

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Merrimack School District, SAU #26  
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room  
November 1, 2021**

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**5:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) (I)**

1. Consultation with recruiter regarding applicant qualifications and compensation

**Present:** Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Hardy, Board Member Peters, and Board Member Barnes. 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.

Chair Guagliumi pointed out that the School Board would accept public comment via email and to do that members of the public could send emails to [publiccomment@sau26.org](mailto:publiccomment@sau26.org).

**2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive, (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record). I am in support of a strong public education system that benefits all kids. I want to thank the school board for all their time and care they have put into this school year. I would also like to thank administration for working tirelessly to ensure all students in Merrimack receive a quality education. You are all appreciated.

I have two daughters who attend Mastricola Elementary School and they have had a great start to the school year which is credit to Michelle Romein who works nonstop to ensure all students receive a quality education in a positive and caring environment. I would like to thank every single staff member and therapist at Mastricola, and every school, who show up every day excited to teach their students. Mastricola has managed to keep parent involvement even in a covid year having popsicles on the playground during open house and a Halloween parade outdoors that all parents could attend.

I want to thank the district for the focus on literacy and handwriting as a way to address learning loss from a pandemic and strengthen skills for all kids. I appreciate that Merrimack is moving towards using a handwriting curriculum. The program "Handwriting without Tears" is being piloted in all elementary schools in select Kindergarten classes. My kindergartener at Mastricola Elementary School has benefited greatly from the program and her teacher's purposeful instruction. Having a consistent handwriting program, like Handwriting Without Tears, will benefit all kids and decrease referrals to special education for occupational therapy, especially after so many kids spent a year on devices.

I am pleased that Mastricola Elementary School has an existing phonics and phonemic awareness program and fluency program in place K-4 and structured literacy interventions for those who need extra support. I am hopeful that the district will follow Mastricola's lead in adopting a district-wide structured literacy program so all students can learn to read.

In NH in 2019 38% of 4th graders were at or above the NAEP Proficient levels. (source [nces.ed.gov](https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/) nations report card). I'll repeat that so you can hear it again in 2019 only 38% of 4th graders in NH could read proficiently. Merrimack's shift to having structured literacy in all elementary schools, and not just Mastricola, will benefit all kids by increasing math scores in middle school, decreasing the dropout rate in high school and enabling our children to be successful and productive members of society.

I am in support of a strong public education system that benefits all kids. I want to give a HUGE Thank you to the teachers and therapists for all you do every day.

Ken Martin, Woodward Road, thanked the budget committee for going through tedious budget process. He asked that priority be given to academic recovery programs and advance student learning to make up for lost time during the last year and half. He stated that test score for math, reading and writing have decreased. This is a perfect time to reevaluate various program that will help increase test scores up.

Heather Callahan, 5 King Henry Court, noted that parents believe that mandating wearing of masks interferes with the parents' right to make medical decisions for their children. She asked the board to take a stand now to defend medical freedom and the parents' right to choose.

Robert Reisman, Iris Drive, thanked teachers, staff, and the School Board for all they do. He stated his child is having a great experience this year. He supports the literacy program structure. He expressed his excitement over the partnership between the Merrimack School District and Greater Nashua Mental Health.

Cheryl Kurdec, 11 Roberta Drive, spoke in support of recording daily classroom instruction for the benefit of students having to quarantine due to COVID.

Rachel Paepke, 67 Tinker Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record). I first want to extend a huge thank you to all of our teachers, educators, support staff and administration teams. I have a handful of examples where teachers and other staff members both at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and James Mastricola Upper Elementary School took an few extra minutes of their day to connect with not only my children but me, to ensure the needs of my children were being met from an emotional wellness standpoint and academic standpoint. It was amazing to see such a positive impact that each of those connections had on my children. Emotional wellness is an important factor for any child to be in the right state of mind to be able to progress and learn. To that point, I really appreciated the work that Fern Seiden and Heather Barker did to present what a partnership with the Greater Nashua Mental Health would look like. I think this would have a positive impact for students within the Merrimack School District to have access to resources that the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center provides within school communities.

I would also like to show my support for the teaching staff by asking that the School Board put emphasis to the Budget Committee on the importance of sufficient funding for all teacher positions as supported by the Merrimack Teacher Association (MTA). Since the Merrimack Teachers Association Master Agreement with the School Board expires in July 2022, it should be one of the top priorities of the School Board to ensure that the next agreement remains competitive in all areas of the MTA Master Agreement. This will not only ensure the Merrimack School District retains our highly qualified teachers but will also attract top educators to bolster instruction throughout our district as vacancies exist.

### **3. RECOGNITIONS**

There were no recognitions to report.

### **4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES**

#### **a. Superintendent Update**

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported that he and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott continue to attend school staff meetings to listen to staff input.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen attended a celebration at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School where employees were presented with recognition pins for 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 years of service.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked the high school administration, staff, and students for a successful Homecoming Dance at Merrimack High School. He noted over 400 students participated.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen informed the Board of his campaign to conserve energy in all buildings.

#### **b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update**

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott expects to focus on curriculum instruction assessment that address individual student needs and curriculum. Work on the Health Curriculum and the World Language Curriculum have resumed. All elementary schools are working on the Essential Learning Competencies (ELC). The ELCs will drive instruction and assessment. All elementary schools will use the same English and Language Arts (ELA) instruction and programs. All curriculum revisions will progress towards the vision of a graduate. The assessment calendar is posted on the district's website for public access.

Board Member Hardy expressed her gratitude for the alignment of the ELA curriculum between all elementary schools. She is grateful and supportive of the portrait for a graduate.

Board Member Rothhaus asked if the portrait of a graduate is the survey freshman take relative to career goals when they leave high school?

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott clarified the portrait for a graduate is unrelated to the freshmen career goals survey. She added that the high school has been working on the portrait for a graduate over the last year and a half as part of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) review. The portrait of a graduate is being looked at in grades PreK through 12. The portrait for a graduate is expected to come before the School Board in December.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that work on the portrait for a graduate began prior to the COVID pandemic, was put on hold during the COVID pandemic and now the work resumes.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell highlighted the sidewalk construction on Woodbury Street. He reported the round-a-bout at the intersection of Baboosic Lake Road and Turkey Hill Road is complete. He felt a similar round-a-bout might be beneficial at the intersection of Old Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reported the LED (Light-emitting diode) lighting retrofit project has begun after a delay of materials. The lighting retrofit will save energy and allow teachers the ability to adjust the lighting in their classroom.

Chair Guagliumi stated conversations regarding how to approach the intersection of Old Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane took place several years ago. She asked if a modification to the intersection needed to go before the Planning Board.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell recalled attending a meeting a few years ago where he was informed that the plans were approved by the Planning Board several years ago and those plans were final and, if it does not work out well, then adjustments might be reconsidered. There are no plans currently to bring the Olde Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane intersection before the Planning Board.

Board Member Barnes clarified that the traffic engineering study report was not in favor of a stop sign at the intersection of Olde Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane. The local committee decided to go against the traffic engineering study's recommendations.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated a design was completed by Steve Keach that showed a round-a-bout at the intersection of Olde Blood Road and Madeline Bennett Lane. Which he believes was approved by the Highway Safety Committee. Something changed. A design by Ken Clinton of Meridian Construction was implemented.

d. School Board Update

Chair Guagliumi reported the School Board has a tentative schedule for the Superintendent search. The final schedule will be posted on the District's website.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Vadney congratulated the Juniors and Seniors who were accepted into National Honor Society this week. The Class of 2023 is having a Texas Roadhouse Rolls Fundraiser to raise funds for the upper classman's prom to be held in the spring. Orders can be placed using the QR code on paper flyers or by accessing a link on the Merrimack Class of 2023 Facebook page. Orders must be placed by Sunday. Pick up will be at Merrimack High School the Monday and Tuesday before Thanksgiving.

**5. OLD BUSINESS**

a. Health & Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported the current data from the Department of Health and Human Services indicated that Merrimack was still a community of substantial transmission,

314 cases per 100K population over a 14-day period. The statewide antigen and PCR positivity rate over 7 days is 4.3%.

b. School Board's 2022-2023 Budget Message to Administration

Chair Guagliumi announced this agenda item would be deferred to the November 15, 2021 school board meeting.

c. Early Release Days in January and March

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported that both the Merrimack Teachers Association (MTA) and the Merrimack Educational Support Staff Association (MESS) agreed with the early release days on January 14, 2022 and March 25, 2022.

Board Member Barnes suggested using the Election day in April to schedule both trainings.

Interim Chief Educational officer Olsen explained using the Election day in April as a training day would extend the last day of school by one day. The two early release days do not impact the last day of school.

**MOTION:** Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve early release days on January 14, 2022 and March 25, 2022. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.**

**6. NEW BUSINESS**

a. Year End Budget Review for 2020-2021

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reported a surplus of \$8,163,070 for the year-end 2020-2021. He noted a higher than normal surplus was the trend throughout the statewide. A large portion of the surplus was a result of not being able to hire professional staff during the COVID pandemic. He also noted that the 2020-2021 budget included a 9.3% increase (the guaranteed maximum rate) for health insurance premiums. The actual rate for health insurance premiums was 5.2%. Other contributing factors for the large surplus include less costs for FICA, NH retirement, Medicare, trash removal, fewer lunches, out of district placements were not available to students, contracted services, professional development, equipment repairs and transportation.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell is not expecting another large surplus for year-end 2021-2022. He noted that the large surplus will not be used as a baseline for the 2022-2023 budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell also reported that approximately \$150,000 was transferred from the general fund to the food service account. He explained the Federal Government's reimbursement of \$3.53 per free lunch was not enough to cover the cost of lunch expenses.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that it would be helpful if the District could retain a percentage of the surplus to use to offset lean budgets in the future.

Board Member Barnes noted if the District did retain the year-end surplus the School Board, unlike the Town, would not be agents to expend the funds.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell clarified that the Commissioner of Education would have the authorization to allow spending of the surplus funds.

Board Member Barnes added there are limited and specific things that the School Board can petition the Commissioner of Education to authorize spending of surplus funds.

Chair Guagliumi suggested Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell's budget video from last year be rebroadcast.

b. Budget Preparation Meeting Dates

Interim Chief Educational Office Olsen announced the School Board budget meeting dates and the Budget Committee budget meeting dates.

c. 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) Results

Chair Guagliumi introduced the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Interim Chief Educational Officers Olsen reported the Youth Risk Behavior Survey is coordinated through a partnership between the New Hampshire Department of Education and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. The survey is generally administered to high school students in the spring (every 2 years). The results are anonymous. He noted 951 (79%) of Merrimack High School students participated in the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey assesses student behavior in the following areas: Drug use; alcohol use; sexual and dating violence; sexual risk; suicide; sadness and helplessness; tobacco use; vehicle and bicycle safety; physical inactivity and unhealthy dietary behavior; bullying, electronic bullying and fighting and other health risks.

Chair Guagliumi noted that the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results can be found on the District's Web page [www.sau26.org](http://www.sau26.org).

Vice Chair Rothhaus asked if a guidance counselor is available on demand for students in crisis at the middle and high schools. She stressed the importance of someone checking in with students who need that type of support.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott reported the District has a suicide protocol currently in place.

Board Member Barnes clarified that the results of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey have been reviewed by the School Board every two years with the exception 2020 due to the COVID pandemic.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey was not administered in March of 2021 due to the COVID pandemic. It is expected that the next Youth Risk Behavior Survey will take place in the spring of 2022. The results of the 2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey will be made available in 2023.

Board Member Barnes noted the District has made consistent progress in the area of support since the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey was administered and will continue support progress while waiting for the results of the 2022 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Board Member Peters expressed concern that the results of the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey could be very different post COVID Pandemic. She asked if it was possible to get a pulse on the status of the student population relative to suicide, sadness and helplessness.

Interim Chief Educational Officers Olsen responded the topic of suicide, sadness and helplessness would be discussed at the Leadership Team meeting this week. He will provide the school board with an antidotal update with regards to current suicide, sadness, and helplessness.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott stated that it is often the teachers that refer students to counselors, maintaining confidentiality.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott reported that she and Director of Student Services Barker and Director of Student Wellness Seiden attended a two-day Social Emotional Learning (SEL) conference.

Board Member Peters felt the Behavioral Warning Sign document should be given to all teachers.

Board Member Hardy expressed her desire to accelerate the progress relative to supporting the Social Emotional Learning needs of students.

Interim Chief Educational Officers Olsen stated the reason for the January 14 early release day was to provide staff with 2 hours of suicide prevention training.

Student Representative Vadney agreed with comments from all board members. She said teachers are trying to make sure students are ok and keeping up. It would be best for students if there were a way that more teachers could check in with them. Many students do struggle with stress, anxiety and other mental health issues that seriously impact their school work and how they act in a school setting. She explained last year one of her teachers took 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the class to ask students how they were doing. This time was very valuable to the class. She felt this practice would be beneficial to other students districtwide.

d. Other

There were no other agenda items.

## **7. APPROVAL of MINUTES**

1. October 18, 2021 Minutes

Chair Guagliumi stated the approval of the minutes would be deferred to the November 15, 2021 meeting.

## 8. OTHER

### a. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Rothhaus reported the Halloween event sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Department had been rescheduled to November 6 due to a forecast of rain.

Board Member Hardy attend a Curriculum Instruction Assessment (CIA) meeting. She noted there is a rubric and process for approval of new curriculum.

Board Member Barnes reported the New Hampshire School Boards Association (NHSBA) Board of Directors authorized the Executive Director to withdraw from the National School Boards (NSBA) due to operational concerns. She emphasized the NHSBA will advocate for schools without NSBA.

### b. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi reported that each Board member received the same two emails. One expressed concern for the validity of facts given by some members of the public during public comment. The other expressed thanks for taking input during these times, for withdrawing from the 2Revolutions contract and for keeping masks in place.

### c. Comments

There were no comments to report.

## 9. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Heather Robitaille, Springfield Circle, expressed her appreciation for the help given to students through difficult times. She is grateful for the Social and Emotion Learning interventions. She requested more information be made available to parents such as the recent Lynn Lyons presentation.

Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record). I don't know if the school board is aware but the masks that our children are being given from the schools if they forget their mask are made by Saint Gobain. Given their history do we want those particular masks on the faces of our children? Have they been tested for Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) before being given to our children?

Naomi Holter, 10 Everest Drive, expressed gratitude for recognizing teachers for years of service.

Sarah Locke, Cota Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record).

I want to start by again thanking our amazing teachers and administrators for showing up every day, chins up, smiles on and ready to do their best for our children.

I also want to voice my support for a task force to study the district's mental health wellness, and programming, to support our kids at both home and in school, and the impact on their



learning. From K-12, this will lead to a better understanding of our dropout rate, testing success, literacy rate and more.

Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, stated students should have the money for what they need in their educational environment. Funding sources come from residential, commercial, and industrial property taxes. He noted that commercial and industrial companies cannot vote on the budget, only the residential taxpayers are able to vote. The school district needs to fund education in a contemporary world in Merrimack.

Carol Kurdek, 11 Roberta Drive, noted guidance counselors are academic counselors. Each school should have a non-academic counselor to be able to talk with students.

## **10. ADJOURN TO NON PUBLIC SESSION**

**MOTION:** At 9:15 p.m. Board Member Hardy made a motion enter non-public session. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0 on a roll call vote.**

**MOTION:** At 10:03 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to adjourn the public meeting. Board Member Peters seconded the motion

**The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.**