

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
May 10, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Stephen Sullivan
Phoebe Hazzard
Katherine Appy
Emily Marriott
Vira Dougnmany Cage
Laura Kent
Sarah Dolven
Anastasia Ordonez

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Michael Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Rachel Bowen, Assistant Human Resources Director
Monica Hall, Director of Equity and Diversity
JoAnn Smith, Student Services Administrator
Marisa Mendonsa, ARMS Principal
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Public and Press

1. Welcome

6:02 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and accepted nominations for Vice-Chair since Ms. Traphagen is no longer on the committee. Ms. Appy nominated Ms. Dolven and Ms. Marriott seconded. Ms. Dolven's appointment was unanimously approved. Mr. Baptiste reviewed the agenda and asked for feedback. Ms. Appy noted that there is already a policy regarding communication with staff which has not yet come up for review by the Policy Subcommittee. She asked why that policy is on the agenda for discussion. Additionally, she noted that she spoke to School Committee counsel and has been informed that the school committee does not have authority to develop a policy regarding stay away orders. Mr. Baptiste stated that the School Committee has received requests from the public recently to get input from the middle school staff. Current policy prohibits that, so it is on the agenda so the committee can discuss whether to have the Policy Subcommittee review it for changes. Mr. Baptiste noted that he has also heard that stay away orders are within the complete authority of the superintendent, but it is important to discuss it in open session so the community can understand that. Ms. Kent noted that she would like to have another Regional meeting prior to June to talk more about process. She moved to meet either in joint session with the Amherst School Committee on May 17 or separately on May 24. Ms. Appy seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Geryk pointed out that the Black Scholars Rising event is scheduled for May 24. After discussion, it was unanimously approved that the Amherst School Committee will meet at 6:00 p.m. on May 17 and the Regional School Committee will meet at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste then noted that the committee will enter Executive Session according to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a) (2) to conduct contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; MGL Chapter 30A Section 21 (a) (3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body, and the chair so declares, and MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21 (a) (1) to discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. By unanimous roll call vote, the committee voted to enter Executive Session at 6:13 p.m. with intention to return to open session at approximately 7:00 p.m. Mr. Baptiste called the committee back to order in open session at 8:13 p.m.

2. Public Comment

8:13 p.m.

Judy Brooks, community member and retired Pelham teacher, noted that Pelham was the first school to implement bullying training when she taught there and asked if such training is still going on. She noted that the curriculum they used is there if it is needed. Peter Demling, parent, made a statement about the workshop model at Amherst Regional Middle School, noting that he thinks it is one of the core problems at ARMS. He stated that it is a requirement that all teachers teach their classes using the same model, noting that the ARMS principal brought the workshop model with her from her previous job. Alfie Alschuler, community member and former ARMS teacher, made a statement that ARMS is a school in crisis and teachers are trying to get help. He stated that teachers have had meetings canceled with both school and central office administration and they do not feel heard. Rebecca Casagrande, parent, spoke about reasons parents opt their students out of the Regional Schools,

citing the experiences of her own children and citing bullying in particular. Vince O'Connor, community member, spoke about the proposed changes to the high school schedule and asked the School Committee to make sure there is a thorough evaluation of each change for two years before any additional change is implemented. Mr. O'Connor also noted that a lawyer who has represented both the School Committee and the Superintendent cannot represent either effectively.

3. Superintendent's Update **8:31 p.m.**

Ms. Geryk reminded the committee that the high school graduation will be June 10 at 5:30 p.m. and all committee members are invited to attend. Monica Hall, Director of Diversity and Equity, reported that a group from the district will be attending the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) conference in New York City. She reported that nine students and 12 adults will be attending this very exciting opportunity. Ms. Geryk noted that the Boston Public Schools, which is part of our District's PLC, is also participating in this event.

3. New and Continuing Business **8:36 p.m.**

A. Policy Discussion

• **Stay Away Orders**

Mr. Baptiste noted that he was considering sending the topic of stay away orders to the Policy Subcommittee after having a full-committee discussion about what can and cannot be written into policy with regard to this issue. Instead, he asked for a volunteer to research what can and cannot be put into policy and report on it at the next meeting. Ms. Dolven volunteered to take on that task.

• **School Committee Communication with District Staff**

Mr. Baptiste noted that Peter Demling, parent, has encouraged the School Committee to gather input from ARMS staff. He stated that the district has a policy against such communication. Mr. Baptiste stated that he proposes implementing use of an app that allows communication via text message; however, in order to do so Policy BHC must be addressed. Ms. Appy noted that the policy does not prohibit the School Committee from communicating with staff; instead it sets up a specific process for doing so. The policy was distributed and discussion followed. Ms. Dolven noted that she would like to see the policy go to the Policy Subcommittee for vetting. Ms. Geryk reminded the committee that this policy should also be vetted through the employee union to make sure nothing is put in policy that would violate contract language. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that a survey was conducted to get staff input on the building project, which was a solicitation of employee feedback. She stated that it would be important to discuss what could be used in evaluation of the superintendent. Mr. Baptiste noted that he wants to be clear that he wants to use input from staff to hear about the direction of the district goals, not in any way to use for evaluation. He sees it as a way to hear from a broader range of voices than just those who reach out and as a way to know that the information really came from the teachers rather than just accepting hearsay. Ms. Kent moved that Policy BHC be referred to the Policy Subcommittee. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. Accept Gifts **8:42 p.m.**

Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to accept \$1,000 from Jim Pistrang to fund a 2016 ARMS Ultimate Scholarship; \$500 from Jones Group Realtors for the general scholarship fund; an in-kind donation of a Beseler Printmaker and Developing Kit from Mina Bozorg; \$250 from the Wildwood PGO for the general scholarship fund; \$300 from the Fort River PGO for the general scholarship fund; \$300 and \$500 from anonymous donors for student activity high school softball gifts; and \$250 from the Crocker Farm PGO for the general scholarship fund. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. School Committee Planning **8:53 p.m.**

May 17 will be the next meeting.

5. Adjournment **8:54 p.m.**

Ms. Appy moved to adjourn at 8:54 p.m. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland