

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
February 2, 2026**

5:30 p.m.: Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) & (c) – Merrimack TV Training Classroom

- **Staff Welfare**

Present: Ms. Lori Peters, Chair; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Board Member; Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member; Ms. Rachel Paepke, Board Member; and Mr. Matthew Brown, Student School Board Representative.

Not Present: Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair (Excused)

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Dr. Kathleen Scholand, and Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the meeting to order.

Chair Peters read aloud the Merrimack School District's mission statement into the record as follows:

The Merrimack School District will provide high-quality, future-focused education for all students in the community. Students will engage in learning opportunities that reflect both rigor and relevance and meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The district will prepare students to understand, adapt to, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological changes worldwide. Our overall goal is to inspire, create, and encourage students to be curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated lifelong expert learners. Merrimack graduates exercise judgment; they are innovative and will become responsible contributors to society. We hope the discussions we have tonight will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

3. RECOGNITIONS

There were none.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that starting Wednesday, the Merrimack School District would allow all students and staff to wear Patriots gear through Friday, as they were playing the Seattle Seahawks in the 2026 Super Bowl.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand, Ms. Melissa Fazlic, Human Resources Director, and he had met with Nick Lavallee to begin planning short budget videos, which would

be approximately three to five minutes in length. He said he would do a deeper dive regarding the budget in one of his cable programs.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said that there would be a Budget Committee working session the following evening.

b. Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand commented that there would be an early release on Wednesday, February 4th, to allow staff a professional development day. She said all of the district's employees would participate in the Annual Suicide Prevention Training. She said it was a mandatory training session and would be conducted via a live virtual format.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that they were completing the mid-year i-Ready benchmark assessments. She said the student data from the reading and math assessments were used to assess student progress relative to baseline proficiency levels at the beginning of the year.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand said the AI Working Group, which was led by Jason Pelletier, Director of Technology, had met with the consultant from AI Navigator on January 14th, and the group was discussing the process of developing the AI Integration Plan, what the group's goals would be, and the development of AI values.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand said two committees had met; the Professional Development Committee to review and approve submitted requests for professional development. She said the Professional Development Master Plan Revision Subcommittee had also met and was beginning to revise the Plan. She added that the plan would be submitted to the Superintendent and the School Board for approval before being sent to the state.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated he was looking forward to attending the Budget Committee meeting the following evening. He thanked all of the staff who worked on the budget.

d. Student Representative Update

Student School Board Representative Brown reviewed the following updates:

- Twelve students were able to visit Quebec City over the weekend.
- Students in the Science National Honor Society and select AP Science students held their annual Science Fair for the elementary students.
- The high school Robotics Team, "Chop Shop," joined the Earth First Initiative.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. 2026 – 2027 School Calendar Survey Results

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that 969 parents and 374 staff members had provided input on the 2026 – 2027 School Calendar. He reviewed some results, including extending the school day, which was favorable to parents but less so to staff. He added that the School Calendar Committee meeting was lively, with two parents providing excellent input. He said they had not yet arrived at the final calendar because some of the committee members asked him to

go back to the Union leadership to see if school could begin a little bit earlier, keeping in mind that Labor Day would be late the following September. Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he would update the School Board after having that discussion.

b. Budget Committee Meeting Update

Board Member Hardy noted that the Budget Committee met on January 27th and was very thorough, asking very good questions. She said the Budget Committee's work session was scheduled for the following Tuesday.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Open Enrollment Discussion

Chair Peters stated that very late Thursday evening, the Senate passed a Bill and attached an amendment that had absolutely nothing to do with the Bill, requiring all districts to adopt universal open enrollment. She said the amendment was heard without a public hearing and voted on without public input. She added that, in response, School Board members across the state had drafted a letter expressing their concerns about the amendment.

Chair Peters read aloud from the draft letter as follows:

An Open Letter on the Risks of Statewide Open Enrollment

We write as School Board members and district leaders from across New Hampshire to express serious concerns about the rapid advancement of statewide open enrollment. While expanding opportunity for students is a shared priority, major policy changes must be implemented in ways that do not destabilize the public education system that serves approximately 90% of New Hampshire students and their families. In addition, using a procedural maneuver to advance this legislation without public hearings limits transparency, excludes the voices of Granite Staters, and stifles meaningful input on a sweeping change to public education.

Statewide open enrollment will create winners and losers. Recent analysis by Reaching Higher NH shows that open enrollment shifts costs onto sending districts and ultimately harms the students who remain. Sending districts must pay new tuition bills that conflict with voter-approved budgets, resulting in higher local property taxes and/or cuts to educational services. If just 20 students leave a district, and tuition is set at the state average cost per pupil of \$22,700, the district incurs a new tuition obligation of approximately \$454,000, an expense that must be absorbed within a fixed, voter-approved budget. While some students are able to transfer to districts with greater opportunities, those students without transportation are left behind in districts with fewer resources and diminished programs. If choice is not available to all students, it is not truly a choice.

In states with full open enrollment, state governments fund public education at significantly higher levels, absorbing much of the risk created by student movement. New Hampshire provides no such buffer. For example, state contributions in Arizona (43%), Idaho (65%), and Mississippi (46%) far exceed New Hampshire, which only funds 29% of public education. In the Granite State, the absence of meaningful state investment means those costs are shifted directly onto local property taxpayers, disproportionately impacting rural and lower-property-wealth districts.

The speed with which statewide open enrollment is advancing has left dozens of critical questions unanswered. Our boards and district leaders have raised persistent concerns about how special education services will be delivered, billed, and reconciled when students transfer. Capacity is treated as a simple seat count rather than a district's actual ability to meet student needs,

including staffing levels, caseloads, specialized programs, and compliance obligations. At the same time, districts will face a significant increase in administrative costs and workload. Collectively, these gaps shift operational risk, legal exposure, and political accountability onto local boards and SAUs, forcing districts to absorb consequences they did not design and cannot control. Proceeding without resolving these questions places districts in an untenable position by design and puts students at risk.

We urge legislators to slow the advance of statewide open enrollment and adopt a more deliberate process that allows for open, public analysis. A July 1, 2026, implementation date would take effect after school budgets have already been approved by voters, leaving districts unable to plan responsibly for its effects. Public education in New Hampshire depends on clear lines of responsibility between the state and its local districts. Without it, districts and taxpayers absorb the burden, and students bear the consequences. Moving forward without clarity hurts districts, taxpayers, and, most importantly, students, undermining confidence in the state's stewardship of public education.

Chair Peters noted that the letter was signed by many, many Superintendents and Board Members across the entire State of New Hampshire.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that he felt this type of nonsense destroyed the integrity of the legislature and created issues with the public's trust. He said the amendments were tacked onto a piece of legislation that was intended to establish a committee to study the licensure of outpatient substance use disorder treatment facilities. He said he hoped the Merrimack State Representatives would stand tall and do the right thing.

b. Discussion on Agenda Items for Meeting with the Legislators

Chair Peters said the School Board wanted to know which legislation was coming up that would affect education. She said the Board would share their concerns, including open enrollment and any other issues on which they had questions or comments. She also said she would bring suggestions and possible solutions to the table.

Student School Board Representative Brown requested that the Board ask legislators about House Bills (HB 1636) and (HB 1557).

7. POLICIES

a. Annual Review of Investment Policy (DFA)

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell noted that, per the RSA, this document was completed annually. He said it basically stated that the district's funds had to be liquid, available, and insured.

Chair Peters noted that the internal controls were audited.

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the Annual Review of Investment Policy (DFA). Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

b. Approval of New Hampshire Parent Bill of Rights Policy (AB)

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to approve the New Hampshire Parent Bill of Rights Policy (AB). Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

- c. Audio and Video Recording on School Property Policy (EEAA) (2nd Reading)

Chair Peters stated that the policy (EEAA) would be on the agenda for approval at the next School Board meeting.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 20, 2026 – Public and Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the minutes from the public and non-public meeting, as presented. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

9. ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND GRANTS UNDER \$20,000

- a. Anonymous gift to the Merrimack School District Lunch Program for \$1,000.00

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to accept the gift in the amount of \$1,000.00 to be used toward the School Lunch Program, with the School Board's sincere appreciation. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

- b. Merrimack Lions Club to Merrimack School District Lunch Program for \$850.00

MOTION: Board Member Paepke made a motion to accept the gift from the Merrimack Lions Club in the amount of \$850.00 to be used toward the School Lunch Program, with the School Board's sincere appreciation. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

10. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no items.

11. OTHER

- a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter commented that she had attended a Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on January 21st, where they heard a presentation from an Eagle Scout. She said summer camp registrations were open and encouraged parents to enroll their children as soon as possible, as spots were already filling up.

- b. Correspondence

Board Member Hardy stated that she had a conversation with a community member regarding the Assistant Superintendent search.

Chair Peters noted she received an email from a parent regarding the policy on Immigration and Customs Enforcement approaching the school district, and Chief Educational Officer Olsen responded to that parent.

Chair Peters noted she had received correspondence from a parent regarding scheduling a meeting with the School Board.

Chair Peters said she also received an email from a student from Academy for Science and Design (ASD) who wanted to be on one of the School Board's agendas to discuss a very cool project she was working on. She told the student that she would get back to her with an agenda date.

c. Comments

Board Member Hardy requested an update on the policy regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that the district's legal counsel was in the process of updating Immigration and Enforcement guidance, and he would share that with the School Board as soon as he received it.

Student School Board Representative Brown stated that the Merrimack USA 250th Anniversary Planning Committee had met and discussed a Speech Contest.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

13. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:20 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.