Approved 02-20-2023

Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Town Hall – Memorial Room
January 12, 2023

Present: Chair Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair Lori Peters, Board Member Jenna Hardy, 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.

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

There was no public participation.

3. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

Chair Rothhaus thanked Director of Maintenance Touseau and his maintenance staff for responding to the water situation at Mastricola Elementary School during a holiday weekend.

a. Maintenance

Director of Maintenance Touseau reported increased costs for building repair and the emergency retrofit lease for the unit ventilators and utilities.

Chair Rothhaus asked for insight on how Mr. Touseau calculated the budget figures.

Mr. Touseau responded this is not going to be a typical year. The maintenance budget is an increase of 15% on top of known costs.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added the Eversource distribution charge will be increasing. The supply cost is locked in at 10 cents per Kwh until the year 2027. He also noted the additional 72-unit ventilators all use electricity.

Chair Rothhaus added that school budgets throughout the state will be similar to this budget.

Chair Rothhaus asked how many full-time, how many part-time staff do we have in the maintenance department in the Merrimack School District? Do you think we have a high turnover rate? Are we understaffed at this point in time?

Mr. Touseau responded there are 43.5 positions in the maintenance department including himself. Currently there are 33 custodians (27 of 33 work second shift) plus 6.5 maintenance positions. He reported 13 open custodian positions and 1.5 open maintenance positions. The maintenance department is very understaffed. In the last three years he hired six individuals; non have stayed.

Chair Rothhaus asked what the major issues are for being understaffed. She noted the Town of Merrimack's maintenance department is also understaffed. What do we need to do to attract and keep help? The turnover rate is high and money is being spent to training and retrain.

Mr. Touseau responded that the six individuals stayed anywhere from one week to a number of months. Some applicants want to work four-day weeks, which is not an option. The biggest issue is attracting applicants to apply for positions. He does not have the answer.

Mr. Shevenell added that the maintenance department work cannot be done remotely. When fully staffed, each custodian cleans between 25,000 and 27,000 square feet of building. It is a lot of work.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen added the square footage equates to approximately ten homes.

Chair Rothhaus noted the schools are very clean despite being understaffed and having older buildings.

Vice Chair Peters asked if the girls softball dugout could be removed from the budget to the Capital Improvement Plan.

Mr. Touseau responded to qualify for placement on the CIP the cost of the item must be a minimum of $100,000. It could be included as part of the future Master Plan. This item may be removed from the 2023-2024 budget due to other priorities.

Mr. Shevenell added the girl's dugout could be feathered into the Master Plan over time.

Vice Chair Peters explained she felt it was more appropriate to include the dugouts as part of field development in the Master Plan.

Vice Chair Peters emphasized she is supportive of the dugouts but questioned this might not be the year given the technology and iReady expenses.

Mr. Shevenell noted the Master Plan does not include field development.

Board Member Hardy asked if there was a specific reason for having the girls' dugout as part of this budget.

Mr. Touseau responded he placed the girls' dugout in the budget because of the inequity and that it had never been included in a budget before.

Mr. Shevenell explained by putting in the budget then having to remove it would provide visibility and begin discussions for inclusion in future budgets.

Board Member Hardy noted she did not see any repairs/upgrades/maintenance for the high school Little Theatre anywhere in the budget (maintenance or otherwise.) Are there things in the Little Theatre that need to be updated or maintained to be useable? She was not able to determine what department or school included a budget for the Little Theatre. The reason she asked the question is because her daughter attended a musical that did not include the use of microphones because of outdated technology.

Mr. Touseau explained that the Little Theatre received a recent upgrade to LED lighting.

Mr. Shevenell reported that funds from the high school “school improvement account” from the current budget (2021-2022) will be used to make needed upgrades to the Little Theatre.

Discussion ensued regarding the need for a larger Little Theatre and a desire for a performing arts center in the future.

Board Member Halter noted some of the tractors and mowers were very old and asked when do we need to look at replacing them?

Mr. Touseau responded that the older tractors are functioning at a high level. They are well maintained and replacement parts are still available. He noted a new lawn mower to replace a 2001 mower has been on back order since March 2021.

Board Member Halter pointed out that track resurfacing and gym floor sanding are one and three years overdue, respectively.

Mr. Touseau responded the middle school gym floor needs to be resurfaced.

Board Member Halter asked how did the 2021-22 budget meet or not meet the maintenance needs of the district? How is 2022-23 looking so far? Are there any big projects that are overdue, or about to become due that we should be aware of?

Mr. Touseau responded O’Gara Drive and the high school parking lot needs work. These are large items on the CIP and will be discussed at a future meeting.

Board Member Martin asked if we are proposing to spend close to $8,000.00 ($7,023.00) to provide water, heat, and electricity to a building (Brentwood) that we do not use. He acknowledged past discussions to demolish the building. He noted the demolition costs and the costs to maintain the building will only get more expensive.

Mr. Touseau responded yes. He added the budget does not include the labor involved when his staff is required to visit the building.

Chair Rothhaus noted that the Planning and Building Committee walked through the building five years ago and supported demolition of the building at that time.

b. <u>Technology/Library/Media</u>

Director of Technology/Library/Media Pelletier reported that budget year 2021-2022 and some of 2022-2023 was a discovery process. Many of the library accounts were adequate however, there were some accounts that were significantly over budget. The areas where it was difficult to meet the needs within the budget parameters were technology in the classroom, software licensing, and networking/server infrastructure.

Mr. Pelletier reported that he inventoried and documented all the technology and equipment within the district. The current inventory is worth approximately 5.7 million dollars that will cost approximately 6 million dollars to replace. The replacement plan will occur over time. The first

cycle of the replacement plan will be the most expensive. He explained without new equipment the technicians will spend their time chasing broken equipment rather than moving forward.

Mr. Pelletier stated that much of the technology budget was listed on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) which will be discussed at a future meeting.

Vice Chair Peters noted that Merrimack High School's accreditation report from New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) listed technology as an area in need of improvement at the high school.

Chair Rothhaus shared negative impacts she experienced as an educator because of outdated technology. She stated it is important to have updated equipment for the business functions as well as the educational aspect.

Board Member Halter noted if we do not support the Capital Improvement Plan things will fall apart resulting in wasted time and money. A methodical plan will result in better management and updated resources.

Board Member Martin emphasized that students need to work with updated technology to prepare them for the updated technology used in the work force or armed services.

Board Member Hardy added many college students use technology to access eBooks rather than traditional textbooks.

Mr. Pelletier noted that inexpensive reliable used computers do not exist anymore. It is better to purchase new computers and that many companies provide educational discounts. He provided a brief overview of his plan to consolidate equipment.

Mr. Olsen added technology is a consumable resource with an expensive annual cost.

Board Member Halter questioned why the budget for the purchase of library books has been level funded for the past three years.

Mr. Pelletier responded ten years ago the book budget was $40,000 it is now $35,000. The cost to purchase books has not been astronomical. Student and curriculum needs have been maintained.

Board Member Halter asked what organizations and associations you are a member of.

Mr. Pelletier responded American Association of School Librarians (AASL), Consortium for School Networking (COSN), NH Society for Technology in Education (NHSTE), NH School Administrators Association (NHSAA) and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Board Member Halter asked if there are plans to attend professional development opportunities this year or next.

Mr. Pelletier responded the South By South West Conference (SXSW EDU) typically held in Texas will have remote access. Local conferences are NHCTO Conferences, MassCUE Conferences, and the Christa McAuliffe Technology Conference.

Board Member Martin asked if there is a continued need for physical periodicals/magazines.

Mr. Pelletier responded yes, it is expensive to get online subscriptions to all magazines and periodicals that are not used by all students. It is also good to have physical copies for computer screen relief and for those who prefer to read from paper. The availability of print magazines and periodicals is difficult to get due to supply chain shortages. The library staff is in the process of assessing and sorting through physical periodicals/magazines that are not being used.

c. Merrimack Middle School

Chief Educational Officer Olsen introduced Middle School Assistant Principal Kathleen Hoppa to the Board.

Chair Rothhaus stated that she has recently received positive feedback with regards to the culture and climate at the middle school. She explained, with encouragement from the athletic director, students picked up trash left behind following a basketball game.

Vice Chair Peters and Chair Rothhaus consolidated their questions. Vice Chair Peters presented their questions.

Vice Chair Peters asked why there was an increase in transportation for science field trips and a decrease in transportation for athletics and how many busses were used?

Mr. Caragher responded six busses were used for the science field trips. The athletic transportation is level funded. Past athletic transportation budgets included transportation for all away games for the regular season and away games for all post season games. When teams do not participate in post season games, there is not a need for transportation. When teams reach the number one see, they become the home team and there is no need for transportation.

Vice Chair Peters asked why a 10% increase in many line items.

Mr. Caragher responded certain items cost more than and others. The 10% increase, across the district, was a result of not knowing where inflation would impact budgets.

Mr. Shevenell added the 10% was based on history, current trends, and anticipated purchases. A 10% increase is an acceptable level of increase for the 2023-2024 without knowing the future of the economy.

Chair Peters explained the District does a good job of not spending the entire budget. She is comfortable having a budget that accommodates for the unknowns. Leftover funds will be returned to taxpayers. We never want to be caught short of funds.

Board Member Martin added the middle school budget was very consistent and appeared to be well thought out and researched.

Board Member Halter noted the proposed budget for the middle school is only a 0.5% increase over last year.

Vice Chair Peters asked if the elementary and middle school administrators had pursued grant funds to pay for co-curricular expenses.

Mr. Caragher responded the middle school received a grant for the FIRST (Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) program.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell added the high school received a grant for the FIRST Robotics Team. There are not many grants available that support co-curricular activities.

Vice Chair Peters asked how the middle school uniform replacement cycle works.

Mr. Caragher responded the replacement of team uniforms is systematic and logical. Age and wear and tear are factors.

Board Member Hardy spoke to the inequitable funding between sports and co-curricular activities within the district. Mrs. Hardy hopes that will be address in future budgets.

Chair Rothhaus supports promoting the drama and arts programs.

Board Member Martin stated that most students do not participate in athletics. Placing resources in drama, FIRST, etc. will help those programs grow and attract more participants.

Board Member Halter asked what are the class sizes and teacher schedules like at the middle school?

Mr. Caragher responded there are between 22 and 24 students per class. There are approximately 90 students in each team.

Board Member Halter asked what is the condition and age of the microscopes being replaced?

Mr. Caragher responded the ability to find parts to repair broken microscopes is limited. Some microscopes are ten years old. The goal is to order replacement microphones regularly.

Board Member Halter noted that the middle school spent much less than budgeted in 2021-22 on Title 1 tutors and para-educators. Is it because of difficulty staffing these positions or are there other reasons? Are we similarly understaffed this year, and what is being done to hire enough staff in 2023-24?

Mr. Caragher responded that the middle school did not have a Title 1 tutor last year due to lack of applicants. There is a Title 1 tutor at the middle school this school year. Efforts to recruit Title 1 tutors is ongoing.

Board Member Halter asked what types of co-curricular activities are being offered at the middle school and how many students are participating?

Mr. Caragher responded the clubs are student and staff driven. Examples of current clubs are anima club, quiz bowl, drama club, hiking, student council, middle school TV club, ski club, Merrimack Middle earth, arts programs and after school help.

Board Member Halter noted aside from items she expected to cost more due to inflation (supplies, transportation, utilities, etc.), this budget was completely level funded, and in a lot of cases has been since 2021-22. She asked if there was a plan for when the level funded items start to cost more?

Mr. Caragher responded if an account is over expended, other accounts will be reviewed to accommodate the overage. He noted the significant increase in the furniture budget was for cafeteria tables. That account was over expended last year.

Board Member Martin noted that he did not see a budget for the choral program.

Mr. Caragher responded the choral budget is shared with the band and instrumental budget.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Heather Robitaille of 45 Springfield Circle expressed her appreciation to everyone for a thoughtful review of the budget She is anxious to hear more about the Master Plan. She supports a performing arts center.

5. ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 7:50 p.m. Board Member Martin made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed: 5 – 0 – 0.