



## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

October 15, 2024

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	October 15, 2024
<b>Location:</b>	MERMHS Learning Commons
<b>Attendees:</b>	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Chris Reed, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist, Vice-Chair Anna Mitchell Erica Spencer Theresa Whitman
<b>Absent:</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>	Julie Sgroi, Principal MER High School
<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** – Mr. Reed 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)**

Nina McKinnon, 1 Lowland Farm Road, Essex. Ms. McKinnon spoke in support of a district-wide phone ban, citing multiple other districts that have implemented a ban. Ms. McKinnon has worked for eight and a half years in support of neurological development science. She stated that smart phones change brains and that it is disturbing that they are being allowed to change children's brains. Ms. McKinnon said that a phone ban would

October 15, 2024

also level the playing field for students who cannot afford smart phones. Ms. McKinnon encouraged the School Committee to envision a lunch room where students were talking to each other or a sports event where they are just cheering and asked what members are waiting for.

**2) Chairperson's Report** – Mr. Reed stated that he met last week with the chairs of the town boards to broach budget topics. The group discussed the framework of health care and other fixed costs and shared information.

**3) Consent Agenda** –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1018 - 1021 and payroll warrant for October 10, 2024
- Minutes for approval: October 1, 2024

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

Questions: Mr. Foster asked if the repair costs for Memorial were covered under warranty. Ms. Cresta replied that they are not. Ms. Cresta said there is a state-wide trend of increasing mechanical issues. Even when parts are covered under warranty, the labor is usually not. Ms. Mitchell asked about a teaching materials voucher entry for \$17K and stated that she thought anything major would be capitalized. Ms. Cresta said that this expense is for consumables and is a routine cost. It would not be included in the capital expenses.

*The motion passed unanimously.*

**4) Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – No Report. Next meeting is October 22.
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Erica Spencer/Theresa Whitman) – General Update. Ms. Spencer stated that the subcommittee met earlier in the day and plans a full report to the SC at the next meeting on October 29. Ms. Mitchell asked if the subcommittee is looking for feedback from members. Ms. Spencer clarified that they received feedback regarding the target reserve percentage at the last SC meeting from members. Superintendent Beaudoin has also been accepting additional feedback from SC members. Ms. Whitman said that the last presentation of the reserve policy was the first read. The current work by the subcommittee will focus on clarifying language within the policy. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that feedback from the general public would also be considered.
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report
- **Finance Committee** (Jake Foster/Anna Mitchell) – No Report.

## **5) Superintendent's Report – Pam Beaudoin: General Update and October Enrollment.**

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that Ms. Leonard would present to the School Committee, as part of her monthly report, on the annual assessment review for MCAS, accountability, i-Ready, and VOCAL (MCAS student survey) data on November 5. This is part of the district's goals around continuous improvement. MCAS individual student reports were released to families last week.

The library task force is soliciting participants, and their first meeting is scheduled for November 20. The focus of the task force will be "building forward," emphasizing the role of the space in supporting challenges faced by the district in terms of managing information science and preparing students for the next generation.

The DESE review team has determined that they will perform a targeted review (half of the full review) for MERSD, focusing on the operational side of the district, including governance, human resources, and the like. The district has received a list of documents to provide as the first step in the review. A site visit is expected near the end of January.

The NEASC site visit for Essex and Memorial is scheduled for October 22. Focus groups at both schools include students, parents, and staff. The visiting team will be looking at how the district's self-assessments align with what they see on-site.

School Committee Tour of Essex Elementary is scheduled for October 16.

**Class Size Section Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin presented the class size section report, first introduced last year. It is included in the SC packet. The preliminary enrollment for the district, before certification with DESE, is 1198 students, plus 17 out of district placements. The final enrollment report will be filed this month. The report highlights the ever-tightening profile for high school section enrollment over the last two years, following community concern about class size enrollment. Most sections are now running at around 16 students. The superintendent shared a few drivers around enrollment, including multi-section classes; combined classes (where more than one level of enrollment meets in the same class, like honors and AP), and singleton classes. There are 58 singleton classes that meet only once per term. This may yield a lower class size if it draws against another required course in a certain scheduling block. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is aligning well with neighboring and comparable high school who are all in the mid to high teens for section enrollment. Class enrollment at the K-8 level is much clearer to track and their specialized programs are well populated.

**Questions:** Ms. Mitchell asked for enrollment data by town. The superintendent said this has not yet been certified and she did not have the information at this time. Mr. Foster pointed out that last year the proportion of core to elective sections was 70:30.

This year they seem closer to 50:50. There was some additional inquiry about how sections are counted in the report. The superintendent acknowledged that there may be some double counting of sections.

Superintendent Beaudoin addressed proposed housing projects that may impact future enrollment in the district. After submission of projected numbers to the MSBA for the Van Wyck property in Essex, the housing development project has escalated from the earlier projection of 50 bedrooms to 140 bedrooms. The project is also scheduled for completion earlier than previously anticipated and well before the expected completion of the Essex building project. The MSBA has agreed to reevaluate the school building project based on the updated numbers. The district will likely go before the MSBA in December. The building committee will receive a new projection and certification document in the next month. This will not necessarily result in different numbers. There has also been discussion about possible housing developments in Manchester. The MSBA is in possession of all confirmed information and their enrollment document captures the impact they expect to occur over the next few years.

#### **6) Continued Business –**

- High School Improvement Plan Update & 2024-2025 Outlook – Julie Sgroi.

#### **MERSD Strategic Plan Priorities**

- Strategic Initiative1 Establish and foster an authentic Pre-K-12 learning environment
  - Explore and implement student portfolios to measure student progress toward the achievement of the skills and disposition of the Vision of the Graduate
  - Review of report card comments and best practices to provide meaningful feedback of student learning and growth tied to Vision of the Graduate skills and dispositions
  - Identify and implement opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and assessment to bring relevance for student learning (new courses and development assessment opportunities between courses)
  - Implement robust review of SCORE (student internship) to serve as capstone experience that reflects achievement of the skills and dispositions of the Vision of the Graduate.
  - Adopt common protocol for review of student work across departments to provide common assessment practices and measures of the Vision of the Graduate.

- Strategic Initiative 2 Integrate social emotional learning into all aspects of the school day.
  - Increase understanding of SEL and Trauma Informed Practices connected to meeting the needs of individual learners as defined in Student Centered Learning Definition
  - Develop and implement faculty advisor to provide opportunities for connection to a trusted adult with the goal to review, discuss and reflect on learning and development and skills of the Vision of the Graduate
- Strategic Initiative 3 Celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals.
  - Review curriculum to expand content and authors that include under-represented groups to promote diversity, equity and inclusion
  - Continue implementation of the ADL World of Difference Program
  - Work on DEI goal with Michael Eatman aimed at meeting the distinct needs, interests, aspirations, and/or cultural backgrounds of individual students in effort to promote greater equity
  - Implement purposeful outreach for hiring of faculty and staff from under-represented groups
- Strategic Initiative 4 Ensure funding for a stable, multi-year budget and capital improvement plan through collaboration with town and community partners.
  - Look for efficiencies to reduce spending by department
  - Review personnel structure to improve or adjust the delivery of the program.
  - Review program of studies and related staffing to assure efficiencies of personnel use

Ms. Sgroi provided insight into the high school's update on its School Improvement Plan progress and its plans for the next SIP cycle:

Celebrating:

- Vision of the Graduate – Part of the first strategic initiative was to develop a common assessment for the vision. This was completed. Departments employ this common assessment with the appropriate rubric. Parts of the vision are also highlighted in assessments throughout the year. Principal Sgroi said that this language is being used by the student population now. It was evident in the recent SC presentation by members of the Model UN club who were able to reference the Vision of the Graduate. Ms. Sgroi said that the Vision is being used within the classroom with integrity and not just as words up on the wall. Principal Sgroi hopes to build on this in the future.
- School Counseling Department – From strategic initiative two, the goal was to bring social-emotional learning into all aspects of the day. The counseling department is

bringing this goal to life. Professional development and increased understanding of SEL has heightened common form practices. The counseling department works closely with the dean and conducts regular meetings to discuss students in need of support. Attendance is a focus state-wide.

- Cultural Competency in the classroom – Principal Sgroi expressed appreciation for her work last year with consultant Michael Eatman, benefitting from his work with the district over the last couple of years. Mr. Eatman provided PD this year for staff. Ms. Sgroi said that the high school has worked to offer more variety in literature and curriculum to better align with being more culturally competent. There is also a new twelfth grade elective aligned with this goal.

Ongoing: Principal Sgroi said that many aspects of the SIP are ongoing as the school adapts and updates its approach.

- Interdisciplinary Classes – This year, the high school is employing PD time to collaborate and create interdisciplinary opportunities through units or student experiences. Principal Sgroi stated that VOCAL data demonstrated an opportunity to link student learning to real life. This connection can be made through interdisciplinary learning.
- Department structure – In looking for efficiencies (strategic initiative 4), the high school was able to maintain the science department structure, shifting teaching assignments to account for an unanticipated retirement. This allowed for keeping a full-time computer science teacher. Similarly, a shift was enacted in the history department to keep the departments even.
- Attendance – The goal is to improve and support attendance. This is a state-wide push. Dean Drinkwater is working closely with the counseling department to improve and support attendance. Last September, 83 high school students had at least one absence, tardy, or dismissal. This September, the high school had 61. Principal Sgroi said that the emphasis for the year is to demonstrate to students that they are wanted in class, in school.

Revisiting:

- Working Groups for Professional Development: Working groups were a good start but have run their course after a couple years. Emphasis is switching now to interdisciplinary opportunities.
- Student Survey - aligning with middle school. High school students will be taking the survey this spring. Data wasn't substantial enough from the middle school because current students were part of the pandemic cohort in the eighth grade. Aligning with the middle school will allow for increased data.

Looking Forward (2025/27 SIP): Principal Sgroi said she would be creating the new SIP with the school counsel. The focus will be on:

- Interdisciplinary Units
- Curriculum Reviews – working with Ms. Leonard
- SCORE – Ms. Sgroi is looking to strengthen the program and take advantage of existing opportunities.

Current High School Topics – Principal Sgroi shared that the high school was named to the AP Honor Roll and received an AP Access Award. The school was awarded a bronze medal. During their high school career, 84% of current seniors took at least one AP exam. Of those, 77% scored a 3 or higher on the test. The AP Access Award is presented for increased access to students of under-represented populations. This is the second year in a row that the high school has received the award. Ms. Sgroi shared that the high school will partner this year with the middle school to produce the musical Shrek. Combining resources will provide more opportunities for students. The principal shared her excitement for the fresh perspectives brought by new staff. The high school has a new Director of School and College Counseling who has already hosted a senior parent night and introduced “counseling corner” sessions. The high school also has a new band teacher and a new science teacher. The team is working well together. Principal Sgroi said that the team is considering schedule alignment, continuing the work begun last year and examining opportunities to find value and balance while maintaining the ideals of the middle school model. The goal will be to take advantage of opportunities without compromising district expectations of the middle and high school programs.

Principal Sgroi continued the discussion around a district cell phone ban, questioning the problem a ban would be aimed at solving. During the recent SC tour of the high school, members were able to see what is happening in classrooms and the hallways. There is a focus on using devices and screens when appropriate. Ms. Sgroi said that the high school is responsible to teach appropriate and safe device use. Teachers are modeling using tech appropriately.

The high school is examining the role of the counseling department. With the new director, they are working to redefine their role to best meet the needs of the population. They are ensuring that all students have a trusted adult. It is also important that students understand the role of the counseling department.

Principal Sgroi examined data related to exit to private school. MERHS is in line with surrounding schools with about 10-15% of students going to private school. This year, the high school lost two sophomores and nine ninth graders to private school. However, there were also one sophomore and four ninth graders re-enrolled in MERHS from private schools. In the previous school year, three ninth graders and three tenth graders left for private school, while MERHS gained two seniors, two juniors, one sophomore, and four ninth graders from private schools.

Questions: Mr. Binieris asked for insight into the current cell phone policy at the high school. Ms. Sgroi said that the current handbook policy references electronic devices and says that

unauthorized use of any of this technology during the school day may result in it being confiscated and that repeated offenses may result in the student's loss of this privilege. Mr. Binieris said that he would like to see student devices secured at the start of the school day until they leave. He said that students have become used to ten second clips and it is impacting their attention span. Ms. Spencer acknowledged that there does not appear to be a high level of concern among educators that phones are interfering with education. However, knowing that they are dangerous, Ms. Spencer questioned why they district would not ban them.

Principal Sgroi said that the conversation about banning cell phones is important if the community is concerned. She stated that there has not been an office referral for a student who refused to put a phone away. Many teachers do have a phone caddy for storage as students enter class. Ms. Sgroi said that the cafeteria is a healthfully noisy place of student interaction. The principal expressed hesitancy to jump to a ban before looking at other communities and their response to the issue. Principal Sgroi said that she believes it is important to teach students how to use their devices safely because there are no bans in the outside world. A ban does not teach them the skills necessary to navigate outside of school. Ms. Sgroi also questioned the role of other devices. The high school is a device school where many students use their own laptops or tablets, and these all allow for access to messaging and social apps. A ban would have to account for all device use. There are also students who rely on a cell phone as a medical device. Districts that ban cell phones also must build in time for drop off and pick up of devices.

Ms. Whitman asked if teachers are expressing a need for support around cell phone use. Principal Sgroi said they are not. Some teachers employ phone drop off to prevent the distraction. Other teachers use them as a tool in class and are doing so with integrity. Ms. Whitman asked if the school was receiving assistance requests from families around cell phone use and if there are resources available to the community. Ms. Sgroi said she is not seeing this with regularity. School counselors are trained in this, and the school partners with the Gloucester public health department to provide outside resources for technology addiction. The principal said that it is rare for phones to create a discipline issue (for instance because of inappropriate texts or video usage). Ms. Whitman asked if the new health curriculum framework includes social media and device use. Ms. Leonard joined the discussion to say that the digital learning/computer science framework emphasizes responsible digital citizenship. Within the comprehensive health and wellness framework there is a lot about monitoring self, pro-social behavior, and decision making that includes device usage and what to do if the student or a friend is not making healthy choices.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist shared that, during the high school tour, she did not see phone use during the passing time nor did she see students hiding the phones from the group of adults. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if students have another way to communicate with parents during the school day. Ms. Sgroi said that students have access to the office or nurse phone. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the school has had many parents speak to the high school about instituting a ban. Ms. Sgroi said they have not. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about teacher input on a problem that would be solved with a phone ban. Principal Sgroi replied that teachers have not identified a problem, but she agreed that phones are an issue of concern for families. In the school building, they are not a problem. Ms. Sgroi said that, because of student device use in class, a ban would have to

account for the role of other electronics devices. Principal Sgroi said she would like to explore bringing back Freshman Academy, making responsible device use an emphasis of the program, and continuing that learning through senior year. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the school council has looked at the rules around cell phone use. The principal said that it was discussed last year and they could re-examine the rules in place. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that, in reviewing the language of other districts implementing cell phone bans, the language used in the bans is similar to what is in place at the high school. Principal Sgroi said that she likes that our policy cites “inappropriate” use, providing the opportunity to define what is appropriate.

Ms. Mitchell asked what benefit is preserved by allowing cell phones and asked if a parent survey has been conducted to determine parent support for a ban. Ms. Mitchell asked, if there is a benefit to a ban, why not do it. Ms. Mitchell said that apps on other devices can be limited. Principal Sgroi said that students find ways around controls. The school does not provide a device for each student, and this means that many students use their own devices. Principal Sgroi reiterated that it is an important discussion because it is a community concern. If the policy is to change, she advocated for surveying parents and teachers. Ms. Sgroi said that a ban would present some hurdles.

Ms. Spencer said that, while teaching responsible use is an important goal, understanding that cell phone use is addictive has deeper implications. Superintendent Beaudoin said that, unlike other addictive substances, students are allowed wide use of cell phones outside of school. Ms. Spencer suggested a more consistent practice between classrooms and said that parents may feel better if the default expectation is caddy storage in class. Principal Sgroi said that students are allowed phone use during U Block, where they have freedom to work as they choose or take time for themselves. Regarding addiction concerns, the principal said that it would take a community effort to address this side of cell phone use if students can expect phone access from 2:15 pm to 10:00 pm. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that parents could make a decision to not send phones to school.

Mr. Reed limited further discussion to curtail debate.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that any discussion of policy change would need to consider more than just the high school. Ipswich brought the matter to staff when considering the cell phone ban. The superintendent said that the district is struggling to manage AI. The superintendent expressed concern about shifting from a building-managed approach to a “ban” and said that an important consideration is the culture of mutual trust that currently exists between students and staff. The district has expectations and rules in place to yield the desired use of cell phones in school. Students respond well to school expectations and in turn receive a lot of privileges. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the principals are wrestling with the prospect of moving to a more restrictive, enforcer state. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district does seek to do everything possible for student social-emotional health. She said that the high school could not pursue a ban alone and a lot of thought would need to go into fulfilling digital literacy goals.

Mr. Foster expressed concern that, although the district received the AP Access Award for participation by students from underrepresented groups, of the 340 tests taken last year, 40 tests were by students in the high-need category. This is about 12% of tests taken. In contrast, the

district has 24% high-needs students. One student with a disability participated and seven of Hispanic heritage. Mr. Foster asked for insight into the award process. Principal Sgroi said that the award is based on categories set by the AP. As a small district, even single test takers can have a large impact. Mr. Foster suggested that the district could do more to facilitate participation by these groups. Mr. Foster also noted that Principal Sgroi did not use the term “authentic learning” in her presentation. Principal Sgroi responded that she thinks there is a real opportunity, supported by VOCAL data, for students to leave MERSD able to say, “I learned that for this reason.” Ms. Sgroi said that authentic learning unlocks that. Principal Sgroi is looking to interdisciplinary units to bring this work into focus.

Ms. Whitman asked if the state is offering support for its current attendance push. Ms. Sgroi said that a lot of the state’s support is in the form of public awareness outreach and tools for districts to provide consistent information. The DESE website also includes resources to support families experiencing high absence. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district received a \$10K grant last year to support implementation of strategies in support of attendance. The district engaged in administrative training and will implement public service pieces and extended counseling support.

Ms. Spencer said that she would like to see SCORE linked to strategic initiatives. Ms. Spencer said that the SCORE program has opportunities for growth, even with challenges around hours for AP students. Principal Sgroi said that the SCORE program would be a great place to connect to authentic learning. She would like to see the development of passions from grade nine through grade twelve when the SCORE project would bring that work to a meaningful experience. That journey would involve research and community involvement. Developing the program in this way would require the involvement of the greater community.

Mr. Reed asked if there are needs or limitations for which the high school could use the support of the School Committee. Ms. Sgroi highlighted the importance of clear communication, increasing community communication about the work being done, and emphasizing the importance of clear expectations from administration to the leadership team and then to teachers. In regard to needed resources, the principal said that the curriculum review is likely to uncover more tangible needs.

Mr. Foster questioned some aspects of the class section size report. There is a discrepancy between total number of sections and the breakdown of core to elective classes. There is also a jump from the 70:30 percent split last year between core and elective classes and this year’s report that shows them closer to 50:50. These discrepancies were explained by the principal and superintendent as related to differences in how they are defined this year and also to errors in the current report due to hand coding.

- FY26 Budget Calendar – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC is at the beginning of budget development. The district is working on its end of year report to DESE, and auditors are working on the E&D report. Both of those will feed into the preliminary budget. Once the preliminary budget is complete, those numbers will be given to the principals for their budget work. The principals will develop a priority list.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that administrators are looking for the School Committee's input on the type of budget they would like to see. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that preliminary input indicates that the district's contractual obligations will grow in the 4% range this year. District administration received estimates of an increase in health care costs in the range of 18%. Town partners are hearing the same in their estimates. OSD sets rates for out of district placement, and an increase is expected in the 3.5–4.32% range.

Ms. Mitchell received confirmation that budget development initially assumes flat enrollment. She noted that the budget is presented to the MBTS finance committee and asked if it is also presented to the Essex finance committee. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is always ready to present to town partners. MBTS has booked that meeting ahead of time, and that is why it is included in the budget calendar. Essex has not done so. The superintendent said that the presentation is more of a Q&A session. Ms. Mitchell asked how the budget process would align with the Essex building project. The superintendent replied that the EBC presentation would not be until between April of 2026 and the fall of 2027.

Ms. Spencer noted that the December 3 budget meeting conflicts with a high school DECA mock competition. The superintendent said that there are some clubs that are not required to run dates by the district office for black out dates. It is not possible to eliminate all Tuesday events, although the district has sought to prevent school-wide events on those dates. Mr. Foster asked if the schedule had the flexibility for the SC to pursue its goal of open collaboration with town partners. The superintendent said that the budget calendar is a list of deliverables based on the regional agreement. Ms. Cresta stated that this is the earliest budget calendar that she has seen in her professional experience, even in the Triton district. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that she met with the state level executive board of administrators, and they are projecting that the next two budget years will be difficult.

- Manchester Housing Development – Ms. Mitchell asked for this item to be added to the SC agenda in order to broach the subject of the impact of potential zoning changes as the result of section 3A of the Massachusetts Zoning Act (Chapter 40A). This act requiring MBTA communities to create zoning districts allowing multi-family housing by-right. The stated goal is to increase the number of multi-family housing units in the state to address the housing crisis. Ms. Mitchell stated that there are questions about whether Manchester should comply. Ms. Mitchell said that it raises the question of how many school-age children could enter the district as a result and asked what it would mean for the district. Ms. Spencer said, as a point of clarification, that the statute only requires re-zoning to allow for a defined number of units within a designated distance from the MBTA station. It does not mean the development will take place. Ms. Spencer noted that 177 communities are tasked with this. Ms. Mitchell suggested that it is the School Committee's job to look at the range and consider the costs to infrastructure. Ms. Spencer asked where the projections are coming from. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is aware of the potential for development and that the MBTA has accounted for

this potential impact. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the future of projects as a result of this legislature is uncertain. Of greater import is the possibility of universal pre-kindergarten, which would put pressure on buildings if communities are mandated to provide PK space, and changing adaptability requirements to meet the needs of students. The district may need more spaces for students with disabilities. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district pushed for the MSBA to consider merger options with Manchester for the Essex building project. With the Essex population projected to be between 250-280, they could not all be housed at Memorial. Mr. Foster stated that zoning consequences are in the future and cannot inform the current discussion until things are more certain. Superintendent Beaudoin said the district has to adapt to enrollment changes, and Memorial is well-designed to handle increases in enrollment of 50 – 100 students.

- School Committee Goal Development – referencing an SC shared document containing updated drafts of SC goals. Ms. Koch-Sundquist reminded the board that at the end of the last meeting, Mr. Foster committed to drafting a goal around the budget narrative, Ms. Koch-Sundquist committed to drafting a collaboration goal, and Ms. Spencer, working with Superintendent Beaudoin, committed to drafting an academic excellence goal. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she strove to include the Essex building project in the goal.

SC members discussed the merits of the goals as developed and made adjustments to encompass additional points. Mr. Foster noted that the Essex building project vote will not happen in the current fiscal year. Mr. Foster said that framing the goal to build support for the eventual funding vote equates to long-term planning.

#### Goal 1: Budget

*Mr. Reed moved to pass the School Committee first goal: The school committee will continue to provide opportunities for open collaboration with town partners to pass a responsible budget and increase awareness of and support for the EES building project.*

*Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Ms. Mitchell asked why the goals were being passed individually. Mr. Reed said that the goal is to finalize at least one.

*The motion 5-1. Ms. Mitchell voted against. Mr. Binieris was not present for the vote.*

Goal 2 – Budget Narrative. SC members discussed what they wished to convey in a “budget narrative.” Mr. Foster said that the budget presentation is usually very high level. Ms. Mitchell concurred that the budget package is number heavy and does not do enough to tell a story. Ms. Whitman raised concern that the SC has been criticized for pulling at heart strings when listing programs that are negatively affected by the budget. Ms. Koch-Sundquist pointed to the positive story around adding a library para-professional versus just having a line-item. Ms. Spencer questioned how to build a narrative beyond past efforts by the superintendent to show how the

budget in broken down by areas (including personnel, health care, OOD, etc.). Ms. Koch-Sundquist advocated tying the budget narrative to the district's strategic goals and said that each SC member should be able to explain the budget in a way that links it to the educational experience. Ms. Whitman said that the School Committee needs to have consensus around the narrative. Mr. Reed said this was his intent; once the budget is adopted, all SC members should back the position voted on by the majority.

Superintendent Beaudoin cautioned that the budget narrative may not be what they would ideally want. It may instead have to explain why things are the way they are. The superintendent emphasized that a crucial part of the narrative is that the district currently operated in a deficit. Until resolved, the narrative will have a difficult time focusing on the program. Mr. Reed confirmed that all members of the SC have shared this perspective with their constituents. The goal was updated to adjust the goal date to match presentation of the budget book.

*Mr. Foster moved to adopt the edited School Committee goal: Collaborate on the development of a budget narrative that describes how key budget elements impact and connect to “the district’s educational program and strategic goals, to be drafted in time for March 2025.*

*Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.*

Superintendent Beaudoin impressed upon SC members that the structural deficit hinders the ability of the district to grow and invest in its educational program. Mr. Foster said that the current goal is aimed at building support for the budget over the long-term.

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved the question.*

*The motion passed 6-0. Mr. Binieris was not present for the vote.*

### Goal 3: Academic Excellence

Ms. Spencer questioned how the SC would gather input from the community about the definition of academic excellence and expressed the importance of embedding a deliverable in the goal. Mr. Foster updated the definition to include metrics.

*Ms. Spencer moved to adopt the edited School Committee goal: Gather input from community, staff, and students to inform the development of a definition and metrics of academic excellence.*

*Mr. Foster seconded the motion.*

*The motion passed 5-0. Mr. Binieris and Ms. Whitman were not present for the vote.*

- 7) School Committee Comment** – Mr. Foster requested that, following adoption of the three SC goal, the goals should return to the charge of the policy subcommittee. Superintendent Beaudoin recommended that each subcommittee come up with a charge for their subcommittee.

### **C. Adjourn**

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting.*

*Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.*

*The motion passed unanimously.*

*Meeting Adjourned at 8:39 pm*

### **School Committee Future Meetings**

- November 5, 2024
- November 19, 2024
- December 3, 2024
- December 11, 2024, Wednesday
- December 19, 2024, Thursday