Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
January 2, 2024

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

Not Present:

Student Representative Shaun Evidente (Excused)

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. S.J. Torres, 10 Brieann Drive, addressed the Board and said he was present to ask the School Board for help with the purchase of a new scoreboard.

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and suggested that Mr. Torres attend the Budget Committee meeting as well.

Mr. Mower said he was interested in figuring out how the proposed new SAU central office would be addressed.

Mr. Mower encouraged the School Board to adopt a 4 x 4 block schedule. He said he felt it would save money and utilize the staff to its fullest.

Chair Martin commented that the Board was aware of the concerns the residents had regarding the 2024 – 2025 budget. He said the school district's budget was a substantial portion of the taxes. However, he noted that the total tax increase was not solely due to the school district, but the Town of Merrimack had lost $74 million in commercial/industrial property tax funding, which affected private property tax rates. He said the town had also lost $1 million in state funding for the schools. He said the goal of the School Board was to do everything they needed to do for the students while being fiscally responsible to the community.

Chair Martin said that at the end of every budget cycle, they were required to give the surplus back to the taxpayers. He said that the town was currently sitting on an $8.2 million surplus and suggested that might be something that could be discussed with the town to see if a portion of that money could offset some of the school district's items.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that in the process of developing a budget, the administration primarily made every effort to understand the needs of the children. He also said that they understood that they also had a significant responsibility to the taxpayers in Merrimack. He said they were absolutely prepared to work with the School Board and the Budget Committee. Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that the proposed new central SAU office was not a want but a critical need, as was the MESSA contract.

Board Member Peters commented that the Board and the administration had worked very hard together over the past few years, and she appreciated the willingness to be heard and to work together.

Board Member Hardy commented that the voters had passed the MTA contract the previous year, and also, the guaranteed maximum rate for the staff's benefits was something they could not do anything about.

Board Member Halter commented that she had been hearing comments about the budget as well. She also said she hoped the continuation of building the reading program would be preserved.

3. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Maintenance

Mr. Tom Touseau, Director of Maintenance, was present to discuss the proposed maintenance budget. He said there were four areas in which he wanted to highlight:

1. Districtwide Repair Supply Cost Rising
2. Emergency Retrofit Lease Cost for Unit Ventilators (10-year Lease)
3. Districtwide A/C Split-Unit Systems (12)
4. Window Repair at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

Question: Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked about the tractors, the mowers, and the automobiles. She asked how he determined when to purchase a piece of equipment versus selling it or purchasing something new.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that if they could repair it, they would, but if it hits the end of its productive life, they would likely purchase something new.

Question: Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked what schools the proposed A/C units would be installed in and if there was a long-term plan to install A/C units in all of the schools.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the district had installed a certain number of A/C units per year for a number of years, and then they put it on pause. Mr. Touseau said they were asking for 12 units, but they needed to figure out where they would be installed. He added that on a long-term basis, he felt there were more efficient ways to go than split systems, but when they were looking at certain students and programs, then it made sense to him.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added that some schools did not have ductwork, and that was why they had to utilize mini-splits.

Question: Board Member Halter asked how many mini-splits were currently in the district.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that there was one in each computer lab, and the remaining were randomly placed among the other schools.

Comment: Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that many people compared the Merrimack School District to the Bedford School District, and she felt it was important to note that a school built in 1948 is going to be much more costly than a new building.

Question: Chair Martin asked if each of the schools used different amounts of water.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that they did, as there were different populations at each school. He noted that the water used at the James Mastricola Elementary School was for watering the field.

Question: Chair Martin asked, regarding the gym floors, if they refinished and repainted the gym lines every year.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that all of the gym floors were scrubbed and recoated on a yearly basis. He added that every 15 to 20 years, the floors needed to be sanded, but each floor could only be re-sanded every time, and then they would need to be replaced.

Question: Board Member Halter asked why they did not spend much money on trash disposal in 2022 – 2023.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that during COVID, sometimes the trash got picked up, and sometimes the company was unable to do it.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what was driving the increase in the maintenance of cameras and other purchased services.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that the cameras were no longer under warranty, and they now needed to pay for a service plan.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what the Mechanical/Energy Management/Maintenance Agreement was.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that it was an agreement the district had with a company that serviced the boilers and the water heaters, replaced filters, and monitored the systems on a 24/7 basis. He added that they made repairs to that equipment, as necessary.

Question: Board Member Halter asked how old the windows that were proposed to be replaced at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School were.

Answer: Mr. Touseau replied that the windows were about 52 years old, and some were significantly deteriorated. He added that it was an absolute need.

Comment: Board Member Halter commented that the proposed maintenance budget was down by 21% from the previous year, and she was happy to support it.

Comment: Chief Educational Officer Olsen pointed out that if an item did not need to be purchased, repaired, or replaced, they did not ask for it. He said they did not engage in incremental increases.

Question: Board Member Halter asked what projects were done the previous year that they were not doing this year.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the prior year, they spent $1.1 million on the roof at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School, but added that the

current year, they were looking at $707,000 for a different project, which was a net difference of -$400,000.

Answer: Mr. Touseau also replied that the prior year, they had done repairs on the track and repairs to the partitions in the bathrooms.

The School Board collectively thanked Mr. Touseau and his staff for all of their hard work.

b. Technology/Library Services

Mr. Jason Pelletier, Director of Technology, was present to discuss the proposed technology/library services budget. He said the goal of the Technology & Library Services was to provide students, teachers, and staff with the tools they needed to succeed in the 21st century and also support teaching, learning, and operations across the district.

Mr. Pelletier said his budget included increased spending on additional resources in Technology & Library, year two of the items listed on the Capital Improvement Plan. He reviewed some of the major budget increases as follows:

- Instructional Equipment Repairs up by 200% due to Increased Device Repair Needs
- Capital Improvement Plan for Technology/Library Increased by 8% Largely due to the Upgrade of the Firewall. (Approximately $100,000)
- Two SANS (storage network)
- Software & Licensing Increased by 72% (Increase by $59,000)

Comment: Board Member Peters commented that her school (outside of the Merrimack School District) used only Google Classroom, but personally, she used Microsoft because that was what she was most comfortable with. She said she felt that while Google was okay to use with grades K -12 schools, most colleges still used Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.

Question: Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked for further information regarding the 300% increase in the software and licensing line item.

Answer: Mr. Pelletier replied that one of the big reasons for the increase was that Microsoft changed its licensing. He added that the licenses would now allow for Education Qualified Users, and that would allow full-time, part-time, and contractors to use it if they needed to.

Mr. Pelletier further replied that the district used the Microsoft A3 license, and that allowed for the use of the desktop version of Microsoft. He added that the cost of all of the software had increased significantly.

The School Board collectively thanked Mr. Pelletier for the presentation of the Technology/Library budget.

c. Student Services/Student Wellness

Ms. Sarah Reinhardt, Director of Student Services, and Ms. Sara Parrotto, Director of Student Wellness, were present to discuss the proposed budget for Student Services/Student Wellness.

Ms. Parrotto said the Special Education portion of the proposed budget represented the anticipated costs, including the anticipated number of special education students they would have the following year. She said the amount represented the cost of providing a quality, free, and appropriate public

education to students with disabilities. She said that currently, 21% of the students in the district have educational disabilities.

Ms. Parrotto noted the following:

- The Elementary Contracted Services Line increased due to Referrals for Special Education for Younger Students.
- Increase in Costs for Contracted Services and Out-of-District Placements
- Change in Out-of-District Placements (Aged out or Returned to Public Schools)

Ms. Parrotto said the Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) programming was part of the proposed budget.

Ms. Reinhardt explained that some of the changes in the proposed budget included:

- Focus on Providing Additional Support and Continuation of Programming, Including having a Universal Screener with the Schools and Expanding it from K-8 to K-12
- Continuing Looking at Second Steps Curriculum (In Process)
- Introduction of having Summer Camp for Kindergarten
- Supplies for the Staff
- Parent Education
- Continue Work with the Youth Educational Employment Service (YEES) and the Nashua Youth Council

Question: Board Member Peters asked to please explain the request for a $300,000 increase for SEL.

Answer: Ms. Reinhardt replied that it was a movement between line items and not necessarily a $300,000 increase.

Comment: Board Member Peters requested the data to support the changes that totaled $300,000.

Question/Comment: Board Member Peters said the district had hired two Reading Interventionists the prior year to help prevent identification for SPED services due to the learning loss due to COVID-19, and it would keep the numbers down. She said that based on the opening statement; it was anticipated that the number of students needing the services would be growing. Moving forward, she asked what the plan was to help students with learning loss who did not really need an IEP or 504 plan.

Answer: Ms. Parrotto replied that Reading and Math Interventionists were essential, especially in the lower grade levels. She said one of the struggles with students who were new referrals was that it was about more than just reading and writing but the high population of students who did not receive early intervention services, so they might have a developmental delay.

The School Board collectively thanked both Ms. Reinhardt and Ms. Parrotto for their presentation on Student Services/Student Wellness.

d. District

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that much of the Merrimack School District's budget consisted of contractual obligations.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed items that had no change because they were part of the MESSA and MTA contracts:

- Support Staff Improvements: $ 78,000
- Professional Staff Improvements: $ 51,000
- Workshops: $ 75,000
- Graduate Studies: $120,000
- District Initiatives: $150,000

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained that there were some new items in the proposed budget, which included:

- Mentors for Stipends: $ 80,000
- Curriculum Inst. & Assessment: $ 75,000
- Additional Professional Development: $100,000
- School Board Contingency Line: $100,000

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that the cost of all insurance had gone up, but the cost of fuel had gone down a little bit. He added that there was an increase in the legal services line item of $50,000, and there was a 5% contractual increase in transportation services.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell pointed out that the district had finished paying the middle school bond, which would free up $800,000.

Question: Vice-Chair Rothhaus said that when they had unused funds at the end of the year, those funds go back to the town. She asked if they could legally form a relationship with the town that perhaps would allow a portion of that money to offset some of the capital improvement programs or other things that they really needed.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that it would be nice to have that conversation with the town. He added that it would be a good idea to start the conservation with legal counsel.

Question: Board Member Halter asked if it were possible to have a line item in the budget that indicated the district was going to save for something.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that it would be a Capital Reserve Account, and the only way to put money in that account would be via a Warrant Article.

Question: Board Member Peters asked Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle to explain the continued expansions of the curriculum.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that the current proposed budget reflected what they felt they needed funds for and how they used funds in the past. She commented that one of the questions a Board Member asked had to do with how mentors were being compensated for their time. She said the stipends for mentors were a separate line item on the proposed budget.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that the district was getting a different level of applicants than it had in the past. She said people were coming in with letters of eligibility but had to seek alternate pathways to obtain their license. She said the state required them to have a site-based mentor to obtain the license. She added that the district currently does not pay

the mentors to support those people trying to obtain their licenses, and she felt they should be compensated for their time.

Question: Board Member Halter asked if the cost would be relatively stable to continue using iReady at our current level. Does it include any other testing platforms?

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that she budgeted for $130,000, and the most recent quote was for $124,000, and $22,000 of that was for professional development that they may or may not need.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said another area she was looking for funding was for district initiative professional development. She added that they continued to have some curriculum needs, especially in the areas of social studies, health, and perhaps foreign language, and the requested monies were for the purchase of pilot programs.

Question: Board Member Peters stated the state was requiring graduates to have Personal Finance as a stand-alone class and asked if new curriculum would be need to be purchased in the future.

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that they would need to plan for that as they would need to purchase something.

The School Board collectively thanked Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle for their presentation.

4. OLD BUSINESS

a. Board's Response to the 2024 – 2034 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan, which the Planning & Building Committee had approved. The CIP included items at various buildings, such as:

- Roofing
- Gym Floor Replacement
- Boilers
- Window Replacement at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School (32 windows)
- Technology Infrastructure
- Turf Field – MHS/Track
- HVAC – Split Systems (12)
- MHS Locker Rooms – Upgrade
- Safety/Security – Cameras (Funded by a grant)
- Safety/Security – Lock Sets (Funded by a grant)
- Score Boards/Campus Signage
- Master Plan/SAU Office

The plan can be viewed by going to the Merrimack School District's website under Supporting Material for Board meetings.

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the Capital Improvement Plan, as submitted. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. December 11, 2023, Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Peters made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from the December 11, 2023, meeting. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Nominations

- Ms. Jocelyn O'Connor, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Dr. Jennifer Gonzalez, Science Teacher, Merrimack High School

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, as presented. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, addressed the Board and said he would be remiss if he did not tell the Board that he felt they were unable to see the advantage of capital reserve planning.
Mr. Mower also said, as the Vice-President of the Historical Society, that they were hosting a program on January 16th that was open to the public, and the speaker would be Ms. Sue Fineman, who was an expert on one-room schoolhouses.

8. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:24 p.m., Board Member Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.