Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
April 1, 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 Doyle, and Student Representative Chase Rheault were also present.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:10 p.m., Chair Martin called the public hearing to order.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

- Board to authorize the purchase of the curriculum for Wit & Wisdom from surplus funds in the amount of $237,500. (K-6)

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that over the past two years, the Merrimack School District had made an intentional shift from balanced literacy to structured literacy.

- Replacing and implementing core programs that are research and evidence-based and aligned with the science of Reading.
    - Heggerty
    - Fundations
    - Geodes
    - Spelling Connections
- Wit & Wisdom is the final component of this shift.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle explained that Wit & Wisdom was a comprehensive standards-based English Language Arts curriculum that looked at reading, writing, and effective communication done through a series of complex, information-rich, grade-level text, and supplementary text.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said Wit & Wisdom paired seamlessly with our foundational skills programs of Fundations and Geodes.

- Geodes are aligned to the scope and sequence of Fundations
- Geodes are produced by the same publisher as Wit & Wisdom

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle explained that the district already had a phonics or foundations component to its curriculum, and it was not part of Wit & Wisdom.

- Wit & Wisdom Framework
    - At Wit & Wisdom's core is a framework of strategic questions and instructional protocols designed to guide teachers and students through reading, writing, and speaking about exceptionally rich and diverse texts.
    - Devotes 6-8 weeks to explore each topic in tightly crafted, multi-faceted lesson sequences.
    - Discussions and activities are built into daily practice.
    - Writing is text-based or text-inspired with clear instructional routines.
    - High-quality materials for teachers and students.
- Core Texts, Supplementary Texts, & Media
    - The core texts include much beloved, award-winning books from both contemporary and established authors.
    - Supplementary texts and media, including poems, videos, informational articles, websites, music and other audio, fine art, graphs, charts, or maps are thoroughly integrated and seamlessly connected to the lesson studies.

Board Member Peters commented that she was very impressed with the curriculum. She added that she also thought it was an appropriate way in which to use the district's retained funds to purchase it.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said for the past two years, in the School Board's goals meetings, literacy had been the number one goal for the district, and she was in full support of the purchase.

Board Member Hardy commented that she had a child who was participating in one of the pilot programs, and she said she loved it. Board Member Hardy also said she was in favor of using retained funds to purchase the curriculum.

Board Member Hardy commented that she liked the fact that the curriculum integrated some non-media, like famous artworks and speeches, and she also felt it was appropriate to purchase the curriculum using the retained funds.

Chair Martin also commented that he was in full support of the curriculum and also felt using the retained funds was appropriate.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to purchase the Wit & Wisdom curriculum from surplus funds in the amount of $237,500. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive, addressed the Board and said her daughter was participating in one of the 5th grade Wit & Wisdom pilot programs. She read the following that her daughter asked her to read into the record:

"I started doing Wit & Wisdom later than my classmates, but I found a way to catch up. I love learning about the Nez Perce Tribe. Wit & Wisdom has helped me learn how to write a paragraph better. I like how I can talk with others about Wit & Wisdom. Right now, we are reading Thunder Rolling in the Mountains."

Ms. Grobecker said she was very happy that the teachers were being provided with the tools and the professional development to teach every child how to read.

4. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions to share.

5. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that on April 15th, twelve members of the Middle School concert band would be performing at the Middle-Level Honor Band Festival at Pinkerton Academy. He also said that on May 5th, seven members of the middle school concert band and two members of the chorus would perform at the South Central District Honor Band & Chorus Festival at the Lurgio Middle School in Bedford.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said in March, two literacy nights were hosted for parents at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School. He noted it was very well attended. He also said the Reeds Ferry School had a bingo night, and it had a tremendous turnout.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the track season would be starting soon. He recognized students who would be receiving an award from the New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the 4th graders at the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School participated in a gradewide Wax Museum where each 4th grader picked a prominent person from New Hampshire and wrote a short speech.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the students would be competing in the FinLit 300, the New Hampshire Financial Literacy Capability Challenge, on Wednesday. He said students were very competitive in the areas of earning income, spending, saving, investing, and managing risk.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School had a "Winter Fun Week" where all activities (inside and outside of the building) included some degree of learning.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the students in Dr. Gonzalez's biology class and Ms. Jones's oceanology class visited the New England Aquarium to study the aquatic ecosystem

further. He noted other students taking biology classes would be touring the Nashua Wastewater Treatment Facility plant to understand the practical applications of filtration systems from a design and engineering perspective.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Middle School Drama Club held two sold-out performances of "Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief."

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Robotics Competition was held the previous weekend, and they were preparing for the New England District Championships.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle thanked the School Board for their support in the purchase of Wit & Wisdom.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said there was a two-hour early release on March 29th, where they offered some terrific, differentiated Google training. She thanked everyone involved in facilitating the training.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said she had provided the Board with some information from a teacher at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School who was interested in doing some research through a voluntary, anonymous survey. She said she would like to tell the Board more about it under "New Business."

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the General Assurances document had to be signed by the members of the School Board in order to receive all grants. He pointed out that they had to obligate the funds by the end of June, and the money had to actually be spent by the end of December.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the preliminary audits would begin soon in anticipation of the year-end June 30th audit.

d. School Board Update

Chair Martin reminded everyone that voting day would be held on Tuesday, April 10th, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Chair Martin stated that the School Board and Chief Educational Officer Olsen had negotiated a two-year extension to Mr. Olsen's contract.

Chair Martin said he had attended the Celebration of Song in the Cavalcade of Bands. He said it was an amazing event. He said the musical maturity of the bands would never be fully realized hearing them perform in a gym.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus noted that they were also in negotiations with Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle as they wanted to be sure that the district was able to keep her.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Rheault congratulated the Merrimack High School students for participating in the following:

- Celebration of Song and the Cavalcade of Bands
- The Large Group Event
- Clark Terry Jazz Festival
- 20 Students to participate in the All-State Festival at Concord High School
- The Drama Department will hold its spring musical "Mama Mia" – Friday, May 3rd, at 6:00 p.m. and Saturday, May 4th, at 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
- The Granite State Challenge Merrimack team will participate in the Quarter Final Match, which will air on NH PBS on April 4th at 7:30 p.m.
- JV team for Quiz Bowl had the best overall record for the season.
    - The Varsity team won 9 to 1.

6. OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion on Warrant Articles/Review of Voters Guide

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the Voters Guide and the following Warrant Articles:

- Proposed New Central Office ($4.8 million)
- Support Staff Contract
- Roofs at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School & James Mastricola Elementary School
- Operating Budget

7. NEW BUSINESS

a. Discussion on Staff Evaluation Process

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that he, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle, and Ms. Fazlic, Director of Human Resources, had been meeting with all the principals and assistant principals conducting staff evaluations. He said most of the staff, by far, have received excellent evaluations. He said they used the evaluation process as a growth model and not punitive in nature. He said they looked at five areas: instruction and leadership, culture, professional learning environment, organizational resilience & community connections, and fulfilling professional responsibilities. He further said that each administrator was graded as either highly effective, effective, or in need of improvement.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus thanked Chief Educational Officer Olsen for bringing a solid evaluation tool to evaluate administrators. She said she felt the only way a person could get better at their job was to have self-evaluations and go through the process of being evaluated. She added that part of the School Board's job was to evaluate the Superintendent.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that she had been meeting with the committee and was working on the teacher evaluation model. She noted that the district was growth-orientated and wanted to provide feedback to their teachers to improve their practice. She said she would bring additional clarifying information to the Board later in the year.

b. Review and Approval of the Document Entitled "FY 2025 General Assurances, Requirements, and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs"

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said it was a standard document that was sent to all school districts across the country that received federal grant funds. He said it was basically an agreement that the district would adhere to its fiduciary responsibilities, and the procurement processes were sound and based on best practices.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to accept the FY 2025 General Assurances, Requirements, and Definitions for Participation in Federal Programs. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

c. Last Day of School (Tabled until the next School Board Meeting)

d. Survey

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said Ms. Hannah Schwack-Trovitch, a 6th-grade teacher at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, was in a master's program and was expected to graduate in May. She said Ms. Trovitch was looking to complete some research with her colleagues at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School as well as the James Mastricola Elementary Schools. She said she was asking for teachers to complete the survey voluntarily and anonymously. She also said that her research had gone to the Institutional Review Board, but she was waiting for their approval.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said Ms. Trovitch's research was surrounding how to motivate teachers to implement new education programs and get additional information about their use of UDL (Universal Design for Learning) in the classroom. She noted that neither the teacher's name nor the town's name would be part of her research.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve the request. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Peters said she would be very interested in listening to a presentation regarding the results of the survey.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. POLICIES

a. 3rd Review and Adoption of Student Dress Code Policy (JICA)

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that she felt the words "The Merrimack School District and the parents had a shared responsibility in determining what the attire is at our schools."

Chief Educational Officer Olsen suggested the proposed language: "Recognize that the school district, students, and their parents/guardians share the responsibility in determining a student's personal attire, hairstyle, jewelry, and personal items."

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to adopt policy (JICA) Student Dress Code Policy, as amended. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. March 18, 2024, Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the public minutes from the March 18, 2024, meeting, as presented. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

10. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no educator nominations or resignations to share.

11. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter shared that she had attended a Strategic Planning Committee meeting where they continued to work on the focus areas of the Strategic Plan and discussed getting a presentation ready for the School Board sometime in May.

b. Correspondence

Board Member Peters commented that she had received a lot of correspondence regarding the election, the SAU building, the voter's guide, and Wit & Wisdom.

Board Member Hardy shared that she had received correspondence regarding the election and Wit & Wisdom.

Chair Martin stated that he had received correspondence regarding the voter's information guide and Wit & Wisdom.

c. Comments

Vice-Chair Rothhaus thanked the students who facilitated the School Board debate and noted that the same students would be doing the Town Council debate on 4/3/24 at 6:30 p.m.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were no public comments.

13. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:25 p.m., Board Member Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.