

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack High School/Cafeteria
December 19, 2022**

6:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – MHS Main Office Conference Room

- **Student Welfare**

Present: Chair Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair Lori Peters, Board Member Jenna Hardy, Board Member Naomi Halter, and Board Member Ken Martin. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Amy Doyle, and Chief Educational Officer Olsen.

Not Present: Ms. Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative – Excused

Budget Committee Members Present: Dan Coakley, (Carl) Lee French, Gina Groff, Michelle Mackey, Charles Mower, Mackenzie Murphy, Rachel Paepke, Naomi Schoenfeld, Ellen Wilson

Not Present: Budget Committee Members Shayne Albuquerque, Michelle Bronchuk, Carol Lang - Excused

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Rothhaus called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chair Rothhaus welcomed the members of the Budget Committee to the meeting.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions to share.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen recognized the “What’s Up Merrimack” program and said he found it to be very interesting.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said winter sports were in full swing and wished all of the participating students the very best of luck.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that the middle school received the okay to start the Clothing Closet to help students in need.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted eight different schools had participated in the “Quiz Bowl” the previous Saturday and Merrimack had a very strong showing.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen also noted that the James Mastricola Elementary School had its chorus concert the previous Thursday. He added that Ms. Heather Barker, Director of Student Services said that parent conversation meetings would be held on January 11th from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. where the guest would be Ms. Peg Dawson, a well-known author, and psychologist.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said calling snow days remained a difficult decision, even after his many years of experience.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the Vision of a Learner presentation would be moved to a future agenda.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that they were actively looking to adopt a new phonics program for the lower elementary schools and would keep the School Board informed.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said, regarding homework, that they were moving forward with making some updates and revisions to the grading practices and she would be sending information out to the community soon.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that he was pleased that the School Board and the School Budget Committee were meeting.

d. School Board Update

e. Student Representative Update

There was no update to share.

5. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to address.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Discussion with School District Budget Committee

Chair Rothhaus asked the members of the Budget Committee to introduce themselves.

Mr. Charles Mower, Chair; Ms. Naomi Schoenfeld, Vice Chair; Mr. Dan Coakley, Board Member; Ms. Mackenzie Murphy, Board Member; Ms. Ellen Wilson, Board Member; Mr. Lee French, Board Member; Ms. Gina Groff, Board Member; Ms. Rachel Paepke, Board Member; and Ms. Michelle Mackay, Board Member.

Mr. Mower noted that the remaining Budget Committee members were unable to join the meeting and were excused.

Chair Rothhaus commented that it appeared that the Merrimack School District would be receiving less funding the following year and in the future.

Vice-Chair Peters stated the School Board's priorities were as follows:

- Social and Emotional Learning
- Competitive Pay and Benefits to Retain the Best Staff
- Increasing and Helping the Graduation Rate – Especially with Alternative Pathways to Graduation
- Technology Needs to be Met
- Capital Improvement Plan
- Facilities
- 2023 – 2024 Goals as a School Board was to Create, and Engage in an Inclusive and Collaborative District Culture built on Mutual Trust and Respect for everyone.
- Improve Learning Outcomes by Ensuring the Instruction is Responsive to the Needs of the Student Population.
- Have Facilities & Equipment that are Safe, Secure, Clean, Healthy, Current, and Appropriate for meeting the Educational Needs of Students & Staff.
- Have an On-Going Review of Existing Policies to Ensure they are Compliant and in Alignment with District Practices.
- 2023 – 2024 Budget Priorities
- School Safety
- Research-Based Reading Program
- Filling Open Teacher and Paraprofessional Positions with Appropriate Funding and Appropriate Student Needs
- Eliminate the Brentwood Building
- Analysis of Current Programs and Sources
- Capital Reserve Fund for Unforeseen Issues
- Possibility of having a Performing Arts Center
- Expanded Extended Learning Opportunities

b. Overview of Proposed 2023 – 2024 School District Budget

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated the complexity of building a school system budget was a difficult one as they want to meet the needs of every single child in the Merrimack School District. He said the district understood the need to recruit, hire, and retain extraordinarily highly qualified educators. Additionally, Chief Educational Officer Olsen said certain curricula needed to be renewed in various grade levels.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated to know how to improve a school district ask the practitioners who were paid to be with the children every day, and not read it out of a book. He also said he felt it was important to enhance their ability to provide academic support to students, especially for reading specialists.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said one of the intended goals was to keep a close eye on enrollment numbers.

Chair Rothhaus stated that an important goal was regarding school safety, and they were going to ask the Budget Committee to provide the School Board with a little bit of grace as they wanted to do a full assessment of all of the schools. She said they would put anything possible on the Capital Improvement Plan.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the district had acquired \$120,000 in grant money from the SAFE Schools Grant Fund. He said more funding may become available.

Mr. Mower said he felt it was important to have a diverse group of people who had a stake in the community making recommendations regarding the budget. He said the Budget Committee was well aware of how much had to be done.

Mr. Mower asked when they would see an opportunity for extended learning opportunities and when they would see an updated competency assessment. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the extended learning opportunities would begin sometime in 2023. He said the competency assessments would likely take two to three years and he added that the hope was to bring in some facilitators who had considerable experience in developing competencies.

Ms. Groff commented that she would like to see standardized programs and was interested in seeing how the district would measure progress as each student learned at different rates. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that the proposed budget included a request to transition students in grades kindergarten through grade 8 to a new progress monitoring tool called IReady.

Ms. Paepke asked if there had been a deep scrub of initiatives or things that had been important in the past but not currently as important, perhaps due to advances in technology and/or curriculum. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied they had already taken some initiatives in terms of saving money such as installing LED lighting, but they were always looking for more opportunities. He noted one of the most important things to do was to keep up with the roofing projects.

Ms. Schoenfeld asked the School Board if any items were important but that were not included in the priority list. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the entire curriculum change was an iterative process that had an impact on professional development, and materials & supplies appropriations. He also said that he would like to see more reading and math specialists at the lower levels. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said writing skills would be on her list of items to be addressed in the future.

Ms. Wilson commented that she felt there was a great deal of focus at the lower levels but there were significant deficiencies at the high school and asked if that issue was going to be addressed. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied one of the changes the district was working on was the schedule and the hope was to find more time within the day to provide additional time that teachers could assist the students. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle added that the high school was in the

process of going through its' NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation and the staff had gone through a lot of reflective work.

Ms. Murphy commented that she was happy to hear that the district would be hiring someone who would manage the extended learning opportunities. She asked if an Advisory Board would be formed that would consist of outside partners to advise how the extended learning opportunities would enhance what the student was learning in the classroom and how the opportunities would be assessed. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would provide the Budget Committee with status updates as they went along.

Mr. Coakley commented that he was very much in favor of alternate graduation pathways such as performing arts. He also commented that he was happy to hear that the School Board was considering school safety to be part of the budget.

Ms. Murphy asked why the high school guidance counselor position was proposed as full-time as opposed to part-time. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that it was his opinion that the position of a high school guidance counselor should be a full-time position.

In conclusion, Mr. Mower stated that there were no redundancies in the administrative team, and he felt it may be beneficial to add to the existing administrative personnel. He also said there was money in the budget to deal with the Brentwood building and it would be prudent to raze it as soon as possible.

c. January Meeting Dates

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated the following meetings were scheduled:

- January 4, 2023 – Budget Presentation – Food Service & the Elementary Schools (Including JMUES)
- January 10, 2023 – Budget Presentation – Student Services & Merrimack High School
- January 12, 2023 – Budget Presentation – Technology Library & Media Services, Maintenance, & Merrimack Middle School
- January 19, 2023 - Discussion School Board Budget Discussion

d. Deliberative Session Dates

Vice Chair Peters suggested the Deliberative Session be held on March 6, 2023; with a snow date of March 8, 2023. The School Board agreed by consensus.

e. Director of Graduation Pathways & Extended Learning Opportunities Role Description

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he hoped to be able to eventually mesh a portion of the position with the Adult Education Program.

Board Member Hardy stated that the new position would be available to all students.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the Director of Graduation Pathways & Extended Learning Opportunities job description with the idea that it would begin immediately. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Chair Rothhaus pointed out that the funding could come from a three-year grant from the Department of Education. She said she was not sure if the title had to be Adult Education Director in order to receive the grant. Vice-Chair Peters said job descriptions could be modified so the Board could approve the position and later modify the description and/or title.

The motion passed: 5 – 0 – 0.

- f. Other

There was no other new business to discuss.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. November 7, 2022 – Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the public & non-public minutes from the November 7, 2022, meeting. Board Member Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

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

- b. November 21, 2022 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the public minutes from the November 21, 2022, meeting. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

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

8. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Nomination

- Ms. Justine Matte, Health Teacher, Merrimack Middle School

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

The motion passed: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Chair Rothhaus stated that recently the Planning & Building Committee had met where they discussed their visions and possibly another field for the district.

Board Member Halter stated she attended a Budget Committee meeting and that Michelle Mackey was chosen to fill the vacant position. She said the committee also discussed their thoughts on the future of the Brentwood building.

Board Member Martin said the Healthcare Containment Committee had met on November 21, 2022, where they discussed three open Wellness Coordinator positions.

b. Correspondence

There was no correspondence to share.

c. Comments

Board Member Hardy gave “kudos” to the custodial staff at the high school. She said she thought they were doing a wonderful job. Chair Rothhaus also gave “kudos” to the Merrimack TV team.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were no public comments.

11. ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 9:04 p.m. Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

The motion passed: 5 – 0 – 0.