



**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES**

April 2, 2024

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	April 2, 2024
<b>Location:</b>	MERMHS Learning Commons
<b>Attendees:</b>	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Theresa Whitman, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Mitchell, Co-Chair Chris Reed Erica Spencer
<b>Absent:</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>	Heather Leonard, Director Curriculum & Technology
<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 of** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:01 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 said that she is still working on the proposed invitation letter to the town boards, as requested by the SC. She has also sent invitations to several local civic groups, including town libraries, PTOs, and rotary clubs, and to the Manchester Mothers Club, to invite members to attend an upcoming

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engagement event to spark conversation on the topic of defining excellence in education. Responding groups have praised the SC's outreach. Ms. Whitman created an excel sheet for School Committee members that includes important upcoming dates and a tab for member notes about engagement sessions. Ms. Whitman ended the chairperson's report by welcoming Michelle Cresta to her first School Committee meeting since taking her post as district finance director.

Ms. Spencer asked if the SC would seek the input of students, as suggested by Student Representative Diego Sanson, when exploring the definition of student excellence. Ms. Whitman said that the hope is to involve the Student Advisory Council. She plans to seek their input. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this may be a topic for the summer workshop. The Superintendent urged the SC to include the faculty and administration in the conversation of student perspective and to ensure that this avenue supports the work already done and underway. Ms. Whitman stated that the SC is still in the information-gathering phase.

Ms. Spencer read from the "School Committee Operating Protocols:"

- A school committee member in his/her relations with fellow committee members should:
- a. Recognize that action at official meetings is binding and that he/she alone cannot bind the committee outside such meetings.
  - b. Realize that statements or promises should not be made regarding how he/she will vote on matters that will come before the committee.
  - c. Uphold the intent of executive sessions and respect the privileged communication that exists in executive sessions.
  - d. Not withhold pertinent information on school matters or personnel problems, either from members of his/her own committee or from members of other committees who may be seeking help and information on school problems.
  - e. Make decisions only after all facts on a question have been presented and discussed.

- 3) **Student Report** – Stella Straub. Ms. Straub stated that the SAC is working on the structure of the group and is striving to formalize its membership process. The council favored having two representatives from each grade and believes that all students should be elected to the position by their peers in order to give the student body a voice. Ms. Straub said that the manner in which the student representative to the SC is chosen should be formalized. Ms. Straub shared that the STEAM night was packed and that some student presenters were at the school for twelve hours that day, showing incredible enthusiasm for their projects and clubs. Ms. Straub said that there is a lot of positive energy evident as seniors enter their last week of school and plan for post-graduation.

Ms. Whitman asked about the student response to changing SCORE requirements. Ms. Straub said that there was some stress due to tighter requirements. It can be difficult to concretize plans for this senior experiential project. However, the expectations were

motivating for students, as well. Ms. Spencer asked if changes to SCORE included ways to help students with many AP units to find a meaningful SCORE experience. Ms. Straub said that these students still have difficulty crafting an impactful project due to the reduced hours they are required to devote to SCORE and by the demands of preparing for AP testing. Some students have arranged to work as a TA in classes.

#### **4) Consent Agenda –**

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1057-1059
- Minutes for approval: March 19, 2024
- Inter-State Travel: DECA International Competition - Anaheim, CA 4/26-5/1. Nine students qualified to compete in the DECA International Competition held in Anaheim, CA. The cost of the trip is \$1350 and includes airfare, hotel, and conference registration.

*Mr. Foster moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.*

Clarification: Mr. Foster confirmed that the price quoted is per student and asked how it is paid. Superintendent Beaudoin said that a combination of school support, student group fundraising, and family contribution covers the expense. The high school has a line item to provide some assistance to groups, like DECA and debate, for competition.

*The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Whitman abstained.*

#### **5) Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/John Binieris) – Report
  - Essex Elementary School MSBA Process Update – Ms. Whitman said that the subcommittee held the first meet-and-greet with individuals interested in serving on the Essex Building Committee. There are additional applicants to meet with due to the timing of the posting's close. The subcommittee hopes to present the list of recommended building committee members for SC approval at the April 24 SC meeting.
- **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) – Ms. Spencer stated that the subcommittee met earlier in the day regarding pending policy recommendations for:
  - Extracurricular participation by resident students not currently enrolled in the district: The subcommittee met with middle school Principal Joanne Maino, and athletic director Cami Molinari who provided insight into the impact to the middle

school program from acceptance of these participants. By necessity, this policy would apply to only the middle school sports program, because high school athletics is under the jurisdiction of the MIAA. The MIAA prohibits this kind of participation. Ms. Spencer stressed that the subcommittee started from the premise that the SC would like to craft a policy allowing for this type of participation. Ms. Spencer said that this is particularly relevant while seeking community support for the district operating budget. Such a policy would bring with it all of the advantages that come with opening doors. The administrators also shared potential challenges of such a policy for the middle school program. Non-district students are not responsible to the code of conduct that all MERSD students agree to uphold. Participation puts a budgetary strain on the district given that only a portion of costs are covered by the user fee for participation. The district would be assuming increased liability, and participation by these students could displace district students. The middle school program is very full, including the specific program that generated the request. There are currently 46 students signed up for field hockey in the fall, which will result in two over-sized teams.

Ms. Whitman asked if the subcommittee had a recommendation. Mr. Foster stated that the subcommittee recommend that the SC does not create a policy allowing for the participation in the middle school sports programs by resident students not enrolled in the district. Mr. Binieris confirmed that this would only have allowed participation in those programs not offered at the student's school. Ms. Mitchell noted that such a policy, if it had been approved, would have opened the door to petitions for participation in other programs, for instance Theater. Mr. Foster stated that this recommendation should be placed on a future agenda for a vote by the SC.

- Reserve Policy: Ms. Spencer expressed gratitude to Ms. Cresta for meeting with the subcommittee and clarifying the difference between traditional reserve funds and the revolving fund accounts which were tapped in the past by the district. Reserve funds are comprised of the E&D fund and the stabilization fund. Given that most revolving funds will be exhausted by the end of this fiscal year, for example the school choice fund used by the district to fund the playing field projects, the E&D and stability accounts will more easily be identified as the reserve accounts. Ms. Spencer said that they discussed having a ceiling to the reserve fund that respected the healthy level of reserves advocated by the auditors while responding to community concern about excessive reserves. Ms. Spencer stated that the subcommittee plans to have a draft policy for presentation and discussion at the next SC meeting.

Ms. Whitman suggested that the subcommittee present recommendation and the full committee could work on the policy. Ms. Spencer stated that it would be helpful to craft a draft of the policy encompassing all they had learned and then pursue a discussion and vote with the full committee. Mr. Foster said that the subcommittee was not at the point of including ceiling amounts and this would be

part of the full SC discussion. Ms. Spencer said that in order to fund the capital plan, the district would need to consider adding a line item to the operational budget. The reserves will be severely depleted by the end of the current fiscal year by the feasibility study and this year's capital investments. Ms. Whitman expressed concern about the full SC being able to contribute to policy formation based on the information gathered by the policy subcommittee and their recommendations. Ms. Spencer said that her understanding was that the subcommittee, with the assistance of Superintendent Beaudoin and Ms. Cresta, were tasked with proposing a draft policy. Ms. Whitman stated that the draft policy would be added to an upcoming agenda for discussion. Ms. Mitchell suggested that the superintendent and Ms. Cresta update the capital plan to provide guidance about what will be needed. Due to constraints in meeting time, Ms. Spencer suggested circulating the draft reserve policy to SC members, allowing members to better prepare to discuss it in detail. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she could circulate the draft and receive feedback from individual members without risking deliberation outside the public forum.

**6) Superintendent's Report –**

- a. Middle School Dean of Students search – The search is under way and the superintendent expects site visits following the April vacation break.
- b. Director of Finance & Operations – Superintendent Beaudoin welcomed Ms. Cresta to the position. Ms. Cresta is currently familiarizing herself with the role and working on a FY24 budget amendment and the FY25 budget documents for the towns for distribution before their upcoming votes.
- c. FY25 Hiring – The first round of postings for known vacancies, based on retirements and other changes, was on March 28. Another set is expected on April 5 for positions included in the current budget proposal, including instructional coaches.
- d. SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council) reformed – The members are invited to attend the SC meeting on May 21. At that time, the superintendent plans to present the SPED report.
- e. MBTS Police Comfort Dog – based off a ninth grade civics project, the MBTS police department is exploring adopting a comfort dog that would visit all buildings. This program may require the SC to amend its existing animal policy, which prohibits all animals from being on school grounds. The MBTS police department is working with the town boards, and they would manage the program. The district would not train or house the dog. The superintendent said that a visit to the SC for further information is planned for the May 21 or June 4 meeting. The superintendent stated that the program would include a plan for dealing with student allergies, etc.
- f. Good News – Senior Week is sparking a lot of energy and excitement. The superintendent will provide a calendar of end of year events. Superintendent Beaudoin thanked Kristi Umile and all those who worked on the STEAM evening and made it an incredible success. Participants from area businesses and representatives from the elementary through high school all had engaging

booths. Upcoming events include: MERHS Spring Concert, elementary poetry café in Essex, an SEL evening with Michael Eatman sponsored by the Middle School Council, a SPED parent informational session for students entering grade six, and an informational session on understanding the new IEP.

Questions: Ms. Whitman asked if the SPED informational meeting was only for those with IEPs or if 504 families would also be including. Although currently geared to IEP families, Superintendent Beaudoin said that she would look into if 504 inclusion would be beneficial to families. Ms. Mitchell asked about the comfort dog and possible allergy concerns. Superintendent Beaudoin said that options could include restricting the animal to certain areas of the buildings or distributing parent consent forms to determine where the dogs should be limited. The district can explore how other districts have handled similar programs. The dog would not be in any one building for long.

## **7) Continued Business –**

- a. Essex Elementary School Building Project & Feasibility Study – Superintendent Beaudoin included the School Building Committee Charge in the current meeting materials packet to provide a sense of what the group does and their responsibilities. The building project page is now up and running on the district website. It contains an introduction to the project, an FAQ tab, and a rolling slide show featuring information from the Habib report and images of the current state of the EES building. There is also a list on the webpage of historical and current documents that lead to the district’s determination to pursue two separate elementary buildings. As previously discussed, seating of the SBC will be postponed while the final list of recommendations is completed. Superintendent Beaudoin spoke regarding the building project and upcoming feasibility vote. The school district is the project owner and SC members will be asked to vote to approve going forward with the feasibility study. The town partners will determine separately how to fund their portion of the cost of the feasibility study, as determined by the apportionment formulae. Each group must approve the language used in their town warrant for the election. Superintendent Beaudoin started with draft language from the 2016 exercise for the School Committee vote, and it has been approved for the current vote. The Town of Essex has obtained approval from counsel. The warrant language is still pending in Manchester.\

*Ms. Whitman moved that the Manchester Essex Regional School District (MERSD) hereby appropriates the amount of \$1,500,000 for the purpose of paying costs of the Essex Elementary School feasibility study, for the school located 12 Story St, Essex, MA 01929, described in two separate deeds recorded in a) Book 4203 on Page 399, and b) in Book 4216 on Page 501 and shown together on a plot plan in Plan Book 86, Plan 88 in the Essex South Registry of Deeds and depicted on Map 129, Lot 5 of the Town of Essex Assessors’ maps, including all costs incidental and related thereto (the “Study”) said amount to be expended under the direction of MERSD Essex Elementary School Building Committee. To meet this appropriation \$500,000 is hereby*

*transferred from available funds of the District, and \$1,000,000 shall be assessed upon the Towns of Manchester-by-the-Sea and Essex and apportioned between the two member towns in accordance with the formula for capital cost apportionment contained in the MERSD regional agreement, as amended. The District acknowledges that the Massachusetts School Building Authority's ("MSBA's") grant program is a non-entitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and any costs the District incurs in excess of any grant approved by and received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the District. Mr. Foster seconded the motion.*

Clarification: Mr. Foster asked if the School Committee was taking a budgetary action with the current motion. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that it was not, but rather committing to engaging in the feasibility study. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the feasibility study includes other sites for consideration. The superintendent stated that the study refers to the site being reviewed (the current location of EES) and not to potential sites for a new building. Those sites will all be considered.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

- b. Curriculum Update: Heather Leonard, Director of curriculum & Instructional Technology.
  - i. MCAS Season – MCAS testing began this week and rolled out smoothly at the high school. ELA testing will continue this month at all locations. The Math MCAS will take place in early to mid-May, and the Science MCAS for grades five and above will be administered in late May. There is a new grade eight Civics MCAS that will be administered in June. Ms. Leonard complimented the district's technology team for their support.
  - ii. Curriculum Review Processes - The work of the history and social science review group, meeting throughout this year, was enhanced by the Genocide Education Grant award for curriculum development. That grant supports curriculum development and seeking community partnerships. Similarly, excess award money from the Investigating History grant allowed the district to reach out to an approved partner and develop a custom professional development event around the aspects requested by teachers: navigating the demands of a dense curriculum with limited educational time. To increase interaction and collaboration with other professionals, an invitation was extended to participants beyond the district, and attendees came from Hamilton-Wenham, Salem, Reading, Wakefield, and Amherst.

The world language review is ongoing. Staff have been working through online DESE learning modules to understand the requirements of the 2021 shift in DESE standards. Once the modules are completed, staff will look at action steps to bring the district up to date. The curriculum review will continue next year.

The Arts Council met and is working to understand the measures and indicators used to consider what the district's program looks like.

The ELA K-5 review is in the implementation stage. The elementary curriculum leadership team met to complete an aggregate data analysis based on curriculum mapping done in each building. The leadership team looked at inconsistencies or gaps and trends across grade levels that will be targeted.

Questions: Ms. Whitman asked if grant information is listed online to share. Ms. Leonard said that is not currently the case, but she is happy to add a grant information area to her curriculum page. Superintendent Beaudoin said that this could be cross-linked with the budget. Mr. Foster asked about the role of auditing for Authentic Learning in the review processes. Ms. Leonard stated that the leadership teams is finding that a lot is imbedded in the work being done. Ms. Leonard described this as a goal for her work next year. Future work will include how to center authentic learning in the conversation. Mr. Foster asked about the timing of the reviews for completion of the History/Social Science and World Language reviews. Ms. Leonard clarified that World Language will be working through the fourteen, hour-long training modules for the remainder of the year as they are intensive. Their review will stretch to two years, allowing the entire team to gain this depth of knowledge. This will inform next steps, whether curriculum adoption, pathway re-evaluation, etc. The history/social science team goal is planning to recommend action steps by the spring. Some of the work of the current year has been field testing. The team will recommend where to go from there. The pilot program is being expanded by the state to grades three and four. The team will consider whether the district should apply to continue participating in the expanded program. They will also consider next steps for the other grades. Their recommendations will encompass each of these areas. Mr. Foster confirmed that the arts is not just a curriculum review but a program review. Ms. Leonard said that their goal for June is to complete the ratings/rubric scale of the program. Then they will work to form recommended action steps, review program artifacts and rank them to find priority areas for further action. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the review of the world language program is tied to staffing requests in future budgets. Completion of the review work will facilitate the formation of a K-12 program concept. This will allow the district to have an effective plan for the extra resources they would request to support the program. Ms. Spencer asked about the timing for a world language budget recommendation. Ms. Leonard said that the team will have completed

the 14 learning modules by year's end. Next fall, the curriculum review process will begin. Any recommendation will be grounded in data and fieldwork. Mr. Binieris asked for more information about the Genocide Education grant. Ms. Leonard replied that a new state law requires teaching middle and high school students about genocide. However, that looks very different for each age group and includes instruction on how grouping people together and creating generalizations is harmful. For the middle school, the focus is on the importance of understanding the perspectives of others. Much of this instruction is integrated into other curriculum. The grant is \$30K and bolsters the current work done by district educators to keep the district in line with the new requirements. It allows for teacher training, texts and novels to support instruction, and student field trips. Brown University has units that partner with the current curriculum. Material also helps to facilitate the very different ways that the topic is communicated with students of different ages.

- c. Student Opportunity Act (SOA) Plan – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this 2015 act arose from concern about the outdated Chapter 70 funding formula. The argument was that Chapter 70 was not keeping pace with the needs of districts. The review resulted in an overhaul of the system, with a seven year phase-in. The Student Opportunity Act is geared to getting funds to populations that need it most. Twelve to fifteen districts receive most funding due to their population needs. MERSD receives money from one area – out-of-district transportation. This amounts to \$40-60K annually. To receive these funds, the district is required to submit a plan yearly for this population. Ms. Leonard completed the plan via an online application. The focus is on trying to align the plan to work already being done. Ms. Whitman stated that the SC would vote to approve this plan. Ms. Leonard stated that the options for the plan components are very limited, often by a drop down menu. A student group must be chosen from those provided. She and Student Services Director Allison Collins reviewed data and chose “students with disabilities.” A “high needs” group was not an option. Ms. Leonard stated that a lot of the plan is not new because the district has done a lot of work to meet the needs of this target group. The plan requires commitment to evidence-based practices (EBP) from a list. Ms. Leonard said that the overall goal is to increase the systems to improve the academic performance across the group. When students with disabilities are able to better access the program, all students benefit.

Questions: Mr. Foster expressed concern that the funds are targeted to students with disabilities but nothing ensures that these students are well served. Mr. Foster asked what the targets are and how to ensure that general approaches meet their needs. Ms. Leonard explained the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) where tier one is the general classroom, supplemented by MTSS work for all students in area needs. Ms. Leonard said that staff work to

build an inclusive environment. The DESE goal is to increase the efficacy of instructional practices to all in order to decrease the performance gaps of the target population. Accountability comes from assessment data. DESE provides a target in accountability. Mr. Foster asked where to find this information. Ms. Leonard stated that it is on the DESE website. Each school and district has a target point. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that students with disabilities also have annual review meetings and a liaison to monitor their individual progress.

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the SOA Plan as presented. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.*

*The vote passed unanimously.*

- d. School Committee End of Year Calendar – The School Committee reviewed the current SC calendar for time management and inclusion of additional agenda items. The discussion yielded several updates to the calendar. The May 6 business meeting will start at 5:15 pm to allow for the addition to the agenda of 1) Curriculum Review and 2) presentation of the amended FY24 budget. The May 21 SC business meeting will also include presentation of the draft reserve policy and a recommendation on the proposed extracurricular participation policy by the policy subcommittee for SC vote. Potentially, the MBTS comfort dog officer would also attend. Added to the June 4 SC business meeting will be 1) the final curriculum review of the year, 2) elementary/secondary school handbook review, and 3) SC re-organization
- e. School Committee Action Items –
  - i. Upcoming Town Meetings - In preparation for the upcoming Town Meetings, Superintendent Beaudoin will provide old scripts for introduction of the warrants.

Questions: Ms. Whitman explained that the SC member who presents each article can invite any official to respond to questions from the audience. For instance, budget questions would be directed to Ms. Cresta or Superintendent Beaudoin. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that there are two votes before the towns – approval of the formula for payment of the feasibility study and approval of the district operational and capital budgets.

Ms. Whitman recommended that members presenting at Town Meeting review likely questions. Mr. Binieris agreed to speak on behalf of the facilities subcommittee in presenting the warrant for the feasibility study. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested calling an online meeting with the chairs of the town boards to finalize who will present and answer anticipated questions. The facilities subcommittee would call this meeting and invite the board chairs to attend. As such, it would be a public meeting.

**8) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Whitman said that the MASC will hold its annual Day on the Hill legislative advocacy event for its membership. Ms. Whitman plans to attend and invited the rest of the SC to join her. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there is a budget to support this work. Mr. Foster asked about funding for other opportunities, and the superintendent said they may be covered. Ms. Mitchell reminded the committee that they were going to review SC operation norms before the end of the year. Ms. Whitman stated that she would look to address presentations by committee members in an upcoming meeting and plan to review norms and protocol during the summer SC workshop. Mr. Reed welcomed Ms. Cresta to the district.

### **C. Adjourn**

*Ms. Spencer moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Mr. Reed seconded the motion.*

*The motion passed unanimously.*

Meeting Adjourned at 7:57 pm

### **School Committee Future Meetings**

- April 24, 2024 (Wednesday) 5:00 pm
- May 6, 2024 (Monday) 5:15 pm
- May 21, 2024
- June 4, 2024
- June 18, 2024 - if needed