



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

January 10, 2023

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	
Location:	MERMHS Library
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson Jake Foster Matt Harrington Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Chris Reed Erica Spencer
Absent:	
Guests:	Patricia Puglisi, Principal MERHS
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1) Public Comment –

Ms. Whitman advised participants that policies for public participation are found in section BEDH and BEDHE of the policy menu.

Nina McKinnon, Essex: Ms. McKinnon stated that she would like an update on teacher absence policies and insight into the current experience of students when teachers are absent at the high school. She stated that many students are still being sent to the library. In addition, Ms. McKinnon asked if information about the out-of-state travel trips could be posted to the MERSD website. She expressed concern that, because trips occur every other year for each program, and upper classmen have priority enrollment, it may limit the ability of some students to participate.

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2) **Student Report** – Diego Sanson: Mr. Sanson provided his perspective on Ms. McKinnon’s input. He stated that he and his peers receive significant work to do while teachers are out. His experience with the Spain trip last year was that it was not difficult for sophomores and juniors to obtain a spot on the trip. Mr. Sanson expressed how much students appreciated the opportunity to participate in developing the Course of Studies presented tonight. Students received a form with possible classes and they were excited about the new class options and the chance to have a voice in the final selection. After recently completing three in-class workshops for the student advisory ADL chapter, Mr. Sanson would like to have student representatives attend and present at an upcoming School Committee meeting. In closing, Mr. Sanson highlighted the success of the MERSD DECA program for business/marketing. This class is active in competitions. At last week’s regional competition, 47 students qualified for the state championship.

3) **Chairman’s Report** –

Ms. Whitman attended the Student Advisory Committee meeting. She also expressed gratitude to the committee members, administration, staff, and community for their continued support and engagement.

4) **Consent Agenda** –

- Acceptance of Warrants: **V1031, V1032, V1033**
- Minutes for approval: *12/06/2022; 12/14/2022*

Ms. Spencer moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster identified a redundant entry in the warrants. Mr. Urbas noted that there was a voided check for \$1950 that was voided after the vouchers were created for the SC. Next time, the voucher will include an update. This will be removed from the next transfer request. Ms. Whitman noted that the middle school raised \$7000 for the Red Cross and applauded their efforts. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked for further details about the expense for SPED contracted services on voucher 1033, the process for deciding when the district uses contracted services versus in-house, and where the rate comes from. Mr. Urbas stated that these are expenses like occupational therapy and speech therapy, as required to meet an IEP, for which we do not have in-house staff. These needs are monitored over time, and if the need becomes substantial enough the district would seek to add an in-house position. That request would go before the School Committee in the budget process. Mr. Urbas noted that although these expenses seem high, they do not cost us in benefits. The rate of pay is determined by the market at the time. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the market and hiring rates are driving the cost.

The motion passed unanimously, however Mr. Harrington abstained from the vote on the 12/14/22 minutes as he was not in attendance for the meeting.

5) **Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/Matt Harrington) – Mr. Foster asked for an update on the Habeeb Report. Mr. Urbas stated the district has

done a detailed review of the data and projected that the final draft would be presented in one to two weeks. Ms. Spencer asked if the turf field bids went out. Mr. Urbas said that advertisements would be published in newspapers this week. Bids can be accepted after a one week advertising period.

- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Lin Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – The finance sub-committee met the previous evening, and Ms. Mitchell stated that they reviewed the summary budget by each line item. They discussed why some budget lines are budgeted at the high end rather than the actual cost for the preceding year, for example insurance costs. They also examined enrollment change trends. They looked at the Capital Budget which is currently not budgeting the sale of the bonds. Ms. Mitchell asked Mr. Urbas to look into that. Mr. Urbas stated that we are required to have a spending budget that is voted upon by the town. Regarding the Capital Budget, they do not estimate the amount of income generated. This can lead to the potentially large variance noted by Ms. Mitchell. This does show up on the revenue page. The amount would decrease the amount the district needs to borrow. The spending budget typically does not have variance because the debt service is modeled out. Ms. Whitman reported that at the recent collaboration meeting on December 19, 2022 there significant of discussion of the draft budget presentation, the natural growth rate of expenses, and the efforts of the district to keep costs down. The collaboration team is looking at how to move forward and at multi-year models to inform town strategy. Essex has proposed that the district use reserves and the towns employ debt exclusions for capital improvements.
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) Finance Policy Updated Recommendations: Ms. Spencer stated that the policy sub-committee reviewed School Committee comments from the first read of the MASC Policy update. The MERSD policy manual is based on the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) model manual. The MASC recently published recommended updates to the financial management model policies, based on recent changes in state legislation. The Finance Sub-Committee has reviewed these recommendations and presented a second-read recommendation for policy updates based on member input from the November 15, 2022 School Committee Meeting. In areas where they did not accept feedback, they were striving to keep the language consistent with Massachusetts general laws. Their next task will be to create a reserve policy draft. Then they will look to make sure that the graduation requirements mirror the program of studies. Ms. Whitman requested a status report on the pending issue of Food Service contract.

Ms. Spencer moved to accept the second read and final approval of financial policy updates, inclusive of requested SC edits, to existing financial policy; Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Whitman asked if the Policy Subcommittee could speak to the decision to table the single signer option until next summer. Mr. Foster said that they did not want to disrupt the current approval policies for finances given that many committee members

are still learning. This change is being delayed until they are more settled in their roles, and then they will change to a single signer option. Ms. Whitman also enquired about file DBD's revision and whether there is a MASC requirement that we are striking and replacing with our own. Mr. Foster replied that they went to state resources and the change reflects guidance supplied by the state. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked for clarification regarding the role of the School Council asking, "when it says 'review school budget in relation to the school improvement plan,' that is a review to make sure that funds will support the school improvement plan versus a review to say this isn't enough money to support the improvement plan." Mr. Foster replied that it is not specified and comes down to the principal and School Council about how they interpret that. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the School Council is not a budgeting authority. Mr. Urbas stated that because the school improvement plan is part of what the School Council oversees, and the budget needs to support everything including the improvement plan, this language works to bring the School Council into that process so that they understand how spending impacts the school. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the spirit of the language is to be inclusive and informative of the School Council and to seek their feedback, but they are not a budgeting authority. Ms. Mitchell asked if the School Council reviews and provides feedback on the budget. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the principals take input from all of their constituent groups, including the School Council, and share it with the School Committee. The School Council is not involved in budget building. Ms. Whitman stated that she was not happy with the DIE-1 section on Regional audits. Where previously the wording stated that a copy of the resulting report would be sent to committee chairs of the municipalities, the update instead says that reports will be "made available." Ms. Mitchell said that she would keep the original wording and commit to delivering a copy. Mr. Urbas stated that the revision is consistent with how reports are currently made available. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that although the SC could choose to commit itself to this course of action, it would open up the question of the chain of command – who from the SC would be responsible for delivery and whom would receive it? Ms. Whitman reiterated that it could be a sign of good will and could be assigned to the SC Chair. Ms. Mitchell noted that it is currently available to anyone. Ms. Annie Cameron, in attendance from the Essex Board of Selectmen stated that it would be well received.

Mr. Foster moved to restore the DIE-1 to the original wording in the first draft and add the suggested edit as well. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she is interested in talking to the collaboration group about getting a letter of understanding about sharing the audit report. She suggested ground rules around something that could get cumbersome.

The motion passed unanimously.

The motion to accept the drafted edits to the existing financial policy updates passed unanimously.

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report

- 6) Superintendent's Report:** Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district continues work around the strategic initiative of cultural competency. Michael Eatman returned for a district administrative team midyear mini-retreat. This work helps to tie all the pieces together so that we can see the feathering together of the District Improvement Plan, the Strategic Plan, the school improvement plans, cultural competence work, and SEL work. This work was supported by the Safe Schools grant and provides the framework to bring it all together. We are seeing employment of faculty meetings as learning labs with dedicated time to work through the competency framework, all in service of creating a more informed teacher course so that so that the work starts to permeate the classroom. In addition, the superintendent pointed out that one of the key Strategic Initiatives is stabilizing our finances. Although it is a twisty and windy road, the SC is making good progress. The superintendent also shared that in the next ten days the district will be posting for a new Curriculum & Technology Director. The search for an Essex Elementary principal will follow. Currently, the district is moving on to FY24 and looking at course offerings. In March, we will begin school spotlights, beginning with a joint presentation by Essex and Memorial Elementary schools on March 7. The high school is looking forward to the return of its science research night.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about the timing of the job postings, and the superintendent stated that we are a little ahead of previous timelines for this type of hiring.

7) Continued Business –

- **2023-2024 High School Program of Studies - Principal Puglisi, Principal MERHS:** Principal Puglisi presented the Course of Studies for the 2023-2024 school year for approval by the School Committee. The course of studies is updated annually to reflect new course pathways, graduation requirements, and new course offerings. Principal Puglisi was particularly happy with the participation of the student body in choosing added courses. Graduation requirements follow Massachusetts guidelines for college/career readiness. The School Committee votes on any change to graduation requirements and oversees the course of studies to ensure alignment with district policy, finances, and strategic objectives.

High School students were involved in the update of the course of studies through an election for courses to add or re-instate. There are courses listed in the Course of Studies 2023-2024 which are not offered in the upcoming year. They either are offered in alternate years or may be re-instated in the future. The high school has also updated its report card comments to align to the Vision of the Graduate. In addition, the SCORE project has been reconceived as a four-year plan. The intension is to integrate it with student portfolios. The high school plans to bring back faculty SCORE advisors and return a research paper to the program prior to the SCORE experience.

Highlighted changes to offered coursework:

- **Media Literacy & Civic Action (grade 9).** New course. This course will meet the Massachusetts state requirement for a student-led civics projects aligned to the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum framework. Currently, this

requirement is met at the end of grade 11, but takes away from the full presentation of course material. This course is proposed as a graduation requirement of the Class of 2027 and beyond.

- Video and Graphic Design. Reinstated course, as selected by student vote.
- Once Upon a Crime. New course, as selected by student vote. An interdisciplinary course (English and Science) culminating in a mock trial.
- Sports and Entertainment Marketing. New course.
- Economics. New, introductory course
- The science department has proposed an update to the physics alignment that will assist students interested in engineering as a post-secondary option or in personalizing their science pathway.

Discussion: Before making the motion to accept the program of studies as presented, Mr. Foster stated that changes to graduation requirements are a policy change and stated that policy requires a second read for approval. Ms. Whitman asked if there was anything in the program of studies in conflict with the graduation policy. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that this does not indicate a change in policy and follows the same process for update to the course of studies that has been utilized for thirteen year. She proposed accepting the current course of studies and updating the policy to reflect the process. Mr. Foster stated that the purpose of having first and second reads is to provide the opportunity for all, including the public, to have input into changes. Ms. Whitman clarified that the current process for updating graduation requirements has been out of alignment with the policy for sometime. Therefore, it is suggested to approve them tonight and then correct the policy to match the established process. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that there is nothing to prevent that and said that the civic action course is not a new requirement for graduation. Instead, it is being re-conceived as a stand-alone course during freshman year. Delaying the approval vote is up to the SC. However, it would preclude the update to the course of studies because the parent meeting for incoming freshman cannot be delayed. Mr. Foster suggested that the SC could vote to deviate from the policy process in order to vote on the course of studies as presented.

Mr. Foster moved to dispense with the two-read adoption policy process for the purpose of consideration of the Course of Studies 2023-2024; Mr. Reed seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster emphasized that the role of the School Committee in establishing graduation requirements is one of the most fundamental roles of a School Committee and one of the most impactful things that the SC does. Therefore we should be giving the public an opportunity to weigh in.

The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Foster proposed separating the motion to approve the course of studies from the update to the graduation requirement in order to show support for the change to the graduation requirement. Ms. Whitman asked to hold the vote as presented and revisit if there was not support.

Ms. Whitman moved to accept the proposed Course of Studies for the 2023-2024 school year and recommend graduation requirements. Mr. Harrington seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Spencer asked if there were any classes that staff would have liked to include but were unable to due to resources. Principal Puglisi said that she would have liked to have added the course Rebels in South America, envisioned as an interdisciplinary course taught completely in Spanish. Ms. Spencer stated that the math pathway is informed by college choice and asked about guidance provided to students through the process of determining what they should take. Principal Puglisi said that guidance staff meet with each grade at least once per year. There are different themes for each grade to coordinate with their educational journey. March is course selection time and guidance talks to classes about how to select classes. The high school also plans for teachers to engage with students as they are recommending their next class. However, Principal Puglisi also stated that they are looking to do better with outreach to students from guidance. Ms. Spencer asked why it is difficult to do more interdisciplinary classes. Principal Puglisi said that a lot of work is involved in building the curriculum. Superintendent Beaudoin asked the principal to confirm that she had the resources to provide the course offerings she wants, and received an affirmative. Mr. Foster asked about the graduation requirement for civic engagement and how the new course around media literacy is tied to civics and advances social studies knowledge. Principal Puglisi stated that the student project is about taking civic action. They have to find a project and dive in with different types of sources to inform their project. This is where digital literacy is relevant. For example, students could work in town to remove plastic bags from local stores. They would have to engage in research to determine the impact to local businesses. They would also have to collaborate with town boards. Mr. Foster asked if this course is in addition to current graduation requirements and how it fits in. Principal Puglisi stated that it is an additional requirement that will result in one less elective. Mr. Foster asked about the impact of delaying the update to the graduation requirement by one year. Principal Puglisi stated that the civics project is already built in because it has been met through the grade 11 history class. However, its inclusion in that course distracts from other topics and is not as robust as they would like. Delaying the vote on the graduation requirement would delay the updated course. Mr. Foster asked what happens if a ninth grader does not successfully pass the course. Principal Puglisi stated that in these situations, guidance recommends alternate routes to completing the work. They do not recommend retaking the course. Mr. Foster asked about the updated report card comments and whether they are part of the course of studies. Principal Puglisi said that report card comments are not part of the course of studies. Mr. Foster asked about their review process. Currently, comments are not being utilized because the previous list was deemed un-useful. After implementation of the updated comments in the fall, a mid-year review will be completed. Mr. Foster stated that the vision of the graduate is supposed to be an outcome achieved by graduation and the proposed comments do not speak to progression towards these goals. Principal Puglisi said that as portfolios are implemented and projects from different classes are added to the portfolios that are tied to the Vision of the Graduate, we will see feedback to students that is tied to the Vision of the Graduate, and it could be tied

to the report card. Superintendent Beaudoin said that report card comments are directed at parents, not students. Ms. Mitchell asked about options for the study of additional foreign languages. Principal Puglisi explained that there is a two-year language requirement. German, Latin, Mandarin, and American Sign Language are offered as independent study courses.

The motion to accept the Course of Studies for the 2023-2024 school year was passed unanimously.

- Budget Workshop
 - Enrollment Review: Superintendent Beaudoin prefaced the discussion by saying that this is not as comprehensive a review as might be desired. Initially, we will explore the usual avenues of enrollment that inform finance. Then, we will examine the issue of kids exiting to private school. The superintendent spoke to the importance of enrollment numbers in informing personnel budget decisions. Enrollment numbers are also the basis for Chapter 70 state aid and a key variable in the Essex-Manchester Apportionment formula. In order to examine trends in enrollment in private school, the district had to create a data set from various sources because this is not required reported information by DESE. This was accomplished by MERSD Data Analyst, Ian Menchini. Essex and Manchester have experienced a decline in the number of school-aged children residing in town between FY12 and FY23. The total school aged population has decreased for both communities – 21% for Manchester and 6% for Essex. Total resident enrollment has declined 22% (MBTS=26%; TOE = 15%). Private School enrollment between fall 2022 and 2023 has increased to 26% (MBTS up 8% with 14 students; Essex up 69% with 46 students). The current resident enrollment levels are similar to those before the demographic increase in resident enrollment from FY03-FY12. MERSD has reduced school choice enrollment.
 - Observations: Private school attendance has been relatively steady in grades K-8. Recent years have seen an increase in students choosing private school when transitioning between grades 8 and 9.
 - Next Steps: MERSD plans to continue monitoring the trend annually and to engage in a study of the issue to better understand why students are opting for private school. This will include an exit survey developed through school council. Information received will inform the district whether there is something that can be done programmatically or customer service-wise to change the trend

Discussion: Mr. Reed asked why school choice enrollment has decreased. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that during the peak rise in enrollment, there were fewer spaces available. Admission of additional students would have required adding staff. The district swung away from accepting school choice as a way to increase revenue because we did not know what would be needed to meet our own rising numbers. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if we would examine subgroups to see if there is some are more likely than others to exit. Mr. Urbas agreed that would be worthwhile data to glean. Superintendent Beaudoin asked whether the consensus from the SC was that they want a campaign to bring back exited

students to our district. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that it is early in the process of understanding this trend to speak to that and wondered if the current trend is typical of communities with similar demographics. Mr. Urbas said that we are gathering a non-DESE data set and it would not include comparable communities. Ms. Spencer stated that the current data is significant in illuminating the perceived increase exit. Anecdotally, she stated that the students leaving are some we would very much like to stay and that their absence impacts the classroom experience and class identity. Ms. Spencer said that she does not think we should be recruiting students back but does think that we may need to consider better publicizing the what our district has to offer in an affirmative way. Mr. Reed asked for a reminder of how enrollment trends affect the budget process. Ms. Whitman said that the conversation stemmed from two directions – the apportionment discussion and the question of whether the enrollment trend is reflective of the quality of program. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there was an assertion that a spike in Manchester students exiting to private school was driving the change in apportionment. In fact, the current data shows that Manchester is quite stable and that it is Essex that has had a sharp increase. Ms. Mitchell stated that is helpful to show the enrollment breakdown between the towns to speak to apportionment.

- Debrief 12/14/22 Public Hearing
- FY24 Full Budget – Draft: Avi Urbas: Mr. Urbas presented the first draft of a more detailed operating budget document, with individual schedules for each school and major department. This more-detailed document provides and opportunity for greater transparency and consistency from year to year. This budget does not have updated changes to spending or revenue. Those figures are expected to change in the coming weeks as updates are received for insurance, utilities, and other estimated expenses. The SC will proceed line by line to see where further reductions or investments are needed.
 - Revenue Summary: Town assessments are at 6.53% growth for both towns combined. Apportionment between Manchester (MBTS) and Essex (TOE) has changed from the tentative budget to 5.36% and 8.5% respectively, due to final DESE certified enrollment numbers. Additional apportionment changes are expected to reflect changes and updated property valuations from the state.

Discussion: Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this budget will be shared with the towns. The district has an upcoming annual meeting on January 26 with the Manchester finance committee and the SC has our public meeting on January 24. Ms. Mitchell asked why a reduction of only 3 FTE positions is shown. Mr. Urbas responded that the positions are summarized across positions. The proposed 4 FTE reduction is from teaching staff. Other line items are changing, notably that for teaching assistants which is based on IEP student needs. Those changes can happen within a school year based on need. Mr. Harrington noted that one of the largest budget drivers is personnel, and that he believes it is a credit to the schools that the majority of teachers fall into the higher qualified staff levels. Ms.

Whitman stated that the SC is committed to the concept of removing reserve funds from budget income. She asked if the SC is committed to not using reserves in the operational budget going forward. Ms. Mitchell stated that we do not have a reserve policy in place but should come to an agreement about what we want that policy to be. Ms. Spencer said that her understanding is that the group wants the policy sub-committee to explore crafting a reserves policy that would limit reserve use and discourage using it for the operation budget. Having read reserve policies from other entities, Ms. Spencer said that this motivation is a given. She also said that it is easy to imagine many emergencies that would dictate the use of reserves by the district. Ms. Ruth Pereen, Chair of the BOS, Essex, commented that people get addicted to reserves. Typically, they should be for onetime expenses and emergencies. Ms. Whitman echoed that she had heard that although it may have not been put forth as an official stance. Ms. Pereen stated that the Town of Essex would like to use debt exclusion for capital projects versus building into the budget. Mr. Foster stated that he would be better able to engage in the conversation if he was able to do so from the perspective of a multi-year outlook – what are the potential needs five years from now. Especially as we look to the finance question versus the budget question. Superintendent Beaudoin addressed the marked difference between spending at the elementary schools versus the middle and high school. This is a result of the rolling through of the reduction of heads and the rolling off of a previously budget-funded position back to the operating budget for the elementary schools. That will elevate their FTE. The district plans to add some footnotes to this part of the budget to provide clarity. Ms. Mitchell commented that there is a perception that costs should be decreasing with enrollment and recommended diving more into explaining why that is not the case. Mr. Urbas agreed that the data from special education versus general education would be informative. Ms. Spencer stated that the challenge is not the formula but the narrative to counter assertions that the population is waning while costs are escalating. Ms. Whitman stated that last spring the SC provided multiple presentations on this topic. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that there are a series of slides from this time period that stress that enrollment decline does not equal declining costs. Mr. Urbas stated that Ms. Mitchell is asking for more granular data to support that assertion and that he is prepared to crunch the numbers as needed. Mr. Reed stated that as a small district we do not have a large staff that can be winnowed in response to population changes. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she was unsure how enrollment data around special education would be used since there is no set dollar price per student for needed services.

- Multi-Model Work – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the administration is looking for direction on what to crunch. What is the big picture goal for the budget? Mr. Reed asked about the process for the last correction seven years ago. Superintendent Beaudoin said that at that time they explored multiple plans including an aspirational exercise that built an ask of upwards of \$1.7 million. The concept was go big and invest. The culmination was an ask of just over \$700k that was palatable to the towns. It ended up just covering use of reserves in the budget. Mr. Reed recollected that the next year health care costs jumped 10%,

wiping out the override. Mr. Urbas stated that the three scenarios were 1) just replace the reserves, 2) reinstate cut programs and address reserves and 3) build forward to a program enhancement goal. We went with the middle road. Mr. Reed noted that currently our proposal does not include reinstatement of programs. Ms. Whitman stated that at our last meeting on the topic the SC was not inclined to include replacement of reserves in the ask and wondered if that has changed. She stated that she is interested in examining debt exclusion to cover capital improvements. Ms. Whitman said that her priority is setting district needs within the SC meeting and letting the financing decisions happen at the town level. This is an issue that she would like to explore at collaboration meetings. Mr. Foster stated that he was expecting information/presentation about modeling tonight. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about word-choice by Ms. Whitman: override versus correction. Ms. Whitman stated that it would require a series of overrides through debt exclusion to meet the needs of capital inclusion and that she would like to let the conversation unfold in collaboration meetings. Ms. Koch-Sundquist expressed concern about the need to replace Essex Elementary while asking that town to extend themselves now through debt exclusion.

Superintendent Beaudoin returned the conversation to the multi-year model but stating that we currently have a level-services budget that can be brought to the towns. She asked if there is more that the SC would like to see built into the budget. Ms. Whitman stated that she would like to see health and wellness built in. Mr. Harrington asked for something about foreign language. Mr. Urbas stated that the current tool is designed to show how do we work at this process multi-year. Mr. Foster stated that, given assumptions, in addition to the correction we need to ask for an addition \$1.4 million to be covered for the next three years without asking for another correction. Ms. Whitman stated that this speaks to a fundamental philosophical question: does the SC make that ask or just give the information and allow the towns to determine how the need is met. Ms. Spencer noted that the 3.5% historical increase will consistently leave us at a deficit. She asked about looking at the untenable formulae. The superintendent stated that the ask is to have the town adjust the tax base to provide the revenue required to meet the district's annual growth. Mr. Urbas said the current conversation is about picking a direction as we move to the town phase. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked how the new Essex Elementary School, assuming a fast-track, would affect the multi-year model. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the feasibility study could take place as early as 2026-2027, with the building commencing 18 months after. Mr. Foster stated that carrying forward at a 3.5% expectation does not hold up and that we need to change the percent or the level of services. Both require looking carefully at the program to cut where able while maintaining excellence. Mr. Foster proposed working as a group to bring the growth rate down by. The time required to explore efficiencies could be used to justify an ask to carry us forward. Mr. Harrington disagreed, stating that the towns had previous years of savings when the district came in under the limit. Ms. Whitman stressed that the SC should move away from solving for apportionment and instead talk about what is good for the district. Mr. Urbas stated that in the last seven years, the average has been 2.7% growth, which often involved reductions. He stated that he is not

comfortable saying that the district can operate on 3.5%. Superintendent Beaudoin agreed, saying that 2.5% is not realistic and 3.5% is conservative. She stated that program is people and those numbers force us to shrink options for kids – likely increasing class size and dismantling in-district programming (which would lead to increase OOD placement). We could also look at merging elementary sites. The superintendent stated that they had asked the collaboration team about planning multiple, small asks every two to three years rather than a large ask further apart. Ms. Koch-Sundquist broached the subject of increasing school choice enrollment. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there is a risk in not knowing what we are taking on. Previously, there had been input from the community to reduce school of choice. Ms. Whitman stated that she would like to see some form of stabilization funding built into the proposed budget. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she would like to see the impact school choice can make. Mr. Harrington said that foreign language re-instatement and the performing arts director position were important to him. Mr. Foster stated that, unless the collaboration group is willing to commit to small asks every few years, he would like to see a model with 3.0% assessment. Ms. Whitman stated that she is opposed to that as an exercise. Superintendent Beaudoin said that 3.0% would put us under the projections of the biggest budget contributors – personnel and insurance. Ms. Spencer stated that the SC would benefit from having a specific question to consider. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that the administration is looking for how large they want the budget to be. Ms. Whitman said that a recommendation from administration may be the best way to generate consensus.

8) School Committee Comment – Mr. Foster asked that future agendas note the items that will be put forth for a vote from members to allow for clarity and inform what members should prepare for.

9) Adjourn

Mr. Harrington moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The motion passed unanimously.

School Committee Future Meetings

- February 7, 2023
- February 21, 2023