

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
May 18, 2026**

**4:30 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, Vice-Chair; Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member; Mr. Harley Hall, Board Member; and Mr. Matthew Brown, Student School Board Representative.

Not Present: Ms. Rachel Paepke, Board Member; & Dr. Kathleen Scholand, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment. (Excused)

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; 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. RECOGNITIONS

Chair Peters introduced State Representative Rosmarie Rung. State Representative Rung read aloud the following:

“A few days ago, I, along with other former members of the Merrimack School Board, sadly learned of the April 29th passing of Jim O’Neil, a retired Superintendent of Schools in Merrimack. She wanted to share with the public how Jim touched out town far better than he found it. Jim’s time in Merrimack began when he and his wife, his soulmate, Reggie, moved here to raise their family. Jim served as a lecturer and graduate teacher at Rivier University, where he taught for more than 25 years, helping to shape generations of New Hampshire school administrators. He coached his children’s sports teams and was President of the Merrimack Youth Association for many years. He announced the Merrimack Cardinals at Merrimack High School football games and strongly believed in the connection among athletics, character, and education. In 1987, Jim became Superintendent of the Merrimack School District, succeeding his mentor, Claude Leavitt. An early adopter of technology, Jim led the district through significant

modernization and navigated it through many difficult times. He led us through additions at every single school and the construction of a new school, Merrimack Middle School, countless contract negotiations and curriculum updates, transition to Senate Bill 2 and a controversy in the mid-1990's that attracted international attention. All the while, Jim led with steadiness, honor, dignity, and respect for everyone, including the dozens of School Board members who held the seats that you now do. Following his retirement in the early 2000's, Jim did not stop leading and contributing. He was elected to two terms as a Merrimack State Representative and served on the House Education Committee. Jim's dedication to excellence in public education has benefited past and present students, parents, and all residents, even today. We owe him a debt that I feel we will pay forward. Rest in Peace, Jim."

Chair Peters asked the room to rise for a moment of silence in honor of Jim.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

4. RECOGNITIONS

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that four students from Merrimack High School submitted short film entries to the New Hampshire Short Film Festival. He said there were 99 submissions, 29 selected, and 4 Merrimack High School students received recognition for their short films.

The following students were recognized:

- Evelyn Gill – Creative Writing Documentary
- Cassie PynnBerry – Merrimack High School Unified Gym Documentary
- Emmy Hartwell - Merrimack High School Music Documentary
- Wesley Tatem – Save Yourself

Vice-Chair Hardy stated that if anyone was interested in viewing the documentaries, they could do so by attending the MHS Film Festival, to be held on May 26, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Chunkey's Cinema Pub.

5. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen provided the following updates:

- Received a visit from a resident who wanted to share how pleased he was with students participating in the community service project who were raking and cleaning up his yard.
- James Masticola Upper Elementary School had a very successful "Neon Nights Glow Party" for parents and students the previous Friday evening. He added that bowling was becoming quite popular.
- Reeds Ferry Elementary School – Recently finished the "Barbie" Club, which was very successful.
- The NHIAA (New Hampshire Interscholastic Athletic Association) had awarded certificates to six Merrimack High School students. They recognized senior athletes who had successfully competed in at least three varsity sports during

every year of their high school career. Chief Educational Officer Olsen congratulated Cayden, Joshua, Felix, Zachary, Ella, & Spencer.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that on May 13th the Planning & Building Committee had met. He said they reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan for the next five to six years. He said that the plan would be presented to the School Board in the near future.

c. School Board Update

Chair Peters reminded the School Board that their Goals meeting would be held on Friday, June 19, 2026. She said they were not yet sure if they would have a facilitator.

Chair Peters stated that she signed the School Board up to participate in the 4th of July parade.

Chair Peters also stated that the town was producing the "Hometown Heroes" banners and that a banner for Veterans could be purchased on the Parks & Recreation website.

On behalf of the School Board, Chair Peters wished Chief Educational Officer Olsen a very happy birthday.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen mentioned that he took Jim O'Neil's class approximately 40 years ago, and he said there was never a dull moment.

d. Student Representative Update

Student School Board Representative Brown reviewed the following updates:

- Senior Service Day was a great success, with 150 seniors going to 52 locations to provide assistance to seniors.
- Incoming Freshmen will have a Student Information Night on May 28th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the high school.
- The student from the Peer Collaborative Leadership Class would host an assembly the following day with an athletic trainer regarding mental health.
- The Merrimack High School music spring concert would be held on Thursday, May 21st at 7:00 p.m. in the gymnasium.

6. OLD BUSINESS

a. Update on the New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Presentation

Chair Peters stated that the New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project was presented the previous Tuesday evening at the high school, and it was very informative. She said they provided an explanation of the history of how school budgets were funded in New Hampshire, and of changes in the laws, particularly around SWEPT funds, which were

the statewide education tax. She commended them for being very politically neutral. She added that the presentation was free of charge.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she was very impressed with the presentation and learned quite a few things.

Board Member Halter commented that she did not really learn any new information, as she was already informed, but she felt there were people in the community who may not have known. She said, however, that regarding facilities and maintenance, Merrimack had two years without funding to keep up with some of the facilities projects.

7. NEW BUSINESS

a. *Artificial Intelligence (*Exhibit attached to Supporting Materials)

Mr. Jason Pelletier, Director of Technology, and Ms. Rebecca Magary, Integration Consultant, from AI Navigator were present to discuss the matter.

Mr. Pelletier addressed the Board and said they began discussing AI with a working group and later formed a committee. He said the committee was formed to move the district to a strategic, human-centered approach to Artificial Intelligence. He added that the goal for 2026 was to design a comprehensive strategy that established clear, ethical guidelines and a practical roadmap for integrating safe, responsible, and equitable AI use.

Mr. Pelletier stated that in order to have a successful change, the end result had to include:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| -Vision | -Skills |
| -Incentives | -Resources |
| -Resources | -Action Plan |

Mr. Pelletier commented that if any of those pieces were missing, the end result would not be successful. Mr. Pelletier said he felt it was so important to get the change correct that he wanted to bring someone in who lived and breathed AI, which was AI Navigator.

Ms. Magary addressed the Board and stated that she was a career-long educator in New Hampshire. She said she wanted to be very intentional about how AI was integrated, with humans being first, and to go slowly.

Mr. Pelletier said they started training teachers first at the middle school and high school. He added that some people were excited about AI, while others were very cautious about using it. He said almost everyone mentioned needing more time and targeted professional development to use AI effectively.

Mr. Pelletier shared that teachers' biggest concerns were students' critical thinking skills, overreliance on AI, and data security.

Mr. Pelletier stated that their vision for AI was as follows:

"We will strategically integrate AI as a powerful tool for learning and innovation. We commit to using it safely, ethically, and always with humanity at the center, while fully aligning with our Vision of a Learner." He added that the human aspects of teaching and learning must remain at the center of all that we do.

Mr. Pelletier reviewed the AI Use Guidelines, as follows:

- **All Human, No AI**

- **AI for Planning – Human Role: Director - AI Role: Assistant**
 - Generating initial ideas and thought organization.
 - Structuring timelines and project completion paths.
 - Role-playing for deep-dive brainstorming.

- **AI for Collaborating – Human Role: Leader – AI Role: Assistant**
 - Co-creating artifacts (visuals, presentations, & music)
 - Analyzing complex data and formatting outputs.
 - Generating counter-arguments and different viewpoints.

- **AI for Supporting – Human Role: Learner – AI Role: Coach/Tutor**
 - Summarizing information and modifying reading levels.
 - Proofreading and suggesting tone/detail edits.
 - Leading questions to help the learner find solutions.

- **All AI, No Human**

Mr. Pelletier reviewed AI Policies, as follows:

EHAGA – Student Use of Artificial Intelligence

EHAGB – Staff Use of Artificial Intelligence

Academic Integrity: Defining the line between “help” and “cheating” with mandatory citations.

Data Privacy: Strictly vetting all tools to ensure FERPA/COPPA compliance.

Human Oversight: Ensuring AI content is always reviewed and refined by the staff or students using AI.

Digital Citizenship: Prohibiting deep fakes and misuse of AI.

Mr. Pelletier reviewed the Roadmap to AI Integration, as follows:

Phase 1: Policy adoption, workgroup (committee) formation, and AI Integration Plan. (Complete)

Phase 2: Staff training and AI literacy mapping. (Ongoing)

Phase 3: Strategic rollout of AI tools and start of student use. (2026 – 2027)

Phase 4: Districtwide integration and review. (2027 – 2028)

Chair Peters asked which AI tools would be rolled out in phase 3. Mr. Pelletier replied that they would use the already-approved Google AI tool, Notebook LM, for staff. He said anything that was integrated and was already approved, such as Conomego and Canva.

Chair Peters commented that she felt Notebook LM was terrible for math and science. Chief Educational Officer Olsen asked whether any Best Practices had been documented regarding the use of AI in enrichment activities for gifted & talented programming for students. Mr.

Pelletier replied that he had not seen anything specifically for gifted & talented. Chief Educational Officer Olsen said he was wondering how they could leverage AI to provide more meaningful educational opportunities for higher-level work without creating a large staffing and funding burden. Ms. Magary suggested focusing on skill development. She said AI could design its own curriculum, but a human would still be needed to oversee it, and the students would still need interaction with a teacher.

Board Member Halter asked what AI would look like at the elementary school level. Mr. Pelletier replied that AI was somewhat ingrained in everything, although he said he appreciated the basic foundation prior to technology.

Ms. Magary said she felt the elementary level needed to learn discernment – what was real and what was not. She said AI was here to stay and that younger students needed some exposure to it without too much screen time.

Board Member Hall asked where they stood on guardrails to prevent students from using AI as a tool for plagiarism. Mr. Pelletier replied that, at present, nothing was 100% foolproof, but they would continue to refine it.

8. POLICIES

- a. High School Graduation Requirements Policy (IKF) – 1st Reading

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to waive the first reading of Policy IKF – High School Graduation Requirements. Board Member Hall seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

9. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. May 4, 2026 Public & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the public and non-public minutes from the May 4, 2026, meeting, as presented. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

10. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Resignations
 - Austin Fox, Classroom Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School
 - Ashley Cocciardi, Classroom Teacher, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
 - Sarah Cooper, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School
 - Courtney Loveland, Math Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- b. Teacher Nominations
 - Ashley Jankauskas, Special Education Teacher, Reeds Ferry Elementary School

MOTION: Board Member Hall made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, as presented. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

11. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Chair Peters, on behalf of Board Member Paepke, stated that the Planning & Building Committee had met and that she had some questions about roofs and moving the expenditures forward. She said the Watkins Funds were discussed, as was the Athletic Fields Advisory Committee.

School Board's actions were as follows:

- To request the balances and interest amounts available for all school accounts from the Trustees of the Trust Funds and to provide them to the Planning & Building Committee.
- Vice-Chair Hardy and Board Member Hall should contact Donna LaRue to reestablish the Athletic Fields Committee.
- The Planning & Building Committee would like the School Board to consider letting their committee make an edit to the current rubric for naming of property in the district, with Laurie Rothhaus, who was familiar with the current one, being happy to update it and present it to the School Board.

b. Correspondence

Chair Peters said she received one piece of correspondence from a community member and parent who wanted to share tremendous praise for the administration and the teachers at the Upper Elementary School.

Chair Peters said she received an email from a parent regarding the last School Board meeting, which was followed up on.

Chair Peters said she had back-and-forth correspondence with Merrimack TV regarding the scheduling of the New Hampshire Fair Funding presentation.

Chair Peters said she had another email from a parent that the entire School Board received, and that the administration would be addressed.

Chair Peters said the School Board received a question regarding the New Hampshire Fair Funding and the cost and related ethics of having that presentation.

Vice-Chair Hardy said she had a Facebook Messenger conversation with a Merrimack High School student about an event where she had some questions.

c. Comments

Student School Board Representative Brown recognized the students who made the cards that the School Board had. He said they were promoting the James Masticola Upper Elementary School's Arts Festival on May 28th from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

13. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:25 p.m., Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to adjourn. Board member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.