Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack High School – Cafeteria
January 21, 2020

Present: Chair Barnes, Board Members Schoenfeld, Nunez, and Schneider. Also in attendance were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Excused:

Vice Chair Guagliumi
Student Representative Koroma

6:45 P.M. – PUBLIC HEARING TO ACCEPT/EXPEND GIFTS/GRANTS OVER $5,000

- **Gift of $5,000 from Elbit Systems of America to Merrimack High School**

Mr. Peter Bergeron, Assistant Principal, Merrimack High School, addressed the School Board and stated the US FIRST Chop Shop Team #166 would like to accept an award from Elbit Systems of America in the amount of $5,000 to purchase parts needed and to offset registration fees for competitions.

Chair Barnes asked if there were members of the public who had questions or comments. There were no comments or questions.

Chair Barnes asked if there were members of the School Board who had questions or comments. There were no comments or questions.

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

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

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. State Advocacy for School Impacting Bill in Current Legislative Session

Chair Barnes welcomed State Representative Rosemary Rung, State Senator Shannon Chandley, and State Representative Dick Barry.

Superintendent McLaughlin reviewed a portion of a list of potential bills that had an impact on the Merrimack School District as summarized below:

(LSR - Legislative Service Request)

LSR #2020-2063 - Establishing the office of school counseling and psychology, establishing the position of school counselor coordinator, and making an appropriation therefor.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented along with many other Districts, Merrimack was encountering significant challenges with student mental health. He said he felt state representation was of the utmost importance.

LSR #2020-2217 - Adding a definition of "reasonably described" to the right-to-know law.

LSR #2020-2218 - Relative to the cost of production of records under the right-to-know law.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated LSR #2217 and LSR #2218 were of significance to the Merrimack School District in terms of finances because in some cases it was not an insignificant amount of money to provide the documents as well as the time it took for personnel to compile the documentation.

LSR #2020–2227 - Requiring secondary schools to grant educational credit for certain courses completed.

LSR #2020-2039 – Relative to credit for alternative extended learning and work-based programs.

LSR #2020-2293 – Establishing a committee to study the reporting criteria of chartered public schools.

LSR #2020-2318 – Relative to competency assessments.

LSR #2020-2319 - Relative to the statewide assessment report.

Referring to assessments, Superintendent McLaughlin shared that he had worked for the Merrimack School District for ten years and in that time there were four statewide assessments. He noted every time there was a change in the assessments it required a tremendous amount of training and made it virtually impossible to discuss trends in student performance when statistically there needed to be three consistent years of a single assessment.

State Representative Dick Barry read aloud from RSA-193:H2 Statewide Performance Targets High School Competency Assessments as amended.

"Every high school is defined in RSA-194:23 shall have in place a competency assessment for each course offered in the high school in accordance with minimum standards for public school approval as adopted by the State Board of Education and shall submit a paper copy or an electronic version of such assessment to the Department of Education no later than June 30, 2021. In subsequent years, high schools shall annually submit to the Department only new or updated competency assessments by June 30th.

LSR #2020-2441 – Relative to special education services for children in charter schools.

LSR #2020-2614 – Relative to the Medicaid to Schools Program.

LSR #2020-2633 – Relative to the acceptance of high school course credits from certain schools or education agencies.

LSR #2020-3016 – Relative to chartered public school use of unused School District facilities.

LSR #2020-2448 – Relative to non-academic surveys administered by a public school or a chartered public school to its students.

LSR #2020-2060 – Relative to the possession of firearms on school property.

Chair Barnes added there were also such items as "the duties of School Superintendent's regarding criminal history records checks," "the restoration of the Lord's prayer in public elementary schools, and another which was "relative to religious activities with teachers and students in public schools."

State Representative Rung stated she would look over all of the bills based on the feedback the School Board provided but noted some may already have been scheduled for hearings prior to the next School Board meeting.

4. Update K-12 English Language Arts/Reading Curriculum Development Process

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio invited Dr. Jenni Calnan, Ms. Jeanette Cote, Ms. Holly Lubelczyk, Ms. Jan Moynihan-Cooney, and Dr. Nichol Rheault to the table.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the members of the School Board all had a copy of the Merrimack School District's RTI (Response to Intervention) model which looked at the continuum of services and supports across the District and how they maintained their goal of increasing independence.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented there were some questions in terms of the English Language Arts curriculum as it currently stood and said he felt it was time to revise it.

Ms. Jeanette Cote, Language Arts Coordinator, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, addressed the School Board and said the team was comprised of the kindergarten through grade 4 Language Arts Coordinators at each of the elementary schools.

Ms. Cote commented the English Language Arts curriculum had not been revised since 1999 and the Language Arts Coordinators across the District were working on an updated curriculum.

Ms. Jan Moynihan-Cooney, Department Head, (English) addressed the School Board and stated the English curriculum and course offerings had stayed current with educational trends and student's educational needs due in large part to the English teacher's continual advancement of their practice.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney commented over the past four years they had gone from four academic levels to three, noting they currently offered Foundations, Comprehensive, and Honor's levels. She also noted they currently had dual-enrollment courses where students could earn college credit through the Running Start Program.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney commented there were currently eight elective courses, which included creative writing, film literacy, journalism, philosophy, psychology and literature, public speaking, sports literature, and true crimes. She also commented the following year they would offer a new course called an Introduction to Theater.

Ms. Moynihan-Cooney said the state's standards were their guiding principles and when the standards were published they worked together as a department to deconstruct the

core standards into meaningful parts and then re-examined what they were teaching in each grade-level course and made sure what they were teaching aligned with the core standards. She said the standards helped them develop the competencies and were hopeful it would help them develop a new curriculum.

Dr. Jenni Calnan said the team was asked to take a look at their “canvas” and think about, reflect upon, and consider what the takeaways were based on their contemplations. She said one of the things they learned was they needed to continue to provide the staff with professional development that aligned their practices and helped teachers remain consistent not only with the instruction but also with the ways the students were being assessed. She further said, subsequently, they held thirty professional development sessions with the teachers in the elementary and upper elementary schools and provided workshops in guided reading, word study, and phonics and spelling.

Ms. Holly Lubelczyk, Language Arts Coordinator, addressed the Board and stated the current phase of the project started in the fall and they created an initial planning document. She commented as the planning took shape the next step was to develop an essential question to help guide their work – “how were today’s students supported to become purposeful and effective readers, writers, communicators, and critical thinkers in order to pursue their individual lifelong goals.”

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio pointed out the standards-based report card was still in draft form but they continued to work on it and would provide the School Board with updates as they went along.

Board Member Schoenfeld commented that she appreciated the presentation very much.

Chair Barnes asked how extensions were being managed so that more students could be challenged. Dr. Nichol Rheault replied one of the wonderful things about ELA was that they had several sources of data that could be triangulated. She said students participated in the Star Assessment, the Fountas & Pinnell Assessment, they did writing assessments three times per year, they did assessments for word study, and they also had classroom assessments. She further said students in RTI (Response to Intervention) sessions participated in small groups of guided reading and some students chose to do independent reading on their level.

Jeanette Cote commented that science, social studies, and English language arts were often integrated into different projects which allowed for students on all ends of the spectrum to be successful.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented it took years to adjust to the impact of different requirements and how instruction was impacted. He also commented the language coordinators and department heads recognized that they had a responsibility to train their teachers and said he felt that the entire team did a wonderful job.

5. Impacts on School and District Operations in the Event of any Additional Proposed Reductions to School Board Approved 2020 – 2021 District Budget

Superintendent McLaughlin stated that the School Board voted on and approved a budget at the last meeting. He said there were over $1 million in cuts that the Board saw fit to implement. He further said the budget would go to the School Budget Committee where adjustments could be made and the final place the budget went was to the Deliberative Session, noting adjustments could also be made up or down.

Superintendent McLaughlin made it clear by saying the item at hand had nothing to do with the District's administration's desire for more cuts. He said frequently the question of "what would happen if any entity for any reason chose to make additional cuts." He further said he felt it was important to share that while they were mindful of the taxpayer's they were unashamedly also committed to providing the students of the District with the best education they could deliver.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented in the event there were any party's who sought to make additional adjustments perhaps downwards in the budget, it would be important to know there were real students with real programs with real consequences.

Superintendent McLaughlin stated he was aware of the fact that there may be a difference of opinion regarding personnel but in his role as Superintendent, he would not ever volunteer personnel to be cut first. He said for example, if an additional $1 million in cuts were proposed he would say they should come from things like co-curriculars as they were not required to offer them. Further, he said another example would be field trips, furniture replacements or provide a gifted and talented program. Superintendent McLaughlin said they would have to look at removing band and chorus which would essentially get to the figure of $1 million. He said if he were to continue they would have to look at cutting sports, pointing out they were not required to offered sports programs. He also said they would have to look at removing text materials. Superintendent McLaughlin said given the above examples of cuts they would not be in line to be accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and they would no longer be able to support Project Safeguard, which was just one program that was intended to support the needs of students in transitional periods.

In addition, Superintendent McLaughlin stated they would have to contemplate cutting World Language as it was not a graduation requirement, noting it was a requirement to have a program and they could only offer French, for example.

Superintendent McLaughlin commented if they were to eliminate personnel to stay within the state minimum standards it would mean class sizes from grades 5 through 12 could be up to 30, pointing out if they chose to do that they could eliminate nine teachers at the elementary and upper elementary grades. He also said they would have to eliminate anything related to technology upgrades.

Superintendent McLaughlin said looking at cutting professional staff meant a fundamental complete change in the way the Merrimack School District provided competitive education to its students, noting it was not just students who went to college but students who needed to be career ready.

Board Member Schneider asked Superintendent McLaughlin if somebody did propose such a dramatic cut why special education would not be included. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio replied the special education budget was built IEP by IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and student by student and the specific services each student needed which included the amount of personnel needed to provide those services. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio stated the District was serving the students as required by law and what was agreed upon in the IEP which was a legal document. He added the State of New Hampshire audited the District on an annual basis.

Board Member Nunez commented she would not support any additional reductions in the budget.

Chair Barnes explained the Board was having the discussion because there was a group of concerned taxpayer's who said they did not understand the budget process. She said the budget was currently in the hands of the School Budget Committee and she felt the budget, as presented was a completely realistic one. She further said if the budget was ever cut by $5 million the School District would not be recognizable and it would be impossible to hold the administration to a standard for student outcomes.

Chair Barnes read aloud from the School Board's Code of Ethics as summarized below:

As a member of the Merrimack School Board I shall promote the best interest of the District by adhering to the following ethical standards and affix my signature to the same:

Trustworthy and Responsibilities

- I will always remember that my first and greatest concern will be the educational welfare of the students of the Merrimack School District.

- I will be responsible to the public by accurately representing District policies, programs, priorities, and progress.

- I will be responsive to the community by seeking its involvement in District affairs and by communicating its priorities and concerns.

- I will work to ensure prudent and accountable use of District resources and never lose sight of the fiscal responsibility of the taxpayers of the District.

- I will make no personal promise or take private action that may compromise my performance or my responsibilities or those of my fellow Board members.

- I will avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest and refrain from using my Board position for personal partisan gain.

Honor and Conduct

- I will be honest, fair, just, and impartial in all of my decisions and actions.

- I will encourage and respect open dialogue and listen with an open mind while working for consensus.

- I will respect the majority decision as the decision of the Board.

Integrity of Character

- I will consistently uphold all applicable laws, rules, policies, and District procedures.

- I will not disclose information that is confidential by law or that will undermine the District.

- In commitment of service, I will focus my attention of fulfilling the Board's responsibilities of goal setting policy making and evaluation.

- I will diligently prepare for and attend Board meetings.

- I will avoid personal involvement and activities the Board has delegated to the Superintendent.

- I will inform myself about relevant educational issues.

Chair Barnes stated that she felt everything the School Board had done in the budget process was consistent with the Code of Ethics.

6. Approval of January 7, 2020 Minutes

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to approve the meeting minutes from the January 7, 2020 minutes.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

7. Board's Response to Acceptance and Expenditure of Gifts/Grants $5,000 & Over

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to accept the gift of $5,000 from Elbit Systems to be utilized for the FIRST Program as previously described their sincere gratitude.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

8. Consent Agenda

Educator Resignation

- Ms. Lauren Nelson, Special Education Coordinator, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

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

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

9. Other

a. Correspondence

Chair Barnes stated the School Board received a right-to-know request regarding a question on bids.

Chair Barnes also stated she received a note from a parent who wanted to understand how the District introduced new curriculum.

Chair Barnes commented she received a communication from State Representative Wendy Thomas who wanted to attend the School Board meeting but regrettably had another engagement. She said Ms. Thomas wanted to know the Board's position on Medicaid.

Chair Barnes said item #3 on the agenda (State Advocacy for School Impacting Bills in Current Legislative Session) was a result of a communication from State Representative Rosemary Rung.

Chair Barnes commented a constituent had asked about what flexibility was available with regard to health insurance options.

b. Comments

There were no comments.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he hoped the general public took the opportunity to watch the meetings from home to help them better understand the municipality.

12. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

At 9:09 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to go into non-public session per RSA:01-A:3, II (a) (b) (c).

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.

At 10:11 p.m. Board member Schoenfeld moved (seconded by Board member Schneider) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.