Approved 10-2-2023

Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
September 18, 2023

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

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions to share.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that the previous Friday, the leadership team had a very successful professional development session with legal counsel covering a variety of topics.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the previous week, Ms. Sarah Reinhardt, the Director of Student Services, and he had met with two local State Representatives, Maureen Mooney, and Tim McGough, as they were looking to obtain some information regarding restraint and seclusion.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that he would meet with Mr. Mark Dolan, Strategic Planning and Innovation Consultant from the New Hampshire School Board's Association, where they would discuss the strategic planning process. He said the goal was to have a three-year strategic plan in place by early spring.

b. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle congratulated Principal Boezeman and Assistant Principal Hoppa, Merrimack Middle School, on a very successful Open House.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said that the following Monday, September 25th, he and Tom Touseau, Director of Maintenance, would have a meeting with the School District's Planning and Building Committee. He said he had a rough draft of the Capital Improvement Plan that went out six years, and he wanted to get their input prior to bringing them the final version.

d. School Board Update

There was no update to share.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Evidente said that there was a lot of backlash from students regarding the no-phone policy. He proposed that the students be able to listen to music while they did independent work. Chair Martin replied that the first step would be to bring his proposal to administration and then request that the item be added to a future agenda.

5. OLD BUSINESS

Vice-Chair Rothhaus stated that they would meet with a group of people who were a part of the "mock accident" on October 16th. She said the SADD was forty years old, and the advisor, the President of SADD, and four State Representatives would be in attendance, and proclamations would be presented.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Statewide Assessment System (SAS) Scores

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle reviewed Statewide Assessment System (SAS) Scores. The presentation, in its' entirety, can be found by going to www.sau26.org, then by clicking the "School Board" tab, and then clicking the "Supporting Materials for School Board Meetings" tab. (2023 – 09/18/23).

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle shared that the district did very well on the SATs, noting that the mean total score was 1016, and they ranked above the state and national average.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked what the plan was to provide further help to those students who were in level one. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that they had updated the Envisions Program to the most recent edition. She added that while the district had reading interventionists, they did not have math-specific interventionists and noted they might approach the Board in the future regarding that. She also said that they were piloting a program entitled "Wit and Wisdom," which was a comprehensive literary program.

Board Member Peters said she would be interested in knowing what the data was for 7th and 8th grade math. She added that she was 100% in favor of hiring math interventionists.

Board Member Halter said the pre-Covid math scores were very good, and in the current year, the scores were lower. She suggested that they take a look at what they were doing pre-Covid when the scores were higher.

Board Member Hardy also expressed her support for hiring a math interventionist.

Chair Martin said he was happy that they could focus on the target areas that needed attention.

b. Review of Preliminary Timeline for FY25 Budget

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the 2024 – 2025 Budget Timeline to begin on September 12, 2023, and end with a vote by ballot on Tuesday, April 9, 2023.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he felt it was important to have a budget that provided for the staffing needed, materials and supplies, professional development, academic support, and social and emotional learning.

c. Review of Five-Year Enrollment Trends

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said over the past five years, the PreK – 12 enrollments had declined by 276 students, with nearly half of that decline at the high school level. He said he was not overly concerned about the decline given the reality that although the demographic data was not entirely predictable, it did tend to be cyclical. He added that the Covid-19 pandemic caused an increase in the number of students being home-schooled.

d. Review of the New Hampshire School Board's Association (NHSBA) Resolution in Preparation for the Delegate Assembly

Chair Martin said the 2023 NHSBA Delegate Assembly would be held on Saturday, October 14, 2023, at 10:30 a.m. at the Grappone Conference Center.

Chair Martin explained that part of the meeting consisted of School Board members from across New Hampshire getting together and voting on proposed resolutions. He then reviewed the proposed resolutions.

Board Member Peters stated that she opposed the proposed resolution that was submitted by the Manchester Board of School Committee as follows:

"Amend NHSBA II:S to read NHSBA supports additional state adequacy aid for public pre-kindergarten."

NHSBA Board of Directors Recommendation: **Supports the alternative language.**

Board Member Peters said she opposed the proposed resolution because she felt the tax impact for free, universal pre-kindergarten would not be sustainable.

Board Member Halter and Board Member Hardy said they interpreted the proposed language a bit differently in that they felt it meant that they would support additional state adequacy aid for public kindergarten.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she supported what Board Peters had said.

Chair Martin commented that he was in favor of the proposed resolution.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented that the formula that determined the amount of state adequacy was convoluted at best.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to accept the proposed alternative resolution brought forth by the Manchester Board of School Committee that stated to "Amend NHSBA II:S to read NHSBA supports additional state adequacy aid for public pre-kindergarten, subject to clarification regarding the spirit of the resolution. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Board Member Peters also said she opposed the proposed resolution that was submitted by the Manchester Board of School Committee as follows:

Proposed Resolution: "We proposed advocating that Medicaid be used as the primary calculator for free and reduced lunch numbers for NH school districts; advocating for the state to join the Medicaid Direct Certification program; advocate that Medicaid to Schools (MTS) be revised to allow greater flexibility in sign-off (by guidance counselors, e.g.); reduce administrative burden on localities; and fund an increase in per service fees."

Proposed Alternative Resolution: The NHSBA Board of Directors **recommends splitting this proposal into three separate resolutions:**

#1 and #3 – No opposition

#2 – Opposed "NHSBA supports legislation and rulemaking that helps make Medicaid to Schools (MTS) funding more accessible for school districts by allowing greater flexibility in sign-off (by guidance counselors, e.g.) and by supporting implied parental consent and a clearly defined and executable opt-out process for accessing public benefits for students with disabilities."

Board Member Peters commented that she never supported "implied" consent and that parents who received Medicaid should have full control over the information, and it should never be implied.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that the wording could say "after multiple attempts of trying to reach out to a parent." She said in some instances, if they did not have implied consent on certain things, there would be no documentation at all, especially with free and reduced lunch because the kids needed to be fed.

Chair Martin said he understood both positions but acknowledged that some families were incredibly difficult to reach.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to accept the proposed alternative resolution regarding supporting implied parental consent, with #1 and #3 as written, and #2 with the expectation that there would be a change of language with the clarification that due diligence on the part of the school district. Board Member Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to support the proposed resolutions as submitted by several school districts across New Hampshire as recommended by the New Hampshire School Board Association. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motions.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

e. Merrimack High School Highlights

Mr. Steve Claire, Principal of Merrimack High School, addressed the Board and shared a video highlighting the 2022 – 2023 school year.

The School Board collectively thanked Mr. Claire for sharing the video and stated that it was very impressive.

Mr. Claire stated that the Merrimack School District would be hosting 125 10th grade Korean students.

7. POLICIES

a. Revised Use of Physical Restraint/Seclusion Policy (JKAA) 1st Reading

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that the policy had been updated to reflect the latest amendments to the statute.

The School Board made several recommendations, and Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would bring the proposed policy back to the Board after the edits were made.

b. Student Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Policy

Mr. Jason Pelletier, Director of Library Media and Technology, addressed the Board and said the main purpose of the policy was to place some parameters around the class of 2024 and 2025 in terms of devices that were acceptable to be in the classroom.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus stated she felt it was important to note that the School Board had moved to adopt the proposed policy based on legal recommendations because they did not have any control over outside devices, and it was important to protect the district from any liability.

MOTION: Board Member Peters made a motion to waive the first reading of (BYOD) Student Bring Your Own Device policy. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items to review.

9. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Chair Martin commented that the Professional Development Committee had met where they discussed the professional development offerings. He said new members were introduced, and they discussed how they would use the funds.

Board Member Peters commented that the Joint Loss Management Committee would be meeting the following day, but she would be unable to attend as it would be held during working hours. She said she would provide an update at a future meeting. She also said that the negotiation meetings regarding MESSA had begun on September 28th.

b. Correspondence

Board Member Peters said a parent had contacted her regarding safety at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School during pick-up procedures. She said she referred that parent to the district administration.

Board Member Hardy said she received additional correspondence regarding energy drinks that were being sold in the vending machines at the high school and would follow up with Dave Dziki, Food Services Director.

c. Comments

Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked if there was a way that all teachers could be notified of changes in policies so they were up to date.

10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

State Representative Tim McGough, Bowers Landing, addressed the Board and thanked Chief Educational Officer Olsen and his staff for making time to speak with Representative Mooney and himself. He offered to answer any questions the Board may have had regarding SB 179 and HB 491 that were passed.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:16 p.m., Chair Martin made a motion to adjourn. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.