



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

August 6, 2024

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	August 6, 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:	Cami Molinare, Athletic Director
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. Call to Order of – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 12:17 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) **Public Comment** (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual) – none

2) **Chairperson's Report** – Chris Reed. No Report

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3) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1089 - 1091 and Payroll Vouchers for July 18, 2024, and August 1, 2024

Mr. Reed moved to approve AP Vouchers 1089-1091, AP Vouchers 1005-1007, and payroll vouchers for July 18, 2024, and August 1, 2024; Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- Minutes for approval: June 4, 2024

Mr. Foster moved to approve the Minutes for June 4, 2024; Mr. Reed seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- Donations – Athletics. Ms. Molinare was present to answer questions about two proposed donations. Mr. Foster asked for a read out of both donation approval requests.
 - Hudl Donation – The Hudl film service is utilized by MERSD athletics program coaches to provide learning opportunities for student-athletes, improve game play, and scout opponents. It is also used by student athletes to prepare recruiting videos for college coaches. The total cost for the renewal is \$13,000. Two community organizations have offered to donate monies to offset this expense. The MERHS Boosters Club seeks to donate \$6,000 and the MERHS Gridiron Club seeks to donate \$2,000.
 - Replacement of Championship Banners in High School Gymnasium – The banners are being considered for replacement to address hard to read listings and to adjust for updated terms for sectionals, now called “final four.” The athletic department accepted three bids for the project. The lowest bid is \$9,983. An anonymous donor has offered to fund the full amount of the project.

Mr. Reed moved to approve the donations; Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Finance Committee** (Jake Foster/Anna Mitchell) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report

- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Erica Spencer/Theresa Whitman) – No Report

5) Superintendent's Report – Superintendent Beaudoin shared goals for FY 2024-2025 and continued work from FY 2023-2024

a. FY25 Highlights

- i. **Concurrent Systemic Evaluations** – Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the district is engaging in three evaluations during the current fiscal year. This will afford the district knowledge of where its programs stand in relation to current standards and will provide clues for improvement. This information will inform the District Improvement Plan three-year update.
 1. **Coordinated Program Review** – a compliance driven review of the district's special education and Title IX programs.
 2. **NEASC Accreditation** – Elementary schools. The NEASC undertaking will last approximately two-and-a-half years. The self-study portion is closing and site visits from NEASC are anticipated in the next year. Two years ago, MERHS completed the NEASC process, and the website contains posted documents for those interested in the process. The goal for the elementary schools is not only accreditation but also alignment between the two schools.
 3. **MERSD DESE District Review 2024-2025**. The district was accepted into DESE's district review program. A meeting with DESE is planned for August during which the administration will receive an overview of the process. From there, the work of self-study and document gathering will commence.
- ii. **District Improvement Plan Goals and Three Year Update**. MERSD is currently in the third year of the DIP cycle. Typically, this is when data gathering begins and outside evaluations can be incorporated into the formation of an updated DIP.
- iii. **Leadership Team Focus – Observing and Analyzing Teaching**. The leadership team continues to improve observation and analysis of teaching and is formalizing a unified approach. This work is with an eye to improving student achievement. The district will partner with Research for Better Teaching.
- iv. **Library Task Force** – The fall newsletter will include a call for participants on the library task force. The budget supported the addition of a library TA for this fiscal year, ensuring that the space will be maintained and access to the library resources increased. The task force will begin to craft a new vision that redefines the role of the library and builds a library program for the future.

b. FY24 Continued Work

- i. Arts Council – Continuing work will yield a resource smart approach that increases arts programming for students.
- ii. Health Advisory Committee – Continuing work will assist in building out the health program.
- iii. Middle and High Schedule Study continuation – The quick turn around on middle and high school schedules, in response to public inquiry during budget discussions, yielded problem solving around the desire to better utilize teaching staff across both schools but also generated feedback on undesirable pieces. Administration will continue work on scheduling updates that support programming and increase cross-school cooperation.

c. Planned Meetings for FY2024-2025

- i. Curriculum Updates to the School Committee every first Monday of the month
- ii. September – School Improvement Plan update to the School Committee

d. Summer Work accomplished to date

- i. Summer Extended Learning Program for Staff was successful
- ii. Facilities - The Middle/High School is an aging facility opened before the current high level of attention to safety design. Future work will look at how to incorporate upgraded safety technology into the existing constraints of the building. For example, the building does not have a vestibule in which visitors can wait while signing in using the new Raptor system. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there will be more facilities issues going forward as the building is aging. Upgrades will be done as possible.
 - 1. ACE Room Renovation for the Middle/High School – The ACE program is a multi-age program expanding at the middle/high school. The buildings have small classrooms and lack space for small programs like ACE. Facilities reconfigured office space to create needed learning space for the program. This approach may be a theme as the district addresses similar needs.
 - 2. M/HS Presentation Board Upgrade, replacing outdated technology for the Middle/High School.
- iii. Professional Development for Administrators - Artificial Intelligence and School Law. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that, much as the district undertook work around cultural competency, it is now turning attention to building capacity around AI and its potential implications for education. The district has conferred with counsel for advice on whether it should be proactive in creating policy around AI. In working with a trainer around the potential impact of AI in school, the emerging approach is currently to go slow but be mindful. The academic integrity avenue recently implemented at the high school is

currently being promoted. The district plans to survey neighboring communities to see how they are approaching AI. The local police department also provided an update on applicable law.

Ms. Spencer stated that her older student was part of the journaling tradition at the high school in which students had a consistent, weekly journaling experience, through all four years, that built capacity for writing. Ms. Spencer noted that, following AI use by students for journaling, the practice has fallen off. Ms. Spencer said that she saw a benefit to the journaling practice and asked how the district was planning to approach the issue, noting that some schools are switching to handwritten journaling. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that this is an example of where the district is working to tailor its approach to AI and hoping not to become the AI police while both building the capacity of staff to understand AI and its uses and increasing student understanding of how and when it is appropriate to use AI. The superintendent promised updates on the issue. Mr. Foster shared that DESE is forming a group to do a landscape analysis of AI. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that MERSD was not accepted into that group, but the district is looking for opportunities to grow its understanding. Ms. Whitman said that the Student Advisory Committee had a discussion on the topic last year, emphasizing the impact AI is having on the classroom. Ms. Spencer questioned how the district would continue to advance the writing skills of the current students while it is working on its AI approach. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested these questions be directed to Principal Sgroi at the high school whose work on the academic integrity policy could be expanded to cover AI.

6) Continued Business –

- a. Essex Elementary Building Project Eligibility Period Update – Superintendent Beaudoin. The district is currently awaiting its enrollment letter and final report to be used at the August 21 meeting and encouraged SC members to attend. The enrollment report will be brought to the school building committee for acceptance. The district will then move forward to the feasibility study. At that point, the district may be able to expand the scope of the project to look at Memorial Elementary as a site for consideration or to split the Essex population into two age levels, moving grades four and five to the Memorial building. Superintendent Beaudoin said that only the operations and maintenance report is pending for the eligibility portion, and it will be done in the next one to two weeks. Once everything is submitted, and if the SBC accepts the enrollment report and accompanying letter, the district will enter the queue to go before the MSBA and move into the multi-year feasibility phase.

- b. FY25 Budget Update – Michelle Cresta. Ms. Cresta shared that they are kicking off FY25 currently, and the SC can expect quarterly reports.
- c. FY25 Budget Development Timeline - Superintendent Beaudoin said that she received outreach from Essex in the hope of gathering the board chairs for a first look at the FY26 budget. Mr. Foster asked which chairs were included. The superintendent replied that the town select board chairs and the SC chair would be invited to meet. Mr. Reed confirmed that the superintendent, business manager, town administrators, and he have been invited to meet.

7) School Committee Comment

Ms. Mitchell noted that the SC calendar only lists a November date for the budget-to-actual fiscal report and asked if the remainder of the quarterly reports should also be included on the agenda. Ms. Cresta stated that the district is working to clean up the cash reconciliation process so that it can be included as part of the quarterly reports. The remainder of the quarterly report dates will be added to the calendar as soon as they can be projected.

C. Adjourn

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

Meeting Adjourned at 12:45 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- Tuesday, September 3, 2024
- Tuesday, September 17, 2024
- Tuesday, October 1, 2024
- Tuesday, October 15, 2024
- Tuesday, October 1, 2024
- Tuesday, November 5, 2024
- Tuesday, November 5, 2024
- Tuesday, December 3, 2024
- Wednesday, December 11, 2024 Tentative Budget Hearing
- Thursday, December 19, 2024, if needed