



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

October 17, 2023

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	<i>October 17, 2023</i>
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Chris Reed Erica Spencer
Absent:	
Guests:	MERMS Principal, Joanne Maino MERHS Principal, Julie Sgroi
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order of Business Meeting Open Session– Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:11 p.m.

1) Public Comment (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual)

Brian Gressler, 30 Choate St. Essex: Mr. Gressler spoke for himself and his wife, Caroline Gressler, and shared that the strength of the school system was a primary driver for his family in moving to Essex. Mr. Gressler stated that they want the best public school system in the Commonwealth, and he said this should be every district's goal. Mr. Gressler said that the average private school tuition in the state is over \$25K and is significantly higher than MERSD's per pupil cost. He does not expect the public

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school system to compete with the class size and depth of program offered in private education, but believes that there is a significant enough gap between the two for MERSD to distinguish itself within public school constraints. He defined a good school system as including a well-rounded program, specialized and advanced core classes, the arts, multiple foreign languages as early as possible, and as diverse a selection of electives and extra-curricular activities as possible. The goal is to develop creative and critical thinkers, raise compassionate and educated citizens capable of leading us into the future, provide the flexibility to meet the needs of students across the full spectrum of capability, and avoid slowly sliding into mediocrity by leaving positions unfilled or deleting offerings. In recognizing the current financial position of the towns and neighbors, Mr. Gressler said his family believes there is a holistic way forward that allows school funding at the level required while finding ways to offset the impact on town operations and struggling citizens. Mr. Gressler stated that these issues do not exist in a vacuum and should not be treated individually.

Lindsay Banks, 40 Forest Street, Manchester: Ms. Banks presented a letter to the SC from several members of both the Manchester and Essex communities:

As you all begin the budget process, on the heels of the elementary school improvement plans, it is important to hear from members of the community about what we would like to see from our elementary schools and our school committee.

As community members, we want to see the following from our schools:

- We want there to be stability. Stability helps our amazing teachers do their best work for our kids. Stability helps us to retain amazing teachers and recruit more. We want a district where teachers can feel secure in their roles and focus their attention on their jobs and our kids and not feel distracted by budget discussions and potential cuts year after year.
- We want instruction that is as individualized as possible for our kids. That means both differentiated instruction based on individual needs and a breadth of program that opens up opportunities for students to explore their interests. It is no secret that: “Increased class sizes make it hard to give students what they need.” We want to see class sizes of around 18 for our elementary schools.
- We want a school that is adequately staffed so that the duty schedule prioritizes student safety before school, after school, and throughout the school day.
- We want foreign languages offered at the elementary level in a pedagogically meaningful way.
- We want students to learn to engage with books and other media in a healthy and productive way. It is more important than ever that students learn how to think critically about media and discern the facts. A single librarian managing circulation and library instruction in two elementary schools across two towns is untenable. An excellent middle/ high school needs an innovative and accessible media center that supports students’ ability to find and access knowledge that opens up the world to them.
- We want structures and systems that unify our towns, like the late bus, that bring the children of our two towns together.

In other words, we want to see programs and conditions return to what they were before budget cuts.

As community members, we need the following from our school committee:

- Put together and present a budget that brings us to a place of academic excellence and not decline. Academic excellence is the vision of the graduate. That is what our communities want for our students.
- Given the budget crisis, we need you to stay focused on your core responsibilities of approving a budget that provides excellence in education, overseeing policy, and evaluating the superintendent. This year is not the time to pursue issues beyond those responsibilities. You can and should table them, but you need to focus on convincing both our towns that the district deserves to be fully funded at a 3.5% growth rate year after year to ensure excellence.

- In order to accomplish this, we need you to find your common ground, compromise, unify your message and bring that message out into the communities. Lead our communities to the approval of a budget that restores excellence.

This is what we need from our schools and our school committee. If there is a way that we, as community members can help, we are standing by.

Caroline Armington (Manchester), Lindsay Banks (Manchester), Lindsey Shaw Bardsley (Manchester), Linnea Borg (Essex), Inga Dowling (Essex) , Brooke Forrelli (Manchester), Hannah Harvey (Essex), Carol Healy (Manchester), Ingrid Johnson (Essex), Emily Kaufman (Manchester), Betsy McKeen (Essex), Alicia Palmer (Manchester), Anna and Troy Porter (Essex), Matt Roberts (Essex), Emily Stanley (Essex), Elle Woulfe (Essex)

Sarah Wolf, 4 Soginese Creek Rd, Essex: We moved to Essex when my children were in Kindergarten and Fourth Grade. They attended Essex Elementary School, the middle school, and the high school. They graduated in 2019 and last year in 2023. I am here tonight to advocate for our children and our schools, even though my own are done. I know that strong schools are essential to strong communities, and I want Essex to be the thriving and vibrant town that I know it can be. I am not planning on leaving any time soon. At a minimum, the district must meet the needs of a diverse student body. It needs to have the tools and technology to deliver instruction, teachers to keep class sizes reasonable, and a high school program that provides students with access to a variety of courses and opportunities that allow them options for post-secondary choices. Schools also need to have enough resources to maintain flexibility, because the needs and demands can change quickly (pandemic, water main break, new students arrive) I am surprised that I feel the need to speak here, at the school committee meeting. The school committee is, after all, charged with being “vigorous ambassadors for public education before all citizens.” I am concerned that this group is not always completely focused on ensuring that our excellent public education system continues. I am asking you to protect the resources of the schools for our students. I encourage you to stay focused on the task at hand, which is determining what the district needs to move forward and achieve the goals that are laid out in the strategic plan. As you move into the budget season, I hope to see you advocating for a fully funded school district. Over the last five years the district and this committee has been continually distracted by the activities of other boards. We have had prolonged budget discussions year after year,

creating instability in our district and our towns. This distracts our educational professionals from doing their jobs, and creates a climate of insecurity for our students. We can do better. Please support our communities by defending our schools.

- 2) **Student Report** – Diego Sanson: Mr. Sanson stated that students have not changed their point of view since the end of last year's budget season. They do not want to see cuts. Mr. Sanson asked the SC members to keep in mind the sentiments of students as they make this year's budget decisions. He also asked that the district consider re-evaluating the Strategic Plan in light of the continuing budget squeeze to determine if its goals remain feasible. Ms. Whitman noted that Student Advisory Council lunches are set to begin tomorrow.

3) **Chairman's Report** – Ms. Whitman

- a. Re-Appointment of Jeff Delaney to the Essex North Shore Technical and Agricultural School Committee – Mr. Delaney has served on the committee since 2017, and his term expires in December. Pursuant to the bylaws of the school, this appointment requires "the consent of the school committee of a Member Municipality shall mean, in the case of a Member Municipality which is part of a regional high school district, the consent of those members of the regional high school committee who are residents of such Member Municipality." The reappointment therefore requires the consent of the members of the Regional School Committee who are residents of Manchester.

Ms. Whitman moved to re-appoint Mr. Jeff Delaney to the Essex North Shore Technical and Agricultural School Committee. Mr. Reed seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

- b. Superintendent End of Cycle Summative Evaluation and Annual Salary – Ms. Whitman presented the completion of the superintendent review. In August, Superintendent Beaudoin presented the SC with a completed self-evaluation. Each member of the SC completed a standardized evaluation form. These documents were compiled by the SC Chair into a committee evaluation. Mr. Matt Harrington, and not Mr. John Binieris, was involved in this process since the review period was during Mr. Harrington's tenure on the SC.

Goals		Rating
Student Learning		Met
Professional Practice		Met
District Improvement		Significant Prog
Standard 1	Instructional Leadership	Proficient
Standard 2	Management of Operations	Exemplary
Standard 3	Family/Community Engagement	Proficient
Standard 4	Professional Culture	Proficient
Overall Summative Rating		Proficient

Discussion: Superintendent Beaudoin thanked the School Committee for their time and effort to complete the evaluation process and for their feedback. Ms. Mitchell asked if the superintendent was surprised by any of the results. The superintendent replied that the feedback was aligned with her expectations.

Ms. Whitman stated that the annual salary increase for the superintendent should have been approved shortly after completion of the budget process. Although the increase was built into the budget, because the superintendent works directly for the School Committee, it is the responsibility of the SC to annually approve the increase. The budget included a provision for a cost of living adjustment for administrative staff of 2.5%. Ms. Koch-Sundquist commented that the original budget stipulated a 4% COLA increase for all administrative employees and expressed concern that the current increase is increasingly behind the rate of increase for META members.

Ms. Whitman moved to approve a COLA salary increase of 2.5% for Superintendent Beaudoin. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Comment: Ms. Whitman stated that the relationship between Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas as a leadership team is an exemplar. Mr. Foster asked when the new superintendent goals would be set. Superintendent Beaudoin said that a draft of those goals was shared at the September meeting and offered to revisit them at the next SC meeting on November 7, 2023. The superintendent has continued to work toward these goals, even without the benefit of approval, and said she would be happy to integrate any additional layers to them that the SC approves. Ms. Whitman stated that Ms. Mitchell asked to postpone consideration of the superintendent's new goals until after the completion of the evaluation. Ms. Mitchell suggested aligning the superintendent's goals to those of the School Committee.

Ms. Spencer read from the "School Committee Operating Protocols:" Demonstrate professional and collegial relations with each other. Maintain trust and mutual respect between and among Committee members, the Superintendent, and the administration by treating everyone with dignity and respect, even in times of disagreement.

4) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Voucher 1020. Mr. Urbas presented one AP voucher for this meeting, totaling \$1,148,952.06, of which \$286K is from the FY24 General Fund taxpayer budget. An additional \$40K is paid out of the FY23 carryforward encumbrance fund, consisting entirely of special education out-of-district (OOD) tuition prepayments with an additional \$12K paid by the Athletics revolving fund, mostly for transportation expenses.
- Minutes for approval: SC Minutes September 19, 2023, SC Minutes October 3, 2023; All-Board Meeting September 19, 2023

Ms. Spencer moved to approve AP Voucher 1020; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Spencer moved to approve the School Committee Minutes from October 3, 2023; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. Mr. Reed abstained from the vote due to absence. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Spencer moved to approve the School Committee Minutes from September 19, 2023; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. Mr. Foster abstained from the vote due to absence. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Spencer moved to approve the All-Board Meeting Minutes from September 19, 2023; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. Mr. Foster abstained from the vote due to absence. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if each board would be drafting their own minutes for All-Board meetings. Ms. Whitman noted that she was present when a town board accepted the SC's All-Board minutes. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that after the SC reviewed the minutes, they were sent to all boards to express that the SC intended to approve them for SC use.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBA Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman stated that the sub-committee attended the MSBA walk through at Essex Elementary with several representatives from the MSBA. District Administration were present, as was Mr. Greg Federspiel of MBTS. This was a detailed walk through to establish the condition of the school facility prior to consideration by the MSBA. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that letters of acceptance for those communities accepted by MSBA are expected in early December. Ms. Whitman asked the representatives how many schools were likely to be accepted. Last year 17 projects were accepted, and 10 were accepted the preceding year. The number of accepted applications is based on available funds and the needs presented. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the needs of the building were clear during the walk through. However, the needs of other applicants is not known. An ADA report was submitted after the initial SOI, considered a post-SOI addition, and the condition ADA issues has highlighted during the walk through. Mr. Binieris said that a good job was done in communicating about the current space and its constraints.

- **Finance Committee/Collaboration Group** (Anna Lin Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the collaboration group in hoping to meet on Friday, October 20, 2023.
 - **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – The sub-committee will meet next week.
 - **Policy/Program Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – Ms. Mitchell shared that the sub-committee was able to review reserve policies from two other school districts and two towns. In addition, they will review the E&D percentage policies of other towns and schools. Once they have a combined recommendation, it will be brought before the full School Committee.
- 6) **Superintendent's Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin spoke about the district's efforts to streamline communication. The schools have committed to producing weekly newsletters, and the district will publish a monthly newsletter highlighting information and undertakings to support the Strategic Plan. In addition, the district's PR company will work to distribute positive messages from the entire program for both extracurricular and academic highlights. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the website has been updated. There will be some challenges as the host coverts to a new platform. It is an ongoing struggle for the district to create and distribute content. In the discussion of budget and staffing, the district lacks staffing to support efforts like these. Hamilton-Wenham, a comparable neighboring community, has a dedicated staff of four or five tech staff members, including one dedicated to district administrative software and another for information and technology. MERSD has two tech staff total. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the final enrollment report should be complete by November 17, 2023. The superintendent presented a preliminary secondary enrollment report that lists subsections to identify areas of concern regarding enrollment. The superintendent pointed out that there are some classes with less than five students. The middle school has a group model. Students move through five subjects, divided into fairly even groups of students. There is only differentiation in leveling for their math class and in their chosen language. Consequently, enrollment numbers are larger and stable yearly. At the high school, there is much more variation to support student opportunity. Ms. Spencer asked which courses are not represented in the preliminary report. The superintendent said that directed sections, including those for tutoring and IEPs, are not included. The final report will include information or SPED programs. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that during the recent walk through of the high school, they saw a classroom that was populated by students from two levels of the course. These would each show as a separate section. Superintendent Beaudoin said that those types of classes are represented as "combined." Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that it was helpful to see the spaces occupied by the small enrollment classes. She said that the Green Scholars were in a very small space. Superintendent Beaudoin said that many of these classes are run like a seminar. The superintendent said that the classes spaces at the high school are small. A room of 18 can feel crowded, in terms of size. Mr. Sanson shared that different types of courses fill the space differently. An enrollment of 18 in English class is very different from the same number of students in a chemistry class. Mr. Sanson stated that his English class has 12 students, and that may seem like a

small class but it can be hard to get in a word in a discussion-based class this size. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she will have a list of the classes with 5-9 and < 5 students. Mr. Sanson spoke to the importance of singleton classes, like those that are AP. He said it is important to look at how long each has been running and how well their students perform on the AP exam in order to determine its value. Mr. Sanson said that by sophomore year, students are looking ahead to their AP choices. He said the AP Chemistry class is a singleton, but performs very well and students value it.

Mr. Reed asked the superintendent how communication to the community beyond school families was part of the discussion on communication. The superintendent said that the district is using Instagram and The Cricket newspaper to reach the larger community. Mr. Reed suggested looking more broadly at the district's media strategy at a later date.

7) Continued Business –

- a. MERSD Strategic Plan Priorities
 - i. Strategic Initiative 1: Establish and foster an authentic Pre-K-12 learning environment.
 - ii. District Strategic Initiative 2: Integrate social emotional learning into all aspects of the school day.
 - iii. Strategic Initiative 3: Celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals.
 - iv. Strategic Initiative 4: Ensure funding for a stable, multi-year budget and capital improvement plan through collaboration with town and community partners.
- b. Middle School Improvement Plan Progress Report – Principal Joanne Maino provided a recap of the middle school's midyear progress on the School Improvement Plan initiatives, with approximately 73% of initiatives on track and 24% on track or in-progress. Principal Maino shared several areas for celebration, including the RULER re-boot, which is starting to be evident and practiced in all areas of the classroom. The school council met last year with the goal of bringing RULER to the community. One of the major stressors they identified in homes is technology use. This led the school to shift focus and schedule guest speakers for a parent education series, including upcoming speakers Dr. Elizabeth Englander (digital behaviors), Sara Ward (Executive Functioning), and Michael Eatman (DEI coach). The middle school conducted a parent survey during open house of student tech use, and this data will be worked into the Englander presentation. The school council's ultimate goal is to bring RULER into the community, social emotional awareness, and the development of EQ in children. The parent education series may help to engage parents. From there, the middle school is hoping to expand to focus groups and discussions to bridge the divide between the towns. Project Adventure has a continued strong foothold in the middle school across grade levels. Work with Culture 7 is ongoing. One of the protocols taught was Awareness Options Decisions (AOD), which Principal Maino folded into faculty meetings. The MS staff has taken a "problem of practice" by each team and incorporated that protocol to address real time issues they face. The middle school

has a new collaboration with the Anti-Defamation League and will have four training sessions for 36 students. These trained student leaders will take their knowledge back to the schools for student-delivered training to the rest of the students. Ongoing work includes work with iReady. It provides useful data, which can be used in conjunction with MCAS results to give insight into trends and student-specific information. Staff uses this information to address gaps in performance. An area of student-specific data gathering is e-hall pass. It is a tool to track student classroom attendance patterns and correlate student classroom performance to time out of class. Teams can use this data to examine strategies to support students. The middle school has re-examined the use of iReady in ME blocks and instead incorporated it into regular class time. Project-based learning was not addressed because of the possibility of staffing shifts due to budget constraints.

Discussion: Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that iReady is a diagnostic assessment for intervention, while MyPath tracks individual student needs to inform their learning path. Ms. Spencer asked if the middle school has the resources needed to identify gaps and address Pandemic-induced learning loss. Principal Maino stated that, while she does think they are able to identify and react to needs, it is difficult to think creatively and innovate because of the risk of further cuts. The seven new teachers on staff this year are looking at the budget landscape and asking if they need to look elsewhere. Principal Maino said she would love to ask her team to spend time thinking creatively about these problems, but staff is not in the kind of position to do so. High School Principal Julie Sgroi spoke up to concur with that insight. Ms. Mitchell wondered if it is possible to sustain the great programs in place at a lower cost. Ms. Mitchell asked about opportunities for more advanced students and mentioned that it is hard to find challenges at the middle school level. Principal Maino said that the ME block provides opportunities for self-direction and may be a place for enrichment. There is not currently a program to create new sections of classes for differentiation within the regular schedule. Mr. Binieris agreed with the need for differentiation opportunities. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that there is a more urgent need to address learning loss and pointed to current grade six MCAS gaps. Principal Maino said that she has heard anecdotal teacher observations about their experience of learning challenges as related to the pandemic learning loss. Principal Maino stressed that she is always eager to tie those anecdotes to data. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there are currently some significant discrepancies coming through in readiness between the students coming from each elementary school. She stated that the district intends to explore the gap that is showing between the two elementary schools. Principal Maino said that, in her time as a grade six English teacher in the district, she could often tell, following her benchmark assessments, which individual teacher a student had. She said this speaks to the difficulty of aligning the practices of many teachers across a grade. Ms. Whitman asked if the parent survey on social media use was offered to parents not present at the open house. Principal Maino stated that it was not, but she intends to do so. The purpose of the survey was to inform new health programs. Ms. Mitchell asked about ideas to introduce the topic of AI into the curriculum.

Principal Maino said that it harkens to the question posed by Ms. Spencer. AI is a tool, and its role would seem to require educators to respond by preparing students for AI. Students at the middle school level are at a good place to receive that kind of instruction. If the district was able to introduce a course on AI, for example “the ethics of technology” at the middle school, it would be a great service. Principal Maino said that the educational system was a bit behind in helping to educate students about the tool of cell phones. Principal Maino stressed that these are our tools our students will use as professionals and going forward, and the educational system has an obligation to educate them. Superintendent Beaudoin asked with Principal Maino currently has the tools to do that. Principal Maino stated that it would require reviewing current offerings, exploring ways to address the issue without a budget impact, and ascertaining what more is needed from there. Ms. Whitman asked that the principals help the School Committee to understand the scope of their needs for meeting future-driven challenges, even if the SC cannot currently promise to fulfill. Mr. Foster asked how students are experiencing, in their classes, the implementation of staff SEL work. Principal Maino stated that they are experiencing them as a natural component of their instructional day. For example, students have “take a break” spaces that students can ask to utilize. They are able to see themselves as emotional beings and understand that emotions drive everything. They are provided with the tools to build agency over themselves. If those tools fail them, trained adults, in building, are able to support them. Mr. Foster asked how the data illuminates the student experience. Principal Maino stated that they look at the Casel Core Competencies, using “I can” statements for student self-responses. Students are improving. The “yes” answers are increasing. There is supportive data for current high school seniors who took this assessment in middle school; the skills they affirmed in grade eight, when the RULER program started, are still there. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there are SEL deliverables for the current year, coordinated by Kim Provost, that will be reported on in the second half of the year and will formalize SEL assessment. This is funded by the ESSER grant. Mr. Reed asked if there are any middle school areas for instructional differentiation besides math. Math is differentiated, and there are two different language options.

- c. High School Improvement Plan Progress Report – Principal Julie Srgoi. Principal Srgoi is new to the high school this year. She stated that this spotlight was a good way to gain perspective on the school and district. The Vision of the Graduate is central to the current summary. Principal Srgoi said that the new, required grade nine civics class is piloting portfolios. The staff has pending faculty work on the updated report card comments but plan to incorporate the new comments, tied to the vision of the graduate, into the T1 report cards. The staff has created interdisciplinary coursework, exemplified by the new “Once upon a Crime” class that incorporates authentic learning by bringing in community detectives. U Block looping, where students are linked to a specific staff member for multiple years of mentorship, has provided a consistent adult support system that students and teachers appreciate. This program aids students in coming back after a set-back. Work with the Anti-Defamation League on their World of Difference program has trained students to educate their peers. Administration is taking a lens to the

SCORE senior student project to look at better community partnership opportunities. They continue to develop systems and structure to help the program flow better. The work in SEL/DEI is ongoing, as it always will be, to see how SEL and trauma-informed practices are helping students. The new tardy scan program shows attendance patterns that inform staff as they work to build relationships and address student needs. The scan program will generate a lot of data by year's end. Staff is also currently utilizing the text selection tool to review materials used in classes for diversity in representation. In the hiring process, the administration strives to be mindful of the goal of diversity that is representative of all. Currently, the curriculum review is ongoing to ensure that the Vision of the Graduate is paramount as instructional choices are made. They are reviewing that rubric to reflect on whether it should be departmental. The Student Risk Survey will inform where the school is in social emotional growth and guide the next wave of decision making. Principal Sgroi stated that the high school is in good shape with 50% of its goals complete and 46% on-track.

Discussion: Ms. Whitman complimented the format of the presentation from both schools and asked when the wire BS survey conducted. The principal said it is usually late winter to early spring. Ms. Mitchell asked about current challenges and Principal Sgroi's definition of excellence. Principal Sgroi stated that excellence is hard to define, whether using MCAS scores, college acceptance, or another measure. She said that, for her, it is having students and staff that are excited to be in the building and by knowing that graduating students are confidently prepared for their next step. That next step is unique for each student. Principal Sgroi said that is why the Vision of the Graduate is so important as it about more than where you are going but how you face future challenges and move forward. For faculty, Principal Sgroi views excellence as having faculty who want to be in the district and are excited to take on challenges. However, a current challenge for staff is that many are unsure of their future in the building and are impacted by factors beyond their control. Principal Maino stated that the middle school journey is a three exploration to answer the question, "who am I?" If a student leaves with self-possession and confidence and a sense of who they are and where they want to be, ready to take risks and comfortable in their own skin, she views that as success. Mr. Foster asked about the new civics class and asked about growth and continuum from their eighth grade experience and about the principals' work in curriculum review. Principal Sgroi stated that the new civics class provides an opportunity to build on the eighth grade experience and dig deeper. Students are able to engage with higher-level thinking. It is also an opportunity to build a sense of community because everyone takes the civics class as a freshman. Ms. Spencer commented on the SCORE project, suggesting that administration examine how it impacts students with different schedules. Students with many AP classes do not have the tie for a meaningful internship. Ms. Spencer asked if there were other meaningful options possible for them. Principal Sgroi said it is an important considerations. However, she has not seen a good solution, but will continue to look for a meaningful way of engaging. In regards to the curriculum review, Principal Sgroi said that her goals were to expand content and increasing DEI through the choice in materials. She is also looking to increase efficiencies by department, which is done yearly. Ms. Whitman asked Mr. Sanson to comment on the high school perspective. Mr. Sanson stated that the you U Block perspective was accurate. Having a consistent U Block faculty relationship builds trust with students. Mr. Sanson recommended surveying students about their goals as a graduate and to align the Vision of the Graduate with their input. Mr. Sanson stated that interdisciplinary courses

broaden the horizons of students. Ms. Whitman asked what the schools need to support more interdisciplinary coursework. Principal Sgroi said that they need time for staff to focus on the concept and build models for it. The concept lends itself to involving community partners. Superintendent Beaudoin asked, given the current discussion on schedule alignment, that the principals saw as the implications to class offerings and structure. Principal Maino said that the staff group had their first meeting last week, and she stated that she was not thrilled with the idea because of the structure of the middle school model and the necessity of “teaming.” Principal Maino expressed concern that aligning the schedule would put middle schoolers into the cafeteria with high schoolers. Principal Maino recently met with a committee member who highlighted the positives of an aligned schedule, including opportunities for creativity and innovation. However, Principal Maino does not think the alignment is justified to save a couple hundred thousand dollars. “Teaming” describes the middle school model of having five core teachers per grade. They meet weekly to discuss students. This lends itself to interdisciplinary work. Teaming is a component that distinguishes the middle school model from a junior high model where students do not stay largely with their cohort in each grade. Principal Maino, citing trauma-informed instruction and social-emotional learning, advocated for a middle school model to meet the needs of 11-14 year olds. Principal Sgroi stated that the proposed benefit of alignment is to share staff between the buildings. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there are several outcomes possible for alignment. For instance, aligning only the times of blocks could allow a teacher with a lighter load to pick up a class in the other building. This would not have the largest budget impact. If the district pushes this model to achieve greater monetary efficiency, it would lose the intention of the educational purpose. However, looking for alignment in foreign language may have positive repercussions. Principal Maino said that they do not want staff working on this to feel it is a top-down demand but to instead look at it creatively to yield an authentic, student-centered option. The superintendent said that contractually there has to be a teacher team so that any outcome does not infringe on contract obligation. Ms. Whitman asked if the district is open to determining that this not in the best interests of students. The superintendent said that they need to evaluate the outcomes are first. Budget necessities may require adopting something that people do not want. It is also possible that savings could be realized that would allow the return of the grade six language program. However, the superintendent does not think it will yield \$200K in savings. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the stakeholders are making it clear that the district needs to explore the options. She said that it will be imperative to outline how the district then weighs cost-savings versus educational cost. Superintendent Beaudoin asserted that it is imperative to have a budget proposal ready to roll by January 1. The superintendent said there may be short-term efficiencies to be gained. Then the district must consider longer-term savings by aligning the Vision of the Graduate to the educational landscape may be ten years along and making adjustments that serve the long term. Principal Maino commented that the staff doing this work are aware that the reason for alignment was budgetary and that they are being asked to minimize themselves. Principal Maino asked if this would be under consideration without the current budget challenges. Ms. Whitman stated that she believes that the focus would be on the educational landscape in ten years, if the budget was not an issue. Superintendent Beaudoin asked about the impact to the schools when hiring is pushed to June, July, and August. Principal Sgroi stated that hiring should definitely be done sooner to allow the schools to be selective and have the time needed to fully vet candidates. The possibility of an unfilled position forces staff to plan for changing everyone’s schedule, requiring a lot of energy and resources. Principal Maino said that the district’s positive reputation is a strong motivation for qualified applicants to leave their

current positions. Later postings create a higher hurdle for applicants to leave a secure position. Superintendent Beaudoin added that early postings allow time for an applicant to do an observed lesson in a classroom. This is not possible with summer hires.

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 - iii. Strategic Initiative 3: Celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals.
 - iv. Strategic Initiative 4: Ensure funding for a stable, multi-year budget and capital improvement plan through collaboration with town and community partners.
- d. Turf Field Project Update – Avi Urbas. Mr. Urbas stated that both fields are done and generating positive feedback. There is a small punch-list remaining and close out of the permitting process. In addition, maintenance equipment purchasing was pulled out of the contracted work in order to save on the purchase price. As previously stated, the contingency portion of the project budget was not required for a significant savings. The final invoices may be available for the November 7, 2023 SC meeting. Mr. Reed asked about add-ons to the project, for example a net to prevent balls from entering the fenced off wetlands area. Mr. Urbas said the district has fielded several similar inquiries, and he has asked Mr. Waldron to do some research with Gale to see what would be permissible with the current permitted plans. Mr. Reed said there is a lot of ideas for improvement, like stands at Brook Street. Superintendent Beaudoin said that any betterment of the site would require first determining where responsibility for the work lies. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that the parking lot belongs to the town. Mr. Urbas said that the DPW is looking at the space. Unlike with the Memorial building project, there is not a provision in the bid for other improvements to the space. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested that the Facilities Subcommittee could consider the issue of field nets. The superintendent also said that the scoreboard issue has still to be resolved for the Brook Street field. Superintendent Beaudoin recommended taking up these issues separately through Facilities and not to risk going beyond the scope of what was approved for the current project.
- e. School Committee FY24 Goal Setting – Ms. Whitman presented two objectives for the SC Goal Setting work, selecting a workshop date and time and sharing categories of goals to represent the most important issues for each SC member. All members were polled and added to the goal categories:
- i. Ms. Whitman: 1) Hanging Goals – things left unfinished, including the lunch contract, student health/wellness, and reconsideration of the elementary language program. 2) Student Achievement – learning from scores and a goal of understanding and defining what excellence means and where to go from there. 3) Capital plan for the future to protect the investment in the facilities
 - ii. Ms. Spencer concurred with the preceding priorities
 - iii. Ms. Koch-Sundquist: 1) Achievement 2) Cultural Competency; 3) Budget Stability
 - iv. Ms. Mitchell: 1) Student Wellness, 2) Communication

- v. Mr. Reed: 1) Clearly define what it means to be a great school and why it is important and prioritize that work for the School Committee
- vi. Mr. Binieris: 1) Financial Literacy, 2) Academic Performance – including an understanding of how that is measured
- vii. Mr. Foster: 1) Define of terms like achievement and excellence, 2) Advancing the Strategy Plan, including cultural competence, SEL, and authentic learning. 3) Engage the community in conversation, and receive the input of those not attending SC meetings. This community engagement must be quick to have an impact. Communication would focus on the priorities established by the SC, presumably at the upcoming workshop.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that a virtual meeting on October 30, 2023 has been proposed for the SC workshop. A 11:30 am to 1:30 pm was proposed and accepted for that date. Ms. Whitman will distribute the collected list of SC goal priorities before that time.

- f. Continued Discussion of All-Boards Meeting and Budget Next Steps – Ms. Whitman asked the SC to choose between two paths for the discussion, either to evaluate the budget solution ideas for viability or to provide direction to the superintendent and business manager regarding the budget. Ms. Whitman distributed a worksheet for listing and commenting on suggestions and a chart for completing the suggestion evaluations. Ms. Spencer stated that the SC has a responsibility following the all-board meeting to respond to the topics raised there. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she believes some existing policies may impact some of the suggestions. Ms. Whitman said that in those instances, the follow up would be to pull the relevant policy and determine if the idea warranted further action. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she has questions about the return on investment for some of the suggestions. Ms. Spencer suggested that the SC prioritize the one suggestion that was agreed upon by both boards, referencing the consultant idea that both the MBTS Select Board and the MBTS Finance Committee supported.

Ms. Ann Harrison, Chair of the Manchester Select Board, was in attendance and addressed the School Committee to share that the Essex town boards have identified a consultant to complete an operational audit of the school. Essex proposed a budget to the Town of Manchester and asked them to split the cost of the audit. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that there is a difference between an audit and a consultant, which implies collaboration. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that an “audit” was not discussed at the all-board meeting. Ms. Mitchell said that the difference is that an “audit” is a service and a “consultant” is a person. Ms. Harrison stated that the cost for the audit was estimated at \$75K-\$125K, and the question was whether it should be split two or three ways. Ms. Whitman asked what how the MBTS Select Board responded. Ms. Harrison stated that they needed to think about it and said that the stated purpose was to find inefficiencies in operations. Ms. Koch-Sundquist was concerned that the boards proposed an audit of the schools operations and asked whether that spoke to a effort at collaboration.

Ms. Harrison stated that it was proposed that the audit would provide information to feed into this year's budget process. Ms. Spencer reiterated that both MBTS boards favored a consultant and asked how the SC feels about the viability of a consultant. Ms. Whitman questioned the benefit of an operational audit given that there is information from the NEASC accreditation process and yearly financial audits. Ms. Spencer saw two possible benefits – to understand what other districts are doing, whether cost saving or just best practice, and to support the perception of transparency. Mr. Foster stated that the issue at hand is trust and asked if this is the way to build trust. He wondered whether the town boards would trust the audit findings if the conclusion is that the district should increase its investment, which would increase the potential value of the audit. Mr. Foster said there may be value to the audit if it is the way to build trust. Ms. Mitchell stated that the work “audit” is scary but said that it provides bench-marking compared to other districts and schools and may validate the district's current practices. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the current administration is paid to complete this kind of work, and that the School Committee has trust in them to do so. Mr. Binieris asked if mechanisms currently exist to determine bench-marks on these issues. The response was affirmative. He asked if the district has experienced value with working with consultants. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the administration loves third party assessments and has engaged in them frequently, including programmatic reviews like NEASC and NELMS, and the current SPED cyclical evaluation, which happens every three years. There are also DESE-coordinated program reviews. Superintendent Beaudoin did not think that programmatic review would yield financial savings. When considering an audit, the superintendent said that it is important to determine what is being examined. A first step for any bench-marking is to determine comparable districts. A consultant would need time to do this. There is benchmarking data available online through the DESE RADAR tool, which compares district finance and staffing data. Regarding auditing, the superintendent said that the district is audited every year. The end of year financial report submitted to DESE is audited and the district is independently audited each spring as a requirement of the regionalization agreement. Superintendent Beaudoin was doubtful that any audit could be complete by January. Mr. Binieris said their work would need to be informed by a goal. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the administration would cooperate with whatever the determination is. Ms. Mitchell stated that the audit process should be collaborative and that it was unlikely to yield answers by January. She recommended planning this out collaboratively for the future. Mr. Reed stated that this potential option is a distraction and urged the SC to stay focused. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the SC has fulfilled its obligations under Massachusetts General Law, including completion and submission of the annual audit. In addition, Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that there is nothing in Mass general law to require the district to submit to such a request at any time of year. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested seeking counsel.

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved that the School Committee not commit district funding to an audit.
Mr. Reed seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Ms. Mitchell stressed that it is a trust issue and asked what an alternative to an audit would be for satisfying all parties. Mr. Foster said it is the wrong time to shut it down. Ms. Spencer agreed, stating that the SC should not take a stand against something that is not currently before them. Ms. Whitman suggested assuming the best intentions.

Ms. Whitman moved to table the motion and revisit at another time. Mr. Reed seconded the motion.

Ms. Spencer said that a plan is needed for addressing all the all-board ideas.

The motion passed 6 to 1, with Mr. Foster opposed.

Superintendent Beaudoin asked for consensus to get clarity on the goal of the audit/consultant at the Friday morning collaboration group meeting. Mr. Reed stated that most items on the list are considered yearly, with the exception of re-examination of the regional agreement. Ms. Whitman said that it is important to have a place of reference for when each suggestion was considered. Mr. Urbas stated that the district might be able to provide links to past examinations of some of the proposals. Mr. Foster requested adding to the all-board request that these suggestions are applied to town budget strategies as well. This should not be only about what the school should do. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she is not opposed to seeking more information but is opposed to committing funds to a study for which the School Committee has been included in the process. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district has previously considered proposals for combining the elementary schools and could bring those forward. In addition, the district can explore options for healthcare. Anything else is a negotiation item. They are currently looking at class size and will receive a free report if accepted into the MSBA.

- 8) School Committee Comment** - Ms. Whitman thanked Ms. Spencer for her email highlighting good community feedback. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the next facilities tour is at Essex Elementary School on October 24, 2023. Another round of tours will occur later in the year.

C. Adjourn

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

Meeting Adjourned at 9:18 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- Tuesday, November 7, 2023
- Tuesday, November 21, 2023
- Tuesday, December 5, 2023