

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
December 6, 2021**

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.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Naomi Holter, 10 Everest Drive, Vice Chair Rothhaus had mentioned having a group of parents to help provide input regarding the school's direction and she said she felt it was an awesome idea and would be pleased to help.

Elizabeth Schalk, 9 Cassie Lane (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Please consider removing the opt-out option for masking. Numbers are worse, cases are up. We need to go back to mandatory masking in our district. We have more cases and less students than surrounding towns.

According to WMUR the seven-day average of daily new cases has risen to 879, the highest it has been during the pandemic, 25.4% were in children under 18.

Merrimack currently has 175 active cases, 2850 total, and 25 new as of today.

We need to protect our staff and students.

Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

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 want to praise the accessible and inclusive playground plans for Thorntons Ferry Elementary School (TFS). The wheelchair picnic tables are at TFS and it's great to have this accessible and inclusive space for all kids available in our community.

I'm happy to see the sensory hallway created at James Masticola Elementary School (JMES) that is utilized by students who receive physical therapy services as well as students who need to regulate themselves before entering class.

I praise the district for the creation of the standards-based report card. Thank you for the focus on academics in spite of being in a pandemic.

I appreciate the sub pay being raised to \$100 but it is still less than surrounding districts. Most districts are paying \$115 to \$150 a day. Merrimack needs to pay a competitive substitute teacher rate to attract and retain substitutes.

As well, going into budget season, I hope Merrimack can offer a competitive rate to retain and recruit educators.

I was grateful the district could bring in Polly Bath to have an open Zoom meeting with parents in November. Polly Bath worked at the Merrimack School District and is now a nationally renowned speaker on student behavior. It was great having her present and answer parent questions on student behavior and executive functioning.

I am here for a strong public education system that benefits all kids.

Thank you to teachers, therapists, and paras for all you do every day.

Robbie Reisman, Iris Drive, addressed the Board and thanked the School District for setting up the vaccine clinic. He also said he was excited about the parents potentially having some input as to the path the district would take in the future. Additionally, Mr. Reisman said, regarding the upcoming teachers' contract, that he would like the district to be able to retain and obtain their top choices and hoped they could be competitive with surrounding towns.

Bryan Townsend, II, 5 Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

We want to thank you for taking a step in the right direction at last month's meeting in regard to the mask policy. We are writing to ask that it further be strengthened for the safety of our students and staff. Although thankfully, the numbers in our schools have been decreasing and no schools are currently under a mask mandate, we would like you to consider adding a 2-week mask mandate for individual classrooms with a cluster of COVID-19. New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS) defines a cluster as "3 or more individuals confirmed with COVID-19 who are part of a related group of individuals (e.g., classroom) who had the potential to transmit infection to each other through close contact."

Mr. Ken Martin, Woodward Road, addressed the Board and said just prior to the Thanksgiving break eighteen Merrimack High School were accepted to the Allstate Music Festival.

Nicole Arp, 329 Daniel Webster Highway (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

A quote from Governor Sununu from www.mychamplainvalley.com regarding mask policies:

"I'm a believer that whatever the schools decide if they're listening to parents, if they're getting the right input, they're not just defaulting to being as restrictive as we can be for the sake of being restrictive," said Governor Sununu. "But really looking at the dynamics of how to get the best education in the classroom, when we make sure schools have all of the flexibility to do that, we are very, very successful in this state."

After listening to, and participating in these School Board meetings, it has become increasingly clear that the School Board is not "listening to parents." There have been an overwhelming number of parents who want to decide for themselves if their children should wear a mask at school. And even though the opt out option is available; parents are still fighting for their right to choose because

of the School Board threatening to take it away and because the opt out is full of arbitrary rules that doesn't completely opt their child out of wearing a mask at school. Kids that are opted out are told to put on their mask to sing in music class and given a "special" mask that has a hole in it to wear while playing the recorder. They put their mask on to walk to the lunchroom but take it off to eat around everyone they just walked with to get there. All these exceptions and more are completely asinine. Also, on the mask opt out form, the School Board was determined to make sure they would not be held liable for any harm done to children due to the parent's decision to opt them out. However, they refuse to comment on their accountability and liability of any physical or mental harm due to forced mask use.

The School Board should be considering other potential health and developmental issues mask use may be causing. Wearing a mask does not stop a virus, however, it does harbor harmful bacteria, other viruses, and causes impaired cognition, prevents a child from distinguishing faces, and negatively affects their social emotional learning. In an article published on www.nbcboston.com, Governor Sununu stated, "It's important to be back in a normal atmosphere, so kids, especially young kids, can see their teacher's mouth, can interact in the right way, don't feel the restrictions or under any constraints of wearing a mask for eight hours a day." Forcing students and staff to wear a mask is hindering the children's learning environment. I'm already seeing my second grader struggle and it is very concerning to me.

The School Board is basing the mask policy on the number of Covid cases and recommendations from the CDC. But according to the "New Hampshire Covid-19 Response" website, not a single person under the age of 19 has died from Covid in our state. Also, the CDC and doctors can recommend all they want, but it is up to the individual to agree with or decline medical advice. How is this virus any different from the flu, common cold, strep, etc. circulating through the schools? Why are we still fighting about forcing mask use? It specifically says on a box of masks that they do not prevent the spread of Covid-19 or other viruses. Vaccinated and unvaccinated people are spreading and contracting the virus, but it is over 99% survivable regardless of age.

There is no one size fits all solution regarding mask use, and it is impossible for the School Board to decide what the best option is for each student and staff member. For the people that feel so strongly that every single student and staff member should be wearing a mask: how would you feel if your opinion didn't matter, and everyone was deciding that you can't wear a mask? It goes

both ways. Make mask use completely optional for students and staff. In doing so, it allows everyone their constitutional right to make medical decisions for themselves and eliminates the accountability of the School Board from causing any unnecessary mental or physical harm or harassment towards anyone due to forced mask use.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were none.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated there would be a vaccine clinic for students and staff of the School District on December 16th, and January 6th, from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Merrimack High School cafeteria where the Pfizer vaccine would be available for children ages 5 and up. He said the Pfizer booster vaccine would also be available to anyone over the age of 18

and have had a six-month time span since their second vaccination. He thanked Rite Aid for sponsoring the clinic and Melissa Fazlic, Director of Human Resources for coordinating the clinic.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the James Mastricola Elementary School was sponsoring a “Mighty Max Toy Drive” for Children’s Hospital through December 18th. He also said they held an Anti-Bullying Contest that was won by Norah Campbell in grade 6, and Macie Nguyen in grade 5.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that Cathy Goodman, a teacher at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School received an honor from the SEE Science Center. He read aloud the following:

We are happy to let you know that a grateful family in Merrimack has chosen to recognize Ms. Cathy Goodman as a teacher who has made an impact. Cathy is an amazing teacher who goes above and beyond every year and creates amazing relationships with not only her students but their families. She is extremely humble and will often let others take credit for her accomplishments and contributions to the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School community.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Merrimack Middle School’s Theatre Arts Group presented the “Legend of Sleepy Hollow” on November 19th and 20th.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the band & chorus Winter Concert would be held on December 15, 2021, with a snow date of December 16, 2021; the theatre play “Give and Take” would be presented on December 17, 2021, and Saturday, December 18, 2021. He said the high school students were also participating in the Annual Giving Tree to provide some Merrimack families with support for the upcoming holidays.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott said the Social Studies Committee, the Health Committee, and the World Language Revision Committees had opened back up and anticipated to share some updates with the Board in April, May, and June.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott commented that the high school was actively working on the NEASC (New England Association of Schools & Colleges) visit that would occur in April and would present “A Vision of a Graduate” through that work.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the Woodbury Street repaving and sidewalk project had been completed, the LED project was progressing quite nicely.

d. School Board Update

Chair Guagliumi commented that the Board was in possession of their budget books and said the budget process was beginning. She noted the budget meetings were available online.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Vadney thanked all of the National Honor Society students who helped with leaf raking. She said the National Honor Society also had an upcoming drive for the Webster House in Manchester, NH, which was a care facility for children who were unable to live with their parents. She said they would be doing toy donations for them for Christmas.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Health & Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he was pleased to say that the James Masticola Elementary School was back to the opt out masking policy because the positivity rate of COVID had fallen from 5% to 2.58%. He added the opt out masking policy was in place at all of the schools in the district.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the data for Merrimack from the state indicated there was an increase in COVID activity with the rate of new cases per 100,000 over the past 14 days was 1,134 which was about three times what it was about 2 ½ months prior. He said the antigen and PCR test positivity rate over a seven-day period was 18.2% up from 5% 2 ½ months prior.

b. Potential Enrollment Impact from Residential Development

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated the Merrimack Department of Community Development has issued a report the prior year that indicated there may be an additional 341 students as a result of new developments. He said there was no way of knowing the exact demographics of what the families would be, but a majority of them would likely have elementary-aged children. He said they would keep an eye on the grade distribution, the rate of occupancy, and economic conditions and would be in constant contact with the building principals.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would also look at the developments that could create a “secondary” enrollment impact was that empty nesters and/or aging residents would sometimes sell a larger home to move into a smaller residence and the larger home was sometimes occupied by a family with school-aged children.

Board Member Peters commented that Gilbert Crossing and Executive Park had been full for one year and asked if they could cross-check and get a baseline to see what they already had in the district. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied they would do that, and they would pay attention to the developments and occupancy as they moved forward.

Board Member Barnes commented that they had a Capital Improvements Plan presentation, but they did not have a CIP work session and vote. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the Board should have that discussion prior to Tom Touseau, Director of Maintenance appearing before the Board to discuss his budget.

Vice Chair Rothhaus asked if the Board could get the number of teachers in each school and a projection if it was felt they would need additional teachers in certain buildings based on what Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen presented pertaining to enrollment impact prior to the next meeting. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied in the affirmative.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Overview of Proposed 2022 – 2023 School District Budget

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the challenge in creating the budget every year was to understand the current academic, social & emotional developmental needs of the students but it was also to understand the needs of the staff.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said there were many elements the district looked at when developing a budget including not engaging in incremental budgeting. He said they looked for opportunities for savings in efficiencies in the delivery of instructional, support services, and in the conduct of operations and ancillary services. He also said they looked carefully at current student enrollments to be sure they could meet the capacity needs of enrollments in every school.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said another element was transportation to help the children get to and from school safely. He also said they wanted to commit to a robust curriculum and professional development, ensure adequate levels of technology were used, and provide the training to use that technology.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the schools in Merrimack were one of the cleanest, well-kept schools he had ever been in and attributed that to the ongoing maintenance of the buildings. He also said school security was very important.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said it was important to recognize the quality of their staff through appropriate collective bargaining but to also recognize their responsibility to taxpayers.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said monies had been incorporated for a Behavior

Specialist at the James Masticola Elementary School as it did not have one. He said they also budgeted money for enhanced programming for social & emotional well-being at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as monies for co-curricular activities at the middle school and the elementary level.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the proposed budget for the 2022 – 2023 school year was \$83,439,157 which was \$264,696 above the default budget.

Vice Chair Rothhaus commented that she was happy to hear that Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen gave teacher's a voice and was also happy to hear him address giving students opportunities to take advantage of different pathways such as the Career Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Board Member Peters commented that one of the things she wanted to look into was bridging the gap that COVID created. She said one of the best decisions made regarding that issue was the expansion of the summer program at all levels and felt it should be continued "long-haul."

b. Other

Vice Chair Rothhaus said she was hoping to discuss forming a parent group to work with them to engage the community and bring positive change to the schools. She added she hoped the Task Force could be goal-driven, and results-driven. She asked if the topic could be added to the next meeting's agenda.

Vice Chair Rothhaus also said she felt the Board needed to discuss directing the Superintendent to draft an administrator's evaluation that would be goal-oriented and results-driven.

Board Member Barnes asked if the district still had a District Parent Group that had been in place for decades. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would check on that.

Board Member Hardy commented that in light of the wave of school security issues, she would like to investigate using ALICE (Active Shooter Civilian Response Training) training to help keep students and staff safe in school. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the leadership team had already begun having that conversation and was planning on having a full-scale mock evacuation during the summer working with the fire and police departments.

Vice Chair Rothhaus commented that she felt the advertisements for "See Something" "Say Something" should be everywhere they could be so students knew how to report something.

Board Member Peters said she was very much in favor of the students and staff being trained using ALICE. She said there had been a huge increase nationwide of in-classroom incidents and she said she felt self-regulation was a big issue coming out of the pandemic.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott commented that part of the professional development was CPI (Crisis Prevention Intervention) and they were doing refresher courses surrounding it.

7. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

- a. Approval of November 15, 2021, Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the November 15, 2021, minutes. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

Edits:

Page 1 – "Board Member Peters was present for the non-public meeting" and should be reflected in a separate document but was "not present" for the public meeting. – Chair Guagliumi

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

- b. Approval of November 18, 2021, Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the November 18, 2021, minutes. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

Edits:

Page 1 – To include the time that Vice Chair Rothhaus arrived at the meeting. – Chair Guagliumi

Page 1, line 44 – "Lock" was changed to "Locke" – Chair Guagliumi

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Resignations

- Shawna D'Amour, Assistant Principal, Merrimack Middle School
- Luke Woods, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack High School

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

9. GIFTS AND GRANTS UNDER \$5,000

a. Delta Dental to Merrimack High School for \$250.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the above gift from Delta Dental was to be used by the Merrimack High School Math Team for supplies and/or refreshments for students during competition.

b. Elbit Systems of America to Merrimack High School for \$3,500

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the above gift from Elbit Systems of American was to be used by the Merrimack High School Robotics Team to help purchase the necessary supplies and materials for the upcoming competitions.

MOTION: Board Member Peters made a motion to accept the grants with the Board's sincere appreciation. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Barnes said she attended the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on November 17th where they discussed the budget presented to Town Council. She said there was a need for additional support staff.

Board Member Barnes commented that the Agricultural Commission had disbanded and with that, the Parks & Recreation Committee would absorb some of their functions; i.e., the community garden, and the farmer's market.

Board Member Hardy said she attended the Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology Integration Committee on November 18th, (virtually) where they saw a preview of "The Vision of a Graduate" that was being put together. She said they also adopted the online tool & resource evaluation rubric for any new tools coming forward in the future.

Board Member Peters said the Healthcare Cost & Containment Committee had met and they were still raffling gift cards (\$25.00 gift cards to Shaw's) to the teachers.

b. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi said any correspondence not addressed would be addressed at the next Board meeting.

c. Comments

There were no comments made.

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Pfingston, Jessica Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Since the summer weather is behind us I figured I would write some heartfelt wording to warm all of our souls.

This mask debate is tiring, and never ending. I have added my input, you know where I stand and my position hasn't changed, because they offer no protection.

I see that a "vaccine" time and place has been established. 1) Let's stop calling it a vaccine, if it truly was then cases and deaths would be down. Cases and deaths are not down so, therefore, it is not a vaccine, it is a source of income for those who are retiring off of it. 2) Efforts are best when the ROI can be seen, a wise choice would have been for the school system to invest in rapid tests for students who have the sniffles and sent home because of it.

Merrimack, come on, let's go...branding, people because of how they view these issues is not right. Let's look at the picture. The pandemic in 1918 was over in 1.5 years, why are we still playing this game, is it because once power is given it becomes addictive to those who have it?

12. NON-PUBLIC SESSION

MOTION: At approximately 8:21 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c). Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Board Member Barnes, Board Member Hardy, 5
Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Peters,
and Chair Guagliumi

Nay: 0

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

At 9:06 p.m. Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to adjourn the public meeting. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.