



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES DRAFT *May 6, 2024*

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	May 6, 2024
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Theresa Whitman, Chairperson Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist Erica Spencer
Absent:	John Binieris Anna Mitchell, Co-Chair Chris Reed
Guests:	Heather Leonard, Director Curriculum & Technology
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

- A. **Call to Order of** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 5:21 p.m.
- B. **Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) **Public Comment (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual)** - none
 - 2) **Chairperson’s Report** – Ms. Whitman attended the Day on the Hill, sponsored by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees as its annual legislative advocacy event. Ms. Whitman said that topics included the struggles of towns, such as Manchester and Essex, that receive little funding through Chapter 70, and current legislature in the pipeline. Ms. Whitman hopes that more SC members can attend in the future, although the conflict with the Essex Town Meeting made that difficult this year. Ms. Whitman will send out notes on her experience to SC members.

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Ms. Whitman reported that she was able to send the anticipated letter to the Essex Board of Selectmen and the Essex Finance Committee inviting them to re-establish the collaboration group and requesting insight into desired outcomes from a third party review of district operations.

In preparation for the Essex Town Meeting, Ms. Whitman shared that the SC conducted two question and answer sessions at the Essex Town Library and thanked the Essex Town librarian and Mr. Foster for their work to prepare for the sessions. Ms. Whitman stated that a one-hour open Facebook session was also held. This session yielded one question regarding who had been appointed to the Essex School Building Committee. This was the only person who attended, but Ms. Whitman said that this is an indication that the budget is not controversial this year. Having just seated the members, the information was available for sharing. Ms. Whitman stated that the SC plans to host another Q&A session before the upcoming Manchester ballot vote on the school budget.

3) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1065-1067
- Minutes for approval: April 24, 2024

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

Discussion: Ms. Spencer requested a revision to the minutes.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to separate the minutes from the vouchers for the purpose of approval. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0.

The motion to approve AP Vouchers 1065-1067 passed 4-0.

- FY24 Budget Amendment Request – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the amended FY24 Budget should have been included in the Consent Agenda portion of the agenda. The updated document reflects that the district has invoiced the towns for their portion of replacement of the turf fields at Brook Street and Highland Field. In addition, it shows deposit to the stabilization fund of increased revenues from interest income. Superintendent Beaudoin said that once the budget amendment is passed by the SC, it is presented to the towns. It is expected that it will be allowed to sit for the required 45 days and then will take effect.

Ms. Whitman moved to amend the FY24 Budget by transferring \$1,401,603 into the stabilization fund from the Manchester and Essex share of the reimbursement for the turf field project and by transferring \$100,138 from the FY23 E&D to the Stabilization Fund. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

Clarifying Questions: Ms. Spencer confirmed with Ms. Cresta that interest on construction funds referred to the Memorial building project. Ms. Cresta reported that MERSD still has temporary

borrowing of \$1.3 M. Once the project is officially closed, the district will pay off or transfer this loan. Until then, the district continues to collect interest on these funds. Ms. Cresta estimated that it will take another year or so for the MSBA to close out the project.

The motion passed 4-0.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/John Binieris) – Mr. Foster stated that the Memorial SBC met for the first time in eight months to identify minor work that is needed to close out the project and identify potential equipment needed at the elementary site that could be used at other buildings, for example a line painter for the parking lot. The committee received an overview of the close out process. Mr. Foster estimated that it will be over a year to complete the process.
- **Finance Committee** (Anna Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – No Report

Superintendent's Report – Superintendent Beaudoin presented additional information from the MSBA regarding building options open for consideration for the Essex building project. Following concerns about the limits of the feasibility study and how those limits may have been communicated to constituents, Superintendent Beaudoin was able to follow up with Diane Sullivan of the MSBA. Ms. Sullivan is further up the chain than the liaison who previously cautioned against the possibility of looking at the option of a combined elementary school. Ms. Sullivan said that the MSBA liaison was accurate in stating that the current invitation is for Essex Elementary School and its students. However, in going through the process, there remains room to consider all options, including consolidating the elementary schools at the Memorial Elementary building.

Superintendent Beaudoin provided clarifying input into the building process. The invitation into the MSBA eligibility process is a response to the SOI filed by the district and is for Essex Elementary School and its population. Currently, the district is in the eligibility phase. No options for study have been ruled in or out at this time. The eligibility phase includes several steps, including an MSBA enrollment projection study. The district is in the process of gathering and submitting required documentation and will have an enrollment meeting with MSBA at the end of June (tentatively). At that meeting, the MSBA will share their enrollment study projections. The findings from the enrollment study will inform the identification of potential pathways/considerations for future study in the feasibility phase. At this point, the district will receive input on the potential for the Memorial site to be included for further study. As part of the feasibility process a number of options will be studied. It is too early in the process to be able to determine if Manchester Memorial will be one of those options or not.

The enrollment projection report, expected in June, may provide insight that a reconfiguration would be in the best interest of the population. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that Ms. Sullivan was clear that no option would be ruled out going forward. However, Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is premature to say what can or cannot be done or how far any particular option is likely to go. The process drives the options. The enrollment projection report due at the end of June will determine the size of the facility that the MSBA will support going forward.

Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that the space study is not the complete study. The district outlines its programs. Square footage and population are taken into account, and a detailed analysis is made of how the space is used. The builders will design to these parameters. Superintendent Beaudoin also clarified that it is a space study and not a program study.

Discussion: Mr. Foster stated that there is an envisioning piece, regarding EES programming. The superintendent stated that it is a component of the feasibility phase.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the Statement of Interest, which is for the Essex Elementary School and its population, negates moving students somewhere else. The superintendent said that nothing is in or out of consideration at this point.

Ms. Spencer stated that her key concern previously had been that the public statement and explanation provided at the Manchester Town Meeting did not accurately reflect the actual options under consideration during the feasibility study. Mrs. Spencer stated that it now appears to have been accurate representation.

Mr. Foster stated that the district has the option to look at consolidation, but the district is not taking a position on how far that would go. Mr. Foster said that consolidation of the two schools would have a two-part hurdle. There is the physical building requirements and the requirements of the regional agreement. From the building perspective, it will be up to the building committee to determine the best path forward. Mr. Foster stated that he believes the information presented at the MBTS Town Meeting was accurate.

Ms. Whitman stated that the SC needs to discuss the options for the Essex building project that they want considered. She said that the consolidation option is a deviation from the current path.

Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the Feasibility phase seeks the most cost effective route to achieve the outcome for Essex Elementary School and its population. The MSBA is not looking to over-build and may bring alternatives to the attention of the SC. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is important to let the data flow.

Ms. Spencer stated that her goal was options, not outcomes. The concern originated with MBTS residents. Ms. Spencer asked to discuss the issue at an upcoming SC meeting as part of the posted meeting agenda to allow attendance by interested community members. Ms. Whitman asked if, in order to let the data inform the conversation, it would be satisfactory to wait until a meeting after the enrollment projection report. Superintendent

Beaudoin stated that the data is due to the MSBA by June 3. Ms. Whitman said that the SC could have a substantive discussion on the topic at the SC summer workshop. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the discussion should be included as a bulleted agenda item for the May 21 meeting. Superintendent Beaudoin said that information could also be added to the Q&A section on the website.

5) Continued Business –

a. Curriculum Update - Heather Leonard

- i. Community Input for the Arts Program – Ms. Leonard shared that the MERSD arts council is seeking community input via a survey. MERSD is completing the Arts & Cultural Vitality (ACV) Index. This structure will help the council to review district arts programming. It is a field-tested, self-evaluation rubric to examine the district's arts program & culture. The information from the survey will be used by the arts council to inform plans for next steps.
- ii. Hiring for Instructional Coaches – Ms. Leonard said that the hiring process is underway with pool of applicants. The interview committee has been formed and consists of staff, administration, and community members.
- iii. Grant Overview on Website – Ms. Leonard stated that she has added grant overview information to the curriculum page of the district website. Information includes the grants the district is currently receiving, the amount awarded, and the purpose. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this page currently reflects all academic grants, but it will be expanded to include all district grants.

Questions: Mr. Foster noted that, according to the SC calendar the current year is a curriculum spotlight. Mr. Foster said that the program has not been talked about and asked when that could be done. Mr. Foster maintains the bucket list of issues deferred to the summer for SC consideration. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that the list be shared with all members again. Mr. Foster stated the importance of using the summer workshop to prioritize how issues will be taken up by the SC. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the SC is about one year behind in its three year presentation cycle. The presentation cycle is designed to keep new SC members informed. However, it was crowded out by other issues. The next fiscal year was supposed to be devoted to a special education review and athletics review. The superintendent suggested flipping years two and three. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that, because the state has accepted funding for school lunches, which previously always ran at a deficit for the district, the review of the lunch program is no longer of high concern.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if students will have a final round of diagnostic testing this year. Ms. Leonard responded that a third diagnostic is scheduled for spring and already underway in some buildings. Resulting data is used to plan for the following year. The only grade that will not have this diagnostic is grade eight, because they will have an additional MCAS test in civics added this year. These students are transitioning to the high school, and their data would not have driven

planning for next year. Ms. Leonard confirmed that the data will be shared with families and the SC.

Ms. Whitman raised the possibility of the district discontinuing participation in the MCAS. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district does not have the authority to do so because it is a state graduation requirement. Ms. Leonard said that the state is looking to include alternate assessment methods in the MCAS. Changes to the science MCAS are the first example of this update. The new civics MCAS is designed to be a showcase of real world knowledge. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district strives for a balanced perspective when it comes to the role of assessments and the MCAS. The superintendent noted that these scores are also used by outside entities when ranking schools. Given the district's success in these areas and public support for that success, it is difficult to know whether to champion the assessment components that go into these rankings. They have a role in marketing and public relation and provide an assessment of how the district is doing. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she appreciates the School Committee's guidance on the issue.

Superintendent Beaudoin communicated that the high school principal has had to reschedule the date of the June half day for students at the high school only. The listed half day is June 7, but that is in conflict with the date for the high school MCAS. The state of Massachusetts assigns the exact high school testing dates, and the district cannot change it. The new half day will be the second to last day of school, for the high school only. Students in K-8 will maintain the June 7 half day. The district does not receive the testing dates from the state until after the school year is well under way and the district calendar published.

- b. FY25 School Committee Calendar – Draft provided in SC meeting materials by Superintendent Beaudoin for review by the School Committee members. Mr. Foster suggested that the SC may need two days in August for the SC workshop. Mr. Foster endorsed Superintendent Beaudoin's recommendation to flip years two and three in the SC presentation schedule, moving the curriculum spotlight to next year. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that the SC summer bucket list be re-shared with SC members. Mr. Foster stated that, functionally, the SC completed many of the components of the year three goals in the current year. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the Student Services report to the SC will be on May 21. The superintendent included tentative dates for SC subcommittee meetings on the calendar and stated that there will also be School Building Committee meetings on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Ms. Whitman suggested holding calendar approval until the May 21 meeting in order to finalize dates for public budget hearings. The superintendent stated that the School Building Committee will absorb much of the district administration's time once it is running. Solidifying subcommittee meeting dates will help to preserve those meetings. Mr. Foster asked about SC obligations to the superintendent contract. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is usually assigned to the School Committee chair who works with the superintendent on revisions or rewrites. The contract is brought before the SC

for final approval. The School Committee decided to postpone calendar approval until the next meeting.

6) School Committee Comment - None

C. Adjourn

Mr. Foster moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:11 pm.

School Committee Future Meetings

- May 21, 2024
- June 4, 2024
- June 18, 2024 - if needed