Approved 10-21-2024

Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
September 23, 2024

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

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

Not Present: Vice-Chair Hardy – Excused

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

3. RECOGNITIONS

- Matthew Brown

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that Matthew Brown, a student, produced legislation when he was in the 8th grade that would add an eating disorder helpline to the back of student identifications. He said House Bill 1109 had been enacted into law and was known as the "Matthew Brown Act."

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, State Representative, was present and invited Matthew to join her at the front of the room. She said she was not only extremely impressed with Matthew's mission statement but added that a large number of people learned a lot.

Ms. Rung presented Matthew with the actual signed statute.

On behalf of the School Board and the Merrimack School District, Chair Peters presented Matthew with a certificate.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the following:

- Merrimack School District received a Robotics Grant for $11,500.

- The classes of 2025 and 2026 were having a mattress sale on 10/6/24 beginning at 10:00 a.m.

- The NH Music Educators Association had put together an All-State Modern Band, and out of twelve students that were selected from the entire state, four were from Merrimack. The concert is to be held on Tuesday, October 16th, at the Sheraton in Nashua, NH, at 4:00 p.m.

- "Scooter," who was a comfort dog, had already begun helping some students at the high school.

- Thorntons Ferry Elementary School has two new Gaga Pits as well as the addition of (ADA) Americans with Disabilities compliant tables and seating.

- Thorntons Ferry Elementary School also received a school grant of $6,000 to continue their work on the hydroponic garden.

- Congratulated Brooke Ross, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, for being accepted into a doctoral program.

- The School Resource Officer, Bill Vandersyde, and the Merrimack Police Department had provided outstanding training to the staff.

- The Unified Arts Teachers began their extension classes at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School for the 3rd and 4th graders.

- Congratulated Colby Wygant, a 1st-grade teacher at the James Mastricola Elementary School, for receiving the Best Ford "Best Teacher Award."

- Liz Dumais, Merrimack High School, had been selected to participate in a Navy League Educators at Sea aboard the Merrimack-based Navy Aircraft Carrier in the fall.

- Fall sports were off to a great start.

- The soccer team would take part in the Hampshire Tackle Soccer Initiative.

- The online store at the Merrimack High School store was open.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that since the School Board's last meeting, an additional professional development day was held where they continued to work on the implementation of new programs and were making progress on many of the district's initiatives. She said she was currently working on the schedule of activities for the early release days, which would include a combination of mandatory training on bullying, suicide prevention, and students who are experiencing homelessness. She said there would also be some presentations from experts on supporting multilingual learners and continuing to develop cultural proficiency. She

added that they would also have some time to look at an adaptation of unification training and crisis management with the Merrimack Police Department.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said Bonnie Painchaud, Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Chief Educational Officer Olsen, and herself met with Chuck Mower and John Lastowka from the Merrimack Historical Society about a partnership. She said they were actively working with Susan Fineman, who worked with a national organization on one-room schools to bring a living history experience to the schoolhouse at #12 on Post Road. She said it worked perfectly with the district's 4th-grade curriculum.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that Sara Parrotto, Director of K-8 School Counselor, was working on a second year of Promising Futures money.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said they were starting the process of developing the budget. He said the amount of surplus had decreased. He added that the grant money received had not increased in 25 years.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters commented that she had attended the Merrimack High School's FIRST Robotics Competition, Mayhem in Merrimack, and it was an exciting start to their season.

Chair Peters also pointed out that item (a.) Review of New Hampshire School Board Resolutions under Old Business would be placed on the next meeting's agenda so that Vice-Chair Hardy would be present.

Chair Peters said that she would be visiting the Merrimack Middle School the following week and looked forward to sharing how that visit went with the School Board at a future meeting.

5. NEW BUSINESS

a. Middle School Lunch

Chair Peters stated she attended all three lunch periods at the Merrimack Middle School, and her observations were that overall, everything ran like clockwork. She said the longest time it took the last student in line to get their food was three minutes. She added that 95% of the students were finished eating with five to seven minutes to spare. She said any student who was not finished eating was allowed to finish their lunch with a teacher sitting with them. Chair Peters said she had noticed that some students liked to "chat" a lot and some students who were slow eaters. She added that the lunchroom was very clean. Chair Peters also said she would return the following week to take a second look.

Chair Peters added that after speaking with a few teachers, she learned that the shorter time period helped to curtail potential behavioral issues.

b. Directory Information

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the School Board had a copy of his memorandum regarding "Directory Information," which included the following:

- Name and address of a student
- Field of study
- Weight and height of athletes
- Most recent previous school attended
- Date and place of birth
- Participation in officially recognized activities and sports
- Date of attendance, degree, and awards

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he recently sent a notice to parents informing them of their right to refuse disclosure of the Directory Information as defined under the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and reiterated through the New Hampshire RSA 189:1-e.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said some parents had inquired as to who might request the information specific to a student(s). He said a request for Directory Information could possibly come from:

- Vendors selling school rings and photos for yearbooks.
- Educational tutoring services.
- College recruiters.
- Military recruiters.
- Public records request.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that the district received very few requests for such information, and they would never disclose non-directory information such as a student's social security number or a student identification number. He added that parents had the right to decline their student(s) information being shared.

c. Student Enrollments

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the current enrollment was about 64 students compared to the previous year. He said enrollments in grades Pre-K through grade 4 were down by 28 students; in grades 5 & 6, enrollments were up by 26 students; in grades 7 & 8, enrollments were down by 30 students; in grades 9 through 12, enrollments were down by 32 students, the out-of-district placements were up by 2, and home-schooled students were up by 10.

d. School Board Goals

Chair Peters reviewed a PowerPoint presentation as summarized below:

<u>Mission Statement</u>

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 rigor and relevance, along with meeting their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The District will prepare students to understand, adapt, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological challenges 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, are innovative, and become responsible, contributing members of society.

Chair Peters reviewed the goals from the 2023 – 2024 school year:

1. Create an engaged, inclusive, and collaborative district culture built of mutual trust and respect (this goal is a continuation of the goal developed from 2022-2023.

2. The Pathways to Graduation (this goal was further developed from last year)

3. Improve our learning outcomes by ensuring our instruction is responsive to the varied needs of our student population (this goal was further developed from last year)

4. Have facilities and equipment that are safe, secure, clean, healthy, current, and appropriate for meeting the educational needs of students and staff (this goal was further developed from last year)

5. Create a dynamic relationship between the school district and community through clear and consistent communication (new goal identified in 2023-2024)

Chair Peters reviewed the goals for the 2024 – 2025 school year:

1. Communication

    - Create a dynamic relationship between the District and the Community through clear and consistent communication.

2. Student Services

    - Provide responsive programs, instruction, and systems of support that engage all students with opportunities and pathways that effectively meet their needs, support academic, social, and emotional growth, and enable the pursuit of individual passions and interests.

3. Merrimack High School

    - Collaborate with the high school administration and staff on a study with the goal of outlining the resources needed to make MHS a flagship school of New Hampshire.

4. Mission and Vision

    - Ensure that the District's Mission and Vision of a Graduate become the central frameworks for our collective work across the District.

5. Important Building Need

    - Work with the Community to communicate the importance of building a new multifunctional, welcoming, and accessible SAU unit.

Chair Peters said that all of the School Board goals aligned with the three-year strategic plan.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she would like to have the mission statement displayed at the SAU and in the meeting rooms. She also said it would be helpful to have Merrimack TV display the mission statement prior to every School Board meeting.

Board Member Halter commented that she felt some of the goals would become things that were done on a daily basis and just part of the culture.

Board Member Martin also said the mission statement should be posted wherever possible.

e. Revised Service Learning Project (SLP)

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that a few years prior, he had begun to have some conversations with the staff and leadership team about the Service Learning Project, for which a sum of money was budgeted in the collective bargaining agreement. He said there was a set of guidelines that were drafted, but he felt it had strayed a little bit from its original intent, and they were beginning to fund a number of activities that he considered co-curricular in nature, which was not the initial intent. He further said that the intent of the program, as indicated in the collective bargaining agreement, was to allow individual, certified teachers to receive training to meet the needs of the school district, as determined by the Superintendent or his/her designee. Chief Educational Officer Olsen said they restructured the program and guidelines with the intent of supporting the instructional program, addressing the School Board goals, and assisting in the accomplishment of one or more initiatives in the district's strategic plan, as well as representing evidence-based educational and best practices.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said they had refocused it on activities such as professional learning teams, mentor programs, domestic & international overnight field trips, etc.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the Revised Service Learning Project guidelines, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

f. Approval of MES, RFS, TFS, and JMUES Parent/Student Handbooks

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said legal counsel had vetted the handbooks, and the new Title IX regulations had been incorporated into all of the handbooks. He said the handbooks would be reviewed every year.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she hoped that the handbooks would be ready in August of the following year. She added that she felt all elementary schools should be consistent with the celebrations, such as birthdays. She noted that all but one school allowed children to bring in food to celebrate the student's birthdays.

Board Member Halter commented that she was relieved that she did not have to send in items for her child's birthday but said she agreed it should be consistent across all of the schools.

Board Member Martin commented that some homes had food scarcity, and that would be difficult for them, not to mention the number of children with different allergies.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would review the matter of consistency and get back to the Board.

Board Member Rothhaus suggested putting together a "Sunshine Committee" that would fundraise for students in need.

Board Member Halter commented that she felt the graphic of "The Vision of a Learner" should be included in the handbooks. She also said that the handbooks looked much better than they had in the past.

Board Member Halter also suggested that the bus routes should be included in the handbooks.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen took a moment to thank Sandy Swanson, his Administrative Assistant, for all of the hard work she put into working on the handbooks.

Board Member Martin suggested that it may be a good idea to have parents sign "a contract" acknowledging that they received and read the handbook. Board Member Halter stated that there was a signature line that had to be signed online.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the James Mastricola Elementary School, the Reeds Ferry Elementary School, the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, and the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School's handbooks, as amended. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

g. Other

Board Member Rothhaus commented that Saint Anselm's College would be offering free tuition the following year for students who were residents of the State of New Hampshire and had a GPA of at least 3.2, and the family's income had to be under $100,000 per year.

Board Member Rothhaus asked if the topic of a "Sunshine Fund" could be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

6. POLICIES

a. Field Trip and Excursion Policy (IJOA) and Field Trip and Excursion Procedures (IJOA-R) 2nd Reading

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he was waiting on some information from the high school staff regarding students who usually took the bus but wanted to leave with a family member or friend. He said he would bring that information to the next School Board meeting.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. September 9, 2024 – Public and Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to accept the public and non-public minutes from the September 9, 2024, public and non-public minutes, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Teacher Nominations

- Megan Reynolds, Elementary Classroom Teacher Reeds Ferry

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

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she had attended the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on September 18th, where they discussed ensuring all of the parks were safe, they continued to search for an Assistant Director, there was an Eagle Scout presentation, and the Halloween party would be held on October 26th. She said they were having a logo contest for the Parks & Recreation Department and thought it would be great for students to send in their artwork.

Board Member Martin shared that he attended the school year's first Professional Development Committee meeting, where they discussed looking for some new members to join the committee and the approval of professional development that staff had completed over the summer months.

b. Correspondence

Chair Peters commented that she and members of the Board had received multiple emails regarding special education, lunch periods at the Merrimack Middle School, and a number of conversations about the curriculum, many of which she referred to Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle.

c. Comments

Board Member Rothhaus sent out a reminder that the “Merrimack Forum” was not the way to contact the Board and that all messages should be sent to their email addresses.

Chair Peters noted that serious concerns should be sent to the Board Member’s official emails and not by text.

Board Member Martin stated the Modern Band All-State was new, but the fact that four students from Merrimack were a part of it was very impressive.

Chair Peters thanked all of those who participated in the fundraiser over the weekend for field hockey, soccer, and basketball.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and congratulated Matthew Brown for his contribution to the new legislation regarding eating disorders.

Ms. Robitaille asked if Chair Peters' presentation regarding the School Board Goals could be made available to the public.

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:48 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.