

**Regular Meeting of Amherst School Committee**  
**September 20, 2011**  
**Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**Present:**

Irv Rhodes, Chair  
Katherine Appy  
Rick Hood  
Rob Spence  
Steve Rivkin

Maria Geryk, Superintendent  
Mike Morris, Crocker Farm Principal  
Susan Kennedy Marx, Fort River Assistant Principal  
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal  
Linda Ganesin, Wildwood Assistant Principal  
Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director  
JoAnn Smith, Student Services Director  
Rob Detweiler, Director of Finance and Operations  
Press  
Public  
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**1. Welcome** **7:04 p.m.**

**A. Call to Order**—Mr. Rhodes called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. He reviewed the agenda and noted that after the agenda items are complete, the School Committee will enter Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations, with no intention of returning to open session.

**B. Approve Minutes**—Mr. Hood made a motion to approve the minutes of August 23, 2011 as presented. Mr. Rivkin seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments** **7:05 p.m.**

There were no announcements or public comments.

**3. Superintendent's Update** **7:05 p.m.**

**DOCUMENTS: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Maria Geryk regarding Superintendent's Update dated September 19, 2011**

Ms. Geryk provided brief updates regarding the First Day Celebration and Project Backpack 2011, noting that parents should contact Kim Stender at [stenderk@arps.org](mailto:stenderk@arps.org) at any time during the school year if they are still in need of a backpack. Mike Morris spoke regarding the Junior Achievement "It's My Business" after-school program that will begin at Crocker Farm in October and is sponsored by the Rotary Club of Amherst. Mr. Morris noted that Donna Kelly, Crocker Farm parent and Babson College Professor, will work with other volunteers to present the program to students in grades three through six. While the program is correlated with state standards, Mr. Morris noted that it is also a highly motivating, fun program focused on entrepreneurship and business. Mr. Rhodes noted that the Rotary Club plans to host the program again in the spring for a different group of students. Ms. Geryk then reported that there was a Community Engagement Expo at Amherst College last week which was attended by Volunteer Coordinator Kim Stender to recruit new student volunteers for the schools. She noted that there is a new segment of *Voices From Our Schools* posted on [www.amherstmedia.org](http://www.amherstmedia.org) regarding the Vela Scholars program at ARMS and that Dr. Bernard Lafeyette, Civil Rights activist, will be working with students at ARHS tomorrow. School committee members are invited to attend. Mr. Rivkin said his son has told him that he is only doing about 40 minutes of Spanish per week. He expressed concern that students will not be ready for 8<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish when they enter the Middle School if that is the case. Mr. Rhodes noted that he would like this item to be added to a future agenda for a full discussion.

**4. New/Continuing Business** **7:14 p.m.**

**A. Summer Program Update**

**DOCUMENT: Summer Program Achievement Academy Highlights 2011; Memo to Maria Geryk from JoAnn Smith regarding Special Education Summer Services (distributed at meeting)**

Ms. Guevara reported that the Achievement Academy summer program, which was held at Crocker Farm, had an enrollment of 90 students and program attendance was very good. She noted that several Tier II online software interventions were piloted at Achievement Academy. ARMS Guidance Counselor Talib Sadiq was coordinator

for the program. Mr. Rivkin asked if the online software interventions have a demonstrated success record and Ms. Guevara confirmed that they do. Ms. Smith reported that approximately 60 elementary students and 32 secondary students accessed extended year services through special education.

### **B. MCAS Scores Overview (added to the agenda)**

Ms. Geryk noted that since MCAS scores were released to the public by DESE today, she wanted to provide a brief overview at tonight's meeting. A more detailed MCAS/AYP presentation is scheduled for October. Ms. Guevara briefly reported on the overall district scores, noting that these are the first scores after the redistricting process, which means that each school has a completely different student population. This impacted the accountability status for the district for identified sub-groups. Ms. Guevara noted that as a district, there was no change in math, a slight decline in ELA and improvement in year two for identified groups. The district is in year one of implementation of many interventions that will make a difference for students, and Ms. Guevara is already working with Principals to examine data this year's data. Mr. Morris reported that Crocker Farm made AYP in the aggregate and in ELA, did not make AYP in math. He noted that this is the first time the school has been able to begin the school year with data from MCAS, the Spring MEPA test, MAP data and the district-developed assessment database. Interventions will begin this Thursday, and a new organized, system-wide intervention approach means that many more students will receive intervention than in the past. Fort River Principal Monica Colley could not attend tonight's meeting, so Mr. Morris reported briefly on Fort River's MCAS/AYP scores. He has been working closely with Ms. Colley, who has experience from her prior work in using Response to Intervention (RTI). Fort River began identifying their students for intervention and will begin working with those students this week. Mr. Rhodes stated that the group he is most concerned about at Crocker Farm is the low-income students in mathematics. Ms. Guevara noted that this is the first year of existence for some of the identified groups because there must be 40 students who fit within an identified group enrolled in a school before they will be reported as a group in MCAS. Redistricting created some new subgroups in the schools. Mr. Yaffe reported that Wildwood was literally a new school last year because almost 200 of their students were new due to redistricting. He believes the MCAS data shows who the school is now and where it stands, rather than being an accurate comparison to prior years. He noted that the Wildwood School Improvement Plan was developed with that as the guiding principle. Interventions will begin at Wildwood next Monday using regularly scheduled, formative assessments. Ms. Geryk said there are things to celebrate in this year's MCAS report, but acknowledged that we are not meeting the needs of all of our students. She said a plan is in place to support these students, and the leadership team is working with teachers to dig deeply into the student data and use it to provide targeted interventions. Mr. Rivkin stated that he believes all of the district's focus should be on the low-income group that is not meeting AYP because the district has high-income families who are accessing tutoring. He said we cannot use redistricting as an excuse, and noted that he believes we need to rethink the decision to continue with Investigations as the mathematics curriculum based on this new MCAS data. Mr. Rhodes noted that this is his third year on the committee and we have always talked about our low-income students in terms of MCAS. He said we may consider this a baseline year, but he is not interested in a comparison with other school districts, but rather in whether our students are progressing from one year to another year. He said the resources are in place and the School Committee will expect to see progress for all students. Ms. Guevara noted that issues of low-income and equity are taken very seriously and the district is committed to tackling the issue.

### **B. Wildwood School Improvement Plan**

#### **DOCUMENTS: Wildwood School Improvement Plan 2011-2014**

Mr. Yaffe and Ms. Gianesin provided an overview of the structure and culture of Wildwood School after redistricting, and briefly summarized the components of the Wildwood School Improvement Plan 2011-2014 (SIP). Mr. Hood noted that he likes the survey used in developing the SIP and appreciates that it can be compared to previous years. He asked for information on the statistic that parent comments indicate that 26% of respondents "felt concerned" regarding meeting students' academic needs. Mr. Yaffe noted that most of the comments were about parents wanting more challenge for their children. To address that concern, teachers are having students work at a deeper curricular level in order to find the "just right" level of challenge for individual students. Ms. Appy asked when and how the professional development needed in order to implement the SIP is happening. Mr. Yaffe explained that the goal is to have much of the professional development embedded in the classroom as teachers are working together with students. They are also using staff meeting time to work on professional development. Mr. Rivkin noted that he believes it is of fundamental importance to put students first,

and he rejects the idea that teachers do not work together without professional development set up in such formal ways. He asked what the plans are regarding grouping students for mathematics instruction both at Wildwood and district-wide. Mr. Yaffe noted that in his 21 years in the district, he has seen it become much more difficult for teachers to connect for professional discussions without a formal system. He believes having people working together to share practice is revolutionary. With regard to math grouping, Mr. Yaffe explained that Wildwood is using a model of flexible grouping by using MAP data and formative assessments to regroup students who have reached mastery of concepts. Mr. Rivkin expressed concern that this formalized system of collaboration means that teachers will not be able to utilize their unique strengths in teaching. Mr. Rhodes noted that the intensive feedback and discussion provided by teacher collaboration has been the hallmark of the success of KIPP schools and Uncommon Schools, which are some of the most high-achieving in the country. Ms. Geryk noted that the district is not talking about a scripted curriculum, but that there must be common agreements about what students are taught and should know at each grade level. Ms. Appy made a motion to accept the Wildwood School Improvement Plan 2011-2014. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

### **C. FY11 Budget Final Year-End Update**

#### **DOCUMENTS: Amherst Schools Operating Budget FY11 End-of-Year Budget Report**

Mr. Detweiler distributed and briefly reviewed the end-of-year budget report for FY2011, noting that the Amherst District ended the year right on track with only \$178 reverting to the general fund of the town for future appropriations. Mr. Rhodes asked why there was a \$14,000 overage in legal expenses. Mr. Detweiler noted that the Amherst District did have to seek a great amount of legal advice last year. Mr. Rhodes expressed concern that an additional \$36,000 had to be used to support the food service program operating expenses. Mr. Detweiler noting he is meeting with Whitsons representatives tomorrow and that will be a topic of the meeting.

### **D. Approve Gifts**

#### **DOCUMENTS: Memo to Amherst School Committee from Mary Wallace, District Treasurer, dated September 15, 2011**

Mr. Spence made a motion to accept \$709.13 from the Target Take Charge of Education program for Fort River and \$500 from Sabina Holub for the Wildwood third and fifth grade classes. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**6. Policies** **None**

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**7. Subcommittees** **None**

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**8. School Committee Planning** **8:48 p.m.**

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#### **A. Calendar**

**B. Items for Future Agendas**—Mr. Rivkin requested elementary Spanish instruction (either on agenda or as part of Superintendent's update). Ms. Geryk stated that she believes Mr. Rivkin's question about the elementary Spanish program was answered by Mr. Smith, World Language Department Chair, at his last presentation to the School Committee. She encouraged Mr. Rivkin to review the tape of the meeting on the ACTV website and she will do the same. Mr. Rivkin also requested that the cost of professional development and special education law representation be added to a future agenda.

Mr. Rhodes noted that four members are needed for the School Committee's Trivia Bee team. He asked that anyone interested in participating contact him.

**5. Adjournment** **8:51 p.m.**

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By roll call vote, the committee unanimously agreed to enter executive session for the purpose of contract negotiations. They will not return to open session.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland