Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
November 4, 2024

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

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

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. The discussions we have tonight, we hope, will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were none.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated Finn on becoming the Student Representative to the School Board. The School Board collectively welcomed Finn to his new position.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that there would be no school the following day because of the election.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said two students at the high school had put together a video presentation on "Halloween Etiquette" as part of a statewide competition and Trey Nichols and Carter Willams came in second place.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that the legal team would be onsite to review a comprehensive training regarding 504. She said school counselors, nurses, special education teachers, and administrators would take part in the training. She said they continued their relationship with Dr. Kalise Wornum of KW Diversity and during the month of October she had met with the staff from Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and Merrimack Middle School.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the new McKinney-Vento liaison, Jocelyne Pinsonneault, had been meeting with each school community to provide the required training.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that budget season was in full swing. He said the goal was to get the budget to the School Board the week after Thanksgiving.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters encouraged the public to get out and vote the following day.

Chair Peters noted that she had taken part in the webinar regarding School Boards and School Committees. She said she learned as part of best practices, that every committee that represented the district should have a School Board member be a part of the committee and have a vote.

Chair Peters noted that she would be serving on the Bus Stop Committee in Board Member Halter's place.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Haddad stated that the previous Tuesday they had a cultural exchange with students from South Korea, they had a Volleyball Team Teacher Appreciation Night celebration, the boys football team won the last game against Bishop Guertin and would advance to the playoffs, there was a pumpkin and gourd decorating contest, and there was a senior breakfast where the students wore Halloween costumes.

Student Representative Haddad shared that the senior class mattress fundraiser raised just over $14,000.

5. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Board's Response to James Mastricola Elementary School Parent Concern and
c. Bullying Law Discussion

Chair Peters stated that the Board would address both items a and c in the same discussion.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the threat assessment process as summarized below:

A threat can be:

- Non-credible - expression of anger, frustration or banter that can be quickly or easily resolved.

- Credible - serious intent to harm others that involved detailed plans and/or a means to create harm with some reference to school.

- Evaluate the Statement or Action

- Interview the Victim

- Interview the Perpetrator(s)

- Statement/Action?

    - Is there a weapon referenced and/or possible use of a weapon to cause harm.
    - Is the statement/action an expression of humor, rhetoric, anger, or frustration?

- Possible Responses after Evaluation

    - Student Apology
    - Increased Monitoring of Student
    - Parent Conference
    - Counseling
    - Conflict Mediation
    - Schedule/Room Change
    - Transportation Change
    - Assessment for Special Education Services
    - Behavior Support Plan
    - In-School Suspension or Out-of-School Suspension
    - Expulsion

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that the district had done a lot of work to make the schools safe, however, he also noted that common sense also needed to be taken into account.

Board Member Martin commented that every child needed to be able to learn from their mistakes and it was very important to keep things in context.

Chair Peters said the district relied on not only the administration but law enforcement when there was a credible threat.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that every incident was taken seriously, and those students were sent to the administration as well as the School Resource Officer.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed RSA 193-F “Understanding the New Hampshire Bullying Law.

Definition of Bullying and Cyberbullying:

"Bullying" means a single significant incident, or a pattern of incidents involving a written, verbal, or electronic communication, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another pupil which:

1. Physically harms a pupil or damages the pupil's property
2. Causes emotional distress to a pupil
3. Interferes with a pupil's educational opportunities
4. Creates a hostile educational environment
5. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school

"Bullying" shall include actions motivated by an imbalance of power based on a pupil's actual or perceived personal characteristics, behaviors, or beliefs, or motivated by the pupil's association with another person and based on the person's characteristics, behaviors, or beliefs.

1. "Cyberbullying means conduct defined above ("Bullying") undertaken through the use of electronic devices, including but not limited to:

    - Telephones Pagers, Cellular Phones, and e-Mails
    - Computers, Instant Messages, Websites, and Text Messages

Reporting of Bullying Incident:

1. Parents/Guardian of victims and perpetrators receive notice of accusation of bullying within 48 hours of the incident report.

2. Bullying investigation is to be conducted within 5 school days of the reported incident (Superintendent may grant an extension of 7 school days to the investigation process).

b. Budget Meeting Dates

The Board collectively changed multiple meeting dates and Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that a new schedule with the changes would be sent to the School Board.

d. Health and Dental Insurance Revisit Rates 2025 – 2026

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the 2025 – 2026 rates would increase by 9.9% for the middle tier plan, the top tier plan would no longer be available, and the lower cost plan would increase by 14%. He said that would increase the operating budget by $1.4 million.

e. Deliberative Session Dates (between March 1st and March 8th)

Chair Peters announced that the date of Deliberative Session would be Tuesday, March 4, 2025, with a snow date of Thursday, March 6, 2025. She added that the meeting would begin at 7:00 p.m.

7. POLICIES

a. Second Review of Revised Limited English Proficiency Policy (IHBBA)

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the district had not received any public comment regarding policy (IHBAA).

b. First Reading of Revised Health Education and Exemption from Instruction Policy (IHAM)

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to adopt the Review and Approval of Field Trip and Excursion Policy (IJOA) and Filed Trip and Excursion Procedures (IJOA-R), given its third review. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. October 21, 2024 – Public and Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to accept the public and non-public minutes from the October 21, 2024, meeting, as presented. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Teacher Nominations

- George Kalipolites, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Annabel Oleson, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack High School

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were none.

b. Correspondence

Board Member Rothhaus, Board Member Martin, and Chair Peters commented that they had all received multiple pieces of correspondence and forwarded them to the appropriate departments/ people.

c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus said she was happy to hear that there had been some training through Project Safeguard regarding bullying.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. James Larkin, 119 Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said he had decided to pull his kids from the Merrimack School District based on conversations he had with administration over the past few weeks regarding his child being bullied. He said he felt the district's policy on bullying was vague and not adequate.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:11 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.