

**Merrimack School Board Meeting  
Merrimack School District, SAU #26  
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room  
January 11, 2022**

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**Present:** Chair Guagliumi, 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, and Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen.

**Not Present:** Vice Chair Rothhaus and Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative - Excused

**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**

Ms. Rebecca Statz, 11 Bradford Drive, addressed the Board and said she did not think the use of masks were working either way. She said she felt everyone on both sides of the mask issue deserved respect.

Ms. Lisa Mungovan, 14 Lamson Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

I see tonight that Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has now adopted the new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) quarantine guidance, to include schools as well. I hope that things will be addressed such as, these students must be masked (no opt-out for them) and that these students will be separated for lunch and snack when they unmask. I hope that this is addressed. I have one child attending preschool who still remains unvaccinated and vulnerable to the actions of others.

Ms. Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, addressed the Board and said she felt her freedoms were being taken away by the decision made for the no opt-out option. She said people had the right to wear masks and get vaccinated if they chose but also said her right not to wear a mask or not get vaccinated was her right.

Mr. Bryan Townsend, 5 Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

I want to thank you for amending the mask policy requiring masking in schools where over 5% of occupants are positive for Covid-19. Currently, 4 out of the 6 schools in Merrimack have surpassed that 5% threshold.

I am writing to ask you to keep the current policy, and add that the same 2-week masking mandate be imposed in individual classrooms where 5% of its occupants have tested positive.

I also ask that you not adopt the new CDC quarantine guidelines. With Covid-19 cases at an all-time high, it is not time to ease restriction. Thank you for considering the health and safety of our students and staff and your efforts in keeping school in person.

Ms. Sabrina Bebe, Wire Road, addressed the Board and said she felt the Merrimack School District needed to drop its mask policy. She said any parent that wanted to have their child vaccinated (5 years or older) had already done so.

Ms. Sheana DeBourke, Belmont Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

I am writing today to ask you to reconsider the previously implemented policy in which the opt-out for masks is removed when the school meets a 5% threshold. This is a completely arbitrary number rooted in absolutely no science. I understand the decision was made in an attempt to try and compromise with those who want masks mandatory and those who want the option. Those of us who want the option have already compromised when you made the decision to mandate the wearing of masks in hallways.

The spreadsheet for the tracking of schools' COVID data is extremely rudimentary, and is not clear about from where the data is coming. As noted last week during the School Board meeting, an error was made on the total occupants where the number increased by one every day, skewing the numbers. It is not clear on the Merrimack Middle School page how on January 3rd there are 13 new positive students, but on January 4<sup>th</sup>, the number of students positive is 12. Then on January 4<sup>th</sup> there are 3 new positive students. On January 5<sup>th</sup> there are 15 students positive, but with an additional 3 new positive students, I would think the number of students positive on January 6<sup>th</sup> would be 18, but it's listed as 17. Then 5 more new positive students on January 6<sup>th</sup>, but only 20 positive students were noted on January 7<sup>th</sup> on the spreadsheet.

How many clusters are there relating to schools? If you are going to remove the opt-out for masks, please base it off of something that at least makes some kind of sense.

It's time we stop making our children afraid that they are going to kill someone if they don't wear a mask. If someone is sick, they should stay home. If they are not sick, then there is no reason people should have to wait for a quarantine period or a negative test. If my child stays home from school because she has a stomachache one day, then feels better the next day, it is ludicrous for you to ask me to hunt around for a COVID test that may or may not be accurate, as the home tests have been known to give not only false negatives, but false positives. If a child feels well, he or she should be in school.

We also know full well that vaccines do not prevent the spread. So if vaccinated children can go to school after exposure to a household contact, then there is absolutely no reason that a non-vaccinated child has to stay home and quarantine. This guideline must change immediately. Please also note that the links on the school district nurses' page are also out of date as many of them did not work.

We are now almost 2 years into COVID, and the pandemic is over. This is an endemic disease now, and it should be treated like any other flu or cold. Stop the mental abuse of our children, forcing them to shoulder the burden of adult anxieties and fears.

### 3. NEW BUSINESS

#### a. Health and Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Health and Safety Task Force had met late the previous week after the New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services (NH DHHS) released its guidance regarding quarantine guidelines and recommended actions. He said the task force supported the NH DHHS revised guidelines. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said there was a recommended reduction in isolation and quarantine timeframe from ten days to five days. He said the new guidelines would require that the nurse from each school contact parents individually to clarify the date of return.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said they also recommended that there be a grace period for all children who were fully vaccinated; those who had two doses of the vaccine but not the booster. He suggested the grace period for those children to receive the booster be extended to approximately February 25, 2022.

Board Member Hardy clarified that if a child had Covid they would be home for five days, but if the child were then symptom-free, and had a negative test they still recommended the use of a mask for an additional five days.

Chair Guagliumi noted that she felt it was very important that the district did not create a database of who was masked and who was not and that it remained confidentially within the medical records. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied nothing would be done that would identify a child and it would all be kept confidential.

#### b. Capital Improvement Plan Discussion

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said he would like to pull the line item in the amount of \$300,000 for the Merrimack Middle School Phase II off of the CIP as more work needed to be done prior to giving the Board a number that would ensure the usability of the entire field including the lower softball field.

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to take the Merrimack Middle School field repair from fiscal year 2022 – 2023 to fiscal year 2023 – 2024. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

Board Member Barnes, referring to the O’Gara Drive and new sidewalk was listed for \$552,625 in the CIP. She asked how much it would cost to pave the parking lot (dirt lot). Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied it would be \$92,800 which would bring the total to \$645,425.

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to increase the O’Gara Drive/new sidewalk project to \$645,425. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to adopt the Capital Improvement Plan as amended. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

c. Approval of 2022 – 2023 School District Budget

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to add \$1,600,500 to the repair/maintenance account #100-4600-62-8451-08 to be used for roofing at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Board Member Barnes said the Maintenance Department had gone before the Board and said she felt the facilities would be at risk if the work was not done.

Chair Guagliumi said she agreed 100% because if it were to be in a Warrant Article then “no meant no” and they would not be able to find any money to do the repairs. She said she felt it should be added to the operating budget.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he had some concern with adding the amount to the operating budget in terms of having to cut monies elsewhere. He asked if there were any alternatives. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied if it went on a Warrant Article and the residents voted it down then “no meant no” and there would be no other way to use any funds with which to do the repairs. He also said if it were to become part of the operating budget it would be an issue because it would be so much over the default budget.

Chair Guagliumi asked if it was on a Warrant Article and it failed if they could appeal it. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied they would likely have to petition the Superior Court to have a special meeting.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen said if it was presented as a health and safety issue it could be a compelling case to stand alone on a Warrant Article.

Board Member Peters said she felt it would be easier to explain the critical need for the roof if it were a Warrant Article.

Board Member Hardy said she agreed that it should be a Warrant Article.

Chair Guagliumi said she felt there would be more transparency if it were a Warrant Article.

Board Member Barnes said the recourse process would be extremely involved. She asked if there were \$1.6 million in the budget that could be moved. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied there was not.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said if the budget failed, the governing body (the School Board) could have one meeting to take up a revised operating budget and there would be another election.

**The motion failed 1 – 3 – 0. (Nay – Chair Guagliumi, Board Member Hardy, and Board Member Peters)**

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to move \$645,425 in the Capital Improvement Plan from fiscal year 2022 – 2023 to fiscal year 2023 – 2024. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to adopt the Capital Improvement Plan as amended again. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

Board Member Peters expressed concern with the way the co-curriculars were being funded at the three elementary schools. She said she felt it was creating an inequity especially for those students who were not able to stay. She asked if there were volunteer positions available.

Board Member Hardy said she felt leaving the item in would make it more likely for the co-curriculars to happen.

Board Member Peters said she was not opposed to leaving the \$2,000 supply line in but wanted to remove the \$5,000 in stipends for teachers; hoping that there would be more volunteers.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Yarlott suggested that the item be put off by a year so more research could be done and they could also look at other funding sources.

Board Member Barnes said she would be more inclined to not cut the item from the budget.

Board Member Peters said it was important to note that the summer learning would be extended again and felt it was critical to keep that going. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that the extended year programming had taken on an entirely new perspective for a greater number of students for a greater number of reasons.

d. Approval of 2022 – 2023 School District Budget

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to accept the proposed budget in the amount of \$83,439,156.21 for the school year of 2022 – 2023. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

e. Warrant Article Discussion

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the proposed Warrant Articles as summarized below:

**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 devises or personal or real property which may become available during the fiscal year. (Majority vote required)

**MOTION:** Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept Warrant Article 2 as presented. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 3** – Shall the district approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association which calls for the following net changes in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels over the amount paid in the prior fiscal year.

2022 – 2023: Estimated Amount of \$1,247,930

and further, to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,247,930 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. (Majority vote required)

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to accept Warrant Article 3 as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**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? (Majority vote required)

**MOTION:** Board Member Peters made a motion to accept Warrant Article 4 as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 5** – Shall the district approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association which calls for the following net changes in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels over the amount paid in the prior year fiscal year for a market adjustment added to the base salary beginning in 2022 – 2023 to position the Merrimack Teachers Association at competitive rates in regards to surrounding districts in the amount of up to \$950,000, said sum not-to-exceed 75% of the unencumbered surplus funds remaining at the end of the fiscal year 2021 – 2022. (Majority Vote Required)

*(Note: This Article represents a one-time salary adjustment to the scale for the fiscal year 2022 – 2023, and if approved, will be embedded into the salary schedule from 2022 – 2023 forward. It is not cumulative.)*

Board Member Barnes stated she wanted to adjust the percentage to a sum not-to-exceed 25% of the unencumbered surplus funds. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated he would be comfortable with 25%.

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to accept Warrant Article 5 with the adjustment that the sum shall not-to-exceed 25%. Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 6** – (Special Warrant Article) Shall the district raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,600,500 for the purpose of roof replacement at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School (Majority Vote Required)

**MOTION:** Board Member Hardy made a motion to approve Article 6 as presented. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 7** – Shall the Merrimack School District vote to raise and appropriate a sum of \$200,000 for the purpose to raze the building known as the former Brentwood School (a.k.a., the Red building) and to return the site back to a usable condition with appropriate fill, compaction, and spread gravel to all future use for school purposes. (Majority Vote Required)

The School Board collectively agreed any work/demolition of the building should be put on hold until there was a clearer picture of the entire project.

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to strike Warrant Article 7 from the ballot. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 8** – To see if the school district will vote to authorize, indefinitely until rescinded, to retain year-end unassigned general funds in an amount not-to-exceed in any fiscal year, 5% of the current fiscal year's net assessment, in accordance with RSA 198:4-b, II (Majority Vote Required)

*Note: The amount for the 2022 – 2023 year is based on the 2021 – 2022 net assessment of \$53,653,240 of which 5% would be \$2,682,662 to the extent that you have that in surplus.*

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that he felt having such a fund was a very important mechanism for maintaining fiscal and operational stability.

Board Member Barnes stated she felt now the law had changed and was in their favor it was an exceptionally good idea.

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to accept Article 8 as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**Discussion:**

Board Member Peters clarified that future Boards could choose to give back the surplus to the taxpayers at any time.

Chair Guagliumi noted future Boards could create a Warrant Article to rescind it.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

**Article 9** – 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 purposes set for therein, totaling \$83,439,156. Should this Article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$82,222,649 (Note: the correct number is \$83,174,461) which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by 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. (Majority Vote Required)

**MOTION:** Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to accept Article 9 as presented. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

- f. Request for Board Authority to Correspond to Gary Daniel Regarding HB 478

Chair Guagliumi asked the Board to give her the authority to communicate, on behalf of the Board, for the purpose of trying to recoup approximately \$130,000 on behalf of the school district. She said several years ago they had spent the money on a water filtration system, but with the intent to recoup the money.

Board Member Barnes stated she would like there to be a consideration for recurring future costs, i.e. filters, and maintenance. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said it was reasonable to estimate spending \$5,000 per year for three or four years but then it would spike to \$25,000 per year due to cartridge replacements.

Board Member Peters said the Bill was a bipartisan Bill by the Merrimack contingency and former and state representatives fought very hard for it. She too said she felt they deserved to get every penny spent back.

**MOTION:** Board Member Peters made a motion to allow Cinda Guagliumi to advocate for the Merrimack School District to recoup the funds spent on the water filtration system related to House Bill 478, and any future costs related to maintenance or repair of that system due to the fault of other people. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**

g. Other

Board Member Barnes stated she had previously asked if the Board could explore the option of a Warrant Article to allow the new home of the Merrimack Historical Society to be under the ownership of the town. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied the request was forwarded to legal and they were awaiting a response.

Board Member Peters said her daughter was a teacher in another state and made more money as a second-year teacher than what Merrimack paid their teachers. She said she felt it was very important to recruit and retain the best of the best. She also said it was important in a year where they had received extra surplus to make the salary correction.

On behalf of Vice Chair Rothhaus, Chair Guagliumi read the following into the record:

- \$8 million was received which offset the tax rate and there may be \$3 million given this year that would create a \$5 million deficit. Every member of the Board answers to our community and our constituents. We all believe in the work before us. We needed to figure out how to decrease spending while maintaining high-quality education. It comes down to how we use our resources and this should be the focus for the July 2022 goals meeting.

There was a \$25 million cut to state aid and this will impact the budget. We should discuss the most recent report on the Commission to study school funding. Public schools are being challenged.

#### **4. CONSENT AGENDA**

Educator and Administrator Nominations

- Ms. Ofelia El Fakih, One-year Grade 5 Teacher, Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Nichole O'Brien, Interim Assistant Principal, Merrimack Middle School

**MOTION:** Board Member Barnes made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**



## **5. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Ms. Erin Haney, 32 Mallard Point, addressed the Board and asked if her child who was not vaccinated, was exposed to someone (with Covid) in class if that meant the child had to stay home for five days. She said it sounded like the vaccinated children did not have to stay home for the five days but the unvaccinated children did. Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied the information would be on the district's website the following day.

Ms. Haney said she felt that parents were going to start lying as to whether or not Covid was in their household just because they did not want their child to be out of school for ten days. She also said she felt the district would not be hitting the 5% number if the numbers were not skewed.

Ms. Michelle Karakaedos, Swift Lane (Board Member Barnes read allowed the following email into the record)

My youngest daughter attends Thornton's Ferry School and today they no longer had the opt-out option due to numbers over 5%. I explained to her yesterday this would occur and she was very upset, in tears, and worried. Today she expressed her concerns to her teacher, and after school, she was very upset with her day because of wearing masks. She said she no longer wants to go to school, she had a stomach ache, and a headache. Masking children most certainly affects their physical and mental health. I am a school counselor at another district and I'm strapped at work due to staff out with Covid. I now need to figure out what to do because I refuse to have my child hate school because of this experience, but more importantly force her to feel anxious and sick. I'm now going to be one less staff member in my facility and my child will not be in school during this time. I will take the day to decide what to do. Financially I would be working to provide her an unmasked private education or decide to homeschool. I'm really struggling as a mother and educational professional. Everyone who has wanted to be vaccinated has had the chance so why now? Why still continue this craziness at the risk of our children's health? If your vaccine and masking did what they all said, we wouldn't need to continue this facade. I will continue to stand up for our children here in Merrimack regardless of what we decide to do, but she will not be attending while masking is mandated. Parents who are struggling with the same things I am, reach out as I may start my own program to fight against this abuse. I have been in and out of private and public care since 2007. I am horrified how political this has become, and how our children's safety is no longer the number 1 priority. Call me radical I don't care; my kids health and safety are always number 1! Thank you for hearing my voice, I hope you will consider what's best for this next generation as it's up to us to lead with ethical considerations not with the funds given to push a mask agenda.

Ms. Rebecca Statz, 11 Bradford Drive, said perhaps parents who chose to be less than forthcoming with information, not only might parents not be willing to share information, she had seen/heard people saying "I know I have Covid" without actually taking a test. She requested if a student was absent from school that both vaccinated and unvaccinated children provide a negative Covid test if symptomatic.

Ms. Tiffney Trant, South Baboosic Lake Road (Board Member Barnes read allowed the following email into the record)

There needs to be clarification regarding close contact, the way it was explained was very confusing.

If an unvaccinated student is in close contact with a positive student, does that mean they quarantine for 5 days and then wear a mask for an additional 5 days?

Also, can you please clarify why vaccinated kids don't have to stay home but unvaccinated kids do?

Ms. Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive, addressed the Board, referring to Warrant Article 5, asked if the district were going to be taking money out of the surplus to give the teachers an increase in pay why were they not taking the \$1.6 out of there to pay for the roof at Thorntons Ferry.

Ms. Naomi Halter, 10 Everest Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

Thank you for the care and consideration with which you approached the discussion of the Thornton's Ferry roof replacement tonight.

It's clear that it was a tough decision, and I appreciate both your concern for the wellbeing of our children, and also your efforts to be transparent to the voters and taxpayers of Merrimack.

Ms. Jennifer Jobin, Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read allowed the following email into the record)

Thank you for your efforts to come up with a creative way to bring teacher compensation up to a competitive level by proposing the use of surplus funds in a warrant article. It is an especially important year to ensure that we can retain and attract quality teachers.

Ms. Rachel Paepke, 67 Tinker Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud the following email into the record)

I wanted to take the time to thank everyone for the thoughtful budget discussions over the past few weeks, as well as for providing additional transparency around many budget line items. Regarding the discussion around the TFS roofing repairs and where this expense should be included in the 22-23 budget or warrant article, I think that one important data point to include in any budget documentation is the range of costs the district may incur should this expense not pass as proposed and the roof fails in the 22-23 school year. I would assume that if this becomes an emergency situation to repair the roof, that the cost to remedy it in a reactive way would more than likely come at a higher cost due to additional damage or health/safety issues compared to the 22-23 proposed cost. I believe this additional data may help the taxpayers make an informed decision when considering this expense as either a warrant article or in the operating budget.

Thank you also for taking steps to bring the compensation for our teachers up to a more competitive level. It is important to take these steps to retain and attract our highly qualified educators.

Ms. Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive (Board Member Barnes read the following email into the record)

Thank you for your efforts to keep teacher pay competitive so we can attract and retain quality teachers.

At approximately 9:15 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

**The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**