

Amherst and Pelham Joint School Committee Meeting
May 15, 2012
Library, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance:

Katherine Appy, Chair
Lawrence O'Brien
Rob Spence
Amilcar Shabazz
AnneMarie Foley, Pelham
Debbie Gould, Pelham

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director
Rhonda Cohen, Director of Teaching and Learning
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal
Monica Colley, Fort River Principal
Mike Morris, Crocker Farm Principal
Lisa Desjarlais, Pelham Principal
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Absent:

Rick Hood, Amherst
Darius Modestow, Pelham
Trevor Baptiste, Pelham

Public
Press

1. Welcome

7:01 p.m.

A. Call to Order and Reorganize—Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. She noted that this is a joint meeting with the Pelham School Committee so they can hear the math update presentation and participate in the later start time discussion. However, there is not a quorum of Pelham members so they will not call their committee to order unless another member arrives.

B. Approve Minutes—Mr. O'Brien made a motion to approve the minutes of April 10, 2012 as presented. Mr. Spence seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comments

7:05 p.m.

Lissa Pierce-Bonifaz, parent, distributed a proposal she submitted to the School Committee three years ago regarding a two-way immersion language program in the Amherst elementary schools. She made a statement regarding the benefits of language immersion programs and requested that her proposal be included on a future agenda for fuller discussion. Mr. Shabazz arrived at 7:08 p.m. Barbara Pearson, Amherst Resident and UMass professor, also spoke about the issue, noting that she and her colleagues would be happy to work with the schools to establish a two-way immersion program. Lee (no last name given), Amherst parent, spoke about a bilingual preschool she is opening in Amherst and the importance of bilingual, two-way education. She noted that she and many other parents will support a charter school in the Pioneer Valley if the Amherst schools do not implement a two-way immersion program. Teresa Austin, UMass professor of dual language development, spoke in favor of multi-lingual education. Bart Boricious, community member, spoke about the benefits of being bi-lingual that he has seen through his work in Peru and Puerto Rico. M. Toressi, UMass faculty member, spoke about the importance of immersion programs in building communicative capacities, noting that she would move from Northampton to Amherst in order to enroll her children in a bi- or tri-lingual immersion school. Vince O'Connor, Amherst resident, said that he hopes the School Committee will consider what they have just heard when considering school choice, noting that he does not want to see another language charter school open in Hadley.

3. Superintendent's Update

7:30 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: *Superintendent's Updates to Amherst School Committee dated May 15, 2012*

Ms. Geryk reported briefly on the following initiatives and events:

- the Amherst Education Foundations' "Our Teachers are Stars" fundraiser campaign;
- the call for student nominees for the 9th annual Human Rights Young Heroism Awards sponsored by the Amherst Human Rights Commission;
- the first annual African American Achievement Awards held on May 11 in the ARHS auditorium, which was organized by parents Shirley Whitaker and LaVonette Burnett;
- the sixth annual Latino Achievement Night scheduled for this Friday, May 18; and
- the start of the annual Project Backpack and Safe Seats for Kids programs.

A. Mathematics Update

DOCUMENTS: Plan for Improving the District's Elementary Math Program by Rhonda M. Cohen, Director of Teaching and Learning, dated May 15, 2012

Dr. Cohen introduced Shari Conklin, Crocker Farm Math Coach, and Ian Stith, Wildwood Math Coach, and noted that Polly Wagner, Fort River Math Coach was unable to attend due to illness. She recognized the math coaches, Superintendent Geryk, and Wendy Bloomenthal, Administrative Assistant for the Office of Teaching and Learning, for all of their support and efforts in this curriculum review. Ms. Conklin reported on how the math coaches worked together to determine what it would take to bring the current math program, *Investigations*, into alignment with the Common Core curriculum, noting that it took hours and a number of supplemental materials just to bring one fifth grade unit into alignment. Dr. Cohen reported on the review process that was followed in selecting three math programs that were reviewed and analyzed in depth: *Think Math!*, *Everyday Math* and *Math in Focus* (the U.S. version of Singapore Math). She noted that *Math in Focus* was ruled out because the program is too new in the United States to have empirical data about its effectiveness. She then provided a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the two remaining programs, *Think Math!* and *Everyday Math*, concluding that *Everyday Math* is the program that was selected. Dr. Cohen reported on the implementation timeline from now through the summer, and Ms. Conklin reported on how the first year of implementation will be handled in the schools in 2012-2013, including information on plans for professional development and support for teachers. Dr. Cohen briefly reported on the K-12 connection, noting that there will be a secondary update at the June Regional meeting. Ms. Geryk recognized the tremendous amount of work Dr. Cohen and the math coaches have done, particularly over the past six weeks. Ms. Gould asked how Pelham will be supported since there is no math coach at Pelham and three of the teachers will be new next year. Dr. Cohen noted that budget arrangements have been made to ensure that the Pelham teachers will have all of the same support materials as Amherst, and she will ensure that they are supported through professional development. Ms. Geryk noted that there will be monthly meetings for grade level teachers across all schools, including Pelham. Mr. Spence thanked Dr. Cohen for all of her hard work and noted that he is so pleased that our district is going to be making this change at this time. He asked if there are any anticipated deficiencies for students who have been taught through *Investigations* in moving to *Everyday Math*. Dr. Cohen said that she anticipates there will be a good jolt to the district as a whole, noting that there are plans in place for supporting teachers as skill deficiencies are identified. Ms. Appy thanked Dr. Cohen and the math coaches for the very comprehensive and informative report.

B. Later Start Time—Elementary Discussion

Ms. Geryk spoke briefly about the process that has been following in recommending implementing a later start time for the secondary schools. She noted that the elementary principals are in attendance tonight to provide input on the impact such a change would have on the elementary schools. Mr. O'Brien asked what are the principals' greatest concerns and/or what adjustments will be required with a later start time. Mr. Morris spoke about the school system as an eco-system, noting that he is convinced about the benefits of later start to the secondary students. He noted that maintaining the tardy rate at the current level will be important, and he believes that there is time for communication around that issue during implementation. He noted that there will be some challenge with early release days which will take adjustments to the lunch schedules. Mr. Yaffe stated that he believes it would be good to hear more from elementary families, noting that tardiness is also a concern for him. Ms. Desjarlais noted that she also believes that this issue is not largely on the mind of elementary parents so they may not be completely aware of it. She spoke about potential financial challenges to families needing to access the after-school program longer, noting that she has spoken to her after school provider and is confident this need can be met. Ms. Colley noted that she believes the advance planning and lead time for implementation will be beneficial, noting the importance of making this change for the benefit of our students. Mr. Shabazz asked why the dismissal time of the Wednesday early release day would have to change if later start is implemented. Ms. Geryk explained that the early dismissal is part of the current contract and changes requiring teachers to work more hours would have to be negotiated. She noted that negotiations will begin again in October. Mr. Shabazz said that the concern he hears from elementary parents is that this change will have a financial cost for them. Ms. Geryk noted that a daily rate has been set for next year's after school program in Amherst, but consideration would be given to ways in which the financial impact can be minimized for families. Mr. Shabazz expressed concern that this change may impact enrollment patterns once elementary students are catching the bus earlier.

Ms. Geryk noted that the bus schedule will need to be reviewed to determine the most beneficial route. After this presentation, Ms. Foley and Ms. Gould left the meeting since all of the remaining business pertains only to the Amherst School Committee.

C. FY12 Third Quarter Budget Update

DOCUMENTS: Amherst Schools Operating Budget FY2012 Quarter Three Report

Mr. Detweiler distributed and briefly reviewed the FY12 Third Quarter Report, noting that any funds that may remain at the end of the year will be used to purchase math curriculum materials. Mr. Shabazz asked, as a new member, which categories of the budget can be variable by quarter. Mr. Detweiler reviewed the accounts, noting that special education, program development/other, utilities, and food services are areas that tend to be most variable.

D. Approve Clerical/Media Awards

DOCUMENTS: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Debbie Westmoreland, Assistant to the Superintendent re: Clerical/Media Awards

Ms. Westmoreland reported that the Clerical/Media subcommittee met on May 3rd and recommend Lisa Fretwell, Fort River Special Education Secretary, and Catherine Aldrich, Crocker Farm Principal's Secretary, for this annual award. Mr. Spence made a motion that in accordance with the Unit B employee contract, the Amherst School Committee approves clerical/media merit awards in the amount of \$500 each for Catherine Aldrich and Lisa Fretwell. Mr. Shabazz seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

E. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENTS: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Mary Wallace, District Treasurer dated May 11, 2012

Ms. Geryk acknowledged that Mr. Yaffe lost his mother recently, and a number of gifts have been made in her honor. Mr. Yaffe made a statement about his mother's life, noting that her family chose to establish an art scholarship in her honor to help students who have interest in art but cannot afford supplies or art camps and programs. Mr. Spence thanked all of the donors and then made a motion to accept donations totaling \$4,788.00 from 50 various donors for the Betty Yaffe Art Scholarship Fund in memory of Principal Nick Yaffe's mother. Mr. Shabazz seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. Subcommittees

8:57 p.m.

A. Appoint New Member to the Amherst Audit Committee

Before appointing a member to the Amherst Audit Committee, the members would like more information about the duties of the representative, including the time commitment. Ms. Westmoreland will get more details from Sandy Pooler, Amherst Finance Director.

7. School Committee Planning

9:02 p.m.

A. Calendar

B. Items for Future Agendas--School Improvement Plans (Mr. Spence would prefer to have those in June rather than August); Mr. Spence noted that he believes that if there is a discussion of an immersion language program it should be part of a larger discussion of the whole program including ELL. Ms. Geryk noted she would want more time to study the research around immersion programs and discuss it in the fall rather than in June. Mr. O'Brien said he thinks August would be a good time to have this as an agenda item.

8. Adjournment

9:11 p.m.

Mr. O'Brien moved to adjourn at 9:11 p.m. Mr. Spence seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland