

Joint Meeting of the Amherst and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committees

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

5:30 p.m. ARHS Library

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Regional Chair (R)
Katherine Appy, Amherst Chair (R/A)
Emily Marriott (R)
Kathleen Traphagen (R/A)
Stephen Sullivan (R)
Rick Hood (R/A)
Vira Douangmany Cage (arrived at 5:36 p.m.) (R/A)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Marta Guevara, Director of Student and Family Engagement
Mark Jackson, ARPS Principal
Doug Slaughter, Data Analyst
Public and Press

ABSENT:

Kip Fonsh (R)
Phoebe Hazzard (R/A)

1. Welcome and Call to Order

5:31 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the Amherst School Committee to order and Mr. Baptiste called the Regional School Committee to order at 5:31 p.m. Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of February 9, 2016 as presented. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comment

5:33 p.m.

Jean Sherlock, Amherst Resident, read the resolution regarding high stakes testing that was approved by the Swift River School Committee, noting that she believes the Amherst and Regional School Committees should approve a similar resolution. Max Page, Amherst resident, noted that there is a line in the Amherst-Regional resolution under consideration that he urges the School Committee to delete: "Opting out may have negative implications for the accountability level of the school and district...". He encouraged the School Committee to devote time at a meeting to a full discussion about the issue of the content of opt-out, which is high-stakes testing.

3. MCAS Opt-Out Resolution

5:40 p.m.

Ms. Appy briefly outlined the process that has been followed in developing the opt-out resolution under consideration tonight. She then moved to accept the proposed resolution with the phrase "may have negative implications for the accountability level of the school and district" deleted, making the sentence read "Opting out will not have negative implications for grades or class placement of any individual student." Mr. Hood seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Hood expressed concern about taking that information out because he has concern that enough students will opt out to impact the schools, but not enough will opt out to change what the state does. Ms. Traphagen read an opt-out resolution passed by the School Equity Task Force. Discussion followed regarding if, and how, the Superintendent should share this resolution with staff and families if it is approved. Ms. Geryk suggested that she include the resolution in her weekly newsletter to all families and staff, which the School Committee agreed was a good solution. The motion was then unanimously approved. Ms. Appy distributed a draft letter she has composed requesting a cap on charter schools, noting that she would like to have it on a future agenda for discussion.

4. Surplus Materials

5:49 p.m.

Mr. Hood moved, on behalf of the Regional School Committee, to declare the attached list of materials and equipment as surplus and to authorize the Finance Director to auction off, donate or otherwise dispose of this equipment in conjunction with provisions of MGL 30B. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

On behalf of the Amherst School Committee, Mr. Hood moved to declare the attached list of materials and equipment as surplus and to authorize the Finance Director to auction off, donate or otherwise dispose of this equipment in conjunction with provisions of MGL 30B. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. Accept Gifts (Regional)

5:50 p.m.

For the Regional School Committee, Ms. Traphagen moved to accept \$280.57 from Target for the Middle School; \$565.96 from Target Take Charge of Education for the High School; \$500 from the Amherst Lions Club for the general scholarship fund; \$800 from the Shutesbury PTO for the general scholarship fund; and \$100 from Samuel Medina for the ARPS Family Center. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Hood moved to adjourn the Regional School Committee at 5:53 p.m. Ms. Marriott seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

For the Amherst School Committee, Mr. Hood then moved to accept \$1,011.77 from Target for Crocker Farm; \$100 from the Fort River Parent Council for Fort River art; and \$897.30 from Target for Fort River. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. New and Continuing Business (Amherst only)

5:56 p.m.

A. FY17 Amherst Schools Budget

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the changes that have been made to the FY17 Proposed Budget since the public budget hearing, which includes restoring the Library Paraeducator positions to approximately 60%. To restore the positions, an addition of \$40,000 that was earmarked for network upgrades has been moved out of the operating budget and sent to the Joint Capital Planning Committee. In addition, the administration submitted a request for an additional \$25,000 from the Town through the Budget Coordinating Group and the Finance Committee. Mr. Hood moved to adopt a budget of \$22,117,324 for fiscal year 2017 for the Amherst Public Schools, and Ms. Traphagen seconded. After brief discussion, the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Appy thanked the administration for developing a budget in a very tough year that kept cuts as far away from the classroom as possible. Ms. Traphagen also thanked Ms. Geryk for listening to the community and for going the extra mile to find extra funding for the library paraeducators.

B. Trends Report/Update

Ms. Geryk noted that this is a brief update on the work toward trends data that has been held by Mr. Hood over the past several years. She stated that Mr. Hood's work has moved the district to the point that we now have a tool called Tableau that, along with our surveys that will be done through UChicago's 5Essentials, will provide us with trend data moving forward. Mr. Slaughter then provided a demonstration of Tableau and how it can be used to track trends in the district. Mr. Hood expressed appreciation, in particular, that the district will now be gathering trend data based on surveys. Ms. Appy acknowledged Mr. Hood for his vision and persistence in helping the district get to this point on such an important issue.

C. Field Trips

Ms. Geryk noted that the issue of field trips has been discussed in the past, and tonight's discussion is just to get additional input and guidance from the School Committee regarding their perspectives on field trips. Ms. Traphagen noted that while she believes there should be some kind of standard for field trips across all schools, she does not want to see constraints placed on teachers' creativity in planning and fundraising for field trips just in an effort to make trips consistent. Ms. Appy agreed noting, however, that she wants to make sure that finances are not an issue that prevents some students from having field trip experiences. For the field trip data provided to the School Committee, Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if dollar amounts can be included for each trip. She suggested that it might help streamline funding if particular grade levels from all three schools participated in the same trips to consolidate expenses. Ms. Geryk thanked the School Committee for their input on this topic.

7. School Committee Planning

6:34 p.m.

Ms. Appy thanked Ms. Traphagen for her service on the School Committee, noting that she has been a real leader who has asked tough, important questions and will be greatly missed. Ms. Geryk thanked her as well, noting that she has provided great guidance personally and professionally. Ms. Traphagen expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to serve, noting that she hopes to serve again at some point before her daughter graduates. Ms. Appy then acknowledged Mr. Hood for his six years of service, noting that he has been a huge support and will be greatly missed. Mr. Hood said it has been a privilege to work with so many wonderful people, noting that the Amherst Schools teach people how to care and how to be special people. Ms. Geryk also thanked Mr. Hood for always giving direct and helpful feedback, noting that she knows he will still be available.

8. Adjournment

6:39 p.m.

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn at 6:39 p.m. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland