



## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

*October 4, 2022*

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	October 4, 2022
<b>Location:</b>	MERMHS Library
<b>Attendees:</b>	PMs. Mitchellela BeMr. Urbasdoyn, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson Jake Foster Matt Harrington Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Chris Reed Erica Spencer
<b>Absent:</b>	
<b>Guests:</b>	John Willis, Principal Memorial School Sheila McAdMs. Mitchells, Principal Essex Elementary School
<b>Recorded by:</b>	Maria Schmidt
<b>Link to Reports and Presentations</b>	<a href="https://www.mersd.org/domain/785">https://www.mersd.org/domain/785</a>

**A. Call to Order** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at *5:34 p.m.*

**1) Public Comment –**

There was no public comment this evening.

**2) Chairman's Report –**

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Ms. Whitman reported that the high school student representative will be Diego Sanson, He is expected to begin attending next meeting. Since the last meeting, Ms. Whitman fielded communication from a community member with input about the turf field improvements and another interested in connecting. Ms. Whitman also met with the chairperson of a neighboring school committee and opened a dialogue about common practices. Going forward, Ms. Whitman plans to adopt the tradition of sharing at each meeting one of the operating protocols of the School Committee, as drafted in the summer session 2021. In the future Ms. Whitman plans to invite another member to read the protocol.

“As elected members of the Manchester Essex School Committee, we accept the trust that has been placed in us to ensure that the students of our district receive the best education. We are continually focused on the school at all times. We hereby commit to the following when conducting our business: We will, in the category of support the educational welfare and well-being of all students, the first bullet is: represent the needs, interests, and achievements of all students in the district and place the students interests above all others in decisions while remaining within the limitations of a voter-approved budget.”

### **3) Consent Agenda –**

- Acceptance of Warrants – FY23 V1014
- Minutes for approval: 9/6/22 and 9/20/22
- Approval of Out of State Travel for the high school field trip to New York City and the Debate Team competitions.

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Mr. Harrington seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

### **4) Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/Matt Harrington) – No Report
- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Linn Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman reported that in their first collaborative meeting, the finance sub-committee had the opportunity to hear what each community is facing in terms of finance limitations. Essex has just finished negotiations with town employees. Manchester has theirs coming up. There are some capital issues on both sides. Following the insight from each town, Superintendent Beaudoin was able to share what the school district has coming up. Superintendent Beaudoin reiterated that what was shared was the notion that the district is picking up from where we closed last fiscal year, with a roughly \$900K gap, with a couple additional concerns – the impact of inflation on out of district placement (OOD), and rising utilities and health care costs. Ms. Whitman added that Essex is finalizing their first Strategic Plan, allowing a first glimpse at what that will mean for the district. Ms. Whitman and the head of the Essex Finance committee will meet further to spell out the communication and connection between the town and the district by way of the School Committee. Ms. Mitchell reported that the finance sub-committee had met to review the

responsibilities of the finance sub-committee to the School Committee and to review the budget calendar regarding required meetings and public hearings. In regards to the dictates of the Regional Agreement and the finance committee, it was discussed that the language may need to be updated to reflect current practices. As a point of clarification, Ms. Whitman noted that the language in the Regional Agreement is twenty years old. The implementation of the agreement has evolved over time. Superintendent Beaudoin provided the example that the agreement stipulates that the annual report be requested by October 1; however, it is actually January when this request is made.

- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – Mr. Foster reported that he and Ms. Spencer were able to meet with Superintendent Beaudoin and Mr. Urbas to review a long list of policies and begin to understand and prioritize the subcommittee's work. The initial focus will be around updating finance-related policies to reflect changes in state regulation, and development of a reserve policy
- **Negotiation Team** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – Ms. Koch-Sundquist reported that negotiations are underway and ongoing. The Negotiation Sub-Committee met on September 23, 2022 and will meet again in a couple of weeks.

**5) Superintendent's Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin shared three points with the School Committee.

- **Professional Development day on 10/7/2022** – The upcoming, district-wide professional development day will focus on our SEL and DEI initiatives, including a workshop with Michael Eatman. The emphasis of the day will draw connections between theoretical components to how they start to play out in the classroom. Training in iReady will familiarize teachers with the ways in which, once the assessments are complete, iReady can provide individualized learning experiences tailored to the individual student. Project Adventure will be another breakout session that pulls together the varied components of SEL. It is of note that this full district professional development day is being done earlier in the year than previously to come out front early with the learning.
- **Safe and Supportive Schools Grant** – MERSD was awarded a \$10,000 grant to be applied towards the planning process for developing SEL and inclusion plans of action.
- **MCAS Reports** – We will be receiving MCAS student-family reports in the next week and forwarding to families. On November 15, 2022, the district expects to receive assessment reports allowing us to see what student assessment tell us about what we need to work on with students.

**6) Continued Business** –

- **School Improvement Plans** – Principal's Reports, presented in tandem by Principal McAdams, Essex Elementary School, and Principal Willis, Memorial Elementary. Superintendent Beaudoin provided a brief overview of the multilevel plans that guide the district. School Improvement Plans are a two-year plan. Their ultimate goal is to create a school that represents the principles of the Strategic Plan. The final School Improvement Plans will be posted with links between

plans to the master overview and out to definitions of vocabulary specific to educators. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the School Improvement Plans are dense documents serving as a playbook to guide the work done at each school, but they are also living documents. She expressed the hope that the plans would be accepted if the School Committee can agree about the content and direction of each plan are representative of the Strategic Plan. Principal Willis began by acknowledging the impact of the elementary School Councils, which work with our principals to discuss improvements. Several members of the Memorial School Council were in attendance, including parents and staff). The elementary schools worked closely to create aligned plans. The first Goal is Authentic Learning (AL), which Principal Willis emphasized as student-centered, real world applications, balanced with traditional approaches. The elementary schools plan to engage with the NEASC review with AL as a component. Principal McAdams stressed that there are many different definitions for AL and that the schools will need to define it for themselves. To that end, a survey will be conducted of school materials to see where AL is currently happening. Principal Willis discussed the transition from the Response to Intervention (RTI) program to the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which will include the use of common K-8 assessment tools. This program has the benefit of suggesting activities to address individual needs, some tech-based, others lesson ideas, in reading, math, and social-emotional learning. Principal McAdams mentioned the curriculum review cycle underway in leadership teams to review gaps between the framework and practice. Principal Willis stated that in addition to informing classroom, SPED, and reading specialist work, iReady data will also be made available to families. Therefore, a goal will be to work with staff to design a data-driven family conference. Principal Willis also shared the partnership between Memorial and local Manchester/Essex Friends of Performing Arts advocacy group to refurbish a baby grand piano. Students are now able to perform each morning during morning arrival, and the sessions have organically expanded to include other instruments and vocal performances. Principal McAdams praised these partnerships with the community that provide opportunities for authentic learning and voiced the elementary schools' commitment to fostering these relationships. Principal McAdams noted that the second strategic initiative, the integration of Social Emotional Learning into all aspects of the school day, is a particular priority of the elementary program as building skills around empathy, community, and a sense of belonging help to develop an overall sense of wellness within students. Research supports the notion that students with these skills have resiliency for the learning journey ahead of them in the middle and high schools. Principal Willis outlined the recent work by Interim Curriculum Coordinator, Angela Bik, to create a consistent educational experience between both elementary schools. Alignment of learning blocks and providing MTSS across both schools was accompanied by the introduction of a daily SEL block, during which teachers have a fluid opportunity to provide needed movement breaks or to deliver lessons/activities where students learn more about SEL using RULER, Responsive Classroom, and Second Step. Principal McAdams discussed the goal

of making strategies and lessons available in the learning community, fostering a common language, and building capacity within staff. Principal Willis described how teacher leadership around SEL has emerged naturally with staff volunteering to train over the summer, at a high level, on Responsive Classroom and another group completing mindfulness coursework, which will be embedded in staff meeting professional development. Principal McAdams also emphasized the role of elementary education as a foundational place to nurture DEI goals. Every child and family deserves a sense of belonging and creating that environment should start young. A self-audit is planned, reviewing language, curriculum, and materials to examine how diverse characters are embedded currently. Principal Willis discussed the Understanding our Differences program that is being re-introduced at the elementary levels. Targeted to grades three, four, and five, each grade will immerse themselves in either physical or learning disabilities or autism. The year-long program includes a panel with guest speakers, many of whom come from their peers at the high school. Long-term, this program could expand to other areas. Principal Willis shared the theme at Memorial Elementary this year, “It starts with ME,” featuring the book by the same name, written by Dr. Bernice King, daughter of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. In discussing the final initiative goal, both principals committed to a diligent examination of staffing efficiencies while emphasizing that their job is to advocate for what staff feel our students need.

- Clarifying discussion: Ms. Spencer asked for clarification regarding what components were supplanted by the new SEL blocks. Principal Willis clarified that little was actually taken away as there was a lot happening at different times in the classroom that was not on paper. This model concretizes the opportunity to address SEL topics. In addition, time is available weekly given the absence of foreign language. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked for clarification on when the SEL blocks occur. Principal McAdams stated that the SEL blocks fall during different times of day based on grade level and teacher schedule. While teachers regularly work these topics into all blocks, as appropriate, the SEL blocks provide a targeted opportunity for instruction. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the district continues to use screeners for at-risk students who may need SEL support. Principal Willis clarified that screeners were previously only used at Essex Elementary and that one of the areas that is being explored as we transition to MTSS is to look at a tool to use for screening at both schools. Ms. Koch-Sundquist also asked how staff is supported in the implementation of all three programs. Principal Willis detailed that staff have been introducing aspects of all three for several years. However the programs are expanding and growing. The RULER program lessons are new for this year, and the Responsive Classroom program is something we did not previously have staff trained in, though they were using the strategies. Principal McAdams described Responsive Classroom as focusing on habits while Second Step is a resource for educators to pull from. The goal has been to provide a diversified range of materials, but while allowing teachers to respond with what students need in the moment. Mr. Foster asked about the three programs as they relate to the review of the science curriculum.

Principal Willis confirmed that this was a current undertaking before administrators. In addition, Mr. Foster asked how the principals will ensure that there is enough data beyond reading and mathematics for the responsiveness of iReady and the family conferences, given that family conferences are about all subjects. Principal Willis acknowledged that the task before them is to present a procedure or protocol for teachers to sit down with targeting all subjects. Principal McAdams said that the goal comes from a needs-based perspective and that they would like to create greater uniformity using ready (and iReady) data. Superintendent Beaudoin took the opportunity to explain that our elementary report cards are standards-based and that there is a history of concern regarding performance in tier-one subject areas, particularly literacy. MTSS is a shift back to tier-one instruction and responsibility. These areas were defined as a deficit and the focus has been on correcting that concern. However, Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that data continues to be collected across all subject matters. Principal McAdams emphasized the importance of building the foundations of reading and math so that deficits do not follow students to the upper schools. Mr. Foster asked about active family engagement, and Principal McAdams highlighted the importance of councils and the friends groups and said that the current emphasis is to let families know that they are welcome at the table and to actively pursue opportunities for engagement. Ms. Spencer requested insight into the educator reaction to the change in recess structure with the SEL block. Principal Willis responded that although the initial schedule generated some concern, teachers were asked to “live it” to see how the intention of the block fit. It seems to be working well and there are other opportunities for classes to get out during the day. In addition, staff have the option to do a quick SEL lesson and still get out to play. However, there is also a mid-year review planned. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if iReady is being employed as a literacy screener, to which Principal Willis said that there are other layers of assessment undertaken by our literacy specialists. Ms. Whitman asked if there has been any thought given to making up for lost time for the fourth and fifth grade students who were unable to participate in the Understanding our Differences program during Covid, and Superintendent Beaudoin said that they may be able to incorporate that into the middle school experience.

*Motion to approve the Elementary School Improvement Plans by Ms. Koch-Sundquist, seconded by Mr. Harrington.*

Discussion: Ms. Spencer reiterated concern about recess time shrinking, particularly as it is a natural state for the social-emotional experience. Mr. Foster emphasized the need to begin communicating to the public the context and goals given the budget reality, and Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the recent crisis response spurred the action to engage a professional public relations team to help with communication. Ms. Koch-Sundquist and Ms. Whitman expressed excitement for the increased collaboration between elementary schools, which also allows them to shine as individual entities.

*Motion passed unanimously.*

- District Improvement Plan – Ms. Whitman asked whether, given the background of discussion and the material provided to School Committee members in advance of this meeting, the matter might be put to a vote. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she had supplied a cross-over list of changes to the DIP. In addition, she was willing to include any additional edits to wording and is planning to further update the DIP with summarizations of schools and links to documentation that guided the creation of the DIP. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that all that is being done is in pursuit of finding inroads to increase the number of students reached by our pedagogy, given that student achievement is the ultimate goal. Ms. Whitman called for clarifying questions. Ms. Mitchell asked whether the language of the DIP should be updated to include specifics of how the school will meet the goals. However, Superintendent Beaudoin recommended allowing those details to be enumerated in the school improvement plans. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that the DIP is a place to line up the things that will be focused upon at the district level to prepare staff to meet the goals at the individual school level. Mr. Foster expressed appreciation for the expanded narrative for context for community readers of the DIP document to show why these goals make sense. He asked if Superintendent Beaudoin had examined each initiative for a component that includes the student-active implications in each area. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that student-focused components are found in the school plans and actions. The current district plan is focused on building for pedagogy change and is weighted towards building a capacity for change in our adults. Superintendent Beaudoin also stated that a progress report is completed on the DIP in June to review how it is working and update it for the following year.

*Motion to approve the District Improvement Plan was made by Ms. Spencer and seconded by Mr. Reed.*

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that it was helpful to put the theory of action on the first page. Ms. Whitman expressed the value in the extended process of reviewing the DIP for approval as it served not only to improve the plan but also helped to illustrate the School Committee's concerns and priorities. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that this examination has allowed for a clarification of thinking and a more robust DIP.

*Motion passed unanimously.*

- Financial Update – Superintendent Beaudoin presented the Budget Calendar, along with a working engagement version, on behalf of Mr. Urbas. While the budget calendar is fixed, the working engagement will focus on what the School Committee wants to plan for engagement with the community. By November, high-level numbers should be available regarding the projected costs of budget items like health care that will affect our plan for the budget. In December, the superintendent presents the recommended budget. Therefore, we are about a month and a half out from deciding on the strategic way to ask our two

communities for what we need. Ms. Whitman asked Superintendent Beaudoin to speak to the difference in what the School Committee can and cannot do. Superintendent Beaudoin described the work of the school committee in crafting and presenting a budget to our towns, through meticulous information gathering and fiscally responsive decisions. Although we are talking about a correction, the School Committee does not ask for that. The budget is presented and the towns determine how they would like to close the gap in funding. Right now, we need to figure out what that number is. Further, the towns decide if the correction will meet just the shortage or if it will be an “aspirational override,” bundling in investment buy-back and replenishing reserves, which will escalate the number. Once this committee votes to support a budget following whichever route we have chosen, then the SC is hands-off. The towns will reach a consensus by vote, and the district must move forward in whatever way they choose. Each town can vote on their own way of bridging the gap. Ms. Whitman made a point of clarification that separate approaches by each town would be acceptable. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the responsibility of the School Committee is to figure out the number that keeps the school district moving forward and present it to the towns. The School Committee does not campaign leading up to the town votes. Mr. Harrington asked if the proposed budget is likely to be a million dollars over, to which Superintendent Beaudoin specified that it will be between December and February that we are able to gauge the gap. The School Committee will then speak to the towns about what they will endorse as regards seeking an override, dipping into reserves, or other options. The highest hurdle is the town meeting since it requires a two-thirds majority to pass to the town ballot. Ms. Mitchell asked for clarification about when we would have clarity on expected costs. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that closer to October we should have stronger estimates. Our broker for health insurance is asked to keep us apprised of market trends. However, the official number is not until April/May when the budget has already been completed. It is therefore very important that our representatives are monitoring trends. Although our last correction in 2016 was crafted to sustain the district for ten years, the following two years saw health care costs jump by 28% and 16% respectively, draining our cushion. Mr. Reed asked for insight into the how a correction is determined to be necessary and mentioned the yearly increase in spending that regularly pushes the 4% increase ceiling. Superintendent Beaudoin discussed the term, “break the model” used to reference spending increases above 4%, at which point few towns would be able to adequately address the deficit through means other than a correction. Superintendent Beaudoin inserted a disclaimer into the discussion that her perspective and insight are based on a “common sense” approach and may be less detailed than that provided by Business Manager Avi Urbas. Mr. Reed asked about the history of crafting the budget proposal, given that more than 80% of the budget is devoted to staffing and maintaining staffing alone is likely to push the 3.5% guideline. Superintendent Beaudoin responded that while the target maximum is 3.5%, the district is often asked to go lower. It may be that the modeling should look at what 3.5% looks like over ten years. Does that give us a stable income that prevents us



from having to do cuts? Historically, when it came time to factor in apportionment, it resulted in a lopsided division between the two towns that required further reductions. Mr. Reed asked about the comfort level of the new School Committee members with the budget process, and Ms. Mitchell suggested a training workshop on apportionment from Mr. Urbas. In addition, Ms. Mitchell asked about the rising cost of district buildings because of age. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the Habeeb facilities report is currently under way. This report will focus on Essex Elementary School in order to factor in the replacement of the Essex building and determine the best time to submit a statement of interest to the MSBA, given the potential delay in approval and entering the queue. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if there was currently overcrowding at Essex Elementary, recalling that last year they were utilizing the stage and storage spaces for instruction. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that accommodations at Essex Elementary last year were a temporary response to Covid. In contrast, the application process for Manchester Elementary occurred during a significant population bubble that strained the old facilities and pushed us ahead in the approval process. Ms. Whitman drew attention to the budget calendar, where the working engagement version has a column for School Committee engagement opportunities, and asked what the committee would be looking to take on in terms of public engagement and outreach given the prohibition on campaigning. Superintendent Beaudoin mentioned that there are two public hearings on the budget. These are open community meetings where MERSD provides a budget overview. The SC takes input from the public via open mic. There is no deliberation. The school committee can work to educate the community about components of the process and key issues that impact the budget, such as health care and shifting enrollment trends. Mr. Foster commented that these meetings are frustrating because they do not include a discussion about the districts educational goals – what we are trying to accomplish and why and expressed the desire to help the public see the connection between the budget and the educational goals. Ms. Koch-Sundquist expressed that she believes a significant demographic is concerned primarily with the cost. It was decided to save a more robust discussion of the budget for the next meeting.

- 7) **School Committee Comment** – Mr. Harrington shared that his former colleague is associated with the Open Door farm truck and said that its MERSD visits have gone very well. It was expressed that many kids were unsure if it was okay to take food and that we must work as a community to normalize the experience. Ms. Mitchell mentioned that Mr. Urbas is exploring connecting with Green Beverly, a local business resource for sustainability practices, to address lunchroom waste.

8) **Adjourn**

*Ms. Spencer moved to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Harrington seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

## **School Committee Future Meetings**

- October 18, 2022
- November 1, 2022