

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst-Pelham & Regional School Committee
Tuesday, January 26, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Katherine Appy
Vira Douangmany-Cage
Kip Fonsh
Phoebe Hazzard
Rick Hood
Emily Marriott
Stephen Sullivan
Kathleen Traphagen

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Marta Guevara, Student/Family Engagement Director
Monica Hall, Equity/Professional Development Director
Carol Ross, Media/Climate Communications Specialist
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Miki Gromacki, ARHS Assistant Principal
Ericka Alschuler, ARHS Assistant Principal
Rich Ferro, ARHS/ARMS Athletic Director
Marisa Mendonsa, ARMS Principal
Nathaniel Woodruff, ARHS Science Teacher
Norman Price, ARMS Science Teacher
Derek Shea, Crocker Farm Elementary School Principal
Community & Press
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

ABSENT

Josiah Vasquez

1. Call to Order & Welcome

6:01 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. Ms. Appy requested that the meeting remain on time. Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of January 12, 2016. Ms. Hazzard seconded. Mr. Sullivan asked that the minutes be amended to include his name on the ABSENT list. He asked if several questions not addressed at the IMP presentation be answered. After a brief discussion, Ms. Geryk and Mr. Morris offered to provide this information to the committee. The minutes were approved with three members abstaining (Appy, Hazzard, Sullivan).

2. Announcements & Public Comment

6:09 p.m.

There were no announcements. Beth Sitar (ARMS parent) expressed concern regarding recess and playtime at ARMS; the school to prison pipeline; and social/emotional curriculum components at ARMS and ARHS. Tracy Zafian (CF parent) is concerned that many parents/guardians are not fully aware of the proposed 7-12 Consolidation and asked that surveys and public forums be implemented. Mr. Baptiste agreed that collaborative community input is crucial to the process. Catherine Corsun (WW parent) appreciated Mr. Baptiste's remarks and endorsed a collaborative process.

3. Superintendent's Update

6:18 p.m.

Ms. Geryk distributed prototypes of brochures designed by the ARPS Family Center and the Office of the Superintendent. Both brochures highlight academic and extracurricular programs, student achievements and contact information for all schools and staff. Ms. Hazzard inquired if these materials are available in Spanish. Ms. Geryk indicated that translations are available.

4. New & Continuing Business

6:19 p.m.

A. Sabbatical Requests

DOCUMENTS: Amherst Regional Schools Sabbatical Application Amendment & Timeline

Ms. Geryk recommended that the request be approved. Mr. Morris concurred and stated that the work of Mr. Nathaniel Woodruff and Mr. Norman Price was most current based upon the recent STEM and NASM published reports. He added that the request embodies what is needed in the districts' K-12 science programs. Mr. Woodruff and Mr. Price explained the basis of their work with a detailed Powerpoint presentation and answered questions from members. Mr. Fonsh congratulated the teachers and praised their willingness to dream and commitment to all students. He inquired about the Finnish education system and if aspects of this could be shared with the ARPS teaching community upon Mr. Woodruff's return. Ms. Geryk noted that this sabbatical will undoubtedly ensure that 21st Century skills will be implemented in science classrooms and create opportunities for students to create relevant and practical applications. Ms. Douangmany-Cage inquired if Mr. Price could return from San Diego High Tech High with information regarding California's assessment version of the MCAS. Ms. Appy requested if the sabbatical work could be extended to include PreK-Grade 6 science programs and 21st Century learning per the district's mission. Ms. Traphagen inquired about the status of Mr. Woodruff's Fulbright Scholarship. She hoped that deep partnerships could be established with local public and private science organizations, colleges and universities. Ms. Traphagen was curious about the Finnish education model and if these practices could be applied here. She implored that the sabbatical focus on intentional plans to connect inquiry-driven STEM work in Grades 5 and 6. She also hoped the sabbatical would provide an opportunity to impact of the semester model on the ARHS course sequence structure and opportunities to engage in new integrated teaching models in which all students could access. In closing, Ms. Traphagen hoped the ARMS Tech Ed program based in engineering could be re-instated. Mr. Baptiste inquired about how this research could be implemented in the schools. He stressed that although inquiry and science are fundamental, each is extremely difficult to explain so he granted carte blanche to both educators to improve students upon their return. Mr. Fonsh moved to approve the sabbatical request of Mr. Woodruff and Mr. Price. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

B. 7-12 Consolidation Presentation

6:51 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: Secondary Grade Reconfiguration Report; Level Services 16-17 Initial 3-Year Model

Ms. Mazur explained the document and its content. She thanked all who contributed to the report including the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC); David Stephen; JCJ Architecture; ARMS and ARHS staff; and the Community Review Team. Mr. Mangano explained the financial reasoning behind the work and offered 3-year projections for different models which include favorable and unfavorable assumptions, expenses and revenues. He then answered several questions from the committee pertaining to Excess & Deficiency, net metering savings, school choice, circuit breaker, vocational programs, special education programs, and municipal/state funding. Mr. Fonsh inquired as to why the figures in his report differed from those in Ms. Mazur's report. He also requested Mr. Mangano's report be shared with members. Mr. Mangano agreed to share the report. He also clarified the reasons why the figures attached to his forecast model differ from those in the Consolidation report. Firstly, the figures in the consolidation report are from Spring 2015 (noted in report) roughly a year and a half ago. Some assumptions have changed since then (Mr. Mangano indicated this is a working model) and we are using a different budget year as a starting point. Secondly, the model from Spring 2015 focused on the operating budget. The model presented at the meeting encompasses the operating budget, school choice revolving fund, and circuit breaker revolving fund, all of which support direct instructional expenditures. The impact of adding

circuit breaker and choice is a little over \$1,000,000 to both revenues and expenditures. Ms. Geryk added that financial conversations with the four towns are ongoing. Ms. Mazur reviewed and explained the five consolidation models in great detail. Ms. Gromacki explained the consolidated bell/class schedules. She stressed that these general guideline models are founded on what the district values educationally. Ms. Alschuler explained three architectural renderings of classroom configurations in a consolidation model.

Ms. Mazur provided her recommendation to the committee (entire statement appears in it italics):

You have each been presented with binders which contain the work conducted to date on the possibility of consolidating Grades 7 and 8 in the Regional High School. The document has just under 30 pages of narrative about the basis for the study and the process undertaken, and details of five possible configurations of the secondary schools, followed by 150 pages with supportive documentation. This document can be found on our website at this time, and the narrative will be translated into Spanish tomorrow. It is a product with many contributors. So, as I begin this presentation, I want to thank the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration, JCJ Architects and David Stephen, but most of all our administrators and middle and high school staff - teachers - who spent many hours in meetings conceptualizing a combined population of learners. I also want to express appreciation to the representatives of the Community Review Team who had access to this work over the past two weeks, and who have provided great feedback to me about the report and also helped contextualize for me a decision about consolidation which was the foundation of my recommendation to the Superintendent late last week, and which I will relate you this evening..

Before I do this, however, I will ask Sean to present the financial reasons that led us to explore consolidation. Once Sean is done, I will briefly discuss the 5 consolidation options and the budget reductions associated with consolidation. Next, I will ask Miki Gromacki to provide an overview of what a consolidated 7-12 bell schedule looks like, and then Ericka Altschuler will show you the building layout as it is currently, and what space might look like in either a school within a school model or a 7th grade academy model.

In terms of the financials, the funding gap illustrated by Sean and the ability of the four towns to pay their assessments for the Regional Schools and their municipal departments, including the local elementary schools, is increasingly challenging. Declining enrollment in three of the four towns and significant reliance on choice funding in two of the four towns is putting into question the viability and sustainability of local schools.

And, as Miki and Ericka have provided an overview of the schedule and building considerations, I am sure that many questions come to mind as you consider the space and schedule and as you envision what a 7-12 building would actually look like and feel like to our students and to our community.

The details are in the report, and it is not an overstatement to say that consolidation will be an historic change for our district. Our K-12 schools once educated almost 4,000 students. Now there are fewer than 2700 in Amherst, Pelham and the Region, with half this amount at our Regional MS and HS. If you remove the Choice students from the K-12 population, there are 180 fewer students.

The capacity of the high school is, on paper, more than sufficient to house all of these students. Space and financial savings are important and we could simply move the students and

staff, however, maintaining the exceptional quality of an Amherst education, I believe and I think our community believes, must be the lens through which this work is done. As we considered the impacts of consolidation, we also gave great consideration to expanded opportunities for our students. We asked ourselves how to maintain the high quality of education provided to students, stop the annual budget cutting, and also more wholly prepare our students for the future by providing them with the skills to be successful in the 21st century. As a community, can we both consolidate and take the necessary steps to maintain and enhance how students are educated? What is the shared community vision, what do we value and can we afford it?

It is important to remember that the HS renovation and expansion project took place 20 years ago. Regardless of consolidation, there are updates and upgrades that should take place. While working with JCJ architects, it was pointed out to us that the free standing, handicapped accessible corridor which connects two old portions of the HS building is not actually ADA compliant. Alone, this improvement will cost over \$350,000. We must invest funds to correct this, but might it also make sense to look at enclosing an adjoining courtyard and expand that space? Another code requirement will be adding girls' toilets in the locker room area to accommodate the additional females in the building. Converting some office and storage space into classrooms needed to effect the consolidation could cost hundreds of thousands more, and you will see this discussed within the report. There are some funds for improvements to the HS within the capital budget which can be used for this purpose, and an initial investment of \$800,000 is needed in order to move the students from Point A to Point B.

Again, Sean showed us the financial picture. Combining the schools is not enough to bridge the financial gap. Our communities need to stop working from a belief that K-12 Regionalization is a dead concept and start considering what is at stake if we don't both regionalize and smartly consolidate.

Within the report, there are details about each of the 5 options we identified and the positives and negatives of each. As shown earlier in this presentation, in any consolidation, we will save well over \$700,000 annually in staffing and utility efficiencies - a long way to the targets shared by Sean. If you add in regionalization, another \$300,000 will be realized annually. Take another look at the screen which is illustrating financial correction made by both consolidating and regionalizing. I think it is time for our communities to look seriously at the practical and financial benefits of regionalizing our schools. This is a critical decision for the future of our communities and the education of our students. How does this get better articulated to the voters in our four towns so they fully understand what is at stake? What will it take to get their attention?

Despite all the work on consolidation to date, there are many important questions as yet unanswered:

- *Finalizing a bell schedule for a consolidated school*
- *Assigning space to staff and identifying the number of staff sharing space*
- *Determining how special education and ELL programming will work in a consolidated building and whether these programs can be partially or wholly merged for students in all or some grade levels*
- *Determining whether the district will adopt a 1:1 computer program so each students has a personal computer device thereby freeing up present computer lab space*
- *Determining what access students in Grades 7 and 8 will have to high school electives and core subjects such as mathematics*
- *Identifying space for storage and meeting spaces in a combined setting*

What I just stated about the consolidation - the complexities and unanswered questions is consideration #1 in my recommendation tonight.

The second consideration pertains to repurposing of the Middle School which is a major undertaking and presently there is no articulated vision for the facility other than the desire and need to sustain the building for present and future educational purposes. LSSE will occupy unused space at the Middle School this March. GCC is presently using space in the evening, and there is adequate space in the district for them here to provide dual enrollment courses a year from now. No other commitments have been made. The future use of the Middle School is a crucial one for our community and, as a large building with high interest from community groups, requires lots of input and thoughtful planning. It would be a mistake to rush planning or make hasty decisions in the interest of covering overhead costs, without regard to planning for capital improvements that will surely be needed over time.

The last consideration for my recommendation is the recent Amherst School Committee decision to reconfigure the elementary school structure and to build a new school. This is a major project that will continue to require significant public input and sustained attention from our town officials, employees, and the community at large. It is my belief that some period of time should pass before asking our community to formally engage in more surveys and important decisions about 7-12 consolidation.

For these reasons, it is my recommendation with the support of administration that a decision by the Regional School Committee concerning 7-12 consolidation at the Regional High School be held until Fall 2016, with consolidation not to occur before September 2018 - one year later than originally planned. *In order to fund the gap anticipated for FY18, the district will continue to effect reductions through appropriate district-level and building based cuts and, potentially, the one-time use of funds from the Excess and Deficiency and/or School Choice accounts in order to preserve our electives for another year. In this interim period, the following groups will be established in order to address outstanding consolidation questions between now and September:*

*Educational Working Group for 7-12 Schedule and Curriculum
Vocational Programming Group
Middle School Repurposing Group
Operational Working Group*

In the coming days I will reach out to the four towns and our staff to let them know the status of the 7-12 consolidation. I will also invite staff and community members to join the Working Groups I just mentioned in order to continue on the path of consolidation. I will keep you apprised of the progress of these groups and will provide appropriate updates. It is my hope that committee members and community members with interest and expertise in the above areas will join the discussion and help articulate the educational vision for our district moving forward.

Mr. Fonsh stated that he was quite surprised at the postponement of the consolidation plan and asked the Chair that time be set at the February 23, 2016 meeting to discuss the report at length. Mr. Baptiste replied that he was not in favor of this suggestion as it may detract from the Regionalization conversion. Mr. Fonsh disagreed with Mr. Baptiste and stated that the Regional School Committee's Regionalization conversation was long overdue. He stated that Regionalization and Consolidation are indeed intertwined and sustainability is the common theme. He implored that all four towns have the right to know where the committee stands on each topic. Ms. Traphagen agreed with Mr. Fonsh and stated that a discussion that frames the vision for educational values and opportunities for students in Grades 7-12 should occur. She would like to hear more from ARMS faculty. She ended by saying that consolidation represents an educational approach and Regionalization represents financial sustainability. Mr. Baptiste replied that the Regionalization conversation is about "corporation." Ms. Appy thanked Ms.

Mazur for delaying the consolidation vote but wants to keep this conversation at the forefront of the committee's work. She indicated that the current financial situation is dire and therefore the educational structure is at risk. Ms. Geryk suggested that the topic be placed on the February 23, 2106 agenda as well as the March 8, 2016 agenda. Ms. Hazzard indicated her primary concern was the social and emotional safety of students and the quality of instruction. She appreciated the delay to vote on a consolidation. Mr. Hood suggested that more meetings be scheduled throughout the year to accommodate topics requiring lengthy discussion. Mr. Fonsh asked if Ms. Mazur's statement be provided to all members so it can be shared with constituents. Ms. Douangmany-Cage suggested that periodic updates be provided by Ms. Mazur especially around the conversation with Geoff Kravitz (Town of Amherst Economic Director).

C. School Choice

8:05 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Memorandum from Superintendent Geryk regarding School Choice FY17

Ms. Appy moved for Amherst -Pelham and Region to continue to be a school choice district. Ms. Traphagen seconded. Mr. Baptiste called for discussion. Mr. Fonsh stated that he dreaded this conversation and refused to vote in favor of the motion as it went against his values, beliefs and principles. Mr. Baptiste agreed with him. Mr. Hood, although hearing Mr. Fonsh's reasoning, sees school choice as an opportunity for the district to gain money. A vote was taken with two objections (Baptiste and Hood) and no abstentions. The motion passed.

D. MASC/MASS Conference Update

8:10 p.m.

Ms. Douangmany-Cage reported on the November conference in Hyannis, MA which she, a representatives from the Shutesbury School Committee and the Collaborative for Educational Services attended. She indicated that a new president was elected in January and a minority caucus was formed of which Ms. Douangmany-Cage serves as a member of the Nominating Committee. While at the conference she participated in many workshops and trainings. She is hopeful that more Regional School Committee members will attend future conferences.

E. Mid-Cycle Superintendent Goal Progress

8:12 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: 2015-2016 District Improvement Plan Mid-Cycle Update; 2015-2016 District Improvement Plan Superintendent Goals

Ms. Geryk thanked the committee for the opportunity to review goals and progress. In the discussion that followed, members expressed the importance of voices from community (especially those of underrepresented groups) and staff relating to programs and initiatives. Ms. Hazzard was impressed with the granularity of the report documents as well as the specific measurements and data. Ms. Douangmany-Cage offered the support of initiatives and programs. Ms. Traphagen would like to learn more about the Equity Learning Network and the partnership between ARPS and the Boston Public Schools. Mr. Hood was impressed with the information provided in the report. Ms. Geryk thanked him for his help to create reports and tools to measure data.

F. Accept Gifts

8:36 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Memo from ARPS Treasurer Mary Wallace (1/22/16)

Ms. Hazzard moved to accept the Regional gifts from the Anthony Reynolds Sr. Memorial Fund, Inc. in the amount of \$500.00 to support the Anthony Reynolds Sr. Scholarship; and the ARMS PGO in the amount of \$1,000.00 to support snacks and incentives for the ARMS Guidance Office. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

5. School Committee Planning

8:37 p.m.

Ms. Geryk offered to provide Regionalization materials to the committee. These will be available on the Google Drive. It was agreed that the following topics would appear on a future agenda:

Equity Learning Network, Amherst Media Makers Space, and Mr. Vendetti's Human Rights Commission Class Project. Mr. Fonsh announced that Senate President Stan Rosenberg will host a public forum on charter school caps on Friday, February 5, 2016 at the Bangs Center. He encouraged all members to attend. Ms. Appy offered to craft a letter regarding the impact of charter schools on the public education system to local elected officials.

6. Adjournment

8:42 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Sullivan moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m. and Mr. Hood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Stender