Merrimack School District/SAU 26
School Board Special Meeting
Preliminary Agenda
January 8, 2024
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room

5:30 p.m. NON-PUBLIC SESSION RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – Merrimack TV Training Classroom

- Negotiations

6:00 p.m. PUBLIC MEETING

6:00 p.m.	**1. CALL TO ORDER and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**	Ken Martin
6:05 p.m.	**2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**	Ken Martin
6:15 p.m.	**3. NEW BUSINESS (part 1)**	
	a. Merrimack High Scoreboard Fundraising Presentation	Sean Powers
6:30 p.m.	**4. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS**	Ken Martin
	a. Merrimack Middle School	Chrigus Boezeman, Kathy Hoppa
	b. Merrimack High School	Steve Claire, Rich Zampieri, Jill Hanlon
	c. Additional Sessions with Department, if needed	
	d. Budget Work Session and Warrant Article Discussion	
	e. Other	
8:00 p.m.	**5. NEW BUSINESS (part 2)**	
	a. Bond Hearing Date and Warrant Article for Construction of New Student Services and Central Office Consolidated Building	Matt Shevenell
9:15 p.m.	**6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**	Ken Martin
	a. December 18, 2023 Public and Non-Public Minutes	
p.m.	**7. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**	Ken Martin
p.m.	**8. ADJOURN**	Ken Martin

* These times are estimates and may vary depending on discussion.

Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
December 18, 2023

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

Not Present:

Board Member Lori Peters (Excused)
Student Representative Shaun Evidente (Excused)

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

3. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

a. Food Service

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that the Food Service was a special revenue fund, and the revenue it received paid for the program, and it did not have any impact on the tax rate. He said due to the COVID-19 money received from the government, the account had a surplus, and that surplus had to go back to the program.

Mr. Dave Dziki, Food Service Director, presented the Food Service Department's proposed budget as summarized below:

- The district received federal funds for free and reduced meals where applicable.
- The district also received federal funds for each meal served.
- The district received federal funds in the form of surplus foods from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA.)
- The district belonged to the New Hampshire Buying Group.

Mr. Dziki explained that the item that probably stood out the most in the budget was equipment replacement. He added that the prior year, he was having issues with the biggest freezer in the district, which was where he stored all of the surplus USDA commodity foods. He said a new freezer had been installed.

Mr. Dziki said he would like to replace ovens at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School and the Merrimack Middle School.

Mr. Dziki, addressing a question regarding the Food Service Improvement and Development line item, explained that the $1,400 had been included in the budget for many years, and it was in there in the event he needed to attend an out-of-state conference. He added that he was on the Board of the New Hampshire Food Nutrition Association, and they had paid for a lot of previous conference fees.

Mr. Dziki said the district served between 275,000 and 300,000 lunches per year.

Board Member Halter asked if the new ovens would come with warranties. Mr. Dziki replied that the ovens would have warranties that would last between three to five years.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she was very appreciative of all the Food Service employees.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen noted that he had provided the Board with some information they had gathered from the Federal Reserve Board and the Bureau of Labor Statistics regarding the increase in appropriations, particularly for supplies. He said it included a graphical representation of what had happened to pricing regarding educational books and supplies, institutional furnishings, insurance, and transportation services. He said he would place the document online so the public could see it as well.

b. K-6 Elementary Schools (James Mastricola Elementary School, Reeds Ferry Elementary School, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, and the James Mastricola Elementary School

Ms. Julie DeLuca, Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School; Ms. Brooke Ross, Assistant Principal, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School; Ms. Bonnie Painchaud, Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School; Ms. Laura Livie, Assistant Principal, Reeds Ferry Elementary School; Ms. Michelle Romein, Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School, Ms. Kathleen Ortega, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Elementary School; and Ms. Meaghan Fowler, Assistant Principal, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School; proposed budgets as summarized below:

Ms. DeLuca said the proposed elementary school budgets for the 2024 – 2025 school year continued to reflect the priorities established by the Merrimack School District and the Merrimack School Board. "We continue to invest in all academic disciplines and co-curricular activities, as well as ensuring that the offerings across the three lower elementary schools are equitable."

- The addition of teachers is based on actual enrollments in grades 1 – 4 and anticipated enrollments in kindergarten.

- The increase in teachers also reflected the alignment of class sizes across all three of the lower elementary schools.

    - Reeds Ferry: Proposed three classroom teachers in grades 1 & 3.

    - James Mastricola Elementary School: Proposed one classroom teacher in kindergarten.

    - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School: Proposed one classroom teacher in grade 2.

Ms. DeLuca stated that in addition to investing in more teachers, they continued to invest in early education.

- The increase of kindergarten Instructional Assistants.
    - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School: Proposed 1 Instructional Assistant.
    - James Mastricola Elementary School: Proposed 1 Instructional Assistant.
- ESL (English as a Second Language): 2024 – 2025
    - Thorntons Ferry Elementary School: Proposed 1 ESL teacher.

Ms. DeLuca pointed out that currently, there was one ESL teacher with a total of 48 students.

- Continue to offer co-curricular activities in after-school educator-led enrichment activities.
- About 50% of students at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, James Mastricola Elementary School, and Reeds Ferry Elementary School participated in the co-curricular activities.
- Continue to invest in facilities and learning space in the schools.
    - Art room redesign at James Mastricola Elementary School: $9,500.
    - New classroom furniture for teachers.
    - New gymnasium barrier dividers at Reeds Ferry and Thorntons Ferry.
    - Invest in additional privacy dividers for special education classrooms at Reeds Ferry.
    - Replace old, heavy 3rd grade chairs at Thorntons Ferry.
- There was an increase in student participation in the elementary chorus.
    - 60% of 3rd & 4th grade students participated in chorus at Thorntons Ferry. (An increase of 30% from two years ago.)
    - 62% of students at Reeds Ferry participated in chorus.
    - Proposed investment in drums, ukuleles, xylophones, and supplies for musical productions, and supplies for the curriculum, including a recorder.
- Curriculum

Ms. DeLuca stated that the district was benefiting from a continued shift from balanced to structured literacy, and to round out the shift; they would be investing in a knowledge-building curriculum called "Wit & Wisdom."

- Police Details
    - Increase in line items as events at the schools were very large. This would be to increase safety.
    - Proposed increase to five police details at Reeds Ferry.
    - Proposed increase to four police details at Thorntons Ferry.
    - Proposed increase to three police details at James Mastricola Elementary.
- Supply Accounts
    - Increase in the cost of supplies.
    - The elementary schools spent an average of $38.00 per student for basic classroom supplies.
    - Increase in cost of Safety Backpacks.

Ms. Fowler, addressing the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School budget, stated the following, as summarized below:

"The primary focus for the development of the 2024 – 2025 budget for the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School was to provide adequate supplies, equipment, and materials to implement the JMUES school programs. Factors that are significant in this year's budget include:"

- The purchase of new reading and writing materials that supported structured literacy.
- The continuation of funds to support all content areas.
- The continuation of funds to support all Unified Arts classes.
- The continuation of co-curricular funds to provide interested students with opportunities to participate in educator-led, afterschool enrichment activities.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

Question: Tell me more about the elementary co-curricular budget items, what activities are being offered, and what percentage of students are participating.

Answer: Ms. Romein replied that Ms. DeLuca had already reviewed the answer to the question. Ms. Romein added that they capped the number of students participating in the clubs at 15. She added that it was open to educators who were part of the MTA contract as well as educators who were part of the MESSA contract.

Question: How are gifted and talented students identified, how long did it take to identify them, what did a personalized learning plan look like, what enrichment activities were being offered, and how was the success of the program measured? Can students at all grade levels be added to the program once they are identified?"

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle replied that the district had adopted the Cognitive Abilities Test, which had a screener for all students, and if a student scored at the 90th percentile or above, they were eligible to take the post-screener. She said there were approximately 60 students between all of the lower elementary schools. She added that from that point, the eligibility was at the 94th percentile or above.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle commented that she felt they were using a very strong identification process. She said new students could be added at any time, noting that the CogAT was a kindergarten through grade 12 assessment tool. She said some parents had asked for their students to be rescreened, and they were. She added that there were two gifted and talented teachers in the lower elementary schools.

Question: Please explain the increase in costs for supplies for science classes.

Answer: Ms. DeLuca said the science instruction was currently aligned across kindergarten through grade 5. She said there were additional purchases in part because they were teaching science at the kindergarten levels, and they were aligned with the Next Generation of Science Standards, which included more rigorous requirements regarding teacher instruction. She added that they were purchasing additional "Mystery Packs" that included science supplies that were aligned with all of the Mystery Science lessons.

Ms. DeLuca also stated that there was an additional question regarding the Next Generation of Science Standards. She said the average cost per student was $15.00.

Question: Please explain the increase in costs for music classes.

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that the increase in music supplies at all three elementary schools reflects an intentional investment in the music programs. Some of the instruments and music supplies required replacement as many of these resources had not been updated for years. We have seen a significant interest in chorus. The music supply account had been relatively lower in past years.

Question: How much does a ream of paper cost, and have inflationary costs been affecting the increase in the item?

Answer: Ms. Painchaud replied that the cost of a ream of paper had gone from $26.00 per case to upwards of $51.00 per case.

Question: There is a decrease of $1,400.00 in the English Language Arts text account. Please explain this decrease.

Answer: Ms. Romein replied that some of it had to do with the purchase of Wit & Wisdom. She also said that they purchased a number of foundational skills materials for five kindergarten classes, but they only had four.

Question: Please explain the new core reading program. How do we expect this program will benefit students, and how will we measure its success?

Answer: Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle stated that in the past year, the district has significantly invested in the word recognition part of Scarborough's Reading Rope. She said what was being proposed was the language comprehension portion and the core text of Wit & Wisdom was at the center of the program, and

it looked at potential areas of interest for students, how they could build long-term knowledge around events in history, events in science, and historically people and places. She said if the voters approved the budget, they would provide high-quality professional development for the teachers. She added that the request included digital access for teachers and students. Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle pointed out that the Knowledge Matters Campaign recognized Wit & Wisdom and was only one of six knowledge-building curricula that had that endorsement.

Question: We lost 52 students from pre-K – grade 12 from 2019 – 2023. I do not believe we decreased staffing at that time. Please confirm. The projected enrollment for 2024 – 2025 is only two students, more than the total number of students in 2019. Are you asking to add teachers or move them from one school to another?

Answer: Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the enrollment had dropped by 52 students since 2019, and the main question surrounding that was if the amount of staffing had decreased. He said it all depended on the density of the decline with respect to a particular building or buildings. He also said they had roughly 80 classes in grades pre-K – grade 4, and if you took those 52 students over 80 classes, it was about .6 students per class, and that meant a staff member could not be cut. Alternatively, he said if those 52 students were in a particular school over two or three grade levels, then he would suggest a reduction in staff. He said the decrease in students was distributed among all of the elementary schools.

Question: Can you please explain the costs of the telephones at the elementary schools? Reed Ferry is budgeted for $6,911. How many phones does this represent across the schools? Are there less expensive systems we could look into?

Answer: Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the district used VOIP (voice over IP) for its phone system. He said the district had approximately 653 telephones. He said they wanted to look into replacing the systems. He said the amount of money the district was spending on phone service had not changed since 2016 because they were using VOIP, which was about $80,000. He added the Cisco phones needed replacement. He said part of the charge for the phone service was the internet that ran VOIP.

Question: I would like to know the number of students projected in grades K – 4 in each school at each grade level with the 5-year enrollment trends.

Answer: Chief Educational Officer Olsen said the Board had been provided with enrollment information in the budget introduction material. He said he would be happy to break that information down more if the Board wanted. Vice-Chair Rothhaus said she would appreciate more information.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus also commented that the Town of Merrimack had been assessed at $74 million less for industrial and commercial properties, but residential property values were still going up. She said the tax bills went out, and the average family in Merrimack was paying $800.00 to $1,000.00 more in taxes. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that if the budget were flat and had not gone up at all, the tax burden shifted to those who owned single-family homes; their taxes would have still gone up, even if the appropriation did not go up because of the shift in the value or the shift in the burden of who paid what.

Question: I would like to learn more about the assemblies. This is in reference to the kindergarten assemblies.

Answer: Ms. DeLuca replied that the reason they had the line item was because the kindergarten students did not go on traditional field trips outside of school. She said the line item was for when the Carriage Shack Farm visited.

Question: What caused the cost of science field trips to go up?

Answer: Ms. DeLuca replied that they looked at the alignment with the units they were teaching. She said they added a field trip in 3rd grade to the Great Bay Discovery Center, and it was located further away, so there was an increase in buses and chaperones.

Question: There was a question regarding shelving.

Answer: Ms. Romein explained there was a line item in their proposed budget to replace the shelving that was built when the school was built in approximately the 1960s. She said the materials were stored on shelves that the students could not reach. She also said they would like to replace the sinks.

Question: There was a question regarding the travel account for the Reeds Ferry Elementary School and the Thorntons Ferry Elementary School.

Answer: Ms. DeLuca said there was an increase in staff members utilizing the account, and they had to travel further.

Question: There was a question regarding the line item for the reading texts at Reeds and Thorntons Ferry. What was the difference between that line item and the one for the language art's texts?

Answer: Ms. DeLuca replied that there was a difference in the number of students and the number of classrooms. She said they also wanted to do Scholastic Storyworks. She added it was more costly because there was a higher enrollment and there were more teachers.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Doyle also pointed out that the Geo kits were costly.

Question: What are the costs of repairing instruments in music classes?

Answer: Ms. Fowler replied that the costs of repairing instruments had gone up. She added that it also included piano tuning.

Question: There was a question about why the travel account at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School had not been used.

Answer: Ms. Fowler replied that the travel account would be used in the current year for professional development retreats.

Question: Board Member Halter said the previous year, she had asked what Project Safeguard was. She said she had the opportunity to attend one with her then-6th-grader and felt it was a very good experience. She commented that it might be a good idea to do some excitement building about it in the 5th grade.

Question/Comment: Board Member Halter commented that the district was taking many existing programs and evaluating them to see if they were still up to date. She asked what the district was doing to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Answer: Ms. Fowler replied that they were working on securing space at the Nashua Community College to hold Project Safeguard, which might make it more welcoming and increase the level of excitement for the students.

Question: Vice-Chair Rothhaus asked if it would be possible to explore the number of events that would have more than 200 people in attendance and see if there was a way gates could be put up to block off certain parts of the school. She also said perhaps if there were over 200 or 300 people, then they would need police coverage.

Answer: Ms. Fowler replied that they already used the fire doors to block off sections of the buildings when there was any sized event. She said it would not only be for the security of the parts of the building that may be unsupervised, but it would make the families feel safer. She also said there would be approximately five events that she felt would require a police detail.

Question: Board Member Halter asked if the Board could hear more about a Social & Emotion Learning Specialist and a Reading Interventionist. Are they additional positions, or are they new, and how will they help students succeed in school?

Answer: Ms. Fowler replied that the SEL Support Specialist would be an additional position to respond to the current student needs. She said the Reading Interventionist was also a new position as there were students at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School who needed additional help.

Board Member Hardy added that she felt it was extremely important that an SEL Support Specialist was available as they could provide support in a classroom and allow the teacher to continue teaching the class in its entirety.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen and the School Board thanked the staff members who spoke at the meeting representing the elementary schools.

4. POLICIES

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that since the first reading, there had been no comments, and legal counsel had also reviewed it.

a. Second Reading and Approval of Revised Admission of Tuition and Non-Resident Students Policy (JFAB)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve policy (JFAB) – Revised Admission of Tuition and Non-Resident Students Policy, as presented, given its 2nd reading. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

b. Approval of Revised Use of Physical Restraint/Seclusion Policy (JKAA)

MOTION: Chair Martin made a motion to approve policy (JKAA) – Revised Use of Physical Restraint/Seclusion Policy, as presented, given its 2nd reading. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

5. BOARD'S REVIEW OF CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan, which the Planning & Building Committee had approved.

2024 – 2025

- Roof at James Mastricola Elementary & James Mastricola Upper Elementary Schools: $707,000
- Replacement of Windows at the James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Technology Infrastructure Improvements
- HVAC Mini-Split Systems
- High School Locker Room (Perform a Study)
- Safety/Security (Received a Grant for Security Cameras & Locksets)
- SAU Central Office

Vice-Chair Rothhaus suggested that Food Service be a line item in the Capital Improvement Plan. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell agreed.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, addressed the Board and thanked the Food Service Department's staff for all that they did.

Ms. Robitaille also said that, as a parent, she was very happy with the direction the district was going regarding literacy and making sure that it was consistent and in alignment with all of the schools. She also said she was very excited to hear how much interest the students had in the music programs, and she particularly thanked Mr. McGuinness, Music Teacher, for all of his hard work.

7. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 8:25 p.m., Board Member Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

January 8, 2024
Budgets to be reviewed: MMS and MHS

Budget Questions For: _____

Submitted by:

Page #	Account Number	General Questions/Comment

January 8, 2024
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