Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
April 15, 2024

5:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – Merrimack TV Training Classroom.

- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Chair Ken Martin, Vice-Chair Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member Lori Peters, Board Member Jenna Hardy, and Board Member Naomi Halter. Chief Educational Officer Everett Olsen, Assistant Superintendent for Business Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Amy Doyle, and Student Representative Chase Rheault were also present.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

2. PUBLIC HEARING

- Board to authorize the purchase of security cameras and access control from the SAFE Grant III in the amount of $387,127.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that the grant would provide money for the district to purchase additional security cameras and locksets. He added that the funds had to be committed by June 1, 2024, and installed, operational, and paid for by December 31, 2024.

Chair Martin asked if any members of the public had questions or comments. There were none.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to accept the SAFE Grant III money in the amount of $387,127. Chair Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell for all of his hard work in obtaining the grant.

Board Member Halter asked if the items covered by the grant were a one-time purchase or if it would obligate the district to any ongoing purchases. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the security cameras would have to be part of the maintenance plan that was part of the operating budget. He said it would cost approximately $20,000 more.

3. SCHOOL BOARD REORGANIZATION

- **Chair of the School Board**

MOTION: Mr. Martin made a motion to nominate Ms. Lori Peters to the position of Chair of the School Board. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Martin stated that he felt Ms. Peters was very motivated to improve the school district and had a tremendous amount of experience.

Ms. Halter asked Ms. Peters what she thought was the Board's biggest priority and how she would move it forward as the Chair of the School Board. Ms. Peters replied that the biggest challenge they faced was that they were working within the default budget, and it would require wise decision-making.

Ms. Hardy said she felt Ms. Peters was an exemplary Board Member.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- **Vice-Chair of the School Board**

MOTION: Ms. Rothhaus made a motion to nominate Ms. Jenna Hardy to the position of Vice-Chair of the School Board. Mr. Martin seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ms. Rothhaus stated that she felt Ms. Hardy was very passionate about the school district and had a lot of enthusiasm and energy.

Mr. Martin stated that he felt Ms. Hardy had an incredible depth of knowledge about the district.

Ms. Peters commented that she and Ms. Hardy had worked together on the Budget Committee, as well as the School Board, and acted with the utmost integrity.

Ms. Halter asked Ms. Hardy what she thought was the Board's biggest priority and how she would move it forward as the Vice-Chair of the School Board. Ms. Hardy replied that she agreed that the biggest challenge they faced was that they were working within the default budget, while keeping up with the improvements they had tried to make and building on them.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Chair Peters thanked Board Member Martin and Board Member Rothhaus for the fine work they had done as Chair and Vice-Chair of the School Board.

4. COMMITMENT TO BOARD CODE OF ETHICS

Chair Peters and Vice-Chair Hardy read aloud the Merrimack School Board Code of Ethics. Chair Peters noted that the entire School Board signed a copy of the document.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive, addressed the Board and suggested that the School Board consider establishing a few committees that could help broaden awareness, understanding, and advocacy of school district programs and policies.

- Re-establish PERC (Program Evaluation and Review Committee)
- Establish an Ad Hoc Committee of Community Members to revisit the new Central Office Proposal
- Establish an Ad Hoc Committee to work jointly with the Town Counsel and the School Board to develop a strategic plan to meet field recreation needs.
- Consider what potential or proposed legislation was needed to support the district.

Ms. Heather Robataille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and said she looked forward to seeing the work that the School Board had focused on. She said she agreed that communication with the public was very important.

Ms. Jeannie Wagner, 4 Cowin Road, addressed the Board and said at a recent meeting that Board Member Martin had mentioned that the School Board had come to an agreement with Chief Educational Officer Olsen and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle regarding future contracts. She asked where she might find the contracts. Chair Peters noted that the current contracts were available to view on the website; however, she noted the new contracts would not be there as they were for the next school year.

6. RECOGNITIONS

There were none.

7. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked Mr. Martin and Ms. Rothhaus for their respective roles as Chair and Vice-Chair, and he also welcomed Ms. Peters and Ms. Hardy for the work they would do in their seats as Chair and Vice-Chair.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said on Thursday, April 18th, a public budget meeting would be held at 6:00 p.m. to discuss proposed budget reductions.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted the following:

- Congratulated Ms. Brenda Wygant, a preschool teacher at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, for being named “WZID Teacher of the Month.”

- He also said one of the district’s teachers ran in the Boston Marathon and finished in 3 hours and five minutes.

- A bowling team would be starting at the middle school.

- The “Get Set” program at the high school had started the planting in the garden beds.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said they had a great middle school science curriculum program, and they were very close to deciding on what materials would be used

in grades 6 through 8. She said similarly that they continued to work on the teacher evaluation model and were close to deciding that as well.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that there was a new scoreboard on the high school football field, and it would be operational the current week.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters thanked all of the residents who came out to vote, pointing out that over 4,000 ballots had been cast.

Chair Peters also encouraged everyone to either attend or watch the meeting on April 18th, as they would discuss some very serious changes due to the default budget situation.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Rheault commented that several students from Merrimack High School had participated in the All-State Festival on behalf of the New Hampshire Music Educators Association. She congratulated all of those who received awards.

Student Representative Rheault said on April 6th, the Statewide Annual Destination College Event was held on behalf of Merrimack High School. She said juniors were invited to Saint Anselm's College for a day of college planning workshops.

Student Representative Rheault also noted the following:

- Student Council Class 2026 held a Spring Fling dance.
- Student Council Class 2025 was starting to prepare for the junior prom.

8. OLD BUSINESS

a. Review Outcome of School District Elections, 2025 – 2026 Budget, and Warrant Articles

Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked the voters for approving the roof project and said the district would adjust accordingly regarding working with the default budget.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell appreciated the public's support in passing the support staff contract.

Vice-Chair Hardy said she had some concerns about the public not being able to have their voices heard before the Board finalized cuts to stay within the default budget. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that he understood and respected the importance of public feedback, but someone would always be impacted by cuts: a person, a program, or a service, and it would become personal to a family. He said the proposed cuts would be decided in the most thoughtful and logical way possible but added they needed to find $2 million in budget cuts.

Board Member Martin said that while the proposed new SAU Central Office Building did not pass, the issue was not going away, and they would continue to look at options.

Board Member Rothhaus noted that they were still waiting for the report from the Merrimack Fire Department and felt that may have been one of the reasons why the article failed.

Board Member Halter said she was pleased that the roof and support staff contract had passed. She noted that she would like to have the School Board meet with the Planning & Building Committee to come up with a different proposal regarding the SAU building because something clearly had to be done. She also said she felt the Board needed to figure out better avenues of communication with the public.

Board Member Rothhaus said she appreciated the comments regarding better communication and felt it was very important to take public comments seriously as they moved ahead.

9. NEW BUSINESS

a. Memo of Agreement between the School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association Regarding Retirement Provision for 2023 – 2024

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that there was an employee who had given many, many years of outstanding service to the Merrimack School District, and there was a provision in the MTA contract in terms of a retirement incentive payment. He said the person was just shy of the stipulated criteria of 15 years, and they had decided that it would be appropriate to enter into a one-time agreement to provide the retirement incentive to the employee.

MOTION: Chair Peters made a motion to accept the Memo of Agreement between the School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association regarding the one-time retirement provision. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. Responsive Classroom Presentation

Ms. Michelle Romein, Principal of the James Mastricola Elementary School, and Ms. Kate Merva, a 5th-grade teacher at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, representing the K-6 elementary school principals, provided a presentation as summarized as follows:

Ms. Romein explained that a Responsive Classroom was a model for building a community within the classroom and the school. She added that it included how people interacted with each other, the curriculum, and all of the teachers in the building.

Ms. Romein stated that parts of Responsive Classroom that had been implemented across all four elementary school buildings in the current year:

- Daily morning meetings where students can get to know each other and ask questions.
- Some classes had closing meetings.
- Every adult was a part of a morning meeting.
- Daily morning messages.
- Grade-level classroom expectations.

Ms. Merva commented that Responsive Classroom was the foundation of all of her teaching. She said that with the district's support, she had been able to take part in almost every training session Responsive Classroom had. She said she felt that a Responsive Classroom builds leadership, the act of valuing everyone, and allows every student to be heard.

The School Board collectively thanked the teachers and administrators for providing such an informative and detailed presentation.

c. Last Day of School

Chief Educational Officer Olsen suggested that Friday, June 14, 2024, be the last day of school (1/2 day) for the Merrimack School District, as the instructional hours had been met. He further said that June 17th, 18th, and 19th would be used for professional development days. He noted, however, that the date of graduation would not change and would still be held on Saturday, June 15th.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion that the last day of school (1/2 day) would be on Friday, June 14, 2024. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

d. Summer Meeting Dates

MOTION: Board Member Rothhaus made a motion to hold the summer School Board meetings on Monday, July 15, 2024, and Monday, August 12th. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

e. Date for June Goals Meeting

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to hold the Board's Annual Goals meeting on Thursday, June 27, 2024. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

f. Other

Board Member Rothhaus commented that the Board had discussed the Superintendent's performance evaluation at the previous meeting, which included educational leadership, school district culture, school district goals, school district management, and relationship with the School Board.

Board Member Rothhaus asked if a discussion regarding improving communication and looking at adding new committees that would support the improvement of communication could be added to the next meeting agenda.

Board Member Rothhaus requested that an agenda item regarding the annual expectations for field preparations be added to the meeting.

10. POLICIES

a. Updated Suicide Prevention/Response Plan (JLDBB-R)

Ms. Sara Parrotto, Director of Student Wellness, addressed the Board and said that the policy (JLDBB-R) needed to have warning signs within the Suicide Prevention/Response Plan, and since she noticed that was not included in the plan, she added it. She said she took the information directly from the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline website.

Board Member Rothhaus suggested adding language that included a crisis team and a list of who was on that team.

Board Member Rothhaus said she had some concerns about the line on page 4 of the policy that stated, "Should the child or parent indicate the presence of firearms, the administrator or designee will inform the police, who will review gun safety measures" because the State of New Hampshire was a "right to carry state" it might be a violation under New Hampshire law. Mr. Parrotto replied she would look into that.

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. April 1, 2024 – Public Hearing Minutes, Public Meeting Minutes and Non-Public Meeting Minutes

Edits:

Non-Public Meeting Minutes – Board Member Rothhaus's last name was corrected. (To be corrected and voted on at a future meeting.)

Public Meeting Minutes – Page 1, line 52, the word "phoenix" was changed to "phonics."

MOTION: Chair Peters made a motion to approve the public minutes from the April 1, 2024, meeting, as amended. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

12. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Retirements

- Barbara DeFrancisco, Elementary Classroom Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary
- Eleni Floras, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Karen King, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Kathleen King, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Claire Mitchell, Elementary Classroom Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary
- Christine Reinart, Special Educator Coordinator, Merrimack High School
- Cheryl Smith, Math Coordinator, Merrimack Middle School
- Carol Smith, Math Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Pat Zink, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School

b. Educator Resignations

- Morgan Bailey, Special Education Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary
- Sarah Demers, School Counselor, Merrimack Middle School
- Micayla Eason, Math Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Denver Greene, Physical Education Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary
- Marina Nickerson, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Lauren Sorenson, Elementary Classroom Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary
- Paige Webster-Scribner, English Teacher, Merrimack High School

c. Administrator Resignation

- Laura Livie, Assistant Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary

d. Educator Nominations

- Lindsay Middleton, Language Arts Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Leanne Keller, Science Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- William Hughen, School Counselor, Merrimack High School

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

13. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were none.

b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Hardy said the entire Board had received correspondence regarding the graduation date.

c. Comments

The Board collectively thanked all of the educators who had retired/resigned and wished them well.

Chair Peters reminded everyone that it was very important to tune into the Special School Board meeting to be held on April 18th.

14. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Jeannie Wagner, 4 Cowin Road, addressed the Board and encouraged the Board to stop by when they toured the school buildings. She said she hoped that they toured all six schools a couple of times a year.

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive, addressed the Board and said when she was on the School Board, they would hold their meetings at the different schools, and they would also hold a listening session for members of the public for the first 30 minutes of each meeting.

15. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:00 p.m., Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Recorder's Note: All available "Supporting Material for Board Meetings" are on the School District's website.