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

Present: Chair Ken Martin, Vice-Chair Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member Lori Peters, Board Member Jenna Hardy, and Board Member Naomi Halter. Chief Education 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

Chair Martin called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and congratulated the School Board on its annual district meeting. He said he believed the appropriate questions and information were passed along to the voters, and he encouraged the voters to confirm the needs of the school district by an appropriate vote of yes on the budget as well as the scaled-back version of the SAU facility plan.

3. RECOGNITIONS - There were none.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the administrators had completed the annual report, and it was currently being printed.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that based on instructional hours, they anticipated the last day of school to be on June 18th but noted he would keep the School Board up to date.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would be bringing forward the dress code policy at the next School Board meeting. He also noted that Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle, Ms. Fazlic, Human Resources Director, and himself would be meeting with principals to review staff evaluations. He added that he would conduct the administrative evaluations.

b. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that the New Hampshire Statewide Writing Assessment was moved up per the Department of Education's request. She said the following year, the assessment would return to its regular schedule. She said the regular New Hampshire State Assessment System (NHSAS) would open on April 1st and would go through June 7th.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that some students from Merrimack Middle School and the Reeds Ferry Elementary School had been selected to participate in the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress.) She said they looked at

short and long-term trends in student achievement. She also shared that the Merrimack High School would hold its first-ever Assessment Day on Wednesday, March 27th. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said there would be a two-hour early release in the Merrimack School District on Friday, March 29th, so that staff could receive differentiated training to support their migration to Google, and they would also have some required training regarding their new timecard.

Board Member Hardy added a program called the New Hampshire Seal of Biliteracy and Learning about Proficiency (AAPPL) for Mandarin, French, Spanish, and Arabic in which upper-level world language students could be awarded the New Hampshire Seal of Biliteracy as a result of their test scores. She said it also included Latin under (ALIRA).

c. Assistant Superintendent of Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell expressed how pleased he was with the number of people who turned out for the Deliberative Session.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said when the voter's guide came back from the printer, he would review it with the Board prior to making it public.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the Grants Management System for 2024 – 2025, including the Safe Schools grant in the amount of approximately $370,000, was ready to start adding details and specifications.

d. School Board Update

Chair Martin said he was also happy with the turnout for the Deliberative Session.

Chair Martin introduced the new student representative, Chase Rheault, noting she was an accomplished percussionist.

Student Representative Rheault, a senior at Merrimack High School, said she was grateful to be a part of the School Board.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Strategic Plan Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen first thanked Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell for all of the incredible SAU-related work he had done.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that about one year prior, they had begun the process of developing a three-year strategic plan. He said they hired Mr. Mark Dolan from the New Hampshire School Board's Association. Mr. Dolan had been facilitating meetings with the district since the prior year's August retreat.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said they were incorporating the School Board's goals as part of the strategic plan, as well as the Vision of a Learner and the Vision of a Graduate. He said they were presently in the process of collecting student focus group input, and in April, they would conduct a community survey. He added the focus areas were as follows:

- Vision of a Learner & Graduate
- Student Outcomes
- Alignment of Curriculum & Instruction

- Cultural Wellness
- Facilities
- Family & Community Engagement
- Communications

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he felt they would have a draft ready for the School Board to review sometime in May.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said she felt they were making very good progress, although she noted there was still some work to be done in the future, especially getting feedback from the community survey.

Student Representative Rheault said they had seen a very good turnout from the student focus groups. She said they discussed plans for the future, visions of the school, and the role of the students.

Board Member Halter noted that there were members on the committee who did not have students in the district but were business leaders in the community.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Athletic Director Update

Mr. Adam French, Athletic Director, addressed the Board and said the past winter sports season had been great. He said as of earlier that day, there were 273 athletes signed up for spring sports, 126 girls and 147 boys. He said the spring sports included:

- Baseball
- Boys & Girls Lacrosse
- Softball
- Girls & Boys Track & Field
- Boys & Girls Tennis
- Unified Track Team

Mr. French said that as he was new to the position, it had taken a little bit of time for him to become familiar with the new systems. He noted he had successfully formed relationships with all of the coaches despite the fact that he did not have an opportunity to do end-of-the-season reports with them, and his biggest goal was to make Merrimack a welcoming place.

Mr. French said one of the changes he made for the protection of all of the athletes was to move the benches so that the Merrimack fans sat directly behind the Merrimack athletes. He said although it was not 100% popular with everyone, the officials liked the idea.

Mr. French said Mia, a gymnastics athlete, came in second place; boys hockey came in 1st place in Division II in the regular season, and Connor was the Division II State MVP. He said in basketball, Logan was the first-team all-state in defense. He also said they had a cheerleading team.

Mr. French noted that they were looking at the possibility of partnering with the American Legion to develop their field into a softball field for the girls' varsity team.

Mr. French shared that the district had its first unified basketball team in the current year, and it had been quite successful. Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he felt it was extremely inspiring.

Mr. French said they would have a unified soccer team in the fall.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she felt technical and discipline skills were very important for athletes to learn. Additionally, she said she was pleased that Mr. French saw an opportunity to have unified sports teams and got it done. She noted that she felt partnering with the American Legion was a great idea.

Board Member Peters said she was very excited to hear about the unified sports teams and was also happy to hear about the potential partnership with the American Legion.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen, Board Member Hardy, and Chair Martin echoed the previous speaker's comments and expressed their appreciation for a job well done.

b. Central Office Building Proposal

Chair Martin explained that an amendment had been made at the Deliberative Session, which would reduce the size and cost of the proposed central office building. He said the new proposed cost was $4.8 million as opposed to $6.9 million.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that they took into account the meeting held with the Planning & Building Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee, and the School Board. He said some comments were made suggesting that perhaps some of the offices could be located at the schools and the size of the conference room was too large. He added that the original proposed size of the central office was 11,100 square feet, and the revised proposal was 8,760 square feet. He said the proposed conference room would be approximately 1,200 square feet, but it was not a Board meeting room, meaning it was just a conference room that did not need electronics, and the School Board would continue to meet in the Merrimack Town Hall.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the new proposed project total was $4.8 million, which included a $300,000 contingency. He noted that if they did not end up using the contingency, they would use the money to refund part of the bond issue.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the district received three estimates, as explained below:

1. Sullivan Construction – (Not received yet)
2. Eckman Construction – (Not received yet)
3. Hutter Construction – ($4 million – Received prior to the Deliberative Session)

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that the price included the cost of demolition for the SAU building as well as the special services building. He noted, however, that they could not demolish the buildings until the new building was complete so they could move into it. He added it would take approximately one year to complete the new building.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the highest year payment (year two) for the prior $6.9 million was $676,000, and the highest year payment (year two) for the $4.8 million was $470,000. He said that broke down to an increase of $47.00 per year on a $500,000 home. He added that the tax impact for the proposed 15-year bond

was based on a 3.25% increase. He said April 26, 2024, was the deadline to submit the bond application.

c. Review of Deliberative Session

Chief Educational Officer Olsen also thanked the community for coming out to vote. He said after speaking with the Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, between 2014 and 2022, the school budget came in under the default budget. He said that was concerning because if a budget came in at the default or below the default, a lot of the needs of students would not be addressed. He said he felt the district was making very good progress.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the things that the district was able to do with the investment the taxpayers had provided, and the Budget Committee had supported:

- An increase in reading and math scores.
- Significant curriculum improvements.
- Adequate materials, supplies, and programs provided to staff.
- Tailor programs to the needs of the students.
- Quality extended learning opportunities.
- Expanding community partnerships.
- Increased professional development.
- Improved student monitoring process.
- School safety.
- Provide competitive wages and salaries. (Marked increase in the quality of applicants.)
- The development of a 3-year strategic plan.
- Create a culture of trust, respect, support, communication, and always be student focused.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen explained that the fiscal 2025 budget was above the default budget because the district needed to move forward and improve. He said the administration team and the staff were superb.

Board Member Hardy commented that she felt the administrative staff was excellent, and she was very grateful.
Board Member Peters echoed everything Board Member Hardy had said. She said the present curriculum was incredible.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that she felt public school education was the backbone of America and said she felt everyone representing the Merrimack School District needed to be held accountable.

Chair Martin said progress was made when a community and School Board bought into the leadership team.

Board Member Halter said she noticed a big difference for the better in the way her children were being taught presently as opposed to three years ago during COVID-19.

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. February 13, 2024 (Public & Non-Public Minutes) (Carried over from 2/19/24)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from February 13, 2024, as presented. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. February 19, 2024 (Public & Non-Public Minutes)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from February 19, 2024, as presented. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

c. March 4, 2024 (Non-Public Minutes)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve the non-public minutes from March 4, 2024, as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

d. March 7, 2024 (Special Meeting Minutes)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve the special meeting minutes from March 7, 2024, as presented. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Resignations

- Ms. Rebekah Spotts, School Counselor, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Leslie Warhola, School Counselor, Merrimack Middle School

b. Teacher Nominations

- Ms. Tracy Griffenhagen, Special Education Coordinator, Thorntons Ferry School

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that she had attended the Professional Development Committee and reported that people were taking courses and getting re-certified.

b. Correspondence

Chair Martin shared that he and the rest of the School Board received an email regarding concerns about the French program and exploring the possibility of expanding the program to make it a more world-language-friendly offering at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.

Board Member Peters shared that she had received additional correspondence regarding questions about the SAU building and the budget, and she had forwarded the questions to the central office.

Board Member Hardy also shared that she had received correspondence regarding the SAU building and the budget, and she, too, forwarded those emails to the central office.

c. Comments

There were none.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he felt it was imperative that they find a solution to the constant stress and anxiety of funding education in the Town of Merrimack. He said he felt the town needed better representation from the people they elected in Merrimack to go to Concord and represent Merrimack's best community interests.

Mr. Mower said he felt block scheduling would deliver more educational services with less cost.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:58 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.