Remote Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Monday, January 4, 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

There were no public comments to be read.

4. Formal Hearing on Technology and Library Media Budget

Ms. Nancy Rose, Director of Technology and Library Media Services, addressed the Board and stated that the Merrimack School District's Technology and Library Media Services continued its work of supporting teaching, learning, and the operational functions of the Merrimack School District. She said many of the changes in the budget reflected the support of remote/hybrid learning that occurred during the 2020 – 2021 school year. She said the proposed budget reflected an on-going commitment to provide technology, software, and library services that supported the ongoing change in the educational landscape and the need to provide engaging learning opportunities that were universally designed at a personalized pace for every learning.

Question

If we have just purchased a number of devices, should we be budgeting more for the repair of instructional equipment? We will have broken screens, lost or broken power cords, etc. as students may also have equipment that may also go home. If it is not part of this account, where is it and how will we account for more devices with repair needs? If I recall correctly, we bought a number of refurbished devices as they were all we could get our hands on.

Question

What percentage of devices are out of warranty and needing this budget money?

Answer

For the schools, this line is what is used for the maintenance of the copier and printing contracts that we get through a vendor, including repair and toner. For the Library and Technology Programs, this is where we pay for the support of the laminators and instructional technology in classrooms, such as projectors, and audio-visual equipment.

It doesn't really cover the cost of device repair. The way that we repair devices is through our technical staff. It's either material or equipment that is under warranty that has to go through a troubleshooting and return process or it's something that they would reimage or power wash if it was a Chromebook. If that doesn't work and it needs a hardware replacement then District staff performed that work and the materials used came out of the Technology and Library Media Services supply account. The proposed budget reflects an additional technology support person.

Question

With the additional devices in use in the future classroom environment, I thought there would be a more aggressive ask for technology infrastructure to address the devices in place. Can you outline what this addresses and if this is a multi-year approach to get the upgrades made districtwide? Things like wireless access points and cabling seem mission-critical based on what we have procured in the last year (in addition to student-owned devices).

Answer

It is important to note that this year we were able to use the state aid money that came in as well as CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, Economic Security) Act funding to pay for additional devices. We were also able to use some state aid money to replace all of the wireless access points throughout the District and we were also able to use those funds to get cameras for the middle and high school classrooms.

Question

Why is there a decrease in the infrastructure line?

Answer

In light of the previously described effort to balance School District needs and community challenges, this budget does not include a request for funds to support the goal of achieving 1:1 computers for all of the District's students. Instead, it is our recommendation to put this request on a Warrant Article in the amount of $450,000.

Question

Regarding Technology, Library Media – Other: Can you differentiate these "non-print" items from what is in the SW/Licensing category? The budget number is small but was proportionately underspend in 2019 – 2020.

Answer

These are things that are not books but were part of the library program like kits for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) equipment, and movie licensing so they could publicly show movies from all of the major production houses so they did not violate the Fair Use Copyright law.

Question

I assume the increase for Software and Licensing is pandemic/remote learning related?

Answer

That is a correct assumption to a large extent but the software line fluctuates based on multi-year renewals that are up.

5. Formal Hearing on Maintenance Budget

Mr. Tom Touseau, Director of Maintenance, addressed the Board and stated there were no significant items in his proposed budget. He said most of the items were level-funded.

Question

How many platforms are we maintaining due to technology advancements? I am seeing DVR's versus cloud storage. Would we benefit from upgrades that would have it all on the same platform with better quality cameras?

Answer

We are only using one platform even though there is a DVR in there, it is all digital. There is an individual unit at each school and they all transmit data back to the single server that is located in the IT (Information Technology) Department. At this time we have not looked into cloud storage as we are focused on replacing old analog cameras with new IP (Internet Protocol) cameras.

Question

What is the difference between what is in your budget versus what is in the Technology/Library budget regarding phone system maintenance?

Answer

The difference is the IT Department has VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) and we use the POT (plain old telephone) service which is the old fashion copper line used for fire alarms and elevators.

Question

Regarding districtwide maintenance repair, what does it cover and how is the request in the budget $0 when expenditures in our last full year of data (2019-2020) was $904,193?

Answer

It is a line item that takes all of the major expenses. The amount of $904,193 from 2019 – 2020 was for the Mastricola parking lot area, windows at the Thorntons Ferry, and Reeds Ferry. Also included was the transformer at the high school and the boilers at the James Mastricola Elementary School.

The same line item in the proposed 2020 – 2021 budget included replacement choral risers for the high school and relief valves for all of the boilers districtwide.

Question

The expended vs. budgeted amounts for Brentwood show a significant underspend to keep the building "alive". The summary is listed here. Can you share that this is an accurate full-year view of utilities for Brentwood and that the expended "scope and scale" is the true accurate view of the ongoing cost?

Water/Sewer - $2K budget vs $1K spent
LP Gas - $8.5K budget vs $2.3K spent
Electrical - $10K budget vs $2K spent
Oil - $2.5K budget vs $2.5K spent

Overall - $23K budget vs $7.8K spent

Answer

We took what we had last year and we level-funded it.

Question

How much will it actually cost to keep the Brentwood building "live" in 2020 – 2021.

Answer

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied it would cost approximately $8,000.

Question

This budget does not include an item for parking lot crack repairs and line repainting like was done in previous years. Is this not needed due to reduced student attendance in 2020 - 2021?

Answer

It does not. Normally those are line items that go in and out of budgets based on need. Right now we do not feel we need it.

Question

Can you provide an update of the work done at the upper field at Merrimack Middle School regarding drainage, and whether there are any initial impressions on the effectiveness of the work that was done?

Answer

The project had been completed the previous summer and so far they had experienced a dry fall but when it did rain they did not experience any ponding. The true test would be in the spring.

6. Formal Hearing on the Merrimack Middle School Budget

Mr. Adam Caragher, Principal, addressed the Board and said the proposed budget was a level-funded budget and was built around the District's focus on personnel, technology, safety, maintenance, and providing the academic, social and emotional supports for students. He said while the proposed budget was level-funded he believed it would provide for the various needs of the students in a fiscally responsible manner.

Question

The expended line for in-school consumable items for students in 2019 - 2020 is less in most every case, largely due to the switch to remote in the spring of 2020.

Can you share how we are trending in spending these consumable items in 2020 - 2021 given the hybrid/remote model, and do you see a long-term shift in these sorts of consumable spending items moving forward?

Have we considered how to provide these consumables to remote students in the future?

Answer

Our expenditures do vary from line to line. Overall, we have expended approximately 40% of what the supply budget had been budgeted for.

The expenditures provide specific materials and supplies that are needed in order to execute the different parts of the curriculum. In the Merrimack School District, we review our curriculum every eight to ten years. During curriculum reviews, instructional materials are also reviewed. We always have a need for printed consumables and technology in our curriculum purchases.

We do provide student supplies to our students who are currently remote.

Question

Is there only one field trip per class per year (D.C. 8th-grade trip notwithstanding since it is not funded through the budget)?

7th-grade: Science
8th-grade: Social Studies

Given the option for further enrichment, what additional programs would you offer? We are no longer doing the YMCA program (which makes sense based on how it was run) or Camp Mi-Te-Na which was highly regarded by students and families.

Answer

Yes, there are two field trips. The first one is the 7th-grade field trip where the students go to Squam Lake and in 8th-grade there is a social studies field trip where the students go to the Lowell Mills.

As a middle school, we are always looking for opportunities for enrichment for our students. We feel that the expenditures that are included in the budget meet the needs of our students but we do have different programming that does occur for our students after school, even in today's remote world for enrichment. Those include Science Olympiad, arts clubs, as well as the drama club.

Mr. Caragher pointed out that as he recalled, there was a financial burden associated with Camp Mi-Te-Na which was increasing dramatically.

7. Second Reading of New Policy (1st Reading Read into the Record on 12/21/20)

- Commitment to Religious Neutrality (ACD)

Discussion to continue at the next School Board meeting, date-specific of January 5, 2021.

8. Approval of December 21, 2020 Minutes

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Barnes) to approve the minutes from the December 21, 2020 meeting as presented.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 1 by a roll call vote. (Abstained – Chair Guagliumi)

9. Consent Agenda

Educator Resignation

- Ms. Kara Cave, Districtwide Pre-School Coordinator

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Vice Chair Barnes) to accept the Consent Agenda as presented.

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

6. Other

a. Correspondence

Chair Guagliumi stated she had received a few items of correspondence asking if the District was still on track to return to school on January 19, 2021. Superintendent McLaughlin replied that was definitely their goal.

Chair Guagliumi stated she received correspondence regarding the Town Deliberative Session and election thoughts from Lynn Christensen.

Chair Guagliumi said she also received an email from a parent regarding the Travel Policy and expressed some concerns about some students who were trying to visit colleges. She said she was going to review the policy and get back to the parent.

Superintendent McLaughlin pointed out that he was fairly sure the state's travel policy had changed and that the District's policy did not yet reflect those changes.

Board Member Rothhaus said she received an email from Dr. Dawn Breault who worked in another School District. She said Dr. Breault asked if the Board would be open to forming a committee of parents and students for input in opening the schools.

b. Comments

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented the District had purchased a license to provide learning opportunities to the families regarding several topics concerning remote learning. He said there would be two workshops offered per month for the next four months. He said information regarding the workshops could be found on the District's website under Parents as Instructional Partners.

11. New Business

There was no new business.

12. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

13. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Vice Chair Barnes commented that no public comments had been received.

At approximately 8:20 p.m. Vice Chair Barnes made a motion (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to go into a non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)

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

At 9:06 p.m. Vice Chair Barns moved (second by Board Member Rothhaus) to adjourn meeting.

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