Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
February 6, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

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

Not Present:

Ms. Jenna Hardy, Board Member (Excused)

Ms. Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative (Arrived at approximately 7:55 p.m.)

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 COMMENT

Ms. Marissa Halvatzes, 24 Seaverns Bridge Road, addressed the Board and said she felt using a structured literacy program was important. She said the Merrimack School District was currently using the Balanced Literacy Program and while the program incorporated phonics, it also taught students to rely on tricks like guessing at words based on a picture or using the first letter of the word.

Ms. Erin Alukonis, 6 Mullikin Road, addressed the Board and stated that she felt it was essential to add the proposed three additional Reading Specialists. She also said she appreciated the deep dive into the reading curriculum, noting she was not happy with the curriculum used at the James Mastricola Elementary School.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were no recognitions.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen thanked Carolyn Morin and her husband, Jerry, for helping to clean the Reeds Ferry Nature Trail.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the 3rd grade at the James Mastricola Elementary School had a fundraiser dance-a-thon and donations were made to the Kelly Family Fundraiser and a great time was had by all.

Additionally, Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that there had been a Spelling Bee at the Merrimack Middle School and he congratulated the winners.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said there were many co-curricular activities, and many children were taking part in them. He also said ten students had been selected to participate in the New Hampshire Music Educator's Association South Central District Middle School Music Festival in May, and twenty students participated in the New Hampshire Music Educator's Association Solo Ensemble Festival on Saturday, February 11, 2023.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the students at the middle school had participated with Mr. James Costa in "School Too" where they filmed videos regarding student-driven events. He added that the students at the Merrimack High School participated in the Granite State Challenge team beat the John Stark High School team.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen pointed out that nineteen Merrimack High School students received three free college credits from the Nashua Community College. He also noted that several programs were coming up for parents, including "Family Connection Circles", and "Everyday Mindfulness Strategies".

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle noted that the "Vision of a Learner" had been rolled out at each school and would provide the School Board with a presentation the following week.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the New Hampshire Learning Initiative had reached out to the Merrimack School District to be a host district for OGAP (Ongoing Assessment Project/Math) which was high-quality math professional development for teachers mostly in grades K through 8. She said Merrimack would also be a host district for a Responsive Classroom Workshop.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the issue with the 4th wing of the James Mastricola Elementary School was taking a little bit longer than imagined and felt another six to eight weeks would be needed to complete the project.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell pointed out that the following evening there would be a Budget Committee meeting at 7:00 p.m. at the high school, where the Warrant Articles would be discussed, and would make recommendations to go to the public meeting.

d. School Board Update

Chair Rothhaus said she received an update from the Chair of the Budget Committee, Mr. Chuck Mower. He explained that the Budget Committee heard from all of the departments districtwide and was preparing for deliberations. He also reported that the high school administration stated that there was a 60/40 inequity between gender in participating in athletics. She said the Budget Committee was looking for support because they believe the Athletic Director needed a part-time administrative assistant that would allow him to focus on more athletic initiatives. She added that the Budget Committee was also planning to discuss the Brentwood building issue.

Chair Rothhaus shared that Mr. Mower wanted the School Board and the administration to know that the Budget Committee members remained devoted to seeing that the School District have the funding it needed to be successful.

Chair Rothhaus stated that she had the honor of representing Division I, which was in ten states in the National Federation of High Sports Committee meeting in Orlando, FL. She said it would be her fourth and final year.

e. Student Representative Update

Ms. Vadney said the gift card fundraiser held by the Class of 2023 and Merrimack High School Student Council hosted raised $5,000 for the Venedam Family.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. 2023 – 2024 School Calendar Discussion

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would be presenting the proposed 2023 – 2034 calendar within the next few weeks. He noted that a committee had been put together representing many of the stakeholders the calendar would affect.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Merrimack Delegation Visit

Ms. Rosemarie Rung, State Representative, 21 Ministerial Drive; Ms. Nancy Murphy, State Representative, 20 Brenda Lane; Ms. Wendy Thomas, State Representative, 10 Wildcat Falls; Ms. Maureen Mooney, State Representative, 9 Hansom Drive; Ms. Jeanine Notter, State Representative, 19 Whittier Road; and Mr. Paul Boyd, State Representative, 139 Joppa Road.

Vice-Chair Peters asked if legislation could be written that would allow school districts to hold **non-public** meetings via Zoom or teleconference. Representative Boyd replied that he had co-sponsored a like bill, but it did not specifically identify only non-public sessions.

Representative Mooney said in every odd-numbered year, in the summer and the fall, state agencies began to draft their budgets to present to the Governor. She said the Governor then began to draft his budget, and by law, had to deliver the draft budget to the House Finance Committee by February 15th. She further said the House Finance Committee had six weeks to review the draft budget and hold hearings, deliver their version to the full House, get it to the Senate by early to mid-April, and get it to the Governor for his signature by the end of June.

Representative Mooney said there was “speculation” that the Governor’s draft budget would increase adequacy aid across the board.

Representative Thomas stated that she was working on three bills that were of particular importance to the School Board:

1. Mandate to make insurance companies pay for preventative PFAS care based on CDC guidelines.

2. Creation of a Study Committee to study “long COVID” and ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS)

3. Co-sponsored to reduce the trigger of special education being covered by the state. The number was currently at 3.5 and the proposal was to reduce it to 1.5.

Representative Notter stated that for one year the legislature told communities they were only required to collect a total of $263,000,0000 and in one year, $100,000,000 in reductions would require the state’s other revenue sources to the Education Trust Fund to fill in the gap and fund the remainder of the state’s obligations. The amount of state support for public education did not change because of the shift in revenue sources, but what it did was reduce property taxes raised locally as a percentage of total funding for education. The SWEPT (Statewide Education Property Tax) reduction would amount to one-time aid for communities with an additional $100,000,000 flowing from the state in the fiscal year of 2023.

Representative Notter reviewed the Education Freedom Account as she interpreted it.

Representative Rung noted that not everyone in Concord agreed about the Education Freedom Accounts.

Board Member Martin said he had some concerns regarding the lack of oversight regarding the Education Freedom Accounts.

Chair Rothhaus stated that the Merrimack School District was trying to find the best pathway to meet the needs of every student.

Representative Mooney commented that unhoused students were an issue in many places. She mentioned that Homeless Child Youth (ARP) was a program that could be looked into as well as Title VI Homeless Education. She said they were both federally funded.

Representative Mooney shared that there seemed to be some movement regarding expanding the amount that was in the school building aid fund.

Representative Rung stated that she sponsored a bill (HB 45) that would include the telephone number of the Eating Disorder Helpline for student identification. She said the bill passed the committee and they renamed it the Matthew Brown Act in honor of the Merrimack High School student who suggested it.

Vice-Chair Peters thanked the members of the delegation and said she felt it was important to continue to have an open dialogue.

b. Other

Board Member Halter stated that she had been attending the Budget Committee meetings, and said she felt the Brentwood building needed to be taken care of. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said that just because an item was on the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) it did not mean that it automatically became part of the budget. He added, however, the district had taken the liberty of contracting three demolition companies as well as a company that did earthwork; adding he felt the project would cost approximately $350,000.

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to transfer $350,000 from the unencumbered surplus into the line item for the demolition of the Brentwood building. Vice-Chair Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

7. POLICIES

a. Second Review of Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect Policy (JLF)
b. Second Review of Availability and Distribution of Healthy Food (EFA)
c. Approval of Revised Pupil Safety and Violence Prevention – Bullying Policy (JICK)

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to approve the Pupil Safety and Violence Prevention – Bullying Policy (JICK). Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. December 19, 2022

MOTION: Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 19, 2022, meeting. Vice-Chair Peters seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

b. January 4, 2023

MOTION: Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 19, 2022, meeting. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

c. January 12, 2023; January 17, 2023; & January 19, 2023

Vice Chair Peters noted that the January 12th, January 17th, and January 19th meeting minutes needed further reviewed.

9. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Educator Nomination

Mr. Kieran Mulligan, Social Studies Teacher, Merrimack High School

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also noted that Ms. Stephanie Scherr was no longer employed by the Merrimack School District as a Science Teacher at the Merrimack Middle School.

MOTION: Chair Rothhaus made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter said she attended a Parks & Recreation Committee meeting where they discussed available spaces at Camp Naticook but noted the program was almost full. She added they were looking to hire staff and were offering a Counselor in Training Program for 15-year-olds. She also said the Winter Carnival would be held on February 25th at Wasserman Park, and the slides at Kids Cove were knocked down during a windstorm and were due to be replaced sometime in the spring.

b. Correspondence

Chair Rothhaus said she had received correspondence from a parent, and she redirected that parent to the school principal.

Vice-Chair Peters commented that she had received correspondence from a parent regarding a coach, and she directed them to administration.

Board Member Martin said he received correspondence from parents regarding foreign language credits which he answered and then directed to the appropriate administration.

Board Member Halter shared that she received a couple of emails regarding issues with IEP's which were forwarded to the administration.

c. Comments

Board Member Martin said the Jazz Allstate Festival was held at Pinkerton Academy and two Merrimack students took part in the jazz ensemble. He said it was phenomenal.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Robbie Reisman, 8 Iris Drive, addressed the Board and stated his opposition to expanding the Education Freedom Accounts. He said he felt taxpayer's money should go to the public school system.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:36 p.m. Chair Rothhaus made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.