



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

March 19, 2024

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	March 19, 2024
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Mitchell, Co-Chair Chris Reed Erica Spencer
Absent:	Heather Leonard, Director Curriculum and Technology
Guests:	
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 6:04 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 responded to several inquiries she has received and broached upcoming topics for discussion within the School Committee:
 - a. Minutes and recordings for subcommittee meetings – posting is planned
 - b. All Boards Meeting checklist – Ms. Whitman suggested adding the list to an upcoming SC agenda meeting.

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- c. Collaboration Group – Ms. Whitman said that, although the Essex boards were unwilling to commit to an open meeting format for collaboration group meetings, the work around has been to invite members of external boards to relevant SC subcommittee meetings as needed.
- d. SC Representatives to town boards – It was suggested that the School Committee appoint representatives to the town boards. Ms. Whitman suggested that the SC take up the issue at the June reorganization meeting.
- e. SC norms and operating protocols – Ms. Whitman reviewed practical issues that the SC may want to take up for discussion. This included whether to invite the chairs of town boards to speak when they are in attendance at SC meetings; how to manage presentations by SC members (e.g., under what circumstances they will be permitted and the timeline for submission of relevant materials to all SC members); and how to introduce the opinions of absent board members during SC meeting for which they would like to provide input.
- f. Review of School Committee goals from December – Ms. Whitman reviewed the goals set for themselves by the SC in December and concluded that most are in process. One area that impacts others is the definition of “Academic Excellence,” and Ms. Whitman said that the SC will want to work on this by June 2024. This includes soliciting public input. In terms of the budget, Ms. Whitman said that many goals had been addressed, though not during SC meetings. Many goals relate to completion of the budget. The SC has still to formalize the reserve policy, but that is with the Policy Subcommittee. The SC will continue to work with town partners to determine budget expectations and limitations and to connect with the community to solicit their input. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that these goals be made available to SC members as a Google document, allowing members to add action points with meeting documentation to demonstrate when each goal was addressed. This would facilitate directing inquiries to the corresponding meeting and actions taken by the School Committee. Ms. Whitman will share the document. She stated that her next action item is to set up engagement sessions to support the budget process as it moves to approval at the upcoming Town Meetings. Mr. Foster asked how input from the engagement sessions is reported back to the School Committee. Ms. Whitman said that, for the single office hours that had public attendance, the information was shared at the SC meeting immediately following. Ms. Whitman said that she is also currently preparing for the Town Meeting. The School Committee Chair and Co-Chair are expected to present the budget on behalf of the School Committee as a unified body.

Mr. Sanson read from the “MASC code of Ethics:”

A school committee member in his/her relations with the school administration should:

- a. Endeavor to establish sound, clearly-defined policies with which to direct and support administration.

- b. Recognize and support the administrative chain of command and refuse to act on complaints as an individual outside the administration.
- c. Act only on the recommendations of the chief administrator in all matters of employment or dismissal of school personnel.
- d. Give the chief administrator full responsibility for discharging his/her professional duties and hold him/her responsible for acceptable results.
- e. Refer all complaints to the administrative staff for solution and only discuss them at committee meetings if such solutions fail.

3) Student Report – Diego Sanson. Mr. Sanson said that at the last Student Advisory meeting, members discussed the issue of choice for students represented by their course catalog. The council debated the merits of the large amount of choice, concluding that the high degree of choices can impose some stress but is more beneficial than anything. However, the council acknowledged that maintaining the current options may not be practical as enrollment wanes. Ms. Sanson said that the students were happy that proposed schedule changes were not implemented for next year. He said that many lower classmen are worried about the future and confused by the statement that observations will be made to decide if change is coming. They wonder who is conducting observations and how their future choices may be impacted.

Mr. Sanson said that the Student Advisory Council discussed reorganizing their group and formally establishing the processes of the advisory board. They are discussing how the representative to the School Committee is chosen. Although Mr. Sanson has served in that capacity for three years, he stated that this is not a practical occurrence. The Student Advisory Council is also examining how representatives to the council are selected. They would like to consider appointment of members to additional terms after an initial election. Ms. Whitman stated that the group is looking at the Massachusetts state requirements to determine what leeway the group has in these matters. Mr. Sanson said that there is not historically a lot of demand for participation. He ran unopposed to the position in each year. Mr. Foster asked if he had insight into why there was not more interest in participation. Mr. Sanson stated that it is a small subset of students interested in the specific work, and it does require a lot of time, including evening participation in SC meetings. Mr. Sanson said it is not one of the traditional four elected offices for class leadership. Ms. Spencer urged the council to consider how overwhelmed some freshmen can be and allow for election to the council in subsequent years. Mr. Sanson stated that, in listening to the SC goals, he believes it is important to ask students how they define “academic excellence.” He stated that people wonder what the Student Advisory Council has accomplished. Mr. Sanson believes that the student representative to the SC is able to impact decision-making by providing context and the student perspective. Ms. Whitman noted that the student advisory council has doubled its membership by increasing representatives to two per grade. Mr. Foster asked if there is a mechanism for other SC members to participate in the Student Advisory Council. Ms. Whitman stated that it has traditionally been the role of the SC Chair but that opportunities for others to attend could be explored after reviewing state requirements for the group. Mr. Sanson stated

that he also believes student input should be solicited for the Vision of the Graduate, which he said is vague and could be clarified, including by adding the student perspective.

4) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1055 and 1056
- Minutes for approval: March 5, 2023

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

Ms. Whitman asked for insight into steam trap replacement. Superintendent Beaudoin explained that there are 98 traps in total. A certain number are replaced on a yearly schedule.

The motion passed unanimously.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) –Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the district has reached a tentative agreement with the Teacher’s Assistants. This is the first ever that they have had with the district. Ms. Koch-Sundquist and Mr. Reed characterized the agreement as fair to all parties. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that once the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is available, it will be brought to the SC Executive session. The School Committee can deliberate. Once they provide tentative approval, it goes back to META for full ratification. Then the MOA comes back to the School Committee for public sharing and a vote on adoption.
- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/John Binieris) – Essex Elementary School MSBA Process Update – Mr. Binieris stated that the subcommittee had met the previous Friday with members of the town boards. Superintendent Beaudoin outlined the feasibility process and presented estimates for the anticipated cost of the feasibility study. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the most conservative estimate stands at \$1.5M. Mr. Federspiel recommended seeking funding for this amount so that a second vote is not required if expenses exceed funding. The participants discussed the two to three potential sites for construction and reviewed wording for the town warrant. Mr. Binieris stated that the district received about a dozen letters of interest for participation on the Essex Building Committee. The subcommittee will meet to review the letters. Ms. Whitman clarified that it is unclear how many participants will be selected. Mr. Foster confirmed that this is only for community members. Additional district representatives will be included on the committee. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the Memorial project had a 50/50 split of participants from each town, and the district may look to duplicate that with voting members. Other interested parties could participate as observing members. Ms. Mitchell asked about approaching the towns for funding incrementally. Mr. Binieris said that the approach has been to ask for all funding at once. The superintendent said that the MSBA wants to know that the district has all of the funding up front. Ms. Whitman stated that in the past

the district was able to obtain a package quote for the feasibility study. However, currently the quotes bill for time and materials. This presents the opportunity for a great deal of variability in the final expense. This is the reason for advocating for the more conservative \$1.5M estimate. The consensus is that it is better to come in under budget than have to go through another round of Town Meetings to obtain additional funding. Superintendent Beaudoin referenced SC materials to share a chart of the process of the Feasibility Study. It is not just one report but aspects of the process go all the way through the vote on the final project, potentially two to three years in length. Once the towns approve the expense, the money is turned over to the district. It is held in a special account and used to pay expenses as they arise. The first phase is to hire a project manager. Mr. Foster stated that Mr. Urbas has previously used interest garnered from this account to fund other district expenses. Ms. Whitman stated that additional details about the process will be presented to the SC at their April 2 business meeting. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is responsible for construction but hands the project over to a team of experts who manage the work, coming back to the district for funding and the final wrap up of the project.

Ms. Mitchell asked if there were lessons learned from the Memorial Building project. The superintendent stated that escalation costs have created less predictability and that the district needs to be prepared for potential hurdles, for instance with the supply chain, that are outside of the district's control.

Mr. Binieris stated that the MSBA will reimburse the district for approximately 30% of the building project costs. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that the job of the MSBA is to build an academic facility. Municipal items are not reimbursed, for instance road construction or potential build requests for community, versus academic, use - like fields or a community center integrated into the building project.

- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) –Ms. Spencer reviewed progress by the subcommittee on proposed policy issues.
 - a. **Class Size** – there is continued community interest in examining class size issues. Ms. Spencer stated that in order to see if a policy makes sense, the subcommittee needs to allow new principal Julie Sgroi to complete the current scheduling process and then receive her input on how creating a minimum enrollment policy would impact scheduling and students. The hope is that this can occur in early May.
 - b. **Reserves** – The subcommittee will pursue the reserve policy with the assistance of incoming Business Manager, Michelle Cresta. In the meantime, they have evolved their understanding of policy options used in neighboring school districts and municipalities.
 - c. **Advertising and Sponsorship** – Currently, the Town of Manchester has a by-law that prohibits advertising. The matter is on the town warrant for the upcoming town meeting, and the subcommittee is awaiting the outcome to proceed.
 - d. **Extra-Curricular Participation by resident students not currently enrolled in the district** – Both positives and challenges of allowing participation have been

reviewed. The next step is to engage the middle school principal and the athletic director in discussion to determine how these students would impact their program. High school athletics is governed by the MIAA, and it does not permit this kind of participation.

- e. Graduation Policy – the updated policy is complete and posted
- f. MASC updates – Mr. Foster has circulated updates to the SC members and Superintendent Beaudoin will review by the next SC meeting.

Ms. Whitman clarified that home school students are considered in-district because the district oversees their program. Ms. Whitman asked whether, with the high workload of the policy subcommittee, the reserve policy should be handled by the finance subcommittee. Mr. Foster stated that the policy work is two part. One part is to delineate the process for use of funds and the other is to determine whether there should be a monetary limit for reserves set by the SC. Ms. Spencer clarified that the subcommittee has done the work possible while awaiting the appointment of Ms. Cresta. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that the lack of time to progress on the reserve policy has been a function of bandwidth for the district administration which has to prioritize the budget and now the building project. Ms. Mitchell recommended leaving the reserve policy with the policy subcommittee at least until an initial meeting with Ms. Cresta. Mr. Foster stated that their work on it is close to being finished. They await the participation of key administrative personnel.

- **Finance Committee** (Anna Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) –No Report as they await the onboarding of the new Business Manager.

6) Superintendent’s Report – Pam Beaudoin.

- a. Essex Principal Search – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the principal search is complete and announced that Kim Provost, current Dean of Students at the middle school, has been appointed to the position. She was highly recommended by the hiring committee and is poised to help the Elementary staff grow and move forward.
- b. Search for Middle School Dean of Students – The search for a new middle school Dean of Students is under way. It is now posted. The process will replicate the hiring of the high school dean. The superintendent anticipates the search concluding in late April or early May.
- c. Director of Finance and Operations – Michelle Cresta is scheduled to take up her post on Monday, March 25. She will need time to acclimate to the position. The goal is to present an updated budget to actual for the second April School Committee meeting. In addition, she will be working on updating the budget document. Once this is completed, the document will be posted online and a postcard with the link will be sent out to the town. This is a change from previous years when hardcopies were distributed to residents.
- d. FY25 Hiring – This is the time when administration looks to fill positions from retirements. The final list of needs is being solidified. Initial postings are expected between March 29 - April 1. Then posting for instructional coaches

will occur. Superintendent Beaudoin said that although the budget has not formally passed, enough security exists to start the hiring process.

- e. Good News to Share – Superintendent Beaudoin said that this week is the run of the second annual, district-wide, grade-five musical. The high school is once again hosting a STEAM showcase. This year, the showcase features presenters from Kindergarten through high school, as well as community partners. The community is invited to attend on March 27.

Mr. Reed asked if there is an update to School Choice student selection. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is fully executed. The lottery was held and families have until next Monday to accept their spot or the district will move on to the wait list applicants. The superintendent reminded the SC that even families who have accepted a spot may change their minds. The wait list will remain open until the start of next year.

7) Continued Business –

- a. 2024-2024 District Calendar – Heather Leonard. Ms. Leonard presented a revised draft of the calendar. Changes to the calendar from this year are targeting the needs of staff across the district for professional development (PD). The number of additional early release PD days was reduced by one, and two of the PD days were moved to Fridays and now about long weekends. Ms. Leonard explained that PD days coincide with extended Wednesdays for staff, allowing for more in-depth work. The spring conference date was moved to a Friday. Ms. Leonard stated that the professional development committee plans to monitor family participation following this change.

Clarifying Questions: Ms. Spencer asked how the additional PD days would impact student time on learning. Ms. Leonard stated that she did not have the exact numbers but that the district is well below the state required minimum number of instructional hours. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the difference is a matter of hours.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to accept the FY 24/25 calendar. Mr. Reed seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Whitman and Ms. Koch-Sundquist expressed appreciation for reaching a compromise with the updated calendar. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if i-Ready testing results would be ready at that time, as well, given that families look for insight into this data. Ms. Leonard replied that there is less flexibility in these reports because of alignment windows. Ms. Mitchell asked whether data existed for family attendance at conferences and whether that time could be utilized for PD. Ms. Leonard said that she does not currently have participation numbers, and reiterated that the leadership team plans to review attendance following the shift in conference times. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the principals utilize conferences as an important component of family communication, and they encourage participation. Ms. Spencer stated that part of the frustration expressed by families around half days is the perception that it is disruptive to classroom learning. Ms. Spencer asked if early release days are meaningful in

terms of instruction. Ms. Spencer suggested surveying families for input and recommended communicating to the community regarding how early release days are used. She stated that this could be valuable in considering changes, like a late-start reduced day. Superintendent Beaudoin said that this brings up the question of the overall length of the day and asked if the SC would like to examine the structure of the school day. Ms. Koch-Sundquist spoke to Ms. Leonard's input about the importance of having PD during the first half of the week as it allows teachers to apply their learning to the rest of the week. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about shifting to a late start of Mondays to support this. Ms. Koch-Sundquist also asked about administration of i-Ready assessments on early release days in order to increase productivity on these days. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the teacher's contract dictates two Wednesdays per month as extended days for staff. The superintendent said that this time is used both for administrator directed purposes and by teachers for collaboration. Ms. Leonard stated that the extra time allows for travel during cross-district training and for longer PD sessions so that teachers can dive deeper into material.

The motion passed unanimously.

- b. School Committee end of year calendar – Superintendent Beaudoin highlighted updates to the SC calendar. The first meeting in April was changed to April 2, a regular Tuesday. In addition, another meeting was added on Wednesday, April 24 at 5:00 pm to accommodate the MBTS Town Meeting. This meeting will be held at Memorial Elementary. The SC meeting prior to the Essex Town Meeting on Monday, May 6 will start at 5:30 pm at Essex Elementary. The retirement reception will precede the June 4 SC business meeting. Ms. Mitchell asked about plans for the SC to get an early start on budget planning for FY26. Ms. Whitman reminded members that budget approval for FY25 is pending until approval at both town meetings. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the finance subcommittee would probably not meet until the beginning May because of work for the current budget and the Essex building project.

Mr. Reed asked about the anticipated last day of school for FY24. The superintendent said that there has currently only been one snow day. This would put the last day at June 13, barring additional school closures. High School Graduation is scheduled for May 31, 2024.

- c. School Committee Action Items
 - i. Third Party Review. Ms. Whitman stated that the town partners have continued to voice interest for a third party review for relief from apportionment. Ms. Whitman asked the SC to consider a review that looked at comparable districts operating at 2.5% to see if there are opportunities for implementing any strategies at MERSD. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that that is not the question that has been broached by those community members requesting an operational audit. Mr. Foster stated that he believes the SC addressed this directive by authorizing Superintendent Beaudoin to pursue the DESE review. Ms. Spencer

that what the DESE review encompasses is not what the requesters want. Essex wants to lower the budget and is looking for places to trim. Ms. Spencer said that information may not come from the DESE review. Ms. Whitman stated that the SC needs to decide if they want to take further action, and that the SC could choose to say that it stands behind the current reviews that the district participates in. Ms. Mitchell stated that different reviews have different purposes and that the SC should know what 2.5% would mean for the district. Ms. Mitchell said that an objective review could help to give a look at the regional agreement. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the proposed review means something different to everyone. The superintendent said that the common ask she sees is for the district to run cheaper and with greater efficiency. Going into this budget year, 2.5% seemed to be the measure. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the district has a list of districts running at 2.5% and stated that in the news most seem to be running much higher. Mr. Reed stated that he does not want to spend additional money to explore what a 2.5% budget would look like because it is clear that it would mean cutting the budget yearly. That would mean cutting staff. Mr. Reed said a review with this goal would be a waste of money. Ms. Spencer also opposed a review to look at running the district at 2.5% and said that there would be few comparables at this level. Ms. Spencer said that, although all corporations take time to have a third party assessment, that type of assessment costs money that the district does not have room for in the budget. Ms. Spencer stated that she does not want to take money from the students. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that it is important to remember that both towns voted on this issue. One town voted to have a review. The majority of stakeholders voted not to do so. Ms. Mitchell said she believes that the constituents voted against the operational audit because the School Committee did not take a position on the article. Ms. Koch-Sundquist questioned whether the SC has more information about the parameters and goals of a proposed audit than they did when it came before the vote. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she believes in third party reviews and that the district regularly engages in them. The superintendent said that corporate reviews are different than educational ones and that it has been difficult to translate the expectations of a review by those with a corporate background to the educational setting. Ms. Spencer stated that there are consulting companies that specialize in this type of audit. She suggested forming a subcommittee to explore what the RFP would be for such a review. Mr. Foster stated that FY26 budget planning goes hand in hand with an operational review. Mr. Foster emphasized the importance of rebuilding relationships with the towns. He said that the SC does not have answers to their questions because they have not talked with the stakeholders and stressed the need to rebuild that connection. Mr.

Foster referenced the Fin Com's suggestion to plan for three to four years ahead. Ms. Whitman summarized that the SC does not currently support a district initiated third party review, stating that it would be okay to make that a position contingent upon receiving insight into the goals of a review. Mr Reed said that the SC did choose by initiating the DESE review and stated that, if that did not satisfy other stakeholders, an additional review should stem from the towns. Ms. Spencer said that she is not interested in taking on the review independently but stated that the SC does want to be in a better position with the budget. She expressed support for tasking a group with these issues in order to better serve the communities. Mr. Foster said he was not willing to say yes or no because he is concerned about the big picture. Mr. Foster underlined the importance of being involved in crafting a 3-5 year plan. Ms. Koch-Sundquist suggested sending a communication to the town partners asking if they intend to communicate specific questions for inclusion in a review. Ms. Whitman said that it was insinuated that the SC did not act on this matter when they should have and thus forced the town partners to pursue the review. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the district has people to advise on the budget and that the SC trusts the administration.

Ms. Spencer moved to reach out to the town partners via the School Committee Chair to request that they submit specific questions they want answered via an operational review of district operations. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

Clarifying Questions: Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that their questions be prioritized. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested that a draft of the request be brought to the next SC meeting before going to the town partners.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved the Question. Mr Reed seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

The motion to reach out to the town partners via the School Committee Chair to request that they submit specific questions they want answered via an operational review of district operations passed unanimously.

Mr. Reed said that having the list of priority questions will help to see if the DESE review will provide answers. The superintendent confirmed that MERSD applied to the DESE review but has not learned if they were accepted.

- ii. FY26 Budget Planning – Ms. Mitchell stated that the 2.5% limit is not reasonable given COLA and inflation, but stressed the importance of rebuilding trust to make the budget process easier. Ms. Mitchell said that it was important for the SC to consider a three to five year plan.

Ms. Spencer stated that the Finance Committee questioned the SC's vote against the budget recommended by Superintendent Beaudoin. Ms. Spencer stated that her reasons had to do with the offsets required by the lower budget. Ms. Spencer stated that she wants to understand more about the categories of programming impacted by previous budgets and the administration's perspective on them. This includes world language, the performing arts, and the library program. Ms. Spencer said that the community often advocates for these programs. She said that SC members could use help to be in a position to advocate for what the administration wants for the educational program and to communicate these goals for these programs to the community. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the programs referenced are not priorities of the principals or curriculum director. Teacher aide needs fluctuate yearly. The superintendent said that the budget has not prohibited the district from accomplishing their goals. However, the district is sounding the alarm that they are running out of cuts without impacting the overall program. Superintendent Beaudoin said that their goal is for a stable budget, not necessarily a larger percent. The superintendent said that the budget discussion has not been about the budget but instead about meeting the apportionment needs of one town. Mr. Reed questioned why the budget creation has not been done with an attitude of growth. He stated that the budget has been managed for assessment requirements instead of growth. The superintendent said that there are other issues at play with the reinstatement of the programs listed. For instance, returning the world language program to the elementary school would decrease time on learning by 45 minutes per week at a time when the need for increased core learning has been identified. Ms. Spencer said that there is a lot of public comment requesting investment in the performing arts department. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is looking to realign stipends. That work has the potential to support the performing arts program. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district consistently looks to reorganize resources to meet needs.

Ms. Whitman broached the topic of working on a three to five year budget plan. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she has district estimates for the next several years already that include expected labor costs. Labor costs next year are listed at 5% to account for the new contract. Health care is also likely to rise. If reserve fund use is removed, MERSD is likely to have an increase of 8% like similar districts. These projections make it unrealistic to build the budget higher to encompass growth. The superintendent said it would be a waste of time. Mr. Foster stated that the district made progress this budget season in linking the program to the budget. He said that continuing to do so will help to articulate the district's needs. Mr.

Foster said that a fiscal multi-year plan with the towns does not exist. Mr. Foster said it would allow for selecting a time that is best for seeking an override. Mr. Reed emphasized that this was done previously, leading up to the correction request last year. The collaboration group had formulated a plan that included reserve use until the appointed year when they were to support a correction. They did not support it. Mr. Foster asked if, having it fall apart previously, the SC was no longer open to discussions. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she has been told there is no appetite for an override. Ms. Whitman stated that the district is involved in town forecast discussions and said that the SC was represented at the joint Fin Com meeting. Ms. Mitchell stressed that the three entities should plan for the next three to five years together. Ms. Spencer said that at the joint Fin Com meeting the idea of reconsideration of the regional agreement and apportionment was broached. That is the job of the SC. Ms. Whitman said that the district will work with Ms. Cresta to see what other districts do. Ms. Mitchell stated that the joint Fin Com meetings are a good indication that reinstating collaboration is possible.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the focus for the School Committee should be in maintaining level services, ensuring that the Essex building project is brought to completion by FY27, which will have implications on the tax rate for each community, and in simplifying the budget work. The superintendent recommended looking at apportionment after completion of the Essex project. Mr. Foster said it is important to open discussion on the regional agreement. The superintendent stated that the district is in the midst of a capital building plan that started with construction of the middle-high school facility. Superintendent Beaudoin said it is worth asking the town partners how they can handle a 3.5% growth rate.

Ms. Spencer asked if there was a way to include more solid health care estimates in the budget, even by delaying the process. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district has obligations to report what they know. Typically, final healthcare numbers are not received until March. Other districts have different timelines. The superintendent said that if the district regional agreement is re-opened, the SC could look to reevaluating budget deliverables. Mr. Foster encouraged the SC not to wait to re-engage with the towns around the fiscal side of planning.

Ms. Whitman said that there are multi-year processes of which members are not always aware. She encouraged the SC to recognize that the current budget process is underway and asked members to consider how they will represent the SC as a whole in their decision to

adopt the current proposed budget. This is especially important for those who did not vote for it. These members must reconcile their concerns with proceeding as a unified group at the upcoming Town Meetings. Ms. Spencer confirmed that Ms. Whitman will present the SC's position at the Essex Town Meeting and Ms. Mitchell will do so at the Manchester Town Meeting.

- 8) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Whitman said that the goal for the policy subcommittee is to present recommendations and not fully formed policy. The SC as a whole will work on this. With all the new hires, Ms. Whitman said it is worth noting that MERSD remains an attractive place to work.

C. Adjourn

Mr. Binieris moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Spencer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:51pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- **April 2, 2024**
- **April 24, 2024 Wednesday 5:00 pm MMES**
- **May 6, 2024 Monday**
- **May 21, 2024**
- **June 4, 2024**