

Merrimack School District/SAU 26
School Board Meeting
Preliminary Agenda
December 6, 2021
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room

Send public comments to: publiccomment@sau26.org. Comments must be received between the start of the meeting on December 6, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. and Agenda Item #11. Based on the volume of public comments received, the board chair will determine if all public comments can be read. If not, they will be incorporated into the meeting minutes.

PUBLIC MEETING

7:00 p.m. **1. CALL TO ORDER and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

7:05 p.m. **2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

3. RECOGNITIONS

7:25 p.m. **4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES**

1. Superintendent Update
2. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update
3. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update
4. School Board Update
5. Student Representative Update

7:35 p.m. **5. OLD BUSINESS**

1. Health and Safety Task Force Update Everett Olsen
2. Potential Enrollment Impact from Residential Development Everett Olsen

7:50 p.m. **6. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Overview of Proposed 2022-2023 School District Budget Everett Olsen
2. Other

8:10 p.m. **7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Approval of November 15, 2021 Minutes
2. Approval of November 18, 2021 Minutes

8:15 p.m. **8. CONSENT AGENDA**

1. Administrator Resignation Kimberly Yarlott

8:20 p.m. **9. GIFTS AND GRANTS UNDER \$5,000**

Matt Shevenell

1. Delta Dental to Merrimack High School for \$250
2. Elbit Systems of America to Merrimack High School for \$3,500

8:25 p.m. **10. OTHER**

1. Committee Reports
2. Correspondence
3. Comments

8:35 p.m. **11. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

8:55 p.m. **12. ADJOURN to Non-Public Session**

9:00 p.m. **13. NON-PUBLIC SESSION RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)**

1. Staff Welfare Cinda Guagliumi
2. Negotiations

MERRIMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT
School Administrative Unit #26
36 McElwain Street
Merrimack, New Hampshire 03054
Tel. (603) 424-6200 Fax (603) 424-6229

KIMBERLY YARLOTT
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum

EVERETT V. OLSEN, Jr.
Interim Chief Educational Officer

MATTHEW D. SHEVENELL
Assistant Superintendent for Business

To: Cinda Guagliumi
Laurie Rothhaus
Shannon Barnes

Jenna Hardy
Lori Peters
Kaitlyn Vadney

From: Everett V. Olsen, Jr.

Date: November 30, 2021

Subject: Potential Enrollment Impact from Residential Development

At our last school board meeting, I presented some preliminary information pertaining to the scope of residential development (as of this date) in Merrimack. Since our initial discussion, I have obtained additional information from town sources that will assist us in projecting enrollments over the next several years.

The spreadsheet data of number of units in a development, number of bedrooms per development and the estimated School Age Children (SAC) impact is from the report "Residential Development Projects and School Aged Children Estimates" by the Merrimack Community Development Department.

Please keep in mind that these estimated enrollments are just that – estimates. There are a number of factors that need to be considered in enrollment analysis and projections including:

Grade Distribution

It is difficult to predict the ages of children who are in a family moving to Merrimack.

Rate of Occupancy

The economy, prices, interest rate and time of year (project completion date) can all impact the rate of occupancy of a development. Additionally, it sometimes takes 3-5 years for a development to generate a level of new students that represents somewhat of an equilibrium point.

Secondary Enrollment Impact

Apartment and condominium developments can sometimes create a "secondary" enrollment impact. Empty nesters and/or aging residents sometimes will sell a larger home to move into a

smaller residence with less required maintenance by the resident. Often the larger home is occupied by a family with school-aged children.

The spreadsheet of estimated enrollments from the respective developments indicates the largest potential impact at Thorntons Ferry Elementary School, followed by Reeds Ferry Elementary School and James Mastricola Elementary School. However, it is important to remember that all children moving to Merrimack to occupy these developments are not all elementary level students and may be of age to attend the middle school or high school. I will keep you informed of enrollment changes throughout the year and I look forward to revising this information with you on Monday night.

Residential Construction December 2021

								District
Project	Type	# Units	# Bedrooms	School-Aged Children (est.)*	Construction Status	MES	TFS	RFS
Bower's Landing	Detached Condos	115	230	17	Under Construction		17	
Gilbert Crossing	Rental Units	240	110, 1 bdrm 130, 2 bdrm	41	Completed			41
Gilbert Crossing	Rental Units	96	N/A	10	Planned			10
Merrimack Townhomes	Rental Units	45	30, 2 bdrm 15, 3 bdrm	8	Completed		8	
Executive Park	Rental Units	2 80	424	48	Completed		48	
Greenfield Farms	Single Family	66	N/A	55	Finishing Construction			55
Merrimack Park Place	Rental Units	224	4 studio 110, 1 bdrm 110, 2 bdrm	24			24	
Crosswoods Path	Condos Mid Rise	21	9, 1 bdrm 12, 2 bdrm	4				4
Edge Brook Heights	Condos (4 story)	156 Market Rate 76 Age Restricted	N/A	27			27	
Chestnut Hill	Single Family	77	N/A	60	Under Construction	60		
360 D.W. Highway	Apartments	40	N/A	7	Beginning Soon		7	
Oak Ridge	Single Family	12	N/A	10	Under Construction	10		
Normandy Estates	Single Family	8	N/A	12	Approved Awaiting Construction		12	
Stage Coach Crossing	Single Family	12	N/A	18	Under Construction		18	
TOTALS				341		70	161	110

* Source Merrimack Community Development Department

N/A indicates that more specific data on the number of bedrooms was not available.

	<u>Single Family</u>	<u>Condo</u>	<u>Apartments</u>			
	66	115	240			
	77	21	96			
	12	156	45			
	8		280			
	12		224			
			40			
TOTALS	175	292	925			
UNITS		1392				

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
November 15, 2021**

6:00 p.m. – Non-Public Session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Hardy, Board Member Peters, and Board Member Barnes. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen, and Student Representative Vadney.

Board Member Peters was excused from the meeting.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Yarlott was excused from the meeting.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Guagliumi pointed out that the School Board would accept public comment via email and to do that members of the public could send emails to publiccomment@sau26.org.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Robert Reisman, 8 Iris Drive stated his child is having a successful year. He supports strengthening the mask protocol. He feels the energy that is uniting behind the welfare of students.

Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I want to thank the district for the focus on literacy and handwriting as a way to address learning loss from a pandemic and strengthen skills for all kids.

Thank you to every board member and member of administration for enabling our students to have a positive school year. Thank you to every teacher, therapist, and para for all you do to teach our children in a caring environment.

I was pleased to see that the district website (sau26.org) now has a Curriculum & Assessment tab on the homepage. I was happy to see all the assessments given are listed in an organized and easy to read document. I applaud the district for putting in writing on this page that "Note to parents: You may request copies of your child's assessments. STAR is a quick diagnostic assessment and does have a parent report that can be printed." The transparency from administration is appreciated and helps parents be better partners in their child's education. I appreciate that the curriculum section of the website is beginning to be updated and the math curriculum has been posted. I look forward to seeing the reading and writing curriculums posted.

The district is piloting a handwriting program in certain elementary school classes. I urge the district to implement a research based handwriting program in all elementary schools.

52 In 2019 only 38% of 4th graders in NH could read proficiently (source nces.ed.gov nations
53 report card). Imagine what that number is after a pandemic.
54

55 Mastricola is implementing a reading intervention for every single student in first and second
56 grade using structured literacy programs. I am pleased to see these programs being used in
57 general education to benefit all students. All students have access to phonics and phonemic
58 awareness programs at Mastricola. I would love for the district to adopt a uniform structured
59 literacy program so all students can learn how to read.
60

61 I am here for a strong public education system that benefits all kids.
62

63 Thank you to teachers and therapists for all you do every day.
64

65 Ken Martin, Woodward Road stated the academic recovery programs are working for his
66 son. He is supportive of the teachers' contract.
67

68 Lisa Mungovan, 14 Lamson Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
69 Could the School Board please remind families and students to wear masks on buses? My
70 students tell me they are rarely worn. I know drivers must pay attention to driving over
71 masking. But I have seen my partially vaccinated children get on the buses in the morning
72 and end up sitting next to or near fully unmasked children. Thank you!
73

74 Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle supports eliminating the mask opt out option due to
75 the recent increase in covid cases. She highlighted the importance of keeping children in
76 school and the shortage of substitute teachers.
77

78 Jennifer McInnis, 8 Evergreen Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
79 First, I want to express my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of all the staff,
80 faculty, administrators, and school board members in these difficult times.
81

82 I support the mask mandate in its current form, with community transmission and percent
83 positivity rates of testing as high as they are. CDC research shows that schools with mask
84 mandates are less likely to have clusters of outbreaks, and our own neighbor district,
85 Bedford (SAU 25) had a dramatic decrease in cases in the high school when a mask
86 mandate was placed due to high cases. Thank you for your time.
87

88 Beth Grady, 15 Parker Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
89 I am writing to express my concern over the exponentially growing Covid numbers within the
90 schools. As of Friday, November 12, 2021, there were 51 active cases. 51! I wanted to do a
91 comparison of districts nearby to see how our numbers compared. Well very unsurprisingly,
92 the districts with a mask mandate had a much lower percentage of active cases. I know that
93 Merrimack likes to claim that we have a mask mandate, but we simply do not. There is an
94 opt-out choice making it not mandated. Please excuse me if the current student enrollment
95 for the districts below is off a bit. While looking for this data I found slightly varying numbers
96 but were all in the same ballpark and all numbers came from the same source. The Active
97 Covid numbers are accurate as they came directly from each school's Covid Dashboards.
98

99 As of November 12, 2021:
100

101 No Mask Mandate, or "Opt Out":

102 -Merrimack: 51 Active Cases out of approximately 3,755 students

103 -Bedford: 56 Active Cases out of approximately 4,437 students
104

105 Mask Mandates:

106 -Nashua: 40 Active Cases out of approximately 11,072 students

107 -Manchester: 109 cases out of approximately 13,255 students

108
109 This data shows that Nashua, a district nearly three times as large as Merrimack has less
110 cases. And Manchester, almost 4 times as large as us has just over twice the number of
111 cases. These numbers speak for themselves.

112
113 I believe the School Board has done their best to try to find a middle ground to appease
114 parents both in favor and against masks, which seemed logical back in September when
115 numbers were much lower. It is no longer logical. It is time to reconsider Merrimack's current
116 mitigation strategies-especially the mask policy. The School Board always said they would
117 revisit the mask mandate regularly and make changes as needed based on numbers.
118 Clearly now is the time. Numbers have NEVER been this high in schools, and they are
119 increasing exponentially. Our current practice is not working. I have listened to multiple
120 meetings of parents discussing mental health due to masks. Wearing masks does not
121 negatively impact mental health, it is the isolation that does. More and more students are
122 being isolated at home due to Covid. This is what is impacting them. Missing out on crucial
123 instructional time and time with peers is unhealthy. Wearing masks will help bring them
124 numbers back down and bring students back to the classroom.

125
126 I teach in a district in MA which has, as all MA schools have through at least the end of
127 January, a mask mandate. I have never once heard a child in my class complain to me
128 about wearing their mask, and I teach 6 and 7 year olds. The parents don't complain either.
129 They respect the policy. Do you know how many active cases we have right now in my
130 district? 1. Yes, 1. We only have 597 students in the school, which makes Merrimack about
131 6 times larger. 1 to 51 where Merrimack is 6 times larger....again it doesn't add up!

132
133 With vaccines now available for ages 5-11, many students are getting vaccinated. Hopefully
134 the numbers will start coming back soon and a mask mandate will no longer be necessary,
135 but until then please revisit your policy. No one is asking for a permanent change, we are
136 just asking for logical changes when needed based on current numbers. Let's do all we can
137 to keep children safe and in schools where they belong. Thank you.

138
139 Angelique Lippmann, 8 Owls Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
140 I am writing to ask you to keep the mask mandate and remove the "opt-out" option for
141 masks for December. While I am aware some classes only have a few opting out, there are
142 several who have half the class opting out. I have been made aware that in some of these
143 rooms with high "opt-out" rates, there is an increase in covid spread and quarantines. As of
144 today, 51 students in Merrimack are positive for Covid, another 51 are out quarantining, and
145 69 students are excluded awaiting testing. A total of 171 students are not in school in
146 Merrimack according to the Covid Dashboard. I have been told that since Merrimack is not
147 live streaming to these students who are home (as they are in Manchester), these students
148 are not receiving any direct instruction and are missing out on a lot of school. Especially
149 worrisome are those siblings of positive cases where they have to quarantine 20 days while
150 their covid positive sibling only misses 10 days of school. I personally know several
151 people who have this situation going on in Merrimack. I teach in Manchester and even as a
152 large city, our positivity rate is far less. The same is true with Nashua. In both of these larger
153 communities, schools are showing less Covid spread within the classrooms. The reason for
154 this is clear, they have mandatory masking with no choice to opt out. In Manchester we also
155 have weekly voluntary pool testing for students and staff, and rapid tests available at all
156 times at each school for students and staff.

157
158 As a teacher who goes from class to class in my position I see hundreds of students a day
159 in their classrooms, and the masks are working and not one child has ever complained to
160 me about wearing them. They are happy to be in school and seeing them in person in
161 school everyday is so important as we are playing catch up to fill in the gaps of what the
162 past two years of interrupted schooling has done. We are in school everyday and learning,
163 and masks do not get in the way of that learning at all. I am so grateful to see Merrimack
164 students going on field trips again and having a somewhat normal year again, with the help
165 of masks to keep them there. However, several people I know have missed out on these
166 field trips due to quarantining. As we are seeing these increasing numbers in Merrimack
167 schools and not in Manchester and Nashua schools, it is clear that their mask policy is
168 working better than ours. They have no opt-out option. Where germs spread are in the
169 classrooms. Please as we approach winter let's keep our kids in school and keep the mask
170 mandate and take away the opt-out option. Otherwise the numbers will keep rising and more
171 of our kids will be home quarantining, missing out on instruction, field trips, and more
172 which will certainly impact their mental health.

173
174 Jennifer Jobin, Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
175 Thank you to all faculty, staff, administrators, and Board Members of the Merrimack School
176 District for your continued hard work this school year. It is greatly appreciated.
177

178 As a parent of a student in Merrimack schools, I am writing to ask members of the School
179 Board to continue to rely on data and science for your decisions regarding mask use.
180 According to the district's COVID dashboard, as of Friday, November 12th, there were 51
181 students who were positive for COVID-19. This number is the highest it has been this school
182 year. As people gather for the upcoming Thanksgiving and winter holidays, it is possible that
183 this increase in cases may continue. I request that you continue the current mask policy and
184 consider temporarily changing the policy to include mandated masks for all students and
185 staff until cases decline to an acceptable number. My number one concern is to have
186 schools remain open so that my child, and all Merrimack students, may continue to attend
187 in-person. Like all parents, I look forward to the day when I can safely send my student to
188 school without a mask. Unfortunately, with positivity rates as high as they currently are, this
189 is not the time to make that change.
190

191 I am writing to you today to PLEAD with everything I have to reinstate the mask mandate.
192 My youngest is in 1st grade at MES. We have been over vigilant doing absolutely everything
193 we can to keep her safe during this pandemic. She has severe asthma which means she
194 often ends up getting pneumonia from the common cold. She has been hospitalized 5 times
195 in her 6 years of life, and, in addition, has had 3 bouts of pneumonia.
196

197 Thursday and Friday November 5th and 6th, she was exposed to Covid by a child whose
198 parents opted him out of the mask rule. We were notified Monday November 9th. We woke
199 up Tuesday November 10th and tested her as a precaution. Her test was positive before the
200 control line even had a chance to process.
201

202 Since that day, we have had to have a televisit with her pulmonologist in Boston at Mass
203 General Childrens who immediately put her on oral steroids Wednesday night.
204

205 By Thursday mid-day she was gasping for air. I was forced to give her 2nd dose of steroids
206 early in addition to a double dose of her rescue inhaler to prevent an ER visit.
207

Meanwhile, both my daughters are on IEP's. Neither have been given the opportunity to remote learn or zoom in to their services without my requesting it first.

Because of this, my older daughter, who is on the autism spectrum, is forced to quarantine for 20 days. 20 days with no schooling. 20 days with no services.

This is unbelievably unacceptable. The fact that you have allowed yourselves to be bullied into a mask opt out despite that your 1st priority is the safety and health of our children.

I am baffled and frankly angry beyond belief that we are faced with this situation. Honestly, I blame those of you who voted for the opt out. I blame you for my child's struggle to BREATHE. Her need for expensive prescription steroids, her need to be monitored 24/7.

Something HAS GOT to be done. Children's and teacher's health needs to be first priority above and beyond someone who wants to flex their "rights" to expose others just to prove a point.

Do the right thing. What you know you should. You MUST keep these children and staff safe. Please.

Bryan Townsend, 5 Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I am writing to urge you to impose a mandatory mask policy. Prior to the start of the school year, a vocal minority of parents urged this Board to allow for an "opt-out." Their primary argument was that the risk of spread amongst children was low. In just a few months since this Board chose to allow for "opt-outs," Covid-19 cases in our schools have exploded. At the three elementary schools alone, there are currently 61 active cases, all but 3 of which are students. At last check, there are currently 125 total active cases in Merrimack, meaning that half of the total cases in Merrimack are our elementary school students. Our own son's classroom currently has 3 active cases. There is no question that the number of Covid-19 cases in our schools dwarfs those from last year when this Board instituted a *mandatory* mask policy. To say this is just a coincidence ignores all facts and logic.

We are in the home stretch. Our elementary students now have the opportunity to begin the vaccination process if their families choose to do so. I would urge the Board to reinstitute the mandatory mask policy so that we may get through the winter safely, without adding to the clusters in our classrooms.

Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Let the parents worry about our own children and you worry about yours. Masks don't work.

Naomi Holter, 10 Everest Drive supports all comments for mandatory masking given the current increase in covid cases.

3. RECOGNITIONS

No recognitions to announce.

4. INFORMATIONAL UPDATES

1. Superintendent Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported school level budget meetings were completed. Budget meetings with school administrators will begin tomorrow. He will present the 2022-2023 budget to the School Board on December 6.

He congratulated the Merrimack High School Interact Club for supporting the Merrimack community through volunteering time at the Reeds Ferry Elementary School Fall Festival, the Merrimack Rotary Club's electronics recycling fundraiser and the collection of 9 bags of trash. Future support will include helping the Merrimack Rotary Club with the annual Turkey Trot, Giving Trees and donations to a local food pantry.

He wished everyone a very happy Thanksgiving.

2. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Update

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Yarlott was excused from the meeting.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell applauded the work of the K-6 Standards Based Report Card Committee. He reported efforts to implement the K-6 Standards Based Report Card for the 2022-2023 school year have begun.

3. Assistant Superintendent for Business Update

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell announced that he will attend the Budget Committee meeting on November 16. He will provide the Budget Committee with a yearend review, assist with the training session and present the Capital Improvement Plan.

4. School Board Update

There were no school board updates to report.

5. Student Representative Update

Student Representative Vadney noted high school fall sports ended. She is looking forward to an exciting winter sports season.

5. OLD BUSINESS

1. Health & Safety Task Force Update

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported the Health & Safety Task Force Committee will meet in the next several days to prepare its mask recommendation for December. Mr. Olsen expressed his concern over the increasing number of COVID cases in the schools. He is currently working with the Merrimack's Health Director Erin Olsen to establish a vaccination clinic in Merrimack for students. As of November 12, 2021 there were 51 COVID cases compared to 7 cases a month and a half ago. He reported many of the cases were at the elementary schools and that mitigation strategies are being discussed. New cases in Merrimack per 100K over 14-day period is 665. The antigen and PCR test positivity rate is 16.4%. He will bring the December recommendation to the next School Board meeting.

Board Member Barnes clarified the next School Board meeting is December 6. She suggested the School Board schedule a special meeting for the School Board to respond to the recommendation of the Health and Safety Task Force.

After discussion, the Board agreed to hold a special school board meeting for the sole purpose of responding to the recommendation of the Health and Safety Task Force.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to give the administration latitude to institute spot mask mandates where needed due to the spread of COVID until the next school board meeting. Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Vice Chair Rothhaus noted that is important that the parents be informed.

The motion failed 2-2-0. (Board Member Barnes and Vice Chair Rothhaus voted against the motion)

2. School Board's 2022-2023 Budget Message to Administration

School Board Priorities for the 2022-2023 Budget.

- Keep the budget as close to level funded as possible.
- Continue to Support Social and Emotional Learning for students
- Competitive pay and benefits
- Hire additional floater substitutes
- Raise graduation rates and support student success
- Offer summer programming for all grade levels
- Maintain the 1:1 student to device ratio
- Maintain the Capital Improvement Plan projects
- Continue to improve ventilation in the schools.
- Maintain COVID standards with cleaning and sanitization
- Provide as much information on budgeted line items as reasonably possible.

Vice Chair Rothhaus suggested the graduation rates include the needs of all students. She would like summer programs to be expanded to include learners needing assistance with reading, math and/or critical thinking skills. Her most important priority is the retention of high qualified teachers. She noted the importance of putting forward a warrant article(s) to reserve money for Capital Improvement Plan projects.

Board Member Hardy noted the importance of an educational screener having a component for early intervention. She wants to expand on the building level Social, Emotional and Learning opportunities sooner than later. The retention of highly qualified teachers is also important.

6. NEW BUSINESS

1. Capital Improvement Plan Review

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell presented the Ten-Year Capital Improvement Plan. Projects for consideration in 2022-23 are:

- Roof repairs at TFS. (The board may want to create a warrant article for the cost of this project)
- Ventilation project at MHS is underway after delay of materials.
- O'Gara Drive paving project, inclusive of a new sidewalk.
- The Trustees of the Trust Funds paid for upgrades to the bleachers in the JMUES All Purpose Room, bleachers in the Smith Gym and installed a new floor in the JMUES All Purpose Room.
- Master Plan/SAU Office Study will resume.

It was noted future skate park plans will include collaboration with the Town of Merrimack and the Flerra family.

2. Standards-Based Report Card Presentation

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen explained the Standards-Based Report Card work began in 2017 under former Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Dr. Mark McLaughlin and continued under former Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum John Fabrizio before a delay due to COVID. Dr. Guskey's book Developing Standards-Based Report Card by Thomas R. Guskey and Jane Bailey was used as a guide for standards-based reporting.

Michell Romein introduced Nicole Rheault, Nicole Frazzetta, Anders Benson, Debra Walter, Holly Lubelczyk and Jeanette Cote.

Assistant Principal Nicole Rheault explained the process of the evolution of reporting student progress.

Educator Anders Benson presented the standards-based report card design.

Assistant Principal Michelle Romein explained the purpose of the standards-based report card.

Educator Debra Walter spoke about the reporting timeline.

Educator Holly Lubelczyk spoke about the difference between the reporting standards and the curriculum standards.

Educator Jeanette Cote explained the process in determining reporting standards and the curriculum standards.

Educator Nicole Frazzetta described the performance indicators.

Board Member Hardy suggested rewording slide 8 from "...where additional time and effort are needed." to read "... where additional time and support are needed."

405
406 3. Preliminary Information on Residential Development
407

408 Interim Chief Educational Office Olsen presented the Board with preliminary information on the
409 scope of residential development in Merrimack. This information will be important when
410 estimating the student enrollment impact to the respective schools.
411

412 4. Memorandum of Understanding between School Board and Merrimack Teachers
413 Association Classroom Coverage
414

415 Board Member Barnes asked the Board to consider a signing a Memorandum of Agreement
416 (MOU) between the Merrimack School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association to
417 assist with classroom coverage. The MOU is intended to be an amendment to the current
418 Merrimack Teachers Association contract that expires June 30, 2021. It will be incorporated
419 in the new contract.
420

421 Board Member Barnes read the Memorandum of Agreement for inclusion in the minutes.
422

423 *Memorandum of Agreement*
424

425 *The Merrimack School Board and the Merrimack Teachers Association (MTA) hereby agree to*
426 *amend the Master Agreement by adding the following provision, effective immediately:*
427

428 *8.7 A middle or high school teacher (grades 7 through 12) who agrees to teach an extra*
429 *academic class at the request of administration or their designee during their planning period*
430 *will be paid an additional \$40 per period. No teacher will be required to accept such an*
431 *assignment. No more than one additional class per day will be assigned to a teacher.*
432

433 *An elementary (preschool through grade 6) teacher who covers part of another class at the*
434 *request of administration or their designee for more than half a day will be paid an additional*
435 *\$60. If the teacher covers part of another class at the request of administration or their*
436 *designee for less than half a day the teacher will be paid an additional \$40.*
437

438 *In all cases, the administrator, or their designee, will be responsible for assigning students.*
439

440 *Approved by*
441 *The Merrimack School Board*
442

443 _____
444 *Chair*
445

Date: _____

446 *The Merrimack Teachers Association*
447 _____

448 *President*
449

Date: _____

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to authorize Chair Guagliumi to sign the Memorandum of Understanding as presented. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4-0-0.

5. Other

Vice Chair Rothhaus asked the school board to consider forming a Task Force to assist with:

- Pressing educational issues such as supporting the upcoming contracts
- Recruiting the best teachers
- Work force development
- Study drop-out trends and recommend solutions
- Study how to close achievement gaps
- The Master Plan Committee could work with the Planning and Building Committee to provide feedback and be part of presentations.
- Parents review the Youth Risk Behavior Survey for trends
- Create a committee to look at the leadership profile when hiring new administrators.
- Parent recommendations to School Board

7. APPROVAL of Minutes

1. October 18, 2021 Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 18, 2021 meeting. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

2. November 1, 2021 Minutes

MOTION: Vice Chair Rothhaus made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 1, 2021 meeting. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

3. November 9, 2021 Minutes

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2021 meeting. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Educator Resignation

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell announced the resignation of Ashley Parker a 7th Grade Teacher at Merrimack Middle School.

MOTION: Board Member Barnes made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.

9. OTHER

1. Committee Reports

Vice Chair Rothhaus reported the Planning and Building Committee met. Architect Steve Keach is working on a Master Plan to present to community.

2. Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report.

3. Comments

There were no comments to report.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Heather Robitaille, 45 Springfield Circle, stated she appreciated the Standards Based Report Card presentation. She asked the board to not delay the emergency meeting to discuss masks.

JoAnne Principe, Beacon Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I believe it is high time that Merrimack joins Nashua and Manchester in mandating masks in classrooms. My granddaughter in first grade tested positive last week. It is now 7 days later and she is still running a fever and has been put on steroids and is still having breathing issues. She suffers from severe asthma and has been hospitalized for pneumonia 3 times in her young life. Last Monday I got her off the bus and she told me that all 3 kids at her desk cluster were not wearing masks. There was an identified positive Covid case from her classroom from the end of the week before. She goes to MES.

Also now, her sister while still testing negative has to be out of school until 11/29. During this time, while they are both on IEPs, they are not getting zoom instruction and not getting services. Manchester is currently zooming for quarantined kids. We are failing our children. With a current high of 125 reported cases in town and a state all time high positivity rate of 8.4% I implore you to make a decision to protect the children in our town.

Chuck Mower, 4 Depot Street encouraged the School Board to attend the Budget Committee meeting tomorrow evening. He hopes to receive a less cryptic budget message from the School Board. He heard financial needs to support ideas, visions and expectations of the school board. He was disappointed there was not a robust push for financing the items needed in a timely fashion. He endorsed Vice Chair Rothhaus's recommendation for a Task Force.

Jennifer Spillane, Craig Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I want to say that I am shocked about the number of COVID cases in Merrimack schools right now, but I cannot. Many of us saw this coming. The sharp, sudden rise in COVID infections in our schools shows that masks should no longer be optional.

My son attends a charter school in Nashua with well over 500 students, and they've had 2 cases of COVID since school started the final week of August, and neither of those cases of COVID were contracted at school. The school is doing so well because ALL students and staff are wearing masks. It's been scientifically proven over, and over that when everyone wears masks, they work.

My son may not attend our schools at the moment, but we've lived in Merrimack for over 20 years, and I care about the people in this community. We need to stop listening to the few who don't want their children to have to wear masks, and start listening to what science, and the experience of other schools tells us...that masks work.

Robert Reisman, 8 Iris Drive emphasized that teacher recruitment and social emotional learning are important budget items.

Christina Laliberty, 11 Parkhurst Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) Unfortunately, I will not be able to make the school board meeting tonight, but I have strong feeling I wish to share.

As a mother and nurse, I am very disturbed by the current "opt-out" rule for classrooms. Masks help prevent the spread of Covid-19. Wearing a mask provides little protection to the wearer but is instead intended to stop the wearer from spreading the virus. The adage goes, "I wear my mask to protect you. You wear your mask to protect me." The families who have opted-out of mask wearing are, in my experience, the same families who do not vaccinate for Covid, and do not adhere to social distancing guidelines. These children are more likely to contract Covid in the community and pass it on in the schools.

New Hampshire is experiencing an increase in numbers. Our current daily infection rates, hospitalizations, and patients intubated rates are as high or higher than they were at the worst point in this pandemic. Our emergency rooms, ICU, and floor bed capacity has been reached. Our healthcare workers are tired and burnt out. Just recently Elliot hospital had to divert - no ambulances or admits because they were well past full. Parkland has more than a dozen patients boarding in their ED. CMC is not faring any better. This situation affects not only people needing to be seen for Covid, but traumas, illnesses, etc.

We all need to do our part. No one likes wearing a mask, but we do because it is for the greater good.

Please remove the mask opt-out option in Merrimack schools.

Katherine Nichols, 40 Burt Street (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I am writing this email to voice my concern as both a parent and educator as to your mask guidelines. As of 11/10/21, 196 students/staff of the Merrimack school district had to be quarantined, as found on your website. The rate of children testing positive with COVID-19 is on the rise and vaccinations for the 5-11 year old group has just started. I am very disappointed with how this board has handled this pandemic during this school year. I feel

596 like you succumbed to the loudest voices against a mask mandate instead of relying on the
597 doctors and NH Board of Education's recommendations. How can I as a parent protect my
598 children when they are at school? I thought the board's best interest should be that of the
599 students and their safety. Were the numbers of quarantine students lower last year when
600 there was a mask mandate? I work in a district with a mandate and we have only had 1
601 positive case in the last three weeks. It definitely makes me think that the board needs some
602 new voices that will protect the health and safety of our children.
603

604 Angelique Lippmann, 8 Owls Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

605 During this meeting, I received an email from the RFS principal notifying me that my son
606 was in close contact with COVID infection. I'm doing my part to keep my child in school and
607 I'm disappointed that you are not. Please vote to remove the opt out until our cases start
608 decreasing.
609

610 Rosemarie Rung, 21 Ministerial Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

611 I share the concern about the rising cases of COVID, especially in context with much larger
612 school districts who have a mask mandate and far fewer cases. I fully support removing the
613 opt out as long as our numbers are trending upward. It is disappointing that the Board did
614 not use current data to respond to this situation tonight or through an emergency meeting.
615 By not making a decision tonight or in the next few days, more children will get sick, miss
616 school, and spread the virus to others. I don't understand why you find this more acceptable
617 than calling an emergency meeting. Also, I strongly support Mr. Olsen's comment about
618 having a vaccine clinic in Merrimack to make it easier for more Merrimack parents to get
619 their children vaccinated.
620

621 As far as the new report cards: please edit to remove jargon or words that are not in the
622 common lexicon, for example, "automaticity."
623

624 **11. ADJOURNMENT TO NON PUBLIC SESSION pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c)**
625

626 Chair Guagliumi announced the Board would adjourn to non-public session to handle unfinished
627 business from the earlier non-public session.
628

629 **MOTION:** At approximately 9:25 p.m., Board Member Barnes made a motion to go to into non-
630 public session. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.
631

632 **The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0 on a roll call vote.**
633

634 **MOTION:** At approximately 10:30 p.m. Board Member Barnes made a motion to go to adjourn
635 the public session. Board Member Hardy seconded the motion.
636

637 **The motion passed 4 – 0 – 0.**
638

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
November 18, 2021**

Present: Chair Guagliumi, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Board Member Hardy, Board Member Peters, and Board Member Barnes. Also present were Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Yarlott, Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Guagliumi called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Guagliumi announced that Vice Chair Rothhaus would arrive after her work commitment.

Chair Guagliumi pointed out that the School Board would accept public comment via email and to do that members of the public could send emails to publiccomment@sau26.org.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Jennifer Jobin, merrymeeting Drive stated that she appreciates the work of the School Board. She wants her child to continue attending school in person. She supports mask wearing and asked the board to consider the facts and not to listen to loudest opinions.

Lisa Mungovan, 14 Lamson Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I would like to encourage all of you to vote for a mask mandate in our school district. Cases are rising in every school. If our schools had an 80% vaccination rate, I would not need to see the need for a mandate - but every health expert on the planet has said the first line of defense to Covid-19 is vaccination. Second comes distancing (which schools cannot do) and masking. This mitigation practice is detrimental to student health and safety. I am thankful my 11 year old and 9 year old have received their first vaccination doses - but they are still vulnerable. My 4 year old who attends preschool in the district, is still vulnerable. As an adult past 6 months post second vaccination dose and ineligible for a booster - I am now vulnerable too. Immunity is potentially waning with the vaccines as in Massachusetts breakthrough cases are up by 44%. As cold weather has settled into New Hampshire for these upcoming months, children will be inside more during school as illnesses circulate and now is the time to implement better strategies. As a district, we can do better. Please do better.

Sara Lock, Cota Road noted that COVID cases are increasing without a remote learning option for students. The School Board has the responsibility to keep children safe, in school and keep staff safe.

Chery Corian, 5 Portside Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I, first, want to thank you all for your service to our community and can't possibly understand how hard the decisions you make are, knowing you will never make everyone happy. I can only hope you continue to always think of the kids first and do what is right instead of trying to win over groups of people, on either side.

I know that you are considering taking the parent opt-out of masking away. As cases are getting out of control, I completely understand why you would do that, however I was hoping you would consider a different "opt-out" and that is for children who are fully vaccinated.

My kids are 5 and 8 and attend TFS and like most kids their age, they need some sort of motivation to do just about anything. I have been telling my kids, leading up to their vaccination appointment, that when they are fully vaccinated, they will no longer have to wear masks in their classroom, which they have been very excited about. I agree that kids who are not vaccinated should continue to be masked but why not reward the kids who are making the sacrifice and doing their part for the community by allowing them to decide whether or not to wear a mask in class. This also aligns with the data, since most of the cases have been in the elementary school, where kids have not been eligible to get vaccinated until recently.

On another note, I want to thank the district for all of the focus on reading this year. TFS has started using Heggerty and I get so excited to read Julie's weekly "Hawk's Happenings" which gives us updates on the use of this program in class, among lots of other great things going on at the school this year. I'm so happy for my kindergartener to get such a great program from the get-go! My third grader, who gets extra reading services, will also benefit greatly from this program! I love that we are now trying everything we can to get them off to a great start with reading to prevent the need for extra help in the future, which can also affect their other subjects greatly.

Finally, I want to thank you for approving the half day in March for the teachers to get the "Think Kids Collaboration Protective Training." As a parent of a child with challenging behaviors due to ODD, ADHD and ASD, I'm SOOOOOOOO happy to see a focus on improving how we can better help and manage challenging behavior in the school and classroom. This will help these kids tremendously and benefit the teachers and the classrooms in the long run, too!

With all of these amazing, new programs and trainings, you are helping to make Merrimack a great place for ALL kids, not just the natural learners, and I can't thank you enough for that!

Sheana DeBourke, Belmont Drive stated masks were never worn to reduce flu and colds. A 20-day quarantine is too long without access to remote learning. Decisions should not be made out of fear.

Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) Once again, I am writing to say mask if you want BUT leave the rest of us alone. They DON'T work, they give you a false sense of security and you all know this. One study says they work, the next study says they don't, even fraudci can't make up his mind. Please step off this merry go round and let parents make the best decisions for OUR children. We are tired of the games and will do what is best for our families while allowing others to do for theirs. Please STOP this never ending cycle and let people live their lives with the God given freedom we all have. If you choose to live in fear so be it, but we WILL NOT!!

Bill Pfingston, 17 Jessica Drive stated he is the voice for individuals who reject the government's gross over reach for trying to raise our children. The Board's vote tonight will be remembered in 2022 and 2024. He asked the Board to keep the current mask policy.

104
105 Rebecca Dalrymple, 1 Hitchinpost Lane (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
106 I am writing tonight to ask please while numbers are rising, refresh air becomes limited, and
107 vaccines just becoming available that you consider mandating masks. For the parent who
108 did not want masks we have had the opt out option for 2.5 months now and have suffered
109 the consequence with numbers rising. Vaccines have just become available to those who
110 want to take that step to protect their children. Please give us some time to protect our
111 children.

112
113 People around the holidays will be out with family in friends in large groups which data
114 shows will increase numbers even more. We also have the flu season upon us so not only
115 will it help with the Covid rising numbers but will hopefully also slow down the spread of
116 other sicknesses and allow the children to stay in school.

117
118 Andrew Morris, Horseshoe Pond stated he is vaccinated and a believer in vaccines. He asked
119 the board to consider how long we want kids to feel like they do not live in a normal world because
120 this is the new normal world. No amount of vaccination and masking is going to make COVID go
121 away.

122
123 Melissa Eaton, Carriage Lane, (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
124 I have 3 children in 3 different schools (Reeds, Middle and High School). Having the option
125 to opt my children out of wearing a mask has had such a positive impact on my children this
126 school year. The last year and a half was awful for my kids with at least one of my children
127 saying they are not going to school this year if they had to wear a mask. He failed most of
128 his classes last year because he gave up and hated being at school. It was a nightmare for
129 him to wear a mask as he has asthma and was struggling to breath with it on all day. This
130 year he has turned it around and his grades have improved. I worry that if he is forced to
131 wear a mask, a repeat of last year will happen. I really want this to be a successful year for
132 all my children.

133
134 I commend the board for listening to parent's concerns and I have faith that you will continue
135 to listen to parents as we know what's best for our children and situation.

136
137 Chad Horton, 39 Whittier Road stated masks do not provide full protection. The wealth of
138 accumulated data indicates children are less likely to become infected, less likely to be infectious,
139 less likely to have severe symptoms and less likely to be hospitalized. Covering a child's face
140 mutes the nonverbal forms of communication and can result in robotic and emotionless
141 interactions and cause anxiety and depression. He asked the board to not act reflexively based
142 on fear of COVID and institute another round of needless masking that will do nothing to stop a
143 virus that will always be with us. He asked the Board to make sound not emotional decisions
144 based on universal data that all points to the same thing; children are the lowest risk group.

145
146 Beth Grady, 15 Parker Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
147 I wrote a letter which was read aloud at Monday's School Board meeting. In this letter I
148 discussed the exponentially growing Covid cases within the Merrimack Schools. I did a
149 comparison between districts that have a mask mandate with no opt-out to those that do
150 not. The numbers were crystal clear yet not surprising at all. When I wrote this letter the
151 number of Active cases in Merrimack was 51 as of Friday, November 12th. I was appalled. I
152 went and checked the numbers again just 4 days later, and they were up to 91. That's right.
153 In just 4 days the already alarmingly high Covid cases within our schools had nearly
154 doubled.

I have been watching the School Board meetings and can say that everyone, Board Members and the residents of this town have a common goal, and can agree on one thing. Children belong in school. Unfortunately, due to Covid, many children are missing out on invaluable instructional time. On Wednesday alone, Merrimack had 91 absences due to active cases, 78 absences due to quarantining (unvaccinated household contacts) and 85 absences due to symptomatic students pending results. This means that on one day alone, 254 students were absent. 254 students missed out on instructional time. Most of these students will remain out 10-14 days.

Masks have been proven to reduce the spread. I have heard people speak at these meetings claiming, "My child, my choice". Unfortunately, even more than a year and a half into this pandemic some people do not seem to understand that wearing a mask protects others from the mask wearer. I believe the saying goes, "My mask protects you, your mask protects me". When a parent chooses to "opt their child out" they are actually choosing to put other children in danger. They are not simply choosing for their child. Their decision impacts many. Children whose parents have been diligent about following all the experts such as CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, NH Department of Health and Safety are still getting sick and losing out on instructional time because other parents are making the choice to put children at risk. This is not right.

The Board has always said that they would regularly revisit the district's mask policy due to trends in numbers. If the numbers were rapidly decreasing would you revisit for a more lenient policy? Likely. Now that the numbers are rapidly increasing it is time to revisit and remove the opt out choice. With ages 5-11 beginning to become vaccinated the hope is that the numbers will decrease soon, and when that time comes perhaps another change can be made. This situation is fluid and the mask policy should mimic the current data.

I wholeheartedly believe that the members of this board's number one priority is the well-being and best interests of our children. 91 active cases, 254 students absent and not receiving instruction? That's simply not putting children first. Jenna, Cinda, Shannon, Laurie, Lori, is your number one priority the safety and well-being of the children? Do you want to see as many children in school as possible? If so, please do what ALL of the experts are recommending. Please heed the recommendation of the CDC, WHO, APA, and NH DHHS and keep a mask mandate but please remove the opt-out feature.

Heather Robitaille, Springfield Circle stated she supports people's right to choose but not when it interferes with receiving a safe education. She supports temporarily pausing the opt out option and revisit the data monthly. She asked the Board to continue to support the data, to pause the parent opt out until the numbers return similar to those in September and to revisit the policy transparently.

Rita Despres, 37 Berkley Street (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I am writing in support of suspending the opt-out-option for masking in our schools. At the start of the school year, the board voted to allow families to opt out of masking requirements, with the understanding that data could change at any time.

That time is now. The data listed on the Covid dashboard shows that numbers are rapidly rising, putting all of our students and staff at risk for contracting Covid.

In fall of 2020, students whose families chose the hybrid option were switched to fully-remote prior to Thanksgiving and throughout the holiday season, returning to in-person learning after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Now, the 2021 holiday season is among us. People will be gathering with families, travelling to functions, and increasing their circle of contacts. Many of the prior mitigation measures have already been terminated, including the separation of individual desks and plexiglass partitions.

The goals of the school board should be twofold: to keep students safe, and to keep children in the school buildings, learning from our dedicated and exceptional staff.

This is not the time to ignore the data. This is not the time to continue to make this a political issue. This is a matter of public health and ignoring the science behind what the factual data shows is irresponsible, dangerous, and unacceptable.

Please make the right decision here. We are counting on you to keep our children safe.

Lindsay Thibeault, 19 Pleasant Street asked the Board to keep the mask opt out to a minimum, look at the transmission in the schools and effects that COVID has on children. She questioned why we are treating COVID different than the flu. She acknowledged efforts to intimidate the School Board.

Cindy Parente, 7 Shady Lane (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I would like to take a moment to praise all of you. Back in Sept, when tempers were on edge, you promised to keep an eye on Covid statistics in our schools to forge a path forward. Tonight's emergency meeting is proof positive that your concern for our children, our community at large, is ultimately rooted in science as the number of active cases has jumped from 9 to 87 in a matter of weeks!

The virus is surging in NH creating an opportunity for the Covid 19 Virus to further mutate, threatening all of us. Tactics such as mask wearing, social distancing, washing hands and, especially vaccinations, have proven effective in combating the spread of this disease that has already claimed over 750,000 American lives.

I urge the board to remove the mask "opt out" option for our children. We simply must stop this disease in its tracks.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. Health and Safety Task Force Recommendation

The current mask policy was reviewed and summarized.

- Opt-out option at parent request while students are in the classroom
- Masks to be worn in all other areas within the school building
- No masks required when outside
- Masks are mandatory on buses

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported approximately 1,250 students (about 1/3 of the school population) opt out of mask wearing while in the classroom. Mr. Olsen reported the number of positive COVID cases and the number of students in quarantine have increased in the last two weeks. Not all schools in Merrimack have been impacted to the same magnitude.

According to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services communities with a test positivity rate of 5% or more are considered in condition of substantial transmission. On November 16, 2021 the test positivity rate in Merrimack was 18.4%, compared to 6.6% six weeks prior.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen supports the recommendation of the Health and Safety Task Force for a target approach rather than a blanket approach to the mask policy.

Recommendations to the mask policy are:

- If the number of positive COVID cases (staff and students) in an individual school is 5% (or greater) of the total number of staff and students in the building, masks will be required for all staff and student while in the school building.
- No masks will be required while students and/or staff are outside or while eating lunch/snack.
- If the percentage of positive cases (staff and students) in the individual school is below 5% for two consecutive weeks, the opt-out mask policy will be reinstated.
- It is the recommendation that, if approved by the Merrimack School Board, the revised policy be effective Monday, November 22, 2021.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen reported the test positivity rates in each school as of November 17, 2021.

James Mastricola Elementary School	7.74%
Reeds Ferry Elementary School	2.35%
Thorntons Ferry Elementary School	3.30%
James Mastricola Upper Elementary School	2.96%
Merrimack Middle School	1.23%
Merrimack High School	0.52%

Mr. Olsen encouraged individuals to practice mitigation recommendations such as staying home and seek testing when sick, vaccination for community members 5 years old and above, maintain healthy handwashing and cleaning practices and proper mask wearing

Board Member Barnes asked if there is data available to determine how many schools are impacted as a result of students having to quarantine due to a sibling's positive test results. She expressed concern with student absenteeism without the ability to learn remotely.

Board Member Barnes suggested find a way to allow students to attend classes from home while quarantining using existing technology.

Board Member Barnes supports the idea of consistency with mask wearing and revisit the data at the January 18, 2022 meeting.

Board Member Peters asked if the Mastricola Elementary School numbers were random or clusters.

Mr. Olsen responded there were four clusters (3 to 5 in each cluster) at Mastricola Elementary School.

Board Member Peters questioned at what point do we acknowledge this is not working within the district. It may not be an in school problem. She would consider a targeted approach in cluster areas for two weeks

Board Member Hardy stated the decision of masks should be based on facts and data, not emotion. Wants everyone to be protected until everyone has had the opportunity to be vaccinated. Appreciates the recommended targeted approach now with a review of the data at the January 18, 2022 meeting.

Vice Chair Rothhaus would vote for continuing to follow the Use of Masks by Students and Staff Policy (EBCVM). It was designed to meet the COVID outbreak and was administered according to the established procedures of the district. The document was modified on October 18, 2021 to specify if there was a community transmissions or clusters the School Board would revisit the policy. She is supportive of the policy and discussions.

Chair Guagliumi supports the proposed targeted mask recommendation. She supports reviewing the COVID data at each school board meeting. She would also advocate another mitigation attempt if a specific classroom was affected and not necessarily the entire school. She expressed her concern of how to maximize and make school more effective for those in quarantine.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy made a motion to accept the recommendation of the administration giving Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen authority to enact his recommendation based on the 5% of occupants testing positive as presented effective Monday, November 22. Chair Guagliumi seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Peters stated she was not comfortable with the motion because it lacked an end date.

Vice Chair Rothhaus referred to the current policy. She hopes to move forward in January.

Board Member Hardy was not willing to amend her motion to include an end date of December 31, 2021 because she believes that two consecutive weeks at 5% is the end date.

Board Member Barnes is not concerned about an end date because the chair has the authority to add an agenda item entitled "Board's response to COVID Data" on every agenda.

Vice Chair Rothhaus and Board Member Peters would like the motion to include an end date.

Chair Guagliumi stated she will add Board's response to COVID Data to the December 20, 2021 agenda.

MOTION: Board Member Hardy amended her motion to accept the recommendation of the administration giving Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen authority to enact his recommendation based on the 5% positivity rate effective Monday, November 22 with the ability to review the data at the December 20, 2021 meeting and again at the January 18, 2022 (the day after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday). Chair Guagliumi seconded the amendment to the motion.

The amended motion passed 5-0-0.

b. Board Response to the Health and Safety Task Force Recommendation

4. PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Tom Gibson, 25 Packard Drive, supports finding a way to teach students that are not in school due to COVID. Parents have a choice to vaccinate or not they should have a choice to mask or not. He heard bullying tonight and board should not be bullied.

Ashleigh Lowe, W Chamberlain Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) Thank you all very much for your service and dedication to our students. I am sure that none of you ever thought your service to this town would be so stressful or fraught with such tension.

I write to day to plead with the board to please strengthen our current policy on masking. When the current policy was put into place, there was wording that it would be revisited monthly and changes could be made at any time if the situation with Covid 19 changed. Without taking up time with statistics and specific numbers, it is clear that case counts are up. Hospitalizations are up. Deaths are up. I saw on the news just this morning that for the first time in months, the predicted numbers of deaths is not expected to decline. Record numbers of children are becoming ill with covid. It is time to straighten the mask mandate and remove the option for parents to opt their children out of wearing masks. I do expect that there are exceptions to be made if the student has a disability that makes masking too challenging for them. Those exceptions should be allowed on a case by case basis. However, for those students who can tolerate a mask and have no medical reason for an exemption, I believe not it is time for them to help protect our community ask mask up while in our buildings. We have surrounding districts that are 4 times the size of Merrimack who currently have less than half the number of cases in schools. Those districts have mask mandates. It is time for the board to vote with science and protect our students, faculty, support staff, and every other person who spends time in our school buildings.

388 It is essential that schools remain open. My son spent a year and a half remotely learning
389 from home. He has autism. He is on an IEP. He finally went back to in person learning at
390 the end of June and it has been so good for him. I have returned to work. I am sure my
391 family is not the only one in town who finally feels some sense of normalcy returning to their
392 household after such a tumultuous year. Having to adjust all over again to a district shut
393 down and/or a return to remote instruction would be devastating.

394
395 Please vote in the best interest of the safety of our community. Please vote to remove the
396 opt out of the current mask policy and protect our students.

397
398 Kathy Komar, Belmont Drive questioned a piece of data in Mr. Olsen's presentation.

399
400 Pat McGrath, 7 Peter Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

401 As a past school board member for two terms, I want to share with you a litany of decisions
402 that prior Boards and or Administrations made.

403
404 In the event of a fire, all schools practice how to safely evacuate a building. That is risk
405 management for all concerned.

406
407 Should there be a hazardous emission near to a school building, plans were designed,
408 reviewed, approved and practiced to evacuate to a designated location was risk
409 management for all concerned.

410
411 Should there be an intruder into one of the buildings, plans were designed, reviewed,
412 approved and practiced to shelter in place was risk management for all concerned.

413
414 Requiring that all coaches, educators, support staff, and substitutes submit to background
415 checks, that was risk management for all concerned.

416
417 When asbestos was discovered in the school buildings, plans were designed, reviewed,
418 approved and funded to eliminate that health hazard was risk management for all
419 concerned.

420
421 When the ravages of storms imperiled students safely traveling to school, administration
422 protected all concerned by keeping the schools closed. That was risk management for all
423 concerned.

424
425 When mold was discovered in JMUES, a plan was designed, reviewed, approved and
426 funded to eliminate that health hazard was risk management for all concerned.

427
428 When PFOAs were discovered in the drinking water for Merrimack, a plan was designed,
429 reviewed, approved and funded to eliminate that health hazard for all concerned.

430
431 Given this pattern and practice of providing a safe learning environment for all concerned,
432 the implementation of a facial covering policy is a risk management practice that is
433 beneficial for all concerned as it is judiciously implemented by administration. It makes for a
434 better and healthier community of learners and classroom success leaders.

435
436 Robert Reisman, Iris Drive supports universal masking until everyone has had an opportunity to
437 be fully vaccinated. He liked the targeted approach and would advocate for mandatory masking
438 at the elementary and upper elementary schools.

439
440 Kaitlyn Bernier, 2 Birch Street (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
441 I am writing to you today to ask you to reconsider the stance on the current masking policy
442 within our schools. Right now, students can opt out of wearing masks, regardless of how
443 many positive cases are in their class. The current cases of Covid are rising quickly in our
444 town and everyone is feeling the negative affects, whether they have been following
445 guidelines all along or not. Other towns around us with more students have less covid
446 numbers than we do and have mask mandates in place. This seems to be a trend that
447 makes a lot of sense.

448
449 It's time to revisit this policy. It is important to be able to pivot and make the changes
450 necessary to ensure the health and safety of our children.
451 The data shows that Covid is spreading in our schools, and with the upcoming holidays, this
452 will likely continue to get worse. The school board's main concern should be keeping our
453 students safe and keeping them learning in an IN-PERSON format.

454
455 Masking is the best way to keep our children in the schools and to keep them advancing in
456 their education.

457
458 My hope is that by suspending the opt out option, we will be able to minimize the already
459 quickening spread through our schools and town. Even by delaying your decision to
460 mandate masks until NOW has had negative consequences that will be felt for weeks to
461 come within the schools.

462
463 We are still digging out from the effects of a full year of remote learning. Students need to
464 remain in the school buildings, where they have access to our dedicated teachers and
465 support staff. Speaking of which, those teachers and support staff all need YOUR, and the
466 communities support and recognition, GRACE and an actual pandemic bonus! Merrimack is
467 NOT competitive with surrounding towns in our pay for substitutes. Please consider
468 increasing the pay, at least during the height of teacher shortages.

469
470 Our children deserve the best that we can give them. We all want to enjoy the holiday
471 season and not be stuck quarantined because of something that could have been
472 prevented. Please vote to suspend the opt-out option for masking.
473 Thank you for your consideration and dedication to our community. We are grateful for your
474 commitment to our future generations.

475
476 Antonio Giancola, Baboosic Lake Road commented that the mask opt out has worked for almost
477 3 months. The increase at James Mastricola Elementary School could be a result of other factors.

478
479 Naomi Halter, 10 Everest Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
480 I have learned a lot since I started coming to school board meetings a few months ago. I've
481 learned that there are a lot of challenges and exciting projects on the horizon for our
482 schools, like lowering the drop out rate, streamlining our curricula, switching to standards-
483 based reporting, and supporting our teens and families so they can better focus on their
484 education and preparing for adulthood.

485
486 We cannot accomplish any of that if we keep getting stuck on masks.

487
488 We need your strong leadership to bring us through this.

490 You must make a decision tonight that keeps as many of our kids in school as possible,
491 even if it is unpopular. After that decision is made, if you continue to reject the guidelines for
492 schools from the NH Department of Health and Human Services and allow families to opt
493 out, you must spend some time crafting your own metrics, so we don't have to have another
494 meeting every time the Covid numbers ebb and flow.

495
496 Let me be clear: masks reduce the spread of respiratory illness, including Covid. Our
497 community, and our schools, are seeing record high numbers of Covid. This is keeping
498 hundreds of kids out of school each day. Until we see absenteeism go back down to the
499 levels we had in September and early October, everyone in school should be masked.

500
501 Michelle Karkatos, Swift Lane, school counselor in another district, stated the main theme for
502 student defiance she deals with is wearing of masks. Masks need to be used properly and
503 replaced when soiled.

504
505 Jennifer Liba, 6 Tomasian Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
506 Thank you for all of the time and hard work you put into making our schools better.

507 I am writing this evening to implore you to reinstate the mask requirement and social
508 distancing practices at our schools. Our number one priority is to keep our children in
509 school so they can learn and grow. As of the past two weeks, the number of covid cases in
510 our schools has spiked significantly. Whole classrooms are being affected, students and
511 educators alike. It is not only the specific classrooms though, family's (Moms, Dads,
512 Brothers and Sisters) are now missing out on weeks of school and work. Additionally, we all
513 know there is a substitute teacher shortage, so having educators out with Covid is the worst
514 case scenario.

515 Masks are proven to decrease the spread of the Covid virus indoors. Social distancing has
516 been shown to decrease the spread of the Covid virus. At my child's school, social
517 distancing is minimal at best in the classrooms. Students are seated at desks organized in
518 clusters or at multi-person tables. That may have worked for the first couple months of
519 school, but now that we are indoors with windows closed, it is not working.

520 The district proved last year students could be at school and be safe from Covid. They
521 could be in their classrooms, participate fully in their studies and be with their peers. We
522 need to figure out how to create that safe, healthy environment again. Merrimack's Covid
523 case numbers in our schools are shocking and sad. At a previous meeting, a Board
524 member stated if the number of cases started to increase, changes would be made. The
525 cases have increased significantly, it is time to make changes.

526 I appreciate you taking the time to read my email.

527 Ashleigh Tenhave, Shelburn Road stated it is taking longer to get a COVID test because there
528 are not enough people to perform the COVID test. This could contribute to some students
529 having to stay out of school longer. She wished the mask recommendation could have waited
530 until vaccinations were available to everyone.

531
532 Joanne Grobecker, 27 Craig Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
533 Thank you for all the time and thought you have put into ensuring all students in Merrimack
534 receive a quality public education.

I implore you to make your decision tonight with the understanding that an in-person education is best for all students. Do whatever it takes to keep all students in the buildings and learning from educators in person.

There were 257 Covid Related absences yesterday and only 9 of them were staff members. That makes 248 students that did not receive an education yesterday.

I trust the board to come to a decision that allows all students to learn in person.

Rebecca Stats, 11 Bradford Drive stated masking should be a choice between the parent and child. Her children wear masks at school out of fear. A mask mandate removes the ability to think critically and is damaging our children.

Craig Belhumeur, 12 Bradford Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) I am unable to make the meeting this evening but would like to voice my opinion none the less. I still do not feel our kids need to be masked, nothing has changed in my opinion and firmly stand against a mask mandate. At least let us keep our mask out option.

Lindsey Burns, 9 Cynthia Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) I am asking that our schools consider a mask mandate until at least after the Christmas break. Other towns have been using sliding scale numbers of cases to determine mask usage and I would also be in favor of this. I am not in favor of an opt out option any longer with these numbers and amount of times my child has been a "close contact" in the last few weeks.

Sarah Hartwell, Joppa Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) I'm writing to request that you follow the recommendations of the state epidemiologist and his team and mandate masks for all in the school buildings. Hopefully vaccination of the student body will make this a temporary measure, but it appears to be a necessary one at the moment.

Nancy Murphy, Brenda Lane spoke in support of mask months ago. She expressed concern with the current COVID transmission rates. It is time to put mitigation measures in place and to balance input from parents and professionals.

Christopher Despres, 37 Berkley Street (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record) Everyone is aware of the rising number of covid cases in our community. We can all view numbers and statistics to see that things are looking grim with our current masking standards in place. We need to remove the option to opt-out for our schools.

But I will not be talking about that. Instead, I want to talk about the subject of bullying in Merrimack.

We've all been told that bullies are the bigger kids who threaten to shove you in a locker or to take your lunch money away from you. Those aren't the bullies that I am concerned with in our town tonight.

The bullies we need to worry about tonight are the ones that stand around a crowded room during a pandemic, unmasked, with their hands across their chest. The kind of bully that makes you call the police before this very meeting to make sure they are present.

We're told that we have to stand up to the bullies and that's how you get them to leave you alone. I wish this was always true. But it's not. They will still be bullies after tonight's vote. You can't change that with your vote.

Your vote can only do one thing. Save lives. It can save a grieving family who may lose their loved ones. It can prevent a lengthy and expensive hospital stay. It can save a parent from losing their job, because their children were close contacts and half the class is now remote and they can't take the time off of work without getting fired. Your vote can do all of these things.

I ask that you ignore the bullies around us and do the right thing.

Sabrina BeeBe, Wire Road asked for clarification on the time frame for submitting public comments through email.

Dana Knight, 17 Dahl Road, (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I would like to state wearing of masks, vaccinations, and social distancing still the smart way to beat this pandemic, and assist our townspeople are protected from each other.

John J. Grady, 8 Abenaki Circle (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
My darling wife and I have been Merrimack residents and taxpayers for forty-six years. During this time each of us dedicated many years in Merrimack town and School District government and we appreciate your time and efforts.

Our two daughters, now adults, received excellent educations and we always knew that Merrimack schools kept them safe. In my forty-one years as a teacher and principal in neighboring communities, I always tried to base my decisions on what was best for the kids and I am confident that you will do the same tonight. It is essential to keep them safe. Listen to science. Listen to the medical experts. Please vote to mandate mandatory masks in our schools for staff and students. Thank you.

Angelic Lippman, 8 Owls Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I am writing to ask you to keep the mask mandate and remove the general "opt-out" option for masks. While I am aware some classes only have a few opting out, there are several who have half the class opting out. I have been made aware that in some of these rooms with high "opt-out" rates, there is an increase in covid spread and quarantines. As of today, 81 students in the Merrimack school district are positive for Covid, another 63 are out quarantining, and 69 students are excluded awaiting testing. Therefore a total of 213 students are currently not in school in Merrimack according to the Covid Dashboard. When looking at the daily Covid dashboard it is showing a VERY alarming trend. Numbers of cases and quarantines are rapidly increasing and something needs to be done to help mitigate this spread. When looking at surrounding districts with mask mandates with no opt-out, such as Nashua and Manchester, the rate of spread is not as high. I am a teacher in a school with a full mask mandate and students do great with them and they do not interfere with learning or socializing and it helps to keep the kids where they belong, which is in school. I would also encourage other mitigation measures be put into place, such as desks all facing the same direction and spread out as much as possible as I have heard some classrooms still have desks in groups and students facing each other.

Members of this board have publicly stated that the opt-out policy could change "on the dime" and that time is now. It is an emergency situation that warrants the board to take away the opt-out unless in cases with a doctor's note for those with certain needs. Please follow through with your promise to be flexible and change policy as the need dictates, which it does. I also suggest creating metrics to take the guess work out of this going forward. Other districts such as Manchester, Nashua and even Hudson base their mask policy by rate of positive cases in their district. Perhaps Merrimack can consult with a local health expert and create a set of metrics to go off of going forward. I know that everyone is tired of this pandemic. However just this week I lost another person I know to Covid and have seen Covid symptoms in children that have led to hospitalizations. Please help to keep the students safe and remove the opt-out option for masks until the rate of infections has gone down.

Caroline Herold, 31 Valleyview Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I used to tell my kids that there was to be no screaming in the car because there was no way for those of us who didn't want to hear it to get away. We just need to be considerate of each other. It seems similar to the idea behind masks on the bus.

Spacing students in class 3 feet or more and unmasked in a classroom would be reasonable because it allows for a comfortable distance for those who are concerned. Walking in the hallways is more congested, and students have no choice but to be confined to that tight space - even if it momentarily. So, let's be CONSIDERATE of those who would prefer not to get sick, and wear a mask in the hallways.

A solution is obviously too difficult to agree upon because we have lost sight of the idea of compromise and consideration.

Just wear a mask in the halls - just like on the bus.

Rachel Paepke, Tinker Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)
I wanted to extend my appreciation for the work that you all do on a day-to-day basis for our school community. I appreciate the time that you all take out of your day and from your own families to support the district.

I know you will get to hear from many members of our community tonight, both from the pro- or against-mask realms; each member has their own story or reason for their stance. Each voice matters and all should be heard. But I ask you, as a board, to stay focused on the near-term priority of keeping as many kids and staff in school through the next couple of months. This would require a change to the current opt-out policy, and would follow the recommendation of the Superintendent and the Health & Safety Taskforce. I am sure you all understand the magnitude of your decision and how it will directly impact the numbers of students and staff that may have to be absent for an extended amount of time due to illness or quarantine.

Should the board decide to keep the mask opt-out policy in place, this will put students and staff at a higher risk for absences due to illness or quarantine, meaning students will continue to miss out on their school experiences. No student should be put in a position of having to be absent for an extended time, away from their educators, friends, or maybe their only meal for the day when there are tools and resources around us such as masks, extra cleaning protocols (i.e. fogging at night), hand washing and social distancing, that help support kids being in-person. I urge you all tonight to make a decision that utilizes the tools

that surround us to achieve the district priority of keeping as many students/staff in the buildings for in-person learning.

Karin Mortimer, Everest Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I'm writing to you tonight in full support of the recommendation to suspend the current 'opt out' mask policy. The board agreed that this policy would need to be reviewed and suspended if the numbers went up. The numbers are up. They are WAY up. Positive cases, the frequency of close contact emails, and wait times for PCR test results they are all way up. I firmly believe the only way to keeps the schools open through the upcoming holiday travel season is to require everyone in the building to wear a mask with no option to 'opt out'. I urge you all to ignore the noise, focus on the data, and vote to support Mr. Olsen's recommendation this evening.

Lisa Martinho, Shore Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Please end the mask mandate for all Merrimack students. If kids still want to wear them then let them. We chose to opt out of wearing a mask. The change from last year I see in my child is profound. We cannot take a step backwards we must move forward! Thank you

Dawn Worsley, Cota Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Thank you for calling this emergency meeting to address the escalating COVID transmission in town, and the schools.

My granddaughter attends Thorntons Ferry Elementary School (TFS), and loves it. She loves her teacher, her classmates, the administration and the opportunities available to her. After a year and half of computer screens, it's been a long time since I've seen her so bouncy. In fact, she recently had to take 2 sick days (non-COVID) and yelled at my daughter for missing school. We need to keep the schools open. Everyone agrees on that.

My daughter and granddaughter live with me. Last year I had two health emergencies that have now left me vulnerable to COVID infection. My daughter and I are vaccinated, and my granddaughter received her first dose last week. We have personally taken all precautions that we can, but I unfortunately also have to depend on others' responsibility for my safety.

Revoking the opt-out for masking in the schools is urgent, for the safety of the entire community — especially families like mine. Regardless of this personal liberty claim being yelled about, there's a more pressing personal responsibility to keep the entire community safe.

You, as members of the school board, have a responsibility for our children, but also to this entire town. I hope you take that seriously.

Karen Brown, 15 Four Winds Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

Thank you for your continued service to our community through these unprecedented times. Thank you also for taking time away from your families to convene this emergency board meeting.

When the mask opt-out policy was enacted earlier this year, members of this Board stated that the decision would need to be revisited should the number of Covid cases increase. Based on numerous pieces of scientific evidence, we have arrived at that crossroad. The Merrimack School District Covid Tracking sheet shows Covid related

absences have been above 200 per day since November 14th. It has more than doubled in the past two weeks.

Yesterday, Dr. Benjamin Chan, the Epidemiologist for the State of New Hampshire provided an update on COVID-19 in our schools. There are two pieces of information that I ask you to consider when voting on the mask policy this evening.

There have been 262 identified COVID-19 clusters in New Hampshire schools since the beginning of this school year.

Paraphrasing Dr. Chan, "there is evidence of schools contributing to community transmission. Kids are bringing COVID-19 home to their families, some of whom are becoming sick."

No matter where you stand on the issue of masks, we share one common ground. It is in the best interest of all children to remain in school. I am asking that you vote tonight to enact a temporary policy of universal masking in our schools. A short-term measure to stop the community spread that is occurring in Merrimack and throughout schools in our state. The surge is here. We need to act with leadership to ensure our children experience as little disruption as possible.

Matt Clement, 65 Patten Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

First I will say that I am disappointed that you didn't act SWIFTLY (I think the term was "ON A DIME") last week as you assured parents you would if things change with COVID. They clearly changed in the past week or two with numbers climbing to their highest levels. With Mr. Everret's recommendation to do mandatory mask it should have been voted for and approved last meeting but was not because of a procedure snafu and I suspect a fear of backlash from the mask opposers who didn't bother to show up at the last meeting as they have done for every meeting. It was pretty rare that I heard nearly NO objection to masks at the last meeting likely because everyone is aware of the numbers.

I also heard about the committee's recommendation for 5% of the population have COVID before mandatory requiring masks and I must say that is absolutely absurd to allow 5% of the entire population of the district to be sick before doing what should have been done from day 1. We know better and the proof is easy to find by simply looking at Nashua or Manchester numbers versus our numbers for a much smaller student population. I strongly urge you to do what the parents are majority asking and make masks mandatory for ALL students except those very rare medical exceptions which doesn't include parents that simply feel their freedom is being hurt. Keep the kids in school and the best way to do that is masks and vaccination.

Brian Townsend, 5 Merrymeeting Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

We are writing to urge you to adopt a mandatory mask policy, at least with respect to all Merrimack elementary schools. There are 175 active Covid-19 cases in Merrimack and, according to Merrimack School District's Covid dashboard, a total of 94 student cases at this time. That means, 54% of *all* active cases of Covid-19 in Merrimack are in our schools.

Nashua and Manchester, our State's two largest cities by population, each have fewer total cases in their schools than we do in ours. Nashua schools' Covid-19 cases make up only 9% of the city's total cases (44 out of 505); Manchester schools' Covid-19 cases make up 15% of total cases (86 out of 575). Our schools make up an alarming 54% of the total active cases in all of Merrimack. The clear difference other than the outrageously lower number of

cases in much more crowded schools is that masks are mandatory. In other words, masks are working.

We were very disappointed to read the Health and Safety Taskforce's recommendations this evening. Masks should be mandatory NOW. We should NOT be waiting for all schools to get to 5%, allowing this virus to continue to spread. This is irresponsible and unfair to our children.

Masks should be mandatory for all until Covid-19 cases in our schools and community decrease.

Christine Reedy Hemingway, Haines Terras (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I have 3 kids that go to TFS- one in 1st grade and 2 in preschool.

I want to thank all of the educators and staff for their hard work during these ongoing uncertain times.

I write you tonight in complete disgust with what is happening here in our district. We are failing. When the board met on Monday and Mr. Olson presented his recommendation on masking, this board chose to vote it down due to transparency to the 1/3 of anti maskers in this town. As a result- you risked children's health/ safety for a few days longer- so that the town is "aware" there will be a vote on masking. I am not sure I see the logic here. What I see is the board catering to keeping people happy- over fact based scientific data. I also see us teaching our kids that we don't need to make health decisions based on facts. If the science isn't relevant in your decision making process, what is...

Since the start of school my 3 kids have had a total of 8 covid tests combined due to colds and needing a test to go back to school. I appreciate the process and I am all for testing to be sure we are not getting people sick. I feel the schools should be doing more with testing, optional weekly testing would be a good way to show we are all doing our part to minimize the spread. It is also becoming increasingly hard to get a rapid covid test only keeping children from learning that much longer.

I have received a close contact letter and was told by a school nurse if it is only one you received, you should be fine. Then went on to share her personal experiences, minimizing the situation, TFS has the highest cases in the district. It is disheartening and very concerning to hear the lack of concern over this- as if, it is just no big deal. We have lost sight of what we know works and forcing everything back to normal. Nothing about kids needing 8 covid tests in 2 months is normal- nothing at all.

More can and needs to be done to mitigate cases in our schools. When I have visited the students class, all desks are facing inward. My daughter came home from school one day this week with a headache because there were kids screaming in the lunch room for the entire lunch period at the top of their lungs, all while not wearing a mask because, they were having lunch. Nothing was done, the student was simply told they could not be first in line when lunch ended. Based on the numbers at TFS, I find all of this unacceptable and concerning.

As adults (and some kids I know) we know what will minimize the spread based on data/ science. So, I have to ask, why this board is more focused on making sure parents are happy. The goal should be children are safe when they attend school. I have heard over and over we are in this together- everything I see as a parent in this community is showing the

838 exact opposite. We can and need to do better than we are right now for our children whom
839 we should be protecting.

840
841 Alan Beebe, Wire Road (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

842 I would like to briefly discuss my experience with masks this school year as it relates to
843 tonight's agenda item.

844
845 At the beginning of the school year, my wife and I informed our child's school that we had
846 made a decision that our child would not wear a mask or face shield anywhere and at any
847 time. This includes in classrooms as well as in hallways.

848
849 Only one time since the first day of school has my child worn a mask, and that was because
850 a staff member put one on my child. The school quickly realized the mistake they made, we
851 received an apology, and it has not happened again. I appreciate that.

852
853 I want to be perfectly clear. We were not granted an exemption or exception, nor did the
854 school district make a decision to allow our child to not wear a mask. We as parents made
855 the decision for our child and the school district had no choice other than to honor our
856 decision. I thank them for that.

857
858 I think this community is under the impression that the school district has the authority to
859 require masks. That is simply false as my wife and I have shown.

860
861 Perhaps the school board should address the public and clarify that a mandate is not what is
862 being voted on. What is being voted on is nothing more than a suggestion that parents
863 make the decision to have their children wear masks.

864
865 Feel free to discuss why my child hasn't worn a mask all year.

866
867 Heather Callahan, 5 King Henry Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

868 Plenty of well-informed parents in Merrimack believe masks on our children cause harm -
869 physically, socially, and emotionally - and that they do more harm than good. Studies show
870 that using masks in a school setting does not reduce transmission of Covid-19, and so many
871 countries in Europe and around the world have stopped recommending their use for
872 children.

873
874 A few meetings ago, Bill Olsen said that going forward, he would not be making any
875 recommendations for a stricter mask policy. Nothing has changed to warrant him going back
876 on his word.

877
878 Please take a stand for medical freedom and for parental rights.

879
880 Laura Millar, Essex Green Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

881 I am a teacher in the school district of Nashua. I find it very telling that the reported positive
882 rates in my work city of Nashua and my residence of Merrimack have been very similar
883 within the last few weeks. Despite having one third the number of students, Merrimack is
884 seeing very similar numbers to the students in Nashua.

885 Nashua is observing masking by policies within its schools. If Nashua is able to keep
886 their numbers tied to a district 1/3 the size, clearly the masks are working. I encourage
887 Merrimack to consider implementing mandatory masking as Covid numbers continue to
888 surge, and will continue through the winter.

889
890 Taryn Swenson, 38 Marty Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

891 I sincerely hope this meeting is for you to remove the mask mandate all together and get
892 back to focusing on the quality of education you are providing this community, instead of
893 how to keep them masked two years later. It's time to admit that the doctors and
894 epidemiologist don't know how to stop Covid, and we've reached the point of insanity to
895 continue to do the same thing. The masks and vaccines aren't stopping it at all. Ever think
896 that making the kids wear masks is also making them more vulnerable to catching Covid?
897 There are 3 times as many cases than this time last year with 64% of the state fully
898 vaccinated! Time to switch up the approach and take the masks off.
899

900 Our kids are going to get sick. The sooner parents and school board accept it the better. My
901 kids had it in March and they may get it again. I will not live in fear of a illness that they have
902 a 0% chance of becoming seriously ill or dying. I'm glad that my kids have natural antibodies
903 (tested). I'm actually terrified of what's in that vaccine and growing on the masks on. I'd like
904 to see the data that the only kids affected by the case increases are those unvaccinated and
905 unmasked.
906

907 We will no longer subject our children to this abuse. We settled on wearing them when
908 outside of the classroom and that is where we firmly stand until the mandate is removed.
909

910 Jennifer McInnis, 8 Evergreen Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

911 I'm reaching out to express my support for a universal masking policy in the district for the
912 duration of the current wave of covid transmission in the schools and the community.
913

914 The CDC has found that masking reduced outbreaks in schools, and a recent meta-analysis
915 of global research being reported on today in The Guardian shows masking to be the most
916 effective non-pharmaceutical intervention in reducing covid spread.
917

918 Bonnie Dunham, 16 Wren Court (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

919 As COVID numbers continue to increase, we are no longer talking about a potential threat to
920 our children's health and safety, the threat isnt even imminent. It is here now and now is
921 when we have to come together as a community to do whatever is necessary to protect our
922 children and staff. Please implement a mask mandate in our schools until the data
923 demonstrates that the crisis has passed.
924

925 I appreciate that you are facing extreme pressure from people who don't "want" their
926 children to have to wear masks, but many vulnerable children need universal masking to be
927 safe. Needs should always carry more weight than wants (or don't wants).
928

929 Jenilee Brown, 10 Danbury Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

930 I will keep this very simple because I can not believe we continue to have this conversation:
931

932 I have 2 young children in the school system and we have opted out of masks.
933

934 1. Masking my children or not is MY choice, not yours.
935

936 2. Parents who are concerned can get their children vaccinated.
937

938 3. Masks for young children are not sanitary, they suck on them, they touch them, they drop
939 them on the floor. It's gross.

940
941 4. Psychologically for children, masking in school does not sense. Children do not need to
942 wear masks anywhere else, not stores, not amusement parks, not friend's houses, not at
943 sports outside of school such as dance, gymnastics, karate, etc. they don't understand why
944 only the school is forcing them to do this.

945
946 Let's talk about important things like how we plan to get all of the kids up to speed who are
947 behind because of the mess over the last few years. Let parents make their own medical
948 decisions for their children.

949
950 Nicole Arp, DW Highway (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

951 I would like to thank the school board for all that you do for our community. I know it's not
952 easy and there are a lot of opinions out there, especially concerning masking our children in
953 school.

954
955 I have some concerns about your consideration in eliminating the mask opt out option for
956 parents. I feel like the opt out is an ok compromise to appease everyone about mask
957 wearing, however, I believe that the only ones that should be making the decision should be
958 the students' parents. A mask is medical device and parents should be able to decide if their
959 child requires wearing one. It specifically says on a box of masks that they will not provide
960 any protection against Covid-19 or other viruses. Masks are known to harbor harmful
961 bacteria, other viruses, and cause headaches, difficulty breathing, skin irritation,
962 and impaired cognition. Covid-19 is never going away and is over 99% survivable. People
963 that are vaccinated or unvaccinated can spread and contract the virus. Why are we trying to
964 stop a virus that cannot be stopped?

965
966 We need to consider how masks are negatively affecting children's learning environment
967 and that they may be more detrimental than helpful. Will kids recover from the loss of social
968 experiences, lack of in classroom structure, and inconsistent academic curriculum? Masks
969 are hindering children's social and emotional development, especially younger children in
970 elementary school. Interacting with adults and peers in this early time of their lives is so
971 important. It sets the foundation of reading emotions and social interaction for the rest of
972 their lives. Everyone wearing masks makes it difficult for them to see other people's
973 expressions, learn from them, discern their emotions, and distinguish one face from
974 another.

975
976 All the restrictions and arbitrary rules in place to try and prevent Covid are not working
977 because you cannot stop a virus. Kids that have the opt out are told to wear a mask in music
978 class while singing and are allowed to remove it when they are done. Does singing spread
979 Covid more than just talking or breathing? Fourth graders playing the recorder in class were
980 given a "special" mask that had a hole in it so they could be wearing a mask but also able to
981 play the recorder. Does blowing through a recorder somehow make Covid disappear? You
982 can't wear a mask while you eat or drink; does Covid not exist in the lunchroom or in
983 classrooms during snack? I truly believe that from the time students arrive at school until
984 dismissal, that masking should be at the discretion of parents, not the school board. You
985 can't possibly choose one masking procedure that is best for every single student in the
986 district. Everyone has different needs and making one medical decision by enforcing masks
987 will affect everyone differently. Parents should be in control of their own children's health
988 and decide if wearing a mask is what's best for them.

There is no one size fits all solution regarding masking students, Covid-19 is never going away, and everyone is at risk of contracting or spreading the virus regardless of mask use or vaccination status. It is very concerning that you are considering taking away the parents right to decide what's best for their own children. Keeping the mask opt out option allows parents to make medical decisions for their own children, give them opportunity to make changes to their decision as needed, and eliminate the accountability of the school board dictating what they think is best for each student. Everyone has their own opinion; however, no one knows a child better than their parents. I believe each parent deserves the right to choose if their child should wear a mask at school. The mask opt out should never be eliminated but rather, it should be rewritten to allow parents full discretion on masking their children. Eliminate special masking situations in hallways, while singing, and other arbitrary rules and allow parents to decide if their child should wear a mask the entire day of school and let kids be kids.

Michael Drouin, 5 Vanderbilt Drive (Board Member Barnes read aloud into the record)

I am a substitute teacher, and I enjoy it. Like you said, there is a severe shortage of subs. I would like you to consider waiving the 4 day per week limit. I do sometimes have 5 days a week to be a sub. Also, to raise the number of subs might I suggest a reward program of sorts. One example being: work 30 days, get a bonus. Or, raise the pay for all subs to \$150.

Interim Chief Educational Officer Olsen announced there will be a vaccination clinic for children 5 years and older from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on November 20 at the Elm Street Middle School, 117 Elm Street, Nashua. A similar clinic for the second does will be scheduled in December.

5. ADJOURNMENT TO NON-PUBLIC SESSION

MOTION: At approximately 9:26 p.m. Board Member Hardy made a motion to enter into non-public session. Vice Chair Rothhaus seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0 on roll call vote.

MOTION: At 10:32 p.m. Board Member Hardy made a motion to adjourn the public meeting. Board Member Barnes seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0-0.

Merrimack School District
Gifts and Grants Acceptance Form

Name of Recipient:

Merrimack High School
School Name

Name of Donor:

Delta Dental
Name

PO Box 2002
Street Address

Concord
Town/City

NH 03302
State Zip Code

Amount of Gift or Grant:

250.00

Date of Receipt of Gift or Grant:

11/10/2001

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. Describe the purpose of gift/grant:

To be used by The Merrimack High School math team for supplies and/or refreshments for students during competition.

2. Describe any specific restrictions or requirements attached to gift/grant:

There will be no restrictions placed on this grant.

3. Describe any recurring costs associated with the gift/grant:

NONE

I, Peter J. Bergen do hereby determine that it is in the best interest of the Merrimack School District to accept such gift or grant and hereby request the acceptance of the gift/grant by the Merrimack School Board.

Signature

Principal/Director

Date

11/23/2001

Published in the _____ on _____

Date

Presented to Merrimack School Board (Public Hearing)

Date

Accepted by Merrimack School Board on _____

Date

By a vote of ____-____-____.

All Gifts and Grants to the Merrimack School District are to be accepted in accordance with RSA 198:20b and Warrant Article II of the 1991 Annual Merrimack School District Meeting.

1. Continued - in addition funds will also be used to purchase team tee-shirts.

Merrimack School District
Gifts and Grants Acceptance Form

Name of Recipient:

Merrimack High School
School Name

Name of Donor:

Elbit Systems of America
Name

P.O. Box 136969
Street Address

Fort Worth, Texas 76136
Town/City State Zip Code

Amount of Gift or Grant: \$3,500. Date of Receipt of Gift or Grant: 10/27/2021

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. Describe the purpose of gift/grant:

This gift is a donation to the high school robotics team to help purchase the necessary supplies and materials for the upcoming season.

2. Describe any specific restrictions or requirements attached to gift/grant:

There are no restrictions from the donor on how the team uses the funds.

3. Describe any recurring costs associated with the gift/grant:

There are no recurring costs associated with the grant.

I, Peter J. Bergeron do hereby determine that it is in the best interest of the Merrimack School District to accept such gift or grant and hereby request the acceptance of the gift/grant by the Merrimack School Board.

Peter J. Bergeron
Signature
Principal/Director

11/22/2021
Date

Published in the _____ on _____
Date

Presented to Merrimack School Board (Public Hearing) _____
Date

Accepted by Merrimack School Board on _____
Date

By a vote of ____ - ____ - ____.

All Gifts and Grants to the Merrimack School District are to be accepted in accordance with RSA 198:20b and Warrant Article II of the 1991 Annual Merrimack School District Meeting.