

## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### BUSINESS MEETING



### OPEN SESSION MINUTES November 1, 2022

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| <b>Meeting:</b>                          | School Committee  |
| <b>Date:</b>                             | November 1, 2022  |
| <b>Location:</b>                         | MERMHS Library  |
| <b>Attendees:</b>                        | Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent<br>Avi Urbas, Director of Finance<br>Theresa Whitman, Chairperson<br>Jake Foster<br>Kate Koch-Sundquist<br>Anna Lin Mitchell<br>Chris Reed<br>Erica Spencer                           |
| <b>Absent:</b>                           | Matt Harrington   |
| <b>Guests:</b>                           | Angela Bik, Director Curriculum & Instructional Technology<br>Sheila McAdams, Essex Elementary School<br>John Willis, Principal Memorial School<br>Joanne Maino, MERMS Principal<br>Patricia Puglisi, MERHS Principal |
| <b>Recorded by:</b>                      | Maria Schmidt   |
| <b>Link to Reports and Presentations</b> | <a href="https://www.mersd.org/domain/785">https://www.mersd.org/domain/785</a>   |

**A. Call to Order** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:09 p.m.

- 1) Public Comment** – Ms. Debra Wood of 5Alpine Road, Manchester, expressed concern regarding library access for middle and high school students. Because there is currently no librarian, students do not have access to the library space or for checking out books. Ms. Wood asked if there were creative solutions to the situation, suggesting volunteer or student staffing or an arrangement that puts other staff into the library. Ms. Whitman clarified that the public comment section is not set up as a dialogue and expressed appreciation for Ms. Wood's input.
- 2) Student Report** – Diego Sanson, a junior at MERHS, reported that the recently concluded Spirit Week was a great success, including the pep rally and senior night events for the athletic teams. He expressed tremendous happiness across the student body at being able to once again come together to celebrate. In addition, he broached concern about the recent MCAS results. In particular, he noticed a marked drop in his

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scores for geometry as compared to other sections. This was consistent with the experience of his peers in student council, where many reported a drop across all math scores. Mr. Sanson stated that there seems to be a large gap in their year of geometry instruction and that this deficiency is noticeable in this year's calculus class where his instructor had to re-teach material from his freshman year. Mr. Sanson asked if there could be resources from the school directed at assisting students with independent work to make up this deficit, particularly before the next MCAS and SAT testing begins. Ms. Whitman inquired about Mr. Sanson's approach to "anything but a backpack day," to which he confessed to not participating in that spirit day's theme. However, he did describe his two favorite solutions – the student who brought a microwave oven in place of his backpack and another who used a portable grill to haul materials to class! Ms. Whitman also thanked Mr. Sanson for sharing his concern regarding the math trajectory. Mr. Sanson asked if the current combination of classroom sections would be restored following the return of a teacher currently out on leave. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that while she could not make a public statement regarding the specific situation, it is the hope that the class sections will return to their original arrangement.

### **3) Chairman's Report –**

Ms. Whitman stated that since the last SC meeting she has met with the Student Advisory Committee, a state-mandated, five-person committee with one elected representative who represents them to the School Committee - Mr. Sanson. In addition, Ms. Whitman also represented the SC in Essex at their quarterly department head meeting where they report out to the public. Ms. Whitman provided an update on the school committee's endeavors and introduced context for the current budgetary endeavors. In addition, Ms. Whitman met with community members and devoted time to work through SC questions on warrant approval, creating an explanatory document. Additional insight can be gained by working with the MASC representation. Ms. Whitman also encouraged participation in the December 4 Charting the Course offered by the MASC to school committee members.

#### **Operating Protocols:**

- 1) Read by Mr. Foster: Work together to establish a vision, create policy, approve a budget, and assure accountability to sustain continuous improvement in teaching, learning, and facilities.
- 2) Read by Ms. Koch-Sundquist: Clearly define success and accountability for the committee, superintendent, faculty, staff, and students.

### **4) Consent Agenda –**

- Acceptance of Warrants – FY23 V1017; FY23 V1018; FY23 V1019
- Minutes for approval: *The minutes for 10/18/2022 will be approved at the next SC meeting.*

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Mr. Reed seconded the motion.*

Discussion: In response to SC member questions from packet review, Mr. Urbas addressed concern about the expense of using per diem athletic trainers. He noted that increases in daily trainers are rising because of labor costs across the market and a limited pool of trainers. In the past, MERSD had in-house trainers. However, Mr. Urbas stated that the costs are fairly even because per diem employees do not receive benefits. In addition, per diem costs are generally higher during the fall sports season. Principal Puglisi stated that with the resignation of our athletic director mid-August, we were behind in placing trainers. When we entered the Mass General pool, all trainers had been assigned. Ms. Spencer asked if the expectation was that we will be unable to fill the positions, and Principal Puglisi confirmed that has been the case so far, but the hope remains that Mass. General may be able to find one for us. Ms. Spencer indicated that she was concerned about the level of service from a constantly changing trainer and wondered if it was possible to get a stable appointment. Principal Puglisi said that our athletic director has worked to do so. However, the difficulty experienced during the regular season is compounded by entering the state tournaments as the schedules are updated daily. In addition, the MIAA has changed trainer requirements, adding trainer requirements to away games. Principal Puglisi complemented the determined efforts of Athletic Director, Cami Molinari, as she works daily, calling company after company to fill the trainer vacancies for each team outside of the Mass. General pool. Mr. Urbas said there was also questions about the cost of uniforms and socks for MERSD athletes. He stated that purchases follow guidelines, but is pursuing reasonable change. In addition, the district is making progress in eliminating the cost of off-site storage containers which reached a height during Covid because of a need to enable distancing in schools. There was a question about whether the vouchers are tied to the budget to actual report. They are not. The report includes everything posted through the end of last month. Items in these vouchers were not included in the report for tonight, but all purchase orders are included in projections. Another question regarded the annual license expense for Tyler Technologies in the amount of \$12,000. Mr. Urbas stated that this expense falls under district administration expenses and is a service contract for warranty on services. He highlighted the difference between back-end technology, like ASPEN and payroll software, and instructional technology used by students. Snow Cap is another warranty contract for servers. Mr. Urbas stated that it has been many years since the SC has provided feedback on how voucher information is presented, and he offered to include in that file what the rollout categories are for items on the warrants to clarify how items are related to the summary category. Mr. Urbas stated that the vouchers are presented to certify that expenditures quoted properly and are within the total budget. Line-by-line distributions are within the individual schools purview. Periodic budget-to-actual reports are provided for a more complete view of expenditures. The School Committee authorizes budget transfers to re-align the budget. Voucher approval by the School Committee provides authorization to release cash. In addition, Mr. Urbas has provided commentary about areas of concern emerging from expenditures so that the School Committee is aware of trends and areas of concern. Ms. Mitchell asked why there is a need to transfer between line items if it is all within budget. Mr. Urbas stated that the notes should clarify each transfer. For the particular example explored, the expense is within expected levels, but is part of a larger category where there are other factors at play, as detailed in the report, that require a transfer. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she has always viewed Mr. Urbas' notes as a budget narrative, not an intent to provide accounting of expenditures. Mr. Urbas confirmed that this is the case. However, he tries to provide insight so that there are no surprises when presenting the budget to actual report. Ms. Whitman added that the vouchers certify that those goods/services have been received and once approved release the cash. Ms. Mitchell asked about the expense

for Cumulous Global and clarification on how it is listed as over budget if the SC has not yet approved it. Mr. Urbas explained that Cumulous equals Google Classroom and is part of a larger category, instructional technology, of classroom technology that is expected to cost more than previously thought. This is because some costs were previously covered by Covid funding and now need to be absorbed by the district. It is true that there are times where we will spend to keep operations running, like with payroll, and then follow up with SC authorization afterward. This is based on the availability of funds in the budget coupled with the inability to get line-item transfers between SC meetings. Most municipalities allow. Alternately, we could cease operations, shutting down Google classroom and not paying teachers. Instead, we keep operations running while awaiting SC authorization. Ms. Whitman emphasized that this discussion should occur during sub-committee meeting. In closing, Mr. Urbas commented that it is very common to have a budget transfer at the end of the year to iron out expenses.

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved the vote. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion. The motion carried.*

*The motion to accept the consent agenda passed 5-1, with Ms. Mitchell voting no.*

**5) Continued Business – the order of the agenda was rearranged to accommodate presentations by the school principals and curriculum director.**

- Annual Student Assessment Report – Dir. Curriculum & Instructional Tech. Angela Bik/ Elementary Principals Sheila McAdams & John Willis/ MS Principal Joanne Maino/ HS Principal Patricia Puglisi: Superintendent Beaudoin introduced the principals and stated that the goal is to provide a wide lens, narrowing to each school. She emphasized that assessments are one piece of information. However, this year particular care and attention is being given to results as we emerge from the pandemic. This year's results provide a new base-line. Curriculum Director, Angela Bik, highlighted some areas to consider when examining the MCAS results. DESE provides subgroup performance information that allows us to monitor whether we are providing equitable opportunities for education for all our students. She also highlighted the impact of absenteeism, given that we had many students (56%) that missed more than ten days of school. The testing landscape was interrupted by Covid for two years. In addition, the test also was undergoing its first update in twenty years. The updated MCAS is designed to give clearer signs of readiness for the next grade or post-graduation. It is now a digital test, rather than a pen and pencil test. The roll-out of the new science and technology was delayed for grade ten until this past year. We are being asked to look at 2022 data as the new base-line. Three assessments were presented at the meeting. The MCAS charts student achievement progress in comparison to state learning standards and identifies gaps in the alignment of curriculum and instruction against those standards. It is given in the spring. The new iReady assessment is the district universal screener for math and reading in grades kindergarten through eighth. It identifies individual student strengths and areas that need support. It also provides supplemental learning experiences aligned to individual skill sets and facilitates targeted support from MTSS (multi-tiered system of support) staff. It is administered three times per year. The Advanced Placement (AP) exams are given to high school students and provides the opportunity for high school students to experience college-level work. It is given at the end of the yearlong AP course. Each level of educator has a detailed process for analyzing the resulting data that includes multiple teams. Different levels (district, school, individual teachers), look at the data through

different lens. For the MCAS, the snap shot of current ninth graders underlines that the district is in the process of recovery from the regression induced by the disruption of education during the pandemic. However, during this period, students classified as high-needs made gains. Cohort data is illustrated in the appendices and highlights the impact of the pandemic.

Principal Puglisi began by providing an overview of the MCAS performance for students in grade ten. Overall results were fairly good, particularly in essay writing. However, plans for progress include promoting stamina in writing through the current journaling program. Students in all grades journal on a bi-weekly basis. On off-weeks, students craft substantive responses to each other's journal entries. Work in literary analysis will continue to be important. Writing across disciplines is crucial. The NoRedInk platform will continue to facilitate real-time correction and grammar assistance. High School administration is also looking to tie elements of the vision of the graduate to assessments to develop skills and dispositions necessary for postsecondary success. Math MCAS scores tell a story. In 2021, statistics and probability were not taught as the result of staffing gaps in freshman and sophomore math classes. While instructors from the special education department did a commendable job in stepping in to assist with instruction, from November to the end of the school year the high school did not have a highly qualified math teacher. Administration addressed this deficit through hiring this year and developed a looping program in grades nine and ten for high needs students working with a certified special education/math teacher. In addition, they will continue to develop opportunities to connect mathematical topics to real-world application. The Science and Technology MCAS was a new test based on 2016 standards and revealed the need to provide further support to high needs students. Again, tying standards to the vision of the graduate and real world skills is a focus of the plan for progress. The AP program at MERHS offers twenty AP courses, which is high for a school our size. Sixty-seven percent of students in grades eleven and ten were enrolled in at least one AP course. In addition, unlike many other districts MERSD requires all students to sit for the exam in order to receive AP credit. Otherwise, they receive honors credit. Other districts do not do this and consequently have a lower test-taking rate which skews their results towards more passing grades. In addition, our AP program is invested in the normal schedule. Other schools have extra labs and time on subject outside of the school day. MERSD students fared very well (over 80% 3 or above) excluding one outlier – Comparative Government where most students scored a one. Plans for Progress: The School Council plans to review the AP program in depth, including surveys of surrounding districts, a review of how AP enrollment affects merit awards, impact on school rankings, and a student/parent survey. In addition, the high school is developing an authentic assessment within AP course beyond testing.

Principal Maino stated that while reviewing data we need to consider some background factors including staffing issues in ELA and difficulty keeping consistent staffing in grades six and eight. There were no candidates available to cover an eighth grade maternity leave. The long-term substitute position was filled by a part-time substitute, supplemented by other substitutes. Chronic student absenteeism was another hurdle. About fourteen students were absent for MCAS session days. When Principal Maino proctored the makeup sessions, she noticed that students were working very quickly. For

example, a test that should take two and a half hours was finished in less than an hour. Students seem test fatigued, as evidenced by push back on the iReady individualized learning paths. Principal Maino also emphasized the need to consider the entire student, including their social and artistic selves, and not just the narrow, standard-based scope of the testing assessments. Middle school students were greatly impacted by Covid. Trauma stunts growth and we are seeing that. In examining MCAS ELA scores, Principal Maino pointed to the clear need to devote focus and attention to writing. While it is clear that the middle school is laying a foundation for success at the high school level, it is not showing in the middle school data. Of particular concern was low writing stamina. During Covid, students were assessed strongly on engagement – that they were present remotely and participating. They did not receive as much writing instruction because it requires an in-person interaction to guide and develop those skills. Lessons also took much longer to deliver. DART analysis was concerning, as well. In science, students exhibited a lack of experience in labs and in Claim Evidence Reasoning (CER). Principal Maino described the goal of “making knowledge sticky;” activating old knowledge to teach new topics so that new material has something from which to build. This foundational knowledge is less available because students were not in school to receive it. Plans for progress include a three-pronged approach: Curriculum and resources, staffing stability, and consideration of professional development train staff. A challenge of middle school is that many skills are developmental and either there or not. With stunting from Covid, many students are behind in accessing these skills. We want to model meta-cognitive thinking and increase exposure to higher order thinking while building basic skills that build to higher order thinking. The entire staff was trained on iReady so all can understand the data and contribute. This is important as math and reading skills are employed across all subject areas. An important component of iReady will be data chats. All staff will be involved in meeting with students to examine their scores and helping students to become invested players in their educational journey. We want kids to see school as something for them and not something that is happening to them.

Principals Willis and McAdams presented results from the combined elementary school scores. Principal Willis expressed their mutual appreciation of staff as the schools emerge from Covid-era instruction. Principal McAdams mentioned that we also adopted a new reading program during Covid. Results showed comprehension, particularly of longer texts, and higher-order thinking as growth areas. Student writing stamina was also low. It is important to note that essay writing was completed on the computer, making typing proficiency an issue. In addition, the box in which students entered their work was expandable, but students did not seem to realize that they had to keep writing. Principal Willis shared that when comparing student math performance to the state average it was assumed that they would score well. Therefore, they honed in on areas where we did not meet this expectation. Higher order thinking again presented challenges – questions requiring input from multiple sources to solve a novel problem. Principal McAdams shared that instruction looks different in science class. It is much more authentic. We see that our kids perform better when that is in play. They performed well in experiment based questions, more so than text-based. Principal Willis expressed that his greatest concern when looking at the data is with kindergarten through second grade. The pandemic hit our youngest students the hardest. Students in third through fifth showed gains in math and STE over the course of the pandemic. Although they dipped in ELA, it

is typical to see a dip anytime new curriculum is introduced. The challenge for the elementary program is to build the foundational skills necessary for higher order thinking at the older schools. Principal Willis shared their plan for progress. The elementary schools will use data to provide differentiated instruction, continue to map the curriculum and align it to standards, and identifying gaps in instruction. They want to minimize teaching skills in isolation (silos) and provide opportunities to integrate thinking and be able to analyze and compare and do higher order thinking.

Curriculum Director Angela Bik pointed out the consistent need across the schools to align curriculum to Massachusetts standards. iReady is aligned to these standards and normed by hundreds of schools. It employs the “at grade level” bar. The district concluded that we want to do a deep dive to see how MERSD aligns to the standards and to be better able to identify what “grade-level” looks like. The high school is further along in this process and now seeks to map student curriculum to the vision of the graduate skills that are needed post-graduation, allowing them to incorporate more authentic learning and have students active participants in their learning process. Ms. Bik also spoke about the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) replacing the RTI program which identified students for support. The MTSS program is more proactive, focusing on Tier 1 (core) instruction, and reaches more students. It does not eliminate short-term intervention where needed. MTSS will also layer in myPath, the iReady individualized plan geared toward each specific student. iReady is an adaptive assessment. It changes based on how a student answers. Information is used to synthesize myPath as a learning tool. This is in addition to core instruction. It should boost all students, wherever they are in their learning process. In addition, we have to look beyond scores to remove barriers to student learning. We speak to this in the Strategic Plan with the theory of action: If we keep students at the center of decision-making and practice, cultivate a collaborative culture, an inclusive culture, articulate the relationship between social-emotional well-being and student achievement, and engage in two-way communication with our community, then students will realize their individual, unique and highest potential achieve academic excellence, value integrity and honesty and become intellectually curious and critical thinkers. This speaks to everything mentioned by the principals.

Discussion: Mr. Reed commended the action plan in place to rebound from the impact of the pandemic and expressed a hope to see continued information on this cohort as they move forward. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked how student growth percentiles looked in comparison with other districts. Ms. Bik responded that current data is limited and Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that there are not currently true comparables because of the testing gaps in MCAS administration. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the discrepancies in testing between the two elementary schools match what the principals are seeing. Principal McAdams said yes and Principal Willis said that it varied by grade. They agreed that results are consistent with early childhood not being where they want. Both principals expressed optimism that the new MTSS program provides the same level of support to elementary students regardless of their location. Ms. Spencer expressed concern about remediation efforts for older students who need those skills for upcoming testing that impacts college. Student Representative, Diego Sanson, echoed this notion, saying that, while it is great to speak about processes that lead to improvement in the future, students like him need help right now. Ms. Spencer asked what can be done now.

Principal Puglisi replied that they might be able to look at a supplementary geometry class for the second semester this year. However, that goal would pose funding issues. The high school is also considering having current teachers spiral back to re-teach needed skills. Currently, they do not have a solution in place. Ms. Spencer also noted the grade eight MCAS scores indicating more than 50% not meeting expectations in ELA and math and asked how those students are being targeted. Superintendent Beaudoin said that grade nine has a large amount of ELA work that preps them for testing. In grade ten, the addition of a SPED co-teacher is expected to bridge the gap. Principal Maino clarified that partially-meeting and not-meeting expectations are lumped together, so there are many students on the cusp. Less than 10% of students were designated not-meeting expectations. Director of Student Services, Allison Collins, shared that students have the option to go straight into geometry or take algebra 1 and wondered if families may shift more to algebra 1 in order to strengthen student skill sets. Ms. Spencer asked whether the position of the ME-block was being re-considered and Principal Maino replied that it is being re-considered given that even teachers are feeling tired at the end of the day. Ms. Bik stated that the other part of iReady is the upcoming data conversations where teachers will work with individual students to formulate their incremental goals. Principal Maino said that, ideally, myPath would be integrated across subjects, but currently the students are pushing back. Principal Maino also stated that all teachers will be involved in the upcoming data conversations with students, not just teachers in core subject areas. Ms. Mitchell inquired about the Boston Globe rankings and the negative comparison in ELA for all our schools, stating that every district experienced Covid challenges. Ms. Mitchell also asked if MCAS results are used to evaluate teacher performance. Principal Maino stated that the DART comparisons tend to be a more relevant comparison as the state says those schools are the most similar to us. Principal Puglisi said that data is used as part of the ongoing evaluation process. Mr. Foster requested that the team be clear, when talking about iReady and MTSS, about which subject areas they address as a reminder of the foundations we are laying in those subject areas and of the work needed beyond ELA and math. We still have work to take on in social studies and science. In addition, Mr. Foster said that he is sensitive to how we speak to the student perspective and asked what the term “stamina” was a proxy for and the contributors to that observation. Mr. Foster asked if there was concern, in targeting high-needs student performance, about further segregation of that group. Principal Puglisi stated that the high school model is about co-teaching in ELA, math, and social studies. For example, math is truly co-taught by a math and a special education teacher working together to teach the class. This model supports all students. Principal Maino confirmed that the middle school also have a co-teaching model of instruction in English and other courses with support. They also focus on tier 1 as much as possible. General education classes are supported within MTSS. Ms. Collins stated that there are many students classified as high-needs who are low-income or second-language learners, and they are not segregated at all. Mr. Foster asked why there appears to be a disconnect between iReady data and MCAS in elementary mathematics. Principal Willis responded that in order to process this seeming discrepancy, the district needs to further understand what iReady means by “on grade level” versus “one grade level below.” It is not currently clear what those mean and how they might be impacted by, for example, summer regression. More insight is necessary. Principal McAdams highlighted the differences between the two measures: iReady is a screening tool whereas the MCAS asks very in-depth questions. Mr. Foster stated that

one of the significant changes in standards is shift away from “higher order” language to that of disciplinary practice, knowledge versus what can you do with this. The principals’ presentations highlight the work needed in this area. Principal Maino concurred and shared that the new MCAS is getting at those life skills that we do want our students to possess – the ability to synthesize an opinion and substantiate it, compare things and analyze. It is a developmental leap for some of our kids. Principal McAdams echoed that at the elementary level they struggle with transference. Ms. Whitman reported that she has been approached by community members who wonder if the current goals are taking away from students who do not need remediation help. Principal Willis replied that the focus on higher-level thinking will take those kids to the next level. Principal McAdams added that myPath is not restricted to remediation and provides greater opportunities for forward movement. Ms. Whitman asked if these opportunities go beyond computer-based iReady, and Principal Willis responded strongly, “yes.” Principal Maino added that the universal design for learning is like building a ramp allowing everyone to experience success. Superintendent Beaudoin also reminded the School Committee our Strategic Plan is calling for a shift in our educational process away from the rote learning that is tested by these measures. As we target individualized learning, higher order thinking, and project-based learning, our success may become harder to demonstrate. We need to continually supply context when making comparisons. She emphasized that we have pointed ourselves in the right direction but need time and energy to get there.

## Sub-Committee Reports

- **Negotiation Team** (Committee Chairs) –Mr. Reed reported that negotiations are ongoing and progressing well.
- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/Matt Harrington) – Ms. Whitman reported that the Memorial building project is on-time and on-budget with only some final approvals pending. Mr. Urbas shared that the commission has granted approval for the turf field project at Brook Street, and this puts us on target for the timeline for getting bids. Mr. Foster stated that the Memorial building project received LEED Gold certification rating based on energy efficiencies. Achieving LEED Silver certification enabled us to reach a higher level of re-imbursement from the state; Gold certification does not affect reimbursement but does reflect well on the efforts of the team and may lead to additional energy savings in the future.
- **Policy and Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) –Ms. Spencer reported that they have finalized their review of MASC policy updates to the fiscal management section of policy manual and will present an update to the School Committee at the November 15 meeting. They are also drafting a reserve policy, looking to other districts and towns, and hope to propose a framework and language, leaving dollar amounts to the finance committee. Mr. Foster stated that they recently learned that their subcommittee is also responsible for communication. They have completed their task of identifying community groups for outreach. Superintendent Beaudoin supplied a plan from the previous budget cycle that included some contacts, and he and Ms. Spencer added to this, including social network contacts. They asked to begin consideration of messaging for upcoming November events, which the SC supported. Superintendent Beaudoin reiterated that we have a packet ready to go out and assistance from the PR firm.
- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Linn Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman reported that they met with the school district treasurer, Charlie Lane, who is preparing to retire. Future SC packets, we will see his monthly treasurer reports. The finance sub-committee was able to have their questions regarding the budget-to-actual report answered during the sub-committee meeting, and they are beginning to talk about long-term goals around business practices.
- **FY23 Budget –Fall Budget to Actual Report & Transfers** – Avi Urbas: Mr. Urbas began with an overview of the goals of the budget to actual report. Mr. Urbas provides not only the current expenditures with their budget line items, but also a projection of future spending. The School Committee is asked to approve transfers to account for overages. Mr. Foster asked if transfers are based on a forecast and not because expenses have already exceeded their budget line. Mr. Urbas replied that is usually the case, but can also be the other way around, especially at the end of the year when final spending numbers are in. Some flexibility of mindset is necessary. Mr. Urbas noted that a lot of the current variability is due to staff restructuring. A staff reorganization of the central office occurred, and you can see the shifting in the budget lines. In addition, the district was previously over-staffed at the school psychologist position for our enrollment level.

Superintendent Beaudoin provided insight into the positions. Adjustment counselors provide day-to-day SEL services while the school psychologist works under an arm of the special education department and is tasked with testing, analysis, and some IEP services. Mr. Urbas said that additional savings from staffing resulted from retirement in some positions. In looking at operating expenses, it had been absorbing the portion for an IT position, but that expense will now be moved to personnel. A major source of increased and anticipated expenses is in out of district placement, including transportation. Unfortunately, there the district has few options to mitigate costs. Switching to in-house transportation would require specialization for district staff in hiring and scheduling driver. Current costs are high because the transportation companies are struggling in these areas. However, we are working to secure orders as soon as possible to secure the best pricing. We are seeing modest savings in insurance and other benefits, but retiree health costs are growing. Mr. Urbas underlined that some areas of savings that we see in the current report will not repeat next year. He emphasized that we have a structural deficit that is very concerning to him and presents the need for a correction.

Questions: Ms. Whitman asked about the history of transportation in district, which Mr. Urbas described as bumpy quality due to their staffing issues, and the strength of utilities cost projections. Transportation is something he is willing to explore in greater detail in the future. Mr. Urbas stated that costs for utilities are changing. However, MERSD is part of a power consortium that does bulk buying. Their service allows us to access their projection model for the best estimates. Of course, these estimates assume similar usage levels to last year. Energy savings will be a priority. Ms. Spencer asked how consistent SPED expenses are year to year. Superintendent Beaudoin characterized SPED as the biggest wild card we have year to year. While there is good visibility in-house, we cannot predict new students. It will not be an area of savings for next year. Mr. Urbas commented that there has been a steady uptick over recent years and expenses can also shift throughout the year, usually including increases in transportation, as well. Ms. Mitchell asked why the current transfer for substitute teachers is only \$14K if anticipating \$100K shortage. Mr. Urbas clarified that some of those expenses have been shifted to staff. He noted that this is a category that can also see unexpected fluctuations if we have staff leaves. Ms. Mitchell also took the opportunity to note that our budget is cash-based, not accrual, and, for a finance person, that is an important distinction that she recently came to understand. Mr. Foster asked if it was possible to tell more of a program story around the budget-to-actual report. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that budget transfers have historically needed 10-15 minutes for approval by the School Committee. Currently, the process is taking much longer. The hope is to streamline the process from here, and Superintendent Beaudoin did not believe that they had the time to increase the story around the budget. Ms. Whitman emphasized that the SC could craft that narrative independently. Mr. Urbas underscored that the entire budget, as approved by town meeting, does not change.

*Ms. Spencer made a motion to approve the budget transfers as presented, with a revision for a clerical correction, as noted by Ms. Mitchell. Mr. Reed seconded the motion.*

*The motion passed unanimously.*

- 6) School Committee Comment:** Ms. Whitman emphasized the need to streamline the process for review of warrants. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the next School Committee session is likely to be a lengthy one as there is an executive session at 5:00 pm and the Business meeting at 6:00 will include presentation of the Habib report as well as sub-committee reports. It was decided that the next meeting will be virtual.

**7) Adjourn**

*Mr. Reed moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 pm.

**School Committee Future Meetings**

- November 15, 2022
- December 6, 2022