

Manchester Essex Regional School District

School Committee Meeting Minutes September 21, 2021

Virtual Meeting via WebEx

Members Present: Sarah Wolf, Chair, Ken Warnock, Eric Bourke, Theresa Whitman, Matt Harrington, Kate Koch-Sundquist and Chris Reed

Staff Present: Pam Beaudoin, Superintendent, Avi Urbas, Director of Finance & Operations, Gail Hunter, Secretary

A. Call to Order: Ms. Wolf called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) Public Comment

Ms. Wolf opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone who is joining us tonight and to 1623 Studios for recording the meeting and posting it for us. We will begin with public comment. I just want to take a moment to remind everyone that this is an opportunity for comment, not debate.

As our policy states: *"A School Committee Meeting is a meeting of a government body at which members of the body deliberate over public business. We welcome the attendance of members of the school district community to view your School Committee as it conducts its regular business meeting, but these meetings are not designed to be an opportunity for dialogue."*

Please know that while we will not be immediately responding to your comments or answering questions, we are listening and paying attention to your concerns. During the meeting we will be focusing on items that are listed on our posted agenda.

If you would like to make a comment, please put your name and address in the chat. Please do not make other comments in the chat. We allot 20 minutes total for public comment, and we ask each person to limit their comments to 3 minutes. I will be timing the comments tonight and I will ring my bell after 2 ½ minutes. After public comment is over, the chat function will be turned off to allow us all to devote our full attention the meeting.

Jake Foster, Essex – Mr. Foster's comments as forwarded to the Committee: "My comments today center on the draft strategic plan documents you looked at in your last meeting. I want to highlight several areas that likely need some adjustment in order to successfully enhance MERSD programming. First, however, I'd like to share that I am very appreciative that the district has taken a number of the recommendations and strategies that emerged from last spring's strategic planning workgroup, of which I was a member. It is wonderful to see the inclusion of strategies for authentic learning, SEL, and diversity so prominent in the draft document.

I also appreciate the drafted Theory of Action, in which the "If we" statements clearly relate to the Core Values and the "Then" statement expresses the broad goals for student qualities upon graduation.

For 3 of the 4 strategic priorities – SEL, diversity, and budget – there is a reasonable focus on each particular priority, and the included strategic objectives show a relatively explicit path toward advancement of each. I'll provide a few specific comments about each of these in writing below, but my primary comments regard the fourth strategic priority, "authentic learning environment." Each of the 6 objectives that are to contribute to this focus are priorities in and of themselves.

I regularly work with schools on full program redesign. In my experience schools taking on just a couple of the objectives listed under "authentic learning environment" invest in substantive program redesign and professional development to create a noticeably different school. MERSD is not intending to engage in a substantive program redesign; these objectives are meant to be enhancement to an already quality program. While I agree with, and laud, all 6 objectives, it is unrealistic to take them all on at once given our district context. I highly recommend that this list be narrowed from 6 to include between 2 to 4 of these objectives. My personal recommendation would be to take on #1 (PBL & authentic assessment), #2 (enhancing creativity, innovation, and the arts), and #6 (common curriculum, assessments and practices). Whichever set you settle on, each of these should be considered its own priority, with its own column in the strategic plan and a set of objectives that are equivalent in scale and specificity to the other 3 priorities.

Looking then to what is necessary to support achievement of a slightly modified strategic plan, I encourage you to revisit the Superintendent's Goals. The goals as drafted are all about process with little indication about what the outcomes are or how they relate to the strategic plan.

Under "Student Learning," for example, there is no indication of what the outcome will be as a result of doing the different things. There should be some indication that these efforts will result in, for example, 'a collaborative and inclusive culture,' with some sort of measure to know that progress has been made toward that goal.

Under "Professional Practice," for example, what is the outcome of all the collaborative bargaining and contract development? It should include some aspect(s) related to program changes needed to achieve the strategic plan. The various working groups, professional development, different teaching relationships, and so on that are going to be needed to achieve the strategic priorities and objectives are likely to have a number of contract implications. Such a goal should be explicit to provide insight into whether the contract work successfully contributes to advancing the strategic plan.

In summary, I highly recommend that you help the district to refocus the "authentic learning environment" priority and rework the Superintendent Goals to better align with and ensure attention to the Strategic Plan. Thank you.

Specific commentary on the strategic objectives for the remaining 3 strategic priorities: #2 SEL • The priority language itself is incomplete. It ends with "...all aspects of the school day to provide." – to provide what? This is key to understanding what the goal or outcome is meant to be. • There is no mention of curriculum in any of the objectives. A key goal of integrating SEL into district programming is figuring out how SEL and academics work together to enhance each other, and not compete for time and resources.

#3 Diversity • The priority language itself is incomplete. It ends with “...recognizes the contributions and uniqueness.” – contributions and uniqueness of what or who? This is critical to understanding what the goal or outcome is meant to be. • Objective #2, “Establish a working group,” is very vague. For what purpose? Who would be involved? What is its role? • Objective #3 is also vague; what is the purpose of an assessment? Is it to gauge school culture? To understand what DEI efforts are already in place. • What about family and community engagement in this priority? From the spring strategic planning work, efforts beyond the school walls are as important to advance this priority as those within the schools.

#4 Budget • Objectives #1 (personnel efficiencies) and #2 (HR practices) are not clear about what the goals are of those efforts. The vagueness of those objectives does not indicate how those efforts will advance any of the other strategic priorities or objectives.”

Nina McKinnon, Essex – Ms. McKinnon informed the Committee the bus that serves her area was late and no longer came down her street. She is requesting clear communication from the District around bus routes and delays. Ms. McKinnon also noted that during the pandemic when school was not in session the District had maintained their contract with the bus company and suggested the service from the company should be good.

2) Chair’s Report

Thank you for joining us tonight. The school year is off to a great start, and in a lot of ways things feel normal. I was able to attend our first home football game on Friday and it was great to see. The team played well, the cheerleaders were enthusiastic, the green hornet was working the crowd, and the pep band kept everyone’s spirits high. Lots of students and families were out enjoying the game.

We want to keep this positive energy going, despite the ongoing pandemic. Later we will be discussing our annual goals. The first goal on our list is to: *Provide for the health and safety of students and faculty while maintaining the robust educational program MERSD and our member towns value, specifically during the COVID crisis.* To that end, tonight we will be discussing COVID protocols and mitigation strategies, as well as the impacts that then pandemic has had and continues to have on our district.

We’re glad to have you here with us as we have these important conversations.

3) Consent Agenda

- Acceptance of Warrants – 1009 and 1010
- Minutes – August 17, 2021, and September 8, 2021
- Out of State Travel -- Athletics

Mr. Warnock moved to approve the consent agenda, with the minutes of September 8, 2021, held. Mr. Bourke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote, (Mr. Reed had not joined the meeting at the time of the vote).

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- Elementary Facilities/MSCC (Theresa Whitman/Chris Reed)

Ms. Whitman stated stake holder tours were continuing at the new Memorial School.

- Finance Committee (Matt Harrington/Theresa Whitman) –

Mr. Harrington stated the Finance Committee had not met. Superintendent Beaudoin informed the Committee on September 28, 2021, the District was hosting an educational meeting for new and returning Finance Committee and BOS members.

- Policy Committee (Eric Bourke/ Kare Koch-Sundquist) No Report
- Negotiations Team (Sarah Wolf/Ken Warnock)

Mr. Warnock stated the Team is not yet negotiating with META, however through COVID the Negotiations Team had met with leadership around keeping everyone safe, healthy and working together. These meetings took place on an ad hoc basis. Contract negotiations will take place later this year.

5) Superintendent's Report

- Congratulations for MERHS & Entire MERSD Team!
Boston Magazine #9 Best High School
- Introductions
Angela Bik, Interim Director of Curriculum & Instructional Technology
Dan Richards, High School, Interim Dean of students
- DEI Work – Michael Eatman – Culture 7 Consulting (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)
Leadership Team Coaching to begin end of September
Focus on developing culture and capacity
Goal of Mid-year work with Faculty
- Open Houses – Going Forward with Some Modifications
- MCAS Data Released
Student Reports to Families end of first week of October
School Committee Reports from Principals 10/19 and 11/2
- MCAS Big Picture
Some decline for 2019 consistent with statewide experience – expected
District data includes students in OOD (year-long remote) and home school (by choice)
2021 – 2019 different cohorts and students
Forward progress for all schools on accountability measures
Still strongly above State average
Data (State/local) will help to guide interventions/remediation plans
Work to do but starting from a position of strength

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the Principals will be reporting to the Committee in November and prior to those meetings if Committee members have questions those questions should be forwarded to the Principals. Ms. Whitman asked what the Committee can expect at the meeting with Principals. Superintendent Beaudoin stated an executive summary, analysis of findings and proposed next steps.

- Covid Management
 - Reporting – **Post Weekly Report** and Email Communication in cases of outbreaks (ex. Class/Team)
 - Testing Program
 - Decision Points for Discussion
 - Vaccination Mandate for Staff

The Committee considered a vaccination mandate for staff who at this time appear to be about 90% vaccinated and discussed requiring vaccinations as a way to minimize staffing issues. However, vaccinated individuals can test positive for Covid, would teachers feel more comfortable knowing their co-workers were vaccinated, does requiring vaccination keep individuals safer and decrease the need for quarantining. The District is still experiencing staffing shortages due to a decrease in the pool of substitute teachers.

It was concluded Superintendent Beaudoin would speak with District Counsel, META and the Health Care Group. Superintendent Beaudoin recognizes this as a topic in the political realm and with no State mandate

- DESE masking Mandate

DESE masking mandate, if a specific school building is at an 80% vaccination rate vaccinated students and teachers could be allowed to go unmasked. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated at this time there are no buildings at an 80% vaccination level. The discussion considered masked students could be a target for bullying, classroom management, choice students, access to vaccination information and proof of vaccination. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated someone will need to monitor and implement the State guidance. At this time there is no system in place to monitor or manage and unmasking policy.

6) Continued Business

- **SEPAC**

Ms. Mulvey reported SEPAC held its third annual picnic at Tucks Point, with 75 families joining in the event and supported by student volunteers and staff. The picnic included lots of food, face painting, paddle boarding and more. Ms. Mulvey stated the picnic was exactly what she had hoped for on a perfect day with a high level of attendance and participation. Challenges moving forward include funding and volunteers resources. SEPAC will hold its first meeting of the year in October.

- COVID Protocols – Status Report
- Transportation Update – Beginning of the Year Challenges

Mr. Urbas stated everyone was surprised when Salter called early one morning to indicate they had a problem with one of their drivers who had taken ill overnight. The District attempted to notify the families on the bus route at the last minute through emails and phone calls. This was an unusual event and like many bus companies Salter is having difficulty finding drivers.

MERSD is covered by many of our regular drivers with some routes being covered by Salter's Administrative Staff. When a bus company is shorthanded, there are challenges. Mr. Urbas thanked parents for being patient, encouraged parents to let the District and Salter know when they have

questions and when buses are running late it is not characteristic of prior years and the District is working with Salter on improving service.

Mr. Urbas assured Ms. McKinnon the District has a good relationship with Salter and during the pandemic worked with other School Districts to support the bus company. The District's efforts on behalf of Salter helped to keep the company from going out of business. Mr. Urbas stated his children take the bus and he understands if the buses do not run-on time, it disrupts the family routine.

Ms. Whitman noted that some after school activities have been delayed when a traveling team's bus service is late. She stated we all need to be flexible and understanding during these times. Superintendent Beaudoin asked if the late bus is running, Mr. Urbas stated it is. She asked parents to use the dedicated email address for bus issues and understands communications with Salter is slower than usual, but the District will work to get everyone's issues resolved in real time.

- FY21 OPEB Contribution Adjustment

Ms. Whitman moved to amend the FY21 OPEB contribution by \$12,834.00 for a total contribution in FY21 of \$550,088.00; Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Goal Setting
 - Strategic Plan – Strategic Priorities – DIP

Superintendent Beaudoin stated the goals were completed at the leadership level and delivered to the School Committee. Following discussion at the previous School Committee meeting the Committee's recommendation was to develop two documents. The documents provide an overview and objectives. This is a 10-year outlook. Superintendent Beaudoin indicated at the District level there are different individuals doing different things and there are some things that are actively in place at the High School level but need to be implemented at the elementary level. Superintendent Beaudoin would like the Committee's general consensus on the Strategic Plan. Ms. Wolf suggested waiting until after the next Strategic Planning meeting next Wednesday and for the Committee to approve following that meeting.

- School Committee – Finalize Goals

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve School Committee goals for school year 2021-2022; Mr. Bourke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Superintendent – Finalize Goals

Mr. Bourke moved to approve the Superintendent's goals; Mr. Harrington seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

7) School Committee Comment

Mr. Warnock thanked Ms. Wolf for her fine leadership and keeping things organized. He also recognized Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas for getting the school year off to a great start. Additionally, he indicated he had had an opportunity to enjoy the new Essex Elementary playground and the new Memorial School playground, and he found both to be a great deal of fun and wonderful additions to the communities.

Ms. Whitman asked what the process was for hiring full time Administrative staff. Superintendent Beaudoin stated in January or February 2022 the search process will begin. A committee of teachers, parents, and sometimes students will review the paper search and invite candidates for interviews. Three finalists will be identified and invited back for site visits with on boarding in July before school year 2022-2023. Occasionally there are contract negotiations when interviewing for leadership positions.

8) Adjourn

Ms. Whitman moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

WebEx call-In information available at <http://www.mersd.org/domain/818>

MERSD Mission Statement

Education all students, instilling a passion for life-long learning and encouraging local and global citizenship.