

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
November 17, 2025**

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. Laurie Rothhaus, Vice-Chair; Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Board Member; Ms. Rachel Paepke, Board Member.

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

Not Present: Matthew Brown, School Board Student Representative and Dr. Kathleen Scholand, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum were excused.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:10 p.m., Chair Peters called the regular 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 a high-quality, future-driven education to 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

State Representative Rosemarie Rung of 21 Ministerial Drive spoke to a letter written by William Cass P.E. of the NH Department of Transportation regarding a "reduced salt area" on Industrial Drive and Continental Boulevard. The letter requested that the Merrimack School Board provide a letter to the Department entrusting the decision to request a reduction in salt to the Merrimack Town Council. The Department of Transportation will then proceed with consideration of the Town's request.

State Representative Rung explained that the Town of Merrimack will be reducing the number of polling places from three to two. She asked that the School Board communicate this information to the public.

Mrs. Rung expressed her support for the School Board and the Town Council to produce and distribute one voter information guide.

State Representative Nancy Murphy of 20 Brenda Lane provided the School Board with copies of the November 6, 2025 letter from NHDOT Commissioner Cass.

Budget Committee Chair Heather Robitaille of 45 Springfield Circle thanked Chief Education Officer Olsen for an opportunity to meet with the District Leadership Team to obtain feedback and ideas. Ms. Robitaille encouraged the public to watch and/or attend all School Board and Budget Committee meetings throughout the budget process.

Ms. Robitaille stated the State Representatives are ignoring ways, other than property taxes, to increase State revenue.

State Representative Nancy Murphy of 20 Brenda Lane asked the School Board to invite the State Legislators to a future School Board meeting to allow the Legislators an opportunity to speak to how the state is working to fund adequate education.

Chief Education Officer Olsen noted that adequacy aid is 4.7% less than it was twenty years ago.

3. RECOGNITIONS

The School Board recognized the members of the Unified Soccer Team, team manager, coaches, and the athletic director.

Vice Chair Rothhaus acknowledged the passing of Brenda Grady, a former School Board Member and long-time Merrimack resident.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

a. Superintendent Update

Chief Educational Officer Olsen reviewed the following:

- The middle school drama club will be performing the play "Puffs".
- 6 students signed letters of intent with colleges based on their athletic skills.
- Approximately 90 high school students are receiving 3 college credits through dual enrollments with local colleges.
- The high school family and consumer science classes are baking 80 loaves of pumpkin bread to donate to the St. James food pantry.
- The high school Granite State Challenge Team is one of fourteen teams moving on to the Granite State Challenge Team Competition for the 8th consecutive year.

b. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

There was no report.

c. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reported the Planning and Building Committee approved the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). In four or five years from now there will be a 10-year break from roof projects. Mr. Shevenell recommended increasing the amount of the Roof Capital Reserve Fund during that 10-year period. All existing roofs have a 45-year warranty.

The only item on the 2026-2027 Capital Improvement Plan is the technology infrastructure improvement.

Mr. Shevenell reported an increased demand for air conditioning during the summer months due to the increased Camp Invention enrollment in recent years. He will meet with Honeywell representatives to research other air conditioning options for the future.

d. School Board Update

Chair Peters reported the Governor declined to attend the scheduled meeting with current and former school board chairs. Commissioner Davis will be in attendance.

Chair Peters reported New Hampshire Fair Funding is drafting a full study on the cost of special education. The report is expected to be available mid-January 2026.

e. Student Representative Update

There was no report.

5. OLD BUSINESS

a. 2026-2027 School Calendar Survey Update

Chief Education Officer Olsen incorporated the Board's input to the 2026-2027 school calendar survey. The survey closing date of February will be adjusted. The survey distribution is expected within the next week.

MOTION: Board Member Paepke made a motion to accept the 2026-2027 School Calendar Surveys. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

b. 2026-2027 Budget Calendar Update

Chief Education Officer Olsen reported that the only space available for the December 17, 2025 budget meeting was Merrimack High School.

The Board discussed budget meeting date options.

The Board agree to reschedule the December 17, 2025 budget meeting to the regular meeting date of January 5, 2026. December 18, 2025 will remain a snow date in the Memorial Room.

c. December 17, 2025 Budget Meeting Location

The December 17, 2025 budget meeting was rescheduled to January 5, 2026 in the Matthew Thornton Room.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. Watkins Trust

Trustee Chair Chris Christensen explained the Trustees of Trust Funds (TOTF) consist of three individuals and one alternate that meet monthly except during the months of July and December. He explained permanent funds are permanent because the donor gave the money to be held in perpetuity by the Trustees of Trust Funds. Trust Funds contain a principal amount and an income amount. Only the income can be used for a particular purpose.

Trustee Chair Christensen reported the Gage & Lawrence Fund does not have restrictions other than to be used for education purposes, inclusive of grades 9-12. The other Funds are limited to grades 1-8 for enhancements, not to replace school funding that should be the responsibility of the school district in its normal course of business. To spend funds specific to preschool and/or kindergarten only would require probate court intervention. Mr. Christensen encouraged the continuation of the global use of funds.

The Trust Funds for educational purposes are:

- Gage & Lawrence (no restrictions other than educational purposes, inclusive of grades 9-12)
- Mastricola Fund (educational purposes for the middle school)
- Stockley (There is no clear guidance on this small fund)
- Watkins (educational purposes for grades 1-8)
- Watkins Forest Income (educational purposes for grades 1-8)
- Watkins Speaking (educational purposes for grades 1-8)
- Watkins Prize Spelling (educational purposes for grades 1-8)
- Watkins Town Forest (educational purposes for grades 1-8)

Previous Trust Fund expenditures:

- \$100,000 a year over four years to upgrade four school libraries
- \$300,00 to make gym bleachers Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant and replaced the all-purpose room (APR) floor at James Mastricola Upper Elementary School.
- Sound and projection system at James Mastricola Elementary School for large group meetings
- Playground at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School
- \$32,000 seed money to start Mandarin classes at Merrimack High School

Vice Chair Rothhaus expressed her desire to honor Mr. Watkins for the gifts he gave to Merrimack.

Trustee Chair Christensen responded a recognition plaque would be appropriate however a bench placed at the Lawrence Road forest would not qualify because it would not benefit grades 1-8.

Trustee Chair Christensen encouraged the school district to approach the Trustees of the Trust Funds for monetary support.

Chair Peters thanked Mr. and Mrs. Christensen for their decades of support to Merrimack.

- b. Determine Deliberative Session Date between March 7-14, 2027

The Board set the dates for the Deliberative Session on Tuesday, March 10, 2025 with Thursday, March 12, 2025 as the snow date.

- c. Other

There were no items reported.

7. POLICIES

There were no policies for the Board's review.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. November 3, 2025 – Public Minutes & Non-Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the November 3, 2025 public minutes as amended and the non-public minutes as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

Board Member Paepke requested that line 209 on page 5 be changed to reflect the language from Chief Education Officer Olsen's memo.

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

9. CONSENT AGENDA

There were no resignations or nomination presented to the Board.

10. OTHER

- a. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Rothhaus attended a Planning and Building Committee meeting. The Committee is reviewing a Facilities and Grounds Naming Application. The application is requesting that the "coaches' box in the stadium" be named after Joe Raycraft, a former athletic director and coach for both men and women's sports. The Planning and Building Committee is reviewing references and is expected to formulate a recommendation at its next meeting.

Board Member Paepke attended a Joint Loss Management Committee meeting. The Committee reviewed the Workers Compensation Incident Report from July 1st to November 1st. The middle school safety walk through was completed. The only outstanding safety walk through is the upper elementary school.

Board Member Hardy reported that efforts are underway to create an Athletic Advisory Committee. She is hopeful that the committee members will be identified during the next couple of months with the first meeting to be held in January 2026.

Chair Peters report that she attended a Professional Development Committee meeting. The committee approved math proposals and discussed who would be involved in updating the Professional Development Master Plan. Chair Peters will be part of that update process.

Board Member Hardy reported that she and Chair Peters participated in interviews for a new Superintendent. An update will be made public soon.

Chair Peters reported the next MTA contract negotiations meeting will be November 18th. She expects to have a report for the December 1st school board meeting.

b. Correspondence

Vice Chair Rothhaus received one correspondence from a concerned parent that she referred to Chief Education Officer Olsen.

Board Member Hardy reported that she had good conversation with a community member about a social media post.

Chair Peters referred a parent concern to Chief Education Officer Olsen.

Chair Peters received a policy request that she will forward to Vice Chair Rothhaus and Chief Education Office Olsen and potentially to the policy committee, if appropriate.

c. Comments

Vice Chair Rothhaus reported that the Merrimack High School Spirit Team placed third place in the State Competition.

Chair Peters noted that the Administration will present the 2026-2027 Budget to the School Board on December 1st. She encouraged the public to attend or watch the December 1st meeting.

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were no comments on agenda items.

12. ADJOURNMENT

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

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.