Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
October 21, 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

Mr. James Larkin, 119 Baboosic Lake Road, addressed the Board and said one thing that was missing from the mission statement was about student safety. He said over the last couple of years, he had noticed that bullies and people who threatened other people in the school had not been disciplined effectively. He said a student had told his son at lunch that he was going to bring a gun to school and shoot him. He further noted that under the guise of anonymity for the student who threatened his son, the district could not tell him what was going on. He said he was not sure how he was supposed to send his son back to school knowing that.

Chair Peters asked Mr. Larkin to please stay until the end of the meeting so that she and Chief Educational Officer Olsen could have a discussion.

Finn, a student, addressed the Board and read aloud from a prepared statement as follows:

Earlier in the afternoon, he had been elected by a coalition of Merrimack students from the Student Counsel to become the next School Board Representative for the SAU 26. In recognition of that, and with the presumption that during the next School Board session, I will be sitting amongst you all, I would like to talk about how I view this role. Since I attended my first School Board meeting about two years ago, I have worked alongside numerous members of this board and have always remained committed to my belief that throughout that time, we have been united in the common goal of improving the Merrimack School District for students, staff, and community members. He said that his primary job as a student representative was to attend school board meetings and represent the entire student body, and he would have to absolve personal feelings about any issue and focus on general student sentiment and observable effects.

Finn said that he had noticed at some School Board meetings incomplete information had been provided about what was going on at the high school. He said that currently, there was not one School Board member who actively operated in an SAU 26 building that was occupied by students. He said he felt it inherently more difficult for anyone on the School Board to have a complete picture of the effects of current policies or to be able to accurately approximate the impact of a new policy. He said it was not to suggest that the people presenting to the Board or any of the district's leadership staff do not understand how the schools run but instead to suggest that there are things that students and faculty feel more comfortable doing or saying in front of me than they would in front of the district's leadership team. He said he felt it was very important for the School Board to feel very comfortable asking him any questions.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated Finn on becoming the Student Representative to the School Board.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that budget season was upon them. He said a revised budget process had been presented but noted the Budget Advisory Committee did not take a vote at that meeting. He added that budget meetings with the administrators had begun, and they met with the staff from the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, where they had their first listening sessions.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Unified Sports participation by the students tried as hard as any other student, and he thought it was absolutely awe-inspiring. He showed a video of clips of the last season.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle congratulated Finn as well. She said on October 11, 2024, the district had the first of five early release days for the district. She said that in addition to some of the mandatory training done on early release days, they would focus on what the individual buildings needed. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle, the middle and high school staff completed the mandatory training required on bullying and sexual harassment. She added that the elementary school staff met with a state expert, Dayna French, from Up River Consulting, where they worked on how to support multi-lingual learners in the classroom.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the next early release date would be on December 11, 2024. She also noted that the fall benchmark assessments had been completed. She said Title I selection was happening in grades 2 through 8.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that in addition to working on the budget, a meeting with the Planning & Building Committee had occurred, and they were also working on the Capital Improvement Plan.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters commented that the next School Board meeting would be held on Monday, November 4th. She noted that November 5th was the general election and that there would be no school on that day.

e. Student Representative Update

There was no update to share.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Review of 2024 New Hampshire School Board Delegate Assembly

Chair Peters stated that she had attended the Delegate Assembly the prior Saturday, and she said she was a bit disappointed as of the 160 districts that were NHSBA members, only 52 attended.

Chair Peters said there were 30 (29 printed) resolutions as there was some computer glitch. She added that out of the 29 resolutions, most were edited, and NHSBA would email the final documents.

Chair Peters shared that budget-wise, they were $64,000 in the black, and they would invest that money in more webinars and more opportunities for training.

Chair Peters commented that the Jaffrey/Rindge School Board was selected as the "Best School Board of the Year," and some of the initiatives they were recognized for were things that Merrimack had been doing for a long time. She added that they had a self-funded daycare program for teachers, which was something Merrimack had in the strategic plan. She also said they were trying to build a CTE school.

b. Planning & Building Committee's Recommendation

Board Member Rothhaus stated that Chief Educational Officer Olsen and she had attended the Planning & Building Committee meeting. She said that the committee voted 4 – 1 – 0 to approve the previous year's building plan for the Superintendent's office.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that they discussed many options, including lease options. He said the Planning & Building Committee decided to go with a plan that was more complete.

Vice-Chair Hardy pointed out that the meetings were open to the public and were televised.

Board Member Halter said she felt having the architect at the meeting was very helpful.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Electronic Hall Pass Program

Mr. Chrigus Boezeman, Principal; Ms. Tracy Ruyffelaert, Literacy Coordinator; and Ms. Maggie Croteau, Health Teacher, all of Merrimack Middle School, were present to discuss the item.

Mr. Boezeman said he felt the middle school had a solid start for the school year. He said they were currently in their first quarter of the 7th-grade world language exploratory classes where all students in 7th-grade would take a quarter of Spanish and a quarter of French to get some experience in each prior to committing to one of them in the 8th-grade.

Mr. Boezeman shared that band and chorus students were able to have classes every day. He noted that the middle school's field hockey and the boys' soccer team were in first place as they finished the season.

Mr. Boezeman said he felt a one-year pilot program for an Electronic Hall Pass Program would provide the following:

- Help execute the Tier I Academic Intervention Model
- Provide valuable data and support for the Tier 2 Interventions.
- Offer enhancements to school safety and security.

Mr. Boezeman stated that they had a trial run of the program for about six weeks, and the feedback from the staff was generally positive.

Mr. Boezeman explained that he felt they missed a few things with the six-week initial pilot program and that they could have identified students who needed more support when they saw there may have been some class avoidance happening. He said on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, they would have an Academic Advisory period available to students who were in need of academic intervention. He said the electronic hall pass would assist with knowing where the students were.

Mr. Boezeman stated that the electronic hall pass program could also help monitor instructional minutes lost.

Ms. Ruyffelaert said she had used the E-Hall Pass, but in her role as Literacy Coordinator, she would be able to schedule students to see her, whether she read with them, or they needed to finish I-Ready. She said it would show up on the students' dashboard as well as the staff's dashboard.

Mr. Boezeman said it would also provide another layer of security, knowing where the students were.

Ms. Maggie Croteau, Health Teacher, addressed the Board and said she, too, found it helpful to be able to see where the students were.

Board Member Rothhaus asked if the cost for the E-Hall Passes would be included in the proposed budget. Mr. Boezeman replied that it would. She said she felt the E-Hall Pass would impede classroom instructional time. She also said that she was not yet sure if she was in support of the program.

Chair Peters stated that funding for this year did not include the cost of the E-Hall Pass Program. Mr. Boezeman replied that he was hoping to use some funds out of the Tier I Intervention line. He said the current cost would be $1.89 per student or $945.00.

Vice-Chair Hardy pointed out that Tier I Intervention was used for Universal Support for all Students.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to allow the Merrimack Middle School to use Tier I Intervention funds to pilot the E-Hall Pass Program for the 2024 – 2025 school year. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Rothhaus said she felt valuable teaching time would be lost if the E-Hall Pass Program were put in place.

Chair Peters said she felt the E-Hall Pass Program would be very easy to use.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 1 – 0. (Nay – Board Member Rothhaus)

b. Approval of MMS and MHS Parent/Student Handbooks

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the parent/student handbooks for the Merrimack Middle School and the Merrimack High School had been edited and were ready for the School Boards' acceptance.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the student handbooks for Merrimack Middle School and Merrimack High School, including the addition of the "Bell Schedule" at Merrimack Middle School. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Rothhaus requested that an agenda item be added regarding lengthening class time at the high school.

Chair Peters requested that the new "Bell Schedule" be included in the Merrimack Middle School Parent/Student Handbook.

c. October 1, 2024 – Student Enrollments

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the Merrimack School District's enrollment had decreased by 124 students over the past three years (PreK – 12). He said the trend was consistent with a statewide decline in public school enrollments. He said the State of New Hampshire had the second lowest birth rate in the country at 8.8 births per 1,000 of the population. He said another contributing factor to the decrease in enrollment since 2022 was the increase of (23) students being homeschooled.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that he and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell had looked at the enrollment projections for the 2025 – 2026 school year, and it looked like they would be down by approximately 40 to 50 students.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he would ask Urbanomics, Inc. to provide a brief presentation to the School Board at a later date.

d. English as a Second Language (ESL) and Home Insecurity

- Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the district had obligations under both federal legislation and critical court cases to provide vulnerable populations of students with specific services as part of the public school Charter. She said the presentation would discuss students who were in need of special services, such as our multilingual learners and students experiencing homelessness.

- English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

    - The ESOL program in Merrimack endeavors to ensure that multilingual learners develop culturally and linguistically in order to become independent in academic, social, and vocational situations.
    - To accomplish this goal, students are immersed in all domains of the language, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

- In addition, it is essential to support students and their families in adapting to and understanding American culture while maintaining and respecting their unique cultural heritage as well.

- Lau Plan & Comprehensive Framework

  - To help ensure that this vision becomes a reality, we have developed the Merrimack School District's Lau Plan and other anchoring documents to serve as a comprehensive framework designed to provide culturally and linguistically diverse students with the support and resources they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.
  - These documents are required by state and federal statutes, as well as district policy, and include:

    - MSD School Board Policy IHBBA
    - MSD Lau Plan
    - MSD/NHDOE Home Language Survey
    - MSD English Language Initial Eligibility Notification Form
    - English Language Annual Parent Notification Form

- At this time, we have 126 ESOL students across the district:

  - This number includes students receiving services and monitoring status as required.
  - Our highest language incidents are Spanish (53 students) and Portuguese (28 students)

- Student Rosters by School

  - James Mastricola Elementary School: 11 students
  - Reeds Ferry Elementary School: 29 students
  - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School: 20 students
  - James Mastricola Upper Elementary School: 25 students
  - Merrimack Middle School: 18 students
  - Merrimack High School: 24 students

- MSD ESOL Instruction & Programming

  - Instruction for our multilingual learners is guided by state and national standards.
  - The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework provides the foundation for curriculum, instruction, and assessment for multilingual learners in kindergarten through Grade 12.

- Until this school year, we had three (3) ESOL teachers for the district, and each teacher was assigned two school buildings with a split schedule of days and times.

  - This was not adequate in meeting the required periods of daily English Language Learners (ELL) instruction, which is based on WIDA levels and set by guidelines from the US Department of Education:
  - WIDA ELP Level 1.0 - 2.9: Two periods of daily instruction
  - WIDA ELP Level 3.0 or greater: One period of daily instruction
  - In response to our growing English Language Learner population, we now have five (5) ESOL teachers and one paraprofessional supporting students and classrooms.

- McKinney-Vento Definition of Homelessness

    - The term homeless means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes:
    - Sharing housing ("doubled up") due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar circumstances.
    - Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds.
    - Living in emergency or transitional shelters.
    - Living in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, public spaces, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings.
    - Inadequate/substandard means a lack of utilities, infestations, mold, or dangerous places.
    - At the end of last school year, there were 40 District students identified as homeless.
    - At the beginning of each school year, each student has to be verified and reidentified for eligibility.
    - If a family has found permanent housing that is fixed, regular, and adequate, the student is removed from the list.
    - At this time, we have confirmed 25 students who are identified as homeless.

- Required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

    - Attend either the local school OR their school of origin if this is in the best interest of students.
    - The school of origin is the school the student attended when they were last permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled.
    - Receive transportation to and from the school of origin.
    - Access to the same programs and services that are available to all other students, including transportation and supplemental education services.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that sometimes the public did not understand that the programs were mandated, noting that sometimes programs were unfunded mandates.

Chair Peters said the "Resources" page on the school district's website had a lot of information regarding sources.

7. <u>POLICIES</u>

a. Third Review and Approval of Field Trip and Excursion Policy (IJOA) and Filed Trip and Excursion Procedures (IJOA-R)

<u>MOTION:</u> 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.

b. First Reading of Revised Limited English Proficiency Instruction Policy (IHBBA)

<u>MOTION:</u> Board Member Halter made a motion to waive the first reading of the Revised Limited English Proficiency Instruction Policy (IHBBA). Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. September 23, 2024 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the public minutes from the September 23, 2024, public minutes, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Nay – Vice-Chair Hardy)

9. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Nominations

- Tara Ponder, School Nurse, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Elizabeth Sheehan, Elementary Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda as presented. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she attended the Planning & Building Committee meeting, during which they met with the architect and discussed the proposed 11,000 sq. ft. design. She also said they discussed asking the School Board to create an Ad Hoc Committee.

Board Member Rothhaus also said she attended the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting. She said the logo design was due on November 1st, there would be a blood drive on November 30th, Safe Babysitter would be held on November 9th, and the annual Halloween party would be on October 26th.

Board Member Rothhaus also said they did a rubrics survey of all of the parks to ascertain what the needs were.

Board Member Martin commented that a Professional Development Committee meeting (via Zoom) had occurred the prior week, although he pointed out that not enough people were in attendance for a quorum. However, they had many discussions and ended up voting via email to approve some professional development opportunities the following day.

Board Member Halter stated that she attended the Budget Advisory Committee meeting, during which they reorganized. Ms. Jen McCormack was the new Chair, and Makensie Murphy was the Vice-Chair. Board Member Halter said they reviewed the bylaws and discussed the budget process, noting that the next Budget meeting would be held on November 19th at the high school.

Chair Peters commented that she had attended a Joint Loss Prevention Committee meeting, and members were setting up their walk-throughs of the district facilities.

b. Correspondence

Chair Peters commented that she had received a number of emails regarding student welfare and staff welfare. She said she followed up with all of those by sending them to administration.

Chair Peters said she received an email from MYA (Merrimack Youth Association), which she was discussing with the administration, and the item may come before the Board at a future meeting.

c. Comments

Vice-Chair Hardy said she was very impressed with the Wit & Wisdom curriculum.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she appreciated the video about Unified Soccer.

Board Member Rothhaus asked if the Merrimack School District's Policy on Bullying could be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Board Member Martin commented that he had attended the very first Modern Band Festival, where twelve students were accepted from New Hampshire, and out of those twelve, four were from Merrimack.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:19 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.