



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

October 1, 2024

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	October 1, 2024
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Chris Reed, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist, Co-Chair Anna Mitchell Erica Spencer Theresa Whitman
Absent:	
Guests:	Heather Leonard, Director Curriculum & Technology Joanne Maino, Principal ME Middle School SEPAC – Caitlin Eppes Student Representatives – Model UN
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

- A. Call to Order of** – Mr. Reed called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:02 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) –**

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Lauren Harrison, 6 Friend Street, Manchester: Ms. Harrison urged the School Committee to conduct a review, including role evaluation, of MERSD administrators. Ms. Harrison asked that this review include community input via survey, email, and in-person focus groups. Ms. Harrison stressed the need for a transparent process.

- 2) **Chairperson's Report** – Superintendent Annual Salary/Contract - Mr. Reed asked for a vote to extend the superintendent's contract for an additional year with the 2.5% COLA.

Ms. Whitman moved to approve extension of the contract for Superintendent Beaudoin for one year with 2.5% COLA. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Reed clarified that the current contract expires at the end of FY25. Two items are under consideration – extension of the contract for an additional year and acceptance of 2.5% COLA for the superintendent.

Clarifying Questions: Ms. Mitchell asked if the contract automatically renews. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the contract does renew automatically, and the district is currently in a one year extension period. Ms. Spencer questioned how the district receives community input regarding the superintendent's evaluation. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that input would fall under the evaluation, not under contract renewal. Ms. Mitchell suggested that an extension should be done at the end of the year, in conjunction with the evaluation. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that the search for a new superintendent is a long process, and the SC would want more time if it became clear that they would have to find a replacement superintendent. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that many SC member terms are concluding in the spring and that a meaningful review should be conducted with current board members who have actual experience working with the superintendent. Ms. Whitman stated that the evaluation should have been done in May. Mr. Reed stated that the SC could choose not to extend the contract. However, the SC has traditionally spent a lot of time on superintendent searches. Mr. Reed said that there is currently a very small pool of qualified applicants for the position, should the SC choose to start looking immediately. Mr. Reed said that Superintendent Beaudoin's willingness to extend for an additional year affords the School Committee flexibility. Mr. Reed also stated that the district has several new hires in leadership positions and would benefit from continued stability at the superintendent level. Mr. Reed assured Ms. Mitchell that with the standard, longer contract the evaluation would be linked to the contract negotiation. Ms. Mitchell asked how the district handles other administrative contracts. Superintendent Beaudoin said that they are entitled to a non-renewal notice mid-year. Mr. Foster stated that other administrators are reviewed by the superintendent. Ms. Whitman reminded the SC that Superintendent Beaudoin received a very positive evaluation in the spring of 2023. That was the time to notify the superintendent of non-renewal. The next evaluation target would be May of 2025. Ms. Koch-Sundquist recommend completing it early so that all evaluators would have worked with Superintendent Beaudoin. Mr. Foster confirmed that the extension would take the superintendent's contract through June 30, 2026. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that concerns from the evaluation are rolled into the superintendent's goals for the following year. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested considering the current extension as a bridge year, affording both the School Committee and her time to prepare for a search. Ms. Koch-

Sundquist reminded the SC that, according to the contract, only the school committee has the authority to evaluate the superintendent. No anonymous data is permitted in that evaluation process. Ms. Spencer said that there are other districts in which community feedback is solicited. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that is not a common practice, and it is prohibited by a clause in the current contract. It could be a point of negotiation for a future contract. Mr. Reed tabled further discussion.

Mr. Reed moved the question.

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Beaudoin sought to alleviate concerns, stating that she offered the one-year extension in order to get the Essex building project off the ground and allow ample time for the SC to conduct a new search.

Mr. Foster asked that, in the future, any voting item be included in the business section of the agenda rather than the chairman's report for clarity and preparation.

3) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1013 - 1017 and payroll voucher for September 26, 2024
- Minutes for approval: September 17, 2024
- Out of State Travel Request – Model UN Field Trip, New York City

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the warrants; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Reed moved to approve the School Committee minutes from September 17, 2024; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0. Ms. Mitchell abstained.

Mr. Reed moved to approve the out-of-state travel request; Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

Charlie Langendorf, president of the high school Model United Nations, presented to the School Committee. Mr. Langendorf explained that 18 student participants and faculty chaperones would receive a tour of the UN and a briefing from a UN expert. The Model UN conducts simulations of UN meetings, and this experience would help them to be more accurate and realistic. They will also learn more about what the UN is about. The trip is scheduled for October 14, 2024, during a school holiday. Mr. Langendorf said that the experience aligns with the district's Vision of the Graduate goals of "Empathic Global Citizen" and "Critical Thinker." The trip received a generous grant from the Spaulding Education Fund.

Questions: Ms. Spencer asked how students were chosen for the trip. Mr. Langendorf said that there were 12 members in the group prior to the trip proposal. These members will be given priority. New members will be afforded the opportunity to participate on a first come basis. Ms. Whitman asked what percentage of members are upper classmen. Mr. Langendorf said that most members were upper classmen last year. Since then, the club has worked to recruit lower

classman to the group. He anticipates that half of the trip attendees will be seniors with a quarter of participants from the sophomore class and another quarter from the junior class. Mr. Foster asked if there would be follow up trips or competition and if the grant would cover those. Mr. Langendorf said that the grant was awarded for this trip alone. He said the group has not yet reached the level of competitiveness. They currently meet every two weeks and conduct a monthly simulation.

The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman stated that the ESBC met last week to tour the Essex building, clearly demonstrating the state of the building and need for resolution. Following the tour, the ESBC reviewed the design enrollment letter. The vote of acceptance was pushed to this month in consideration of new Essex building projects. The committee gained clarity on the language used in the letter, including what will be covered under the proposed designations of a full elementary school in Essex or split projects where certain grades would be housed at Memorial Elementary. The ESBC voted to accept the letter and approved the projections. The next step is to go before the MSBA in October or November. Mr. Binieris said that their next meeting will be October 22.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the group wanted to do their due diligence around the proposed Essex building projects to ensure that the numbers were solid. Ms. Whitman shared that the next ESBC meeting will be held at Memorial School in order to tour the facility. Future meetings may be held in Essex.

- **Finance Committee** (Jake Foster/Anna Mitchell) – Mr. Foster reported that the finance committee met earlier in the day. They discussed formalizing the processes in the guidelines for budget process and improving the budget presentation to better tell a budget narrative rather than presenting a package that is focused on the numbers.
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Erica Spencer/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman stated that the subcommittee did not meet but submitted two items to the SC for consideration:
 - **Bully Prevention Policy Update**– The subcommittee presented a bully prevention policy update focused on language revisions to align MERSD policy to state law updates. The state is returning to using the terms “victim” and “perpetrator” to replace “target” and “aggressor” throughout the policy. In addition, the subcommittee removed a section of the policy that went above what the law includes, determining that it is legally unnecessary. The subcommittee requested a vote to approve these updates.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the proposed changes to the MERSD Bullying Prevention Policy. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster noted a correction to the text where a proposed change was not reflected in the edit to the document.

The motion passed unanimously.

- Reserve Policy – 1st Read. Ms. Whitman stated that the draft reserve policy was discussed at the last SC meeting and asked members to consider whether they want a target window or single percentage number. The current draft lists the number as 8%. Ms. Whitman also said that the draft includes definitions of funds included in the term “reserve funds.”

Mr. Foster moved to accept the draft reserve policy for a first read. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster complimented the work that went into the draft and its resulting efficiency and clarity. Ms. Whitman had three points regarding interpretation and expected outcomes. Ms. Whitman asked that the SC reconsider employing a window for the percentage instead of a single percentage. This window could reflect the target reserve numbers used by the member communities, connecting the reserve goal to that of the towns. Regarding the use of the term “extraordinary circumstances,” Ms. Whitman suggested using different language or expressly defining the term. Ms. Whitman pointed out that the district is currently applying reserve funds to reduce the operating budget as a matter of course. Finally, Ms. Whitman recommended updating the proposed uses of reserve funds to include language clearly defining that the SC is not limited to the two events mentioned and that the SC could choose not to use reserve funds.

Ms. Mitchell received confirmation that there were no major updates to the draft reserve proposal since last year. Ms. Spencer stated that Ms. Cresta made some updates. Superintendent Beaudoin said that those updates went into the May 31 version. Mr. Foster confirmed that they were not substantive and were for clarity. Ms. Mitchell said that she supported a fixed percentage number because it is easier to maintain and common practice. Ms. Mitchell pointed out that the district has been using reserve funds for the operating budget because the funds have been running in the 12-14% range of the operational budget. By setting a target of 8%, Ms. Mitchell said it would take a more extraordinary circumstance to dip into the reserve fund. Ms. Spencer stated that the subcommittee looked at policies from several other districts using the term “extraordinary.” Ms. Spencer said that the impetus for the reserve fund revision was auditor input. The language is a necessary addition to protect the reserve balance. Ms. Spencer was reluctant to further define a scenario that the SC cannot envision. Ms. Whitman said that she was trying to account for possible failures of the reserve policy so that it does not have to be revised repeatedly. Ms. Whitman asked whose criteria would be used to define “extraordinary.” Ms. Cresta stated that there is statute that requires a stabilization fund to be used for capital items that can be borrowed for or under extraordinary circumstances as determined by DESE. Ms. Whitman worried about being caught between the two town’s ideas of extraordinary – e.g. with

Essex having trouble meeting its operating budget while Manchester feels the district has an extraordinary need to do more.

Mr. Foster pointed out that there are three sentences in the policy regarding usage of the stabilization fund. Two allow use for any purpose for which a regional district may borrow money. If the district reserves exceed 8%, the stabilization fund may be used to offset the operating budget. The third sentence says in extraordinary circumstances. Mr. Foster said it is a little contradictory and may need clarification. Ms. Spencer said that it is not necessarily contradictory because the first sentence relates to borrowing money while a regional school district cannot borrow money for its operating expenses. Mr. Foster asked if Ms. Cresta had determined the type of stabilization fund that the district has. Ms. Cresta replied that it is a general-purpose stabilization fund. Mr. Foster asked for clarification about the DESE statute. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the DESE standard is wide-open. Ms. Cresta said she would review the issue further. Mr. Foster recommended that the policy subcommittee review those three sentences and ensure that they are coherent as a set. The superintendent said that the language is to the effect that the funds can be used for other anticipated events that cannot be supported by the current general fund. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the SC needs to come to consensus or majority agreement on a philosophy statement for the reserve funds because it is not possible to create a check list that satisfies the varying opinions between town partners.

The School Committee reviewed the process for adopting the Reserve Policy. Ms. Mitchell asked about receiving feedback from the community. Superintendent Beaudoin said that if the SC still had substantive disagreements, she would recommend voting to not pass the first read. Mr. Foster recommended taking the vote, as the purpose is to receive feedback on the points in question. Ms. Spencer asked for feedback regarding having a window or range for the target percentage and whether the policy subcommittee should define the term “extraordinary.” Superintendent Beaudoin asked for clarification on the School Committee’s expectations and desires for public comment since that is a new component. The superintendent asked how it would be structured and what it would achieve. Ms. Mitchell proposed going to the subcommittee to gather comments. Committee members committed to sending comments this week. Mr. Foster suggested treating this policy update in the same way as the graduation requirement revision. Ms. Whitman said that during the graduation policy update, the process did not involve soliciting public input outside of the practice of putting it on the public agenda. Mr. Foster said that should be acceptable for the reserve policy.

Mr. Reed called for input from members. Mr. Binieris and Ms. Whitman favored a percentage range. Ms. Koch-Sundquist, Ms. Spencer, Mr. Foster, Ms. Mitchell, and Mr. Reed favored a target number.

Superintendent Beaudoin invited members to send her their input regarding language for the tiered approach to utilization of reserve funds, ranging from use for borrowable items to extraordinary circumstances. The superintendent asked for input by Wednesday for presentation to the policy subcommittee. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the current schedule of subcommittee meetings results in policy subcommittee deliverables being for the first meeting of the month and finance subcommittee deliverables for the second meeting of the month.

The motion passed 7-0.

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report

5) Continued Business –

- **Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) Update** – Caitlin Eppes, parent representative. Ms. Eppes shared that SEPAC held a back-to-school event at the chowder house in Manchester. Attendance was hampered by an event at Essex Elementary the same night, but there were many new families in attendance. Both Superintendent Beaudoin and Allison Collins attended. SEPAC will hold trainings coming up. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the district hopes to have SEPAC assistance with launching a new bike therapy program. The local vendor teaches biking to kids with special needs.

Questions: Mr. Foster asked to what extent SEPAC can be utilized as an advising group for other efforts by the district, like the library review, to gain their perspective. Ms. Eppes said that they can help as an outreach portal to increase participation among their families. Superintendent Beaudoin said that SEPAC advocates for the needs of special education families to the special education department. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that SEPAC helps to ensure confidentiality by being the go between with families. Ms. Eppes stated that outreach includes helping families to identify with the group and can deliver feedback confidentially.

- **Middle School – School Improvement Update & 2024-2025 Outlook:** Joanne Maino, Middle School Principal.
Strategic Initiative 1- Establish and foster an authentic Pre-K-12 learning environment.
 - 1) Conduct external elementary school level assessments of current practice inclusive of authentic learning self-study. [Student Centered, Student Achievement]
 - 2) Define “student centered authentic learning” and develop internal needs assessments for secondary level schools. [Student Centered, Student Achievement]
 - 3) Map and deliver a developmentally differentiated professional development plan informed by the outcomes of school-based assessments
 - 4) Strengthen traditional academic program practices to ensure horizontal and vertical articulation. [Student Centered, Student Achievement]
 - 5) Develop community partners to provide opportunities for students to connect learning to real-life application. [Family and Community Partnership]
 - 6) Prioritize and support programming to promote creativity, innovation, and the arts. [Student Centered, Family Community Partnership]

District Strategic Initiative 2 -Integrate social emotional learning into all aspects of the school day.

- 1) Create a K-12 SEL Leadership model charged with training staff on ways to integrate a variety of strategies to help increase student availability for learning. [Student Achievement, Student Centered, Equity]
- 2) Create a Vertical SEL Team to support the implementation of SEL informed instruction. [Student Achievement, Student Centered]
- 3) Design an integration plan and rubric to use to measure effectiveness of SEL integration at the individual student and classroom level. [Student Achievement, Student Centered, Equity]
- 4) Involve families and the community in the SEL work that our staff and students are engaged in. [Family and Community Partnerships]

Strategic Initiative 3 - Celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals.

- 1) Identify and hire a consultant/coach to support the district in achieving cultural proficiency in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion. [Student Centered, Student Achievement, Equity, Family and Community Partnership, Resources]
- 2) Conduct a cultural proficiency, diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment. [Student Centered, Student Achievement, Equity, Family and Community Partnership, Resources]
- 3) Build on and expand inclusion and cultural competence training for staff and students.

Strategic Initiative 4 - Ensure funding for a stable, multi-year budget and capital improvement plan through collaboration with town and community partners.

- 1) Develop and pass a budget that maintains quality and forward progress maintaining efficient practices but shifting to greater advocacy for increased funding to the District.
- 2) Articulate large and small scale operational and facilities capital needs and obligations. [Student Centered, Student Achievement, Equity, Family and Community Partnerships, Resources]
- 3) Continue to evolve the central administrative organization structure to efficiently and effectively support district wide improvement goals. [Student Centered, Student Achievement, Resources]
- 4) Review personnel efficiencies to improve or adjust delivery of programs. [Student Centered, Student Achievement, Equity, Resources]

Principal Maino welcomed Mr. Janack, the new Dean of Students for the middle school and praised his partnership.

Ms. Maino shared that the middle school is in good shape to conclude the previous SIP and move forward to the new SIP. Ms. Maino shared several areas that are to be celebrated, including data collection necessary for Vision of the Graduate landscape maps and the development of consistent i-Ready assessments. Principal Maino said that students are scheduled to complete the assessment three times in grades six and seven and twice in grade eight. Eighth graders have an additional Science MCAS

during the spring trimester, and the i-Ready data is not utilized after the transition to the high school. Principal Maino characterized RULER language as integral to the middle school, including within disciplinary/correcting actions. DEI was expanded in reading. The middle school developed a rubric to analyze texts. English teachers, content area specialists, and special education staff employed the rubric to review the summer reading lists, classroom libraries, and selections for English class and were able to expand selections to increase diversity in texts. The middle school academy will incorporate what the review has learned into the program. Cell phone usage falls under SEL, and Ms. Maino said that a new approach was employed to introduce the middle school's cell phone policy to students. Use during school is prohibited. Phone watches must be in school mode. All grades were visited by the principal and dean of students to review the policy and all students signed a contract. The principal said that the incidence of cell phone use has greatly decreased. Individual teachers are using singular approaches in the classroom, employing shoe bags and boxes to store phones brought to school. Ms. Maino said that this has eliminated bathroom texting and had a great equalizing effect for students, especially in grade six, that do not have phones. The principal said this is a great development for student social-emotional health as they are relieved of the social fear of missing out.

Principal Maino characterized “ongoing” items as consistent year to year, having no end point. The school has MCAS data, i-Ready data, and data from individual classrooms. This year, the middle school academy was restructured to function as a Tier-2 system of support. The learning center teacher has been present for the first six weeks to co-teach with the new academy teacher. They are employing the existing data and using additional benchmark assessments for all sixth graders to identify students who may need a higher level of intervention. This is much earlier identification than typical years and is allowing the middle school to provide supports much more quickly than in previous years.

The middle school has revisited the concept of project-based learning (PBL). Early in the process of incorporating project-based learning, Ms. Maino saw a need for additional coaching and had considered additional professional development, including training a staff member to become a coach in the model. Since that time, staffing and leadership has shifted at the middle and high school level. Ms. Maino said that, for now, the middle school will pull back from PBL and focus on Interdisciplinary Learning. It is a strong focus of the high school, and the middle school can better align with the high school by also pursuing interdisciplinary learning. The middle school academy is already engaged in this work. Their strong focus will be writing, and their teacher will work with the science and history teachers at the sixth grade level, extending their curriculum and learning into research and writing projects. This interdisciplinary work is focused on expository writing, which is highlighted by data as an area of weakness.

Looking forward, Principal Maino highlighted upcoming items for the 2025/27 SIP.

- Celebrating Diversity - The middle school would like to bring the elementary DEI program, Understanding Our Differences, to their campus, presenting the perspectives of high school students, often those in the district SAIL program or divergent thinkers, to middle school students. In discussing bullying policy, Ms. Maino said that the middle school is an area for focusing on this work. These interactions afford students the opportunity to learn what it is to be different across many areas, whether learning or culture.
- Service Projects and Student Driven Inquiry – The middle school is looking to interdisciplinary work to expand service projects and student driven inquiry. This year, the student council will undertake service projects. Student driven inquiry may be possible in English, history, and other areas via research projects. This work continues to drive the district towards project-based learning goals.
- Curriculum Reviews and Response to Data – This year the middle school will focus on science. Next year the middle school will review English and math. Principal Maino emphasized the importance of these reviews to align the programs and make them curriculum focused, ensuring that instruction is standards-based and vertically aligned from a standards-based perspective. The goal is for this work to drive instruction to meet student achievement needs.

Principal Maino said that there are some pockets of inconsistency when looking at data, for example in MCAS. Ms. Maino said that the middle school needs to address these gaps by being more methodical in student-to-student instructional delivery, which is challenging when factoring in differences across the hundred-plus students that a teacher will see in a day. The principal underscored the importance of differentiation to meet the needs of every learner. Ms. Maino is working on identifying the best training for teachers to help with student-to-student differentiation. The MERSD administration is beginning a 42-hour training with Response to Better Teaching (RBT), focused on supervision, evaluation, and support, targeting the instructional skills and tools that are research-proven to improve student outcomes. This alignment will be district wide. Principal Maino expressed particular urgency with particular middle school cohorts and her eagerness to complete this work.

Questions: Mr. Foster voiced concern that, when speaking about data, the language used is very general, but it actually only represents math and literacy. Ms. Maino confirmed that MTSS refers to math and literacy data and the academy is literacy. However, the academy dips into science and history through cross-disciplinary work, bolstering those content areas. Ms. Maino said that math is the next large undertaking. Mr. Foster expressed that his family was disappointed at the disproportionate focus on math and literature at the elementary level and said that one of the joys of middle school was the balance between all subjects. Mr. Foster questioned whether the balance could be tipped toward imbalance given the focus on math and literacy. Mr. Foster was also concerned about the past tendency of service projects to focus on

fund raising. This could foster the belief that social ills are solved by giving money. Mr. Foster cautioned against service being tied to fundraising. Mr. Foster asked if interdisciplinary learning would be limited to the sixth grade middle school academy. Principal Maino said that it is currently residing in the sixth grade program to support the subjects of science, history, and writing. The expertise students gain will be used to leverage the program into seventh and eighth grades. Next year, the goal will be to have each team to do at least one interdisciplinary project.

Ms. Spencer praised the work of middle school academy, particularly because the jump to middle school writing expectations is challenging. Ms. Spencer asked if Principal Maino sees the need for a wider cell phone policy or if current school-based practices are sufficient, given the current community concern around the topic and bans in other districts. Principal Maino said that, while she is willing to work vertically to address concerns district-wide, at the middle school they are not seeing cell phone use as an impediment to learning. Superintendent Beaudoin complemented the middle school policy. Although it has not been labeled a ban, the policy prohibits use at school and the contract affords students the opportunity for self-monitoring. Ms. Maino said that, during classroom visits by herself and the dean, students were educated about the impact of cell phones on the brain and socio-emotional health.

Ms. Whitman asked Principal Maino to speak to the YRBS survey due for students this year. Principal Maino said that YRBS is given every other year to students in grades seven and eight. SBIRT is a yearly, face-to-face questionnaire with students in grade seven. The face-to-face questionnaire tends to have very palatable results, with low self-reports of bullying, sexualized behavior, substance use, etc. YRBS numbers tend to rise, both because the survey assesses students in seventh and eighth grades and because it is anonymous. Across the grades, incidence of a yes response for any category was 30% (bullying, riding in a car with someone after they have been drinking, sexual behavior, not wearing a seatbelt, drug use, etc.). It is a cumulative percentage and includes students reporting that they have driven with parents who have had a drink while out to dinner. Principal Maino said that they are generally pleased with where the middle school is culturally. Mr. Janack will complete anti-bullying training in the next several weeks and will pass it on to grade six students, refreshing with students in the upper grades. This work will be folded into the RULER language.

Ms. Whitman asked about potential roadblocks to the next SIP for the middle school. Ms. Maino said she will need time and resources to identify needed training, bring it into the school, and oversee implementation, while ensuring ongoing integrity and fidelity. She will also need to determine appropriate accountability measures to ensure implementation. The principal said that putting these goals into the evaluations can help; this was key to implementing RULER. It will be important to help teachers write data specific, measurable goals that identify specific student cohorts to target. Principal Maino emphasized that time, consistency, and persistence is crucial. She said that repetitive coaching and oversight is paramount. Ms. Maino said she is

looking forward to approaching this as a team with the department chairs and Ms. Leonard.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist liked the goal of identify specific cohorts with whom to work and quickly provide support. Too often, changes are made after a struggling group has moved on. Ms. Maino said that the district currently has high impact tutoring through a DESE grant for students in grades four and eight. She said that the seventh grade cohort could also use extra supports, particularly in the area of math. There is a strong focus on their data and what needs to be done to bring those numbers up.

- Curriculum Update – MERSD Arts and Culture, Heather Leonard. Ms. Leonard shared that, with organizational support and tools from DESE, the district completed the curriculum review process for its arts and culture program. The arts council was formed a year ago via a grant award for member stipends. The council is comprised of educators, administrators, and community members and implemented DESE’s Arts and Cultural Vitality Index to illuminate the state of the district’s program. The goal of the review was to ensure that the MERSD arts program is aligned to state frameworks, accessible to all students, and reflects district, school and community goals. The Arts & Cultural Vitality (ACV) Index is a self-evaluation tool that provides schools and districts with a scoring mechanism to improve understanding of their unique arts and cultural assets as part of their school climate. The index details a structure for identifying areas of strength, and pinpointing opportunities to advance arts and culture within the school community. “Vitality” refers to healthiness on a scale of 100%. Four levers were considered, each with several indicators for health. Each indicator is rated using the designations “not-existent; attempting; effective, supported; and sustaining.” The index uses self-assessment by the council members who gathered artifacts to support their ratings, including the use of surveys of students and the community. Once a month, the arts council met with other participating districts from around the state.

The council began by gaining familiarity with the rubric. They collected information that spoke to the given indicator and reviewed in depth the indicators where members gave a wide range of vitality scores. Ms. Leonard shared that this allowed for deepening conversations.

Results for Levers

- Infrastructure - systems and structures in place for implementing culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, routine procedures, policies, and provisioning for successful and equitable arts and culture programming and services, as well as processes in place to remove historically inequitable barriers to learning. Final score: 56.9%
- Opportunity for students to learn and engage through arts and culture, with all school members experiencing access and equity in arts and culture programming and services both in and out of school. Final score: 41.2%

- Participation - level of engagement and active and equitable participation in arts and culture programming and services by all members of the school community. Final score: 42.4%
- Impact - the effect that arts and culture programming and services have on the community, particularly on student learning, educator effectiveness, and school climate outcomes, and have evidence of significant, positive, and equitable impact. Final score: 56.8%

Overall, MERSD Arts and Culture program garnered a 49.3% “Beginning Vitality/Developing Vitality” rating. Next steps for the district include reconvening the arts council, in partnership with DESE and other Massachusetts districts that completed the ACVI; sharing detailed findings with the community; holding listening session to learn more in areas that lack clarity; utilizing community input to set program priorities; and mapping a timeline for Arts programming action steps.

Questions: Ms. Whitman asked about the definition of arts and culture and whether the data allows for differentiation. Ms. Whitman asked if the district’s DEI work has increased the cultural dimension where the arts may have lagged. Ms. Leonard said that a lot of what the council found in the indicators at each lever had the two concepts integrated together. For example, enrollment in arts courses shows equitable enrollment across demographic groups, especially in underserved populations. This embedding was characterized as a positive, particularly considering that equity should be built into all the work done by the district. There were not separate ratings for culture and art. Ms. Leonard said that the index provides a great model as the district looks to build equity in other curricular areas.

Mr. Foster complemented the graphic provided as a hierarchy of needs model, with opportunity is dependent on infrastructure and impact is dependent on participation. Mr. Foster questioned how the district could have a substantively better impact rating than its rating for participation and opportunity given the pyramid. Mr. Foster asked how impact is defined. Ms. Leonard pointed to the definitions for each lever. The impact lever allows the district to list the inclusion of student portfolios as a strength without a penalty for lower participation. Within each lever, the language allowed for exploration of what the district does have. The index also recommends considering the levers in the hierarchy model when considering next steps approach. Growth opportunities in the base levels may prevent positives in upper levels from being sustainable. The goal is to build a sustainable program and improvements. Mr. Foster asked about data on who is participating in the arts program. Ms. Leonard said that the district has data about enrolled classes, which is public data on the DESE website. Through grade eight, these courses are required, yielding high participation in arts and music, though not in dance which MERSD does not have as a course option. The district does not have participation on activities that are outside of the course offerings. Ms. Leonard said this information was a large part of what was solicited and said that the data could be collected by building systems to do so.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about opportunities for teachers in the arts to collaborate with core-subject teachers. Ms. Leonard said that this is an indicator that is measured by the index under participation. The district did not rate as high. Currently efforts at the middle and high school to encourage interdisciplinary work are already having positive gains in this area. Ms. Leonard said that the level and consistency of collaboration is an area for growth. Ms. Koch-Sundquist pointed out that participation is hard to measure if it's happening in a general education class. Ms. Leonard said that the dialogue in the council revealed some of these instances. It may be happening, but it is not intentionally sustained. Ms. Whitman asked if this collaboration happened more readily at the elementary level before the two schools started sharing specialists. Superintendent Beaudoin said that this collaboration still happens most frequently at the elementary schools. The superintendent highlighted the work of Ms. Yutkins, the elementary art teacher, who coordinates regularly with classroom teachers. Scheduling at the upper schools makes this more challenging.

Superintendent Beaudoin pointed out that she has seen a few dance opportunities, including the upcoming Essex hoe down. There are many items components that the index does not pick up. Ms. Leonard said that they could work to increase the voices to take in this data, but that they are well-poised with the work that has already gone into the index go to the action phase.

6) Superintendent's Report –

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- General Update – Superintendent Beaudoin shared that Essex Elementary School was named a School of Recognition by DESE for student achievement and growth as measured through the MCAS. This accomplishment sets the table for Principal Provost's work at EES, setting a positive environment for continued growth goals. The superintendent complimented the efforts of interim Principal McAdams for this recognition. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the NEASC team will be on site at the elementary schools on October 22. SC members have already received an invitation to sit on a focus group. The DESE district review team will conduct a site visit by the end of January. In the next week or so the district will be notified whether that review will be full or partial. Full MCAS results are expected by November 5. No date has been set yet for the release of the student reports. The Essex building committee will meet next at Memorial Elementary for a tour. Many members had not seen the new building. Several members who are familiar with Memorial emphasized the stark contrast between the facilities. Some team members spoke of this as a catalyst for change beyond efficiency. The team meeting on October 22 will be in Essex. School Committee site tours at the middle/high school and Essex Elementary are scheduled for October 8 and 16, respectively.

Mr. Reed asked about attendance for the tours. With only one member able to attend the Memorial tour on the following day, the tour will be rescheduled.

- Recommendation for Appointment of School Physician – Alison St. Marie. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that a replacement has been found for Dr. Suzanne Graves after many years of supporting the district and staff. The appointment is primarily for consultant services. The district physician signs off on prescriptions and consults for IEP and 504 services. There is a small stipend associated with the position.

Mr. Reed moved to appoint Dr. Alison St. Marie to the position of MERSD school physician. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

The motion passed 7-0.

Superintendent Beaudoin acknowledged that a fundraising letter had been distributed that was not approved by the district. Although it stemmed from good intentions, the letter generated confusion about the process for funding the middle and high school theater program. The district requested that the fundraiser be halted. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is positioned to support the theater program and apologized for the inconvenience and confusion.

- School Committee Goal Development – School Committee members continued work to develop goals for the group. Mr. Reed expressed the hope to focus on finalizing one to two goals. Ms. Mitchell said she hopes to improve the budget presentation and narrative. Ms. Spencer said that four topic areas were voted upon during the summer workshop. These included the budget narrative, collaboration with town partners, SC standards and communication, and academic excellence. Superintendent Beaudoin offered to draft a quasi-goal with those four topics and encouraged the SC to include the Essex building project as a goal for the year. Mr. Foster said that the SC is spinning their wheels on this topic and that the work of the SC is already engulfing the committee. The four topics are the work to be done. Ms. Koch-Sundquist proposed that the academic excellence goal be a two-year goal, understanding that the spring may bring key transitions in the district. That would make it a good time to solicit community input about what community members value in the district and where they see as the district's academic trajectory.

Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the SC should be modeling the development of smart goals and assessing the goals at intervals. The SC has discussed seeking community input of goals. The SC should be modeling the rest of the evaluation process. The superintendent said that the SC goals inform her own goals, which then inform district improvement goals to the principal. It is a waterfall.

Ms. Spencer said that a topic area agreed upon was to define academic excellence. She stated that to do so it is important for the SC to solicit feedback from at least two cohorts, families and students. Goals include deliverables and a deliverable would be surveys of these groups. The superintendent agreed and suggested adding teachers and principals to the list as well.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist proposed that Mr. Foster draft the goal around the budget narrative. Superintendent Beaudoin volunteered to craft the goal around the Essex building project and to find the last iteration of the academic excellence goal and send it to Ms. Spencer for input. Ms. Koch-Sundquist volunteered to work on the collaboration goal.

- 7) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the current year feels ripe with hope, marked by forward progress. It is a year where the district is not worrying about what was lost or trying to catch up.

C. Adjourn

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

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:33 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- October 15, 2024
- November 5, 2024