Remote Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Thursday, January 14, 2021

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Barnes, Board Members Schneider, Rothhaus, and Hardy. Also present were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio.

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Guagliumi led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Guidelines for Public Participation for Remote Meeting

Chair Guagliumi stated public comments could be sent to publiccomment@sau26.org or by going to sau26.org where a meeting link was provided. She said all comments would be read and written into the record but noted the name and address of the speaker had to be provided.

3. Public Participation

Vice Chair Barnes read the following e-mail into the record summarized below:

Jen and Jon Alexander, 4 Cardinal Court

Dear Merrimack School Board,

I am writing to you in regard to the recent e-mail from Superintendent McLaughlin and the survey before parents. I wanted to stress two factors about the potential change that I hope you take into serious consideration. First, I want to remind you that you have stated since the beginning of the year that the COVID-19 metrics was such that it was not safe to return to full in-person schooling and I am quite confused as to why, on the day that the U.S. hit its highest death tolls since the start of the pandemic, this information about the change was released. I am trying to understand how the metrics have changed in favor of moving to full in-person instruction. I hope you do plan to answer this question for those of us wondering. I fully support the return to in-person instruction as soon as possible and I hope you understand the importance of delaying any full in-person learning until after all staff and teachers have been given the opportunity to be vaccinated. Moving forward with this plan before that is irresponsible and is putting your staff, teachers, and students at a higher risk of transmission due to the inability to maintain proper social distancing. Let's also keep in mind that when we examine the number of positive cases within each school the only thing you are actually aware of is diagnosed cases. The a-symptomatic carriers that are not getting tested are potentially still spreading the virus yet they aren't part of the number of cases in any tally. We also have the "new" variant of the virus (which has begun to appear in New England) that has scientists concerned that it carries a significantly higher transmission rate among children than the original strain.

Second, I hope that each one of you takes the time to observe the remote classrooms of the youngest students and 1st, 2nd, and other grades before you make the decision to increase the class size. You

will quickly realize that combining the current remote cohorts into one larger group is not going to be productive or sustainable and if you are doing so it is going to put these remote students behind their peers academically. It is hard enough for your teachers to manage smaller groups of ten or eleven through a screen and doubling that is an impossible ask of the teacher to be able to manage these children. These kids have a much harder time staying focused compared to in-person learning. In addition, it is an incredibly difficult task for these students to be a part of such a large Zoom classroom at such a young age. To maintain the attention to be able to get their individual needs met throughout the day when the teachers' attention is divided by many more raised hands and kids shouting out of turn, especially if the plan is to increase their time on the screens. While you might be thinking they have 20 plus kids in a typical classroom, why should this be different? I would like to invite you to join one of the Zoom sessions with the young kids to see for yourselves.

As an educator myself, I know I speak for many of your teachers when I say they are exhausted and already overworked, and feeling undervalued. Implementing these changes prematurely is only going to exacerbate this and prove to them and the community that you are not properly prioritizing their health and safety.

4. Work Session/Review of 2021 – 2022 Budget

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed a ventilation cost-benefit analysis with the School Board.

Board Member Schneider suggested $11,500 be included in the proposed budget to cover the cost of utilities for the Brentwood building. He added it would be a reduction of $12,300.

Vice Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Hardy) to move the 2021 – 2022 operating budget to the School District Budget Committee in the amount of $81,875,163.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the proposed operating budget was $81,875,163 and the default budget was $81,918,937.

5. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Vice Chair Barnes reported there were no additional public comments.

At approximately 7:33 p.m. Vice Chair Barnes made a motion (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to adjourn.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.