlap and she was advised to add the item to the agenda so the first motion could be rescinded. She said the current protocol regarding the Task Force recommendations regarding masking was in effect from September 1st through September 30th. She added the intention was that it would be reviewed on a monthly basis and adapted as necessary.

Chair Guagliumi read aloud the following regarding the use of masks as summarized below:

On August 23rd the School Board approved the District's Task Force recommendation regarding mask wearing with the exception that parents could opt-out of mask wearing for their children while they were in class. During the timeframe of September 1st through September 30th the first 16 days of school masks are to be worn by students, staff, visitors, and volunteers within the school buildings. Given this directive by the Board, it is a joint request of the District's Chief Educational Officer, Bill Olsen, and herself, as the School Board Chair, that those seated at the table model the current masking protocol while at Town Hall and also as the requirements changed from month to month. She said masks were available to everyone who wished to wear one.

As a reminder Chair Guagliumi stated there were two motions made at the August 23, 2021, meeting that overlapped. She said Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen suggested that the first motion be rescinded.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the first motion was regarding the general option to opt-out of wearing a mask which passed by a 3 to 1 vote. He said Chair Guagliumi was not able to participate due to technical issues. Further, he said after the re-establishment of the telephone connection another motion was made which allowed students to opt-out while in the classroom only.

Vice Chair Rothhaus said she did not feel there was enough information regarding which motion was to be rescinded and would have liked to have had that information prior to the meeting.

Board Member Barnes suggested both of the motions should be rescinded and then take another vote that more accurately reflected the Board's intent. She also suggested that the motion be tabled.

Board Member Hardy said she felt it was important to have a policy in place prior to the students starting school and there was no time to table the discussion.

Board Member Peters said she did not feel the first motion had to be rescinded just because they added language in the second motion. She added the policy had been published based on the second vote.

Chair Guagliumi provided the Board with a copy of a revised "Use of Masks by Students and Staff Policy." She said the policy was for the Board to review prior to the next meeting. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the proposed policy was vetted by legal counsel and was in line with the second motion passed two weeks prior.

Vice Chair Rothhaus commented that moving forward she felt they need to find out how many student athletes were vaccinated and what the NHIAA's position was. Chair Guagliumi instructed Board Members to reach out to her and Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen with suggestions.

Board Member Hardy confirmed that the second mask policy voted upon two weeks prior was the policy passed out to the Board minus the indoor sports topic. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that was correct.

Chair Guagliumi said the policy would be on the agenda at the next School Board meeting and noted they had the ability to waive the two-week rule in an emergency situation.

b. Health and Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated he would provide the Board with updated data every day or every other day from the Town's Health Director, Erin Olson, and pointed out the information was updated on a daily basis and was available on the District's website. He said he would also include the opt-out numbers by school which would also be updated daily.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Student Enrollment Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he was particularly pleased with the number of enrollments at the elementary level. He expressed his thanks to the Board for approving an additional hire at the James Masticola Upper Elementary School as it reduced the class sizes.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would continue to provide the Board with monthly enrollment reports. He added he would be speaking with Mr. Tim Thompson who was the Director of Community Development to review the residential development in the Town of Merrimack; noting they should keep an eye on the development in the Town up to three years out. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said for every \$1.00 contributed to the tax base there was approximately \$1.30 to \$1.45 in expenses created by residential development.

Vice Chair Rothhaus commented she appreciated the reduction in class size but also felt it was important to retain the wonderful teachers they had. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he was absolutely in agreement with that and was something that manifested through the collective bargaining process in terms of their ability to attract, recruit, and retain high-quality teachers.

b. Consideration for the Board to Accept Emails from the Public

Board Member Barnes said she felt public comments should be accepted via email beginning immediately.

c. Review of September 2, 2021, Professional Development Program

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott noted they had two keynote speakers, Dr. Robert Brooks, and Dr. Allison Roy, addressed the staff via Zoom and the staff was able to interact with both of them. She said they also reviewed Canvas and thanked Ms. Nancy Rose, Director of Technology and Library Media Services for her assistance in rolling it out. She also said there were speakers who discussed the Universal Design for Learning Program (UDL) as well as speakers who addressed the social and emotional component.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott stated the other priority addressed during the professional development sessions was the ELC (Essential Learning Competency's) in grades pre-K through grade 12.

7. APPROVAL REQUESTS

a. August 23, 2021 Minutes

Edits:

Page 1, line #8 – Board Member Hardy and Board Member Peters were added to those who were present. – Board Member Barnes

Page 6, line #245 – “Board Member Barnes suggested that the School Board could initiate a policy mandating masks but the like many other policies, parents could sign a document for their child to opt-out.” was changed to “Board Member Barnes suggested that the School Board could initiate a policy mandating masks similar to another policy about objectional content that parents could sign a document for their child to opt-out.” – Board Member Barnes

Page 9, line #407 was changed to: “Board Member Barnes reminded everyone, in response to earlier public comment that there were water filtration systems in every school in the District and the water was PFOA free. – Board Member Barnes

Page 9, line #412 was changed to: “Mr. Brian Trant, 419 South Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said he thought the motion made by the Board was that masks were optional in hallways.” – Board Member Barnes

Chair Guagliumi stated Ms. Natalie Reyes-Silverman had said that she did not feel her public comment was properly reflected.

Page 2, line #98 – “Ms. Kathy (inaudible)” was changed to “Ms. Kathy Komar” – Chair Guagliumi

Page 9, line #437 – “Mr. Finlay Rotthaus” was changed to “Mr. Finlay Rothhaus” – Vice Chair Rothhaus”

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 23, 2021, as amended. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

b. August 26, 2021, Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the non-public minutes from the August 26, 2021, meeting. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Board Member Peters)

c. June 2, 2021, Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the non-public minutes from the June 2, 2021, meeting. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

d. June 9, 2021, Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Peters made a motion to approve the non-public minutes from the June 9, 2021, meeting. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

e. Educator/Administrator Nominations

- Ms. Brielle Lapiana, School Counselor, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Sarah Leland, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Amanda Belliveau, Grade 6 Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Melissa Gagne, Director of Human Resources, Districtwide

f. Approval of the Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy and Grievance Process

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the educator/administrator nominations and the Approval of the Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy and Grievance Process as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

8. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were no reports to share.

b. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi said the entire school board received twelve emails regarding support of students wearing masks in school, concern for health, and support for Mr. Olsen's back to school plan. The school board received 5 additional emails regarding no masks, mask opt-out option and optional masks.

Chair Guagliumi reported that she received 3 emails in support of masks and three emails expressing concern over the agenda item that referred to the rescinding of the mask motion.

Chair Guagliumi said she received correspondence containing specific situations relating to their children. One email was referred to Merrimack High School Principal Stephen Clair. She referred another email from a parent expressing frustration with the support for her children and lack of remote learning options to the appropriate building administrators.

Chair Guagliumi said one email sent to public comment was addressed by Board Member Barnes.

Board Member Peters commented she received an email from a parent who was concerned about the \$10.00 technology fee for the 1:1 computers. She said she referred the parent to Ms. Nancy Rose and said the Board would take the matter under advisement during their budget discussions.

c. Comments

Board Member Barnes commented the memorandum dated September 3rd included in the Board's package stated: "I believe we should require students who have opted out to wear a mask at all times in our schools indoors if they have been identified as a close contact of a family member in the home who has tested positive for COVID-19. It is my recommendation that also applies to a student who has been identified as a close contact with someone in the community who has tested positive." She asked why those students were not being asked to quarantine and also stated she felt it was very important to vet that issue. Chair Guagliumi said she would make sure the discussion was added to the next meeting's agenda.

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following people made comments:

Ms. Heather Robitalle, 45 Springfield Circle thanked the Board for all of their hard work, particularly regarding social and emotional learning.

Ms. Rosemary Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive said the CDC still recommended a 14-day quarantine for an unvaccinated person who had COVID-19 exposure.

Ms. Heather Callahan, 5 King Henry Court commented the World Health Organization stated that children under the age of 6 should be within sight of a parent or guardian if they were required to wear a mask. She also said that she liked the idea of the District sending out surveys.

Ms. Ashley Tenhave, 75 Shelbourne Road, addressed the Board and said she felt it was dangerous not to require a mask while in school.

Ms. Tiffany Castellucci-Trant, 419 South Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said she was not in favor of the mask mandate and was disappointed with the Board's decision regarding the use of masks.

Mr. Bill Pfingston, 17 Jessica Drive, addressed the Board and said he did not feel anyone should be allowed to take pictures during the meetings.

Ms. Alyssa (not provided), a resident, said she registered her child for school and she was not asked whether or not she wanted to opt-out of the mask policy. Chair Guagliumi said the opt-out option was available on the District's website.

Mr. von Schoen 4 Conservation Drive, addressed the Board and suggested the Board focus more on clarity in education and how learning platforms were introduced. He added that he felt there should be more simplicity in sending out assignments as well as updating the grades.

10. Adjournment

MOTION: At approximately 9:20 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to adjourn. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.