Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
February 20, 2023

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

Not Present:

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Heather Robitaille of 45 Springfield Circle said she was intrigued by the presence from the State Representatives. She welcomed all State Representatives to be informed about the strengths and the challenges that our District faces. She felt their presence turned into a display of partisan politics which she believes does not have a place in our school board meetings or interfering in our students' education. She also said she was disturbed to hear the discussion supporting education freedom accounts which have remained largely unchecked and unsupervised in our state resulting in gross over budget spending and a reduction in tax dollars available for the public education this board is meant to protect and support.

She is opposed to any attempt by the government or school board to sensor materials available in our schools and public libraries. The Board and the administration has her sincere thanks and appreciation for all your do to support staff, students and the community. She said the goals and initiatives are building good positive forward momentum for the district and she looks forward to that continuing.

Chuck Mower of 4 Depot Street spoke as Chairman of the School Budget Committee. He said the Budget Committee took the School Board deliberations and discussion into account during its review of the budget. He supported the Budget Committee's work. He wants to work with the School Board to streamline, reorganize to save money and to make education more efficient and less complicated. He welcomed future discussions between the Budget Committee and the School Board.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions to share.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Updated

Chief Educational Officer Olsen announced that 4th grade students are anticipated to return to their classrooms at James Mastricola Elementary School after vacation. He thanked everyone involved.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated the members of the Merrimack High School swim team, bowling team, gymnastics team and wrestling team for their participation and accomplishments at the State Championships.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted 11 middle school students registered to participate in basketball and floor hockey intramurals.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen announced nine cocurricular activities would be offered at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School in March. He thanked the School Board and Budget Committee for supporting the funds to allow a variety of cocurricular activities at all schools.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted two programs for the community organized by Director of Student Wellness Seiden. The programs are Family Connection Circles and Everyday Mindfulness Strategies.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen acknowledged a group of high school students who performed in a production of Beauty and the Beast.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated she would be presenting a Vision of a Learner later in the meeting.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reported he is in receipt of a few quotes to raze the Brentwood building. He is waiting to receive a few outstanding quotes. The cost to raze the building is well within the budgeted amount.

d. School Board Update

Chair Rothhaus reported she represented Division I for the National Federation of High School Sports in Orlando, Florida last week. Topics discussed were safety in school sports and concussion protocols. She suggested Athletic Director Mike Soucy be invited to a future meeting to explain to the public Merrimack School District's concussion protocols and safety when it comes to concussions in sports. Another discussion topic was athletics is a privilege, not a right. All rules that were created were related to school safety. She thanked the budget committee members. Lastly, she announced the FIRST Team completed assembly of the robot for competition.

e. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Vadney reported tickets are on sale in the cafeteria for the March 10th sophomore semiformal. Preparations for spirit week, Aril 10-14, are underway. Seniors can sign-up for senior yard signs.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. Revote on Warrant Article #6, School District Operating Budget

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained the Budget Committee amended the Operating Budget on February 16, 2023. The amendments increased the Operating Budget by $248,355.

The following is a list of the amended items and the cost or savings.

- Softball Dugout, $54,553
- Furniture, $25,550
- School Board Contingency $150,000
- ESOL Supplies, $1,100
- Utilities- Brentwood ($7,923)
- .5 FTE Grounds Maint. Position, $25,000
- Implementation – Master Plan, $25
- New SAU Office, $25
- New Performing Arts Center, $25

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the operating budget as amended by the Budget Committee totaling $88,577,992. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

Vice Chair Peters apposed the addition of $150,000 for School Board Contingency because it was not needed post pandemic. Out of respect for the Budget Committee's work she asked for an explanation.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell explained the $150,000 was added to the School Board Contingency fund during the pandemic in order to have funds available to use in the event the ESSER funds were delayed. The account was created during the pandemic and that it was no longer needed for covid reasons.

MOTION CARRIED: 5-0-0.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Vision of a Learner

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle introduced and thanked the members of the Vision of a Learner Committee; Nicci Rheault, Adam Caragher, Julie DeLuca, Bonnie Painchaud, Michelle Romein, Steve Claire, Angela Maslanka, Fern Seiden, Heather Barker and Maureen Mooney.

Each committee member presented a portion of the presentation. The following is a summary of the Vision of a Learner presentation.

The purpose of the Vision of a Learner process was to engage with a broad range of stakeholders within the Merrimack Community to develop a common understanding of the values, priorities, opportunities, and challenges of learning. The group engaged with many constituency groups, including students, parent/guardians, teachers, administrators, and community members in a variety of formats, including interviews and surveys. The work consisted of three phases: Research, Vision, and Recommendations, with goals and key activities established for each phase.

In Phase 1, committee members gathered perspectives from stakeholders in an effort to better understand their priorities for student learning, and to identify the opportunities and barriers of those priorities. Throughout the work in Phase 1, core focus areas emerged for learners, including a focus on empathy, self-management, working together, and developing independence.

In Phase 2, the group developed a collective vision through the establishment of five key attributes for learners – curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated. Anchoring documents and visuals were created to capture the vision and accompanying supporting language for each attribute.

This work is purposefully connected to Merrimack High School's Vision of a Graduate, which preceded this district-wide visioning.

The Vision of a Learner work is now in Phase 3, which will actively focus on actualizing the Vision of a Learner. This includes determining how we will measure progress in building these learner attributes. A pilot of a strengths-based tool, the DESSA (Devereau Student Strengths Assessment), is happening soon in grade four. Parents/guardians will be notified about this work and how they can learn more about the DESSA.

b. Preparation for Warrant Presentations for Deliberative Session

The Board determined who would move and second each of the warrant articles at the Deliberative Session.

Article #2: Board Member Hardy will make the motion and Board Member Halter will second the motion.
Article #3: Chair Rothhaus will make the motion, Vice Chair Peter will second the motion.
Article #4: Vice Chair Peters will make the motion, Board Member Hardy will second the motion.
Article #5: Board Member Martin will make the motion and Board Member Halter will second the motion.
Article #6: The Budget Committee will move and second the motion.

Vice Chair Peters was excused from the meeting.

c. Update on Graduation Pathways Program and Extended Learning Opportunities

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported the job posting for a Director of Graduation Pathways and Extended Learning Opportunities produced several internal applicants and one external applicant. The external applicant withdrew. Merrimack High School Teacher Harley Hall was selected for the position. Mr. Hall will continue in his teaching role for the remainder of this year and will be paid a stipend for the program planning work that he will conduct outside of his contracted workday. There will be additional discussions with the high school administration at the March 20, 2023 school board meeting.

Board Member Hardy moved to accept the recommendation of Harley Hall as the Director of Graduation Pathways and Extended Learning Opportunities position. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

d. Other

Chair Rothhaus asked for volunteers to work with the Town of Merrimack to explore the possibility of moving the April town elections to a day in March.

Board Member Martin asked for historical information why the Town votes in April.

Chair Rothhaus and Board Member Martin volunteered to investigate moving the Town election day to March.

Assistant Superintendent Shevenell suggested a consultation with the District's legal council be part of the research.

7. POLICIES

a. Approval of Availability and Distribution of Healthy Foods (EFA)

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the policy Availability and Distribution of Healthy Foods (EFA). Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

b. Approval of Child Abuse or Neglect (JLF)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the policy Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect (JLF). Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

c. First Reading of Early Admission to Kindergarten and Grade One (JFAAA)

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to waive the first reading of Early Admission to Kindergarten and Grade One (JFAAA) policy. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

d. First Reading of Service Animals (JMGA)

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to waive the first reading of Service Animals (IMGA) policy. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

e. First Reading of Animals in the School (IMG)

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to waive the first reading of Animals in The School (IMG) policy. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. January 12, 2023 Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to accept the January 12, 2023 minutes. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

b. January 17, 2023 Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to accept the January 17, 2023 minutes. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED 4-0-0.

c. January 19, 2023 Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the January 19, 2023 minutes. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no nomination or resignations.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Martin reported he attended the Healthcare Cost Containment Committee meeting. A representative from HealthTrust reviewed the changes in the Slice of Life Program. Efforts are being made to fill vacant positions on the committee.

Board Member Halter reported she attended a Parks and Recreation Committee meeting last week. The Winter Carnival will be held on February 25 from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. at Wasserman Park. The Parks and Recreation Department received approval from the Town Council to start a pilot after-school program at Wasserman Park for next school year. The pilot program will be restricted to 30 children from Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. Summer Camp registration continues.

Board Member Hardy reported the CIA Committee met. Two new high school courses were presented. A new vocabulary tool is being piloted at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School and Merrimack Middle School. Discussions are ongoing with regards to continue use of Google Read and Write software.

Chair Rothhaus said she enjoys it when the school administration presents to the School Board. She expressed a desire for school administrators to share highlights of their school at future meetings about twice a year.

b. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

c. Comments

There were no comments.

11. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille of 35 Springfield Circle thanked the leadership team and community members for their work on the Vision of Learner and a Vision of a Graduate. She is very excited for what this means for our students, staff, and community. The theme we heard shared about empathy, tolerance, compassion, self-confidence and advocacy hit home how important social and emotional learning is to all students at all levels. She appreciated the thoughtful and consistent messaging from the elementary schools to the high school. She thanked Thorntons Ferry Elementary School unified arts team for the creative work in the showcase of learning and the co-curricular programs. She is proud and grateful to be part of this community.

Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street, recalled his understanding of why election day was moved from March to April. He noted all service animals are required to be certified. Mr. Mower shared a comical story about a former Merrimack farmer, Mr. John Wright.

Mr. Mower stated the community of Merrimack is becoming a very different community today than just a short time ago with different aspirations. He appreciated the Vision of a Learner presentation. He highlighted the fact that the budget committee added a place holder of $25 in the budget for a new SAU office and $25 for a performing arts center.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:45 p.m. Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter

MOTION CARRIED: 4-0-0.