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

Present: Chair Lori Peters, Vice-Chair Jenna Hardy, Board member Rothhaus, Board Member Board Member Naomi Halter and Board Member Martin. Chief Educational Officer Everett Olsen, Assistant Superintendent for Business Matt Shevenell, and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Amy Doyle.

Not Present: Student Representative Chase Rheault

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the public hearing to order.

Prior to the beginning of the meeting, Chair Peters commented that the School Board would be making decisions to align the budget with the will of the voters.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that no cuts would be made to athletics. He added that the staff had to have their contracts by May 1st, so it was important to make such decisions regarding the default budget as soon as possible.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he felt it was very difficult to bring relief to people in the current times. He said he felt everyone was trying to recover (financially) from COVID-19.

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and said she felt that the community wanted and needed to know what the thought process was regarding making the necessary cuts.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. Review of the Proposed 2024 – 2025 Budget Reductions

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the default reductions for the Merrimack School District:

Default Reduction – Item/Position	Dollar Amount	Comment
JMUES – Windows	$200,000	Safety Issue – Money to come out of the 2023 – 2024 budget.
MES – Preschool Teacher	$ 74,078	Decline in enrollment.
MES – Kindergarten Classroom Teacher	$ 86,557	This was an additional request for the 2024 – 2024\5 school year.
MHS – Social Studies Teacher	$ 70,549	Decline in enrollment. Position to be absorbed by existing classes.
MHS – Science Teacher	$128,624	Decline in enrollment. Position to be absorbed by existing classes.

MHS – Library Assistant	$ 43,170	Retirement – Position to be absorbed by existing employees.
MHS – World Language/Mandarin	$118,186	Decline in enrollment.
MHS – World Language/Arabic	$ 73,828	Decline in enrollment.
MMS – Math Coordinator	$119,683	Retirement – Position to be absorbed by an existing employee.
MMS – Special Education Teacher	$ 89,857	Position to be absorbed by existing employees.
MMS – Digital Learning Specialist	$ 92,570	Eliminating the position & re-assigning the employee.
JMUES – World Language Teacher	$ 94,958	Eliminating position.
JMUES, JMES, TFS, & RFS Gifted & Talented Program & Related Supplies	$225,000	Elimination of the Gifted & Talented Program & Supplies
Computer Replacement	$ 40,000	Purchase deferred to a future year.
iPad Replacement	$ 90,000	Purchase deferred to a future year.
Classroom Peripherals	$ 15,000	Purchase deferred to a future year.
JMUES – World Language Supplies	$ 1,000	With the elimination of the World Language experience, these supplies would no longer be needed.
JMUES – Round Tables	$ 7,000	Purchase deferred to a future year.
JMUES – Texts Literacy, Science, & Social Studies	$ 21,516	Purchase deferred to a future year.
TFS Classroom Teacher	$ 86,557	This was an additional request for the 2024 – 2025 school year.
Tier 1 Supplies	$ 47,428	DESSA and Wayfinder
SEL/Intervention Supplies	$123,000	SAP and 1 YEES (Youth Educational Employment Service)
Various	$ 53,466	Hiring and Operational Savings
SAU – CIP Materials	$ 25,000	
SAU – PD Mentors	$ 20,000	
MHS – Band Camp (Summer)	$ 30,000	
SAU – Contingency	$100,000	
SPED – Wellness Director	$124,472	
Total Proposed Cuts:	**$1,976,499**	**Positions Listed are Inclusive of all Benefits.**

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive, addressed the Board and asked if any staff positions were not being absorbed into other positions or if they were actually being cut. She also said she felt the district should try to keep the summer band camp.

- ***Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the two positions that they were unable to place elsewhere were a Spanish teacher and a Social Studies teacher.***

Ms. Gina Groff, 29 Dahl Road, addressed the Board and said that as a member of the Budget Committee, she had received many telephone calls from parents regarding the budget. She asked the Board to reconsider purchasing the round tables at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

- ***Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that the round tables at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School were in good enough shape to wait until the following year.***

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 25 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and said social media had become a popular place for people to leave information that was not always accurate. She suggested that the voters know what services, curriculum, and staff might be cut if they voted for the default budget. She also said that she felt the Gifted & Talented program should remain in the budget.

- ***Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he found that deciding what reductions would be too early, given unknown conditions, could cause a tremendous amount of anxiety for the staff. However, he noted that it could be advantageous for voters to know what would be cut if they voted to use the default budget.***

Ms. Kaitlyn Kelly-Bernier, 2 Birch Street, addressed the Board and stated that she, too, was in favor of keeping the Gifted & Talented program.

Mr. Robbie Reisman, 8 Iris Drive, addressed the Board and said he was in favor of keeping the Gifted & Talented program.

Ms. Melanie Hern, 122 Joppa Road, addressed the Board and asked what the current unassigned fund balance was. She also asked if any consideration was given to cutting any of the positions that the district was unable to fill year after year. She also said she was not in favor of cutting the World Language program at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School and was not in favor of cutting the Gifted & Talented program.

- ***Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the previous year, $6.2 million was returned to the taxpayers, and he was hoping to have at least that amount. He said he would know the amount for certain after the audit.***

- ***Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said cutting positions that were not filled was a decision that the unions had to make. He added that once the positions were gone, they were removed from the operating budget, and the default budget and the money would have to be reappropriated.***

- ***Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the paraprofessionals were paid out of the Special Education line item, and the positions were dictated by need and the service grid for students.***

Ms. Lisa Allen, 1 Fuller Mill Road, addressed the Board and said she hoped that the hockey program would not end up on the list of cuts.

Ms. Jennifer Jobin, 42 Merrymeeting Drive, addressed the Board and said she was not happy to see that Mandarin was on the list of cuts. She also said she was hopeful that the district could find a way to keep the Gifted & Talented program.

Ms. Nicole Tomaselli, 11 Knollwood Drive, addressed the Board and said she would like the Board to consider zero-based budgeting.

- ***Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that zero-based budgeting would be a bit challenging to use in a school district when it came to staffing. He added that enrollment dictated staffing.***

Ms. Jennifer McCormack, 34 Cramer Hill Road, addressed the Board and asked how the district found the money for the window project at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

- ***Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said there would be a surplus in the 2023 - 2024 budget, and that would pay for the window replacement project at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.***

Ms. Marcia Brew, of 39 Merrimack Drive, addressed the Board and said she also hoped the sports programs were not on the cut list.

At approximately 8:53 p.m., Chair Peters declared a break, calling the meeting back to order at approximately 8:58 p.m.

<u>School Board Discussion</u>

Board Member Halter commented that she appreciated the vast experience that the leadership team had.

Vice-Chair Hardy said Merrimack was one of the few schools in surrounding towns that offered Mandarin. She also said she felt keeping the Gifted & Talented program was important. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the Mandarin class had not seemed to gain traction, and the enrollment was low.

Board Member Martin commented that any of the items on the list could come back at a future time.

Chair Peters said she had hoped that the World Language Department could become more robust, but she agreed that they could bring it back in the future.

Board Member Halter suggested that perhaps having a stipend position at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School that provided short classes with games and activities that could get students excited about World Languages at the middle school.

Board Member Rothhaus suggested the possibility of having a World Language Summer Enrichment program but noted that she felt these suggestions should be discussed by the Board at a future date.

Chair Peters said she felt all high academic achievers were challenged in the classroom.

Board Member Halter commented that she was most concerned about cutting the Gifted & Talented program.

Board Member Martin said he, too, had concerns about cutting the Gifted & Talented program.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to keep the Gifted & Talented program line items (personnel & materials) in the amount of $224,020.

The motion failed due to the lack of a second.

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the administration's suggestion to cut the World Language program at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that with the motion made, they had reached the goal of $1.985 million in reductions.

Chair Peters stated that Band Camp would remain on the cut list, but they would look for a solution and have a discussion at the May 6, 2024, School Board meeting.

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to keep the Gifted & Talented program line items (personnel & materials) in the amount of $224,020. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Chair Peters commented that, although it was very difficult to say, it meant the district would spend $220,000 for 32 students out of 1,938 students.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen explained that by restoring the Gifted & Talented program, the Board agreed to approve the cuts pertaining to Hiring & Operational Savings, SAU – CIA Materials, SAU – PD Mentors, the MHS – Band Camp, and the SAU Contingency. The Board collectively agreed that they understood that.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and said she appreciated the fact that the Board decided to keep the Gifted & Talented program. She also thanked the staff who the cuts would impact.

Ms. Jennifer McCormack, 34 Cramer Hill Road, addressed the Board and said she appreciated the way the Board and the administration were thinking outside of the box.

Ms. Melanie Hern, 122 Joppa Road, addressed the Board and commented that "Graduation Alliance" might be a good avenue to look at with the elimination of the YEES position.

Ms. Kaitlyn Kelly-Bernier, 2 Birch Street, addressed the Board and thanked the Board for listening to all of the members of the public who attended the meeting and made public comments and for keeping the Gifted & Talented in the budget.

Timothy, a student, thanked the Board and the administration for all of their hard work on the budget.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 9:33 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.