

Manchester Essex Regional School District

School Committee Meeting Minutes March 1, 2022

Virtual Meeting via WebEx

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

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

Call to Order: Ms. Wolf called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

This evening State Representative Jamie Belsito spoke to the School Committee noting the State's participation in the District budget was between 6% to 9% and although she could not promise additional funding at this time, she is here to assure the Committee she will be a voice for the District. She will collaborate with Senator Tarr on behalf of the District and is available to support the District. She thanked the Committee for the invitation.

1. Public Comment

Ms. Wolf opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone who is joining the Committee tonight and thanked 1623 Studios for recording the meeting and posting it for us. We will begin with public comment. She took 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. Ms. Wolf will time comments and ring a bell after 2 ½ minutes. After public comment is over, the chat function will be turned off to allow the Committee to devote their full attention to the meeting.

Maura Twombly – Ms. Twombly stated the turf field is dangerous with holes and uneven surfaces; maintenance does not fully solve the problem. She added if referees judge the field to be unplayable, they can shut down play. Funding for the field has been put off for 3 to 4 years and Ms. Twombly believes players are at risk.

Samuel Bothwell a freshman stated the field is dangerous with holes, patches and is uneven. He specifically mentioned the area in front of the goalie box concluding that it is in the best interest of athletes for the District to replace the field.

Ms. Collins, Manchester reiterated the position of the Friends of Manchester Essex Performing Arts that cutting funds for music and changing the program to a fee for service program will result in a decrease in participation. The District has difficulty keeping music teachers and the elimination of a position will cut into the remaining performing arts programs. She believes Elementary music is an essential part of the arts program and without Elementary music the Middle School band program will be difficult to support. She concluded by pleading do not cut music from the budget.

Ben Buttrick, Essex Finance Committee – Mr. Buttrick stated on a personal level he would like to extend appreciation to the members of the Essex Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen for their decisions and challenging compromise with approval of an apportionment in the low 4%. Additionally, the Town of Essex will be asked to approve the allocation of \$50K from the Town School budget fund.

Hadley Levendusky, a Junior and Captain of the Field Hockey and Lacrosse teams stated the turf field is unsafe and one wrong step can cause an injury. She added his brother who is about to graduate from college was promised a new turf field when he played for Manchester and that was four years ago.

Wrede Charlton, stated the field is super dangerous and scary. She read a note from the Lacrosse coach stating that the MERSD field was one of the worst in the league and referees have spoken to her about the safety of the field.

Andrew, a Senior, and Lacrosse Captain stated the field was bad adding it has one giant patch where many kids have tripped and fallen. When the ball hits a patch, it bounces and goes off in a random direction.

Annie Cameron, Essex – Ms. Cameron stated the State is working slowly on behalf of regional schools and she wishes the State would honor their commitments for additional resources. The State's lack of commitment to regional schools puts the towns in a position to be fighting for resources. Ms. Cameron knows the District towns will be going for an override and she knows this is going to be difficult following a difficult budget year.

2. Student Report

Diego introduced himself as a sophomore at the High School and the Student Representative to the School Committee he would like to reinforce what other students said about the turf field which he believes needs to be replaced because the entire student body plays on the field or uses the field during gym class.

- Diego stated he was happy to see the mask mandate lifted and see everyone's face.
- Diego does not like the idea of cutting Elementary Foreign Language adding the program had given him a strong foundation for Middle School Foreign Language.

- Diego noted a member of the swim team set the State record in the 200-meter free style and the High School basketball team is in the playoffs.

State Representative Jamie Belsito stated she applauded the civic engagement of the community and invited interested groups to tour the State House.

3. Chairperson's Report

Ms. Wolf thanked all the students who spoke about the field. She stated there is a lot to talk about this evening and the School Committee is working with the towns to provide educational programs. Ms. Wolf encouraged everyone participating in the meeting to attend their Town meetings and support the District budget.

4. Consent Agenda

- Acceptance of Warrants 1042 and 1043 – the warrants are lined in the PDF below.

Ms. Whitman moved to accept warrants 1042 and 1043; Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Ms. Whitman asked if the curriculum and technology expense was for new boards. Mr. Urbas stated the expense was for boards. The boards are ordered, with delivery anticipated this Thursday or Friday.
- Ms. Wolf pointed out additional expenses were for snow and ice and the new boiler at Memorial School which will likely be covered under warranty.
- Ms. Wolf also noted a savings under the school bus contract. Mr. Urbas stated routes were consolidated with no impact on service and the change represents a new savings.
 - Acceptance of Meeting Minutes for January 25, 2022 and February 1, 2022.

Mr. Warnock moved to approve the minutes of 1/25/2022 and 2/1/22; Mr. Bourke seconded the motion. The motion was tabled to the next meeting.

5. Sub-Committee Reports

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

Mr. Urbas stated it was helpful to hear the feedback on the field. He added turf fields have an 8-year warranty and the District is past that but has an active maintenance program and it is true that the District has had to do a lot of patching. The funding is set aside to replace the field but there have been a couple of challenges. The District had planned to complete the project this summer but have run into delays with the supply chain and will continue to rely on short-term fixes. If the field was not safe to play on it would not be open. The District is moving forward with the design of a new field and has a contract with Gale Associates, however, replacing the field will likely rely on passing an override while the District is using reserves to cover operational costs. When the revenue picture is corrected the District will be ready to move forward with replacing the fields.

- Finance Committee (Matt Harrington/Theresa Whitman) – the Finance

Essex Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen agreed to modify their original apportionment request and stated that the Essex apportionment could come in at 4.3%. The Essex Finance Committee has additional questions which will be addressed. Both Boards have agreed to collaborate on a correction next year.

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

6. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Beaudoin has three points to address:

- Volunteer mask mandate in elementary schools has about 40% participation with the MHS at about 20% participation
- CDC new guidance dropped mask mandate for Pre-K to Grade 12 on buses and in all school settings DESE is aligning with CDC and masks are now voluntary in all school settings.
- Manchester Town Meeting is rescheduled for April 25, 2022. The School Committee meeting schedule will be adjusted to reflect the change.

7. Continued Business

- SEPAC

Christine from SEPAC stated the recent meeting had 15 parents in attendance and all parents agreed their children were missing out on traditional “rites of passage” at all levels. SEPAC is recommending that the District find opportunities outside of school to create more social events that the children have missed out on during Covid. Superintendent Beaudoin asked if this related to a particular grade level? Christine stated it was across the board.

State Representative Jamie Belsito invited SEPAC to bring a group of children to tour the State House.

- COSO Internal Control Procederes Update

Control Procedures Update indicated there were opportunities for improvement and the memo and specifics (in the PDF below) were discussed and confirmed in a discussion between the Committee and Mr. Urbas.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to acknowledge receipt of the Internal Control Procedures Updates; Mr. Bourke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Memorial School Construction

The specifics related to the bond are contained in the PDF below and were discussed and confirmed in a discussion between the Committee and Mr. Urbas.

Mr. Harrington moved that the School Committee vote to accept bid results for sale of \$1.3 million Bond Anticipation Notes (BANs) for the Memorial School Construction project; Ms. Whitman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.



MERSD Financial
Memo.pdf

- FY23 Budget Workshop



3.1.22 MERSD
Budget Adjustment

- Discussion of Scenarios

Superintendent Beaudoin presented four options for the Committee to discuss in columns A – D. She reminded the Committee that when you look at column D it is the extreme ask and this column is already a \$980K reduction in the budget. This is nowhere near addressing the real budget needed to maintain level services. The Committee is starting at a \$980K gap with the assumption 3.5% was the number the District needed to hit. Areas to the left of column D represents a larger gap. Superintendent Beaudoin added there is a lot more going on to the right that is not being discussed in this budget.

The Committee discussed the proposed options. Mr. Warnock requested clarification on which options were acceptable to Essex. Superintendent Beaudoin stated columns B and C met the Essex request.

- Vote to adopt FY23 Budget

Ms. Whitman moved that the School Committee adopt Column C for FY23 Budget spending \$28,925,987 with matching reserves the targeted increase assume 2.89% with Essex apportionment 4.39% and Manchester apportionment 2.05%; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

Mr. Urbas pointed out that the apportionment is certified later in the process and could change.

Mr. Warnock stated that puts the budget off an additional \$150K from level services and he prefers column B.

Mr. Harrington stated he is not comfortable with cuts from programming and staffing. Mr. Reed expressed concern that the use of reserves could cost the District millions of dollars down the road and that does not make sense moving forward suggesting the Committee could do this better.

After further discussion the School Committee voted on the motion.

Mr. Bourke, Mr. Reed, Ms. Koch-Sundquist, Ms. Whitman, Mr. Warnock, Ms. Wolf voted affirmatively, Mr. Harrington voted no.

Ms. Whitman moved to approve the Capital Budget in the amount of \$4,506,096.00 Mr. Warnock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

- Next Steps

The School Committee will meet on March 15, 2022 Mr. Eastman will present. Ms. Wolf proposed the Committee meet on April 5, 2022 in person and the April 25, 2022 meeting will take place prior to the Manchester Town Meeting.

8. School Committee Comment –

There was no additional comment this evening.

9. Adjourn

Mr. Warnock moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Harrington 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.