

MOMENTUM

The MRUUSD Newsletter

February 2018

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Budget, Calendar, School Safety and Future Vision - Feb 2018

Thriving Students. Premier Schools. Engaged Community. We continue to work toward making this vision a reality. We believe that our community and children deserve nothing less than the best schools and learning environments that can be found in Vermont, New England, and beyond! It is beginning to happen, and your continued support is appreciated. [Please read this full newsletter for more exciting information.](#)

Our district budget for FY19 has come together well in recent months, and our communities will be asked to vote on the budget on March 6, 2018. Board members and administration have worked diligently to ensure that the budgeting process supports our vision, that our staff members are assigned to where the students are in appropriate ratios, and that we orient ourselves to move wisely and deliberately into the future with consistently improving instruction and learning outcomes for students. Finally, we must act as good stewards of taxpayer dollars. The budget that can now be seen in the MRUUSD Annual report (mailed to your homes recently and posted very soon on our website) accomplishes all of these things.

Some big picture aspects of the proposed budget:

- Enrollment has risen slightly, and is projected to at least be stable in coming years. We are actually seeing many more students deciding to access our schools through public high school choice than we have in recent years (up 25%+). We expect that for 2018-2019 a waiting list/lottery system will be in effect for students wishing to enter MRUHS from other communities. We believe that this is primarily due to the school culture and learning environment that our educators are diligently working to create for every student that walks through the doors of each of our schools.
- Four (4) retirements are occurring, and at least two (2) of those positions will be refilled.
- The overall expenditure budget is up 1.58%, but the per pupil cost (due to increase in student numbers) is down 0.13%. Our equalized student cost is now under \$16,000 per student for the full district.
- There are reductions of 3.5 Teacher positions (from MRUHS) and 1.8 General Education Support Staff positions (from elementary schools).
- Additionally, the board has determined to request additional approval of a \$3.5 million bond request, with those dollars to be used for capital improvements at all of our schools, addressing facility needs and issues that require timely attention. An informational meeting about that bond question will be held on February 28, 2018 at 6:00 pm in the conference room at the district offices. Please feel free to attend if you are interested or have questions for the board about the bond request.

Next year's school year calendar is included with this email, and will be available on our website at <http://millriverschools.org> . Please check it out.

School safety is at the forefront of our minds every day, and recent national and local events have made that even more the case. While we have very strong safety protocols and relationships with first responders in place, we will be working to undergo a comprehensive review of our systems and practices to ensure that the plans we have in place are as effective as possible. These discussions and reviews will occur at the board, leadership, and staff levels as appropriate, and may utilize outside resources as needed. We also realize that student voice is emerging as a strong factor in the response to the latest tragedies, and despite the fact that it has become all too common for various entities to politicize tragedies such as these, we will be working to ensure that our students' rights to expression are protected while our schools continue to provide for a productive learning environment for all students. We believe in student voice and choice, and will advocate for that in addition to our efforts to protect our students and staff from harm at all times. If you have questions in the interim about safety protocols please contact your school principal directly as a first step for school-specific information.

We are very excited to share the beginning stages of our district vision that is unfolding for the future! Our administration has been working with board members through planning retreats and with educators through focused design teams to clarify and plan for a vision that will take the MRUUSD into the next several decades. Essentially, our goals are focused around creating epic experiences for students that connect them to a school learning environment that they WANT to be a part of.... and to do so in a way that honors the uniqueness of our towns, keeps our small schools viable for the future, leverages the passions and skills of our educators and communities, and does so in a way that allows for options for families and attracts a diverse population to the MRUUSD. Sounds lofty, right? We are primed and ready to make it happen.

In very broad strokes, our future vision structure has a target start date of August 2020. At that time, each of our elementary schools will have shifted in design and staffing to support a local, unique approach to learning that is personalized for students.

Shrewsbury Mountain School – will maximize the resources and passions of Shrewsbury with the SMS Sustainability Academy, where the learning experiences for children from Shrewsbury (and children from our other communities who are interested) will be immersed in outdoor learning with environmental science, sustainable development, and ecology as the foundation. Existing community relationships in this realm will be strengthened, and the difficult task of replacing Mrs. Fishwick as principal will be interconnected with the development of the SMS concept.

Tinmouth Mountain School – very similar to the Shrewsbury concept, the phenomenal community and natural resources of Tinmouth will be leveraged to create the TMS Wilderness Academy, where experiences will be immersed in experiential, wilderness-based adventure studies. Tinmouth students and interested students from our other towns will have access to the TMS Wilderness Academy. At both SMS and TMS we intend to also develop **Sustainability (SMS) and Wilderness (TMS) Academies for students in grades 10-12**, where high school

students can choose to engage for a full semester in an immersed, place-based environment that will help meet required proficiencies for graduation while providing an alternate learning experience and transcript endorsement in the area of study that they immersed themselves in. Mentoring and community service will also be key components of these programs.

Clarendon Elementary and Wallingford Elementary Schools will have further developed the aspects that already make them unique and exemplary. CES will operate more traditionally than SMS and TMS, but with a focus on enhancing its project-based learning environment, where students are supported and encouraged in ownership of their learning experiences by expert teacher/facilitators who provide even the youngest students with the opportunity to participate in their learning in more active and less passive ways. These shifts are already well underway in CES classrooms, and those families who are familiar with the way CES currently operates can endorse its impact!

WES will function more traditionally as well, but in a true personalized/inquiry-based elementary school environment where unique student needs are met through flexible class groupings based on subject (for on target learning, extra support and enrichment or extension) while ensuring that students have the voice and choice that they need in order to invest in and drive their own learning process and the development of their Personalized Learning Plans. We ultimately see CES and WES as regional and statewide leaders in the implementation of the tenets of Act 77 through implementation of our Foundational Beliefs with specialized school structures that explicitly support personalized learning, maximize educator skill-sets, and encourage student voice, choice and actual engagement in their learning.

For those who are familiar with the past and present of MRUHS, you are aware that significant changes are underway already at what we believe will soon be Vermont's premier middle/high school. The shifts to instructional methods, scheduling and student agency in learning are already resulting in real benefits and an increased desire among students outside of our district to attend MRUHS. The next phase of the vision for MRUHS involves taking steps to ensure that the internal footprint of the school matches the instructional and learning environment. We intend to engage in a wise, thoughtful redesign of the MRUHS internal space in order to utilize more effective open spaces and create variable-sized and focused learning environments that more closely mirror the post-high school experiences that our students will move on to, either in higher education or the workforce. We seek to establish the MRUHS campus as an actual community hub and a tangible epicenter of community in a geographic area that does not have such a place. We seek to increase community engagement and ownership of our middle/high school by making our grounds appealing, accessible, and a point of pride for the community. And, we intend to do all of this at as little of a cost as possible.

Part of the process of redesigning the MRUHS experience includes shifting our 6th grade students to begin attending MRUHS beginning in the 2020-2021 school year. In other words, our current 3rd grade students would be the first class to complete 5th grade at their home elementary school and complete 6th grade as MRUHS students. While this is a shift that is significant, it is one that we believe strongly is in the best interests of students and the school district overall, as creating a cohort of middle school students in grades 6-8 is very important socially and instructionally. Many of our staff members with middle school experience in other places have experienced the value of a 6-8 structure firsthand and are well-prepared to support families and students through that shift when it occurs. Given the time we are putting in to planning for this shift, our students will be prepared and excited about it when it occurs!

In terms of next steps coming soon, you can expect the following:

- March 7 Superintendent presents vision information at a board meeting, providing an overview of the vision and timelines associated with it.
- March 12 Superintendent provides overview of the vision to all staff during staff in-service time.
- March 15 – April 15 Individual Community Information Meetings will be scheduled at each of our four (4) elementary schools where the vision dynamics will be presented in detail to interested parties and questions can be asked and answered, and community input provided.
- April 1 Following a structured process, target date for announcement of next SMS Principal.

If you have any questions in the interim, please don't hesitate to contact me. Otherwise, I look forward to seeing you at the various presentations and informational sessions that are outlined above.

Here's to maintaining and focusing our MOMENTUM for the future!

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Younce