Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
June 19, 2023

5:30 P.M. NON-PUBLIC SESSION PURSUANT TO RSA 91A:3, II (a) (b) & (c) – Merrimack Training Classroom

- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Ken Martin, Chair; Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair; Lori Peters, Board Member; Naomi Halter, Board Member; and Jenna Hardy, Board Member. Also present were Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business; Amy Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment, and Student Representative Sean 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 were no public comments.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen opened his comments by wishing everyone a happy summer vacation. He thanked the administrators and staff for a great school year.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that he had a wonderful opportunity to have lunch with the school bus drivers the previous week where he thanked them for their years of safe driving. He said he would be doing a cable program on "school bus safety" later on in the summer.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that he and Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle had been meeting with the principals and staff at the elementary schools to discuss what they wanted to do from a curriculum and instructional perspective. He said the leadership team was working with Polly Bath, who was a nationally recognized behavioral expert where they discussed the multi-tiered system of support.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated those students who won awards at the Merrimack High School Awards Night, pointing out that $135,000 was given in awards.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated Ryan Church who was the bowling state champion and would be attending the National Championships in Indiana representing the Town of Merrimack.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said there was a Goals Setting Meeting scheduled for the following Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and the Board had the agenda and supporting documentation.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he was happy to announce that there would be a "Band Camp" this year after a 20-year hiatus.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also thanked everyone for all of the different end-of-year celebrations that were happening. She said she was very happy to have attended the high school graduation ceremony.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle reviewed a few legislative updates as summarized below:

- House Bill 157-1 (Civics Instruction Requirement)

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said they had implemented the testing requirements as required by the RSA and they implemented a remediation effort for those students who did not pass the test; either the local assessment or the naturalization test on their first try.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also said they were in compliance with the revised version of RSA 189:11 which required the teaching of cursive handwriting and multiplication facts by the end of grade. She said they had the phonics program in grades K-3, Fundations (which teaches cursive handwriting), and the new word study program, Spelling Connections, which also taught cursive handwriting.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle congratulated the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, one of eight schools in New Hampshire that had been awarded the "Leaning into Literacy" grant offered by the state. She said a multi-year grant would provide $50,000 in funding to continue the shift from a balanced framework to a structured literacy framework.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that he had a conversation with the DPW Director regarding the decommissioning of the Brentwood building. He said the utilities would be stubbed out at the street on McElwain. He said the utilities had started to be shut off inside of the building. He added that they were moving forward with the traffic study.

d. School Board Update

Chair Martin echoed the prior sentiments of the Board regarding high school graduation. He reiterated that the Goal Setting meeting would be held on the following Thursday at the middle school.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Evidente said the students had not yet found out who their advisors were, and they were open to suggestions. He said the Class of 2025 was planning to do two or three fundraisers over the summer and was in the process of confirming the dates.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Review of Process for Policy Approval

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he provided the Board with a sample policy of BGB (Policy Adoption) which was an older policy, but the most recent version was a sample policy BGAA (Policy Development, Adoption, and Review. He asked the School Board to review the documents for discussion at a future Board meeting.

b. Alternative Pathways Grant

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said the district applied for and received a $45,000 Alternative Pathways grant over three years and was based on the number of kids that complete the program.

Board Member Peters clarified that "alternative pathways" did not mean it was "easier to graduate" but a recognition that students could learn in a multitude of ways and accomplish the state's requirements for graduation.

c. July 4th Parade

Chair Martin commented that some of the Board Members would be attending the 4th of July parade.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Year in Review of Pre-K – Grade 6, & Co-Curricular Activities

Ms. Bonnie Painchaud, Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School; Ms. Nicole Rheault, Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School; Ms. Michelle Romein, Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School; and Ms. Julie DeLuca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School were present to discuss the "Year in Review."

Ms. Romein said they were all in agreement that one of the biggest successes of the year was the addition of extracurricular activities at the elementary school level. She said the added extracurricular activities were an absolute success with over 765 students, and 50 educators participating in the first year alone. The clubs that were offered included: Cheer Club, Pickleball, Animation, Disney Art, Knitting, Clay Club, a Zoom Cooking Class, Basketball, Bird Watching, Chess, and many more.

Chair Martin thanked the panel for sharing how successful the extracurricular activities turned out.

b. Review of 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results (Full presentation is available on the School District's Website)

Ms. Fern Seiden, System of Care Coordinator, addressed the Board and stated that the survey was representative of a partnership between the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education. She said 914 of 1,176 Merrimack students participated in the survey. She noted the data did not include 100% participation.

Ms. Seiden provided a very high-level review of the 2021 survey: (She noted the data reflected a snapshot of the student's experience during Covid.)

- Less in-person experiences that might prompt electronic bullying.
- More use of technology could prompt more electronic bullying.
- Less access to drugs and alcohol so there was a reduction.
- Increased stressors due to Covid impacted students' mental health.
- Mental health concerns continue to rise.
  - Females are more at risk: 57.5%
  - Behavioral health was already beginning to rise in 2018 – 2019
- The opioid pandemic continued to impact families.
- The numbers in Merrimack tracked with the State of New Hampshire with the exception of:
  - Merrimack students were less likely to wear bike helmets.
  - Merrimack students were less likely to see public messages about avoiding substances.

Ms. Seiden stated that the two pieces of information that she felt would help them were strengthening the relationships between students and trusted adults.

Ms. Seiden reviewed a few topics of interest including:

- Bullying (saw a decrease during Covid)
- Bullying (saw an increase in cyber-bullying)
- Most students felt safe attending school, but 6.2% avoided school because they felt unsafe.
- Substance & tobacco use stayed the same or dropped slightly.
- Mental Health
  - Increase in the number of students who considered suicide.
- Stressed the importance of getting good sleep.

In conclusion, Ms. Seiden said that for immediate help, call:

NAMI NH Information and Resource Line at 1-800-242-6264 – Press 4

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she felt the information was very important and she appreciated all the work being done on prevention. She asked to what extent should they address the use of social media and the way it negatively affected students.

Board Member Peters commented that she was surprised that social media was not mentioned. Ms. Seiden replied that the issue was addressed in Health Class, the "Away for the Day" policy at the middle school, and the theme of the Mental Health Awareness Month was regarding reducing screen time and the impact on mental health.

c. Discussion of Chief Education Officer Olsen's Performance

Chair Martin commented that working with Mr. Olsen had been a true joy. He said he was fair, compassionate, and involved. He added it was evident in the way the district had progressed in the last two years.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said the evaluation process included asking the Superintendent to do a self-evaluation and the School Board used a National Evaluation Standard for all Superintendents of schools which was evidence-based and research-based. She said the School Board felt the district had a distinguished leader.

Board Member Hardy commented that she felt there was a shift from "things could be going in the right direction" to "clearly, I see a difference for the better." She said she felt Chief Educational Officer Olsen had done a great job of leading the district.

Board Member Peters said one of the things she liked best about working with Chief Educational Officer Olsen was that he gave honor where honor was due. She said only a man with great character could have the level of humility that he had. She added she was very grateful that he was here.

Board Member Halter commented that she agreed with all of her colleague's statements and added that she did not feel Chief Educational Officer Olsen ever shied away from difficult conversations. She said she felt he did a very hard job and did it very well.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said it was his absolute pleasure and privilege to work in the Merrimack School District. He said he viewed the work done as teamwork and the common goal was to focus on the needs of children.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that his administrative staff was absolutely superb.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen requested the School Board to review the below job descriptions to then take action on them at the next meeting. **(Job descriptions are available under Board Meeting Supporting Documentation online.)**

d. Review of Athletic Director Job Description
e. Review of District Registrar Job Description
f. Review of Director of School Counseling Job Description
g. Review of Middle School Dean of Students Job Description
h. Review of Reading Interventionist Job Description

7. POLICIES

a. Fund Balance (DIA) (2nd Reading)

   There were no edits or discussion from Board.

b. Wellness Policy (JLCF) (2nd Reading)

   There were no edits or discussion from Board.

c. Student Transportation Services (EEA) (1st Reading)

MOTION: Board Member Peters made a motion to waive the first reading of policy (EEA) Student Transportation Services. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 3 – 0 – 2. (Abstained – Chair Martin, and Board Member Halter)

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. June 5, 2023 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 5, 2023, public meeting, as presented. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 3 – 0 – 0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Teacher Resignations

- Ms. Alicia Hansen-Proulx, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School
- Ms. Brianna Durand, Language Arts Coordinator, Merrimack Middle School

b. Teacher Nominations

- Ms. Emily Claire, Science Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Mr. Lauren Danis, Elementary Education Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Ms. Deborah Werthman, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Haley Ness, Math Teacher, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Elin Pelland, Social Worker, Merrimack High School
- Ms. Rebecca Hawkes, Elementary Education Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Mikiko McGee, Special Education Coordinator, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Ms. Leia Donovan, Language Arts Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Ms. Rachael Allan, Preschool Teacher, James Mastricola Elementary 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.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Chair Martin stated that the Healthcare Trust Containment Committee had met the previous week and shared that open enrollment had officially closed. He said the “Blue Choice” plan was going away in June of 2025. He also reported that the Safety Coordinator training funds had been proportioned out throughout the schools for wellness incentives for staff, lunch incentives, and raffling off yoga mats & sunscreen.

Board Member Peters said the Joint Loss Management Committee had met where they received a very detailed list from Primex of all of the injury's employees had experienced. She said the charge was to work with the safety teams to ensure that everyone was as safe as possible.

Board Member Halter said she had attended the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting where they discussed the following:

- Summer concerts in the park are on Wednesdays through August 16th.
- Fourth of July festivities.
- Movies in the Park on Saturday, July 29th – Top Gun Maverick, Saturday, August 26th – Minions, Rise of Gru, and on Saturday, September 30th – Puss & Boots – The Last Wish

Board Member Halter said the afterschool program at Wasserman Park would move forward for families from the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School the following year and registration was open.

Board Member Halter said she also attended the Budget Committee meeting where they held its reorganization meeting resulting in Chuck Mower stepping down from the position of Chair and Naomi Schoenfeld being nominated as the new Chair.

b. Correspondence

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she received correspondence asking what the graduation rate was in Merrimack. She replied she would get back to the person.

Chair Martin said he received correspondence regarding curriculum, and he sent that person up the chain of command.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were no public comments.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:53 p.m. Board Member Peters made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.