Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack High School/Cafeteria
January 4, 2023

6:30 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – Merrimack TV Training Classroom

- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Chair Laurie Rothhaus, 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.

Not Present: Ms. Lori Peters, Vice-Chair (Excused)
Ms. Kaitlyn Vadney, Student Representative (Excused)

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Rothhaus called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive, addressed the Board and thanked the School Board for all their work to ensure that every student in Merrimack received an appropriate education. She commented that at the last meeting, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said the district was going to implement the reading program "Fundations" across all of the elementary schools. She further said that she felt Merrimack would be a model for the state of New Hampshire surrounding literacy.

3. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen shared that there had been a major flood at the James Mastricola Elementary School as a result of a broken pipe. He said Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Mr. Tom Touseau, Director of Maintenance, Mr. Mike Dumais, Assistant Director of Maintenance, and their entire staff did a fantastic job addressing the situation.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle thanked Ms. Grobecker for her comments.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle said she had sent some information out to staff regarding the Homework Policy and had also sent information out to the community.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell thanked all of the people involved with the clean-up as a result of the flood. He said the cost of the clean-up (including replacement of rugs, flooring, ceiling tiles, etc.) would be covered under the district's insurance less a $500.00 deductible.

d. School Board Update

Chair Rothhaus, on behalf of the entire Board, thanked the maintenance crews for their dedication in getting the school open after the flood.

e. Student Representative Update

There was no update to share.

4. BUDGET PRESENTATION

a. Food Service

Mr. Dave Dziki, Director of Food Services, was present to discuss the proposed budget for the Food Services Department. He said the Food Services Department was a self-supportive operation in that they received federal reimbursements and cash from parents paying for meals. He added they were experiencing supply-chain issues but noted they were part of the New Hampshire Buy-In Group, and they were in a locked bid for the next year.

Mr. Dziki reviewed questions from the School Board as summarized below:

Question

Board Member Halter: What products are more expensive this year?

Answer

Mr. Dziki: Most of everything has been more expensive this year. He said every year they had a surplus of commodities that were available to them from USDA funds, and this year they had $105,000 of which half could be used to buy fresh fruit and vegetables.

Mr. Dziki said one of the things he was asking for within his budget was the replacement of food warmers for the Reeds Ferry Elementary School and the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School. He added they were approximately over 30 years old.

Question

Board Member Halter: Are we going to have to raise lunch prices to keep up with the rising costs?

Answer

Mr. Dziki: Every year they reviewed PLE (paid lunch equity) tool and noted they raised the cost of lunch by .25 cents across the Board and he was hoping they would not have to raise them again this year. He said he felt it would be a big bonus to offer the students a free meal as part of their education.

Question

Chair Rothhaus: Would the district have the staff to offer a breakfast program and how much would it cost?

Answer

Mr. Dziki: It would benefit the free and reduced students. They did offer breakfast at the high school but if they did it in all of the schools he would likely have to hire additional staff. He said he was not sure if the program would be self-funded or not.

b. K – 4 Elementary Schools & James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

The following were present to speak on behalf of their budgets:

Ms. Bonnie Painchaud, Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Michelle Romein, Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School
Ms. Alisha Hansen-Proulx, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School

Ms. Laura Livie, Assistant Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Julie DeLuca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
Ms. Brooke Ross, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School

Ms. Nichole Rheault, Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
Ms. Meaghan Fowler, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Ms. DeLuca said she would make opening comments on behalf of all of the staff present.

Ms. DeLuca said the elementary school 2023 - 2024 budgets continued to reflect the priorities established by the Merrimack School District and the School Board. She said they continued to invest in all academic disciplines, the arts, and social & emotional learning. She also said for the second year in a row they were offering co-curricular opportunities for students to participate in after-school educator-led enrichment activities.

Ms. DeLuca explained the budget included the addition of a grade 1 teacher at both Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and the James Mastricola Elementary School. She said they were also requesting a Unified Arts Physical Education Teacher at the James Mastricola Elementary School, and a request to add two grade 5 teachers at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School. She noted the asks were based on actual enrollment information.

Ms. DeLuca also explained that the budget also included requests for supplies, furniture, and texts due to a huge jump in inflation.

Ms. DeLuca reviewed questions from the School Board as summarized below:

Question

Board Member Halter: How are the new co-curricular programs going? What kinds of things are being offered, and how many kids are participating? Are they new programs or existing programs taking advantage of the new funding? Did the amount appropriated last year adequately fund those programs? Was it too much?

Answer

Ms. DeLuca: The teachers were very excited about the cool offerings that would be coming into place. There were two curriculum programs, the first session would begin in January, and would run for four weeks, and the second session would begin in March. She said programs being offered included basketball, dance, virtual cooking, baking, chess, animation, sewing, sign language, and French, et al. She added the programs were free and would be held after school.

Question

Board Member Halter: What is Project Safeguard?

Answer

Ms. Rheault: Project Safeguard was established in the 1980s. They were looking for something that would enrich children and families to meet the health curriculum and to learn about self-esteem and how to meet challenges in life. She said parents were invited to spend the day with the children and speakers were hired to have presentations and discussions with them. She added it was a great day, but it was expensive. Ms. Rheault said they had not had one since 2019 due to Covid. She said after they had the next one she would share the feedback with the School Board.

Question

Board Member Halter: I would like to hear more about the new Physical Education Teacher position, why is it needed? What will it look like having two Physical Education teachers?

Answer

Ms. DeLuca: To support the growth in student enrollment at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School and increase in the number of classrooms, they needed an additional Unified Arts Teacher. She said they selected a Physical Education Teacher because they wanted to make sure the offerings were equitable across all of the schools. She also said there was a direct correlation between physical education to academic and social & emotional learning.

Question

Board Member Martin: Can you please explain the cost increase in the line item for police details?

Answer

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell: The cost had increased, and it also depended upon the frequency with which they used police details.

Question

Board Member Martin: Why was there so little participation in professional workshops and conferences in 2022, even though some of them were offered online?

Answer

Ms. Romein: Covid certainly had an effect on the amount of participation but in addition to that, there were a number of workshops that were offered for free. She also said the needs of the district after the worst of Covid occurred, many teachers chose not to take a day away from being in-person and able to teach. She noted many administrators and teachers would take part in workshops in the current year.

Question

Chair Rothhaus: How many reading specialists do we currently have? How many students are currently reading below grade level, will those services be for all students, and what the job description would look like?

Answer

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle: There are currently five Reading Specialists in the district. She said they did not currently offer Tier 2 intervention. She also said the district currently had ten Title 1 tutors but noted there was a widening gap between Tier 1 and Title 1. She said a Reading Interventionist position would be best. She added that she did not think the one position would be able to help every single student who was reading below grade level, but it would be a coordinated effort to look at Tier 1 instruction, regular instruction, Tier 3, and those students that were somewhere in between.

5. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to discuss.

6. NEW BUSINESS

Chair Rothhaus pointed out that the start time of the School Board meetings would be held earlier during the budget season, and would be announced at a later date.

7. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports to review.

b. Correspondence

Chair Rothhaus stated that she received one piece of correspondence from a Merrimack woman who was very excited about the Pathway to Graduation position.

c. Comments

Chair Rothhaus said she felt everyone did a great job with their budget presentations.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and thanked the administrators for all of their work done on the budget proposals. She said she was whole-heartedly in favor of early intervention. She said she would like supporting documentation regarding the proposed budget to be made available to the public.

9. ADJOURNMENT

At approximately 8:28 p.m. Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed: 4 – 0 – 0.