Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
January 7, 2020 (Tuesday)

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

Excused:

Board Member Nunez
Student Representative Koroma

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 comment.

3. Formal Hearing on Student Services Budget

Ms. Heather Barker, Student Services Director, addressed the School Board and stated the Student Services budget served students with educational disabilities and was a student-specific budget that was built upon the unique, individual needs of the student. She said there was a portion of the budget which required projecting and planning for students who they did not currently serve or whose needs may change over time through the special education process. She further said FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) was a component under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) and was an absolute requirement.

Additionally, Ms. Barker commented that they were also required to provide all students in special education with the least restrictive environment which meant a child with a disability should be included, as much as possible, in a private or public institution, and that they be educated with their non-disabled peers. She said special education classes, separate

schooling, or the removal of students with disabilities from the regular environment occurred only if the nature of the severity of their disability required it.

Ms. Barker stated that students with educational disabilities in charter schools were also serviced through the public education system because they were considered public schools.

Ms. Barker commented there were 3,913 students in the Merrimack School District and 685 had IEP's (Individual Education Plan) or 17.5%. She said the state district average was approximately 16% but that did not include pre-school students and her figure did.

Ms. Barker said she looked at the current program, services, supports, and staff that was in place to look at how they could meet the needs of students with their current resource allocation versus increasing the allocation. She said the current proposed budget for the following school year was $13,692,108 or a 2.8% increase, pointing out that it did not include increases in staff or related services and programs that were currently in place for special education. Further, Ms. Barker said the increase was primarily due to the contractual salary increases of the staff as well as a 3.5% increase cost.

Ms. Barker read aloud from a list of questions from the members of the School Board as summarized below:

Question: If the student had been at the Merrimack School District versus a charter school, would the resource we are funding have been in a position to offer the Merrimack School District value beyond serving that one student during the school day?

Answer: The local school district is responsible for providing special education for students who are placed in charter schools. However, the challenge is that once students are placed in the charter school setting the resources were not the same as in a school setting; noting people had to drive out to the school setting. It would impact the ability of people to provide the kinds of services one could get in the Merrimack School District because the resources were consolidated in the setting and the provider may have the opportunity to work with other students as well.

Question: What are we doing in the MSD to increase participation by students with special needs in co-curricular activities?

Answer: All students including those with educational disabilities have the right to participate in co-curricular activities. If a student wants to participate in an extra-curricular or co-curricular activity the special education team would contact the Student Services Office through a referral requesting the allocation of resources.

Question: Please provide insight as to the varied concentration of paraprofessionals. The Thorntons Ferry Elementary School has the highest elementary population and the lowest ratio of paraprofessionals to the student body. The Reeds Ferry Elementary School is quite concentrated. What would an average ratio be and what might one not be seen from just looking at numbers?

Answer: We look at the unique needs of each of the students that we serve and that is individually determined by the special education team that convened around the student to ensure the student has a meaningful educational benefit.

School	# of Paras	Enrollment (projected)	Ratio (para: students)
RFS*	35	504	1 : 14.5
TFS*	21.5	589	1 : 27.4
MES*	20	440	1 : 22
MUES**	25	540	1 : 21.6
MMS**	23.5	557	1 : 23.7
MHS**	43	1209	1 : 28

* = from table provided in Budget Message ** = from NESDEC projected enrollments

The reason that the Reeds Ferry Elementary School has a higher concentration of paraprofessionals is because they have several students from the other two schools who are in the very specialized autism program and need 1:1 aides.

Question: Because of the remote locations of the students attending charter schools, do we incur an increased cost per student for these services over having them in-district (loss of an "economy of scale)?

Answer: Yes, there is some cost incurred.

Question: Without compromising student identity, can you provide the # of students served in your department attending charter schools?

Answer: We have less than 1% of students who are currently attending a charter school in Merrimack.

Question: Can you provide what percentage of the Merrimack School District population is served by your department? Can you break it down by IEP (Individual Education Plans vs. 504 Plans?

Answer: The Student Services Department works with all students in the RTI (Response to Intervention) through the local schools. The Student Services Department is directly responsible for the students with IEP's.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio commented all 504 Plans were within his purview. He said there were 439 students with 504 Plans or 11.4%. Further, he said there was no state average data on 504 Plans.

Question: I still cannot find in the budget the accounting for the new "System of Care Coordinator" position outlined in the budget summary message. It states that this position will work in conjunction with the Director of Student Services, so I'm putting this question here to get more information on where this might be listed.

Answer: It is in the budget book under the budget by unit section. It is within the line item called "psychological services" that had $67,000 which was an increase of $50,000 for the System of Care Coordinator position. The remainder of the salary, if needed for that position would come out of a grant.

Question: Can you share the process that you go through in order to source these externally-provided services, and whether you have looked at other sources for these services in conjunction with other districts in our region?

Answer: The Merrimack School District currently contracts with multiple vendors with whom we renew contracts with annually. I have met with different contractors over the past year so there is a continual flow of vendors reaching out to us. We currently have approximately twenty vendors that we contract with for speech and language occupational therapy, physical therapy, assessments, evaluation services, consultations, screenings, and a multitude of other necessary services for the students as determined by the IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) and as students needs arise different vendors are sought out.

Question: Please provide a succinct and brief overview of the program and the primary laws by which we are bound for people listening at home including how we need to support students at charter schools and in some cases out of district placement. How do we determine what students receive out of district placement?

Answer: Student Services is bound by a variety of special education laws to ensure the least restrictive environments, zero reject, and ensure that students in charter schools receive special education.

Out-of-district placement occurs when a special education IEP team had exhausted the least restrictive options in the school setting.

Question: What tutoring is being provided during the school year for students outside of the extended summer program? How many students do we serve approximately during the year and over the summer with tutoring support? What is the total tutoring cost for all students across all grades and the number of students we serve with this support? How do we, or can we, leverage this support to also support our typical students?

Answer: The Merrimack School District provides tutoring for students with a 504 or IEP during the school year or beyond the extended school year program when a student has a medical or psychological need that is taking them out of school for an extended period of time or they were in a reduced school experience because of the medical or psychological issue. That number can fluctuate at any given time and the money that is in this section of the budget is the bulk of the money; the $231,200, which includes the transportation costs. The special education teams convene and decide whether or not a student needs an extended school year. There are about 200 students annually who participate in that program.

4. Formal Hearing on Merrimack Middle School Budget

Mr. Adam Caragher, Principal, and Ms. Shawna D'Amour, Assistant Principal were present to represent the budget for the Merrimack Middle School.

Mr. Caragher stated that the budget included increases in the classroom supply and office supply accounts to offset the rising costs of products. He said it also included a 3.5% increase in all of the transportation accounts and the continuation of the replacement of the cafeteria tables.

Mr. Caragher read aloud from a list of questions from the members of the School Board as summarized below:

Question: How much of the budget goes toward extension programs for students identified as exceptional versus school-wide or club-level programs like those listed?

Can you talk a little about the ways the middle school meets the needs of these learners from other areas of the budget and how the program activities interact with the broader curriculum?

Answer: A significant portion of the funds that are related directly to the gifted and talented program went to specific programs that supported them.

It is important to recognize the impact of the curriculum and those materials that were implemented at the middle school and their uses not only just for the broad and general but also the impact that they have relating to extension opportunities for the students. Those gifted and talented students would also receive the benefit of that as well as other students within the school and the available intervention opportunities.

Question: Can you please explain the service contracts for twelve computer stations and where they are located.

Answer: The twelve computer stations are under non-instructional equipment which was the office supplies in the main office as well as the guidance office.

Question: The per-student cost provided for other similar budget lines is very helpful. Is there a similar contextualizing number (i.e., per classroom, per student) that could be given here?

Answer: We took a three-year average and added 10% to account for those costs as opposed to making it something that fluctuated dependent upon a per-pupil type of expenditure.

5. Formal Hearing on Merrimack High School Budget

Ms. Sharon Putney, Principal; Mr. Rich Zampieri, Assistant Principal; and Mr. Peter Bergeron, Assistant Principal were present to represent the budget for the Merrimack High School.

Ms. Putney stated several line items had been reduced or level-funded in the proposed 2020 – 2021 budget. She said some of the reductions were due to one-time purchases in the previous budget, increased purchasing through online vendors, and their on-going efforts to reduce paper consumption through online access to information.

Ms. Putney said some proposed increases reflected the replacement of worn materials and the increased cost of supplies and materials. She also said there were increases in the areas of athletics, transportation, and some replacement in additional texts.

Ms. Putney commented that some of the additional costs would provide an increase of services to students and materials to support project-based learn and differentiated instruction to meet the diversities of our students.

Ms. Putney requested additional funds to cover projected increase in official and assigner fees; additional funds to cover the cost for coach education and training; transportation costs to reflect increases for away contests and playoff games and the purchase of family ID software which provided a web-based platform for athletic registrations, online paperwork information tracking, and communication.

Ms. Putney stated additional items requested through physical education and health were the Act Fast Medical Anti-Chocking trainers as well as the replacement of the CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) dummies and AED (automated external defibrillator) training devices.

Additionally, Ms. Putney commented that the Math Department had requested calculators to continue to support the implementation of the new district math curriculum.

Needs varied at Merrimack High School by department. The actual ratios in the three core areas of math, social studies, and English were 19:1, art and technology were 14:1 due to safety considerations, science was 16:1, also due to safety considerations, and physical education and health classes were 23:1.

Question: In 2018-2019 actual expenses, you utilized $15K less than was budgeted. Do we know how much students paid for transportation/accommodations/meals out of pocket from these clubs that would have been eligible to be costed out of this line-item? We know they are paying 100% for any uniform they need for events.

Answer: This line item for the high school includes only transportation and not an accommodation for meals. There are some co-curricular activities where students may need a t-shirt or a sweater and if need be assistance would be available for students who were unable to purchase it.

Question: Referring to the Kitchen-Aid mixers, can you provide specifics on what the district needs? They range from $200 and up depending on size.

Answer: This is for our Family Consumer Science classes and they wanted to make sure very good mixers were purchased because they were used frequently.

Question: Pertaining to the golf bags, would the bags be district equipment or would they remain with the player? At this time do players use their own golf bags? Can one assume they use their own clubs?

Answer: The golf bags would be owned by the District. The players can have their own bags but in competitions, they use the Merrimack High School golf bags. The players use their own clubs.

Question: Please explain the 504 Coordinator at Merrimack High School and about the loss of the partial grant funding.

Answer: About six or seven years ago 504 Plans were handled by guidance. The number of students on 504 Plans has dramatically increased. It became too much for guidance to handle along with their other responsibilities so the District worked with the Youth Council in Nashua to contract with an employee, which was funded through a grant, to work with the Merrimack School District to provide support to the Guidance Department to deal with that increased load. The previous year the School Board added $25,000 to supplement the position and the remainder of up to $40,000 was paid for by a grant. Subsequently, that grant or any other grant had changed and could not be used.

As a result, the remaining $15,000 was being asked to be added to the $25,000 to make it a $40,000 position.

Question: This appears to be a transportation line to cover costs bringing students to the various tech ed programs at Alvirne, Nashua North and Nashua South. Does this line get impacted by the 3.5% increase in transportation due to the bus services contract? It is budgeted flat from the previous 2019-20 budget figure.

Answer: This is the Vocational Education transportation and it is budgeted flat. It depends on utilization and the number of runs per day, wait times, etc. We are not planning on increasing it by 3.5% because we have not fully expended it in the past.

Question: This account is increasing by over $14,000. One of the description items explains an increase in cost due to "wait times". Can you explain what that means? Overall, is the "per mile" increase really attributed to the transportation percentage increase of 3.5?

Answer: The 3.5% is correct per mile. The wait time is the amount of money they charge for the buses to wait for the kids while they are at an event.

Question: Covering the cost of transporting students to practices is something that was an active topic of conversation last year.

Can you provide information on how any implementation of transporting students to practices has worked out in terms of everyday pragmatics? Do students use it? Is it providing services of value to students and staff? How yes, and how no?

Answer: Once they were through a full year that question could be adequately answered.

Question: Can you explain what is included in the line item "Athletic Training Supplies" ($6,000) at the bottom of page 20? Other lines appear to be fairly explicit - this one not so much.

Answer: Athletic Training supplies included game balls, tape, ice packs, bandages, and gauze, just to name a few.

Question: Regarding the "Math Texts" this item has been zero budgeted for several years – but now has over $3,000 in the line. Can you explain the reason for this change, and describe how the "lost/damaged" description applies?

Answer: This request is made specifically to cover the replacement of thirteen Algebra I text, eleven Geometry texts, and ten Algebra II texts that were purchased with the new math curriculum. They would like to maintain complete class sets as it was intended.

Question: Regarding the "English/Language Arts Texts" is the purchase of these new "novels" a one-time purchase, and will these be used in subsequent years? Any additional information on why/how the change was made, and how this was handled with past years changes, will be helpful.

Answer: These novels will be used in subsequent years. The texts go through a rigorous vetting process.

Question: Are these noise-canceling headphones replacing existing units or something that is being added? Are these used in a lab environment?

Answer: They are used in the classroom lab environment and they are shared between members of the World Language Department. They currently have fifteen working headsets from the original thirty that were originally purchased. The most important reason for them to have these is to record MP3 voice samples to the computer and uploading them which is a requirement for the AP (Advanced Placement) Spanish and French exams.

Question: Are the TI-84+ calculators being requested helping to expand district-owned calculators for students, or are they replacing existing units?

Answer: This request is to expand the existing number and the number of complete class sets available to the staff.

Question: Can you share a bit more about the "Futures Lab" and the need for flexible seating items?

Answer: Flexible seating and multiple instructional areas will allow us to meet more of the individual needs of some of the struggling students who were trying to obtain credits and graduate. We are interested in obtaining online licenses and permits in the Futures Lab to have access to online courses.

Question: Can you explain more about the Decennial Accreditation that is described and how the funding requested will be used?

Answer: The costs include a seminar for the co-chairs of the NEASC (New England Association for Schools and Colleges) visit and the principal regarding the process for that decennial visit. It also has to do with when the visiting team comes in 2021; it helps to pay for the hotel, meals, a conference room at the hotel to hold discussions, as well as membership in NEASC.

Question: With regard to the general, curricular supply lines, per-student breakdowns of the costs for curricular supplies (e.g., page 17), where possible, would be very helpful in contextualizing these and similar costs. See elementary schools for an example. (If there is a reason this would not be a useful metric at the high school level, please don't hesitate to say so and/or to offer an alternative.)

Answer: We have found that calculating a three-year average for the use of classroom supplies has been a more accurate gauge for us at the high school compared to a per-pupil expenditure. Each course within the department has different requirements for what they need for supplies and that is figured differently but classroom supplies are calculated with a three-year average.

Question: With regard to Athletic Supplies and the Family ID software program, they both sound both interesting and useful. Can you tell us more, please?

Answer: The Family ID software program is a registration platform and we use it in athletics and have been utilizing it for a few years. It helps to streamline the process for both parents and coaches.

Question: Regarding the co-curricular and athletic transportation combined expenses of approximately $107,000, how many students do these line items serve?

Answer: For each athletic season, (fall, winter, and spring) it would be between 300 and 400 students and as far as clubs go, at least 600 students throughout the year.

Question: Please explain more about the $30K graduation awards night line item.

Answer: Most of the expenses under this are not for awards night but for the actual graduation day. They have to do with expenses such as diploma covers and inserts, caps and gowns, multiple tents, tables, and chairs rentals, sound system and a police detail.

6. Formal Hearing on Districtwide Budget

Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio were present to represent the districtwide budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the districtwide budget was primarily contractual obligations and items that serviced the district on a districtwide basis. The areas of retirement incentive, health insurance, dental insurance, FICA, the New Hampshire Retirement System. He also said it included general education transportation, and debt service, pointing out the District would be debt-free in 2024.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell and Superintendent McLaughlin both commented it was very rare for a school district to be debt-free.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell also said District's audit fees were included in the budget which was approximately $25,000 to $30,000 per year.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated $100,000 for the Master Plan was also included in the proposed budget. He noted that included hiring a consultant to provide advice on the design of what might be put in place of the Brentwood building.

Additionally, he said the proposed budget included $125,000 to remove the Brentwood building.

Question: With regard to testing and scoring, is this a cost for the technology or a projected cost based on the anticipated number of pupils in kindergarten through grade 6 in 2020-2021? Can you provide details on the assessments we use and what they measure?

Answer: This is an assessment account and the majority of this account has to do with the Star Assessment. The Star Assessment is a computer-based assessment that we use in the District from kindergarten through grade 8 and we use some portions of it in math at the high school level. It is a computer-based adaptive assessment for students.

Question: Regarding transitional academic support and salaries, can you be more specific on the programs? Please provide data on academic outcomes on the students receiving supports from these programs.

Answer: Several programs that are part of this line item. Evening Academy is an opportunity for students to earn make-up credit towards graduation requirements. Students receive .5 credits for the successful completion of a class. Classes are offered for credit recovery. Credit recovery classes are online through a software name PLATO.

Last year in the first semester Evening Academy had 20 students enrolled and out of those 20 students, 17 passed the class, 2 failed the class, and 1 was issued an incomplete due to other factors. There were 48 enrolled in the spring and of that 29 of them passed, 9 failed, and 10 had either an incomplete or were dropped from the course.

Three other programs that encompass the line item with the first one being the Summer Reading Program. The previous year there were 88 students enrolled in the Summer Reading Program, which typically ranged from kindergarten through grade 6, although 7th graders were offered to participate in the program, no one participated.

The second program is a Summer Institute for credit recovery that would be held at the high school. The prior summer 28 students took English, 15 took math, 8 took history, and two took science.

The final program is called 8.5 (what used to be called Springboard to Success) pointing out the program was for grade 8 and then the half was in the summer. A total of 54 students participated in the program.

Question: Can you please provide the rate of increases percentage-wise of our health insurance for the district over the last 5 years and the rate that our staff is cost-sharing? How does this rate compare to what we see in other districts? Please explain how this process works (guaranteed maximum) and the driver for the increases?

Answer: We have a guaranteed maximum rate and every year we get that rate in November so we use that figure to build our budget. We get the actual rate in April after the vote transpires. The rate this year is 8.4% and last year it was 13.7%. The rate was comparable to other districts.

The middle-tiered plan, the point of service, the teachers cost-share 85:15 and 89:11 for the support staff. This is also comparable to other districts.

The driver for the increase in health insurance was based almost entirely on claims.

Question: Referring to the New Hampshire Retirement Staff, please explain the 11.17% increase.

Answer: That is actually not an increase but rather it is the total rate times the wages.

Question: Please explain our relationship/advantages with SNHU and the most recent Masters Cohort. Where is/was this in the budget? Also, have we considered providing something similar for a cohort of paraeducators?

Answer: Years ago, we were required by the State of New Hampshire to have a second criterion beyond tenure alone to consider when there was a reduction in force and we chose academic attainment which created a desire for a lot of teachers to gain additional credits. In addition to that, it dovetails with the District's goal to drive up the professional experiences of the teachers. We partnered with Southern New Hampshire University approximately seven years ago to have an initial cohort that allowed participants to get a drastically reduced rate for a Masters Degree. The first cohort graduated about several years ago with a Masters Degree. The second cohort would be finished the following summer.

This is part of a negotiation between the District and the MTA for professional development. Teachers are allowed to apply for reimbursement for taking graduate courses.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated the number for health insurance was $13,920,664 but said they could decrease the request by $450,104 which would bring the number down to $13,475.60.

7. New Business

There was no new business.

8. Public Comments on Agenda Items

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and stated he fully supported the reworking of the school district's central campus. He suggested that the School District conduct a design charette that may provide a number of different concepts for the new campus design.

9. Adjournment

At 11:05 p.m. Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to adjourn.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.