Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District
School Administrative Unit #26
Tuesday, January 2, 2018
Merrimack Town Hall-Memorial Room

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Schneider, Board Members Guagliumi, Thompson and Schoenfeld, Superintendent Chiafery and Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell.

Assistant Superintendent McLaughlin was excused from the meeting.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Formal Hearing on James Mastricola Upper Elementary School Budget for 2018-2019

Chair Barnes invited Principal Marsha McGill and Assistant Principal Bill Morris to the table.

Principal McGill shared the primary focus for the 2018-2019 school year. Significant factors continue to be the purchase of texts and instructional resources to support students at a variety of reading levels in grades five and six. Also there is the continued purchase and implementation of a standards-based math program for students in grades five and six including instructional resources as well as consumable student materials. Replacement of the thirty-plus years old kiln and the stacking racks to support student art instruction, replacement of the cafeteria tables, and the replacement of science room stools with classroom chairs round out the major requests.

Principal McGill then responded to pre-submitted questions from board members.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted the question: "Is the kiln at the end of its life and cannot be deferred out any longer? Details on previous planning for this and impacts if not replaced"

Principal McGill responded that the kiln was purchased in about 1983 and is over 34 years old. Since 2015 minor repairs have been made such as the venting system ($900), switches ($200-$300), and cracked bricks removed and re-cemented by the teacher. To replace the lid would cost $600 plus $150 for shipping; installation would be about $300 and element replacement would be about $100.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to Project Safeguard: "Can you tell me more about the speakers to whom we pay stipends"?

Principal McGill responded that there are a variety of different speakers and that the program has now been moved into the building. This is a half day program for students and parents and an afternoon program for just students. Speakers have included the New Hampshire Teen Institute Theater Group who talk about safe choices, Jack Agotti who speaks about encouragement, Ben Garver who offers parent workshops such as "Taming the Beast Within" and "Keeping Kids out of the Middle", Marco the Magician, keynote speaker Mr. LaBelle who speaks on making good life choices, Deannis Theater presents an anti-bullying program, and June Currier who speaks on bringing up children through the teen years.

Additional programs are given by School Resource Officer Prentiss and Merrimack High School coaches.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to non-instructional equipment: "Do we actually use "typewriters"?"

Principal McGill responded there is one in the office area and she will remove it from the next budget cycle.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that there are still some forms that require a typewriter and that there is still a maintenance contract in place for them.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to math supplies: "Please tell me more about the consumable supplies, manipulative and curricular resources?"

Principal McGill responded that students are provided with individual white boards, dry erase markers, and erasers. Additional consumables include graph paper, number counters, counting chips, and plastic covers.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to community relations: "Can you tell me more about the programs for home, school and community collaboration?"

Principal McGill responded that they are involved with the Partners in Education Blue Ribbon Volunteerism application and ceremony, Gold Circle Business Partners applications and business breakfast, a holiday breakfast, PFA Volunteer Appreciation Tea, Success is up to you, Community Readers, and also a Veterans Day Assembly.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to math texts: "Can you tell me more about the math texts and teacher resource materials. I know that we revamped the math curriculum in the 2017-2018 year so I'm wondering why this expense has remained consistent over three years (2 prior and 1 budgeted)."

Principal McGill responded by first referring board members to the assortment of new math resources she had brought to the meeting. She then explained that this budget item covers student math journals, teachers' additional workbooks, resource books, assessments, and digital versions of resources.

Chair Barnes and Board Member Guagliumi both questioned why the expense is still so large when the text books were purchased last year and asked if the amount would decrease next year.

Principal McGill responded that the site licenses for the non-print resources is significant and recurring. This past year there was an investment in providing resources and materials for teachers and going forward this will be done for Special Educators, Title One tutors, and Gifted and Talented teachers.

Board Members expressed concern over when they could expect to see a decrease in the budget item in regards to math texts.

Principal McGill responded that the recurring costs will not be as high once the students and teachers have all received their materials.

Vice Chair Schneider noted that the text book cost has changed from $19,000 to $22,000 the past two years and asked what the $19,000 represented.

Principal McGill responded that before the new texts were purchased, much more was spent on student materials such as journals and consumables. The new program comes with a six year site license that now includes the student journals. In the first two years teachers and students are being provided the needed materials and resources. Then the costs should decrease until the next site license is due for payment. The site license cost is per pupil. As student populations change the site license will adjust to accommodate the changes.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to art equipment: "I'm not questioning the need to replace this, but I'm curious how this cost compared to the kiln we replaced at Reeds Ferry a couple of years ago."

Principal McGill responded that the kiln was costed out to replace the AMCO kiln now in use. It is larger due to the ceramics that are fired.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "How many students are served by the Gifted and Talented program? Is this funding level sufficient to provide meaningful enrichment and differentiation?"

Principal McGill responded there are 27 in total, 18 in grade five and 9 in grade six. About another 35 students are serviced in math and vocabulary. Building resources are utilized.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "Can you provide a sense of how the fiction and nonfiction materials funded here differ from those purchased as part of library funding? Do the two funding channels collaborate, and how?"

Principal McGill responded that these purchases are for materials for direct instruction for guided reading. Collaboration between the librarian and the language arts teachers takes place on various units on author studies and literature units.

4. Formal Hearing on Student Services Budget for 2018-2019

Chair Barnes invited Director of Student Services John Fabrizio to the table.

Director Fabrizio began his presentation with an overview of the special education legal requirements. The budget is built from the bottom up. It is based on a student's needs, shaped by teams, involves parents and needs to follow many state and federal regulations.

The two primary regulations require the district to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for all in district students ages three to twenty-one in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

This year again the number of students being served has declined and is now at around 659 students.

This budget is based on projections of what services each student will need for next year. These can change throughout the year. The budget proposed is an increase from last year of 2.76%. Much of this is based on increases in the cost of busing, contracts with para's, split air conditioning systems, and replacement of the second van.

On the issue of out of district placements, Director Fabrizio cautioned the board to remember that the amount of services this provides to a student is usually more cost effective than to try to provide the same services in-district.

Director Fabrizio then responded to board members pre-submitted questions.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "I too think an explanation of the services some of these out-of-district placement schools deliver that cannot be covered within the resources of the district. The costs are staggering (roughly $3.8M of the operating budget) and an understanding of the unique offerings they deliver would be beneficial.

Director Fabrizio responded that federal law requires out-of-district when the services cannot be provided within the district. Each year he receives a booklet from the state of New Hampshire that outlines all of the programs available and what services they provide. The rates for these programs are set by the state of New Hampshire. There is also an obligation to serve students closest to home. This sometimes results in placing students in an environment in Massachusetts.

Board Member Schoenfeld asked for examples of what the district can and cannot provide.

Director Fabrizio responded that certain medical conditions such as breathing issues, violence issues, and unique chromosomal disability require outside placement. There is also the possibility of a court ordered placement.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "The other is more of an observation than a question. It is about Charter School funding. $132,038 of our operating budget is never used in our

district. These monies are delivering special services to students in Merrimack choosing to attend Charter Schools. This is in addition to the transportation of students outside of Student Services which adds $37,508 to our operating budget for students who choose to attend Charter Schools. This totals $169,546 that is dedicated to Charter School resources."

Director Fabrizio responded that RSA 194-B is the charter school law. It requires that if a student attends a charter school, all of the IEP needs be serviced in that school, including transportation if necessary.

Chair Barnes expressed concern over the limited number of students served by this cost and noted that this is out of the hands of the district. She asked that it be kept in mind when the budgets are reviewed.

Board Member Guagliumi asked if there is a cost share for resources with the charter schools.

Director Fabrizio responded that he continues to build relationships with the charter schools and other special services directors. The district is currently in some cost-sharing relationships with several other districts.

Board Member Guagliumi asked for more information on how IEP meetings are conducted for charter school students.

Director Fabrizio responded that each situation is unique and sometimes the district staff go to the charter school and sometimes the distance is too great. As Merrimack is the legal agent the choice of meeting site is the district's prerogative. The law is new and all parties are still trying to figure things out.

Board Member Thompson asked if there is concern about the district being required to provide services to private schools with the recent changes to state law.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the district is required to provide transportation to all students to in-district charter schools and private and parochial schools. This $35,000 cost is shown in the district side of the budget.

Chair Barnes asked what services will now be expected under the voucher program now approved by the state legislature.

Superintendent Chiafery responded that this is difficult to predict. She does not anticipate large changes to the budget now being vetted. Next year could see an impact.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted a question in regards to outsourced services: "Generally across items in this budget object, there are increases due to changes in service providers. Is this due to the changes in the SERESC services provided, and if so, what's the overall impact that we may see moving forward? If not, reasons for the change in vendor/cost? Several items show a 3% cost increase. Is this due to the third and final year of the current support staff agreement? Or another reason?

Director Fabrizio responded yes, this is due to the changes in SERESC. Last May he had to research new vendors. SERESC was a non-profit vendor and the available vendors are now for profit vendors and this costs more. He expects the costs to be stable for the next two years.

The 3% increase is due to contract changes.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted a question in regards to psychological testing: "This item shows a significant increase over previous budget year, and somewhat higher than actual spent in 2016-17. Can you share some of the background on this, and will it be an ongoing increase for future budgets?

Director Fabrizio responded that this budget item contains the legally mandated assessments. Pearson Publishing makes frequent changes to its assessments and the law requires using the most current version of the assessment. While there are other assessments available, Pearson is considered the best practices vendor and it is also used by most other districts.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted a question on purchased services: "Most items with transportation attached show a 5 percent increase. This question is probably for Matt, but what is the difference in the Caring Hands transportation contract vs. the district-wide transportation contract, and is this 5% something we'll see annually?

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that when the bid was submitted it was well below all of the other bids. This was a bad business decision for the vendor, but will be very advantageous to the district for five years. The percentage changes are to bring the costs in line with the anticipated new costs when the next contract is negotiated.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to Speech: "Please tell me more about the increase and the vendor change.

Director Fabrizio responded that this is due to the impact of the changes at SERESC.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to charter schools: "In the 2016-2017 year we expended about 80% of the total. Last year we budgeted at $30K and this year $40K. Is the reason for the increase because of how we are tracking in this current year?

Director Fabrizio responded yes and that this year a family moved into the district with children currently in a charter school.

Board Member Thompson had submitted a question in regards to various accounts: "I see that the expenditures vs. budget for many of the tutor line items is far lower on past years. Can this please be explained in detail during the meeting? Is there a reason that they have to be funded at the levels they are at?

Director Fabrizio responded that these are all estimates and take into account hospitalizations, injuries, illness, social and emotional absences, and the statute requires the money be in the budget.

Board Member Thompson expressed concern over the almost $50,000 over-budgeting on this item last year.

Director Fabrizio responded that unexpected situations such as long-term hospitalizations do occur.

All agreed that this is an area that should be looked at more closely.

Board Member Thompson had submitted a question in regards to out of district placement: "This could be an offline discussion. I'm interested in how a school is chosen for a student. Is this something that can be outlined and emailed? Or is a discussion needed?

Director Fabrizio responded that he and Board Member Thompson spoke about this and he used this conversation to frame his opening remarks.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "Can you talk a little about the changes in vendors, what prompted the change, and why the new vendor(s) are more costly?

Director Fabrizio responded that time, availability and the changes at SERESC led to the changes.

Chair Barnes thanked Director Fabrizio for his responses to their questions.

5. Formal Hearing on Technology /Library Media Budget for 2018-2019

Chair Barnes invited Director of Technology/Library Media Nancy Rose to the table.

Director Rose began her presentation by noting that this budget provides for a continuation of technology, library and media services in support of teaching and learning and district operations.

The budget provides for adding additional laptop carts district-wide, increased Wi-Fi, continued collaboration with the office of student supports on the installation of sound field systems in classrooms, and the continued upgrade of infrastructure in areas such as the paging system.

Director Rose then responded to board members pre-submitted questions.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "We are in the middle of your technology strategy planning. When you presented it to us we had faced some tech failures (phone system and PowerSchool server to name a couple of examples). Overall where do you see our technological infrastructure from a stability standpoint?"

Director Rose responded the system is now as stable as it has ever been. PowerSchool and BudgetSense Data is backed up to the vendors and the server side is backed up locally. Off-site back-up of the servers is currently being investigated. The phone system has been in place now for several years and the district is working on redundancy scattering services on the phone system and servers. Cloud service is being used more widely for storage and email. Staff training is needed in this area. Virtualization of servers is increasing which lessens the problems of hardware failures.

One vulnerability is that the district has only one Internet Service Provider (ISP) and a back-up should be considered to ensure continuity of service.

Chair Barnes asked if the district ISP is consistent with who the town uses.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell responded that the Town of Merrimack uses Comcast. Central Office does have a Comcast Wi-Fi connection that can be used in emergencies. He agreed that redundancy should be investigated.

Chair Barnes had submitted the question: "Based on investments and implementations of new technologies, where do you see our bandwidth supply/demand?

Director Rose responded that the current bandwidth is sufficient but as more devices are added and the length of time they are used increases, the need will increase. When the district moved from Comcast to FirstLight an agreement was entered into that would build out the fiber on a lease-to-own contract. This contract offers several options to the district going forward.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added historical context that explained how the district made the decision to move toward eventually owning the fiber optic. He acknowledged Director Rose's work in achieving this.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question on library books: "Please tell me more about the increase over this current year and proposed. Is this one area you were referring to in your overview?

Director Rose responded that the book budget was cut in the previous budget year of 2016-2017 and the current budget brought things back. The money is broken up in to three areas; elementary, middle and high school. One area of note is that e-book purchases are the property of the district.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to additional library equipment: "Please tell me more about the equipment and how it supports flexible learning environments."

Director Rose responded that equipment includes items such as document cameras, mimeo teach bars, apple TV's, I-pads, quicker response systems, snap circuits and tools for learning centers. This is an area where the need continues to grow. It is shared equipment and frequently there is not enough to go around.

Board Member Guagliumi had submitted a question in regards to technology infrastructure improvements: 'Please tell me more about the Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) education line item and about the funding targeted to increase STEM learning opportunities as you mentioned in your overview. In the overview, you state the "beginning of funding specifically targeted to address STEM learning opportunities'. Please tell me more about the overall plan."

Director Rose responded that some of the technology teachers and students are using require specific equipment. The FIRST robotics program creates opportunities that are moving from

after school to in school environments and specialized equipment is needed in order to participate.

Vice Chair Schneider had submitted a question on binding: "Binding funding was brought back for 2017-2018, and continued for your proposed budget. Can you share whether the year to date (YTD) spend on binding work will utilize full budget, or be less/more than utilized? Would love information to prepare for future years' budgeting."

Director Rose responded that the binding is done based on the budget amount.

Board Member Thompson had submitted a question in regards to software and licensing: "Since this item is increasing at a large rate, I would like to see further details on this item to understand the increase better. If this is something that can be provided prior to the meeting. I could review it and let you know if I'd like further discussion?"

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "How much of the $10,000 increase is a rise in cost for existing software licenses, and how much is new software? What curricular needs are new licenses addressing?"

Director Rose responded to both questions. Changes to this account are due to coverage of back-end systems such as Enterprise wide wireless management. This year she worked on a project to co-terminate the licensing for the management of the access points, of which there are currently several hundred in the district. About eighty more will be added next year. The management of the licenses was moved to a three-year across the board lump payment.

Additionally, the increase in mobile devices has a per unit management cost. Content and spam filtering, assessment management, network optimization, local storage systems and licensing and back-up, software packages and annual cost increases factor into this increase.

Services that support differentiated instruction and the refreshed K-6 labs that provide more learning options are examples of how curricular needs are addressed in new licenses.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "Student to device ratio-what is the current ratio, what is considered optimal and why?"

Director Rose responded that the current range of students to mobile devices is 4.5 to 9 per device. When computer labs are incorporated into this ratio the range changes to 3 to 6 per device. The standard practice is one to one and preferred by Director Rose. She noted that teachers feel the need to plan back-up lessons in case the technology is unavailable on the day they need it. Students with a single device are more protective and damage can be tracked back to specific students.

With more of the curriculum moving on-line the need for more devices is skyrocketing. This year's budget shows a request for twelve more laptop carts to alleviate the need.

Board Member Thompson asked if any consideration has been given to using more student owned devices through a Citrix or cloud based model and was told no, it is not manageable. While student do now bring their own devices to class, they cannot be supported and the potential for virus infection increases.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "Can you talk a little about the increase in library book purchasing needs to the $40,000 level, and the reason it is remaining there on an annual basis? What benefits have the libraries seen over the past year from this level of funding relative to 2016-2017?"

Director Rose responded that this amount is divided across all the schools and goes towards collection weeding, keeping the library collections up to date, and e-books.

Board Member Schoenfeld had submitted the question: "How is the increase in funding distributed across the 11 Transmission Control Protocol/Internet (TCP/IP) categories?"

Director Rose responded that the increase covers cabling, leveraging e-rate funding, increasing the wireless access, the twelve additional laptop carts, STEM, and paging systems.

Director Rose noted the recent collaborative agreement between the district and the town library in book sharing.

Director Rose spoke about the request for an additional technician position. There are currently only two technicians and technology use has moved from convenient to have, to critical to instruction. Trouble-shooting and repair demand have greatly increased

Board Member Thompson strongly supported funding this position.

Chair Barnes thanked Director Rose for responding to the board's questions.

6. Dissemination of Proposed New Hampshire School Board Association (NHSBA) Resolutions

Chair Barnes stated that Board Member Schoenfeld will attend the delegate assembly on January 20th as the Merrimack School District representative and vote on the resolutions as approved by the NHSBA board of directors.

The alternate is Board Member Guagliumi.

At the assembly Merrimack School Board Chair Shannon Barnes will be installed as the new president of the NHSBA.

7. Request to Withdraw $225,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund for Emergency Repairs for Mitigation of Bat Residue

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the total cost is about $600,000. The tear down and re-bricking of the masonry with new brick costs $323,000. This includes the insulation. The remediation process done by Critter Control costs $210,000. Approximately $30,000 in testing is still to be done. Unknowns include the cost of the classroom air ventilator removals and cleaning by Honeywell.

There is currently $154,062 in the Capital Reserve Fund held by the Trustees of the Trust Fund with an additional $75,000 to be transferred from a vote on the 2017 ballot for a total available of $229,062. This withdrawal will leave the fund with a balance of $4,062 to be used for future emergency purposes.

Vice Chair Schneider asked for details on the process that was undertaken to deal with the problem.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the entirety of the problem was unknown as it evolved over several weeks of investigation. Scaffolding was used by both the masonry contractor and the bat remediation company which saved some money. The entire area is now sealed off and the brick work is expected to be done by the end of February.

The state representatives were clear in acknowledging that this was the result of unforeseen circumstances over which the district had no control.

Vice Chair Schneider stated that while there is still an outstanding request in to the state department of education for financial relief; it behooves the school board to authorize the administration to pay the bills when they come in.

Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to by-pass the two week rule to allow the administration the ability to pull monies from the emergency fun up to the amount of $225,000.

Board Member Thompson asked if the state reimburses the district where the money will go.

Superintendent Chiafery stated that when Department of Education (DOE) representatives visited they put a price tag of $600,000 on the project. The most the state will reimburse is 30% or $180,000.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Chair Barnes asked if the district office has received questions from any sources outside of the media and was told no.

8. Approval of December 18, 2017 Minutes

Board Member Guagliumi move (seconded by Board Member Thompson) to accept the minutes.

The motion passed as proposed 5-0-0.

9. Other

a) Correspondence

Chair Barnes and Vice Chair Schneider had received correspondence from a new Yoga Studio asking how they could support the district. The requests were forwarded to Superintendent Chiafery.

b) Comments

Superintendent Chiafery reminded the community that the next meeting is a budget meeting scheduled for January 4th in the Town Hall Memorial Room at 7:00 p.m. In the event of inclement weather the meeting will be held on Monday, January 8th in the same location.

The meeting will not be shown live as the capability to do so does not exist at that site.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

14. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

15. Manifest

The board signed the manifest.

Board Member Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to enter non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II (a)(b)(c).

A roll call vote was taken. The motion passed 5-0-0.

At 9:56 p.m., Vice Chair Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Guagliumi) to adjourn the meeting.