Approved 12-4-2024

Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
November 18, 2024

Present: Ms. Lori Peters, Chair; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Vice-Chair; Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member; Mr. Ken Martin, Board Member; and Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member.

Not Present: Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative - Excused

Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Ms. Amy Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum; and Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business, were also present.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the regular meeting to order.

Chair Peters read aloud the Merrimack School District's mission statement into the record as follows:

The Merrimack School District will provide a high-quality, future-driven education to all students in the community. Students will engage in learning opportunities that reflect both rigger and relevance and meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The district will prepare students to understand, adapt, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological changes in the world. Our overall goal is to inspire, create, and encourage students to be curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated individuals who are lifelong expert learners. Merrimack graduates exercise judgment; they are innovative and will become responsible contributors to society. We hope the discussions we have tonight will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Nicole Tomasalli, a resident, addressed the Board and said she had some concerns about the athletics program at the middle school. She said that in recent years, there were large numbers of boys trying out for sports with few available spots. She said she felt that sports at the middle school level should be more about exposure. She added that she felt more intermural programs should be available.

3. RECOGNITIONS

- NH High School Short Film Festival Competition

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the School Board would recognize Trey Nichols and Carter Williams. He said that Trey and Carter placed second in the competition for their submission of a video entitled "Halloween Rapper."

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that the posters reflecting the Merrimack School District's Mission Statement had been created and would be distributed throughout the schools.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that 213 students had registered for 11 different winter sports. He added that the Merrimack High School had hosted 36 schools in a preliminary Granite State Challenge competition. He said the students took a 60-minute 100-question trivia test, and the top 14 scorers would be selected for participation in the Granite State Challenge on TV. He also congratulated the high school's Performing Arts Program for their outstanding production of "Clue." Additionally, he said the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School's students of the month were Annalise P., Russell H., Grace C., Jake D., Riley C., and Mason E.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle congratulated Trey and Carter's teacher, Mrs. Moran, who was a Merrimack High School graduate.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the following Thursday and Friday, the Interventionists would receive training on using AimsWeb Plus, which was a nationally normed skills-based progress monitoring tool for reading and math.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that they continued to work on the budget. He noted that there was an increase in health insurance by approximately
$1.2 million, and there was a significant increase in out-of-district placements for special education, which was approximately $1 million. He said that the district was already over the prior year's default budget by approximately $2.4 million and noted that the two items were not negotiable as they were contractual and legal obligations.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said that prior Wednesday, they met with the Planning & Building Committee, and they presented a revised central office plan. He said the revised plan had the same amount of square footage, but the Planning & Building Committee had decided that if they were to build it, it would be built to service the present time as well as the future, as opposed to doing something that would require add-ons over the years. He said if the proposal were to be passed in April, they would have to start with design plans; it would be put out to bid in January of 2026 and ready for occupancy in June of 2027. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the cost was estimated to be approximately $6.2 million.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said they had two quotes so far, and they were looking for a third. He noted after that third quote was received; they would be presented to the Planning & Building Committee for their final recommendation.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters commented that as they headed into budget season, there would be multiple meetings in the month of December and encouraged the public to watch those meetings. She noted that the primary budget presentation would be held on December 2, 2024.

e. Student Representative Update

There was none.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Gallup Survey Schoolcard Report for 2024

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle reviewed the Merrimack Middle and High School Student 2024 Gallup Poll Results. She said the Gallup poll measured student engagement, hope, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. She added that the poll was in partnership with the New Hampshire Learning Initiative (NHLI), Gallup, and a statewide, work-based advisory group.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that the district had made notable progress in several areas.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Connected Arts Network Survey Request

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the National Art Education Association, in partnership with the Educational Theater Association, the National Association for Music Education, the National Dance Education Organization, and the NYC Department of Education's Arts Office, launched the Connected Arts Networks (CAN). She said CAN was a five-year grant initiative to create nationwide virtual Profession Learning Communities with educators in visual arts, music, theatre, dance, and media arts.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle explained that the prior year, Ms. Kate Viands, Art Teacher at the Thorntons Ferry School, had applied for and was accepted into the program. She said that Ms. Viands met monthly with 12 other art teachers from across the country, and the group was starting to develop action research plans. She added that as part of the research, Ms. Viands was seeking the Board's support and approval to conduct an anonymous, voluntary, non-academic survey about art class to one first-grade class and one fourth-grade class at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.

MOTION: Board Member Rothhaus made a motion to accept the Connected Arts Networks (CAN) survey request. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. Student Services Parent Survey

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he had sent out a letter to the parents of children who received special education services regarding a Parent Engagement Survey. He said they received 139 responses and were in the process of reviewing them. He further said he would review the responses with the Board at a future School Board meeting.

c. Vote on Ad Hoc Committee to Planning and Building Committee

Chair Peters commented that the Planning and Building Committee had asked the School Board to put together an Ad Hoc Committee to be a part of the communication and informational process regarding the proposed SAU building.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to develop an Ad Hoc Committee to support the recommendations of the Planning and Building Committee regarding the proposed SAU building. Board Member Martin Seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

7. POLICIES

a. Approval of Revised Limited English Proficiency Policy (IHBBA)

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to approve policy (IHBBA) – Revised Limited English Proficiency policy, as presented. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. November 4, 2024 – Public and Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Rothhaus made a motion to accept the public and non-public minutes from the November 4, 2024, meetings, as presented. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items to discuss.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Rothhaus said the Planning and Building Committee voted 5 – 1 – 0 to bring forward the new central office. She said one of the questions asked was why they only received one bid to refit the old SAU building, and the reason was that the building was not safe enough to refit.

Board Member Martin said the Professional Development Committee had met the prior week, during which much of the discussions surrounded the special projects that each school was doing. He added that each school was allotted a certain amount of money to do projects. He said they were all approved; however, they were still waiting for a partial grant to go through for the James Mastricola Elementary School.

Chair Peters stated that the Joint Loss Management Committee had met and said the building inspections were ongoing. She said workman's compensation claims with student interaction incidents had increased. She added that she felt it was not necessarily because there were more incidents but that the administration had encouraged teachers to report the incidents.

Chair Peters said Crisis Prevention Intervention training for staff was underway.

b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she had correspondence with a Merrimack constituent who had concerns regarding middle school athletics.

Chair Peters said the School Board received multiple correspondences regarding student incidents and parent concerns.

c. Comments

Chair Peters stated that the Planning and Building Committee would make their presentation/recommendation to the Board regarding the SAU building in December. She noted that the School Board had not yet decided as to whether or not the proposed project would be a warrant article on the ballot. She said the Board would make that decision at the end of December.

Chair Peters read aloud from an article entitled "New Hampshire Schools Told to Expect Less State Aid for Special Education Costs." "Under Edleblut's plan, the state would pick up 67.5% of its portion of special education aid in 2025, down from 87% this year and 98.3% in 2023. Edleblut pointed to an increase in the number of students qualifying for special education services and an increase in the cost per student for those services by 9.3%. She said the administrative team had already accounted for the loss of revenue in the budget. She added that all districts were legally responsible for providing special education.

Board Member Rothhaus suggested that letters should be sent to the delegation, the governor, and Mr. Edleblut's office voicing their concerns.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 6:56 p.m., Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.