



## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES -DRAFT *October 3, 2023*

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	October 3, 2023
<b>Location:</b>	MERMHS Learning Commons
<b>Attendees:</b>	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
<b>Absent:</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>	EES Principal Sheila McAdams MMES Principal John Willis MERSD Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology Heather Leonard
<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 Business Meeting Open Session–** Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

#### **B. Business Meeting Open Session**

- 1) **Public Comment** - none
- 2) **Student Report** - none
- 3) **Chairman's Report** – Ms. Whitman thanked Mr. Reed and Ms. Koch-Sundquist for attending the Memorial walkthrough earlier in the day. Since the last SC meeting, Ms. Whitman has collected superintendent evaluations from SC members. The compiled

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summation will be included in the SC packet for the October 17, 2023 meeting. Ms. Whitman received a question from an SC member regarding procedures for the chair's response to email inquiries from the public. Ms. Whitman proposed that the SC take an opportunity to look at the SC norms, adopted several years ago, and determine if they should be revised.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist read from the "School Committee Operating Protocols:" Clearly define success and accountability for the Committee, Superintendent, faculty, staff and students.

#### **4) Consent Agenda –**

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers V1015, V1016, V1017, V1018
- Minutes for approval: held for next meeting
- Out of State Travel Request – Principal Sgroi requested approval for the social studies department to take 50 students and five chaperones to the 9/11 Memorial and Museum on Friday, October 27, 2023. Additional sites to visit include Wall Street, Trinity Church, and Federal Hall.

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

Discussion: Mr. Foster asked that greater insight into why each field trip is undertaken be provided going forward. The superintendent said that she could return with that insight to the next meeting.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

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

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Finance Committee/Collaboration Group** (Anna Lin Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – Ms. Koch-Sundquist reported that the negotiation team met briefly on Wednesday, September 27, 2023 to begin negotiations for the Unit B contract. At this meeting, they reviewed norms for the negotiation process.
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – Mr. Foster reported that the sub-committee met to review the items added to policy and educational program-related items identified in the bucket list of SC member issues. At the top of that list is creation of a reserves policy. In addition, there are edits to be made to the graduation requirements policy regarding where it is housed. No changes are planned for the actual requirements. A mask policy update will clarify that it has been suspended, not struck, allowing the policy to be re-implemented in the future if needed. As regards

the educational program, the top priorities for the subcommittee are whether a recommendation about class size should be made and to define what is meant by “excellent schools.”

*Mr. Foster moved that the School Committee recommend and support that the Policy & Program Subcommittee would work toward the following priorities:*

- 1. Finalize and recommend a reserve policy*
- 2. Update graduation policy*
- 3. Notate suspension of the mask policy*
- 4. Examine need for class size policy*

*Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Ms. Whitman expressed support but wondered if these issues may be broached in the upcoming budget discussion. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if class size policy exists in other districts and if it has existed at MERSD in the past. Mr. Foster said that this would be the opportunity to review that. Mr. Foster stated that as a subcommittee, no decisions will be made and all information will be brought back to the SC for approval.

*The motion passed unanimously*

- 6) Superintendent’s Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin said that things have settled in at all schools, and everyone is digging into the work of the year. The high school is celebrating spirit week. All open houses have concluded and were well attended. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district concluded first trimester data meetings and is preparing for the upcoming professional development day on Friday. The PD day will focus on the strategic priorities and the message presented at the beginning of the year, which is how to integrate SEL, cultural competence, and authentic learning pieces. That is the theme for the year. The professional development will structure that for staff so that they can see the connections. Opportunities will be presented for building those integrations. The superintendent invited Heather Leonard, the new director of curriculum and instructional technology, to speak about these events.

Ms. Leonard stated that the elementary data meetings provided an opportunity to get staff from both schools together, and staff at the upper schools were able to collaborate. The professional learning day will take place in three parts. The first will be a full-district meeting during which staff will make literal those interconnected themes and focus areas for the year’s work. Staff will explore how this leads toward the Vision of the Graduate, from PK through the twelfth grade experience. Then staff will have the opportunity to choose an area for in-depth exploration. They can select between cultural competency work with Michael Eatman, applying that knowledge to work with students; focus on social-emotional learning and how to integrate those efforts and strategies in the classroom, led by Kim Provost, district SEL coordinator; or creating authentic learning environments that all students can access through universal design for learning structure and access point with local CAST expert Ruth

Templeton. In the afternoon, staff will work with their building teams around building-based needs.

Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the parent learning series is beginning with a virtual webinar with Elizabeth Englander on Thursday, October 12. The focus is managing social media and the adolescent brain. Dr. Englander is the founder of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State University and is on the forefront of behavior issues for students around bullying. She is a consult around how social media and technology interplay with student behaviors. Superintendent Beaudoin said that during budget season last year the administration committed to exploring schedule alignment between the middle and high schools. The middle and high school principals will be working with the deans to launch a school-based teacher committee to explore this issue. The superintendent expects this work to proceed in two phases. In the initial phase, the team will explore short-term alignment - what can be done now? Both schools have rotating, waterfall drop schedules, with six classes at the middle school and seven at the high school, but they do not align. Therefore, staff cannot easily be shared between buildings, carrying partial class loads in each. Potentially, some alignment opportunities in English, art, and music may be possible. The team will explore how to create alignment and if there are efficiencies to be gained. The second phase will be an in-depth examination of whether the current schedule fits where the district wants to be ten years down the road. The current schedule has a lot of buy-in, and the superintendent anticipates a long road to change. Ms. Spencer asked if there have been previous alignment measures. The superintendent said that because the “Me” and “U” blocks are fixed in the daily schedule, the music and chorus teachers are shared between buildings. Ms. Mitchell asked about plans to share a health teacher. Superintendent Beaudoin said that was a consideration when the district was anticipating a leave of absence, but is not currently being pursued. The superintendent stated that any changes to the schedule would need to be planned by January because scheduling work begins in February. By contract, the district must have the input of a teacher group. This second phase would be a multi-year process.

Superintendent Beaudoin provided an update to enrollment data. While the final report is slightly behind, those numbers will play an important role in the budget process and apportionment. Class size is beginning to show the impact of staff position elimination. At Memorial, one grade has three instructors. The rest are bumping up against class size benchmarks. There is a small increase in enrollment from last year. The pre-kindergarten program was expanded this year to three classes, funded by a state grant to aid districts. The pre-kindergarten program is a good pipeline for bringing kids into the school system. Ms. Whitman asked if the program is on target to be self-sustaining after the grant is exhausted. Mr. Urbas affirmed that it is.

## **7) Continued Business –**

- a. Elementary School Improvement Plan Progress Reports – Principals Sheila McAdams & John Willis. The principals provided an overview of goal areas

in each of the three strategic initiatives introduced during FY 23, progress made, and action steps for the current fiscal year.

- i. NEASC Process – This is a new process for the principals. They have completed some training around the accreditation process and are preparing to start training for the teacher leaders working on the application. Once the application is in, the schools will host a site visit by NEASC.
- ii. Authentic Learning Assessment – Staff developed a common understanding of what authentic learning means. They will embark on an audit of current authentic learning practices within each school.
- iii. Congruent MMES/EES MTSS Model – Intervention models for the elementary schools were merged across the district. Curriculum Director Heather Leonard is leading the effort, and the program will continue to be refined.
- iv. iReady “My Path” – The iReady assessment applies performance data to create an individualized program for students. It was piloted with a few students and its effectiveness will be reviewed.
- v. Curriculum Journaling – Curriculum journaling of what teachers are actually doing quickly led staff to create a Family Curriculum Guide that was introduced at the recent elementary open houses and available through QR codes. These guides will be polished and distributed each trimester. The next goal will be to create a pacing guide common to both schools to inform which skills will be accessed and when. The plan is to begin with ELA.
- vi. Grade 5-6 Transition & Team Building – Feedback had indicated that more was needed to help the fifth graders transition from both elementary schools to the middle school as a united class. The principals work with stakeholders to create a plan that included a combined grade five musical and joint field trips into Boston and Project Adventure for team building.
- vii. Project Adventure – to foster equity between the elementary school experiences, Project Adventure was employed to add height elements to the MMES building to match existing challenge course elements at EES. The administrators are continuing to work with Project Adventure to come up with a good package for both schools.
- viii. Expand Community Partnerships – Both elementary schools have partnered with the Open Door to host a community mobile market truck, supplying free produce to all. They also work with the Safe Routes to School program by hosting training days and promoting awareness of bike and pedestrian safety. The principals will continue to look for opportunities to engage community partners.

**Strategic initiative 2:** Social-Emotional Learning and incorporating it into all aspects of the day.

- ix. SEL Leadership Model – The goals of this initiative are about being sensitive to the needs of all students. The SEL leadership model

created a team, comprised of staff from both schools, to check in with teachers and collect data. They are tasked with making sure the schools are common and have needed resources. Kim Provost is leading the team.

- x. SEL Instructional Planning and PD – Several years ago, the RULER model was adopted as a tool for lessons and planning around social-emotional learning. Last year, a summer team of educators worked within this model to create a scope and sequence of lessons across both buildings and through all the grade levels. Faculty regularly shared ways that teams were using RULER and integrating its use with the culture of each school.
- xi. SEL Instructional Scheduling, Implementation and Remediation – Work in this area led to the implementation of an SEL block in the daily schedule. However, the feedback was that this was too prescribed and felt inauthentic. This year, it is expected that the same lessons will be carried out within the scope and sequence of the day, allowing teachers to respond to real time occurrences with the same material. Still to accomplish this year is ways of measuring and assessing SEL supports and tiered supports. For example, how does staff identify students struggling with these lessons, and what does tiered support look like for such a student. The SEL leadership team will achieve this.
- xii. Family Engagement in SEL – This goal is about shared language with families. The schools will utilize communication opportunities, including weekly newsletters from teachers and principals and the school charters, to highlight terms families can expect their students to be exposed to.
- xiii. School and Classroom Climate/Culture – School-wide and classroom charters focus on the school and classroom climate, which are integral to ensuring that students feel a strong sense of belonging and feel social safe and comfortable. These charters came out of both family surveys and student-led reflection.
- xiv. Responsive Classroom Training – A strategy for building culture and sense of community. Last year, a teacher was trained in this model and shared these strategies with staff as a regular component of staff meetings.

**Strategic Initiative 3:** Creating and Celebrating an Inclusive and Diverse Culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of everyone. It flows from the SEL work. This initiative focused on self-reflection around language and materials.

- xv. Representational Audit – An on-going audit of how the district presents itself through materials, including many old forms, to ensure that the language is inclusive.
- xvi. Reintroducing Understanding our Differences Model – This program, run in third, fourth, and fifth grade and introduced by Allison Collins,

features guest speakers who share their perspective on living with a particular disability. Students gain perspective on the experience of those with disabilities and barriers to learning by meeting individuals, listening to their experiences, and engaging in dialogue. The program reiterates that all come with challenges and need a sense of belonging.

- xvii. Staff Training: Diverse Characters in Curricular Material. The Wonders reading program features representation of diverse characters. Staff was trained on how to use this resource.
- xviii. Classroom library audits – Software was implemented to review classroom libraries to explore the content of current titles and identify materials that are no longer appropriate. A future goal is to replace these titles with new material that is culturally diverse.

The principals reviewed the strategic plan deliverables and determined that most goals were in-progress and on track, if not completed, and should be achievable by year's end.

Questions: Superintendent Beaudoin asked if there were financial constraints on the principals' efforts. Principal Willis said that the School Improvement Plans are written collaboratively with the school counsels and do not have monetary support from the school budget. Efforts therefore revolve around practice and culture where progress can be achieved without financial investment. Ms. Spencer said that she would be interested to hear if there are areas for improvement that would require a budget investment. Principal McAdams stated that there is concern in the classroom for rebuilding the class libraries following the classroom book audit but no budget for back-filling with new titles. Principal Willis said that Ms. Spencer's question brings to mind the desire of the School Council to discuss class size. Although the School Council has kept their focus on areas where they can make progress without a budget increase, those topics are still of interest to them as a way to support students' educational experience. Ms. Spencer noted that the enrollment report presented shows four grades at Memorial that are above the benchmark for class size and asked about the level at which it is beyond the teacher's ability to deliver education. Principal Willis said that he has historically seen classrooms in the neighborhood of 18 students have a well-balanced room with the best level of personal attention and classroom climate. During the building tour earlier in the day, it was impactful to see the tight spacing of classrooms with 24 desks in the room. Adding in the bodies, emotions, and needs of a class that large spreads teachers thin. Teachers with more than 20 students are more stressed by day's end and have difficulty getting to all things they want in a given day. Students tend to be happier in a smaller classroom environment – more connected, seen, and heard. Principal McAdams stated that there is a clear correlation between teacher effectiveness and class size. Goals have been established for differentiating instruction and meeting kids where they need. As class enrollment increases, a tipping point is reached where instruction becomes more generalized and the teacher is unable

to respond to individual needs. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked how the dimensions of the classrooms at Memorial were determined during the building planning. Principal Willis said that the MSBA has a formula for square footage by age group. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district submitted benchmarks for class size to the MSBA but that it was formula-driven in the end. The superintendent said that the rooms are similarly sized in the middle/high school campus. Principal Willis stated that in a class of 30, students are lost in the shuffle and harder to engage. Although research indicates that 15 is an ideal student classroom enrollment, Principal Willis would put the ideal number at 18 for creating groups, etc. Mr. Foster, who served on the building committee for the new Memorial Elementary, stated that the smaller classroom area was a deliberate implementation to allow for hallway breakout spaces. He asked if the school needs to make cultural shifts to utilize these spaces. Principal Willis stated that the hallway breakout spaces are currently all used during the school day. Mr. Foster asked if the definition of Authentic Learning could be shared and where to find the curriculum family guides. The superintendent said that the definition is available and will be shared. Mr. Foster asked about the relationship between curriculum journaling and the curriculum review cycle. Principal McAdams distinguished between the district curriculum cycle, which will be looking at the district's science curriculum, and the elementary schools' desire to use journaling to first examine reading as a foundational subject. Ms. Leonard stated that the difference between them is that curriculum journaling informs the staff and memorializes their instruction. The audience is staff. It charts when focus areas are taught. Teachers examine, within a unit of study, areas that they want to preserve and ensure that students have access to regardless of the teacher or school that they have. This experience can be assessed vertically, as students go through their K-5 experience. Staff build a shared, consistent experience. The elementary is focusing on ELA. The curriculum review is about how the district K-12 experience approaches the standards. What do the standards say? What is the district responsible for? What does the district currently have, and what practices, assessments, etc. should be considered for the future. This process could lead to a material curricular adoption or training or a new assessment. Principal McAdams said that it is important to be fluid enough to the curriculum review process to take advantage of materials coming out via DESE. Ms. Leonard stated that the family curriculum guides can be found at the district website under curriculum and instructional technology in the academics and curriculum section. Ms. Mitchell asked if the teacher's aides present in the classroom are helpful or distracting where there are several present in addition to the lead teacher. Principal Willis said that it is a benefit at the elementary level where a special education teacher may be in a co-teaching role in a classroom and there may also be a teaching assistant for a student that needs one to one support. He said there are other districts with much higher levels of adults in class where they can be distracting. Our schools have a supportive program of co-teaching with their special education



teachers. Ms. Whitman asked what has been the most impactful and what the principals would want to change after completing the first year on the School Improvement Plan. Principal McAdams stated that MERSD stands out as a district with plans closely tied to the school plans and benefits from the resource alignment that emerges. Principal Willis stated that the alignment between the elementary schools has been very impactful. The principals are a collaborative unit and able to share ideas. The two staffs are also pulling in the same direction because they are led by the strategic plan. Regarding change, Principal McAdams stated that they need to look closer at academic progress and add goals. Within the context of authentic learning, she wants to look closer at instructional efficiencies and look for instructional gaps. In addition, looking vertically through journaling will inform conversations. Principal McAdams stated that she does not think the schools are holding students accountable enough. Understanding what the goals of each grade are will inform this work and assist in accountability over the years. Ms. Spencer asked if the schools have the tools they need to address the gaps, including the learning gaps caused by the pandemic. Principal Willis said that every time the budget shrinks, it gets harder. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if Mr. Willis was referring to staffing, which he confirmed, stating that materials are a small component of the budget compared to the current reduction to the special education budget and the increase in class size due to regular education staff reductions. As the student to teacher ratio increases, it is increasingly difficult to give each student what they need. Principal McAdams stated that in Essex, they have not leveraged family resources and need to offer a way that families can help their students. They are reexamining the concept of homework. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that iReady is the diagnostic assessment that shows where individual students are and what they need to progress. This data informs in-class instruction. For students who need instruction beyond the core curriculum, MTSS is the intervention model. It is much more difficult for the teacher to differentiate instruction for data based on 24 students than for 18. The MyPath avenue is currently being explored at the middle school level. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked what happens differently between the two elementary schools and how each school identifies its unique needs. Principal Willis stated that curriculum journaling was one way to take a look at the needs of each building. In addition, listening to the stake holders provides helpful feedback. The School Council completed a survey to families that was very helpful and pointed to the need for consistent communication. Principal McAdams said that getting teachers together more often fosters conversations that reveals those needs. Principal Willis said that the iReady data also uncovers differing needs between the schools and informs where each school focuses. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that a positive aspect of declining enrollment was the creation of shared positions across the district. These staff members see firsthand the needs of each school. It has contributed to a shared culture between the buildings. The superintendent also clarified that the SEL leadership model is currently grant funded through ESSER. The hope is to

fund these position through use of a stipend. The net to the district would be zero dollars. Similarly, there is the math interventionist funded through ESSER. That position will be brought back into the operating budget this year from ESSER funding.

- b. Turf Field Project Update – Avi Urbas. Mr. Urbas stated that the Brook St. field walk through was scheduled for the following day and the field is expected to open by week's end. Ms. Mitchell asked if the parking lot would be fixed. Mr. Urbas stated that, outside of repair for damage caused by the building project, the parking area is not part of the project and is town property. Mr. Urbas stated that there is expected savings on the project from unused contingency monies in the construction budget. Ms. Whitman asked when the final numbers would be in for the projects. Mr. Urbas stated that he is hopeful they will be in by the end of October. Ms. Mitchell asked how the Town of Manchester will be billed given that they approved a full \$400K for the Brook Street field work, if the final cost is less. Mr. Urbas stated that a reconciliation is standard practice at the end of a project, and the town would not be billed for more than their project cost should be.
- c. School Committee FY24 Goal Setting – Ms. Whitman said that the SC has the most flexible of goals because they are yearly. The Strategic Plan is a 10 year plan, the DIP is a three year look. The School Improvement Plans and the superintendent's goals are two year. Each year, the SC has the opportunity to decide which components of this are most important to them. Ms. Whitman stated that the School Committee goals are very important because the superintendent can construct her own goals to the Strategic Plan and the SC goals. Currently, without SC goals, things are a bit out of sequence. Ms. Whitman asked SC members to review their goals from last year and the goals' alignment to the Strategic Initiatives. She asked that members consider if the SC should craft this year's goals in small chunks during each SC meeting or all at once in a workshop. In addition, Ms. Whitman asked that all members review the learning lunch offered by MASC in June. Ms. Whitman will redistribute the link. Superintendent Beaudoin asked how much the SC anticipates diverting from the current SC goals. Historically, some SC goals have remained in place through multiple years. The direction could inform the avenue pursued for updating the SC goals. Ms. Whitman stated that she is aware of significant additions that some members wish to make. The current SC goals are in the SC meeting packet from September 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. Ms. Koch-Sundquist advised reviewing the current goals before deciding on the approach to update them.

Ms. Whitman read the SC goals from FY23 to assist in determining the scope of the work to update them and choosing a method for the work, either a workshop or a devoted section of the SC meeting over the coming months:

FY23 School Committee Goals:

1. Work collaboratively with our member towns, to allocate resources for both the near-term and long-term financial health of the District, including the pursuit of a correction that maintains educational quality and supports our mission, vision, core values, and strategic initiatives.
2. Utilize the facilities index report of the Essex Elementary School, Middle School, and High School buildings and propose a timeline for pursuing renovation/repair of Essex Elementary School.
3. Partner with our students, families, faculty, and staff in pursuit of our strategic initiative to nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals.
4. Advance academic excellence by ensuring implementation of, and developing community support for, the district Strategic Plan, including strategies for authentic learning and SEL integration.

Ms. Mitchell stated that the goals for any organization should be something achievable in the current year. Ms. Mitchell said that over the past few meetings, the SC has prioritized items, including communication and the budget, that should be married to the goals. Ms. Mitchell stated that, based on MASC, the School Committee is responsible to manage the superintendent, ensure that the Strategic Plan is carried out successfully, and manage the budget. Ms. Mitchell said that all three charges should be reflected in the SC goals. Ms. Spencer said a workshop is needed. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that with those three functions of the school committee, it is possible to divide up the SC goals by each function to consider goals related to each in a separate session. Ms. Whitman said that before deciding, she recommended that each member watch the MASC learning lunch, and that the goals should also tie back to the strategic plan. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that, for the next meeting, members watch the learning lunch and come prepared with the buckets they want goals to fall into. Ms. Spencer stated that given the significance of the goals, she still recommended a single day to working through it. Ms. Koch-Sundquist suggested a remote meeting. Ms. Whitman confirmed that they will set the date and time for the remote workshop at the next meeting. Ms. Mitchell asked that members also review the SC policy which has a specific section about rules and responsibilities of the committee members. Ms. Whitman agreed and stated that the learning lunch has much of this material built in to it. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested consideration of two-year goals because of how much of the year has already passed. The superintendent will send out a handful of possible meeting dates for the workshop. Ms. Mitchell stated that other districts complete a School Committee self-evaluation. The superintendent replied that self-evaluation has been part of the summer workshop historically. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that by mid-November, the SC would need a strategy regarding budget goals and clarity about what will be communicated.

- d. Discussion of All-Boards Meeting – Ms. Whitman stated that the SC should have a plan of action for evaluating budget solution ideas broached at the All-

Boards meeting. As a committee, the SC will need to decide what they will support and present to district leadership. As regards the budget, will the SC approve a cuts budget to support the needs of one town; ask for a level-service budget; or advocate for a growth and investment budget. In order to evaluate presented budget ideas, Ms. Whitman suggested compiling a list of those discussed; refining the list for viability; inviting members and administration to research ideas; and voting on whether the SC will task the superintendent to include each idea as part of the budget (could be over time). This would document for the community that the SC has considered each idea. Ms. Koch-Sundquist expressed concern that, regardless of the steps taken by the SC, some town partners will take their own opinion or insist on doing their own evaluation and impose their conclusions on the district budget process. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that ideas should be considered based on defined roles and responsibilities. As an example, Mrs. Koch-Sundquist questioned why the town partners want to own the class size decision. Ms. Whitman advocated taking that power back by considering each idea in open meeting and making a vote that all SC members will back. Mr. Foster asked about the magnitude of inquiry being considered. Ms. Spencer stated that a reasonable starting point would be to reflect on the All-Board meeting and the things the town partners asked for. Ms. Spencer stated that she heard support for engaging a consultant, either as a budget auditor or as an agreement expert; looking for efficiencies by combining functions and services; class-size policy; and cutting budget items that are not instructional. Ms. Mitchell stated that town partners want reassurance that everything has been reduced to the bare minimum before asking them to cut from the town budgets. Ms. Koch-Sundquist mentioned examination of the regional agreement and enrollment trends. Mr. Binieris said that he heard a desire to look at facilities efficiencies. Mr. Binieris stated that a look back at the budget over the previous ten years, with an explanation of anomalies, could be helpful. Mr. Binieris said that starting with a budget of 3.4% have be a good base-line. Ms. Whitman said that fundraising and fee increase were two additional solutions. Ms. Spencer stated that the SC should examine what they want the schools to look like and stressed that it may need to add back teachers. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that a shared understanding of what “level services” means in necessary. Mr. Foster stated that school choice should be examined. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the SC was looking at a list of possible solutions that assume there is a problem. The district is being asked to meet a growth number that is inconsistent with historical levels. The superintendent asked if the SC needs to begin the budget process with the assumption that it needs to come in at a lower level. Mr. Foster stated that he is looking for guidance from the town of an absolute percentage goal. Ms. Spencer stated that Essex was clear that they would not support an override, even at 2.5% increase (at which they estimated a \$60K gap). Ms. Spencer questioned whether any of the strategies presented could result in meeting the 2.5% while delivering educational excellence. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she has heard from voters who do not want to support a

budget for “excellent” schools. Ms. Whitman said that the creation of the Strategic Plan was a multi-year process developed with a 3.5% growth cap and reinvestment to support the initiative. Ms. Whitman said this should be the definition of what is sought. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the SIP does not give specifics, like foreign language in the middle school. Mr. Foster stated that the Strategic Plan states that the district wants to improve but does not specify a base. He also stated that the goals of the Vision of the Graduate could be accomplished in different ways. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested considering the competitiveness of MERSD versus neighboring and like communities with whom our students will compete. Should the district accept the reality that there are several variables that regularly increase at greater than 3.5% and will need to be compensated for. That is the structural piece, that healthcare and mandated components like the teachers’ agreement and OOD push the district over the limit. Superintendent Beaudoin also stated that the class size benchmark has been a reliable expectation. Even if data supports a change in this area, it will feel like a loss to staff and families. Ms. Mitchell suggested starting with a budget at 2.5% and determining how big the gap is. By reviewing the final FY23 budget to actual numbers, she said the assumptions could be re-examined. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the budget has been created with a specific percentage in mind. The SC has not seen a budget where educational goals drive the percent increase. Mr. Foster asked if that was “level-services.” Ms. Koch-Sundquist said it is not because each previous budget includes cuts from the previous year. Superintendent Beaudoin said that decreasing enrollment has permitted the district to make staffing adjustments that were palatable until two years ago when it impacted the Spanish program. Currently, the district was unable to replace an interventionist to address learning loss resulting from the pandemic. The superintendent said the district can continue to tighten to meet the 2.5% goal, but it will not promote growth of the program. Mr. Foster stated that he appreciates the current discussion of program and not just percentages. Ms. Whitman said that when she joined the SC, the group had a goal to advocate for the needs of the district. Ms. Whitman asked for input from educators about their needs. Ms. Mitchell commented that the term ‘best’ is objective without measurable outcomes. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that sharing a librarian between the elementary schools has the unintended consequence that the library is unavailable as a resource when a question or issue arises. Ms. Spencer stated that this is an example of an authentic learning opportunity. Superintendent Beaudoin cautioned that the example gets into justifying a librarian whose position would be partly non-teaching. Mr. Urbas and the superintendent stated that the administration needs quantifiable input from the SC regarding the budget by the October 17<sup>th</sup> meeting, November 7<sup>th</sup> at the latest. Mr. Urbas said that the administration will present the tentative budget by the first week in December. Although some shifts can be accommodated after that time, re-imagining the budget would be very difficult. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district administration prefers to build

in variations in the budget early and would like to know desired scenarios out of the gate. Statewide, the average growth rate of school districts is 3-3.5%. At 3.5%, the district will make tradeoffs that are palatable. Going lower will place the district on a problematic trajectory.

- 8) School Committee Comment:** Ms. Spencer said that she would like to better understand the impact of the big three which grow at a faster rate – healthcare, the teachers’ contract, and out of district placement. Mr. Urbas stated that the district is currently working on this illustration. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked to see a list of program cuts. The superintendent stated that the district would work on this in combination with a list of efficiencies already implemented, including food service, transportation, and custodial services. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the administrative structure side of the budget is under-staffed in comparison to Hamilton-Wenham. Ms. Mitchell stated that the decision to re-examine the regional agreement apportionment formula lies with the School Committee, who must request a review. Ms. Mitchell asked what approach or reasoning the SC would use to both entities for whether they would pursue a review. Ms. Whitman encouraged SC members to attend upcoming building walkthroughs. The next walkthrough is October 11 at the middle/high school building. On October 24, there is a Facilities Sub-Committee tour with the MSBA at Essex Elementary.

### **C. Adjourn**

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

*Meeting Adjourned at 8:58 pm*

### **School Committee Future Meetings**

- October 17, 2023
- November 7, 2023