

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
March 16, 2026**

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

- **Student Welfare**

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

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

Ms. Tracy Castle, 9 Grape Vine Road, addressed the Board and said she did not feel that the Gifted & Talented students in 4th grade received the education that they deserved.

3. RECOGNITIONS

- a. **Winners of the Anti-Bullying Poster Contest**

Chief Educational Officer Olsen said Jocelyn, a 5th-grade student, and Erica, a 6th-grade student at the James Masticola Upper School, were the winners of the Anti-Bullying Art Contest. The School Board and Chief Educational Officer Olsen presented both students with certificates in recognition of their creative works of art.

- b. **Laurette Cillo**

Chief Educational Officer Olsen recognized Ms. Laurette Cillo, a school bus driver who had driven for the Merrimack School District for over 51 years. He said she was one of the unsung heroes in the Merrimack School District. The School Board and Chief Educational Officer Olsen presented Ms. Cillo with flowers and a Certificate of Appreciation.

Chair Peters stated that Margaret (Peggy) O'Shea had passed away on March 7, 2026, in Bonita Springs, FL. She said she was an educator at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School for 33 years. A moment of silence was held in her memory.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen provided the following updates:

- The Middle School band performed at the New Hampshire Band Directors' Association's Middle School Honor Band Festival.
- The Middle School students participated in a concert band performance at the New Hampshire Music Educators' Association Large Group Festival.
- Congratulated high school sophomore, Bowden, for winning the New Hampshire Educators' Association High School Competition contest. He noted that Bowden was only in the 8th grade!
- The Merrimack High School Jazz Band participated in the Clark Terry Jazz Festival at the University of New Hampshire. Three students received awards for outstanding performances: Evan, Sam, & Jacob.
- The Peer Collaborative Leadership Class at the high school put together presentations on fundraising activities.
- Spring athletics to begin on March 23rd.
- Congratulated students on some recent college signings: Gavin, a Lacrosse player, had signed with UMass Boston, Cayden, a Soccer player, and Zach & Shay, who played football, had signed with St. Anselm's
- The hockey team had another strong season.
- The New Hampshire Hockey Coach's Association recognized Liam as the All-State goalie, Alex as the All-State forward, and Josh as an honorable mention on defense.
- The 1st-graders at Reeds Ferry Elementary School were working hard on Wit & Wisdom.
- Reeds Ferry Elementary School raised several thousand dollars for the American Heart Association.
- Chief Educational Officer Olsen had a great opportunity to read to all of the kindergarten students at Reeds Ferry Elementary School.
- Chief Educational Officer Olsen interviewed Student School Board Representative Brown on his cable program.

b. Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand Update

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand reviewed the math program with the School Board, which included an evaluation of the district's math program that began with the review of student math proficiency data from the New Hampshire Statewide Assessment System in grades 3 through 8. She said the data review covered the period from the spring of 2021 through the spring of 2025, as well as other data. She said they were beginning to see evidence that the benchmark data were getting higher.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand explained that the Merrimack School District used core curriculum resources from Envision Math in grades K-6, and Big Ideas Math in grades 7 & 8, as well as Algebra. She said that local assessment data from these core curriculum resources were not reviewed or analyzed in her report. She said her findings included that Mathematics in grades K-8 generally lagged behind versus English Language Arts proficiency when looking at the New Hampshire SAS Summative Data and the I-Ready benchmark data. She added that this may be due to a concerted focus on literacy during the past several years. She said it may also be due, in part, to the core Mathematics Program used in grades K-8, which was the driver behind the decision to pilot Math programs the following year.

Chair Peters agreed that the scores were getting better. She also said that she did not agree that all students should be expected to do well on the SATs. She pointed out that there were SAT questions the students had not even learned yet, and that some students were not college-bound and would not use statistics, so that everyday math would be more beneficial.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that he was very impressed with the tone and tenor of the Deliberative Session.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the district was preparing for the preliminary audits in May.

Board Member Hardy thanked Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell for all of his hard work.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters reminded people to vote on April 14th and to check the polling locations, because they may have changed.

e. Student Representative Update

Student School Board Representative Brown reviewed the following updates:

- March 30th from 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m., the National Honor Society, in partnership with the Student Council, will be hosting a free Senior Citizens dinner.
- April 9th, Merrimack High School will have another blood drive.
- March 17th, the Chorus students from the elementary schools to the high school would participate in the Celebration of Song Festival.

- The following Saturday, the high school Band & Chorus would participate in the high school version of the NH Music Educators Association's Large Group Festival.

5. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Deliberative Session Review and Upcoming Ballot

Chair Peters stated that all of the Warrant Articles were addressed at the Deliberative Session, with no amendments.

Chair Peters also stated that there was one petitioned Warrant Article from a citizen regarding the New Hampshire Education Freedom Account (EFA) program and pointed out that, if the Warrant Article passed, it would be directed to the state legislature.

6. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Date for New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project Presentation

Chair Peters commented that the New Hampshire School Funding Fairness Project would present to the Town of Merrimack on May 12th, at 7:00 p.m. She said she felt the high school cafeteria would be the most appropriate venue.

- b. Math Curriculum

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Scholand stated that the district was currently using a 2024 version of Envision Mathematics. She said it followed a digital update that was part of the 2024 program. She added that they had seen two presentations from the 2027 program, which were more of a program update, focusing on instructional lessons. She said they would decide which of the two programs to use. She said the "pitch" day would be held on March 26th.

7. POLICIES

- a. Approval of Revised School Volunteers Policy (IJOC)

Board Member Paepke commented that, currently, a background check was performed on all volunteers, and as long as the person volunteered within 365 days of the original background check, they did not need to do another one. She said she felt it might be a better idea to have an annual background check, but would like additional time to review it.

Vice-Chair Rothhaus commented that she did not want to create many roadblocks for volunteers, but she felt self-reporting might be another way to handle it.

Chair Peters stated that the Revised School Volunteers Policy (IJOC) would be tabled for the School Board's further review. Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

- b. Revision to Parental Bill of Rights Policy (AB)

Chief Educational Officer Olsen stated that on March 3rd, Governor Ayotte signed an amendment to the Parental Bill of Rights Policy (AB) into law regarding audio and video recordings of students. He said the amendment essentially stated that the district did not need parental

permission for standardized assessments or for a school-sponsored event open to the general public.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the amended language in the Parental Bill of Rights policy (AB). Vice-Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- c. Rescind Student Computer Network and Internet Use Policy (EGA)

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to Rescind Student Computer Network and Internet Use Policy (EGA). Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

- d. Approval of Revised Student Use of Artificial Intelligence (EHAGA)

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to approve the Revised Student Use of Artificial Intelligence (EHAGA) with the amended policy (JICL). Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. March 2, 2026 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 2, 2026, public meeting, as presented. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 1. (Abstained – Board Member Halter)

9. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Educator Retirements

- Susan Bradford, Classroom Teacher, James Mastricola Elementary School
- Denise McLaughlin, Digital Learning Specialist, Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- Colleen Powers, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Maryna Gurova, ESOL Teacher, James Mastricola Upper Elementary School
- Christine Blain-Cohn, Art Teacher, Merrimack Middle School
- Leanna Avery, Special Education Teacher, Merrimack High School

- b. Administrator Resignations

- David Dziki, Director of Food Services, Districtwide
- Kathleen Hoppa, Assistant Principal, Milford Middle School

MOTION: Vice-Chair Rothhaus made a motion to accept the retirements and resignations listed above. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

10. OTHER

a. Committee Reports

Board Member Halter commented that she attended a Parks & Recreation Committee meeting on February 18th, and reviewed the following:

- The Easter Egg Hunt would be held on Saturday, March 28th, from 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., where 8,000 eggs would be hidden for the kids to find.
- Camp TREK was already sold out, Camp Naticook was more than 87% full, and the one-week theater camp was $\frac{3}{4}$ full.
- The July 4th parade was open for registration if the Board was interested.

Board Member Paepke commented that she attended a Professional Development Committee meeting, where they discussed processes, and that the Master Plan Committee was meeting again. She said they reviewed the hours put forward for approval and reimbursements.

b. Correspondence

Chair Peters commented that she had received several emails from parents and that the administration was following up.

Chair Peters stated that she received one email from an educator who requested a meeting with her regarding further education, as well as several emails from the School District Governance Association of New Hampshire (SDGA). She said she would attend a webinar on School Funding the following Thursday.

c. Comments

Vice-Chair Rothhaus wished all staff leaving the district the best of luck.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At approximately 7:38 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Paepke seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.