



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

June 4, 2024

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	June 5, 2024
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Chris Reed, Chairperson John Binieris Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist, Co-Chair Anna Mitchell Erica Spencer Theresa Whitman
Absent:	
Guests:	Heather Leonard, Director Curriculum & Technology Allison Collins, Director Student Services; Principal John Willis; Principal Maino; Principal Sgroi
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

- A. **Call to Order of** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:12 p.m., following the conclusion of the district retirement reception honoring this year's retirees.
- B. **Business Meeting Open Session**
 - 1) **Public Comment (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual) - none**

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- 2) **Chairperson's Report** – Ms. Whitman stated that she, and other SC members, attended Memorial Day observations at the schools. Ms. Whitman also met with the Student Advisory council, who continue their work to solidify their operating processes. They plan an election for new members by the fall. Ms. Whitman recognized outgoing School Committee Student Representative Diego Sanson for his three plus years of service to the committee. In addition to representing student interest and perspective at SC meetings, Mr. Sanson helped to organize student question and answer sessions, provided input on the budget, and was a good colleague on the committee.

Ms. Whitman stated that the final role of the committee chairman is to be a servant to the board and continue to advocate for diplomacy. Ms. Whitman expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to serve as School Committee Chair and spoke of the components of the position that “filled her cup,” – the opportunity to speak on behalf of the SC and build relationships throughout the communities of Manchester and Essex. Ms. Whitman said she is proud of her service as chair and is ready to move on from the position. As she makes way for new leadership, Ms. Whitman believes she will know how to support the new SC Chair.

- 3) **Reorganization** – Ms. Whitman stated that the procedure for reorganization of the School Committee is outlined in section BDA of the School Committee policy manual. The superintendent will open the floor for nominations and a second. Then, discussion will follow for the candidate. This process is repeated for all nominations. A roll call vote is used to select the winning candidate. This process applies to the Chair and Vice Chair positions.

Before nominations, Ms. Koch-Sundquist formally acknowledged Ms. Whitman for her service to the School Committee and commended her for the degree of support Ms. Whitman earned in the community, even winning re-election during a contentious year when the override failed in Essex. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the School Committee was very fortunate to have Ms. Whitman as the chair.

Superintendent Beaudoin opened the floor to nominations for Chair of the School Committee:

Ms. Whitman nominated Mr. Reed for the position of School Committee Chair. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the nomination.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she believes it is important for the chair position to return to a representative from Manchester. Ms. Whitman reflected that Mr. Reed previously served as the Vice Chair of the SC and was a supportive partner to her during that time. His understanding of the roles of the chair would be a benefit. Ms. Mitchell asked if Mr. Reed would be able to manage the time demands of the position. Mr. Reed said that he had reflected on this and believes he is able to manage

the time demands of the position. Mr. Reed said that the next vice chair would be in the position to run meetings in his absence.

Ms. Mitchell nominated Ms. Spencer for the position of School Committee Chair. Mr. Foster seconded the nomination.

Discussion: Ms. Spencer stated that, while she loves the idea of being chair and building consensus, the demands on her time with a rising senior in high school make the commitment difficult. Ms. Spencer said that if Mr. Reed is willing to take on the role, she is happy to cede the nomination.

Ms. Mitchell withdrew her nomination.

Superintendent Beaudoin called a roll call vote to elect Mr. Reed to the position of School Committee Chair.

Ms. Whitman – Yes
Ms. Koch-Sundquist – Yes
Ms. Spencer – Yes
Ms. Mitchell – Yes
Mr. Binieris – Yes
Mr. Foster – Yes
Mr. Reed – Yes

The vote to elect Mr. Reed to the position of School Committee Chair passed unanimously.

Mr. Reed thanked the committee for their support and promised to serve to the best of his abilities. Mr. Reed took over management of the meeting.

Mr. Reed opened the floor to nominations for Vice-Chair of the School Committee, noting that the School Committee has historically teamed a member from each town in the positions of chair and vice-chair:

Ms. Mitchell nominated Mr. Foster for the position Vice-Chair of the School Committee. Mr. Binieris seconded the nomination.

Discussion: Ms. Mitchell stated that Mr. Foster would bring a lot of education and experience to the role and would help to build the SC's relationship with Essex and other stakeholders. Mr. Foster said that he was interested in remaining on the Finance subcommittee. If the tradition of having the Chair sit on that committee is to continue, he would be willing to serve as the chair. Mr. Foster stated that it is very important to reestablish the relationship with the Town of Essex.

Ms. Whitman nominated Ms. Koch-Sundquist for the position of Vice-Chair of the School Committee. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

Ms. Whitman complimented the work done by Ms. Koch-Sundquist to complete contract negotiations with Unit B and expressed her appreciation for her support during her tenure as committee chair. Ms. Whitman stated that it would be a positive and balanced team effort with Ms. Koch-Sundquist as the vice-chair. Mr. Reed said that, while working together on the negotiations subcommittee, he came to greatly respect her opinions, even when they disagreed, and he believes Ms. Koch-Sundquist would be a valuable asset as the vice-chair. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that their work together led to discussion and increased perspectives.

Mr. Reed called a roll call vote to elect for the position of School Committee Vice-Chair.

Mr. Reed – Ms. Koch-Sundquist
Mr. Binieris – Mr. Foster
Ms. Whitman – Ms. Koch-Sundquist
Mr. Foster – Mr. Foster
Ms. Mitchell – Mr. Foster
Ms. Koch-Sundquist - Ms. Koch-Sundquist
Ms. Spencer - Ms. Koch-Sundquist

Ms. Koch-Sundquist prevailed in the vote for the position of School Committee Vice-Chair, 4-3.

The School Committee considered whether to continue with reorganization of SC subcommittees. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the next SC meeting is scheduled for August 6. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about the tasks left to the negotiation subcommittee given that they completed two rounds of negotiation. The superintendent said that there are outstanding joint labor pieces, stipends, grievances, and follow up work remaining for the negotiations subcommittee. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she would like to remain on that subcommittee. Ms. Whitman said that she would like to remain on the facilities subcommittee to finish the work begun on the Essex building project. She stated that she would be willing to serve on policy/program, as well. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that, in addition to negotiation, she would be willing to work on policy. Ms. Spencer said that she was interested in policy or facilities. Ms. Mitchell said that she would like to remain on the finance subcommittee and would also be willing to work on policy. Mr. Foster expressed interest in the finance subcommittee and said that he could remain on the policy/program subcommittee. Mr. Reed stated that he would stay on the negotiation subcommittee and that the Chair is customarily on the finance subcommittee. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it would be possible to change the practice of having the chair work on finance. Mr. Binieris expressed interest only in the facilities subcommittee. Ms. Mitchell asked if it would be helpful to have three members on the

finance team. The superintendent replied that there is an issue of balance on that committee between the two towns. The committee determined that most of the subcommittee spots looked unchallenged, with the exception of the facilities subcommittee.

Mr. Foster moved that Ms. Koch-Sundquist and Mr. Reed serve on the negotiation subcommittee. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote –

Mr. Reed – Yes

Mr. Binieris – Yes

Ms. Whitman – Yes

Mr. Foster – Yes

Ms. Mitchell – Yes

Ms. Koch-Sundquist - Yes

Ms. Spencer - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Whitman moved that Ms. Mitchell and Mr. Foster serve on the finance subcommittee. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote –

Mr. Reed – Yes

Mr. Binieris – Yes

Ms. Whitman – Yes

Mr. Foster – Yes

Ms. Mitchell – Yes

Ms. Koch-Sundquist - Yes

Ms. Spencer - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Three SC members were interested in serving on the facilities subcommittee. In these instances, the chair puts forth the slate for the vote to select the members. Ms. Mitchell asked about expanding the subcommittee to three members. Mr. Foster stated that the SC members on the facilities committee serve on the SBC, and the MSBA must vote to approve them. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there is also the issue of balance between the two communities for this committee. Ms. Spencer withdrew herself from consideration for this committee.

Mr. Whitman moved that Ms. Whitman and Mr. Binieris serve on the facilities and program subcommittee. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote –

Mr. Reed – Yes
Mr. Binieris – Yes
Ms. Whitman – Yes
Mr. Foster – Yes
Ms. Mitchell – Yes
Ms. Koch-Sundquist - Yes
Ms. Spencer - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Three SC members expressed interest in the policy and program subcommittee. However, this subcommittee functioned with three members last year. The previous members of the subcommittee stated that this was a good arrangement.

Ms. Mitchell moved that Ms. Spencer, Ms. Koch-Sundquist, and Ms. Whitman serve on the policy and program subcommittee. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion. Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote –
Mr. Reed – Yes
Mr. Binieris – Yes
Ms. Whitman – Yes
Mr. Foster – Yes
Ms. Mitchell – Yes
Ms. Koch-Sundquist - Yes
Ms. Spencer - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

4) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1074-1076 and payroll warrant for May 23, 2024
- Minutes for approval: May 21, 2024

Mr. Reed moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Spencer seconded the motion.

The motion passed 6-0. Mr. Reed abstained.

5) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/John Binieris) – No Report
- **Finance Committee** (Anna Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – No Report

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – Mr. Foster stated that the subcommittee had not met. However, two items remained for resolution following the last SC meeting.
 - Participation of Unenrolled students in MERSD sports – At the preceding SC meeting, the subcommittee recommended that the SC take no action on this issue, leaving in place the Athletics department prohibition against unenrolled students. The SC voted on the motion to take no action, and the result was 3-3. To open the current dialogue, Mr. Reed asked for highlights of the discussion. Mr. Foster stated that the initial request was from the family of a middle school student attending a local private school whose school does not offer the desired sport. The subcommittee tried to approach the issue from a desire to allow participation. Key concerns that emerged from discussion with district administrators included fairness and the access this would create for many students, not just the few private schools in the area. Key concerns from district administrators were how to administer and oversee those students given that the district lacks the same degree of oversight for them. Middle school sports enrollment is already very high and admitting additional students could lead to cuts, which is in opposition to the middle school's inclusivity policy. The subcommittee once again recommended that the SC take no action, leaving in place the current prohibition.

Ms. Spencer said that she was against this recommendation as a subcommittee member because she does not believe that allowing participation would lead to feared cuts. Instead, the athletic director would determine which sports have room and which do not. Ms. Spencer said that the small number of local private schools generally offer a lot more extra-curricular opportunities, reducing the likely number of applicants.

Mr. Foster stated that the administration and subcommittee were not able to find any examples of local districts that allow this kind of participation. Mr. Foster said that if the School Committee chose to create a policy around this issue, it would have to create extensive guidelines or direct the superintendent to do so.

Ms. Whitman stated that her previous vote against no action was because of not wanting to have a void in policy. She had heard that other districts in the area allow this kind of participation. However, the superintendent reached out to the district cited and determined that it is not their policy to allow participation by unenrolled students. Ms. Whitman acknowledged that a policy could impact other after school activities, as well, and asked if there was harm in having a policy that permitted or prohibited participation.

Mr. Foster moved that the School Committee take no action on the request. Ms. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Whitman asked the superintendent if there is a potential negative impact in having a policy. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the issue does not come up often. In canvassing neighboring communities, the district found that other schools do not allow this kind of participation. The superintendent said that to do so is akin to expanding enrollment and the district would need to solicit the advice of counsel to determine what its liability would be. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that, because the current prohibition is standard practice, she does not believe that a policy is necessary. The district would need to determine if such participants were covered by existing insurance. Managing them on a daily basis would be an extra workload. The district is also concerned about discipline and accessibility issues. Allowing participation in district sports would expand the scope of work and responsibility in the domain of student management and there is no example of other districts doing so to provide guidance in how to implement the practice at MERSD.

Ms. Spencer said that she does not believe it would be the headache imagined as it would be a rare occurrence. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this kind of participation has only been permitted a few times before and one of them resulted in an OCR (Office for Civil Rights) complaint about access. The superintendent was hesitant to place the district in that situation again.

The motion passed 6-1 with Ms. Spencer opposed.

- The Reserve Policy – Ms. Mitchell listed key provisions of the draft reserve policy presented by the subcommittee to structure the SC conversation. The subcommittee recommended an 8% for the total pooled reserve fund, comprised of the stabilization fund and the E&D. With the SC's approval, the stabilization fund could be used in the operational budget. Mr. Foster stated that 8% is currently drafted as a target but asked if there should be a minimum target as well, with 8% as a maximum. The district may want a minimum to ensure a high bond rating.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked how the subcommittee arrived at the 8% figure and stated that she would like to see both a lower and upper percent. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if a definition of E&D is needed within the policy. Ms. Mitchell replied that 8% was used to be consistent with the Town of Manchester which recently lowered their target from 10% to 8%. Mr. Foster asked to what extent the district can rely on the town in the event of an emergency. The 8% target is intended to demonstrate that money that sits in the reserve account is managed well. If the district were to run short in a budget year, it could go back to the town. Ms. Mitchell stated that the E&D definition exists elsewhere. Ms. Spencer stated that, although she does not usually like to see the same definition in different places, in the case of E&D, it may be beneficial to new SC members to have the clarification. Ms. Mitchell stated that the reserve fund will exclude

school choice and facilities rental revolving accounts going forward. Ms. Whitman said that she likes clearly defining what is included in the reserve fund. She stated that, while Manchester lowered its E&D limit, Essex's limit on E&D remains at 10%. Ms. Whitman asked about their balances and if a cap is needed for the district given the state limit. Ms. Whitman asked how the subcommittee arrived at the structure of the proposed policy. Ms. Spencer stated that the policy subcommittee built the structure of the draft reserve policy based on canvassing comparable districts and towns, with input from Michelle Cresta, district Director of Finance, based on her experience in other districts. Superintendent Beaudoin said that pursuing the details of a reserve policy requires a consistent philosophy on what the SC wants from the policy. Ms. Spencer stressed that the conversation needs to happen with the full board and asked what concerns members felt had not been addressed by the draft policy under consideration. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked what lower percentage boundary would be cause for alarm. Mr. Foster stated that he thinks a minimum percentage is important to include. Once the district has a policy, it will be in a position to determine whether it can or cannot contribute monies from E&D to the operational budget, providing a concrete reason. With an upper limit, the district can commit to applying any overage to the operational budget. Ms. Whitman advocated for additional group discussion in a workshop format. The superintendent suggested all SC members provide feedback on what they want from the policy, the percentage they want, and whether anything over that percent should be committed to the operational budget. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested using the workshop to obtain a commitment to the content of the policy and then working on the definitions. Mr. Reed concluded discussion.

Superintendent Beaudoin asked to move her report to allow the principals to present to the School Committee.

6) Continued Business –

- a. **Elementary & Secondary Handbook Updates – Vote to Approve.**
Principals from all schools submitted requests to revise the 2024-2025 MERSD school handbooks. Revisions to the handbook section on attendance were requested in order to align school handbook language across the district with current DESE guidance. In addition to this alignment of language, the purpose of adopting and aligning this language is to better communicate attendance law and specific school expectations with students and families. Existing handbook language addressing state guidelines will be deleted. Principal Sgroi also requested revisions to the High School 2024-2025 MERSD school handbook to reflect current quarter dates for the upcoming school year and National Honor Society application dates; to add a definition of academic integrity, as developed by the School Council; to update the progressive discipline chart in regards to language and alignment to consequences of the attendance policy; and to update general language and information about free lunch.

Principal Willis stated that there has been a nationwide increase in chronic absenteeism, defined by DESE as greater than or equal to 10% of the school year. Although the district previously had the authority to excuse some forms of absence, DESE now treats all absences equally. This has led to confusion this year as the buildings have struggled to roll out new attendance policies that are at odds with previous expectations. The schools are looking to shift to the terms “documented” versus “undocumented” absences. Documented absences include medical, bereavement, and school visits. The updates are intended to change terminology and provide an explanation of state law. Principal Sgroi stated that the high school request covers similar issues. In addition, there was concern at the high school level to clean up language, including the addition of post-secondary activities to the “documented” category. Principal Maino said the proposed changes would help to align practice and coding in the system across the district. In addition, Principal Maino said that the middle school would like to adjust the tardy policy in order to focus on a case by case response to tardiness. Previously, a detention was given following six tardies. However, the administration believes that a greater impact is made with a relationship approach. The change will allow the new Dean of Students, Joe Janack, to meet with families to determine the best course of action. Ms. Provost said the goal is to work collaboratively with families. Principal Sgroi said that the phone call to families in these situations is about forging relationships. They have learned that detention does not fix the problem and want to shift the focus to providing families with tools and support to combat tardiness.

Principal Willis said that the district, following a hiatus during COVID, is once again sending families attendance letters after 5, 10, 15, and 18 absence days. These letters include DESE standards. Next year, they will start going out at the beginning of the year.

Questions: Ms. Spencer asked if the high school has modified its tardy policy as the middle school did. Principal Sgroi said that a detention is given at five tardies. However, a conversation usually takes place at three tardies. Ms. Spencer commented that some families appreciate the known consequence of a detention as they try to motivate their students to get to school on time. Ms. Koch-Sundquist noted that the language in the middle school change is almost identical to that of the elementary school. Ms. Koch-Sundquist expressed concern about the wording as it directs students to confer with their teachers to make up all the work that they have missed. As a parent, Ms. Koch-Sundquist said it may be too much for parents. Principal Willis assured the SC that the standards for makeup work are developmentally appropriate. Teachers adjust the amount of work to what is reasonable and necessary. Mr. Foster said it is not clear when a student should confer with the teacher and suggested clarifying the language. Mr. Foster asked about the role of Google

Classroom. Principal Sgroi replied that teachers do not have to provide work in advance of anticipated absences, such as vacations. Not everything is in Google Classroom. Students may need to do a peer activity or lab project. Principal Sgroi said she would not want everything to be in the online platform. Mr. Foster suggested some clarification to indicate that those going on vacation should not expect work ahead of time. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she has had a child out for a legitimate reason and would hope that he was able to complete schoolwork at home during the period that he was recovering in order to decrease learning loss. Ms. Maino said that those situations are where Google classroom can be utilized. Principal Willis said that language could be added about extended medical absences. However, these situations are what DESE is trying to move schools away from doing. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there are two sides to the issue - communicating that there is a relationship between the school and families and educating families that the state does not recognize excused absences. The district will accrue ticks against itself in accountability ratings. Ms. Spencer stated that things would be better if everyone read the handbook, but it often does not happen. Ms. Spencer said she thinks it is discouraging when a parent reads something that does not apply to their situation. Seeing reference in the elementary handbook to “college visits” may cause parents to tune out. Ms. Spencer recommended striking that phrase. Principal Sgroi stated that the common language is in the service of aligning all the schools. Ms. Whitman asked that the administrators be mindful of “may” and “will” statements and thanked them for finding a balance.

Principal Sgroi said that in addition to the common changes, the high school also is updating their handbook to include a definition of academic integrity. Previously, the section spoke only of punishments without defining what academic integrity is. Principal Sgroi was proud of the collaborative work accomplished by the School Council, students, teachers, and parents to craft a narrative that defines what is expected of students. The word “may” is also included in the listed consequences. Ms. Koch- Sundquist suggested that school visits are relevant at all age levels as a documented absence.

Mr. Reed moved to approve the handbook changes and request that the input of School Committee members be included in the final versions. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

- b. **FY24 Budget – Spring Budget to Actuals & Transfers – Vote to Approve.** Michelle Cresta. Ms. Cresta presented the spring budget to actuals. At this point, approximately 76% of the budget is spent, but the largest payroll warrant comes at the end of the year, covering the final teacher payments for the summer months. As anticipated by Mr. Urbas, out of district tuition costs

are approximately \$300K more than anticipated. The district did receive \$238K in a one-time Circuit Breaker payment and will be able to fund the remainder. Transportation costs go along with OOD placements and were about \$52K over budget. As in previous years, Ms. Cresta said the district should be able to make a prepayment of \$150K towards next year's OOD expenses. To meet the overages, Ms. Cresta requested a transfer of \$66K from personnel and transfer it to expenses.

Ms. Whitman moved to transfer the funds totaling \$66K from the personnel side of the budget to operational side for the budget for the detailed categories listed in the budget to actual report. Mr Reed seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Koch-Sundquist complimented the new budget to actual format. Ms. Mitchell said it would be helpful to compare the budget numbers to the same period from the preceding year. Ms. Mitchell received confirmation that it is normal for a portion of OOD expenses to be paid in the prior year. Ms. Mitchell said that she thought the school choice fund was zeroed out. Ms. Cresta clarified that the \$400K was voted in the FY24 budget, the current year to offset health insurance costs. The same will be done in the FY25 budget. The FY25 money will come from the FY25 budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said stated that school choice payments are on a monthly basis. So even though the past balance was drawn down, the district continues to receive payments.

The motion passed unanimously.

- c. **OPEB Trust Annual District Contribution – Vote to Approve.** Each June the recommended contribution to the district's OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) trust fund is calculated. The contribution for fiscal year 2024 has been calculated at \$605,327, based on the formula contained in the teachers contract. The district pledges to contribute savings from negotiated changes in active employee health insurance coverage. This negotiation was put into effect in fiscal year 2016. Savings stem from introducing lower-cost deductible plans and from reducing employer contribution rates from 80% to 75% for legacy staff and from 75% to 70% for new hires. MA State Law requires school districts to fund lifetime retiree health care for any retiree that earns pension eligibility, with a minimum employer contribution rate of 50% of health insurance premiums. MERSD's OPEB trust contributions are invested with PRIT, the same fund that manages teacher and state employee pensions. Earnings on these investments help to reduce the amount that MERSD must contribute. With this transfer, contributions since inception will now total \$4.57 million.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve a transfer the amount of \$605,327 from the operating budget to the OPEB trust fund. Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster clarified that the number requested is similar to what was anticipated in the budget. Ms. Cresta confirmed that it is.

The motion passed 6-0. Ms. Spencer abstained.

d. Hyland Field Advertising Rate Schedule – Vote to Approve.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that this is follow up to the work of community member Donna Furse and prepares Athletic Director Cami Molinare to proceed with selling advertising banners. Ms. Cresta said that Ms. Molinare and Mr. Millman, the administrative assistant for the athletic department, canvased other districts for advertising fee structures. The money raised will be placed in a revolving account.

Clarifying questions: Mr. Foster stated that it was his understanding that the policy committee would work on the policy before the roll out of the program and that the subcommittee was waiting for the vote in Manchester to allow advertising. Mr. Foster said there is no policy to manage the practice, including who may advertise and who receives discounts. A policy would address whether staff will solicit for advertisers. Mr. Foster said that it may be that the policy directs administration to determine these aspects. Mr. Reed stated that, in order to roll out advertising for the fall, it would be possible to approve the requested motion and then develop a policy. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that a vote on the rates is needed.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve banner fees as \$650 for a single season, \$1,050 for two seasons, and a discounted rate of \$100 per season for Manchester Essex Youth Sports organizations. Mr. Reed seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster stated that he would vote against the motion because it is too early to post this information until relevant issues, like the proposed discount, are thought through. Ms. Mitchell agreed that the SC should establish boundaries. Ms. Whitman stated that she pulled up the current policy. It prohibits advertising without the permission of the School Committee. Ms. Whitman stated that permission was given. Mr. Foster expressed his concern that the current ask did not account for the charge given the policy subcommittee to draft an advertising policy. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she thought the SC should vote and trust the administrators to proceed. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the SC could still work on the policy without precluding the athletic department from moving forward. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the program would likely run as does advertising for school playbills and programs. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if policy exists for those ads. The superintendent said no such policy exists. Ms. Whitman and Mr. Binieris agreed that it would be reasonable to approve the current request while pursuing a more explicit policy.

The motion passed 5-2. Mr. Foster and Ms. Mitchell voted against.

- e. **District Improvement Plan End of Year Update** – Directors: Allison Collins, Michelle Cresta, Heather Leonard. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the evening’s reports are based on the District Improvement Plan (DIP), in support of the Strategic Plan and the district’s overall vision. The DIP encompasses more than the local wants and needs. It also includes federal and state responsibilities, such as DESE accountability based on attendance, the goals of the strategic plan, and student data and local needs assessments. The district plan informs not only district work, but also school and educator plans, bringing coordination across the district. It is a living document. Some components that seemed valuable two years ago have been reevaluated in favor of other strategies that now seem better aligned with district objectives. The district remains open to modification of the DIP as a living document. An example is the work on tiered focused monitoring in response to federal and state mandates. Previously referred to as coordinated program review. The district is currently in the middle of this monitoring for special education, English language learners, and civil rights. The on-site review will be next year.

The superintendent also reported that the district was accepted into the DESE district review process next year. Further details will come by the end of summer. These reviews, combined with the elementary NEASC accreditation, will divert some of the district’s resources but will yield useful information which will be integrated into the next three-year DIP.

Superintendent Beaudoin referred to the cycles of the district plan contained in SC meeting material – the Strategic Plan is a ten year endeavor. Within it live three-year DIP roadmaps which inform the school improvement plan for each site. In turn, educator plans are built from their school improvement plan. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that years one and two of the DIP are heavy in deliverables, with year three affording time for catch up and data collection for use in formulating the next DIP.

(HQIM) High Quality Instructional Materials is also part of the mandates the district must respond to, as are Attendance Accountability, the Student Opportunity Act (SOA), and the IEP Improvement Project (New IEP). There is some drawdown on what the district would like to devote its time to in order to satisfy these requirements.

Ms. Leonard said that, although these processes take time, they can also provide structure and a thoughtful way of going forward in the district’s continual work to improve. They will continue to inform the work that is built into the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Collins commented on the Tiered Focused Monitoring and the IEP Improvement Project. The Tiered Focused Monitoring process is policy

oriented to determine if the district is following procedures as set forth by DESE. It involves a review of student files and policies. Ms. Collins described the review for English Language as an extensive project that has been very time-consuming over the last month. DESE will then visit building sites and complete interviews about the district submissions.

The IEP Improvement Project refers to a new IEP format that began this year. The goal was to make the process more student-centered, to provide increased student opportunity, and to integrate parent feedback. Ms. Collins complimented the new approach. It is under the umbrella of a strengths-based approach, looking at how the district structures learning environments to support all learners. The district has conducted professional development around the New IEP. The leadership team conducted Universal Design for Learning training in line with this. It has been a large focus this year and will continue to be so next year.

Superintendent Beaudoin noted that the DESE director stepped down midyear. It is unclear how this may impact the direction DESE provides and whether a new leader will have other priorities. However, the district believes it will have to tackle revision of educator evaluation rubrics. One of Superintendent Beaudoin's personal goals was to begin work on this at the leadership level, similarly to the way that the leadership team was prepared to work at their level around cultural competency. This year, the district began work with leadership teams around spending more time together as a team, developing common "look fors." Next year, that will carry forward with more intensive observation and analysis of teaching throughout the year. It is both a time to come together to do the work, but also to re-calibrate how the work is done so that the leadership team is prepared to implement new evaluation rubrics. The new rubrics are starting to pull in the work done around cultural competency and inclusion.

The superintendent outlined the four major strategic initiatives that comprise the DIP, three of which are curriculum and instruction focused. The fourth is operational. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district strives to establish and foster an authentic preK-12 learning environment, integrate social emotional learning into all aspects of the school day, and celebrate and nurture an inclusive and diverse school culture that recognizes the contributions and uniqueness of all individuals. The goals and objectives work with and in support of each other. Strategic Initiative 3 had the highest success rate and fewest deliverables. The slowest growth, but ramping up, was in new focus areas of strategic initiative 1. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the focus on the second and third initiatives is starting to fade to the background because the district is grounded in these areas. The reach of teachers at the school level expands by utilizing leadership learning. Authentic learning is starting to come to the fore as the primary work for the coming year. The pace of

implementation of some deliverables was slowed by the need to transition new administrators to the team. Nevertheless, the district completed 78% of deliverables for the second year of the DIP and is on target for completion by the end of the third year of the cycle. The superintendent said that it is sometimes necessary to revise or reconsider goals set early in the process. The overarching goal is to increase educator capacity to reach all learners.

Superintendent Beaudoin spoke about the overarching themes of the year for leadership – what they found themselves working on, speaking to, or managing through. Themes included curriculum review and development, supporting administrator transitions, and community connections.

Ms. Leonard discussed curriculum review and development, stating that during the year the focus was on applying learning from the previous year and integrating it into practice. Although harder to measure, this is an important component of growth. At the elementary level, the district saw system shifts with literacy adoption and implementation to support students who need additional academic or behavioral/emotional support. Ms. Leonard said there has been tremendous growth in this area over the last three years.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about the progress of hiring instructional coaches. Superintendent Beaudoin asked to delay her reply as this would be covered in her report to the SC. However, the superintendent did express how the instructional coaches are an example of how the goals can shift during the cycle. They were not part of the original DIP.

The superintendent said that the transitions piece can seem less tangible. Supporting the integration of new staff to the district can provide fresh insights but may also slow the process of implementation in some goal areas. For instance, the mapping goal at the secondary level had to be delayed while new leadership integrated into new roles. Focus will return to this area next year. Superintendent Beaudoin said that these transitions went well and that all new members have had successful first years.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district came out ahead in terms of community connections thanks to opportunities that presented themselves throughout the course of the year. These include the arts council partnership, re-partnering with a county-wide group around wellness, and rebooting the Cape Ann Caucus that advocates at the level of state government.

Strategic Initiative 1: Ms. Leonard said that part of her own transition was to identify what authentic learning looks like and means and understand what the shared understanding is. She said the district is positioned to really lean into this area in the coming year. Within this initiative, work that is complete or on track includes NEASC, Multi-Tiered System of Support, community

partnerships, and professional development plan. The NEASC accreditation is not complete. Both elementary schools completed their structured self-study and now await site visits. The feedback garnered will help to set goals for ongoing work. MTSS also has growth extending into next year, particularly regarding breadth in the areas of social-emotional intelligence, attendance, and academics and looking vertically as the partnership is carried into middle school. The professional development plan includes summer learning opportunities and plans for next year on the work highlighted by the district and targeting short-term needs. The work is driven by the goal of enhancing authentic learning. The completion of secondary curriculum maps is behind schedule. However, Ms. Leonard stated that the completion of curriculum mapping is always ongoing. Curriculum maps do exist. As staffing or course pathways have changed, or standards been revamped, revision is necessary. Superintendent Beaudoin said that, during this cycle, the goal was to inventory the art program's existing authentic learning opportunities and determine what components to add or move out. There was a pause on the push to create an arts coordinator position in favor of using the Arts Council program examination to perform a deeper review of the program. It provided the district with a quantitative measure of the program from which goals for an arts coordinator can be set. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there were many different ideas about what an arts coordinator would be for the district. The Arts Council examination provided tools to clarify what the goals for the position should be, if the district is able to fund the position. Ms. Leonard said that another component of strategic initiative 1 was for each building to work on drafting a definition of authentic learning. This work was pulled together for a district definition that will drive work going forward.

Strategic Initiative 2 is also curriculum focused. Superintendent Beaudoin said the district was able to roll out the SEL teacher leadership model, SEL needs assessment, MTSS handbook, and parent education series. Components that are behind or in-progress are the MTSS vertical team and SEL Scope and sequence assessment. The SEL teacher leadership model included two teacher coordinators at each elementary school and the middle school who guide staff in professional development and stay current on RULER research and implementations. They ensure that K-8 has a consistent approach. Currently, the high school does not fit the mold of the approach at the younger grades, and a pathway for vertical MTSS is an area of growth for the district. The SEL needs assessment is ongoing, and a report out from coordinator Ms. Provost is expected in the fall. Ms. Leonard said that the MTSS handbook process is alliterative as the discussion uncovers areas where leadership needs to do a deeper dive. This work is in support of providing students with consistent access to supports across schools and grades and ensuring that staff is effective in their process and utilizing DESE guidance. The district is using DESE's MTSS self-evaluation rubric to consider all aspects of this programming. The district is in the second year of vertical diagnostic

assessment of student growth and data for K-8 students. In conjunction with this, middle school leadership is looking at how they have historically provided intervention services and how they can extend MTSS processes to the rising middle school students. An MTSS vertical team of elementary and middle school staff has been established to coordinate to discuss the transition of both students and practices to the middle school level. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the parent education series was successfully launched. However, participation levels are still a struggle, even with online participation options. The district will continue to explore effective means of outreach. The superintendent said that the SEL scope and sequence assessment is slightly different from the needs assessment. The assessment is designed to measure the impact of what the district is doing and provide a long-term measure on whether the SEL model is having the desired outcomes.

Strategic Initiative 3 accomplishments include inclusion and cultural competency training for staff and students, cultural competency and inclusion assessment and roadmap, and policy revisions. Superintendent Beaudoin said that this initiative is a place where the district had considerable reconsideration of goals. Ms. Leonard said there has been a shift in the field about what is effective. The district has been able to overcome the hurdle of having difficult conversations and is now positioned to think about cultural competency as more than symbolic gestures and to define what a culture looks like, to determine whose voices are not being heard, and to bring them forward. Growth and understanding have shifted to consideration of how a curriculum review should be done using an equity lens. As the leadership team is observing classrooms, they are able to assess indicators of cultural competency. Superintendent Beaudoin said that when the district was first crafting goals around cultural competency the equity audit was a popular discussion point for many districts. This has since become less common because the audit has not proved effective in providing the desired outcomes. The school councils attempted to implement a shorter version of the inventory with smaller groups at each school funded by the Safe and Supportive Schools grant. DESE provided an assessment tool. The feedback was not positive. The survey was heavy on lingo and many of the scenarios that the assessment explored are not applicable in this community. The VOCAL climate survey is an existing tool that the district is employing instead of the diversity/equity audit.

Superintendent Beaudoin stressed the integration of the three curriculum-focused initiatives and said that in the next year 2 and 3 will provide the conditions under which the district will attack the authentic learning piece. Tools embedded in initiatives 2 and 3, which staff will continue to build capacity around, will allow teachers to pursue more interactive learning. Ms. Leonard shared several other accomplishments by the district including the history/social science curriculum review, wellness committee rejuvenation,

updates to professional development, high dosage tutoring for students, elementary literacy curriculum mapping, and secondary world language DESE module training for staff. These accomplishments do not fall within the strategic initiatives but do help the district move forward. Mr. Reed asked if there is feedback from high dosage tutoring. Ms. Leonard offered to write a summary of the experience to share back with the School Committee. Both Ms. Leonard and Superintendent Beaudoin said that the program has been inconsistent. The level of content and the student's age mattered is the success of the tutoring.

Strategic Initiative 4 is finance and operations focused. The superintendent said that operations and finance are the foundation that supports curriculum and instruction. This initiative aimed to ensure funding for a stable, multi-year budget and capital improvement plan through collaboration with the town and community partners. Within this initiative, the district successfully submitted the Essex Elementary building project to the MSBA, the district office completed hiring of new staff, completed operations and maintenance planning, and undertook its annual review of staffing to identify potential operating and financial efficiencies. The creation of a reserves policy and reorganization of curriculum support (stipend JLM) remain ongoing. The School Committee is close to completion on the reserves policy but has collective work to do. Priority for the stipend work had to take a back seat to the unit B negotiations. The superintendent expressed disappointment that a budget or funding correction was not achievable. The superintendent stated that the SC will need to consider whether to pursue a budget correction as they have in the past or reconsider the issue if the district is facing a multi-year period without a correction. Efficiencies are the yearly look at components that can be trimmed because they are no longer needed or are outdated. These savings are then reinvested in the program to achieve updated goals. The district was able to deliver a FY25 budget that maintained quality and forward progress through the implementation of efficiency practices, strategic use of reserves, and reinvestment of savings from enrollment-based staff reductions. Superintendent Beaudoin concluded that the district is in a good financial position, even with structural funding dilemmas yet to be resolved.

Questions: Ms. Whitman asked if the newly installed SEPAC advisors have had an opportunity to receive training on the New IEP, considering that they will be a resource to parents looking for insight. Ms. Collins agreed that it would be a good idea. Two parent training sessions on the New IEP were held, but they were not well attended. Ms. Collins said that early feedback is that the form is more intuitive and user friendly than before. Ms. Whitman commented that parents may not attend the educational presentation, but they are likely to reach out to the SEPAC liaisons once they have questions. Ms. Koch-Sundquist shared that evening education sessions are tough to attend because it is a tough time for families with children. Superintendent Beaudoin

stated that the district has worked this year to standardize the start time of any evening programs based on parent feedback. Previously, feedback had requested more evening parent learning sessions to accommodate working parents. She expressed appreciation for Ms. Koch-Sundquist's suggestion to have them during the day. Mr. Foster asked how the student's educational experience is changed by the processes being implemented via the district improvement plan. Ms. Collins said that the New IEP will impact the parent experience more than the student's. However, every student will be asked to articulate their vision, which is a major update. The compliance tasks that the special education program takes on are more of a technical exercise that the district must go through with less impact felt by students. The impact would be much higher for students were the district out of compliance. Ms. Leonard said that the processes being implemented afford students a more consistent and higher quality experience. For instance, the district's schedule alignment across elementary schools means that they have a similar experience no matter the town they live in or the teacher they have. Work on professional development means that all staff are learning about UDL and able to translate that to the student experience. The superintendent said that the district has moved as a body from questioning to accepting the need to cohesively work across grade levels. The staff is now eager to do the work, while still respecting the cultures of each building. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that, as a result of the DIP processes, students are more present and active in communicating, their voices are heard, and there are more opportunities for the student to be active in their learning. Mr. Reed commented that the district has reached the point where it has a solid foundation, and he looks forward to seeing it accelerate from here. Superintendent Beaudoin said that rhythm has returned to the academic routine after years of response to COVID.

7) Superintendent's Report –

- a. **General Update** - Superintendent Beaudoin began by congratulating the graduation class of 2024 and inviting School Committee members to attend the moving on ceremonies at all the buildings next week. The Essex Elementary Building Project has seated its committee and is expected to start its work in the fall, once the MSBA grants approval for the project to enter the next phase. A faculty member will be added to that group in the fall. The Feasibility Study received funding from both communities, and administrators will now complete the funding agreement documents to close that process. The district completed work to provide the MSBA with enrollment data and an educational questionnaire. In the next couple of months, the MSBA will work on their enrollment projection. The MSBA will next provide their completed report and directional information to the administration sometime in the next couple of months. The design build will be informed by the enrollment projections. Superintendent Beaudoin said that report will be distributed. The superintendent stated that administration is still working on

an Operations and Maintenance Questionnaire for the MSBA that can earn the district additional points toward reimbursement by demonstrating solid maintenance practices. During the Memorial project, the district received a couple additional points due to solid maintenance practices, including long term planning, capital management, and cycles of maintenance.

- b. End of Year Goal Update** – Superintendent Beaudoin referred to School Committee meeting materials and said that, although the SC did not vote on them last year, she has been working towards a series of goals in support of the District Improvement Plan (DIP). Superintendent Beaudoin said that a lot of work has gone into working with the leadership team around student observation as an inroad to deriving feedback to improve student achievement. Next year's goal is for the leadership team to participate in a core set of learning together about how to do effective observation and evaluation. The superintendent is working with the curriculum director to determine the best facilitator to work with the diverse leadership team, a few of whom are new to the district. The leadership team meets about twice per month, with one session dedicated to teaching and learning. Their work will build on this year's classroom observations. The superintendent set a goal of 80% completion of the DIP deliverables. Superintendent shared that she hit 78% of curriculum goals and 77% on district goals. Although the superintendent still sees a lot of forward progress happening, she is most concerned with the budget goals. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she is very interested in working on the library piece. The superintendent had hoped to introduce a plan for the reintegration of the library program at the middle/high school. However, the departure of the business manager delayed this work. The approval of library TAs is serving to revitalize interest in what the program could be. The hope is to build something new and innovative.

Questions: Ms. Whitman pointed out the success that Superintendent Beaudoin was able to achieve while navigating the departure of the business manager midyear and the newly filled leadership positions. Superintendent Beaudoin highlighted the importance of relationships in reaching goals, stating that although turnover has caused some delays, it is important not to rush the necessary relationship building for new administrators. Forward progress is still happening. Ms. Whitman complimented the superintendent on her leadership of the SC. Superintendent Beaudoin demurred that there is still much work to be done.

- 8) Committee Comment** – Ms. Koch-Sundquist commented that the meeting felt productive and like a celebration. She has been seeking to quantify progress that aligns with her children's experience in school.

Superintendent Beaudoin reported that hiring is almost complete. One of the instructional coach positions has been filled and the district is reposting the literacy position.

Mr. Foster broached the topic of the SC bucket list. He said that the SC has a lot on the list and has not been successful in the past at addressing each topic. Mr. Foster asked how the SC could get to a place to successfully address it all. Ms. Whitman suggested reviewing the list to triage what remains important to members and then asking Mr. Reed and Superintendent Beaudoin to prioritize how time at the summer workshop is spent. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the timing of the SC workshop on August 6 has not yet been determined. In addition, the superintendent is unable to meet on the evening of August 20 for the proposed first SC business meeting, and she suggested moving to an earlier time or pushing out until September. The superintendent suggested a longer workshop time. Ms. Whitman favored a longer session with more opportunity to work. Ms. Mitchell stated that last year the workshop included a lot of training that took away from SC work time. Mr. Reed said that since the committee has been together for some time now, they should be able to forgo as much training. Ms. Spencer questioned how workshop items would be chosen from the bucket list. Ms. Koch-Sundquist recalled ranking the bucket list topics in order of importance so that the SC chair could choose the most pressing items for further exploration. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested creating three categories for consideration: 1) What does the committee want to learn about; 2) What does the committee want to take action on; and 3) What do committee members wish to convey to the rest of the group because they are receiving feedback from the community? The superintendent said that it would be possible to bring in a facilitator to help the SC navigate list and their work on it. Mr. Foster stressed that it is important for each member to look through the bucket list and communicate to Mr. Reed how they feel about topics now. Ms. Koch-Sundquist and Mr. Reed expressed the idea that priorities change with time. Ms. Whitman suggested giving Mr. Reed and Ms. Koch-Sundquist time to break the bucket list into areas and then members could send their updated priorities.

Ms. Mitchell asked about the evaluation of the superintendent as last year it was late getting done. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that her evaluation is on a two-year cycle.

Mr. Reed said he is looking forward to supporting the committee and working together.

C. Adjourn

Ms. Whitman moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:00 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- June 18, 2024 - if needed